The Peloponnesian Fleet:
Disputing Thucydides’ Land versus Sea Dichotomy

By

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Abstract

The clash between Sparta’s Peloponnesian League and the Athenian Delian League is considered one of the most famous events in Classical history. Lasting over two decades, the Great Peloponnesian War engulfed the greater part of the Greek mainland and Aegean, and extended to Sicily and Italy to the West, and Persia to the East. In essence, to the Hellene of the ancient world, this was a Greek World War. One of the major themes which the Peloponnesian War continuously iterated, and one which is emphasized in Thucydides’ narrative, was the dichotomy between the two πόλεις. Thucydides insinuated that the war was based on a polemic juxtaposition of Sparta, the predominant land power, and Athens, the naval juggernaut. Thucydides ultimately used the land versus sea motif to explain how the two city-states intended to fight. However, by doing this, Thucydides heavily disregarded Sparta’s maritime capabilities and even downplayed the Peloponnesian fleet’s role in the war. This paper will argue that Thucydides misconstrued the reality of the war. I believe Sparta pursued naval hegemony during the war and there is evidence for a deliberate naval program.
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Introduction: The Dichotomy

The clash between Sparta’s Peloponnesian League and the Athenian Delian League is considered one of the most famous events in Greece’s ancient past. As Thucydides wrote, “κίνησις γὰρ αὕτη μεγίστη δὴ τοῖς Ἐλλήσιν ἐγένετο καὶ μέρει τῶν βαρβάρων, ὡς δὲ εἰπεῖν καὶ ἐπὶ πλεῖστον ἄνθρωπων”.1 Lasting over two decades, the Great Peloponnesian War2 engulfed the greater part of the Greek mainland and Aegean, Sicily and Italy to the West, and Persia to the East. In essence, to the Hellene of the ancient world, this was a Greek World War. The war was comparatively different to the common inter-city-state conflicts which were determined by pitched hoplite battles. The Peloponnesian War has been studied intensively for the purpose of examining how the war evolved and those characteristics which made it unique in ancient Greek warfare. The dramatic conflict revolved around the two colossal powers of Sparta and Athens in their attempt to solidify hegemony over the Hellenic world.

One of the major themes which emerged from the Peloponnesian War, and one which Thucydides emphasized in his narrative, was the dichotomy between the two πόλεις. Thucydides insinuated that the war was based on a polemic juxtaposition of Sparta and Athens such as Spartan oligarchy contrasted with Athenian democracy. This duality was stressed throughout the entire narrative by the historian, and even indirectly through historic figures such as Pericles in his famous Funeral Oration.3 I believe that Thucydides’ polemic juxtaposition of Sparta and Athens

1 Thucydides, *Historiae in Two Volumes*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1942):1.2 “The motion was the greatest having happened to the Hellenes and some share of the barbarians, in a manner of speaking the greatest of mankind”. Author’s own translation. Further original Greek phrases from Thucydides will come from this edition.
2 The Peloponnesian War derives its name from the Athenian standpoint meaning “the war against the Peloponnesians”. However, if we consider the Spartan standpoint, it would be the ‘Athenian War,’ meaning the war against the Athenians”. See: Paul Cartledge, *The Spartans, The World of the Warrior-Heroes of Ancient Greece*, (Vintage Books, New York, 2003): 181.
3 Thucydides uses Pericles as his mouthpiece using the word, διαφέρομεν, literally “we differ”. See Thuc.2.39.1 for an example of this in which Pericles directly deals with the difference between Athenian and Spartan military policy: “διαφέρομεν δὲ καὶ ταῖς τῶν πολεμικῶν μελέταις τῶν ἑναντίων τοίσδε”. Use of the word appears again at Thuc.2.40.3. Thucydides further demonstrates this by means of ‘μὲν...δὲ’ clauses such as at Thuc.2.39.1.
is merely a literary tool for dramatic embellishment which has resulted in a misconstrued reality of the war. One such contrast, and the inspiration for this paper, was Thucydides’ exaggeration of Sparta as having strictly been a land power whereas Athens dominated the sea.

The Spartan navy is an under-researched and mostly ignored topic among military historians. This is mostly because of Sparta’s well known superiority on land, which borders on the realm of legendary thanks to modern representations. The existence of a Spartan navy, for the most part, goes unnoticed throughout Sparta’s history and especially during the Peloponnesian War. The lack of recognition for a Spartan navy is easily noticed in contemporary literature and the fault for this primarily rests with the historian Thucydides. In the speeches of the Corinthians and Pericles, Thucydides outlined the strategies of the Peloponnesians and Athenians. In those speeches, Thucydides discredited the existence of an effective Peloponnesian fleet and used this to help him explain how the Spartans and Athenians fought. In short, Sparta would engage Athens only by land and avoid them at sea, while Athens would avoid Sparta on land and engage them at sea. Many historians today follow Thucydides’ neat dualism of land and sea powers to explain the strategy of the war. Modern scholars and leading experts of the Peloponnesian war, such as Victor Davis Hanson and Donald Kagan, subscribe to this theory in setting up their grand narrative.

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4 Frank Miller’s movie, 300, epically immortalized Spartan invincibility at the battle of Thermopylae. Shows like Deadliest Warrior conjectured that the Spartan was the ultimate warrior in comparison to other ancient warriors such as the Samurai and Viking. One of the toughest marathon and obstacle races today is labelled the Spartan Race.


6 Sparta had ships but predominantly relied on its infantry, while Athens had an army, but an even greater navy.

7 Donald Kagan, The Peloponnesian War, (Penguin Books, 2003): 19. “By recognizing Sparta’s hegemony on the mainland and Athens’ in the Aegean it acknowledged and accepted the dualism into which the Greek world had been divided and so provided hope for a lasting peace.” Victor Davis Hanson, A War Like No Other: How the Athenians and Spartans fought the Peloponnesian War,” (Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2005): 18. “Just think of it: a land versus a maritime power, the starkness of the Dorianst contrasted with Ionian liberality. Oligarchy was pitted against democracy, practiced dearth set against ostentatious wealth.” Hanson further disregards the significance of the Peloponnesian fleet at the outbreak of the war terming it The Mythical Spartan Fleet, 20.
of the war. This classic Thucydidean portrayal should be called into question because there is substantial evidence that the Spartan state actively pursued a naval program during the war.

Therefore, the purpose of this research paper is to prove the existence of an effective Spartan naval program during the Peloponnesian War. The research will predominantly focus on the first phase of the war known as the Archidamian War because most scholars do not contend the significance of the fleet during the second phase of the war but do, however, contend its role in the first phase. To accomplish that, this paper will begin by examining issues such as Thucydides’ role in having disregarded the navy and his purpose behind it. Following this, this paper will also discuss the composition of the Peloponnesian Navy in its entirety, ranging from basic numbers of ship-contributing allied states to the problem of leadership. This paper will later focus on four significant logistical aspects of the Peloponnesian navy and examine them each. The four aspects to be discussed are broken down as follows: how they financed the fleet, what naval facilities were available to the fleet for anchorage, what supply routes secured timber for ship construction and maintenance, and how they manned the fleet. Following these points, I hope to show that Spartan policy from the outset of the war demanded intentional and aggressive naval operations. My research directly contradicts the traditional and prevalent conception of Spartan neglect and total disregard for the sea. It is ironic that the war ends with the destruction of the Athenian navy as a result of the Spartans’ naval supremacy at the sea battle of Aegospotami.

The Historian: Thucydides

The most significant problem for anyone researching the Spartan navy during the Peloponnesian War is the fact that the majority of our information is heavily reliant on Thucydides. Considering Thucydides was a navarch himself and is chiefly concerned with the rise and fall of
or “rule of the seas”, one would expect a wealth of information regarding the nature and evolution of Spartan naval power in his work. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Any information from Thucydides regarding Sparta’s maritime disposition is sparse at best. Thucydides instigates speculation rather than presenting any definitive answers. Whatever information is available is overshadowed by the behemoth Athenian navy, which is the more popular modern research interest. As a result, the significance of Sparta’s navy is consistently overlooked and neglected. This contemporary disregard for Sparta’s navy can be attributed to Thucydides because this was his intention. Throughout his narrative and especially in book one, Thucydides slyly dramatizes the ensuing and inevitable conflict between a land and sea power. This land versus sea motif is one major factor Thucydides employs in establishing the dichotomy between Athens and Sparta. The direct consequence of this is that Thucydides is intentionally forcing his audience to dismiss Spartan maritime activity. The effect of this is seen in modern historiography of the Peloponnesian War because many authors use the dichotomy to attract their readers in the same way. Classicist Thomas Kelly likewise uses this model, “The stage was set, then, for Athenian victories at sea and Spartan domination on land”. A scholar of the Peloponnesian War must not be fooled by Thucydides into abiding by this dichotomy; strictly a literary tool to make the war perhaps more interesting and fascinating for the reader. Recent scholarship seeks to discredit the cogency of this juxtaposition of the two πόλεις. However, the purpose of this paper is not to judge Thucydides as an historian. Our intent here is to demonstrate that Thucydides has intentionally suppressed information regarding the Peloponnesian navy in the

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8 Thucydides’ interest in the rise and fall of sea powers can be seen in the opening of his work which is commonly recognized as The Archaeology. Thucydides outlined the great sea powers of history credited King Minos as the first to rule by sea power (Thuc.1.4), followed by Agamemnon (Thuc.1.9), and ultimately concluding with the sea power of his own time, Athens.


10 Crane, 229.
interest of emphasising his dichotomy. Nevertheless, since little information is available on the subject, and because Thucydides remains the primary reference for what is known, we must return to Thucydides in our search for evidence of a Spartan navy. Anyone interested in the Peloponnesian navy must be wary of instances when Thucydides mentions it. One example of this will be sufficient here before moving on to the focus of this research paper. Thucydides consistently portrays Spartan naval commanders as stereotypically timid and inept. For instance, he presents a speech given by the Corinthians in 432/1BC\textsuperscript{11} in which they portray the Spartans as slow and sluggish, which is similar to his later portrayal of Spartan navarchs such as Astyochus and Cnemus.\textsuperscript{12} This is suspicious and it is likely that the Corinthian speech reflects Thucydides’ own thoughts and not the Corinthian opinion. Therefore, Thucydides is misleading his readers, and in this case is insinuating to his audience that Spartan naval commanders were incompetent and their naval command structure was ineffective. Keeping this in mind, we may now examine why Thucydides disregarded the Peloponnesian navy.

Why?

In defense of Thucydides’ intentional downplay of Sparta’s maritime capabilities, it is essential to answer the question: Why did he do this? What purpose did this serve? There are various possibilities that could provide an explanation. It can be argued that Thucydides’ disregard for the navy was unintentional. Thucydides’ profession in the Athenian navy during the Archidamian War until his dismissal in 424BC indicates that he was removed from much of the events he discussed as he was preoccupied with his naval duties. Therefore, he could not rely on

\textsuperscript{11} See Thuc.1.70. for the Corinthian characterization of Spartans as timid, cautious, slow, conservative, and passive in direct contrast to Athenian innovation, opportunism, daring, and speed.
\textsuperscript{12} Caroline Falkner, “Astyochus, Sparta’s Incompetent Navarch?” \textit{Phoenix} 53, no.3/4 (1999): 206. See Thuc.2.80-94, 3.29-33 for the narrative regarding Cnemus’ ultimate failure as a navarch in the Corinthian Gulf and Thuc.8.79.5-6 for Astyochus’ failures for being unwilling to fight at sea.
personal ‘autopsy’ as a third party member or have access to Peloponnesian viewpoints until his exile from Athens. The consequence of this could have led to misinformation and inaccurate details of events from 431 to 424 BC. In order to see whether this was in fact the case, it is necessary to examine the controversies surrounding Thucydides’ narrative of the battle of Pylos and Sphacteria in 425 BC as a case study.

In his attempt to undermine the strength of the Peloponnesian navy, Thucydides claimed that the Spartan strategy for the battle was to blockade the harbor with their ships, which denied access to the Athenians, and consequently avoided a naval battle. However, topographical investigations of the site by scholars like William Pritchett and Arnold Gomme suggest that there was no way the Spartans could have blocked the southern channel, considering the distance of the channels. Thucydides’ inaccuracy suggests that he had never visited the site and must have relied on informants for details. As an unintentional result, Thucydides’ understanding of the Spartan plan as avoiding a sea battle and blockading the harbor may have been incorrect. Since he never examined the area himself, he attributed a plan to the Spartans which seemed reasonable with respect to the strategy he had credited the Spartans with following so far in the war: avoid the Athenians at sea.

13 It is unclear how blockading the entrances would have avoided a naval battle since Thucydides’ measurements for the distance of the channels was wrong. Even if the Peloponnesian fleet could have blockaded the entrances, it is vague why the Athenians would not engage them anyway. See Appendix, Fig. 1, for a plan of the battle of Pylos. Thuc.4.8. “the island of Sphacteria lies close in to the shore […] room for two ships abreast on the side nearest Pylos and the Athenian fortifications, and for eight or nine on the other side nearest the mainland”. In reality, the southern channel is approximately 1200 meters wide and the entire Peloponnesian fleet could not have blockaded the width. See William K. Pritchett, Studies in Ancient Greek Topography: Part 1, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965): 29. Also see Arnold W. Gomme, A Historical Commentary on Thucydides, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1956):443. For more recent examination on this subject, see Catherine Rubincam, “The Topography of Pylos and Sphacteria and Thucydides’ Measurements of Distance,” The Journal of Hellenic Studies (2001):82.

14 Gomme has suggested that it would have been too dangerous for Thucydides to travel there at the time (484). It has been argued that the Athenian commander at Pylos, Demosthenes, was Thucydides prime informant. For details see D.K. Silhanek, “Pylos Revisted: Thucydides’ Primary Source,” The Classical World (1970):12.

