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Military commitments and political bargaining in ancient Greece

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Abstract: This paper explores the relationship between military commitments and political bargaining in Greek poleis and beyond. While it is possible to document a number of instances of concurrent political and military mobilization, comparative evidence suggests that state type may be a more important determinant of military mobilization levels than regime type.

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I concentrate on several elements of the bargaining hypothesis, especially the relationships between military commitments and political regimes, and between military inducements and political change. I argue that military activity had a critical impact on the development of political institutions. I also hope to show that a broader cross-cultural perspective is required to understand the nature of bargaining processes in ancient Greece.¹

Naval mobilization and political regime

The memo asks if places that extended citizenship to adult males were more likely to establish navies, or if poleis with navies were more likely to have inclusive citizenship rules. Before we can address these questions, we need to determine if there is a consistent positive correlation between extended citizenship and naval strength. The ‘Old Oligarch’ thought so (with reference to Athens), but the case is by no means clear-cut.

Ionia provides two probable matches. Chios was endowed with an unusually large navy, contributing 100 ships at the battle of Lade (494 BCE), more than any other Ionian polis (Hdt. 6.8, 15). It appears to have been a democracy in the second half of the sixth century BCE (Robinson 1997:90-101). On Naxos in the second half of the sixth century BCE, an anti-oligarchic regime mobilized ‘8,000 shields’ and many warships to defend itself against expelled oligarchs (Hdt. 5.30). Given the limited size of this polity, this indicates massive mobilization: Robinson 1997:118 thinks that this may well be a reference to a “full levy from all classes”, and observes that “a large, unevenly equipped citizen levy would be consistent with a newly democratic state under arms. The great number of warships mentioned (*ploia makra polla*) bespeaks the active service of the poorer members of the populace, also consonant with a state permitting broad political participation.”

However, other major naval powers may not fit this pattern. Corinth is credited with the first big naval battle in Greek history (Thuc. 13), under a tyranny (a form of government that generally may well have entailed considerable levels of popular military mobilization and participation). In the Persian Wars, Corinth contributed 40 triremes to the war effort, far fewer than the Athenians but more than any other polis (Hdt. 8.1, 43). The status of Corinth’s constitution at that time is unclear, but it was apparently fairly oligarchic. Land forces amounted to 5,000 hoplites at Plataea (Hdt. 9.28.3), with up to 3,000 on later occasions, but perhaps out of a continuing total of closer to 5,000 (Salmon 1984:166-7). 40 triremes require 8,000 crew. Salmon 1984:168 reckons with a maximum of 15,000 adult men, for a total of population of 70,000 including slaves etc. What was the Athenian ratio? Around 490/480 BCE, we hear of 9,000 hoplites and (allegedly) 180 warships. Did the Athenian population contain a larger thetic component, or was Athens able to mobilize a larger percentage of poorer citizens? If we knew, we could establish a correlation between political participation and naval mobilization.

It would also be helpful to know more about the political system of Aegina. A small island endowed with unusually strong naval assets (up to 70 warships in the fifth century BCE: Figueira 1981:29-31), it would be a suitable test case for the nexus between political regime and (naval) mobilization levels. Vague hints all point to some form of oligarchic regime (Figueira 1981:299-300), unsuccessfully challenged by an Athenian-backed (‘democratic’?) coup attempt c.490 BCE (Hdt. 6.88-92; Figueira 1981:306-10). In 479 BCE, a state that may have been able to marshal up to 10,000 naval crew members contributed only 500 hoplites to the all-out battle of Plataea (Hdt.

¹ This paper was prepared for the workshop on ‘Military organization and political regimes in classical Greece’ organized by Frances Rosenbluth and John Ferejohn at Yale University on December 5, 2004. I wish to thank my colleague Ian Morris for his comments.

8.131.1).² It appears that an oligarchic form of government could go hand in hand with substantial naval mobilization. It may be more profitable to explain sea power as a function of strong concentration of population and capital in certain poleis: Chios, Corinth and Aegina are all noteworthy examples of early commercial development.

Military crises and democratization

The archaic period

The data on pre-classical democracies in Robinson 1997 suggest a frequent link between democratization and military mobilization. Unfortunately, all these events are very poorly documented, and any modern interpretations suffer from considerable uncertainties.

