INTRODUCTION.
FROM SICILY TO CNIDUS: NAVAL WARFARE, GRAND STRATEGY, AND THE STRUGGLE FOR POWER IN THE AEGEAN SEA.[1]

È singolare che i moderni abbiano guardato ad Andocide assai più che a Conone.
P. Treves

This book follows the political and military activity of one Athenian statesman, Conon of Anaphlistus. Conon began his career in the Athenian navy in the years before the coup of the Four Hundred, holding important commands at Naupactus, the Athenian navy base in Peloponnese. After Alcibiades' defeat at Notium, he was appointed the commander in chief of the fleet at Samos, and would hold the post until the ruinous end of the conflict. After the disaster of Aegospotami, Conon sought refuge to Cyprus, at the court of the ambitious king of Salamis, Evagoras, where he spent some years seemingly looking after his personal affairs.[2] The important turning point in his career came in the winter of 398/7, when Conon accepted an offer from the satrap Pharnabazus and took over the command of the Persian fleet in the war against Sparta, which had broken out following the defeat of Cyrus at the battle of Cunaxa. In the summer of 394, Conon defeated the Spartans at a major naval battle off Cnidus, and thus ignited a domino-like series of secessions amongst the cities and islands of the Aegean, which Sparta had subjugated in the aftermath of the Peloponnesian War. Conon was the man of the hour, the man who had brought Spartan hegemony to an end. Following the battle of Cnidus, Conon returned to Athens and completed the rebuilding of the Long Walls, the bastion that linked the urban centre of the polis to the port of Piraeus. The Walls were a powerful symbol of the city's maritime dominance, which the Athenians had been forced to demolish in compliance with the humiliating peace terms imposed by the Spartans at the end of the Peloponnesian War. By re-erecting them, the Athenians seemed to be claiming back their traditional ascendancy over the Aegean. Conon died less than two years later while on a diplomatic mission to Persia. Conon was the head of an embassy of Greek cities which had been dispatched after the Spartans sent Antalcidas to confer with Tiribazus, the commander of the Persian troops in Asia Minor. These talks were the first step towards the signing of the Peace of Antalcidas, in 386.

After his death Conon soon became a symbol of the best Athens could offer: a loyal democrat and a staunch patriot who strove to restore his fatherland to its for-

1 All the dates are B.C. unless otherwise stated.
2 Isoc. 5.62.

mer glory at the time of deepest crisis. This is how orators from Isocrates to Demosthenes hailed him in their speeches. The goal of this book is to examine what lies behind the literary image of the patriotic admiral. It will start by analysing Conon's military activity in the course of the Peloponnesian War and the political and military circumstances of his rise to the top of the Athenian military in the final years of the conflict against Sparta. Then, this book will challenge the assumption that Conon steadily pursued but only one patriotic goal after the humiliation of Aegospotami, namely the restoration of Athens' power over the Aegean.

The study of the career of the Athenian *strategos* who agreed to put his expertise at the service of the Persian crown provides a good standpoint to consider the growing political complexity of the Aegean world in the decades following the end of the Peloponnesian War. This work will try to shed some light on this complexity by addressing the following issues: what good was the experience of Conon, the loyal democrat and skilled admiral, to Persia in general and to Pharnabazus in particular; how the war against Sparta, and the way it was fought, was to influence the balance of power between the satraps of Asia Minor; how the events of the so-called "Rhodian War" were to affect the politics of mainland Greece and the outbreak of the Corinthian War; what was Persia's interest in promoting the politics of "autonomy" and "independence" amongst the cities of Greece; and how Athens could rebuild an active foreign policy in this complex political environment.

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Writing history through the life and deeds of an individual is an exercise which invariably raises a series of questions. Some of these questions concern the specific merits of the chosen subject, and why said subject would deserve the reader's attention. Then there are other, more general questions concerning the choice of looking at the past through an individual's life, and the risk of conveying a distorted historical picture, for instance by magnifying the life and achievements of the investigated subject beyond their actual relevance, or by developing some kind of affection for it to the detriment of historical objectivity and accuracy.[3]

The practitioners of biography have often had to fight to defend the place of their chosen field amongst respectable historical disciplines, even though in the last couple of decades the genre seems to have enjoyed an unexpected revival, at least in the United States. This revival was inspired by a new stream of studies on those great personalities of the country's history, who had come to be disparagingly known as "Old White Men".[4] In 2010 this revival was marked by the publication of a special issue of the *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* entitled *Biography and History: Inextricably Woven*. As R. I. Rotberg pointed out in the opening essay of the collection, "historical insights" are essential to attain a fuller understanding of "social forces" and "cultural variables".[5] Writing biography, says Rotberg, is a very