In direct opposition to the argument that Thucydides unintentionally understated the role of the Peloponnesian Navy, I argue that he downplayed the significance of the navy on purpose. The events of Pylos and Sphacteria can be examined again to support this. Research has indicated that Thucydides was wrong in stating that the Spartans wanted to avoid a sea battle. A sea battle would have been necessary for the Spartans to control the bay and to prevent any tactical landings by the Athenians to assist their countrymen at Pylos. This helps to explain why the Spartans did not set up a blockade, as it is very difficult to accept Thucydides’ portrayal of lazy, unprepared Spartans who simply neglected to block the entrances. Accepting this would be akin to accepting the stereotype of the Corinthian portrayal of Spartans at the pre-war delegation. Additionally, the purpose of the Spartan occupation of Sphacteria can be explained in the language of naval strategy. The Spartans were willing to risk their hoplites on the island as part of a plan to win a naval engagement because the hoplites on the island would have had the duty of holding a shore for friendly forces or defending it against hostile forces when shipwrecked, which denied a safe place of retreat for the Athenians. The Peloponnesian fleet had a reasonable chance of success considering its numerical advantage and position, perhaps having intended to perform the *periplous* maneuver. All of this contradicts Thucydides’ explanation of the overall Spartan

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18 Compare the events at Pylos at Thuc.4.13 and the delegation at Thuc.1.70. Thucydides simply states that the Spartans failed to blockade the entrances (even though they had been diligent to do so up to that time) and immediately put to flight upon seeing the Athenians. During the delegation the Corinthians accuse the Spartans of procrastination and of being fearful to advance in dangerous or risky situations.
19 Samons, 537. Thucydides simply states the Spartans occupied it in fear that the Athenians might occupy it and use it against them, “The Spartans meant to close the entrances with a line of ships placed close together with their prows turned toward the sea and, meanwhile, fearing that the enemy might make use of the island to operate against them, carried over some hoplites to it, stationing others along the coast.” Translation from Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, “The Landmark Thucydides: A Comprehensive Guide to the Peloponnesian War,” ed. Robert B. Strassler, trans. Richard Crawley (New York: Simon Schuster, 1998): 4.8.7. Further translations from this edition will be indicated by traditional abbreviation ‘Thuc.’
20 The Peloponnesian Fleet was 60 triremes strong (Thuc.4.8.2) compared to Athens’ 50 (Thuc.4.13.2). Unfortunately, there is no way to confirm whether or not the numbers presented by Thucydides is correct or misleading. The *Periplous* maneuver may have been planned as it required superior numbers or great superiority in
strategy for the war to avoid Athens at sea because the event at Pylos suggests an intentional naval engagement against the Athenians by the Spartans. Acknowledgment of any significant Spartan intention and strategy on naval conduct destroys Thucydides’ Spartan grand strategy of the war and undermines segments of his narrative. Therefore, Thucydides distorts this event to fit his own version of how the war was fought based on the land and sea dichotomy.

Thucydides’ intentional suppression of the Peloponnesian navy is further supported indirectly with the arguments made by Dr. Hunter R. Rawlings in his work, The Structure of Thucydides’ History. Rawlings argues that although Thucydides considered the Peloponnesian War as one great war,21 he also viewed it as two distinct wars, the Archidamian and Decelian, with a seven year interbellum period. In what Rawlings termed ‘double vision’, Thucydides based the structure of his narrative on constant comparison and contrast of the two wars.22 Furthermore, Rawlings argues that three elements make up the structure of the narrative; selection, emphasis, and juxtaposition.23 I will go over each, specifically in how it relates to Thucydides and his downplay of the Peloponnesian navy and ultimately answer why he did so.

Selection is defined by Rawlings as “the inclusion or exclusion of events by the historians”. Thucydides is guilty of exclusion whenever the significance of the Peloponnesian navy might be stated. For example, Thucydides was extremely vague concerning the reason for the Spartan occupation of Sphacteria. He excluded its purpose for fear that it would reveal Spartan intentions with respect to a naval battle. For more evidence, there is the fact that Thucydides excludes order to place ships both sides of the hostile line, or on a part of it. The periplous consisted of a navy “sailing around” the enemy's line to expose the enemy's stern for an easy ramming target. See William Ledyard Rodgers, Greek and Roman Naval Warfare: A Study of Strategy, Tactics, and Ship Design from Salamis to Actium, (The United States Naval Institute, Maryland, 1964): 10. A more detailed discussion of numbers and the Peloponnesian fleet will follow shortly.

21 Thuc.5.26.2.
23 Rawlings, 50.
Sparta’s maritime allies in the Argolid peninsula in the 431 roster of ship-contributing cities, thereby limiting the Peloponnesian navy’s true potential.\textsuperscript{24} Thucydides’ use of ‘selection’ has been recognized by scholars such as R.A. McNeal in their critique of Thucydides:

“So far from being a record of history ‘as it really was’, Thucydides’ work is a carefully contrived piece of special pleading which gives us only that part of the past which the historian thought relevant to his theme. The selection of incidents and the logic which connects them have been plotted to awaken in us a particular reaction; and everything which will not further the author’s purpose has been ruthlessly suppressed”\textsuperscript{25}

In direct reaction to this quote, I would suggest that the Peloponnesian navy did not further Thucydides’ purpose and as a result was ‘ruthlessly suppressed’ by this method of \textit{selection}.

\textit{Emphasis} is defined by Rawlings as “the form in which the included events are expressed”.\textsuperscript{26} Thucydides constantly emphasizes the stereotype that the Spartans were slow, uninnovative, and lazy, as first seen in the Corinthian speech to the Spartan assembly. This was re-emphasized repeatedly to diminish the Peloponnesian navy in regards to its conduct as can be seen with the portrayal of Spartan \textit{navarchs} like Cnemus and Astyochus, and suggesting laziness as the reason for Spartan defeat at Pylos and Sphacteria in 425BC.

The most important element, and one that has been mentioned in passing beforehand, is \textit{juxtaposition} defined by Rawlings as “the order in which the included events are composed”.\textsuperscript{27} The most obvious, to reiterate, is the juxtaposition of Spartan land power versus Athenian strength at sea. The Athenian victory at sea at Pylos is followed up in juxtaposition by Spartan success on land with the invasion of Thrace and the capture of Amphipolis. Therefore, it can be seen that

\textsuperscript{24} Thuc.8.3.2. Most notably, Hermione, Troezen, and Epidaurus were excluded.
\textsuperscript{26} Rawlings, 50.
\textsuperscript{27} Rawlings, 50.
Thucydides used all three elements as defined by Rawlings, and that Thucydides’ disregard of the Peloponnesian navy was deliberately structured in his work.

The question that remains is ‘Why?’ Why would Thucydides downplay the Peloponnesian navy? Again, we can turn to Rawlings’ theories for the answer. Thucydides’ structure was based on contrasting the Archidamian and Decelean War. Thucydides had the foreknowledge that Sparta ultimately won the Peloponnesian War because of its dedication and aggressive deployment of its fleet in the Decelean War. Hence, it was logical for Thucydides to downplay the Peloponnesian navy in the earlier Archidamian war in order to successfully contrast its superiority and success in the second war. Thucydides, who is interested in the rise and fall of navies, may not have been ignoring the Peloponnesian fleet after all. Instead he was dramatically setting up the rise of the Peloponnesian fleet in the later phase of the war in contrast to the fall of the Athenian supremacy at sea. Unfortunately, Thucydides’ narrative ends unfinished in 411, and consequently he never had the satisfaction of completing his grand structure. Thankfully, Xenophon finished Thucydides’ narrative, and included a detailed description of Spartan naval power in his *Hellenica*.

The ‘Spartan’ or ‘Peloponnesian’ Navy

A necessary starting point is to examine what the Spartan navy resembled at the outbreak of the war in 431BC. Thus far, I have been referring to the navy loosely as either ‘Spartan’ or ‘Peloponnesian’. This is in fact wrong as the two are not the same. A ‘Spartan’ navy indicates that the settlement of Sparta ‘itself’ had its own triremes, sailors, and naval facilities, was self-funded, and could not be usurped by another nation. Contrary to that, a ‘Peloponnesian’ navy indicates that

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28 Does Rawlings’ theory of dualism also work for Athens? I think an argument can be made that it does. Thucydides’ predecessor and close contemporary, Herodotus, wrote about the pinnacle of Athenian achievement and glory having defended Hellas from the Persian Invasions. Contrary to Herodotus, Thucydides wrote about the downfall of Athens and its evolution from a righteous early empire to an imperialistic tyrant.
an allied contingent of city-states based in the Peloponnese contributed to a collective navy by providing a portion of triremes, sailors, naval facilities, funds, and could be usurped by another nation. In 431BC, the correct term is ‘Peloponnesian’ navy. Sparta itself is estimated to have had no more than ten triremes, a small navy by ancient standards.\textsuperscript{29} In the Persian Wars Sparta contributed 16 triremes to the Hellenic League.\textsuperscript{30} Even if Spartan maintainability of 16 triremes through the Pentecontaetia is argued, the fleet was indeed small in comparison to the approximately 200 triremes supplied by Athens during the Persian Wars. The true strength of the Peloponnesian navy came from Sparta’s maritime allies. Thucydides mentions seven ship-contributing states (ναυτικὸν παρείχοντο) of the Peloponnesian fleet in 431: Corinth, Megara, Sicyon, Pellene, Elis, Ambracia, and Leucas.\textsuperscript{31} At the battle of Sybota in 433BC each of the cities mentioned, with the exception of Pellene and Sicyon, contributed to produce an allied naval contingent of 150 ships. Corinth supplied the majority at 90, Ambracia at 27, Megara at 12, Elis and Leucas each provided 10, and Anactorium with the least at 1.\textsuperscript{32} It should also be kept in mind that the major contributors such as Corinth would have had a small portion of reserve ships at home.\textsuperscript{33} It can also be estimated that the two remaining states of the original seven, Pellene and Sicyon, were able to produce approximately 10 ships combined based on the Spartan requisition of ships in 413/2BC.\textsuperscript{34} In addition to this, Thucydides never mentioned Sparta’s maritime allies in

\textsuperscript{31} Thuc.2.9.3. See Appendix, Fig. 2, for map of the seven ship contributing states.
\textsuperscript{32} Thuc.1.46.1. A small note about numbers and Thucydides. It can be asked: how can we trust Thucydides with ship numbers since he wants to undermine the Spartan navy? The problem is that we have very little information otherwise to confirm or reject his numbers. Therefore, we must be critical and accept that Thucydides may be wrong or misleading when supplying numbers throughout his history.
\textsuperscript{33}Legon, 162.
\textsuperscript{34} Thuc.8.3.2
the Argolid peninsula in the 431 roster, most notably, Hermione, Troezen, and Epidaurus which also contributed 10 ships combined in 413.\textsuperscript{35} It is reasonable to suggest that these Argolid states had a combined total of around 10 ships in 431. Therefore, the total number of ships in the Peloponnesian navy can be estimated to be between 180 and 200 triremes.\textsuperscript{36} There is no doubt that a fleet of 200 warships in classical Greece was considered a maritime power. However, the Peloponnesian fleet is considered small, and as a result overlooked, because it is compared with the colossal power of the Delian League fleet estimated between 300 and 400 triremes.\textsuperscript{37} Leaving the Athenian navy aside for the moment, the breakdown of the Peloponnesian fleet raises an intriguing question. It has been established that the fleet of 431BC should be considered the ‘Peloponnesian’ rather than ‘Spartan’ fleet. But is that also a mistake since the dominant maritime force and half the contribution of the fleet belonged to Corinth?

To apprehend the true nature of the Peloponnesian navy it is important to establish early on that even though Corinth supplied the greatest portion of the Peloponnesian fleet, around ten times as much as the \textit{polis} of Sparta, the fleet belonged to Sparta. It can be conceded that Corinth in contrast with Sparta, possessed a superior navy, had superior experience at sea, had greater facilities to build triremes, was geographically better situated on the Corinthian gulf to receive supplies for shipbuilding purposes, and lastly was better suited financially to fund a fleet.\textsuperscript{38} Nonetheless, Corinth’s greater nautical \textit{curriculum vitae} did not permit the city-state to dominate

\textsuperscript{35} Thuc.8.3.2
\textsuperscript{36} Accounting for only 10 Spartan ships and 20 reserve ships for the ‘League Allies’ total. I also added estimated numbers for ship-contributing city-states that were left out of the 431 roster such as those in the Argolid; Hermione, Troezen, and Epidaurus. However, this is at best an estimated guess.
\textsuperscript{38} Legon, 161-162. Corinth was able to construct over 100 triremes between the Battle of Leucimme in 435BC and the Battle of Sybota in 433BC. It is arguable that Corinth was better off than Athens in regards to supplying her own materials for shipbuilding. Trade partners such as Ambracia and Leucas were nearby to supply timber needed for the construction of ship and tax collection via use of the \textit{diekplous} supplied the finances.
control of the Peloponnesian fleet during the war. That authority remained with Sparta. The reason for this can be comprehended by examining the Peloponnesian League’s alliance system and Spartan mentality. The label ‘Peloponnesian League’ is deceiving since the ancient Greeks did not recognize the organization in that manner but referred to it as ‘the Lakedaimonians and their allies’. Unlike the Delian League, each ally swore a separate oath that assured their loyalty to Sparta independently from other city-states of the ‘league,’ swearing to follow Sparta as their leader in all affairs. This institution allowed for the possibility of war between allies as long as it did not interfere with Spartan interests. The most significant article for the acceptance of a city-state by Sparta was the ‘hegemony clause’ whereby the ally had to swear to recognize Sparta as hegemon or leader especially in times of warfare. This clause is significant because it made explicitly manifest to each ally that Sparta was, and always would be, the de facto ruler by not making them swear on behalf of an organization but directly to Sparta itself. This is crucial for understanding why Sparta refused to relinquish the command of the fleet to any other city-state. In warfare, allies were ordered to contribute a certain quantity of troops or supplies to the overall ‘League’ army. Regardless of the size of contribution mustered by the subsidiary allies, Sparta had final decisions of strategy and policy as exercised through a Spartan commander-in-chief and Spartan officers. This practice reinforced the ideology of hegemony by the physical presence of Spartan leadership. In respect to land-hoplite warfare, it is reasonable to suggest that the allies likely appreciated Spartan hegemony considering the Spartans’ superior experience and their militaristic educational upbringing. But how did this translate to naval command, considering Spartan maritime

40 Cartledge, The Peloponnesian League in Thucydides, 595.
41 Paul Cartledge, Sparta and Lakonia: A Regional History 1300 to 362BC, 2nd ed. (Routledge: London and New York, 2002): 127. There is no official primary source that details how the Peloponnesian League functioned. We can only infer from statements made in passing by the ancient historians including Thucydides.
inexperience? In short, Sparta could not accept anything less than the command which they had enjoyed on land, regardless of naval shortcomings. In naval warfare, the ‘League’s’ fleet was controlled by Sparta which supplied the *navarch* and additional officers such as *trierarchs*. Sparta could not allow any of its allies to have any significant positions of command, such as within the navy, because it was a direct threat to Spartan hegemony as a whole. As early as the Persian Wars, Sparta demanded that it be the hegemon over the Hellenic fleet even though it contributed only 16 ships in comparison to the 180-200 provided by Athens. Therefore Sparta, and not Corinth, commanded the Peloponnesian fleet. Spartan naval hegemony seems to have been unchallenged within the league, especially by Corinth, at the beginning of the Peloponnesian War. The first naval operations involved predominately Corinthian ships, but the *navarch* was the Spartan Cnemus, symbolizing and strengthening Corinthian cooperation and willingness to accept Spartan hegemony.