Democratization followed by military success

When Megara established what (hostile) sources call ‘unbridled democracy’ (somewhere around 600 BCE), major naval operations ensued, such as an (unsuccessful) foray into the Propontis (Sea of Marmara) to fight the Samians, and an initially successful operation against Athens to gain control over Salamis (Legon 1981:89, 120ff).

Military success followed by democratization

The Samian fleet, having defeated the Megarian force, returned to Samos, overthrew the oligarchic *geomoroi*, thereby ‘freeing’ the city (Plut. *QG* 57), which may well be code for the creation of some kind of democratic system (e.g. Gehrke 1986:119-20; Robinson 1997:118-9).³

Military failure followed by democratization

There are several examples of democratization in the wake of massive defeats. In Syracuse shortly after its defeat at the Helarus river in 492 BCE, the demos revolted and with the help of freed serfs (?) overthrew the *gamoroi* oligarchs (Hdt 7.55). This movement was however short-lived. In Acragas, the tyrant Thrasydaeus was overthrown after his defeat by Hieron of Syracuse in 472 BCE, and replaced by a democratic regime (Diod. 11.48.6-8; Robinson 1997:78-80). In Argos, the catastrophic defeat at Sepea (c.494 BCE) caused violent disturbances, with ‘slaves’ taking over; the precise character of this regime change is obscure (Robinson 1997:84-8). In Cyrene, a defeat by the Libyans around 550 BCE led to the temporary replacement of the monarchy by what appears to have been a democratic regime (Hdt 4.159-62; Robinson 1997:105-8). In 473 BCE, a disastrous war against the Iapygians undermined the aristocratic regime of Taras and ushered in a democracy (Aristot. *Pol.* 1303a3-6; Berger 1992:53).

² The use of hired foreigners and domestic slaves as rowers is a possibility, albeit downplayed by Figueira 1981:33-37); cf. now Hunt 1998 for Athens. Aegina was reputedly a particularly slave-rich polis (Athen. 272d).

³ The ‘radical’ democratic regime of 412 BCE in Syracuse is closely linked to the victory over the mighty Athenian invaders and appears to have been a consequence of significant popular military participation in this success (Aristot. *Pol.* 1304a27).

The classical period

It would surely be unwise to generalize from a few cases. Moreover, it is only the archaic period that is poorly documented. The classical period provides us with an abundance of examples of regime change: Gehrke 1985 discusses no fewer than 283 instances of stasis in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE. In up to 70 cases, an oligarchy was replaced by a democracy, compared to up to 63 instances in which a democracy became an oligarchy (ibid. 205). However, unaided regime change in the wake of military defeats is only very rarely attested in this period (ibid. 283).⁴ Foreign intervention (to install or help install or remove an existing regime) occurred much more frequently: in 204 cases, external forces played a role (ibid. 268). It appears that few poleis were sufficiently powerful to determine their regime type free from outside influence. This fact alone makes it difficult to establish any meaningful correlation between political regime and popular participation in Greece overall, especially for the vast majority of Greek states that were considerably less powerful than Athens or Sparta and therefore much more susceptible to direct or indirect foreign intervention in their domestic political affairs.

The case of Athens

Thanks to its unusually powerful position, Athens affords a rare opportunity to observe political change in the absence of overt outside intervention. Military events and political change were closely intertwined. ‘Democratizing’ events in Athenian history may be plotted as a series of responses to military inducements. Thanks to the superior quality and quantity of the pertinent evidence, we are able to trace the self-reinforcing sequence of military challenge followed by democratization and subsequent military mobilization, and so forth. To further debate, the following argument is presented in a fairly reductive and partial (in both senses of the term) manner, in order to highlight the proposed nexus between military and political processes. Proper consideration of real-life complexities and confounding variables would require a book-length study.

Phase 1: The beginning of the sixth century BCE

Given the nature of the evidence, the earliest instance is necessarily the most obscure, and divergent reconstructions are equally possible. The available evidence (for what it is worth) is consistent with a scenario that fits the overarching model (admittedly a somewhat circular approach).

