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The Fleet of Syracuse (480-413 BCE)

The Deinomenids

The ancient sources make no reference to the fleet of Syracuse until the beginning of the 5th century BCE. In particular, Thucydides, when considering the Greek maritime powers at the time of the rise of the Athenian empire, includes among them the tyrants of Sicily¹. Other sources refer more precisely to Gelon's fleet, during the Carthaginian invasion in Sicily. Herodotus, when the Greeks envoys asked for Gelon's help to face Xerxes' attack, mentions the lord of Syracuse promising to provide, amongst other things, 200 triremes in return of the command of the Greek forces². The same number of ships is also mentioned by Timaeus³ and Ephorus⁴. It is very odd, though, that we hear nothing of this fleet during the Carthaginian campaign and the Battle of Himera in either the narration of Diodorus, or the briefer one of Herodotus⁵. Nevertheless, other sources imply some kind of naval fighting in Himera. Pausanias saw offerings from Gelon and the Syracusans taken from the Phoenicians in either a sea or a land battle⁶. In addition, the Scholiast to the first *Pythian* of Pindar, in two different situations – the second one being from Ephorus – says that Gelon destroyed the Carthaginians in a sea battle when they attacked Sicily⁷.

¹ Thuc. I 14, 2: ὀλίγον τε πρὸ τῶν Μηδικῶν καὶ τοῦ Δαρείου θανάτου ... τρήρεις περί τε Σικελίαν τοῖς τυράννοις ἐς πλῆθος ἐγένοντο καὶ Κερκυραίοις.

² Hdt. VII 158.

³ Timae. *FGrHist* 566 F94= Polyb. XII 26b, 1-5, but the set is not the court of Gelon, but the conference of the mainland Greeks in Corinth. It is worth mentioning, though, that Polybius in the same passage further attacks Timaeus for his credibility.

⁴ Ephor. *FGrHist* 2a 70 F186= *Scholia* in Pind. *Pyth.* I 146b.

⁵ Diod. XI 20-25; Hdt. VII 165-167. According to Meister 1967, 42-43, the whole episode of the Himera campaign in Diodorus derives from Timaeus.

⁶ Paus. VI 19, 7.

⁷ *Scholia* in Pind. *Pyth.* I, 146a; *Scholia* in Pind. *Pyth.* I 146b= Ephor. *FGrHist* 2a 70, F186.

Some scholars tried to reconcile the references of the sources. Pugliese Carratelli⁸ and Dunbabin⁹ supposed that Gelon's fleet engaged a battle with Anaxilas'. Dunbabin added also some Pindaric passages from which sea fighting in 480 BCE could be inferred¹⁰. Dunbabin's hypothesis has been proved very stimulating and many scholars have followed him¹¹. Others, though, have dismissed the possibility of any kind of sea fighting¹². According to my view, a close reading of the passages quoted by Dunbabin does not show any sea fighting in 480 BCE. Even if we accept that Pausanias refers to Himera¹³, he himself does not seem to know whether the battle mentioned was fought on land or at sea¹⁴, while the Scholiast's passage is too full of inaccuracies to be completely trusted¹⁵. Finally, the sea fighting, in which Chromios and Hegesias took part – according to Dunbabin –, could easily be the Battle of Cumae¹⁶.

In conclusion, I must exclude the possibility of a major sea battle in 480 BCE. The silence of both Diodorus and Herodotus is decisive in this matter, and the other passages mentioned do not prove the opposite. Nevertheless, this cannot exclude the option that Gelon did possess a fleet. But should we trust the figure of 200 triremes mentioned, and if yes, why did this fleet not engage a battle?

On the one hand, I must remark that this number seems suspiciously round and close to the size of the fleet provided by the Athenians at the Battle of Salamis. Moreover, 200 ships are a large naval force, probably too big not to be mentioned by Herodotus and Diodorus as taking part in the battle. Finally, maybe 200 ships

⁸ Pugliese Carratelli 1932, 432.

⁹ Dunbabin 1948, 425-426.