Although Corinth did not lead the Peloponnesian fleet, it would be a mistake to undermine its influence over Sparta. Corinth’s naval contribution to the league signified that it was, without illusion, Sparta’s most important ally at the start of the war. It is a safe assumption that Sparta not only recognized and accepted this, but even realized it was susceptible to approve Corinthian policy in order to secure and maintain the relationship. If the alliance between the two states deteriorated, then Sparta endangered its own security by relinquishing a strategically located and financially powerful city-state with a powerful navy. Conceding that Corinth had a certain sway over Spartan foreign policy explains Thucydides’ special allotment and reference to them in his narrative. One of the most significant and studied of Thucydidean speeches was the one made by

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42 These are the numbers recorded by Herodotus at the Battle of Salamis in 480BC, Hdt.8.44-88. Sparta had supreme command of the allied naval forces as early as 480BC at the battle of Artemision with the Spartan Eurybiades as commander. Herodotus states that the allies insisted (most likely pressured by Sparta) that a Spartan be in command over an Athenian and even threatened to abandon the campaign if this did not happen. Hdt.8.2.
the Corinthians to the Spartan assembly in 432/1 BC concerning the decision to go to war with Athens. The Corinthian speech was one of the three speeches delivered to the Spartan assembly at the time quoted by Thucydides, in addition to the speeches made by the Athenians and King Archidamus of Sparta. Each party argued for a separate decision: for war, against war, delayed war, respectively. It is interesting that Thucydides mentions that “there were many [city-states] who came forward and made their several accusations” but chose to proceed only with the Corinthian speech insinuating they were the most influential over the Spartan assembly. Furthermore, of the three opposing speeches, the Spartan assembly voted in agreement with the speech of the Corinthian delegation surprisingly over that of their own king, Archidamus. The reason for the Spartan assembly voting in agreement with Corinth has been stated earlier and can be found in the speech itself, “For the present, assist your allies…and do not sacrifice friends and kindred to their bitterest enemies, and drive the rest of us in despair to some other alliance”. The threat of leaving the Peloponnesian League and, more importantly, the loss of their greatest naval contributor, exemplifies how important Corinth was as a maritime ally to Sparta and to the Peloponnesian fleet as a whole. The structure of the navy in the Peloponnesian League, although under manifest Spartan hegemony, was fragile.

The Peloponnesian Navy: Logistics

The purpose of this section is to analyze certain logistical aspects of naval warfare that are inherently connected to the overall performance of Hellenic navies, and hence, the Peloponnesian navy. Although there are many aspects directly linked to naval warfare, due to the restriction of this paper, I will focus on four significant topics: funding a fleet, naval facilities, supplies for ship

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43 Thuc.1.67.4.
44 Thuc.1.71.4.
construction, and manning the triremes. Certainly, without these elements a navy could not function as an effective force. To reiterate, this section primarily focuses on the logistics of the Peloponnesian navy during the Archidamian War. An examination of the Peloponnesian fleet in the later phases of the war, its evolution and alterations, will be considered later on.

Sparta’s principal obstacle in 431BC was not how many triremes it had in its possession, but the financial capability and reserve capital required to deploy the armada and sustain it for any significant length of time.\(^\text{45}\) It can be stated simply and bluntly that maintaining and employing a navy in Classical Greece was ridiculously expensive. The cost to construct one trireme was one talent, and the sailors’ wage fluctuated from three to six obols a day per rower, or simply one talent a month for two hundred rowers.\(^\text{46}\) According to a study on wage rates in 377BC, a talent was the equivalent of nine man-years of skilled labor.\(^\text{47}\) Without diverting too much focus on the ancient economy of Greece, the financial requirement of a fleet was a demanding burden for any city-state, which explains why many did not have a navy of their own. The point stressed here is that without the financial resources, there could be no success or efficiency in naval warfare. In 431BC, Sparta, the *hegemon* of the Peloponnesian fleet, was lacking these arduous funds.

In comparison to Athens, Sparta was seriously ill equipped to invest in, or finance, a fleet. The Spartan economy was based on traditional land holding and did not have its own coinage system, unlike other city-states. In addition, the Spartan mentality dictated a life based on hardship and poverty; they were very critical of the wealthy. To the Spartans, acquired wealth meant corruption and eventually turned men ‘soft’. As a demonstration of their socio-economic ideology,

\(^\text{45}\) Hanson, 23.
\(^\text{46}\) Ron Keeva Unz, *The Spartan Naval Empire: 412-394BC (Thesis)*, (Harvard University Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1982): 30. There standard capacity for a trireme was 200 rowers.
the Spartans used awkward iron spits instead of coinage as money because of their socio-economic ideology. 48 Needless to say, the city of Sparta was not considered attractive for its thriving commercial and economic practices. In addition, Sparta lacked any substantial reserve capital conveniently stored in a treasury on an acropolis, unlike their adversary. The Athenians’ superiority at sea derived from their ability to fund the fleet through the collection of tribute. The Athenian Delian League required its members to contribute either ships or *phoroi* (payments) annually to Athens. The Athenian Tribute Lists, an archaeological record of *phoroi* collected on stone *stelai*, illustrated the vast wealth Athens had accumulated, estimated to have numbered in the thousands of talents. 49 In contrast, Sparta’s Peloponnesian League did not have a tribute collection program 50 and consequently had little start-up capital at the outbreak of the war to invest in its fleet. It can be argued that Sparta issued war taxation as a solution to fund its fleet. However, war taxation was not enough to cover the financial drain that was necessitated by naval warfare. It was readily available reserve funds that was required, as Pericles stated: “Capital, it must be remembered, maintains a war more than forced contribution”. 51 The Spartan authorities were undeniably cognisant of their financial handicap. This is verified by segments of King Archidamus’ speech to the Spartan assembly; “Is it [their reliance for victory] in our [Spartan] money? There we have a far greater deficiency. We neither have it in our treasury, nor are we ready to contribute it from our private funds”. 52 Archidamus further states; “The Athenians have

48 Hanson, 22.

49 Around 330 city-state names are recorded on the Athenian Tribute Lists to have contributed *phoroi* to Athens. Since the foundation of the league in 478BC, Athens had been collecting approximately 460 talents annually. This assessment would have gone up throughout the Pentecontaetia, and eventually reached 1500 talents annually by 425BC. Thuc.1.96. Also, see Alan, L. Boegehold, “The Athenian Empire in Thucydidides,” in *The Landmark Thucydides: A Comprehensive Guide to the Peloponnesian War*, ed. Robert B. Strassler, trans. Richard Crawley (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998): 587-588. The increase of 425BC is preserved on its own stele but is not mentioned by Thucydides at all.

50 Thuc.1.19.1.

51 Thuc.1.141.5.

52 Thuc.1.80.4.
allies as numerous as our own, and allies that pay tribute, and war is a matter not so much of arms as of money, which makes arms of use. And this is more than ever true in a struggle between a continental and a maritime power”.\footnote{Thuc.1.83.} Considering the economic disadvantage as expressed by Archidamus, it is necessary to understand how Sparta financed the Peloponnesian fleet.

Evidence for Spartan financial resources is limited in Thucydides’ narrative, as he was an Athenian navarch and favored detailing the economic institutions and capabilities of Athens. There are a few instances in the narrative, however, that may explain how Sparta initially funded the Peloponnesian fleet. The first and most obvious solution is that Sparta utilized the resources of its allies. In one of Thucydides’ speeches, the Corinthians urged the Spartans to raise enough money for the purpose of funding the navy by increasing the financial contribution of the Peloponnesian allies.\footnote{Thuc.1.121.3.} Immediately following the declaration of war, Sparta followed Corinth’s advice and asked allies as far away as Italy and Sicily to provide a specified sum of money.\footnote{Thuc.2.7.2.} None of this is surprising since it was common practice for the leader of a league to expect financial contributions in wartime. However, it seems evident that the primary reason for the raise in contribution, which Sparta imposed, was for the purpose of funding the Peloponnesian navy. Furthermore, Sparta could and did rely on its most important ally, Corinth, for contributing a large portion of the financial responsibility. Corinth was a financial powerhouse in the ancient Greek world, inferior only to Athens. Thucydides’ acknowledgment of Corinthian wealth is worth quoting in full:

“οἰκονύτες γὰρ τὴν πόλιν οἱ Κορινθίοι ἐπὶ τοῦ Ἰσθμοῦ αἰεὶ δὴ ποτε ἐμπόριον εἶχον, τὸν Ἐλλήνην τὸ πάλαι κατὰ γῆν τὰ πλείω ἢ κατὰ θάλασσαν, τὸν τε ἐντὸς Πελοποννήσου καὶ τὸν ἔξω, διὰ τῆς ἐκείνου παρ᾽ ἀλλήλους ἐπιμισγόντων, χρήματι τε δύνατον ἔχαν, ὡς καὶ τοῖς παλαιοῖς ποιηταῖς δεδήλωται: ἀφενεῖν γὰρ ἐπωνύμασαν τὸ χωρίον. ἐπειδή δὲ οἱ Ἐλληνες μᾶλλον ἐπέλεξον, τὰς ναῦς κτισάμενοι τὸ λῃστικὸν καθήρουν, καὶ ἐμπόριον παρέχοντες ἁμφότερα δυνατῶν ἔσχον χρημάτων προσόδῳ τὴν πόλιν.”

“Planted on an isthmus, Corinth had always been a commercial emporium; as formerly almost all communication between the Hellenes within and without the Peloponnesus was carried on overland, and
the Corinthian territory was the highway through which it travelled. She had consequently great money resources, as is shown by the epithet “wealthy” bestowed by the old poets on the place, and this enabled her, when traffic by sea became more common, to procure her navy and put down piracy; and as she could offer a market for both branches of the trade, she acquired for herself all the power which large revenue affords.”

In the aforementioned speech, the Corinthian delegates express this financial capability and attempt to persuade the Spartan assembly by insinuating that they will cover a major portion of the expenses. Besides relying on the Peloponnesian allies, Sparta perhaps sequestered gold and silver from temple repositories such as at Olympia and Delphi. These religious establishments, along with other temples and shrines, had amassed so much silver and gold offerings that they were a means of ready capital in times of emergencies.

The Spartans further aimed to achieve financial supremacy in an unconventional ‘Spartan’ manner. The stereotypical portrayal of a conservative and xenophobic Sparta is turned on its head because the Spartans pursued a liberal course of action in seeking financial support through foreign diplomatic channels. In a policy that contradicts xenophobia, Sparta sought support by means of negotiated agreements with their barbarian nemesis, Persia. According to Thucydides, this policy was first suggested to the Spartan assembly by Archidamus:

“οὐ μὴν οὖδὲ ἀναισθήτως αὐτοῦς κελεύω τοὺς τε ἐξ ἡμμάχους ἡμῶν ἄννα βλάπτειν καὶ ἐπιβουλεύοντας μὴ καταφωράν, ἀλλὰ ὅπλα μὲν μήπω κινεῖν, πέμπειν δὲ καὶ αἰτιᾶθαι μήτε πόλεμον ἄναν δηλοῦντας μὴ ὅσον ἐπιτρέψωμεν, κἂν τούτῳ καὶ τὰ ἡμέτερ’ αὐτῶν ἐξαρτώσθαι ἥμμαχον τε προσαφεῖ τι καὶ Ἑλλήνων καὶ Βαρβάρων, εἰ ποθὲν τινὰ ἡ παρεκκλησία ἡ χρημάτων δύναμιν προσληψόμεθα (ἀνεπιφθονὸν δὲ, δόσει ὡσπερ καὶ ἠμείς ὑπ’ Ἀθηναίων ἐπιβουλεύομεθα, μὴ Ἑλλήνας μόνον, ἄλλα καὶ βαρβάρους προσλαβόντας διασωθῆναι), καὶ τὰ αὐτῶν ἄμη ἐκποριζόμεθα.”

“The means will be, first, the acquisition of allies, Hellenic or barbarian it matters not, so long as they are an accession to our strength naval or financial – I say Hellenic or barbarian, because the odium of such an accession to all who like us are the objects of the designs of the Athenians is taken away by the law of self-preservation – and secondly the development of our home resources”.

56 Thuc.1.13.5.
57 Thuc.1.121.3-5.
58 Thuc.1.121.3.
60 Thuc.1.82.1.
Archidamus’ proposition of ‘barbarian’ aid was convincing and this policy was actively pursued by the authorities at Sparta. It was also a failure, however, in the sense that Persia did not commit any resources until much later in the war. Persian financial aid and its impact on the Peloponnesian fleet will be examined later. For now, it is sufficient to stress how far Sparta was willing to go outside its comfort zone in order to secure funding for the Peloponnesian fleet. Thucydides mentions three instances within his narrative concerning Spartan embassies to the Persian King for financial support during the early stages of the war. A delegation was sent immediately following the declaration of war in 431BC, the Athenians intercepted the second delegation to the Persian king in 430BC, and the Athenians arrested the Persian envoy Artaphernes in 425BC, whose objective it was to negotiate with the Spartan king.  

Foreign diplomacy, although not entirely successful at the start of the war, was the greatest strategy Sparta pursued in order to fund her fleet and by the end of the war, it proved to be the key to victory.