Around 600 BCE, or perhaps a bit earlier (Legon 1981:89), Megara established a democratic regime, unfavorably described as ‘unbridled democracy’ and credited with the implementation of a process called *palintokia* that required creditors to repay interest on loans (Legon 1981:114-6), presumably a measure to aid the poor against the wealthy, reduce dependency and inequality, and curb social unrest. Regime change coupled with reforms increased popular mobilization which in turn increased naval capabilities. I have already referred to an ambitious naval expedition to the Propontis to confront a Samian challenge. At around the same time, Megara inflicted a naval defeat on Athens that compelled the latter to recognize Megarian control over the island of Salamis (halfway between the two polities) (Paus. 1.40.5). “The Athenians had worn themselves out in a long and difficult war against the Megarians for possession of Salamis” (Plut. *Sol.* 8), and following their defeat allegedly even imposed a law that prohibited consideration of renewed military action over Salamis. Enter Solon. Insofar as there is a kernel of truth in the mythological tradition proffered by Plutarch over 700 years later, Solon assumed a leadership position in renewed campaigning that eventually resulted in the recapture of Salamis as well as in continuing hostilities down to the seizure

⁴ In addition to the famous case of Athens in 411 BCE, examples are limited to Acragas c.470 BCE (tyranny >> democracy), Syracuse c.405 BCE (democracy >> tyranny) and Elis 365/4 BCE (democracy >> oligarchy). Cf. also Thurii in 413 BCE (?democracy >> aristocracy) for an indirect case.

of Megara's port Nisaea several decades later, a feat associated with the later tyrant Peisistratus (Legon 1981:122-31; Oliva 1988:40-46).

Solon's involvement in this conflict has been overshadowed by his role in social reforms in 594/3 BCE when he abolished debt-slavery and enacted measures designed to promote cohesion and curtail social tensions between different strata of Athenian society. It is tempting to view his implementation of *seisachtheia* – some form of cancellation of debts – as an (deliberate) analogue to the Megarian *palintokia* that was arguably instrumental in facilitating the degree of popular mobilization that led to military success against Athens. In a further step, we ought to allow for the possibility that Solon's reforms did not merely aim to improve domestic class relations for the sake of internal stability (as an ultimate good) but also – or perhaps even primarily? – to enhance Athenian military capabilities along the lines of Megara's somewhat earlier progress. Later ancient and modern sources are preoccupied with the element of class struggle to the complete exclusion of potential exigencies posed by international relations, i.e., inter-state competition. Viewed within a broader framework that accords greater significance to inter-polis rather than intra-polis conflict, social reform in early sixth-century BCE Athens can be re-cast an example of bargaining between socio-economic classes for the sake of military mobilization and war-making. (Unfortunately, this reading turns out to be less novel than I initially thought: as my colleague Ian Morris kindly reminds me, he already noted the impetus for reform created by Athens' foreign defeats in Morris 1987:207-8 and 2002:37-8. Morris' argument focuses on how military defeat weakened the elite's ability to resist a major redistribution of property rights, whereas I would be inclined to go further and identify the improvement of military capabilities as a possible overt goal of social reform.)

Phase 2: The end of the sixth century BCE

By the sixth century BC, Sparta had developed into the strongest military power in mainland Greece. Drawing on the serfs or state slaves of Laconia and Messenia to support a rentier-warrior population, and commanding the manpower resources of the perioecic cities and (albeit to an uncertain degree) those of assorted Peloponnesian allies for military purposes, its attempts to extend its hegemony over ever wider parts of the Peloponnese had been checked mostly by Argos. Athens, outside the Spartan sphere of influence but located in close proximity to its allies Megara and Aegina, was one of the largest and most populous poleis in mainland Greece. Constrained in its military capabilities by the putative disarmament of the citizenry under the Peisistratid tyrants (claimed or implied by various sources), it was nevertheless a sizeable state by regional standards, and thanks to its demographic weight had an obvious potential to become a major player in inter-state relations, contingent on its ability to mobilize domestic manpower. In 510 BCE, Spartan hoplites defeated the mercenaries of Peisistratus's sons, causing the collapse of the tyrannical regime, and advertising the superiority of skilled citizen hoplites. In 508 BCE, Sparta invaded Attica and temporarily seized the city of Athens in support of one of the warring aristocratic factions that vied for leadership. Popular military mobilization ended this intervention: in 507 BCE, the Athenians – '17 ranks deep', according to Aristoph. *Lys.* 282 – besieged the Spartans on the acropolis, compelling their temporary withdrawal.

Probably in 508/7 BCE, Kleisthenes instituted reforms that led to a restructuring of the citizenry in tribes, trittys and demes. Despite their later significance as basic units of popular political participation, these redesigned units were not merely voting districts but represented conscription districts that corresponded to particular military units. Despite its current marginality, the view that Kleisthenes' reforms primarily aimed at creating a strong citizen army has a long pedigree in modern scholarship (Hasebroek, Levi, Bicknell, van Effenterre, Siewert).