¹⁰ Pind. *Nem.*, 9, 42, postulates that Chromios was Gelon's admiral; see Pind. *Ol.*, 6, 9, 10, for Hegesias' participation in sea fighting.

¹¹ For example, Vallet 1958, 364; Berve 1967, 144; Burn 1990, 482; Kufofka 1993-94, 268 n. 51; Mafodda 1996, 126 with n. 94.

¹² Ameling 1993, 43; Bravo 1993, 446-447; Zahrt 1993, 361, n. 26; 377, n. 72, adding that the reference to sea fighting is, as a whole, a later invention; Luraghi 1994, 307 with n. 145; Krings 1998, 301-302; Milinno 2001, 140 n. 63; Coretti 2006, 424, n. 35; 417.

¹³ Frazer 1965, 61, says that the spoils are almost certainly from Himera, but see Krings 1998, 301 who remarks that nothing in Pausanias' passage confirms such a supposition. Himera could be reasonably inferred in this dedication but it is not the only possible battle.

¹⁴ Bravo 1993, 446; Luraghi 1994, 307, n.145; Krings 1998, 302 who adds that the sea or land battle in Pausanias is explained by the fact that the latter likes to complement the great historians and especially Herodotus.

¹⁵ Bravo 1993, 446; Luraghi 1994, 307, n.145; Milinno 2001, 140, n. 163. Both Bravo and Luraghi consider the whole *scholion* as an error of the Scholiast. The mistakes are: a) the embassy is mentioned as being sent from Athens, not from the Greeks in general; b) it was sent to Hieron, Gelon's successor, not to Gelon himself; c) a pact was made which does not seem possible since in that case it should have been mentioned by either Diodorus or Herodotus.

¹⁶ Bravo 1993, 447; adding that the fighting in which Hegesias took place was not against Anaxilas but against the Phoenicians; Luraghi 1994, 307, n. 145, who adds that Chromios' bravery in sea battles is conventionally mentioned along with his bravery as an infantry and cavalry fighter.

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needed to be declared by Gelon if he was to make a claim to the leadership.

On the other hand, the two hundred ships are mentioned by many sources (Timaeus through Polybius, Herodotus and Ephorus through the scholiast)¹⁷. Moreover, Thucydides' reference to the tyrants of Sicily as possessors of a remarkable fleet is easily applicable to Gelon¹⁸. It is difficult to give a definite answer. Athens' example is significant in showing that Gelon could have managed to build such a fleet in a few years, especially if he was expecting an attack by Carthage. Maybe, some components of this fleet had already taken part in the war to free the emporia, which Gelon says he waged against Carthage at an earlier stage¹⁹.

But if Gelon had such a large fleet, why did it not participate in the Battle of Himera? I think that there are various possibilities. The first hypothesis is the one previously expressed by Dunbabin, who supposed that the straits of Messina were blocked. Another suggestion comes down to reasons of strategy. Gelon's navy was inferior to his enemies and quite probably inexperienced at overcoming an enemy fleet whilst outnumbered, since all the war operations where Herodotus mentions Gelon taking part in, before 480 BCE, were on land²⁰. A final possibility could arise if we consider that Gelon preferred using free people to man his ships, namely from the lower or middle classes of the cities he controlled, and mostly from Syracuse, and not slaves²¹. In that case, Gelon could have thought that it was better not to fight at sea at all than to man the ships with forces more experienced and valuable in land battles. This is because of the danger of being defeated by the more sea-experienced Carthaginians and then losing valuable soldiers which were to be needed in the decisive battle which was expected to take place on land²².

¹⁷ It is possible, though, that they all have a common initial source; probably Antiochus or even Herodotus.

¹⁸ Maddoli 1980, 33; Hornblower 1991, 47, says that Thucydides probably refers to Hippokrates and Anaxilas. But if Hippokrates had a reasonable fleet, his successor Gelon would have at least the same navy, if not a bigger one, since he also had Syracuse under his command.

¹⁹ Hdt. VII 158.

²⁰ Hdt. VII 155-156.