The last means to be discussed on the subject of funding the Peloponnesian fleet is directly linked to the navy. It concerns not how Sparta acquired wealth to fund her fleet but instead how Sparta reduced the cost of manning the triremes. As mentioned earlier, a great portion of the expenditures for a fleet was the pay of a sailor’s wage. The earnings ranged from three to six obols a day, which calculates to a talent a month for one trireme’s total crew. Military salary did not exist within the Spartan state itself. Spartan military ethos was predicated on the belief that it was a sacred duty, whether a Spartiate or Perioikic hoplite, to fight on behalf of the city-state without

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61 Thuc.2.7.1, 2.67.1, 4.50.2 respectively.
the incentive of reward in the form of material wealth. The Peloponnesian War introduced a problem since the maritime theater of war demanded tens of thousands of sailors and rowing was a paid profession. However, Sparta cleverly took advantage of the fact that it had an abundance of slave Helots who could be forced to row the Peloponnesian triremes for free. The deployment of slave Helots as rowers reduced the cost significantly. Slave sailors were not unique in Greece, but Sparta had a superior advantage over other city-states because it had the greatest ready slave collective of over 200,000 Messenians. Certain studies have estimated that the Peloponnesian navy could have been made up of between 50% and 80% slaves. Considering Sparta was hegemon of the league and had the greatest number of slaves available, it is reasonable to assume that the Helots were supplied by Sparta as free rowers. Helots in the Peloponnesian navy will be further discussed later on. The focus here was strictly to demonstrate that Sparta’s employment of Helots as rowers relieved the league of a portion of its financial burden.

In addition to the financing of the Peloponnesian fleet, it is essential to examine the naval facilities Sparta had available at the commencement of the war. For the purpose of this paper, a ‘naval facility’ refers to a natural harbor with ship-sheds and other structures designed for the primary intent of nautical warfare. Strategically located harbors were vital components of the Peloponnesian fleet because without them, any great collective armada would cease to function. To fully appreciate this, it is necessary to understand some crucial factors on the limitations of

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64 In Athens, pay for public services was introduced in 467/6BC after the Battle of Eurymedon as part of the government’s transformation to ‘radical democracy’. Not only were rowers paid, but hoplites, jurors, magistrates, and anything else that was considered a public service also received remuneration. Also, because conditions of trireme warfare were dreadful (this will be discussed very soon) offering pay was a way to provide incentive to encourage citizens to row. After Athens introduced pay for rowing, the rest of the Greek world quickly adopted it.
65 Peter Hunt, Slaves, Warfare, and Ideology in the Greek Historians (Cambridge University Press, 2002): 87. This remains to be definitely proven. I believe more solid evidence is required to confirm this besides the numbers given in written accounts.
trireme warfare. The wooden structure of a trireme offered little to no extra space, cramming around 170 rowers in the hull designed only 120 feet long by 20 feet wide; a nightmare to anyone with claustrophobia or agoraphobia. There was no room for storage, cooking and hence eating, sleeping, or even relieving oneself. The trireme’s effectiveness in battle depended on speed and maneuverability, which meant it had to be lightweight. Hence, the trireme was severely limited in any capabilities and functions outside of its sole pragmatic function. On account of this, triremes typically could not travel for any significant length of time because the crew had to eat and rest. These functions could only occur on shore. If a squadron of triremes engaged in long overseas operations, it required multiple friendly harbors on route for safe anchorage spots and resupply. Furthermore, the fact that triremes were constructed of timber meant that these vessels were liable to being waterlogged. As a consequence, crews were forced to beach their vessels and dry them for extended periods of time. It has been estimated that a trireme had to be dried out after every five days at sea, which made friendly harbours all the more essential. Lastly, as a consequence of the dangerous autumn and winter weather conditions, sailing practically ceased during those months. This geographical factor, in addition to the basic storage necessity, demanded the establishment of ship-sheds at significant harbors dotting the coasts along any expedition. With this in mind, it is possible to examine Peloponnesian harbors and facilities.

Modern and ancient sources do not agree definitively concerning an identifiable ‘national’ Spartan naval base, comparable to Athens and its iconic Piraeus. The controversy exists because

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66 See Appendix, Fig. 3, for an illustration of a trireme.
68 Hanson, 255.
70 See Appendix, Fig. 4, for an illustration of ship-sheds.
there are, at best, unclear references in the ancient sources, no validating archaeological evidence, and little contemporary interest in such research. Regardless of these absences, an argument must be made. Most scholars who argue for a truly Spartan naval base indicate Gytheion as the principal harbor. Gytheion is located 45km south of Sparta, on the Laconian Gulf west of the Eurotas, and is suitable for safe anchorage.\footnote{See Appendix, Fig. 5, for map of Southern Laconia and Gytheion.} The scant and speculative evidence derives from ancient historians. The strongest evidence is from Diodorus Siculus, who wrote of the Athenian admiral, Tolmides, and his famous clockwise circumnavigation, \textit{periplous}, around the Peloponnese in 457BC:

\begin{quote}
“ὡς δ’ αὐτῷ καὶ τᾶλα τὰ πρὸς τὴν στρατείαν ἠτοίμαστο, πεντήκοντα μὲν τριήρεσιν ἀνήχθη καὶ τετρακισχιλίους ὀπλίτας, καταπλεύσας δὲ τῆς Λακωνικῆς εἰς Μεθώνην, τοῦτο μὲν τὸ χωρίον εἶλε, τὸν δὲ Λακεδαιμονίων βοηθησάντων ἀνέξειος, καὶ παραπλεύσας εἰς τὸ Γύθειον, ἐπίνειον τῶν Λακεδαιμονίων, χειροσάμενος δὲ καὶ ταὐτὴν τὴν πόλιν καὶ τὰ νεώρια τῶν Λακεδαιμονίων ἐμπρήσας, τὴν χώραν ἐδήμοσεν.”
\end{quote}

“As soon as all other preparations for the expedition were complete, he [Tolmides] put to sea with fifty triremes and 4,000 hoplites. He made [his initial] landfall at Methana in Laconia and captured this stronghold. When the Lacedaemonians came to recover it, he withdrew again, and coasted around [the Peloponnese] to Gytheion, a Lacedaemonian seaport. This city, too, he reduced, setting fire to the Lacedaemonians’ dockyards and laying waste the countryside around”\footnote{Diodorus Siculus, \textit{Diodorus of Sicily in Twelve Volumes with an English Translation by C. H. Oldfather}. Vol. 4-8 (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann, Ltd, 1989): 11.84.6.} Diodorus’ statement reveals three significant facts; he names Gytheion as a Lacedaemonian seaport, that as early as 457BC there were dockyards or ship-sheds present, and that Gytheion was strategically significant enough to be the target for an attack. However, many academics are suspicious of Diodorus’ claim because he is far removed chronologically from the narrative he describes, and secondly, Thucydides who is a contemporary of the period, and who was invested in naval warfare, does not identify Gytheion by name:

\begin{quote}
“καὶ Πελοπόννησον περιέπλευσαν Ἀθηναίοι Τολμείδου τοῦ Τολμαίφυ στρατηγοῦντος, καὶ τὸ νεώριον τῶν Λακεδαιμονίων ἐνέπρησαν καὶ Χαλκίδα Κορινθίων πόλιν εἶλον καὶ Σικυωνίους ἐν ἀποβάσια τῆς γῆς μάχη ἐκράτησαν.”
\end{quote}

“The Athenians sailed round the Peloponnesus under Tolmides son of Tolmaeus, burnt the arsenal of Sparta, took Chalcis, a city of the Corinthians, and in a descent upon Sicyon defeated the Sicyonians in battle”\footnote{Thuc.1.108.5.}
Although Thucydides frustratingly left out a location, there is some reassurance in this passage. His words, τὸ νεώριον τῶν Λακεδαιμονίων ἐνέπρησαν, literally translates to “They [Athenians] burnt the dockyard [singular] of the Lacedaemonians [not Peloponnesians]”. Thucydides distinguished a specific dockyard that was inherently the recognized Spartan dockyard. Whether Gytheion or not, Thucydides’ description revealed that Tolmides burnt not a dockyard, but the dockyard. Having Finished off Thucydides’ narrative of the Peloponnesian War, Xenophon credited Gytheion as a valuable Spartan dockyard by at least 407BC:

“Ἀλκιβιάδης δὲ ἐκ τῆς Σάμου ἔχον τὰ χρήματα κατέπλευσεν εἰς Πάρον ναυσὶν ἐκκοσία, ἔκκειθεν δὲ ἀνήχθη εὐθὺ Γυθείου ἐπὶ κατασκοπὴν τῶν τριήμοιν, ἣς ἐπιυπνάνετο Λακεδαιμονίους αὐτὸθι παρασκευάζειν τριάκοντα, καὶ τοῦ οἴκωδι κατάπλου ὅπως ἡ πόλις πρὸς αὐτὸν ἔχοι.”

“Alcibiades, in possession of the money from Samos, sailed back to Paros with twenty ships; from there he went directly to Gytheion to spy on the thirty triremes that he had learned were being outfitted there by the Spartans, and also to find out how the city felt toward him and the possibility of his returning home.”

Xenophon’s remark regarding Gytheion is clear but can be misleading. It is clear that by 407BC, Gytheion was a valuable Spartan dockyard. Conversely, it can be misleading because there is no way to answer whether it had always been that way or had just become significant with Persian financing since 413BC.

There is practically no validating archaeological evidence at Gytheion for a mighty ancient harbor that once anchored the Peloponnesian fleet, although, tantalizingly enough, in 1971 and 1972, the harbor of Gytheion was surveyed by divers with sonar survey tools and revealed a massive formation, 220x70m, which was interpreted as a possible ancient harbor structure now below water. Any physical evidence would logically be underwater considering the rise in sea

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levels over the past two millennia. Ancient ship-sheds were located directly perpendicular to the shore for the purpose of making it easy either to drag the ships out of the water or to set sail. Possible archaeological remains under the water that would identify ship-sheds at Gytheion would be deep cuts in the slopes of ramps, used to carry the keel of the ships safely into the shed, or the base of columns in parallel lanes which once supported the roofs.

Whether or not Gytheion was the main Spartan harbor or naval facility requires further investigation. There are cases that can be argued for other viable locations within the Southern Peloponnese. What is clear is that Gytheion was recognized as a harbor during the Peloponnesian War and was undoubtedly utilized by the Peloponnesian fleet. The search for a principal Peloponnesian harbor may be a search in futility. Unlike the Athenians, the Spartans may have preferred not to have all their triremes located in one place, but instead strategically spread among the allies’ naval bases, which were more than likely better equipped than their own. Corinth had two practical naval facilities on either side of the isthmus, Kenchreai on the east, and Lechaion on the west. Both harbors have been silted up since, but archaeological evidence has revealed the great facilities, including the warehouses for gear. Furthermore, throughout the war Sparta was liberal in changing which naval base would be utilized as the principal facility. For evidence, from 429 to 425BC, Sparta arguably dictated that the Peloponnesian fleet be centered in Elis’ harbors; most notably the harbor of Cyllene because the maritime theater of war was in the Corinthian Gulf.

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77 Camp, 149.
78 Taenarum, Asine, Las, Thyrea, Epidauros Limera, and Boiai, all offered favorable harbors. See: Cartledge, Sparta and Lakonia, 156.
81 In relation to ship-sheds, some naval facilities included great storerooms, skeuothéke, for hanging tackle of the fleet such as the ropes, sails, oars, etc. See: Camp, 149.
and western waters. Later in the war, the Peloponnesian fleet anchored in Cnidus, Miletus, Ephesus, and other locations across Asia Minor.

The vital service that friendly shores provided for the Peloponnesian fleet during the war could offer an explanation to the controversial Melian episode of 416BC. Melos is the most southwestern of the Cycladic islands and offered good anchorage for ancient triremes on the eastern shore of its natural bay harbor. Although the Melians claimed neutrality during the Peloponnesian war, they became nonetheless a target of unwarranted Athenian aggression which Thucydides dramatized in his narrative, and has become commonly referred to as *The Melian Dialogue*. Athens’ motive for besieging neutral Melos and Thucydides’ reason for including this in dialogue format is subject to much controversy because it is unclear what either purpose served. However, if the annexation of Melos into the Delian League is examined outside of Thucydides’ dialogue and in the context of the importance of naval facilities in trireme warfare, the answer can be found.

The people of Melos shared a Doric ethnic background with the Spartans. Although the Doric Melians claimed that they were independent of Sparta, their shared ethnicity provided the foundation for friendly relations with each other. This relationship between Melos and Sparta

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82 Caroline Falkner, “Sparta and Lepreon in the Archidamian War (Thuc.5.31.2-5),” *Historia: Zeitschrift fur Alte Geschichte* 48, no.4 (1999): 389. See: Thuc.2.7.2, 66, 68.7, 84.6 for examples.

83 The Melian Dialogue (Thuc.5.84-116) is very odd when it is compared to the rest of Thucydides’ work. The dialogue format between the Athenians and Melians is a different style from any other part of Thucydides’ narrative. It seems to either reflect a philosophical debate (Plato puts ideas in dialogue) or a legal trial in which the prosecution, Athens, accuses the defense, the Melians. It is possible that Thucydides was attempting to answer philosophical and legal questions such as how an imperial power should behave. Credit is due to Dr. Susan Downie of Carleton University for this.

was beneficial to the operations of the Peloponnesian fleet because it could beach and rest at a friendly shore. It was common in ancient Greek naval warfare for neutral states to offer their harbors for anchorage to states engaged in warfare even while maintaining their neutrality. Melos’ position as the most southwestern island in the Cyclades would have been essential for the success of Peloponnesian naval operations in the Aegean and Ionia. To understand this, it is essential to demonstrate the average distance a trireme could travel. In good weather, triremes could travel 80-100km in 6-8 hours. However, experienced crewmen could propel a trireme 300km in a single day. Melos was conveniently located for the Peloponnesian fleet because it was 120km away from the Laconian coast, an almost perfectly achievable distance within a day. Therefore, since Melos was the closest, within range, and the only friendly Cycladic Island to Sparta, it was the only harbour the Peloponnesian fleet could hope to anchor at in order to rest and resupply. Without Melos, the Peloponnesian fleet’s ability to conduct operations in the Aegean and in Ionia would have been compromised since it would have to take alternate and dangerous sailing routes. This explains why Athens targeted Melos during the war because its role as a harbor to the Peloponnesians was a major threat to Athens. Although the Athenians only successfully captured Melos in 416BC, there was an earlier and lesser known unsuccessful attempt in 426BC suggesting the Athenians understood Melos’ importance to Sparta well before 416BC. The motive behind Athens’ attack on Melos may also explain Thucydides’ decision to present this

85 Gomme, A Forgotten Factor of Greek Naval Strategy, 18.
86 Hanson, 261.
87 Thuc.3.49. An Athenian messenger ship travelled from Athens to Lesbos, which is a distance of 296km, in just a single day.
88 Without Melos, Sparta’s sailing routes would have been dangerous and limited. Option 1: Sail south and follow the string of islands along Crete towards Ionia. This would have been costly in time. Option 2: Sail northeast following the Attic coast. This would have been dangerous for obvious reasons. Option 3: Sail through hostile Cycladic islands without any benevolent shore to rest, eat, and maintain the ships. This would have also been risky and dangerous.
89 Thuc.3.91. Thucydides’ goes into this action in very little detail only stating that it was done because Athens was mad that Melos refused to join the Delian League.
event in his work in dialogue format. If Rawlings’ theory of ‘double vision’\(^90\) is correct and Thucydides was intentionally disregarding the Peloponnesian navy in the first phase of the war in order to contrast its rise in the second, then Thucydides could not concede the fact that the Peloponnesian navy was in a position to threaten Athens by means of Melos early in the war. Therefore, he masked the true motive of the Melian episode by way of his confusing dialogue content. Melos, although neutral and not part of the league, was in fact a vital asset to the Peloponnesian fleet because of its harbor and location.