This is not the place for a detailed discussion of this thesis (see esp. Siewert 1982). Suffice it to note that the assumption that military concerns were central to the reforms in 508/7 BCE is consistent with the fact that while military activities and successes increased immediately thereafter, political consequences were late, and for a long time rather limited in scope. In 506 BCE, military operations widened. The Athenian hoplite army confronted the Spartan army and their allies at

Eleusis, and the latter retreated (Hdt. 5.75). Immediately thereafter the Athenians countered attacks by the Boeotians and Chalkis and scored two spectacular victories (Hdt. 5.77). 4,000 men of military age were settled as *kleruchs* on confiscated Chalkian territory, an act that may be regarded as the earliest manifestation of Athenian ‘popular’ imperialism.

Again, modern observers tend to focus on the class-struggle dimension of the Kleisthenic reforms, and to regard domestic stability and reconciliation *per se* as a plausible ultimate goal. This perspective may well underestimate the severity of shock that armed foreign intervention and temporary occupation administered to all strata of Athenian society. Spartan encroachment on a very large sovereign polis would have provided a powerful inducement to institutional reform designed to enhance military capabilities. After the Spartan retreat, the new aristocratic leadership must have sought to prevent a repeat performance, and could presumably draw on the patriotic sentiments of a citizenry that – however divided – was unused to and resentful of foreign occupation. This is not to say that we should focus on inter-state relations and neglect the role of intra-state conflict: this shift would merely invert the current pattern of interpretive bias. Rather, we must allow for the possibility that both external threats and domestic concerns converged in encouraging the re-arming of the (propertied) citizenry: for instance, mass conscription was also in the interest of the victorious aristocratic faction, as the Peisistratids had (supposedly) relied on mercenaries, and Isagoras on foreign intervention; both could be prevented with the help of a strong citizen army.

Phase 3: The fifth century BCE

Once a basic framework of military and political institutions that depended on popular participation had been put in place, a self-reinforcing feedback loop between military and political mobilization gradually developed over time. In Herodotus’ words (5.78), “while they were oppressed under tyrants, they had no better success in war than any of their neighbors, yet, once the yoke was flung off, they proved the finest fighters in the world”. In practice, there wasn’t just one big yoke, but many small ones: multiple constraints on political participation weakened over time, as military commitments rose.

The creation of popular-participatory institutions for military purposes and their long-term effects on political practice is a phenomenon that was repeatedly remarked on in the Greek tradition. Aristotle observed that oligarchic system changed in wartime when they allowed the demos participate in politics to entice them into military service (Pol. 1306a19-26). According to Hdt 5.37, Aristagoras of Miletus hoped to increase the military capabilities of the Ionian cities by replacing tyrants with (presumably elected) *strategoï* and by creating *isonomia*. Events in Mytilene on Lesbos in 427 further illustrate this principle: when the oligarchs armed the demos as hoplites, the latter demanded an equitable distribution of food (Thuc. 3.27).

The military-political development of fifth-century BCE Athens follows the same trajectory. Military activity and political change occurred in tandem. Foreign invasion and internal strife since 511 BCE triggered domestic reorganization in 508/7 BCE. Political reform, while significant, was limited in scope: aristocrats were elected archons by the assembly *en masse*, and subsequently joined the areopagus, a senate-like quasi-oligarchic institution. Military successes followed in 507 and 506 BCE. This was followed (as a consequence?) by the introduction of elected *strategoï* in 501 BCE to replace the archon *polemarchos*, to lead the massed hoplite militia. It is telling that political change occurred first in the sphere most intimately connected with popular military participation, i.e. in the sphere of military leadership.

In the next step, military intervention in Ionia followed in 498 BCE. The collapse of the Ionian uprising increased the likelihood of Persian military aggression. This, together with latent conflict with Aegina, an adjacent island endowed with a strong navy that had replaced Megara as Athens’ regional bogeyman, provided new inducements to military mobilization. Consequently, Athens continued to strengthen its war-making capabilities, most notably during the archonship of Themistokles (493/2 BCE), with the fortification of the port of Piraeus and a naval building program. In 491, the Spartans cracked down on *persophile* Aegina, followed by an Athenian attack on the

island with 70 ships (20 of them rented from Corinth) and a temporary landing on the island. Thus, once the hoplite system that rested on 'middling' farmer-proprietors had been established, inter-state relations induced the gradual expansion of military mobilization into poorer strata of the Athenian population. The creation of a large navy that necessarily relied on lower class participation: Athenian naval assets of 50 vessels (not counting the 20 rented ones) in 490 BCE already represented one of the largest navies in mainland Greece but were soon augmented by another 100 ships built in 482 BCE.