²¹ Griffin 2005, 121, based also on Casson 1971, 323-324, postulates that mercenaries or slaves were more unlikely to have manned these ships and that Gelon's fleet was constituted by citizen forces, perhaps with some *Kyllyrioi*, namely free native Sicels, and other allies mixed in. This approach is close to my view of the crews in Gelon's fleet. On the other hand, of course, it cannot be excluded that Gelon could have used slaves, either from the cities he had enslaved such as Megara and Euboea (Hdt. VII 156, 2-3, but it is worth mentioning that the people enslaved were sold out of Sicily) or from other sources. The latter would be of much lower cost for him, but also less eager to fight.

²² Of course this last analysis is speculative and based mostly on the Athenian model of manning the fleet at that same period, although it cannot be excluded that the Athenians did use slaves as rowers later in the fifth century. For this last issue, see among others Dover 1970, 388; Graham 1992; Hunt 1998, 90; Morrison-Coates-Rankov 2000, 117 cf.; Hornblower 2008, 563. *Contra* Casson 1971,

Six years after Himera, Hieron, Gelon's brother and successor in the government of Syracuse, won a great naval victory. Diodorus says that Cumae threatened by the Etruscans asked for Hieron's help. Hieron responded to this request and sent a significant number of ships to assist Cumae. According to Diodorus, these ships, together with the Cumaeans, won a decisive battle against the Etruscans causing them many casualties and freed Cumae from the Etruscan threat²³. Unfortunately, Diodorus does not give any numbers for this fleet. We should not expect them to be numerous though, since he supplemented the fleet of Cumae; thus, it would definitely be less than 100 ships. The dispatch of this navy along with the campaigns of Hieron against Croton and Rhegion, which preceded it²⁴, indicates two very important things. The first is directly related to the analysis of Gelon's fleet in Himera. It is very tempting to consider that Hieron relied on the navy that his brother built for his campaigns, especially for the campaign against the Etruscans. The fact that Hieron possessed an important fleet which could assist Cumae²⁵ indicates that Syracuse had a good navy in 474 BCE. The most likely period during which this fleet would have been built was soon before the Carthaginian invasion of 480 BCE. Of course it could be claimed that Gelon built his fleet after Himera from the spoils and the recompense he took from the Carthaginians²⁶ or even that the fleet which faced the Etruscans was built by Hieron himself after the death of his brother in 478 BCE²⁷. However, in my opinion, the available data point more to the first case, without excluding the possibility that Hieron also took some measures to enlarge this fleet.

The second important feature is Hieron's will to expand Syracuse's power beyond Sicily and his interest in the area of the Tyrrhenian Sea. Some scholars observe that this policy could have also been initiated for commercial reasons, namely the control of the commercial transactions between Campania and the north part of the Tyrrhenian Sea²⁸. Nevertheless, in my view, it should merely be considered as the will of a monarch to expand his influence for reasons of prestige

323-324, previously mentioned.

²³ Diod. XI 51. For this victory, see also Pind. *Pyth.* I 70-75; *Schol.* in Pind. *Pyth.* I 137a. From the latter *scholion* it seems that the Carthaginians were present at the battle of Cumae at the side of their old allies, but see Huss 1990, 59-60; Kuforka 1993/4, 271, n. 60. Moreover, I should remark that it seems very improbable that Carthage after such a great defeat a few years earlier could become involved again in a war against the tyrant of Syracuse, since no vital interests were menaced at Cumae.

²⁴ For these campaigns, see De Sensi Sestito 1981, mainly 626 cf.; Luraghi 1994, 349-350.

²⁵ Diodorus says that the Etruscans were masters of the sea (Τυρρηνῶν θαλαττοκρατούντων), meaning that a sizable fleet was needed to confront them.

²⁶ Diod. XI 26, 2 mentions 2000 talents.

²⁷ As Corretti 2006, 421, stands.

²⁸ For example, Maddoli 1980, 54; Mafodda 1992, 267, n.82; Consolo Langher 1997, 38; Braccisi 1998, 37 (for Gelon's commercial interests); 42 for Hieron's.