The Piraeus may be the exception instead of the rule when examining naval facilities during the 5\(^{th}\) century BC. The Delian League allies either provided triremes or money to Athens as tribute. From that moment forward, these assets were considered the possession of Athens. The number of ship sheds in the Piraeus\(^91\) reveals a psychological dogma of Athens in which the city-state felt that it needed to have complete control over its ships at all times. The ship sheds at the Piraeus also demonstrated the fear Athens had of other allied states having possession of the ships. The survival of Athens depended on its naval superiority and the security of its trade routes at sea. Those things would have been threatened if Athens had not had complete control of its ships by means of the Piraeus.\(^92\) Whereas Athens was vulnerable if it had no control of its ships, Sparta was not. Sparta dominated the Peloponnesian and could depend on its yields from the land to persevere. Its inherent survival did not depend on a distant trade route by sea. Thus, Sparta only demanded ships in times of emergency from its allies and only for the duration that they were required.

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\(^{90}\) Refer back to page 8 for Rawlings’ theory of ‘double vision’. In short, Rawlings’ argued that Thucydides based the structure of his narrative on constant comparison and contrast of the two wars.

\(^{91}\) An inscription dating to around 325/4BC (IG II\(^2\) 1629) records that there were 372 ship sheds. See: Camp, 296.

\(^{92}\) For example, throughout the Delian League’s history, many member city-states revolted from the League at one point or another. If Athens permitted a city-state to keep many of their ships and that city-state revolted, Athens would have lost a significant portion of their navy immediately.
Afterwards, the ships were returned to each contributing city-state respectively. As a result, Sparta did not require a gigantic naval base where it could directly control the Peloponnesian fleet.

The most vital commodity for any naval power in the Hellenic world for constructing, maintaining, and equipping a fleet of triremes was timber. Consider the following statement:

“In the modern world a state which makes any pretension to sea-power must control within her own borders adequate material for the construction and maintenance of her fleet. Otherwise she is at the mercy of an enemy in time of war unless she is able to secure foreign supplies through ordinary commercial channels.”

This statement, although directed at the twentieth century, holds especially true with respect to ancient city-states. The acquisition of timber in Classical Greece was not a simple affair. One harsh geological condition of Greece was very little rainfall per annum, which meant that much of the Greek mainland and islands had been deforested by the 6th BC. As a result, by the time of the Peloponnesian War good timber was sparse. Unfortunately for the Spartans, whatever forests remained in Greece during the 5th BC which were of quality timber were not found in the Peloponnese. Therefore, the Spartans depended on commercial trade outside their boundaries to acquire timber to construct their fleet.

It is a mistake to consider Sparta’s reliance on foreign timber for their fleet as a weakness or disadvantage. Athens, the recognized naval superpower, was also in a situation where it depended on foreign trade to sustain its fleet. Athens dominated trade and timber supply in the Aegean, while Corinth’s position dominated trade and timber supply in the west by means of the Corinthian Gulf and access to Illyria. The point being made here is that the Peloponnesian fleet

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94 Johnson, 199. The Greeks had been cutting down their forests as early as the Bronze Age to construct their fleets. The continuous felling of trees coupled with little rainfall ultimately led to deforestation by the Archaic period.
95 Some of the best timber in the ancient world was located in Thessaly, Macedonia, Asia Minor, Cilicia, Syria, Cyprus, Crete, and Southern Italy.
96 The Corinthian colonies on the Northwestern coasts at Corfu, Ambracia, Leucas, and Epidamnos were vital in assuring the supply of ship timber. See: Legon, 163. See Appendix, Fig. 6, for trade route.
had equal, if not better, access to timber than the Delian League. Therefore, the Peloponnesian fleet should not be looked at as inferior in terms of supply for naval construction by ca.435BC. This is evidenced by the fact that the Peloponnesian states were able to construct an astounding one hundred triremes in the span of two years from 435 to 433BC.97

Timber was such a strategically important commodity during the Peloponnesian War that many of the events and decisions made in foreign policies can be explained by it. One state either attempted to block and harm the enemy’s timber supply or attempted to capture and acquire new sources of timber from the enemy. Targeting vital supply lines in warfare has been and still is a common tactic to inflict damage upon an enemy.98 A chief example of this is the Megarian Decree. This was a set of economic sanctions imposed on Megara by Athens, which primarily banned the city-state from trade at home and abroad just before the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War around 434-432. The main reason for the decree remains debatable99 and Thucydides is vague concerning how the decree was a cause for the war, having dismissed its significance as a Spartan justification for declaring war. However, a re-examination of the Megarian Decree will reveal that Megara was not the real target of the decree by Athens.

The decree negatively affected Megara’s allies in the Peloponnese in terms of their capability to supply themselves with timber. The only city-state in the Aegean which imported

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97 See Thuc.1.31 for Corinthian shipbuilding and Thuc.1.46.1 for the number of Corinthian ships. See: Legon, 162. Also, a good production of triremes per annum is 20. See: Blackman, 203. Diodorus 11.43.3 states that Themistocles persuaded people to build triremes at Athens at a rate of 20 per year.

98 For a modern example, much of the Allies’ success against Germany in World War II derived from a strategy in targeting vital supply lines that the German military depended upon. The Allies’ bombed factories which produced weapons, ammunitions, transportation vehicles, and much more. Also, if the German Navy’s submarine campaign and the Battle of the Atlantic had been successful sinking vital cargo for Britain, then it is more than likely that Britain would have surrendered or been unable to establish a second front against Germany.

99 Thucydides states that: “she [Athens] accused the Megarians of pushing their cultivation into the consecrated ground and the unenclosed land on the border, and of harboring her runaway slaves.” Thuc.1.139.2. If this was indeed the reason for the Megarian Decree, it remains to be proven.
timber to Corinth was Megara.\textsuperscript{100} It is reasonable to suggest that the Peloponnesians’ naval build-up between 435-433, and the possibility of acquiring the Corcyran fleet\textsuperscript{101}, threatened Athenian supremacy at sea. Therefore, Athens sought a subtle way to indirectly cripple timber supply necessary for the Peloponnesian fleet by banning timber import and export between Megara and Corinth without violating the terms of their treaty with the Spartans.\textsuperscript{102} This is supported by the fact that a recent estimate on the date of the Megarian Decree places it between late summer of 434BC and spring 433BC.\textsuperscript{103} It is not a coincidence that at the outbreak of the war the first action by the Athenians was the siege of Potidaea: Corinths’s last important contact in the richly forested Chalcidice region on the Aegean side.\textsuperscript{104} Corinth, and in effect the Peloponnesian fleet, having been completely deprived of timber from the Aegean, solely relied on the Corinthian Gulf and access to Northwestern Greece for their timber by 431BC. Therefore, Sparta’s deployment of Cnemus and the Peloponnesian fleet to the Northwestern seas and the Corinthian Gulf in 430BC can be understood as a maneuver to secure the vital timber route to Corinth and assure their fleet’s continuity. Athens’ position at Naupactus, Zacynthus, Corcyra, and Cephallenia threatened this supply route and could effectively choke off or harass Peloponnesian vessels.\textsuperscript{105} Therefore, Athens’ attack on the Peloponnesian timber supply by means of the Megarian Decree and the siege

\textsuperscript{100} Legon, 165. Since Athens had a complete monopoly on Aegean trade, the majority of city-states required Athens’ permission to import or export any material to a destination. Corinth seemingly did not have permission to get timber through its port on the Saronic Gulf, which was Athenian territory. Megara was one of the last city-states on the Aegean side which sustained commercial activity free from Athenian control and was hostile to Athens. Therefore, Megara used its advantage to import Aegean timber it had received to Corinth.

\textsuperscript{101} Sparta never actively participated in the conflict between Corcyra and Corinth due to the peace with Athens. However it is reasonable to suggest that they supported Corinth and the prospect of gaining a greater Peloponnesian fleet which could threaten Athenian hegemony at sea.

\textsuperscript{102} Very little is actually known about the Megarian Decree. Thucydides briefly states: “Above all, it [the Spartan ultimatum] made very clear to the Athenians that war might be prevented if they revoked the Megara Decree, excluding the Megarians from the use of Athenian harbors and of the market of Athens.” Thuc.1.139.1. The playwright Aristophanes also alludes to it in his play, The Acharnians. It mentions how the Decree was slowly starving the Megarians. Aris.Arc.2.530-7.

\textsuperscript{103} Legon, 168.

\textsuperscript{104} Legon, 165.

\textsuperscript{105} Thuc.2.66-2.80.
of Potidaea suggests that the Athenians might have felt threatened by the growing Peloponnesian fleet. It is reasonable to suggest that Thucydides’ claim for the cause of the war being Sparta’s fear of Athenian power was wrong and that it was rather Athenian fear of the growing Spartan naval strength.\textsuperscript{106}

The Corinthian Gulf was not the only supply route for timber to the Peloponnesese. Friendly city-states in Sicily and Italy such as Syracuse and Tarentum might have been relied upon for ships. According to Thucydides, the Spartans had ordered the construction of 500 triremes in the Western colonies, making it reasonable to suggest that there was an abundance of quality timber there.\textsuperscript{107} However, it is not likely that the West supplied timber in its raw state to the Peloponnesese, on account of the material being too burdensome to transport over the vast distance.\textsuperscript{108} It would have been more practical for the Western states to use the timber at home to construct the vessels and export them in their finished form to the Peloponnesians. Due to the distance between Greece and the West, and the length of time required to construct the triremes, it is logical to conclude that Sicily and Italy were not a primary or reliable source of timber for the Peloponnesian fleet.

The Spartan failure in the Corinthian Gulf in 429BC combined with the unreliability of timber from the West threatened the continuity of the Peloponnesian fleet. Without timber, it was impossible to maintain or construct a sufficient number of triremes, either to replace those that had been captured or damaged in naval combat or by natural deterioration. Therefore, by 425BC the Peloponnesian fleet faced annihilation and Athens was close to having complete control of the

\textsuperscript{106} Legon, 171. See Thuc.1.23. “The real cause, however, I consider to be the one which was formally most kept out of sight. The growth of the power of Athens, and the alarm which this inspired in Sparta, made war inevitable.”

\textsuperscript{107} Thuc. 2.7.2. The order of 431BC has been disregarded by most scholars as nothing more than a serious miscalculation or over-exaggeration of numbers. However, scholar Thomas Kelly argues that not only was raising a fleet of 500 triremes possible in 431BC but explains that Sparta did not get the 500 triremes only because they miscalculated the willingness of their Greek allies and Persians to support their navy. See: Kelly, 25-35.

\textsuperscript{108} Legon, 164.
seas. In response to the uncertainty of their predicament, the Spartans made a bold and daring move to secure new means of timber. The events of 424-422BC in regards to Amphipolis can be explained as a response to the tenuous grasp the Peloponnesian fleet had on timber supply.

The seizure of Amphipolis was another example that much of Sparta’s policies for the war was dictated on the principal of securing the supply of timber for naval construction. Located in Thrace, Amphipolis’ position on the Strymon River was important because it gave access to fertile plains and was surrounded by forests which supplied the majority of the timber exported to Athens for naval construction.\textsuperscript{109} The timber available around Amphipolis derived from the \textit{Abies Alba}, or silver-fir, an uncommon tree in Greece and only found in Macedon and Thrace. The silver-fir was the material preferred by the Greeks for naval construction because the wood was strong while also being lightweight; traits desirable for the speed and manoeuvrability of trireme warfare.\textsuperscript{110} The appealing quality of the timber for naval construction had been recognized by the Persians almost a century earlier as was noted by Herodotus. The Persian general Megabazos warned King Darius that if they allowed any Greek to settle on the Strymon, then the Greeks would be able to construct great ships and oars.\textsuperscript{111} Thucydides considered the loss of timber upon the Spartan capture of Amphipolis as one of the main reasons Athens’ was so alarmed that it agreed to an armistice in 423 with the hopes of reaching a general peace.\textsuperscript{112}

It can be conceded that the Spartans decided to capture Amphipolis for purposes other than enhancing the Peloponnesian fleet.\textsuperscript{113} However, it can be argued that naval construction was the
primary objective for the operation. The timing and boldness of the operation is conspicuous. The Spartans had been recently deprived of timber supplies from the West and had lost over 60 ships at Pylos in 425BC. It is not a coincidence that, fresh from a naval disaster and having been deprived of timber, the Spartans quickly counter-attacked against the Athenians. They sent over 1700 hoplites on an expedition 700km away to capture a city famous for its silver-fir, a wood regarded highly in naval construction. No Spartan army had ever before ventured by land so far and so fast. In retrospect, military logic seems to indicate that this was a last desperate and risky attempt to secure timber which was invaluable to rebuild their navy. Furthermore, the decision by the Spartans to elect Brasidas in charge of the operation supports the theory that Amphipolis was targeted for its timber. Brasidas’ career and experience looks more closely related to the navy than the traditional army. In 429 Brasidas was one of three ‘ξυμβούλους’, sent to give advice to the navarch Cnemus in the Corinthian Gulf on how to engage the Athenians at sea. In 427 he was again sent as σύμβουλος to the admiral Alcidas. In 425 he was a captain of a trireme at the battle of Pylos. Therefore, it is odd that the Spartans sent a naval officer to conduct a land campaign unless the goal of the operation required Brasidas’ expertise in naval affairs. Brasidas’ naval experience, supported by the fact that his first action after the seizure of Amphipolis was the immediate construction of triremes in the Strymon, suggests that the Spartan goal was the procurement of timber in response to having lost the supply route to the Corinthian Gulf.