The failure of the Persian invasion of Attica in 490 BCE, at the hands of the Athenian hoplite militia, led to another round of political reforms. Three years later, ostracism was first deployed, and very probably invented in the first place. The same year, the archons came to be elected by representatives of the demes, proportionate to their size. This continued the process of expanding the bargaining process between the organized citizen militia and the aristocratic clans that produced the elected leadership. Electoral canvassing was now concentrated on the military office of strategos. Access to more capital enabled the expansion of the navy, thereby creating a need for future bargaining with the sub-hoplite elements of the Athenian citizenry. In fact, the equally important roles of both hoplites and naval crews in the defeat of the Persian invasion of 480/79 precipitated more widespread military mobilization thereafter, drawing not just on the propertied half or so of the populace but increasingly on poorer citizens as well.

The capture and destruction of the city of Athens in both 480 and 479, and the temporary mass evacuation of Athenian citizens to Salamis and allied communities in the Peloponnese, represented the most massive external shock so far. The creation of the Delian League permitted the accumulation of capital necessary the long-term maintenance of an expanded Athenian navy. The 460s BCE witnessed renewed and successful engagement with the Persians, also the siege and capture of Thasos (465-2 BCE), a strong allied state that had attempted to secede. Once again, this (together with the 'quasi-defeat' represented by the failure of Cimon's military co-operation with Sparta) fed back into institutional change in Athens itself. In 462/1 BCE, the areopagus lost most of its power, and something more like 'demokratia' was instituted, anchored in the representative council, the assembly, and popular courts. As in 507 BCE, these reforms were immediately followed by a huge expansion of military activity that put a heavy strain on Athenian manpower: again, bargaining had enabled more intense popular mobilization for military purposes, and facilitated the exploitation of external opportunities that had arisen from Sparta's temporary weakness and the previous defeat of the Persians in the 460s BCE. In the early 450s BCE, Athenians operated in Cyprus, Egypt, and Phoenicia. Athens supported Megara against Corinth, one of the major capital-rich centers in the region. The other capital-rich competitor, Aegina, was defeated. Athens started to set up a land empire in central Greece, whilst launching naval raids against Sparta. Rival navies were successively destroyed in the 450s BCE. Between 454 and 449 BCE, the number of tributary allies rose from c.135 to c.155-173. The league treasury was transferred to Athens, and consultative meetings discontinued. Most allies ended up without a navy, with only three (temporary) exceptions. However, the costly failure of the intervention in Egypt was followed by further resistance in mainland Greece. Casualties mounted, especially among the hoplites.

Political reform continued concurrently with these exceptional and broad-based military exertions. Jury pay was introduced. Between 454 and 440 BCE, the number of citizens who benefited from some form of state pay rose to about 20,000. Thousands of Athenians were sent off as *kleruchs* (perhaps 15-20,000 in the fifth century BCE as a whole). Aristotle summed up Pericles' policy as promoting naval power and thereby democracy. Naval power appears as the primary concern, not democracy per se, though the latter was strengthened as a result.

Military mobilization of the citizenry reached new heights during the Peloponnesian War. The disastrous defeat of Athenian and allied forces in Sicily in 413 BCE led to a short-lived attempt to establish oligarchy in Athens, an event that might perhaps best be understood as a bargaining process with those who hard borne the brunt of the conflict. Most casualties had been sustained by cavalry and hoplites, who also underwrote domestic levies. However, the main recipients of state

support also controlled the main means of imperial coercion (the navy). The memo asks why the navy stationed on Samos did not rush back to challenge the 400 in 411 BCE. This question exemplifies the conventional tendency to privilege intra-state or class conflicts over inter-state competition. Without the navy, an oligarchic Athens lost the ability to continue war, or at least any hope to control its empire.⁵ Naval victories achieved by the democratic elements based at Samos (Cynossema 411 and Cyzicus 410 BCE) restored the bargaining power of the commoner population and led to the restoration of the democratic regime (this time bolstered with an oath to kill everyone trying to overthrow democracy). The peaceful resolution of this conflict (as well as earlier cooperation between the oligarchic forces at home and the democratic forces in the navy against the Spartans) suggests that the ability to wage war was ultimately a greater goal for all factions involved than an equitable distribution of costs and benefits within the citizenry, and once again points to the primacy of the drive for war-making compared to class-specific interests.