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and power and also an attempt to match his brother's achievements and reputation²⁹. Alongside his plans for expansion should also be viewed the naval base which, according to Strabo, he built at Pithecoussae³⁰. This naval base shows that Hieron did not consider the fleet as an instrument to be used only in certain conditions, and then left until needed again, but as a permanent tool of expansion and influence in distant places. In this context the possession of a fleet merely as defensive weapon for the rebuttal of the Carthaginian invasion is transformed in a very small span of time to an offensive instrument for intervention and expansion in distant places. At the same period the identical evolution is easily traceable and better documented of course, for Athens.

As for the synthesis of this navy I expect the same to be mentioned as before for Gelon's fleet. Griffin is right to exclude the possibility of skilled mercenaries³¹. Such men were more likely to fight as hoplites and work as farmers, like the 10.000 to whom citizenship was granted by Gelon³². Also slaves must be excluded. I expect that this fleet was manned mainly by the lower classes of the cities controlled by Hieron and mainly from Syracuse³³. The existence of the naval base in the Gulf of Naples shows also that Hieron needed naval crews for longer and more permanent periods of times; thus that part of the population of the lower classes could benefit from it and earn wages on the same permanent basis. By manning his ships with members of the lower classes Hieron was giving them the notion that they were also members of the community under his rule, integrating a greater part of the Greek population in the political system and gaining their support by providing wages.

In 466 BCE, during the rebellion of the Syracusans against Thrasybulus, Diodorus mentions that both parties possessed ships and that they engaged also in battle³⁴. A little later, after the expulsion of the tyrant, the Syracusans won at sea against the rebel ex-mercenaries of Gelon³⁵. I do not expect many ships to have

²⁹ The phrase of Alcibiades (Thuc. VI 18, 2) is very suitable for Hieron.

³⁰ Strab. V 4, 9. With this naval base he could check movements around the Gulf of Naples as has been remarked (Staccioli 1991, 114; Consolo Langher 1997, 38; Haynes 2000, 262). Giuffrida Lentile 1983, 67, wrongly refers to this base as a military colony. Scholars have also related Hieron's involvement in the area to the foundation of Neapolis (Lepore 1967, 128 and 157; Maddoli 1980, 54; Giuffrida Lentile 1983, 67; Mafodda 1992, 267, n.82; Sartori 1992, 93; Luraghi 1994, 352-353, with n. 346; Consolo Langher 1997, 38-39). Millino 2001, 150, n.8, based on Strabo's passage, speaks of mercenary soldiers, but in my view this is not supported by Strabo.

³¹ Griffin 2005, 125-126, postulates also the existence of marine-infantry, which seems very probable.

³² Diod. XI, 72, 3.

³³ The same opinion is also expressed by Luraghi 1994, 369-370, who seems to back the idea that both Gelon and Hieron relied on the lower classes of Syracuse to crew their ships.

³⁴ Diod. XI 68, 2-3.

³⁵ Diod. XI 76, 1.

taken part in these sea battles. In the first case, since Diodorus mentions that all Syracusans turned against Thrasybulus³⁶, it seems probable that the fleet of the Syracusans was manned from members of the lower classes, while the tyrant's came from his Cataneans and mercenaries³⁷. In the second case, I expect the same synthesis for the Syracusan navy, which was presumably enlarged with ships previously belonging to the tyrants.

Campaigns of the Democracy

Twenty years after the battle of Cumae, Syracuse led another expedition against the Etruscans (454 BCE). This time, the tyrants no longer governed Syracuse and a kind of a democracy had been established³⁸. Diodorus mentions that the Syracusans elected Phayllus³⁹ as an admiral, in order to suppress piratical Etruscan activity in the Tyrrhenian Sea. The admiral initially conquered the modern island of Elba but then sailed home bribed by the Etruscans. The Syracusans exiled him and elected another admiral, Apelles, and put him in command of 60 ships to deal with the Etruscans. Apelles raided the coastal areas of the Etruscans in mainland Italy and then turned to Corsica which at the time was controlled by the Etruscans, raided the island, conquered the city of Elba and returned to Syracuse with a great number of prisoners and spoils⁴⁰. This expedition to Corsica could be related to the Syracusan port of Corsica mentioned by Diodorus and Ptolemy⁴¹. Diodorus does not mention the causes for these campaigns; however, modern scholars have expressed some opinions about their aims and character.