Brasidas’ campaign in the north also briefly won him the allegiance of King Perdicas II of Macedon whose kingdom contained the northern forests which had been supplying Athens’

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Athenian grain supply route from the Black Sea. Thuc.4.108. For more information on Athenian grain supply check out Alfonso Moreno, *Feeding the Democracy: The Athenian Grain Supply in the Fifth and Fourth Centuries BC* (Oxford University Press, 2007).

114 Thuc.2.85.1. ξυμβούλους translates as either ‘advisors’ or ‘counsellors’.

115 Thuc.4.108.6.
vital timber for its navy. It is reasonable to suggest that Sparta initiated diplomacy with Perdiccas well before Brasidas’ campaign, having anticipated the need to secure a trade deal for timber. From as early as 431BC, relations between Athens and Macedon were fragile because Perdiccas had acted against Athens at Potidaea. More significantly, by 429 Perdiccas openly offered help to the Spartans for their assault in Acarnania by sending 1000 Macedonian troops. Without a doubt, at least by 429BC, Spartan negotiations with Macedon took place. The aim of the Spartans would logically have been twofold; secure a new source of timber for the Peloponnesian fleet and, as a result, take away Athens’ vital timber supply. The timing of this relationship also makes sense because Sparta’s supply route by means of the Corinthian Gulf had been compromised around that time. Hence, diplomacy with Macedon may have been a desperate measure taken by the Spartans to ensure their supply of timber and the furtherance of their fleet.

Macedonian-Spartan relations were at their peak by 424BC as Perdiccas fully supported Brasidas’ campaign in the north. Perdiccas’ support included the capture of Amphipolis, and betraying Athens. In return, Brasidas used his manpower to assist Perdiccas with the subjugation of Arrhabaeus, king of the Lyncestians. Although Thucydides does not specifically mention that the Spartans struck a deal with Perdiccas for timber at this time, this was likely part of the relationship. The degree of trepidation which Thucydides described in Athens would thus be a

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117 Borza, 36. In addition to the climate, the fact that Macedon’s population was much less than Attica ensured the survival of Macedonian forests. Much of the forests were of the best quality, silver-fir, like Amphipolis.
118 Thuc.2.80. Ultimately, the offer was a failure because the 1000 Macedonian troops arrived too late. Nonetheless, it is the act of openly supporting Sparta that is important here.
119 Thuc.4.79.
reaction to the fact that in one campaign the Spartans managed to counter their losses in the Corinthian Gulf and Pylos by having successfully seized the Athenian timber supply at Amphipolis in addition to having acquired foreign timber from Macedon.\textsuperscript{120} Evidence that Sparta secured timber from Macedon in 424BC comes from an inscription dated only a year later in 423BC when Athens regained Perdiccas’ alliance. Inscription IG\textsuperscript{3} 1.89.1.31 records “And I will not export [oa]rs [to anyone] but an Athe[nnian].”\textsuperscript{121} This inscription is evidence that Athens, after their crisis of 424BC, took measures to ensure that Macedon would exclusively export timber, in the form of oars, to Athens and no one else. The ‘exclusivity’ clause was reinforced in writing because Macedon was likely supplying the Peloponnesian fleet with oars in prior years. Therefore, Athens made sure in their treaty with Macedon that there would be no underhanded deals with Sparta, which they were known to have had in the past.

Spartan-Macedonian diplomacy was revived in 417BC when Perdiccas joined the Spartan-Argive alliance during the interbellum period of the war. Not much is known about the alliance during this period but it can be assumed that Macedon once again supplied timber to the Peloponnesian fleet, implicitly against Athenian interests. However, Macedonian relations with Sparta deteriorated yet again with the death of Perdiccas in 413BC, and the succession of his son Archelaus who was pro-Athenian.\textsuperscript{122} The complex and constantly changing Spartan-Macedonian relationship is a crucial example of how the supply of timber was a vital part of diplomacy and politics during the war. More significantly, Macedonian timber was integral to the Spartan plan

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{120} Thuc.4.108.1.
\textsuperscript{121} IG\textsuperscript{3} 1.89.1.31 καὶ οὐδένα [κο]πέας ἔχοντας ἐξασθάνειν ἐάσο [ε] μέ Αθη[νιο]. (PHI Inscriptions.com)
\textsuperscript{122} Borza, 44. The timely succession of Archelaus to the Macedonian throne in 413BC may account for the swift build-up of triremes for Athens after the Sicilian Disaster in the same year.
\end{footnotesize}
for the continuance of the Peloponnesian fleet, especially as the interbellum period was about to end.

The final logistical aspect to examine in the Peloponnesian fleet is manpower. As was mentioned earlier, each trireme consisted of between 170 and 200 sailors. Since the sailor’s wage was expensive, the Spartans employed their Helots as rowers in their fleet for free labor.\textsuperscript{123} However, the use of Helots and other slaves\textsuperscript{124} in the navy was advantageous for other reasons besides economics. At the outbreak of the war the traditional social hierarchy of Sparta, with land-holding full citizen Spartiate hoplites at the top, was deteriorating. The Spartiate class population had seriously dwindled since the late 6\textsuperscript{th} and early 5\textsuperscript{th} century, and as a result strained the integrity of the social structure on which Sparta depended.\textsuperscript{125} This position made the employment of Helots and slaves in the navy especially appealing because it preserved the Spartiate population from having to row while also relieving the common threat of Helot rebellion close to home in Laconia.\textsuperscript{126} It can be argued that the use of Helots and slaves in the navy was a dangerous concept because the possibility of a mutiny while at sea was certainly possible. However, neither Thucydides nor Xenophon mentions an instance of this ever having happened. Helot and slave use

\textsuperscript{123} See p.20-21 above.
\textsuperscript{124} The Helots specifically refer to the Messenians which had been subjugated by the Spartans. The other slaves were any slaves provided by the allies which were of a different origin (not Messenian).
\textsuperscript{125} Reasons for Spartiate decline were the inability to replace those lost in Sparta’s frequent wars, demotion of Spartiate citizens on account of their failure to pay requirement for syssitia, and commercial activity forcing Spartiates to sell their land holdings. 8000 Spartiate in 480BC fell to around only 1500 by 371BC. See Simon Hornblower, Anthony Spawforth, Esther Eidinow, ed., \textit{Oxford Classical Dictionary} (Oxford University Press, 2012): 1390. The need for Sparta to preserve the Spartiate class explains why the Spartans were so alarmed at the capture of only 192 Spartiate on Sphacteria that they were willing to discuss peace terms on the condition of their return.
\textsuperscript{126} Hunt, 57. The Helots were Sparta’s enemy at home. Helot servitude was harsh under Spartan regime and as a result, many detested the Spartans and desired to regain Messenian freedom by means of revolt. This was a serious threat to Spartan society because Helot population within Laconia far outweighed the Spartan population. See: Paul Cartledge, “Spartan Institutions,” in \textit{The Landmark Thucydides: A Comprehensive Guide to the Peloponnesian War}, ed. Robert B. Strassler, trans. Richard Crawley (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998): 590. Therefore, by deploying Helots in the navy overseas, Sparta was reducing Helot numbers at home and as a result, reducing the threat of Helot revolt.
as rowers in the navy was considered safe because their position at the oars meant they had no access to arms and therefore posed no threat, while marines and captains of superior rank could securely command those below with weapons.\textsuperscript{127} Another argument for the disadvantage of using \textit{Helots} and slaves as rowers in the navy is the lack of morale in relation to their performance. This can be demonstrated in a comparison between Peloponnesian and Athenians rowers. For the Peloponnesian navy, slave rowers were forced to fight against their will for people who had subjugated them and likely for a cause they did not share. For the Athenians, their rowers were voting citizens who shared a common care for their city which motivated them to enlist and to defend their homes, with the bonus of being paid.\textsuperscript{128} If one were to choose between the two, in respect to which side would row better, then the obvious choice would be the Athenians. It is likely that the Spartans recognized this problem and the negative effect it could have had on the Peloponnesian navy because they came up with a radical policy which gave \textit{Helots} and slaves something to fight for: their freedom. Starting with the Peloponnesian War, there is evidence that \textit{Helots} and other slaves called \textit{despoionautai}, “slave sailors” were freed subsequent to their service in Peloponnesian navies.\textsuperscript{129} Therefore, the Spartans were able to incorporate \textit{Helots} and other slaves safely and effectively in the Peloponnesian fleet.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{127} Hunt, 83-84. Aristotle recognized that marines on vessels allowed for a city-state to possess a navy without actually having sailors made up of its’ own citizenry: “[warship crews] need not be part of the city, since marines are free and from the [city’s] infantry class. They are the ones in charge and control the crew.” Arist.Pol.1327b8-11.
\item \textsuperscript{128} Hanson, 253. Athenian trireme rowers were not only Athenian citizens. There were also metics, slaves, and mercenaries: see for example B. Jordan, \textit{The Crews of Athenian Triremes}, L’antiquité classique, 69, 1, 2000 pp. 81-101; Trundle M., \textit{Coinage and Economics of the Athenian Empire}, in \textit{Circum Mare: Themes of Ancient Warfare}, J. Armstrong (ed.), Boston 2016, p.79.
\item \textsuperscript{129} Hunt, 85. A fragment from Myron of Priene, who wrote about the history of Helots, seems to suggest this. This is believable considering that as early as 424, Sparta allowed and encouraged the liberation of Helots for the price of military achievement such as with Brasidas’ \textit{neodamodeis}.\end{itemize}
Occupying a position in society below the Spartan citizens, the Perioikoi\textsuperscript{130} were heavily relied upon to serve in the Peloponnesian fleet. On account of the depreciating populace of the Spartiate class, the Perioikoi were more frequently enlisted in the navy to serve as either marines or captains of allied ships.\textsuperscript{131} Employing Perioikoi in the navy was appealing for other reasons besides their numerical superiority over the elites. While the Spartiates’ main function was professional military service on land, the principal function of the Perioikoi was primarily focused on economic and commercial activities. The majority of marine resources lay in Perioikic territory on the coasts, commercial relations with the outside world for Sparta came through the Perioikoi by trade, and they were prominent craftsmen.\textsuperscript{132} Because of these things, it is reasonable to suggest that they would have been the most experienced sailors within Laconia from dealing in trade and would have been the boat builders for Sparta. Even Sparta’s supposed ‘national’ harbor at Gytheion was a Perioikic town, further suggesting that they were well acquainted with conduct on the seas.

The Spartiate had an important role in the Peloponnesian navy as an admiral (known as a navarch) for the fleet. As important as the function of admiral was, a Spartiate’s role in the navy was otherwise limited. Of the 200 crewmen per ship, 170 were likely made up of slaves or allied volunteers, 30 others as Perioikoi or allied statesmen, with only one or possibly no Spartiate on board. Sparta’s social structure demanded that the Spartiate focus on agriculture and professional hoplite warfare.\textsuperscript{133} By the outbreak of the war, the Spartiate population was estimated to have been

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{130} As defined by Paul Cartledge: “they [Perioikoi] were the inhabitants of the towns in Laconia and Messenia apart from Sparta and Amyklai, free men but subjected to Spartan suzerainty and not endowed with citizen rights at Sparta.” Cartledge, \textit{Sparta and Lakonia}, 153.

\textsuperscript{131} Strauss, 45. See Thuc.8.22.1 for an example. Thucydides states that one of the Perioikoi, Diniades, commanded the Chian fleet in 412BC.

\textsuperscript{132} Cartledge, \textit{Sparta and Lakonia}, 155.

\textsuperscript{133} In the Funeral Oration, Pericles famously rebukes the Spartans’ ability for seamanship by claiming that they are farmers, not sailors. Thuc.1.142.6-9.
\end{footnotesize}
around 2000 and therefore it would have been dangerous for Sparta to employ many Spartiates overseas in the navy far away from home. High casualties in naval warfare threatened social collapse at home. This reality at Sparta begs the question: was the Peloponnesian navy a threat and detriment to Sparta’s social system?

The Peloponnesian navy was an opportunity for those of lower rank in Spartan society to be promoted in a city-state that made it otherwise impossible to do so. For this to be possible, Sparta had to give up a certain degree of power and responsibility to those of inferior rank. Perioikoi held positions of leadership more frequently in the navy as captains, trierarchs, and eventually held the command of navarch in the Ionian phase such as the Spartan Perioikos Diniades. Besides the Perioikoi, the navy also attracted ambitious Spartiate men who were of lesser standing than their supposed equals. Famous Spartiates such as Lysander, Gylippus, and Callicratidas all served as commanders in the navy but were also considered ‘μόθακες’, Mothakes. Mothakes were Spartiates but of lower sociopolitical standing because they were either the children of a Spartiate father and a Helot mother or because they were children of impoverished Spartiates and could not contribute to the Syssitia. Mothakes were not even permitted to fight alongside other Spartiates in pitched hoplite battle but were forced to fight alongside the Perioikoi, which symbolically matched them more to that status. Mothakes such as Lysander gained so much sway during his leadership in the Peloponnesian navy that he became as influential and powerful as Spartan kings during the Ionian phase of the war. Lysander’s influence even granted him successive navarchy commands which was against the Spartan constitution. For the Spartan elite to concede power to their inferiors reveals how far Sparta was willing to go in order to be victorious

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134 Unz, 39.
135 Strauss, 35.
136 Thuc.8.22. As navarch, Diniades was able to incite the revolt of Methymna and Mytilene against the Delian League in 412BC. See: Parke, 45.
while also revealing how the institution of the navy contributed to the detriment of Sparta’s sociopolitical system.

Thus far, all of the previously discussed aspects of the Peloponnesian navy reveal a highly complex institution within the Spartan state. Whether or not the Peloponnesian fleet was ineffective or ‘disregarded’ prior to the Peloponnesian War, it is nonetheless clear that by the Archidamian phase of the war, Sparta was determined to demonstrate the League’s power at sea. In fact, Sparta’s dedication to the fleet was extraordinary and exposed their willingness to adapt in order to overcome Athenian imperialism. To acquire funding for their fleet, traditional xenophobic Sparta looked to foreign diplomacy with ‘barbarians’ and even adopted radical policies of granting freedom to *Helots* in exchange for service in the fleet. These things would have been absurd and unthinkable to Spartans decades prior to the war. Unlike the Athenians, Sparta used the naval facilities of its allies and did not obsess over controlling the fleet at one ‘national’ Spartan harbor. The Peloponnesian fleet’s rapid expansion, on account of Corinth’s profitable location on the Corinthian Gulf and access to Illyrian timber, threatened Athenian supremacy at sea. Sparta’s determination to acquire timber for the fleet resulted in an unparalleled and bold campaign in the north. Lastly, the very institution of the fleet defied Sparta’s sociopolitical system because it challenged the traditional structure of land-holding aristocracy. Therefore, the dedication and advancement of the Peloponnesian fleet reveals that Sparta was willing to adapt and innovate during the Peloponnesian War. Furthermore, it challenges the Thucydidean preconception of a traditional, land-based, and cautious state. Examining Sparta’s naval efforts is key for understanding the extent of its evolution into a liberal, daring, and adaptable state. Sparta’s naval program should not be dismissed by Thucydides and modern scholars as a mere afterthought, when
in reality it is a vital component towards a full comprehension of Spartan disposition during the war.