Attempts to raise money for continuing war subsequently became more desperate: melting of precious objects from temples, a cargo toll on Bosphorus traffic, raids of Persian-controlled areas specifically for plunder (409-7 BCE). At the same time, however, state payments to the lower classes in Athens were expanded. This is not paradoxical if we consider this as a further act of bargaining with the 'naval' element of the demos on which success had come to depend more than ever, now that Persian subsidies had enabled Sparta to launch a navy, and much greater risks were incurred in naval operations than before. The trials after the costly victory at Arginusae in 406 BCE are also best understood in these terms.

Phase 4: The fourth century BCE

In analogy to the events in Phases 1 and 2, the (otherwise surprising) reconciliation in Athens after the fall of the Thirty in 403 BCE should perhaps be interpreted as yet another manifestation of overriding concerns about Athens' position in inter-state competition. Civic reconciliation provided the most efficient means to resist foreign domination and renew military activities. It surely merits attention that over the course of a quarter of a century, the Athenian demos displayed an unwavering commitment to continuing war in the face of manpower losses that were so catastrophic that they even necessitated acceptance of polygynous unions (Hansen 1988 reckons with the loss of about 40% of the adult male citizen population): can we expect them to have simply 'switched off' this disposition after a (close and by no means inevitable) defeat, and resisted intra-polity reconciliation even if it would have interfered with military renewal?

In fact, not long after the crushing defeat of 405/4 BCE, once new cohorts of males had attained fighting age, the sub-hoplite elements of the demos sought to renew imperialist policies (in 392/1 BCE), creating a navy by taxing the rich. Control over the Bosphorus allowed the imposition of a toll on trade flows, followed by raids for plunder (down to 388 BCE); state pay once again began to be fed by these revenues. Persian intervention only temporarily stalled this process in 387 BCE. By 374 BCE, a new Athenian-led alliance had become the leading naval power in the Aegean and Ionian Seas. Navy strength rose from 100 ships in 377 BCE to 283 in 357 BCE. This time, Athenian involvement entailed heavy domestic taxation of the rich; and again, due to the naval character of the league, it involved redistribution to the poor. Once again, imperialism went hand in hand with domestic bargaining via state subsidies: pay for assembly attendance rose 6-to 9-fold, and jurors were more fully employed than before. In 358 BCE, a special fund was created to subsidize attendance of state festivals. Renewed annexations outside the alliance opened up land for kleruchs (366-4 BCE). Only the mounting costs of aggressive warfare and the growing power of Macedonia eventually checked Athenian war-making and undermined its democratic regime.

⁵ Thuc. 8.75-6 claims that the Athenian naval crews were fully aware of this situation. Subsequent events suggest that he is right.

Conclusion

For some 150 years, popular military mobilization and political participation advanced concurrently (see Table 1). Strictly speaking, this coincidence does not formally establish a causal relationship between these two variables. However, given the substantial duration of this process, and a variety of parallel occurrences in other Greek poleis, any model of military organization and political regimes in ancient Greece that does not accord critical importance to this correlation would seem to be gravely deficient. A consistent focus on the political repercussions of inter-state competition provides a necessary counterweight to the conventional emphasis on various forms of class struggle. Ancient Greek sources pay considerable attention to both phenomena: class relations feature as prominently as foreign relations. In the aftermath of the great wars of the mid-twentieth century, and finally after Vietnam, western historians of ancient Greece (as typical representatives of a predominantly leftist academic establishment) have – arguably for ideological or aesthetic reasons – increasingly focused on class relations at the expense of a proper appreciation of the strength of popular commitment to inter-state competition. To what extent this commitment was a function of the specific demographic or ideological characteristics of Greek city-states is a question in need of further investigation.