Cristofani sees in Diodorus' vocabulary a piratical character for this campaign which aimed at the production centre of the Etruscans and not the conquering of specific places⁴². In the same context, Maddoli suggests that these campaigns were aimed at the mines of Elba on which the opposite mainland area depended⁴³; thus, the Syracusans were not interested in gaining new territories,

³⁶ Diod. XI 67, 6-7.

³⁷ Diod. XI 67, 7.

³⁸ For my purposes I limit comment to saying that the democracy of Syracuse does not seem to have been the same as the Athenian after the reforms of Ephialtes. It was a democracy where the lower classes had few opportunities to participate in the government of the city. For the democracy of Syracuse see Hüttl 1929, 64; Maddoli 1980, 56; Consolo Langher 1997, 51-56; Rutter 2000, 137-166.

³⁹ Scholars do not agree whether his name is to be restored in an inscription from the temple of Zeus Malophoros at Selinus; see Giuffrida Lentile 1983, 68-69, n.33; Haillet 2001, 185.

⁴⁰ Diod. XI 88, 4-5.

⁴¹ Diod. V 13, 3; Ptol. III 2, 5; see also Gras 1996.

⁴² Cristofani 1987, 72, quotes the verbs «προθέω, κατατρέχω, χεῖρόω».

⁴³ The mining activity of the Etruscans in Elba is specifically mentioned by Diodorus (V 13, 1).

but in serving their economic interests in the south Tyrrhenian Sea⁴⁴. Giuffrida Lentile relates these expeditions to the aim of Syracuse to control the route of the metal trade, adding also that the Etruscans were in a friendly relationship with Athens, which was a rival of Syracuse in the area⁴⁵. Haynes says that the aim of the expedition was the suppression of Etruscan piracy but there were also economic reasons⁴⁶.

In my view, these campaigns are proofs of Syracuse's power since the Syracusans showed that they were able to undertake major expeditions to distant places and attack the enemy on his own ground in more than one area (Etruria, Elba and Corsica). If the pretext for these expeditions was raids by Etruscan ships in the Tyrrhenian Sea, this is a sign that Etruscan power was not totally reduced after Cumae and that the latter still had a hand in the area. Nevertheless, the Syracusan success and degree of penetration into Etruscan soil show that the Etruscans did not have the power to resist Syracuse, which is a sign of some kind of decline. It seems that the *θαλαττοκρατούντες* referred to by Diodorus for the Etruscans in 474 BCE no longer applied.

As for the main causes of these expeditions, these must be interpreted through economic reasons, motives of prestige and general political power. However, the economic explanations must not be seen through a modernistic angle of trade and market control in the area that would provide constant profits for Syracuse. Of course the clearing of piratical activity from the area would benefit all kinds of traders, and naturally also the Syracusans merchants, but the control of commercial activity in the Tyrrhenian Sea was not a priority for Syracuse.

The economic reasons were of a more immediate character. On the one hand the Syracusans could aim at controlling the mines in Elba, which could provide much profit for the Syracusan state. On the other hand, Diodorus himself mentions that Apelles returned to Syracuse *αίχμαλώτων τε πλήθος κομίζων καὶ τὴν ἄλλην ὠφέλειαν ἄγων οὐκ ὀλίγην*, that is to say that even more profit was gained. As for the political ground, the extensive assault on Etruscan soil manifested the power of Syracuse in the area to both foes and friends and proved once more her hegemonic role. Similarly, the Syracusan democracy proved a good successor of the tyrant's policy of being the protector of the Greeks against the barbarians, an element that enforced even more its leading role.