3 See Rotberg 2010, 319; Lepore 2001, 129–130.
4 Shalhope 2005, 162–163.
5 Rotberg 2010, 305.

complex, and eminently multidisciplinary exercise which demands "more than the piling up of facts".[6] Biographers, at least those who deal with figures of the not-so distant past, have to work their way through an extremely diverse range of first-, second- and third-person sources, of variable quality. Sometimes biographers have very thin evidence at their disposal, and so they have to "make inferences – sometimes unsatisfactorily – from crumbled shards and scattered clues". In other, not necessarily more fortunate cases, biographers find themselves in the very opposite position. Faced by a mass of diaries, reports, notes, interviews, print clippings, and other such materials, the biographer has to give the shape of a coherent discourse, and give sense to an inextricable mass of documents.[7] Speaking of his work on the life of Stewart Gore-Browne, an English settler and advocate of independence for Northern Rhodesia, Rotberg says that he had been "blessed with abundant first-person written documentation and interviews". For instance, this documentation included a long and regular correspondence between Gore-Browne and his English aunt, both of whom wrote superbly and with a very fine turn of phrase. This allowed a rare degree of insight to the author: "assuming that his lengthy correspondence and diaries were reliable, I came to know him very well, and even to glimpse his romantic, and highly complicated, love life".[8]

Dealing with such a large abundance of direct evidence is a situation unknown to ancient historians, most of whom would probably read Rotberg's words with great envy. Biography, as observed by Robin Osborne, thrives on details to conjure up "a sense of context", and the impression of coming face to face with the real selves of history's main figures. Quite unfortunately, none of the great personalities of classical antiquity has left behind a quantity of materials even remotely comparable to the mass of evidence left behind by Gore-Browne. And lacking details, we lack the essence of good biography. And this is the reason why, as Osborne argues, there cannot be "great historical biographies of figures from the Greek world".[9]

In the case of Conon, we know very little, if anything, about his family tree, the circumstances of his private life, and all the other details which constitute the main "plot" of a good biographical tale. We also lack a full and coherent narrative of his public career and achievements. Conon's public career spanned for some twenty years, roughly between 414 to his death in 392/1. Conon therefore had just enough time to make one cameo appearance in the *Histories* of Thucydides, who says that in 414/413 he was he was serving as *archon* at Naupactus.[10] For the later phases of Conon's career, historians have to rely on the first four books of Xenophon's *Hellenica*, and in the *Bibliotheca Historica* of Diodorus Siculus, books 13–15, plus some fragments from the *Hellenica Oxyrhynchia*. The information provided by these sources is often contradictory and incomplete. Nor do we have anything like a Plutarch's *Life of Conon* to make up for all this scantiness.

6 Rotberg 2010, 306.
7 Rotberg 2010, 310.
8 Rotberg 2010, 310–311.
9 Osborne 2000, 155.
10 Thuc. 7.31.4–5.

Also, if one were to read through the rest of the literary evidence available on Conon, the impression would be that since antiquity, his historical image was completely determined by his involvement in the battle of Cnidus. Conon, by winning that battle, became the man who brought to an end the decade of Sparta's Aegean hegemony which had begun with the naval battle of Aegospotami. Conon restored the liberty and autonomy of the Greeks of the Aegean, ushering in a new, albeit ephemeral phase of resurgent Athenian imperialism. This was the last opportunity which the Athenians had to restore their ascendancy over the Greek world.

Like the personages of Dante's *Comedy*, whose essence the poet crystallised in one specific moment of their life, "in which everything must be revealed", through a process of synopsis and abstraction,[11] the battle of Cnidus defined Conon, revealing his loyalty to the cause of Athens and his military prowess beyond the need for further testing. Even though by the time of the battle of Cnidus Conon was already a veteran admiral, who had served in the Peloponnesian War and had served the Great King in the Rhodian War, the whole of his career and achievements seem to have been encapsulated in that single event.

Conon's exploits at Cnidus were hailed with great enthusiasm throughout the Aegean, turning him into the object of semi-heroic cult in the liberated cities. After the battle, Conon and his Persian patron Pharnabazus put to sea again to induce the subject cities to secede. The Spartan garrisons were expelled; Conon and Pharnabazus were welcomed as saviours and liberators everywhere they landed.[12] Upon his return to Athens, Conon received the extraordinary honour of a statue in the *agora*, which was erected next to that of those of the two tyrannicides, Harmodius and Aristogiton.[13] After his return, Conon employed the money which Pharnabaxus had given him to complete the construction of the Long Walls and to carry out a series of naval operations in the Aegean. Unfortunately for him, however, all this glory was to be very short-lived. The renewed activism of the Athenians, and the circumstances of the collaboration between Conon and Pharnabazus were cause of concern amongst the Spartans, who resolved to send an embassy to Persia. In the winter of 392/1, Antalcidas and other legates were sent to Sardis to start talks with the satrap Tiribazus: the Spartans wanted peace and made no claim to the cities of Asia. The Great King therefore had no reason to wage war upon them, or support their enemies. The Spartan mission was soon followed by another delegation sent by the Greek adversaries of Sparta, at whose head was Conon. Tiribazus was impressed by his meeting with Antalcidas and took some important steps to show his support: he secretly gave him money to prepare for war at sea and had Conon arrested as an enemy of the Persian Crown. Conon, as we shall see, would die soon afterwards in rather mysterious circumstances. Then the satrap went to confer with Artaxerxes. Far from endorsing his satrap's opening to the Spartans, the king decided to replace him with Struthas, one of his courtiers, whom our sources describe as a friend of Athens.[14]