Comparative perspectives

Tyranny

Several problems remain. Military stress need not result in democracy: tyranny is another option. Aristotle's discussion of the origins of tyrannical regimes (*Pol.* 1310b) may not be particularly enlightening, but it deserves attention that he considers strong military leadership a positive and enhancing feature of tyrannical regimes (*Pol.* 1315b). A systematic survey of the creation of tyrannical regimes in Greek states from the seventh century to about 400 BCE suggests a substantial degree of association with military activity. For that period, the most detailed survey of Greek tyranny provides some information about the way in which 41 tyrants came to power (Berve 1967):⁶ 14 were the sons, brothers or other relatives or deputies of the previous tyrant, whereas 27 established 'new' tyrannical regimes. Of those 27, 10 (or 37%) attained this position in their capacity as military leaders, compared to 9 (or 33%) who seized power in coups (with the help of a particular faction), 7 (or 26%) who were installed by outside powers, and 1 (4%) who started out as a purely civilian leader. This breakdown probably underestimates the presence of war leaders, as some of the instigators of coups may well have enjoyed a similar position.⁷ (Incidentally, an association between tyrannical coups and popular military mobilization can be observed in the city-states of Spring-and-Autumn China: Lewis 2000:369-70). Once established, tyrannical regimes certainly accommodated further war-making: Periander of Corinth, Kleisthenes of Sikyon, Thrasybulos of Miletus and Polykrates of Samos are merely the best-known tyrants credited with intense military activity during their reigns. Unfortunately, the nature of the evidence forestalls a similarly systematic assessment of the relative frequency of this pattern.

City-states

Another question is whether high levels of popular mobilization for military purposes and political bargaining to sustain such efforts are typical characteristics of city-states, compared to other types of states. This is an important issue because in studying the relationship between bargaining, war-making and regime type by focusing on Greek (and subsequently) Roman city-states (and

⁶ After c.400 BCE, tyrants usually relied on mercenary forces to seize power, often in cities other than their own. I exclude them from this survey.

⁷ The poor quality of many of the pertinent sources is of little concern here: it does not matter much if tyrants really started out as military leaders or whether it could be plausibly imagined that they had occupied this role.

sometimes city-state empires), we may in fact be studying the specific properties of city-states (i.e., a state type) rather than the qualities that are associated with a particular type of political regime per se. In so far as city-states conform to the ideal type of the “highly institutionalized and highly centralized micro-state” (Hansen 2000:19) endowed with broadly-based consultative and participatory civic and military institutions, they are a priori likely to be characterized by relatively high levels of popular mobilization: in this regard, the difference between city-states with different political regimes may be smaller than the difference between all city-states and other kinds of other states.

A recent comparative survey of 36 city-state cultures in Europe, Asia, Africa and the Americas during the last 5,000 years makes it easier to address this problem (Hansen 2000, 2002). In a sample of 38 specimens (two entries were broken up into two new ones each), no usable information on military mobilization levels is available for 18 cases (47%).⁸ Among the 20 better documented systems, 7 experienced high levels of popular military commitments, 3 may have done so, 5 moved from popular mobilization to professionalization,⁹ and 1 may have moved the other way. *In toto*, (at least) 16 out of 20 systems, or 80%, at some point appear to have experienced high levels of popular military mobilization, as opposed to 4 that did not or may not have done so. Strictly speaking, we would have to compare this sample to one covering all other pre-industrial states in order to establish the significance of this finding: however, it seems very unlikely a priori that most early states regularly relied on massive levies of citizen militias rather than the services of a more narrowly recruited military that was sustained by tributary surplus extraction.

In a second step, we need to establish the degree of positive correlation between popular military mobilization and political participation in order to ascertain the applicability of the bargaining hypothesis to city-states in general. No clear pattern emerges (Table 2): 44% of the high-commitment systems were monarchies, 38% had de facto mixed constitutions, and 19% were oligarchic republics. Among low-commitment states, half were oligarchies and half were monarchies. This suggests that *state type* (i.e., city-state vs. other types of state) is a more significant determinant of military mobilization levels than political regime.¹⁰