Diodorus reports that Apelles manned 60 ships for his expedition, and this is the first firm number given by Diodorus for any naval expedition in the West. It is very plausible to assume that along with the rowers, a sufficient number of infantry was on board, since their existence was essential for the raids in coastal

⁴⁴ Maddoli 1980, 65.

⁴⁵ Giuffrida Lentile 1983, 70; see also Lepore 1967, 181.

⁴⁶ Haynes 2000, 262.

areas and the occupation of Elba and parts of Corsica. But even in that case, approximately 10,000 rowers were needed for the expedition. And of course these must have been hired from the lower classes of Syracuse. It seems that these people were gaining some power at the time. We must not exclude the possibility that the campaign against the Etruscans could somehow be related to the alleviation of the lower classes that were gathered along with Tyndarides the previous year⁴⁷. It is quite probable that the lower classes managed to obtain some benefits after the fall of Tyndarides, so that the political unrest ceased. The campaign to Etruria could be of some benefit to them since they could obtain wages as rowers, presumably part of the spoils and also the notion that they were part of the Syracusan state, since they were contributing in a military campaign. Tyndarides' effort to gain power in Syracuse has many similarities with Heracleides', about a century later. They both relied on the lower classes, while in the latter's case Plutarch clearly states that he depended mainly on the naval crews⁴⁸.

The Peloponnesian War

Diodorus does not mention any sea battles in the conflicts of Syracuse with Ducetius or the other cities of Sicily, such as Akragas, but under the year 439/8 BCE he says that the Syracusans reinforced their military strength by building 100 triremes⁴⁹. However, this reference by Diodorus seems totally contradicted by the fact that during the first Sicilian expedition the small Athenian force of 20 ships operated undisturbed by the Syracusan fleet⁵⁰. Thucydides mentions that Syracuse at that time had blocked Leontinoi by land and sea (427/6). However, apart from this, there is no other mention of Syracusan naval activity⁵¹. This weakness of Syracuse at sea is later clearly attested by Thucydides who says that the Syracusans, although controlling the situation on land, were excluded from the sea by a few Athenian ships. They could not tolerate this, so they started to prepare themselves also at sea⁵². But what kind of arrangements were these? Building some triremes? Could they possess so few ships that they needed to build some more to confront the Athenians? How few? Even fewer than 40? So should Diodorus' reference to 100 ships be dismissed as a whole? Or these preparations did not have to do with building the ships but with manning them, meaning that the Syracusans had to find crews in order to fill the ships and confront the small Athenian force? It is difficult to give definite answers to these issues, but it seems that maintaining

⁴⁷ Diod. XI 86, 4-5.

⁴⁸ For these events, see Plut. *Dion*, 47-50; Diod. XVI, 16-17.

⁴⁹ Diod. XII 30, 1.

⁵⁰ Thuc. III 86, 1.

⁵¹ Thuc. III 86, 4.

⁵² Thuc. III 115, 3-4.

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a permanent fleet was not a priority for Syracuse.

The situation for the Syracusan navy does not seem to have altered some years later, during the second Athenian expedition, since there are very few references until the arrival of Gylippus (414). But even when they decided to fight the Athenians at sea, they never put more than 80 ships into the fight⁵³. And of course some of these ships were not Syracusan, but belonged to their allies⁵⁴.

On the eve of the Sicilian expedition we hear Nicias saying in the Athenian assembly that Syracuse and Selinous possessed many ships and many men to man them, but his wording is not to be trusted, since his goal is to discourage his fellow country-men from voting in favor of the expedition⁵⁵. Later on, when the Athenians were sailing to Sicily (415), Hermocrates urged his fellow-citizens to gather the fleet of the Sicilian cities, or at least the Syracusan fleet, and sail to confront the Athenians at Taranto, but his proposal was not followed⁵⁶. Moreover, we hear nothing of the Syracusan fleet in Athenagoras' speech, especially in the passage where he refers to the military strength of Syracuse compared with the Athenian forces⁵⁷, nor in Hermocrates' measures proposed to the Syracusans⁵⁸, nor in the war preparations during the winter of 415-4 BCE⁵⁹. Moreover, the information given to the Athenians by Camarina that the Syracusans were manning ships was proven to be false.⁶⁰ Briefly, there is no mention of a Syracusan navy for a whole year from the summer of 415 BCE until the arrival of Gylippus the next summer. There are two possibilities for this omission; either the Syracusans avoided confronting the numerous and powerful Athenian fleet, or they possessed practically no fleet⁶¹. If they had no ships, they had plenty of time to build them by the next