11 See Auerbach 1961, 134–142.
12 Diod. 14.84.3–4.
13 Dem. 20.68–70; Paus. 1.3.2.
14 Xen. *Hell.* 4.8.12–16.

Antalcidas did not obtain the agreement with the Spartans for which the Spartans had hoped. However, some years later, in the spring of 387, when he headed another diplomatic mission to Persia, he was much more successful, obtaining from the King the promise that, should the Athenians and their allies refuse to make peace on the terms to be dictated by him, he would become an ally of Sparta and wage war upon them. One year later, the envoys of all the Greek cities met at Sparta and swore a peace whose terms provided for the disbanding of all alliances between *poleis*, and claimed for the Great King the possession of the Greek cities of Asia.[15]

The signing of the Peace of Antalcidas shot down any hopes which the Athenians might have entertained of restoring their Aegean predominance. The treaty soon became the topic of intellectual and political debate. The orators took to comparing the humiliating effects of this agreement, which had given the Persians unprecedented ascendancy over the affairs of Greece, and had persuaded the Spartans that "leadership is theirs by ancestral right", and the so-called Peace of Callias signed by the Delian League and Persia, which had recognised the independence of Ionia.[16] In 380, Isocrates in his *Panegyricus* proposed a plan to bring back concord (*homonoia*) amongst the Greeks: all the *poleis*, including Sparta, should unite under the leadership of Athens and embark upon a new, grand campaign to liberate the Greeks of Asia from Persian domination.[17] Whether this plan ought to be understood as a serious political manifesto or little more than the topic for a rhetoric exercise has long been debated.[18] In either case, Isocrates' argument rests on a startling revision of Aegean history since the end of the Peloponnesian War, in which the Rhodian War and the battle of Cnidus became episodes of the struggle for the liberation of the Greeks from Spartan dominance. In that conflict, the Great King could count on the support of the subjects of Sparta and the services of as skilled an admiral as Conon, and of valiant Athenian seamen. Yet, Persian ineptitude caused this mighty fleet to remain "bottled up" for three years before Conon found the decisive victory at Cnidus. Indeed, Conon, as Isocrates put it, was the best an admiral could get: for not only was he "the most competent of our generals" and "the most experienced in the hazards of war", but he also "possessed more than any other the confidence of the Hellenes".[19] And it should perhaps have been expected that this monument of Athenian virtues would fall victim of the cruelty and ungratefulness of the Persians, who "shamelessly seized him for punishment by death".[20]

The eulogy of Conon became a popular *topos* of fourth-century oratory. In the decades following the signing of the Peace of Antalcidas, the late admiral thus came to embody the archetypal Athenian leader, who was honest, patriotic, and had a deep sense of the international role of the city.[21] Athenian propaganda appropriated

15 Xen. *Hell.* 5.1.25–31.
16 See Isoc. 4.18, 118–120. On the reactions to the Peaces of Antalcidas and Callias see Thompson 1981, 164–165.
17 See e. g. Isoc. 4.57, 173–174.
18 See Salomon 1996, 44.
19 Isoc. 4.142.
20 Isoc. 4.152–155.
21 See Dem. 19.190–191, 22.72, 24.180.

the Persian victory at Cnidus by portraying it as the rightful punishment for the treacherous greed of the Spartans, who, covetous as they were to displace Athens and acquire the hegemony of the sea, did not hesitate to come to terms with the Persians in the course of the Peloponnesian War.[22] Conon therefore was the man who restored the pride of Athens after the humiliation of the conflict against the Spartans and made the city again a contender for Greek hegemony. As Demosthenes says in his speech *Against Leptines*, written in the difficult years of the Social War:

> "It was just after the return of the exiled democrats from the Piraeus, when our city was so weak that she had not a single ship, and Conon, who was a general in the Persian service and received no prompting whatever from you, defeated the Lacedaemonians at sea and taught the former dictators of Greece to show you deference; he cleared the islands of their military governors, and coming here he restored our Long Walls; and he was the first to make the hegemony of Greece once more the subject of dispute between Athens and Sparta".[23]

In 346, the year of the Peace of Philocrates, Isocrates renewed the old plan for a pan-Hellenic campaign against Persia outlined in the *Panegyricus*, and wrote a letter to Philip of Macedon, the new master of Greece, urging him to take the leadership of the ambitious expedition.[24] To persuade the king of the feasibility of this venture, Isocrates cites the cases of some great men who in the past had succeeded in accomplishing enterprises "of greater magnitude and difficulty", but far less noble than the one facing Philip.[25] These were Cyrus the Great, the foundling who managed to become the master of Asia, Dionysius of Syracuse, the ordinary citizen whose "mad and unreasoning passion for monarchy" drove him to the conquer of the whole of Sicily, and, most importantly, two notable Athenians, Alcibiades and Conon, whom Isocrates presents as the counterpart (*antistropha*) of one another.[26] Alcibiades was the great individualist who believed himself to be bigger than his fatherland. He was the man who, when his fellow-citizens condemned him to exile, refused to submit to "the greatness of the city", and went so far as to move war to his own city in order to force his return home. Conon, on the other hand, was a loyal patriot who had devoted his entire life to the service of the fatherland, so much so at the time of its deepest abasement, after the disaster of Aegospotami, for which he felt personally ashamed, he tried to seize any opportunity which might be offered to him for restoring the wounded honour of Athens:

> "After his defeat in the naval engagement in the Hellespont, for which not he but his fellow commanders were responsible, he was too chagrined to return home; instead he sailed to Cy-

22 See e. g. Isoc. 12.97–105.

23 Dem. 20.68.

24 On the pan-Hellenic ideology of the *Panegyiricus* and the letter *To Philip*, see Perlman 1969, 371–373.

25 Isoc. 5.57–67.

26 Perlman 1957, 311–312 argued that these four personalities were "carefully chosen", for all of them attained "dominion at sea". What Isocrates envisaged was a collaboration between Macedon, a great land power "like Sparta", and Athens, which still held the primacy in naval warfare. Athens and Sparta should work together as partners to spare Greece a disaster "similar to that which befell her at the end of the Peloponnesian war".

> prus, where he spent some time attending to his private interests. But learning that Agesilaus had crossed over into Asia with a large force and was ravaging the country, he was so dauntless of spirit that, although he possessed no resource whatever save his body and his wits, he was yet confident that he could conquer the Lacedaemonians, albeit they were the first power in Hellas on both land and sea; and, sending word to the generals of the Persian king, he promised that he would do this. What need is there to tell more of the story? For he collected a naval force off Rhodes, won a victory over the Lacedaemonians in a sea-fight, deposed them from their sovereignty, and set the Hellenes free".[27]

The overarching image of Conon is that of a patriot and skilled seaman, for whom defending the glory of Athens was paramount, even when he was formally at the service of the Great King. This image was elaborated in the decades after the battle of Cnidus, when the late admiral first became the hero of the struggle against Spartan hegemony, and then a symbol of the political and naval virtues of the Athenians. Quite interestingly, this image completely leaves out what Conon had achieved in the course of the Peloponnesian War, in spite of the very important position which he held at Naupactus and most notably at Samos, where he took over the supreme command of the fleet after the ruinous defeat at Notium and the demise of Alcibiades (407).

Modern scholars have never cast any doubts on Conon's military proficiency and political loyalty to the cause of democratic Athens. Martin Ostwald, for one, said that the choice of Conon as Alcibiades' replacement after the fiasco at Notium was "militarily sound" and politically "offensive to no one". The man certainly seemed to tick all the boxes: he belonged to a respectable house of the Athenian aristocracy, he was an experienced admiral who "had loyally served the Athenian democracy", and in the troubled years after the of the debacle of the great campaign to Sicily, he managed to stay out of political trouble owing to "genius and good fortune", while devoting his life "to the service of his country".[28]

This judgement, although essentially correct, needs substantiating. When the Athenians entrusted him with the command of the fleet at Samos in replacement of Alcibiades, Conon was to take over the highest responsibility which could be given to a single citizen in compliance with the principles of the democratic constitution. Yet, the question of what he had done to deserve that important post, and why he could be considered so politically reliable by the time of his appointment at Samos, has never been seriously posed, almost as though Conon's political and soldierly virtues could be taken for granted in the light of his later epochal victory at Cnidus.

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This lack of interest in Conon's career can be attributed, at least in part, to the scarcity of information available on him: we certainly lack those "details", which, as argued by Osborne, are essential to good biography. On the other hand, this writer believes that we know enough to pose a number of questions concerning Conon's political and military profile, which have not yet been seriously asked. These ques-

27 Isoc. 5.62–63.
28 Ostwald 1986, 428.

tions are very important to help us to gain a better understanding of the history of the Greece, and of the wider Aegean world, in the crucial decades between the Athenian expedition to Sicily and the signing of the Peace of Antalcidas, to complexify the debate on the political and social repercussion of the Athenian naval empire, and of the interplay between maritime hegemony and democratic politics.

Conon held his first important office, in all likelihood a *strategia*, in 414/3, in the second year of the Sicilian expedition.[29] This is a fortunate historical coincidence, which places the onset of Conon's naval career at one of the most critical junctures of the history of Athens and of the whole Aegean. For the long war against Sparta had put the political and social system of Athens under considerable strain, creating tensions that would soon break out and call into question the city's democratic constitution, while Sparta was about to scale up its military capacity to challenge the Athenian domination of the sea.

Thucydides clearly describes the disaster of the Athenian fleet in Sicily as the turning point that completely changed the nature of the Peloponnesian War, and thus determined its outcome. The annihilation of the Athenian armada off the shores of Syracuse engendered a general belief that the fall of Athens was nigh, bringing about a general upheaval amongst the cities of Greece (*epermenoi esan*). The neutral states began to think that they could not stand aloof any longer, but it was time to contribute to the war against the Athenians. The allies of Sparta, worn out by the long conflict, were now eager to bring it to an end, while those of Athens began to show a "readiness to revolt" (*upekooi etoimoi esan*).[30] Inevitably, all the eyes were now turned to the Spartans, who became confident that their hegemony could be extended to the whole of Greece.[31]