The case of Republican Rome

The Roman case is not a good parallel to the Greek case. The conventional view is that of an expanding Roman citizen-state surrounded by (and increasingly interspersed with) a penumbra of allied polities, with gradual integration between the two parts. This view is misleading for two reasons: the allied polities were more separate than often assumed, and their alleged desire to become ‘Roman’ is a mirage created by later Roman imperial sources and reinforced by 19th-century nationalistic perspectives (Mouritsen 1998; Dresden 2004). The Italian alliance system was a military confederacy for the dual purpose of (usually) predation and (more rarely) defense. More importantly, much the same is true of what is usually called the ‘Roman state’. A Roman society and citizenry (as a political body) only existed in the original city-state core of Rome and the surrounding *tribus* (gradually expanded to a maximum capacity of about 1,600 km² by 390 BCE), while a growing proportion of the so-called citizenry (eventually up to ¾ of all Roman citizens) resided in a far-flung Italian periphery: though nominally part of the Roman state and formally (though not always) endowed with the franchise, these Romans belonged to largely self-governed communities or districts (often even without much knowledge of Latin). Non-elite contacts with the core were minimal and participation in the *res publica* was limited to life-cycle military service for unmarried

⁸ In a few (but clearly not many) instances, relevant information might be available in the secondary literature beyond the Hansen volumes. However, most of these cultures are only poorly documented, or primarily known from the archaeological record.

⁹ City-state cultures that lasted a long time regularly underwent this transition.

¹⁰ This does not rule out the presence of appropriate bargaining mechanisms in high-mobilization monarchies: this issue merits further study.

young men. In this specific context, bargaining (beyond the disbursal of material benefits such as spoils to ensure military participation) was impossible because the peripheral Romans were excluded from the political process. This reading is consistent with the fact that political reforms that may be interpreted as concessions or bargaining to support military efforts – while frequent in the fourth century BCE – ceased after about 300 BCE, concurrently with and in consequence of the massive expansion of citizen status (and therefore military commitments) well beyond the city-state core: as the aristocracy was increasingly able to draw on the de facto disfranchised ‘citizens’ of the periphery to sustain war-making, further political bargaining in the core became superfluous (Scheidel 2004). Renewed disbursal of benefits at the core in the last century of the Republic was a function of increasingly intense electioneering, not of war-related bargaining. From the early third century BCE onwards – at least when we seek to understand military mobilization –, it does not make sense to treat Rome as a ‘republic’ with participatory political institutions; this label can only be applied to the city-state core, and then only with regard to the process of popular affirmation of aristocratic leadership through election.

Table 1: War-making and state-making in Athens

BCE	MILITARY	POLITICAL
c.600 594/3	Defeat against Megara Victories against Megara	Reforms of Solon
511/06 510 508/7 506	Spartan interventions Victories against Sparta, Boeotia, Chalkis	Fall of tyrants Conscription reforms
501 498 493/2 491	Intervention in Ionia Fortification & naval programs War against Aegina	Election of strategoi
490 488/7	Victory against Persians	Creation of ostracism; election of archons
480/79	Victories against Persians	
c.465/2 462/1 450s	Victories against Persians & Thasos Offensives against Persians (Egypt, Levant) and Sparta; expansion in central Greece	Ephialtes' reforms Jury pay; citizenship law
440s	Failure of (hoplite) land expansion	Annual naval service building programs
431/21	War against Sparta & allies	
415/13 413 411 411/10 410 410/04	War against Syracuse Sicilian disaster Naval victories of democratic faction Renewed war effort against Sparta	Oligarchic coup Democratic restoration Expanded state pay
404	Defeat against Sparta	Oligarchic regime
403 392/1- 377/57	Renewed expansion of navy Second Delian League; great increase in navy strength	Democratic restoration Increase in assembly pay; sidized attendance of festivals

Table 2: Popular military mobilization and political regime in city-state cultures

System	Mobilization	Regime
Spring/Autumn China	yes	aristocracies with monarchs, later occasional 'tyrannies'
Latium	yes	oligarchic republics (assemblies, elections?)
Tarim Basin	yes	monarchies
Vikings	yes	monarchies (assemblies)
Switzerland	yes	oligarchic republics (assemblies)
Fante	yes	rulers & city councils
Eastern Niger	yes	monarchies
Sumer	perhaps	monarchies (assemblies)
Yoruba	perhaps	monarchies
Mixtec	perhaps	monarchies
Greece	yes, later less so	various
Carthage	yes, later less so	monarchy?, then oligarchy (assembly, later elections)
Rome	yes, later no	republic (oligarchic with 'democratic' elements) later monarchy
Netherlands	yes, later less so	oligarchic republics
Aztec	yes, later less so	monarchies
Etruscans	no, later yes?	monarchies, later oligarchies
BA Palestine	perhaps not	monarchies
Italy	sometimes, mostly not	oligarchic republics
Germany	no	oligarchic republics
Hausa	no	monarchies

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