⁵³ 80 at Thuc. VII 22, 1; the same number also at Thuc. VII 37, 3; 76 at Thuc. VII 52, 1 and about the same at Thuc. VII 70, 1.

⁵⁴ The 12 or 13 (see Kagan 1981, 276, n.44) which Gylippus brought with him (Thuc. VII 7, 1). Moreover, Gylippus during the winter of 414-413 BCE searched for naval reinforcements among Syracuse's allies and he may possibly have obtained some. When describing the final engagement at sea Thucydides (VII 70, 1) mentions that προεξαγαγόμενοι δὲ οἱ Συρακόσιοι καὶ οἱ ξύμμαχοι ναυσὶ παραπλησίαις τὸν ἀριθμὸν καὶ πρότερον, meaning that the fleet was not wholly composed of pure Syracusan ships.

⁵⁵ Thuc. VI 20, 3.

⁵⁶ Thuc. VI 34, 3. Dover 1970, 299, followed by Kagan 1981, 220-221, suggests that if his advice was followed, the Sicilian fleet would have met disaster. Busolt 1904, 300, says that the Syracusans needed at least two months to build and man a fleet to confront the Athenians. On the other hand, Green 1970, 134 and n. 5, though recognizing the difficulties of such a plan, finds some good arguments for it.

⁵⁷ Thuc. VI 37, 1-2.

⁵⁸ Thuc. VI 72.

⁵⁹ Thuc. VI 75.

⁶⁰ Thuc. VI 52, 1. Kagan 1981, 224, assumes that this information was given to the Athenians by pro-Athenian Camarineans who wanted to bring them to their city in order to seize power.

⁶¹ The numbers of the Athenian ships are provided by Thucydides at VI 43-44 (134 ships – among them 40 to carry troops – and 130 ships carried provisions for the army).

summer, but in that case I think that there should be some reference or hint in Thucydides.

In contrast, the next year, after the arrival of Gylippus, there is a shift in the state of affairs and, from that moment, we hear more and more of the Syracusan fleet. The first action mentioned on behalf of the Syracusans was the capturing of an Athenian ship while a little later a small squadron of 12 ships led by Gylippus managed to enter the city⁶². At this point Thucydides states that the Syracusans ναυτικὸν ἐπλήρουσαν and they were preparing to fight also at sea⁶³. The phrase ναυτικὸν ἐπλήρουσαν is to be translated as meaning that the Syracusans were manning the ships. This sentence along with the absence in Thucydides of the Syracusans building triremes allow us to conclude that the latter did possess a fleet but did not wish to confront the more experienced Athenians. Diodorus, on the other hand, in referring to the naval preparations of the Syracusans, adds that they were also building new ships and were practicing in the small harbour⁶⁴.

The shift in their planning has to do mainly with the arrival of Gylippus, along with the ships from Corinth and its allies. Gylippus had realized that victory could not be achieved without the neutralization of the Athenian fleet. This is why he tried from the beginning to find more ships among the allies of Syracuse⁶⁵ and later on urges along with Hermokrates the Syracusans to fight at sea⁶⁶. It seems that Gylippus played a great role in reorganizing the Syracusan fleet during the winter and spring of 414-413 BCE. In this reorganization a decisive role must have been played by the admirals of the ships from Corinth and its colonies who, along with their crews, were more experienced compared to the Syracusans. It is very clear that the transformations made in the Syracusans ships were of Corinthian origin⁶⁷. This change in the balance of power at sea was very obvious to Nicias, who mentioned it in his letter addressed to the Athenian assembly⁶⁸.