**Strategy: Debunking Spartan Naval Inferiority & Intention**

Thucydides’ use of speeches in book one was an essential tool for implanting the seed in the minds of his audience that the Peloponnesian fleet was inefficient and inferior. This is evident in two speeches, firstly as iterated through the voice of King Archidamus of Sparta, and then via the famous Pericles. Archidamus’ and Pericles’ speeches directly echo one another in contrasting Athenian superiority at sea to the weakness of the landlocked Peloponnesians.\(^{137}\) Consider Archidamus’ and Pericles’ reflections on their nations’ experience at sea, inferiority of the Peloponnesian navy, and superiority of Athenian seafaring:

Archidamus: ‘[The Athenians are] people who have the widest experience on the seas’ (1.80.3).
Pericles: ‘Such people are incapable of often manning a fleet ... when we have control of the sea’ (1.141.4).

Archidamus: ‘What have we to rely upon if we rush into it [sc. the war] unprepared? Our navy? It is inferior to theirs’ (1.80.3-4).
Pericles: ‘We have nothing to fear from their navy’ (1.142.2)

Archidamus: ‘And if we are to give proper attention to it [sc. our navy] and build it up to their strength, that will take time’ (1.80.4).
Pericles: ‘And as for seamanship, they will find that a difficult lesson to learn. You yourselves have been studying it since the end of the Persian wars, and have still not entirely mastered the subject. How then can it be supposed that they could ever make much progress? They are farmers, not sailors, and in addition to that they will never get a chance of practising, because we shall be blockading them with strong naval forces. ... Seaman ship, just like anything else, is an art. It is not something that can be picked up and studied in one's spare time; indeed, it allows no spare time for anything else’ (1.142.6-9).

The cogency of the two speeches regarding the navy is clear and it is reasonable to accuse Thucydides of having intentionally crafted them in this way. Establishing the limitation of the Peloponnesian navy further allowed Thucydides to create his grand strategy for the war, and the land versus sea motif.

Archidamus: ‘Perhaps there is ground for confidence in the superiority which we have in heavy infantry and in actual numbers, assets which will enable us to invade and devastate their land. Athens, however, controls plenty of land outside Attica and can import what she wants by sea’ (1.80.1-2)
Pericles: ‘If they invade our country by land, we will invade theirs by sea - and it will turn out that the destruction of a part of the Peloponnesus will be worse for them than the destruction of the whole of Attica would be for us. For they can get no more land without fighting for it, while we have plenty of land both in the islands and on the continent’ (1.143.4)

If Rawlings' theory about double vision is correct, the speeches were Thucydides’ primary weapon for downplaying the Peloponnesian navy in order to contrast its later rise and supremacy, ending in ironic fashion with a naval victory for the Spartans at Aegospotami in 404. One last example of comparison between the two speeches is necessary to prove that Thucydides intentionally highlighted the deficiency of the Peloponnesian navy. Thucydides diminished the fleet by revealing Sparta’s financial handicap. Without diverting too much focus to the ancient economy of Greece, it is necessary to understand that the financial requirement of owning, maintaining, constructing, and deploying a fleet was a demanding and exacting burden on any city-state. 138

Lacking financial resources meant there could be no success or efficiency in naval warfare. With this in mind consider the following statements:

Archidamus: ‘Are we relying on our wealth? Here we are at an even greater disadvantage; we have no public funds, and it is no easy matter to secure contributions from private sources’ (1.80.4)
Archidamus: ‘They have just as many allies as we have, and their allies pay tribute. And war is not so much a matter of armament as of the money which makes the armaments effective; particularly is this true in a war fought between a land power and a sea power’ (1.83.2-3)
Pericles: ‘But this is the main point: they will be handicapped by lack of money and delayed by the time they will have to take in procuring it. But in war opportunity waits for no man’ (1.142.1)

Here, Thucydides indirectly undermines the Spartan fleet by showcasing Sparta’s lack of funding in comparison to the wealth of the Delian League. 139 These are a few of the many comparisons

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138 See p.16-20 above.
139 Contrasted in the second, Decelean, war in which Sparta’s Peloponnesian League is a financial powerhouse as a result of Persian funding.
that can be drawn between Archidamus’ and Pericles’ speech, but due to the constraints of this essay, they will have to suffice.\textsuperscript{140}

Throughout his narrative Thucydides continually contradicts himself regarding the Peloponnesian fleet. This is seen through comparing his set speeches to his narrative of events. Take the material mentioned above for example, regarding how Thucydides used the speeches of Archidamus and Pericles to demonstrate the inferiority of the Peloponnesian fleet. Pericles’ dismissal of the Peloponnesian fleet’s effectiveness also conveyed to his readers that the Athenians were never concerned or even imagined that the Spartans could ever threaten them at sea. To paraphrase Pericles, as far as the Athenians were concerned, the Spartans were only farmers who lacked the constant training and seamanship and he even stated outright, “We [Athenians] have nothing to fear from their [Peloponnesians] navy”.\textsuperscript{141} However, if those sentiments, as reflected in the speech, are compared with other events, as recorded by Thucydides, then a complete opposite representation unfolds. Consider the following passage from Thucydides’ narration regarding the first actions of the war in 431:

\begin{quotation}
“ἀναγωρισάντων δὲ αὐτῶν οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι φυλακὰς κατεστήσαντο κατὰ γῆν καὶ κατὰ θάλασσαν, ὡσπερ δὴ ἔμελλον διὰ παντὸς τοῦ πολέμου φιλάξειν: καὶ χίλια τάλαντα ἀπὸ τῶν ἐν τῇ ἀκροπόλει χρημάτων ἐδόξεν αὐτοῖς ἔξαιρετα ποιησαμένοις χορίς θέσθαι καὶ μὴ ἀναλαυνῖν, ἀλλ᾽ ἀπὸ τῶν ἄλλων πολεμεῖν: ἢν δὲ τις εἴπῃ ἢ ἐπιψηφίσῃ κινεῖν τὰ χρήματα ταῦτα ἐς ἄλλο τι, ἢν μὴ οἱ πολέμιοι νητή στρατῷ ἐπιπλέοσι τῇ πόλει καὶ δὲν ἀμύνασθαι, θάνατον ζημίαν ἔπεθεντο.”
\end{quotation}

“They [Athenians] also resolved to set apart a special fund of a thousand talents from the moneys in the Acropolis. This was not to be spent, but the current expenses of the war were to be otherwise provided for. If anyone should move or put to the vote a proposition for using the money for any purpose whatever except that of defending the city in the event of the enemy bringing a fleet to make an attack by sea, it should be a capital offense. With this sum of money they also set aside a special fleet of one hundred triremes, the best ships of each year, with their captains. None of these was to be used except with the money and against the same peril, should such peril arise.”\textsuperscript{142}

\textsuperscript{140} Also check out these comparisons regarding manpower, Thuc.1.80.3 and 1.143.1; and Strategy, Thuc.1.80.1-2 and 1.43.4.
\textsuperscript{141} Thuc.1.141-1.142.
\textsuperscript{142} Thuc.2.24.
This passage is inconsistent with Pericles’ statements about the Peloponnesian fleet. Whereas Pericles shows total disregard for Sparta’s naval capabilities, this passage indicates an Athenian government absolutely cautious and fearful of an impending naval attack. If Athens was not worried about the effectiveness of the Peloponnesian fleet, then they would not have reserved a thousand talents, their hundred best ships, and dictated capital punishment to any who objected. For that reason, the only plausible explanation for these actions is that they acknowledged the Peloponnesian fleet as a danger.\textsuperscript{143}

In addition to the aforementioned law, other actions by the Athenians in the first year of the war reveal that unlike what Thucydides claimed, they feared Sparta’s ability to contend with them at sea. In response to the invasion of Attica by the Spartans in 431, the Athenians retaliated that same summer by deploying one hundred and fifty ships to raid the Peloponnesian coast.\textsuperscript{144} The size of the Athenian fleet should arouse suspicion and be called into question. Considering the logistics of naval warfare examined so far, Athens’ decision to deploy as many as one hundred vessels for their first naval maneuver of the war does not make pragmatic sense. It is especially not practical if the Athenians at that time supposedly felt they had nothing to fear from the Peloponnesian fleet. Contemplate the following logistical nightmare for Athens: over 25,000 rowers would have to be fed and hydrated every day, a significant portion of their reserve funds for their citizen rowers had to be spent, and anchorage had to be arranged for up to one hundred and fifty vessels in suitable harbors in predominately enemy territory.\textsuperscript{145} If the Athenians really

\textsuperscript{143} Kelly, 38.
\textsuperscript{144} Thuc.2.17.4, 2.23.2-3.2.25.1. One-hundred of the ships belonged to Athens, while the other fifty came from Corcyra. Among the many notable places around the Peloponnese that were ravaged by the Athenian armada including unnamed places in Laconia, Methone in Messenia, and Pheia in Elis. During the same summer the Athenians dispatched their fleet to expel the Aeginetans from Aegina and to guard Euboea.
\textsuperscript{145} Manpower: A minimum of 170 rowers for a trireme multiplied by 150 (triremes) equals 25,500 rowers. In addition to the rowers there was 1000 hoplites and 400 archers (Thuc.2.23) Also, it is unknown how many slaves, attendants, cooks, or other serviceable professions would have accompanied the naval operation. Economics: each
dismissed the Peloponnesian fleet as irrelevant, then an Athenian armada of just fifty vessels would have been sufficient. The deployment of one hundred and fifty vessels could be argued by scholars to have been a mere show of force as an act of psychological warfare against the Spartans. However, even this is doubtful, given how unnecessary and costly it would have been. The Spartans were well aware of Athens’ naval capability and their position as a thalassocratic hegemon for the past fifty years. It is more likely that the vast size of the Athenian fleet indicates that they were cautious and anticipated an effective counter-offensive by the Peloponnesians at sea. This repeated costly maneuver in the second year further demonstrates an unconfident Athenian naval policy. Thomas Kelly, a scholar of Spartan strategy in the Archidamian War, sums up the situation best:

“This clearly are not the actions of a state convinced that enemy military activity would be confined to invading Attica, and this should come as no surprise...Publicly, Pericles might scoff at Sparta’s ability to compete with the Athenians on the sea, but privately the possibility had to be given serious consideration. If the Spartans had hopes, the Athenians had fears”.

Therefore, it is clear that early in the war, contrary to the insinuations made by Thucydides, the Peloponnesians were serious contenders at sea.

Thucydides’ narrative of book one in his Histories prepared his audience to expect Spartan victories by land invasions and Athenian victories by deploying her navy. The Spartan assembly had declared war immediately after the delegations of 432, siding surprisingly with the Corinthians over their own king, Archidamus. The decision and the successive annual invasions of Attica have convinced many scholars that this was indeed the Spartan plan: little dependence on the

sailor cost a drachma a day or each trireme was approximately a talent a day. A fleet of 150 triremes for 3 months would cost 450 talents. 

146 Kelly, 39.

147 Thuc.2.56.1-2. Suspiciously, Thucydides does not mention the unusual size and magnificence of the 431 and 430 Athenian fleet until much later during his narrative of the Sicilian Expedition, Thuc.6.31.2.

148 Kelly, 39.
Peloponnesian navy, and heavy reliance on the experience of their elite hoplites. However, with the foresight of what transpired, Archidamus’ speech and his proposed strategy must be revisited in light of how events unfolded because it was alarmingly accurate in respect to what the Spartans actually accomplished during the war and suggests an early commitment to the Peloponnesian navy. Archidamus ultimately argued to delay the war long enough to better prepare and equip the Spartans to engage in a war he suspected could not be won by invading Attica alone. His plan directly focused on building up the Peloponnesian navy by diplomacy, in order to secure domestic and foreign alliances. Archidamus emphasized that he was specifically looking for new allies who could bolster the Peloponnesian fleet’s strength. The Spartans seemingly ignored his advice after having been influenced by the Corinthians to declare war on Athens immediately. However, as Thucydides’ narrative unfolds there are subtle hints that indicate Archidamus’ proposal was adhered to after all. Consider the following section at the opening of book two:

“With the affair at Plataea the treaty had been broken by an overt act, and Athens at once prepared for war, as did also Sparta and her allies. They resolved to send embassies to the King and to such other of the barbarian powers as either party could look to for assistance, and tried to ally themselves with the uncommitted states at home. Sparta, in addition to the existing naval forces, gave orders to the states that had declared for her in Italy and Sicily to build vessels up to a grand total of five hundred, the quota of each city being determined by its size, and also to provide a specified sum of money. Till these were ready they were to remain neutral and to admit single Athenian ships into their harbors.”

Considering Archidamus’ proposal and this passage, it is clear that the Spartan assembly agreed with their king. At the outbreak of the war, the Spartans’ first actions were to make an alliance

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149 See p.19 above for quote Thuc.1.82.1.
150 Thuc.2.7.1-2.
with Persia. The alliance ensured financial backing for the fleet and the improvement of naval forces at home enabling them to order the construction of five-hundred triremes in Italy and Sicily, and demand money as contribution from alliance members. If the Spartans had not been in agreement with their king, they would not be wasting their time doing these things. Combined with the naval operations performed by the Peloponnesian fleet during the war, it can be conceded that Spartan naval conduct was founded on Archidamus’ plan, which contradicts Thucydides’ grand motif. In fact, it has been calculated that the Spartans spent fewer than 120 days in the first seven years of the war focusing on the invasion of Attica, while in the same period of time, they put more effort into expanding their fleet’s potential and conducting naval operations.