Nineteen years earlier, in the months preceding the outbreak of the war, a group of Athenian ambassadors who happened to be in Sparta addressed a meeting of the Peloponnesian League, and remembered the circumstances under which their city had come to acquire its empire in the years after the Persian Wars. This empire had been acquired without resorting to violence, but with "zeal and sagacity of judgement", and with the consent of the allies after the Spartans abandoned the struggle with the barbarians. Once the Athenians acquired the empire, they said, "the compulsion of circumstances" compelled them to expand it to its present state under the influence of three compelling forces: fear, honour and self-interest.[32] In the aftermath of the Sicilian expedition, the Spartans found themselves in a somewhat similar situation: "the compulsion of circumstances" was driving them to acquire "a fleet for the first time in the history of the city and engage in a naval war across the Aegean to reap the fruits of the imminent collapse of Athens. The Spartans also received ambassadors from Chios and Erythrae, who urged them to intervene in Ionia and foment rebellion among the Athenian allies of the area. Among the ambassadors there was also an envoy of Tissaphernes, the commander of the Great King's troops in Ionia, who promised that Persia would provide the money to maintain the Spartan

29 Develin 1989, 153–154.
30 Thuc. 8.2–3.
31 Thuc. 8.2.4.
32 Thuc. 1.74.4–75.5.

army if they resolved to intervene in the region.[33] The necessity of pursuing the war against Athens by sea compelled the Spartans to seek the collaboration of Persia and to levy contributions from their allies to build and maintain their fleet.[34]

Traditionally the Spartans had always been reluctant to engage outside Peloponnese, particularly in regions as far away from it as the Hellespont.[35] The changing face of the conflict with Athens was to intensify political division within Sparta, while the presence in town of the Athenian exile Alcibiades was to cause further controversies.[36] In Sparta a phase of profound social transformations was about to begin,[37] and most of those transformations were the result of the choice, or indeed the necessity, of turning Sparta into a naval power. According to Lisa Kallet-Marx, there is a parallel between the bold, collective determination of the Athenians at the outbreak of the conflict and the "new collective resolve" of the Spartans in the aftermath of the Sicilian expedition, when, as Thucydides points out, all the parties in the conflict were behaving as though the war was just about to break out afresh.[38]

Naval warfare is a complex and expensive business, which requires skills, experience and adequate sources of funding. The necessity of securing the financial backing to attain and maintain naval *arche* is in fact one of the overarching themes of Thucydides' historical investigation, as Kallet-Marx has brilliantly discussed.[39] But the development of naval power also appears as the most powerful catalyst of political and social transformation in the history of Greece.

In his witty book *Guns, Sails and Empires*, Carlo Cipolla linked the global expansion of the nations of Atlantic Europe since the sixteenth century with the development of a new kind of great oceanic armed sailing-ships, the so-called galleon, whose lower forecastle and longer hull made much easier to manoeuvre compared to the old galleys. The galleon was invented by the Spanish around the mid-1550's, but it was the Dutch and most notably the English "who adopted and perfected the new type of vessel most quickly and got the best out of it".[40] Something similar happened in the decades following the victory over the Persians, when the Athenians "took the best out of" the trireme, a type of vessel which had been invented in Corinth around the end of the eighth century,[41] and used it to create a naval empire stretching from Attica to the shores of Ionia to those of the Hellespont.

The development of naval empire accelerated the process of democratisation of the city, as the critics of popular government did not fail to observe.[42] Athens was an innovative and young *polis*; "we are yet in the strength of our age", as Pericles proudly declared.[43] The development of the fleet also allowed the Athenians to

33 Thuc. 8.5.4–5.
34 Cp. Thuc. 2.65.12.
35 Kagan 1987, 13.
36 Thuc. 8.6.2.
37 See Kagan 1987,11–14.
38 Thuc. 8.5.1; see Kallet 2001, 238.
39 Kallet 1993, 15.
40 Cipolla 1965, 83–84.
41 Thuc. 1.13.2–5.
42 See e. g. [Xen.] *Resp. Ath*. 1.2.
43 Thuc. 2.36.3.

break old temporal and spatial barriers by allowing them to go further and faster. The Athenians could now "project their power"[44]onto a wider, unprecedented horizon, transforming traditional perceptions of conflict, wartime and power.

In the autumn of 431, as tension was mounting in Greece and war loomed as near as ever, Spartan ambassadors came to Athens. Their message was that the Spartans desired peace and that there would be peace if the Athenians would give "the Hellenes their independence". Pericles, however, in the ensuing debate at the *pnyx*, urged the Athenians not "to yield to the Peloponnesians", and prepare for war.[45] In the same speech Pericles also outlined his strategy for the forthcoming conflict. This was a very innovative plan, which was based less on battlefield considerations than on a wider analysis of the different socio-political systems of Sparta and Athens and, most importantly, on the repercussions of naval hegemony. Pericles is often credited as the first practitioner of deterrence and grand strategy in the history of Western warfare. As recently discussed by A. Platias and C. Koliopoulos, Pericles addressed the enemy's "aims and motivations in undertaking offensive action" and devised a strategy whose goal was to secure long-term security for Athens, and not simply to prevent harm or obtain success on the battlefield.[46]