Another reason for the changing of Syracusan policy on sea battles could concern the internal affairs. After the defeat at Epipolai, the Syracusans changed their generals appointing new ones and beginning some kind of discussion with Nicias⁶⁹. It seems that the – let us say – moderate party, to which Hermokrates belonged, had lost influence and that the popular party gained the initiative. This

⁶² Thuc. VII 7, 1.

⁶³ Thuc. VII 7, 4.

⁶⁴ Diod. XIII 8, 5-6. The possibility of building some new triremes in the small harbor, where their dockyard was located as mentioned by Thucydides (VII 22, 1), is not to be excluded. But again in no way could a reference of Diodorus carry more weight than Thucydides.

⁶⁵ Thuc. VII 7, 2.

⁶⁶ Thuc. VII 21, 1-3.

⁶⁷ Thuc. VII 36, 2, Diodorus (XIII 10, 2) also attests that the Corinthian Ariston made these alterations to the Syracusan ships.

⁶⁸ Thuc. VII 12-14.

⁶⁹ Thuc. VI 103, 3-4.

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is why the negotiations with Nicias are explained, and obviously the new generals were of the same political bias⁷⁰. These generals were in charge of the Syracusan forces when Gylippus arrived and it is very plausible to assume that they were more willing for a sea battle, since they were to rely on the ship crews who were presumably drawn from the lower Syracusan classes. In this context it is also easy to explain the constitutional change which occurred after the final victory against Athens mentioned by Aristotle and Diodorus⁷¹. When Aristotle says that the *demos* managed to change the constitution from *politeia* to democracy because it contributed to the Athenian defeat⁷², it is obvious that he has in his mind the crews of the ships⁷³. In this last case the fleet has proven to be not only the decisive factor for the repulsing of the enemy but also the moving force for political reforms.

Conclusions

In conclusion, I think that, following Thucydides, the first building of the fleet was carried out in Syracuse under the tyrants. It seems very improbable that Gelon did not possess a fleet since he was expecting an attack by Carthage, and I think that he did not use it for reasons of strategy. This fleet, probably not as big as 200 triremes, was possibly increased from the spoils of Himera and became a decisive tool of expansion for Hieron. After the fall of the tyrants it seems that the Syracusan democracy used the fleet in a very occasional manner. The campaigns against the Etruscans seem to be of a raiding character, targeted at instant economic benefits, and we hear of no other naval expeditions in the following years. Diodorus' reference to 100 ships is very much contradicted by the absence of naval activity on behalf of Syracuse during both the first and the second Athenian expeditions before Gylippus' arrival. Either the Syracusans had few ships, or they had no money to man them. As for the role of the fleet in the political evolution of the city, the use of the navy in the last year of the Athenian expedition clearly led to political reforms and constitutional change. In asserting this conclusion, it is very plausible to assume that the lack of a permanent fleet the period 466-413 BCE was an important factor that prevented, in a way, the emancipation of the lower classes, and preserved the moderate democratic regime where the medium and upper classes had the biggest share in the government of the city.

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⁷⁰ Kagan 1981, 267, also refers, very vaguely though, to factional divisions.

⁷¹ Diod. XIII 34, 6.

⁷² Aristot. *Pol.* 1304a, 27-29.

⁷³ See the remarks of Newman 1902, 328-329; see also Keyt 1999, 99, who identifies the *demos* with both the ship crews and the light-armed troops. It is reasonable to assume that the *demos* who served as rowers in the sea battle, later, after the total destruction of the Athenian fleet became the light armed troops that pursued and harassed the retreating Athenians (Thuc. VII 78, 3, 6; 79, 5).

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Abstract

This paper explores the naval activity of Syracuse as an instrument of its expansionistic policy, and as a defensive tool aiming at repelling foreign invasions from the time of the Carthaginian invasion (480) to the end of the Sicilian expedition (413). In particular, it is focused on the literary sources, which although in some cases are pointing to the existence of an important fleet, no naval activity is mentioned in them. Finally, there is special interest to the composition of the fleet and its role in the city's political affairs.