Even more complicated is the probability that Archidamus’ strategy doesn’t reflect what the king’s actual plan was, but instead reflects Thucydides’ own hindsight. To reiterate, Thucydides’ knowledge pertaining to anything prior to 424 would have been slim, so that by the time he was writing his History he relied on informants and hearsay regarding events of antecedent years. Therefore, the Archidamian speech which outlined the strategy for the war in the assembly of 431, in all likelihood, does not accurately reflect what Archidamus actually said. It is more reasonable to suggest that Thucydides used Archidamus as his mouthpiece to outline at the start of his History how Sparta would come to win the war by means of their dedication to the Peloponnesian fleet. Thucydides used Archidamus like a ‘character’ in any grand narrative. For Thucydides, the Spartan king is the wise old archetype who knows the war cannot be won by

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151 See p.19-20 above.
152 Many scholars reasonably conclude that this was either an exaggeration on Thucydides’ part or a serious miscalculation of Spartan policy. However, some scholars have argued that raising the Peloponnesian fleet to 500 triremes may have been possible. See Kelly, 32-35.
153 Sparta aggressively deployed Cnemus as admiral of the Peloponnesian fleet to purge the Athenian fleet from the Corinthian Gulf in the Archidamian War. Lysander’s actions as admiral of the fleet in the Decelean War were even more aggressive conducting naval operations far away from home in Ionia.
154 Kelly, 53.
invading Attica alone and is stereotypically ignored by his people. But why does Thucydides mask his hindsight behind Archidamus? To explain this, Rawlings’ theory of dualism can again provide the answer. Thucydides insinuates that Archidamus’ naval strategy was disregarded by the Gerousia when it sided with the Corinthians in immediately declaring war and invading Attica by land. However, as mentioned beforehand, Archidamus’ strategy was in fact followed. This seems contradictory, but, considering Rawlings’ theory of dualism, it can be argued that the confusion was the design of Thucydides. In order to contrast Sparta’s superior fleet in the second half of the war, he had to mislead his audience by making them think Sparta disregarded their fleet in favor of depending on their hoplite superiority. However, in staying as close as possible to the truth of events which unfolded during the war, Thucydides contradicts himself and it becomes clear that the fleet was not ignored.

The Spartan Naval Empire

Thus far, this essay has focused on the Peloponnesian fleet during the Archidamian War. However, it is necessary at this point to examine the fleet during the last phase of the war, commonly referred to as the Ionian War or the Decelean War, in order to fully comprehend its significance for the Spartans in winning the war. The vital turning point for the rise of the Peloponnesian fleet was the result of Sparta’s success after having defended Syracuse against the Athenians’ Sicilian Expedition of 415-413BC. As a result of the crippling defeat, although there were many others,155 Persia had been at last encouraged enough to make an alliance and aid Sparta.

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155 The entire Athenian expedition force was either killed, captured, or sold into slavery. This included much of their fleet being either destroyed or captured. Athens was so desperate that they were forced to use their emergency reserve fund which they had set aside during the summer of 431. In addition to this, Athens’ was forced to cancel financial tribute from their allies because they could no longer enforce it without their pre-413 fleet. Furthermore, widespread dissention from tributary allies ensued across Greece revolting from the Delian League and joining Sparta. Most notable were Euboea, Chios, and Lesbos. Sparta also received Syracusan ships during the Ionian War in exchange for the help they had received during the expedition.
in the war with the hope of regaining control of Asia Minor from Athenian dominance. It is well known that Sparta had been seeking Persian assistance in vain since the outbreak of the war in order to fund the Peloponnesian fleet. By 412BC, Archidamus’ vision for the advancement of the Peloponnesian fleet with Persian aid had become a reality. On account of this, for the remaining pages this paper will briefly examine how Persia’s alliance was fundamental in propelling the Peloponnesian fleet to naval supremacy over Athens.

The Spartan-Persian alliance benefited the Peloponnesian fleet first and most notably financially. Whereas Sparta was at a disadvantage against Athens in funding their fleet during the Archidamian War, they were far superior by 412 with almost unceasing cash flow from Persia. The primary objectives for Sparta during the negotiations were ships from Persia as well as money to pay the sailors.\textsuperscript{156} By 407 BC Persian funds for the Peloponnesian fleet increased on account of improved relations between the Spartan navarch Lysander and the Persian prince Cyrus. The financial support included, most prominently, over five hundred talents for the fleet and an increase in the daily wage of Peloponnesian rowers to four obols a day.\textsuperscript{157} The increased pay for Peloponnesian rowers meant that the Peloponnesian rate of pay was at that time approximately twenty-five percent above the Athenian wage, which as a result enticed large scale desertion of Athenian rowers.\textsuperscript{158} Needless to say, the deplorable expenditures required for manning and equipping a fleet were no longer an issue for the Spartans.

\textsuperscript{156} See Thuc.8.58.5-6 for the terms of the alliance with Tissaphernes in 412BC.
\textsuperscript{157} Xen.Hell.1.5.1-7. Cyrus’ financial generosity may have gone beyond the 500 talents as Xenophon states: “He [Cyrus] said that he had come with 500 talents, and if this was no enough, he would use his own funds, which his father [the King of Persia] had given to him. And if even these were insufficient, he would mint coins using the throne on which he sat – which was made entirely of silver and gold”. Cyrus also offered 30 mina per month to each ship for maintenance and back pay for sailors with an additional month’s worth in wage.
\textsuperscript{158} Strauss, 47. Xenophon recorded that the Spartans believed higher pay for sailors would cause desertion among Athenian rowers and, as a result, end the war sooner because the deserted rowers would enlist in the Peloponnesian fleet. Xen.1.5.4.
Besides Persian financing, the alliance further benefited the fleet in respect to the naval facilities that became accessible on the Ionian Coast. Persian military support in Asia Minor and a well-funded Peloponnesian fleet allowed the Spartans to take the war overseas to target vital Athenian interests. More significant is that the fleet could anchor, rest, and regroup at secure locations along the Ionian Coast which had not been possible beforehand. For example, Sparta could not use the naval facilities of the ‘Dorian Hexapolis’ in southwest Asia Minor beforehand but stationed there continually after the Persian alliance.\(^{159}\) In addition to the Hexapolis, Persian presence on the mainland allowed the Spartans to anchor at Miletus which became the principal naval base for the Peloponnesian fleet until Lysander moved it to Ephesus, which was even better situated, during his navarchy.\(^{160}\) Peloponnesian naval facilities also improved domestically after the Persian alliance. By 413BC there is the first recorded evidence of Spartan intention to build a ‘national’ fleet by ordering the construction of twenty-five Spartan ships, presumably at Gytheion.\(^{161}\) Sparta’s growing naval presence in the Aegean by means of these facilities permitted the Peloponnesian fleet to perform overseas operations to win the war. Controlling timber supply routes for ship construction was still of importance during the Ionian War but to a lesser degree.

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\(^{159}\) The Dorian Hexapolis was a federation of six city-states of Dorian lineage in southwest Asia Minor. They are as follows: Kos on the island of Kos, Cnidus in Caria, Halicarnassus in Caria, Lindus on Rhodes, Ialyssos on Rhodes, and Camirus on Rhodes. See Appendix, Fig. 8, for map of Dorian Hexapolis. As noted earlier in respect to Melos, traditional or ethnic Doric ties meant that Sparta could utilize their facilities during the war. See: Falkner, Astyochus, 209. Of the six cities, Cnidus seems to have been the most important naval base, especially during the satrapy of Tissaphernes around 412/11BC. For more on Cnidian-Spartan relations, see: J.M. Cook, “Cnidian Peraea and Spartan Coins,” *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 81 (1961): 67. For Spartan ships stationed at Cnidus see Thuc.8.41.3, 8.42.4.

\(^{160}\) Miletus and Cnidus seem to have been the most important naval bases for the Peloponnesian fleet during the Spartan relationship with Tissaphernes. However, Lysander moved the principal naval base to Ephesus in order to be in closer proximity to the Persian city of Sardis and Cyrus the Younger. Ephesus’ position was therefore better situated for Cyrus to provide for the fleet. Parke, 48-49.

\(^{161}\) Thuc.8.3. See: Falkner, *Gytheum*, 498. The Spartan requisition was for 100 ships to be built: Sparta would build 25, Boeotia 25, Phocians and Locrians together 15, Corinthians 15, Arcadians, Pellenians, and Sicyonians together 10, Megarians, Troezenians, Epidaurians, and Hermionians together 10. It is significant to point out that Sparta passed Corinth in this quota in ship construction. This shows that Sparta was by that time better equipped to produce ships than Corinth. However, the quota was never completed on account of the offer of 60 vessels from Chios. In 408BC Alcibiades witnessed 30 triremes being outfitted by the Spartans at Gytheion in preparation for a campaign in the East suggesting a rise in importance for the ‘national’ harbor. Xen.Hell.1.4.11.
Sparta’s new alliances were naval powers in their own right and, as a result, could contribute already completed triremes to the Peloponnesian fleet, bypassing the need to import timber to construct new ships. The new naval alliances included Persia, Syracuse, and Chios.\textsuperscript{162} The last transformation was Sparta’s socio-political system. As mentioned earlier, the very institution of the fleet challenged Sparta’s traditionalism. By the time of Lysander’s navarchy and Persia’s alliance, the challenge came to its climax. Lysander, a Mothax, used his position as navarch to become more influential than the king of Sparta. Lysander was so influential that Cyrus refused to aid Sparta anymore unless the Spartans reinstated Lysander as navarch for a second time, which went against Spartan law, and Sparta was forced to concede.\textsuperscript{163}

**Conclusion: Final Thoughts**

To conclude, the Peloponnesian navy has been downplayed and ignored in scholarship, largely due to Thucydides’ lack of recognition for its role in the war. Thucydides employed several methods to deliberately downplay the navy, enabling him to cleverly set up the dramatic land and sea dichotomy. However, if Rawlings’ theory of ‘dualism’ is considered, it is reasonable to suggest that Thucydides was only moderating the Peloponnesian fleet’s role in the Archidamian War to contrast it with its supremacy in the Ionian War. Thucydides, whose interest is in the rise and fall of naval empires, may have been narrating the story of Athens’ fall from naval supremacy and the evolution of the Spartan naval empire. Unfortunately, he never finished his work and we will never know how he intended to finish his history.

\textsuperscript{162} The Persian fleet is mentioned during the Spartan negotiations with Tissaphernes and was referred to as the “King’s vessels”, which in fact was a Phoenician fleet. Sparta’s assistance to Syracuse in the Sicilian Expedition resulted in naval assistance as compensation from the west. The island of Chios supplied 60 ships to the fleet after it had revolted from the Delian League and allied itself with Sparta in 412BC.

\textsuperscript{163} Xen.Hell.2.1.6-7. Sparta used a loophole to send Lysander back in charge of the fleet. They sent him in 405BC as vice-admiral of the fleet with Aracus as admiral. However, in reality Lysander was in charge. Unz, 53.
Upon examining the logistics of the Peloponnesian fleet during the Archidamian War, a more complex and sophisticated structure is revealed than is insinuated by Thucydides. Sparta’s commitment to the fleet found ways to circumvent the financial problems of funding the fleet. Without any significant naval facilities of their own, the Spartans preferred to use their allies’ harbors and especially those allies who had traditional ethnic Doric ties. After losing their timber supply route through the Corinthian Gulf, the Spartans undertook a bold and daring campaign northwards to ensure the survival and advancement of their fleet. Lastly, the Peloponnesian navy was an opportunity for those of lower rank in Spartan society to rise in influence in a city-state that made it otherwise impossible to do so. For this to be possible, the Spartan elite had to concede power to their Perioikic and Mothakes inferiors, which revealed how far Sparta was willing to adapt in order to be victorious. In addition it demonstrates how the institution of the navy contributed to the detriment of Sparta’s traditional sociopolitical system. Thucydides’ presentation of the ineffectiveness of the Peloponnesian navy in the Archidamian War can be debunked, as we have shown in the many contradictions within his narrative, especially in his set speeches. The Spartans had accepted Archidamus’ strategy for the war and dedicated themselves to better equip and deploy the Peloponnesian fleet.

In the Ionian War, the Spartans’ naval success can be undisputedly credited to the Persians. The Peloponnesian fleet truly became a magnificent superior force because the Spartans were able to receive near inexhaustible resources from Persia. This alliance allowed for Spartans to deploy the Peloponnesian fleet more aggressively and administer naval disasters against the Athenians without serious implications. At Cyzicus the entire Peloponnesian armada was destroyed and yet they were able to rebuild. Again, at Arginusae much of the fleet was destroyed but they were able
to rebuild within a year. At Aegospotami\textsuperscript{164} the Spartans secured a victory with over one hundred and eighty triremes. \textsuperscript{165} The Great Peloponnesian War challenged Sparta’s hegemony in the Hellenic world through Athens’ ability to claim supremacy over the seas. For the Spartans to retain their hegemony and win the war, they had to become the undisputed and recognized sea power. This explains the somewhat lenient unconditional terms of surrender Athens received as punishment. Sparta removed the Athenian navy and ordered the destruction of the long walls to the Piraeus; both symbols of Athenian naval power. Therefore, the Athenian punishment is symbolic because Sparta took away Athens’ only claim to their naval hegemony.\textsuperscript{166} To conclude, it was the Spartans and the Peloponnesian fleet, not the Athenians, who proved themselves more capable, adaptable, and dedicated throughout the Peloponnesian War.

\textsuperscript{164} An expert on ancient seafaring, Lionel Casson considered the Peloponnesian fleet’s victory at the battle of Aegospotami as the most spectacular victory in the history of naval warfare. Lionel Casson, \textit{The Ancient Mariners: Seafarers and Sea Fighters of the Mediterranean in Ancient Times}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed (Princeton University Press, 1991): 96.

\textsuperscript{165} A comparison can be drawn to the Second Punic War between Carthage and Rome. Roman armies were completely destroyed in successive engagements by Hannibal’s forces at Trebia, Trasimene, and Cannae. However, Rome eventually won the war because they were in a position to draw upon almost inexhaustible resources whereas Hannibal could not.

\textsuperscript{166} Unz, 58.
Appendix

Fig. 1: A plan of the Battle of Pylos and Sphacteria.

Fig. 2: Map - The seven city-states that contributed ships to the Peloponnesian fleet.
Fig. 3: An illustration of an ancient Greek trireme.

Fig. 4: An illustration of ancient ship-sheds (Hale, 257)

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Fig. 7: Northern Greece: Amphipolis (Lazenby, 92)
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