Pericles' strategy was a response to the social and political transformations which Athens had undergone since the end of the Persian Wars. The strength of the city now rested in the control of the sea and the might of its walled *asty*. The defence of the countryside of Attica had become of marginal strategic relevance, and was unsustainable against the superior forces of the Peloponnesian infantry. The exercise of maritime hegemony seemed to have transformed the spatial and temporal horizons of the *polis*. Ruling over an empire of tributary cities and islands scattered all over the Aegean Sea, Athens no longer had a single centre of gravity, the vital spot by attacking which the Spartan hoplites could deliver her a mortal blow:

> "The rule of the sea is indeed a great matter. Consider for a moment. Suppose that we were islanders: can you conceive a more impregnable position? Well, this in future should, as far as possible, be our conception of our position. Dismissing all thought of our land and houses, we must vigilantly guard the sea and the city. No irritation that we may feel for the former must provoke us to a battle with the numerical superiority of the Peloponnesians. A victory would only be succeeded by another battle against the same superiority: a reverse involves the loss of our allies, the source of our strength, who will not remain quiet a day after we become unable to march against them."[47]

The Athenians could defeat the enemy only by exhaustion, by dragging them into a new kind of "prolonged and transmarine war" (*diakronion polemon kai diapontion*), in the course of which the Athenians would use the money stemming from the empire and their naval expertise to undermine the stability of the enemy's social and political system. The Spartans, Pericles envisaged, would march into the territory of the Athenians, and the Athenians would sail against theirs, with the notable difference that the devastation of the land of Peloponnese would in the long term

44 See Morris 2010, 12.
45 Thuc. 1.140.1.
46 Platias and Koliopoulos 2010, 45–49.
47 Thuc. 1.143.5.

cause irreparable damage to the Spartans, while no hoplite raid into Attica could hamper the Athenians' control of the sea, which provided them with the necessary funding to finance a long war.

The Spartans and their Peloponnesian allies certainly made exceptional hoplites, but they still lived and thought within the limited confines of a community of tillers. Every aspect of their lives, including war, was regulated by the natural cycle of land; they could not stay away from it for too long, or to engage too far away from it, and so they confined their military undertakings to small-scale conflicts between single neighbouring cities, resulting in the acquisition or loss of territory.[48] The Athenians had broken all these barriers. The knowledge of seamanship, the control of the sea, the steady flux of money coming in from the allies, together with the civic spirit and the dynamic mentality which decades of engagement on the sea had helped to develop, allowed the Athenians to think about the war against Sparta in completely new terms, and beyond the old temporal and territorial constraints of the fighting season and the battlefield. Pericles wanted to take the best out of the Athenians' naval expertise, monetary wealth and political preparedness. To achieve this, the city needed to project its military effort beyond the necessities of a single campaign,[49] and to consider the role of the "interplay of a variety of forces – military, financial, political, and psychological" in determining its outcome.[50]

Wars are traumatic and extraordinary events, which inevitably carry profound consequences on the lives of the involved communities by accelerating any process of social and political transformation. This is why, as legal scholar Mary Dudziak has observed, war is always seen as a powerful "historical signpost", which divides history in a "before" and an "after".[51] Someone, however, might wonder whether that was the case in ancient Greece, where the discourse of war was much more pervasive, and conflicts were a relatively common experience of one's life.[52] Victor Alonso goes so far as to say that war was in fact a "structural component of the Greco-Roman world", like "slavery or agriculture".[53] So, was war an ordinary fact of life for the citizens of ancient Greece? In an interesting passage of the speech *For the Liberty of the Rhodians*, Demosthenes reminds the Athenians that their city had been engaged in may wars in the course of its history, some of these wars had been fought against fellow-democracies, some against oligarchies. In the former cases, war normally stemmed from the inability of the Athenians and their rivals to resolve their differences in a peaceful manner, be they "a question of territory or boundaries, or else rivalry or the claim to leadership". On the other hand, whenever they were challenged to war by an oligarchy, the Athenians were fighting for their "constitution" and their "liberty".[54] The Peloponnesian War belonged to the latter kind of conflicts: the Peloponnesian War was the epochal clash between democratic Ath-

48 Thuc. 1.141.3–5.
49 See Rosencrance and Stein 1993, 3.
50 Ober 1996, 66.
51 Dudziak 2012, 7.
52 Ausenda e Pozzo 1992, 32.
53 Alonso 2007, 208.
54 Dem. 15.17.

ens, the up-and-coming power of Greece, and the traditional leaders of Hellas, the oligarchic Spartans. If we are to follow Thucydides, the conflict stemmed from the imperial growth of Athens and the fear that this brought to the Spartans.[55] The rivalry between the two had kept growing since the end of the Persian Wars; war broke out when the two powers with their respective alliances had reached the peak of their political ascendancy and military preparedness, and exercised a power of attraction over the rest of the Greek world.[56] The clash between these two rivals, so diametrically different to each other and both at the zenith of their power, propelled a conflict of previously unseen magnitude, which caused political upheaval in many cities, civil strife and bloodshed, while even nature seemed to be willing to contribute to this catastrophic breakdown of ordinary life by sending more devastating earthquakes, more frequent eclipses, more severe droughts and famines than previously experienced. Never before, in sum, had so many people been affected by the events of war, or so deeply.[57]

All this made the Peloponnesian War the most extraordinary "historical signpost" in the history of ancient Greece. However, it was not just the size of the armies involved, or the number of the casualties, which made the Peloponnesian War extraordinary. Those were first and foremost the consequences of the new nature of that conflict, which had been brought about by a completely new experience in the history of Greece, the development of the naval hegemony of democratic Athens, which transformed the deciphering of the spatial and temporal dimensions of war, its objectives and costs, and its political and social repercussions. In order to carry out his plan, Pericles asked the Athenians who lived in rural Attica to take the extreme step of abandoning their home and withdrawing within the walls of the city, for the defence of the territory of Attica was neither strategic nor sustainable for the Athenians. Pericles' plan, therefore, required a considerable material sacrifice and cultural effort from the Athenians, who ought to leave behind themselves everything they had, and take conscience of the deep-reaching consequences of naval empire, and of how it had transformed their lives and the space where they lived. Pericles synthesised all this by asking his fellow-citizens to frame themselves as islanders.[58]

The Athenians could not have been persuaded to accept all this was it not for the extraordinary leadership of Pericles, and his ability to understand and direct the moods of his fellow-citizens. The exceptional persuasive skills of this man, his incorruptibility and undisputed reputation brought about an extraordinary situation, whereby the civic liberties of democracy were maintained, but the city was in fact governed by one man, as Thucydides famously said. As the citizens were astonished and outraged at the sight of the Peloponnesian troops in the land of Attica, only a man like Pericles could dominate the feelings of the democratic crowd and prevent the outbreak of political disorder, while maintaining the discipline and cohesion necessary to execute Pericles' revolutionary strategy. Therefore, the long

55 Thuc. 1.23.6.
56 Thuc. 1.1.1.
57 Thuc. 1.23.2–5.
58 Thuc. 1.143.5.

and exhausting conflict became one protracted test for the stability of the Athenian democratic constitution and the balance between the principle of popular rule and the necessity to entrust specific powers to individual citizens to deal with the contingencies of war. For the first two and half years of the conflict, Athens remained under the secure leadership of Pericles, before the plague killed him, like so many other Athenians who had withdrawn to the overcrowded city. Unfortunately for Athens, civic and political discipline would collapse very rapidly following Pericles' departure, when this single, towering figure was replaced by a wave of politicians, as mediocre as they were indistinguishable, who took to pursue their personal interests by giving in to the basest desires of the people. Thucydides describes how the degeneration of democratic politics led to the dispatch of the fleet to Sicily, the most calamitous decision which the Athenians could have possibly taken in the course of the war.[59] The mismanagement of the operation, as we have seen, led to military disaster, and emboldened the enemies of Athens.

After that debacle, the Athenians were admirable in their resolution to take all the necessary measures to fight back, and fight on. Steps were taken to secure money and timber "from whatever source they could"[60] to build new ships, and to restore order in the Delian League. Inevitably, the events of Sicily had consequences on the way in which the city was governed and the attitude of the Athenians towards their democratic constitution. As soon as the reality of what had happened in Sicily was forced upon the Athenians, they immediately began to blame the disaster on the soothsayers and the politicians who had proposed the expedition at the assembly, as though they had not enthusiastically voted for it.

According to Thucydides, the reaction of the Athenians to the shocking news of the Sicilian disaster testified to the proverbial volatility of the democratic crowds. Horrified as they were by the destruction of a fleet which seemed invincible, the Athenians were apparently willing to change course from the excesses of the years after the death of Pericles. Facing the prospect of further years of fighting against the Spartans, they resolved to reorganise the political and financial affairs of their city on a more economic and rational foot, and so they appointed a commission of elderly men to draft emergency legislation.[61] Whether or not there was a direct correlation between the appointment of this commission of *probouloi* and the constitutional changes of 411,[62] the failure of the Sicilian campaign seems to have opened a phase of profound scrutiny of the Athenian constitution. Yet, the crisis of the Athenian democracy in the years of the Peloponnesian War was not just a matter of declining quality of the city's political personnel following the death of Pericles. In fact, the changing nature of warfare had profoundly modified the nature of the du-

59 Thuc. 2.65.

60 Thuc. 8.1.1. On the vote of the assembly, see Thuc. 6.24.2: The Athenians "were not diverted from their eagerness for the voyage by reason of the burdensomeness of the equipment, but were far more bent for it".

61 Thuc. 8.1.3–4.

62 As argued in Hignett 1952, 269. Andrewes (CAH V, 464) remarked that the title *probouloi* had an "oligarchic ring" to it, although this did not necessarily involve any implications at the time of their appointment for the stability of the democratic constitution.

ties of the *strategoi*, the most senior military officers of the city, the political connotations of their post, and their relationship with the voting people.

The board of the ten *strategoi* was established some twelve years before the battle of Marathon, in 501/500, as a consequence of the democratic reforms of Clesithenes or perhaps as an integral part of them. The original function of the *strategoi* was that of commanders of the regiments of the ten new tribes instituted by Cleisthenes. They were appointed by the *demos* and dependent on its authority. The creation of this new magistracy significantly curtailed the powers traditionally held by the polemarch and resulted in a form of "civilian control" over the activity of the city's military forces.[63] The nature of this magistracy began to change radically in the decades following the establishment of the Delian League, when all other offices of the state began to be assigned by lot, and the *strategeia* remained the only elective one. This increased the authority of *strategoi* well beyond their military duties, and by the time of Cimon's campaigns in the mid-fifth century. This authority had expanded to the point of making them the "political leaders of Athens".[64] The outbreak of the Peloponnesian War further altered the military duties and the political implications of *strategeia.* Formally, the assembly maintained political control over the activity of the fleet and the army.[65] The voting *demos* appointed the generals, assigned them to their specific tasks, and brought them to account at the end of their term in office, but the changing nature of campaigning led to an increase of the autonomy of the generals. Military campaigns became longer, more complex and more expensive; generals often served for protracted periods far away from Athens. Soon after the outbreak of the war, the Athenians began to install permanent naval bases in foreign territory, like the one established at Naupactus, on the northern shores of Peloponnese, and that of Samos, which was to serve as the main Athenian base in the eastern Aegean in the years of the Ionian War. The commanders of these bases were expected to establish political relations with local powers, intervene in foreign states to defend democratic regimes if required, seek for funds and reinforcements, and keep the men and the ships fit for combat. All this inevitably enlarged the operational responsibilities of the generals, generating tension with the political prerogatives of the *demos*: the Athenian people seemed to recognise the need to grant more autonomy to their generals as required by the extraordinary contingencies of war, but at the same time, the *demos* was not willing to see its sovereign role anyhow curtailed. An interesting and illuminating case, which will be examined in due course, is that of the launch of the Sicilian expedition in 415, when the grant of plenipotentiary power (*strategoi autokratores*) to the commanders of the campaign was counterbalanced by the appointment of a college of three generals instead of one.[66] N. G. L. Hammond argued that the growing tendency to appoint more than one general to important military missions was a sign of the likewise growing "distrust" of the Athenian citizens towards the political and mili-

63 See Fornara 1971, 1–9, 17–19; Raaflaub 1998, 18.
64 Fornara 1971, 27; CAH V, 84–86; Hansen 1999, 233–234.
65 Cp. Hamel 1998, 115–117.
66 Thuc. 6.8.2–3, 24; see Asmonti 2006, 15–19.

tary leadership of the city.[67] This distrust also led to an increase in the legal proceedings against serving generals, starting with the indictment of Pericles for peculation.[68] This growing tension led to a most spectacular breakdown in the fall of 406, when the generals who had defeated the Spartan fleet at Arginusae were brought to trial before the assembly and sentenced to death for having failed to recover the bodies of the fallen and the men who had been shipwrecked after the battle.[69]

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Having repeatedly served as *strategos* between 414/413 until the battle of Aegospotami, Conon appears to have consistently enjoyed the favour of the voting *demos* in the most turbulent phase of the war, so much so that he was entrusted the supreme command of the fleet in the final phase of the Peloponnesian War. Yet this first phase of Conon's career has so far received very little attention from scholars, depriving us of a very good standpoint for considering the political effects of the Peloponnesian War on Athenian democracy.

The first question which this book will address is why the Athenians judged Conon a suitable candidate to replace Alcibiades as the head of the fleet at Samos after the embarrassing defeat of Notium, in the most delicate phase of the war against Sparta. According to Barry Strauss, Conon obtained the command of the Ionian fleet because, on top of his proven military expertise, he did not belong to the group of friends of Alcibiades, like Thrasybulus and Thrasyllus, who had recalled Alcibiades to Samos and had been serving with him since 411, and whose reputation had been completely eroded by the maladroit operation of Notium. Physical separation underlines this political distance: when Alcibiades and Thrasybulus were serving at Samos, Conon was in Athens, and when the latter was elected to the board of generals following Alcibiades' return from exile, Xenophon specifies that he was chosen "from those at home" (*ek ton oikothen*).[70] In this passage the historian seems to stress, and not without a hint of irony, the peculiar make-up of that board of generals, which included some members who were in Athens at the time of the election, like Conon, some who had been fighting at Samos, and one, Alcibiades, who was formally still an exile. Yet it would be misleading to interpret the apparent disunity of the board exclusively in terms of factional rivalries, for the election of the ten *strategoi* for 407/406 was no ordinary ballot.

The vote of the *demos*, and the appointment of Alcibiades and the other Samian generals through a regular election, was meant to conclude a long phase of political and institutional emergency, which had begun in 411 with the coup of the Four Hundred. Challenging the stereotyped image of the democratic crews at Samos defending democracy against the oligarchs in Athens, this book will stress the insti-

67 Hammond 1973, 368–371.

68 Thuc. 2.65.3; Pl. *Gorg*. 576a. On the trials against generals, see Hamel 1998, 140–147. On the trials of embezzlement, see Roberts 1982, 24–27; Strauss 1985, 68–69.

69 See Kagan 1987, 354.

70 Xen. *Hell*. 1.4.10. See Strauss 1984, 42–43; 1986, 108.