The Athenian Expedition to Sicily –
The Reasons for its Failure

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the University of Liverpool for the degree of Doctor in Philosophy by

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October 2023

Acknowledgements

Professor Tom Harrison for starting me on the journey,

Doctor Fiona Hobden for walking with me throughout,

Professor Christopher Tuplin for seeing me to the end.

Table of Contents   **Page No.**

Abstract

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This study considers anew the reasons for the failure of the Athenian Expedition to Sicily in 415. It begins with the premise that the venture could and should have been a success and examines why this did not turn out to be the case.

The study is effectively split into two halves. The first half examines aspects within Athenian society and democracy which impacted adversely upon the Expedition. An examination is made of groupings within society, based on age, class and wealth. A study of tensions between these groups is undertaken and an assessment is made as to whether these tensions formed fault-lines with Athenian society which contributed to the failure of the Expedition. The Athenian democratic institutions are also examined and an assessment made on whether the day-to-day functioning of the democracy hindered the Expedition. Underpinning the first half of the study is a detailed examination of temporal measurement in Attica and how the Athenian calendar functioned. This study enables a more exact assessment of the time-line of the build-up to the expedition to be made, thus facilitating an examination of which groups within Athens held positions of power and influence at key moments just prior to the Expedition.

A case study of the Mutilations of the Herms and the Profanations of the Mysteries then serves to highlight the tensions in Athenian society just prior to the Expedition.

The second half of the study examines the military and tactical failures during the Expedition itself. Nicias' failure as a *strategos* is examined in detail, as is the impact of cavalry warfare on the Expedition.

My study reinforces the point that the Athenian Expedition to Sicily should have been a success. Athens' catastrophic defeat was due to a series of serious tactical errors on the ground, compounded both by unreasonable interference from the democratic Assembly and by the impact of factions within Athens working to bring about the downfall of the Expedition to serve their own ends.

List of Abbreviations

All abbreviations contained in the footnotes will follow the format in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (Hornblower and Spawforth (2012)):

Ael. *VH*	Aelian *Varia Historia*
Aeschin. *In Ctes.*	Aeschines *Against Ctesiphon*
Aeschin. *In Tim.*	Aeschines *Against Timarchus*
Andoc. 1.	Andocides *On the Mysteries*
Andoc. 3.	Andocides *On the Peace with Sparta*
Andoc. 4.	Andocides *Against Alcibiades*
App. *Pun.*	Appian *Punica*
APF	Davies (1971)
Ar. *Ach.*	Aristophanes *Acharnians*
Ar. *Av.*	Aristophanes *Birds*
Ar. *Eccl.*	Aristophanes *The Assemblywomen*
Ar. *Eq.*	Aristophanes *Knights*
Ar. *Lys.*	Aristophanes *Lysistrata*
Ar. *Nub.*	Aristophanes *Clouds*
Ar. *Pax*	Aristophanes *Peace*
Ar. *Plut.*	Aristophanes *Wealth*
Ar. *Ran.*	Aristophanes *Frogs*
Ar. *Thesm.*	Aristophanes *Thesmophoriazusae*
Ar. *Vesp.*	Aristophanes *Wasps*
Arist. [*Ath. Pol.*]	Pseudo-Aristotle *The Athenian Constitution*
Arr. *Tact.*	Arrian *Tactica*
CAH	Andrewes (1992)
Comm. on Thuc.	A Commentary on Thucydides I-III: Hornblower (1991), (1996) and (2008)

Dem.	Demosthenes
Dem. *De Cor.*	Demosthenes *On the Crown*
Din.	Dinarchus
Diod. Sic.	Diodorus Siculus
Eur. *Supp.*	Euripides *Suppliants*
FGrH	Fragmente der Griechischen Historiker (Jacoby 1923-)
Frg	Fragment
HCT	A Historical Commentary on Thucydides I-V: Gomme (1945), (1956a), (1956b); Gomme, Andrewes and Dover (1970); Andrewes (1981)
Hdt.	Herodotus
Hes. *Op.*	Hesiod *Works and Days*
IG	Inscriptiones Graecae
Is.	Isaeus
Isoc.	Isocrates
Lucian *Salt.*	Lucian *De saltatione*
Lys.	Lysias
OCD	Hornblower and Spawforth (2012)
Nep. *Alc.*	Nepos *Alcibiades*
Nep. *Hann.*	Nepos *Hannibal*
P. Oxy.	Oxyrhynchus Papyri
Paus.	Pausanias
Pl. [*Hipparch.*]	Plato *Hipparchus*
Pl. *Lach.*	Plato *Laches*
Pl. *Meno*	Plato *Meno*
Pl. *Symp.*	Plato *Symposium*
Plut. *Ages.*	Plutarch *Agesilaus*

Plut. *Agis*	Plutarch *Agis*
Plut. *Alc.*	Plutarch *Alcibiades*
Plut. *Arist.*	Plutarch *Aristides*
Plut. *Cim.*	Plutarch *Cimon*
Plut. Mor. *De Stoic.*	Plutarch *Moralia De Stoicorum*
Plut. *Nic.*	Plutarch *Nicias*
Plut. *Num.*	Plutarch *Numa*
Plut. *Per.*	Plutarch *Pericles*
Plut. *Sol.*	Plutarch *Solon*
[Plut.] *X orat.*	Pseudo-Plutarch *The Ten Orators*
Polyb.	Polybius
Ptol. *Alm.*	Ptolemaeus Mathematicus *Almagest*
Procl *In. Op.*	Proclus *Commentary on Hesiod's Works and Days*
Rhodes, *CAAP.*	Rhodes (1981)
Theophr. *Sign.*	Theophrastus *On Weather Signs*
Theopomp.	Theopompus
Thuc.	Thucydides
Xen [*Ath. Pol.*]	Pseudo-Xenophon/The Old Oligarch *The Athenian Constitution*
Xen. *An.*	Xenophon *Anabasis*
Xen. *Eq. mag.*	Xenophon *How to Be a Good Cavalry Commander*
Xen. *Hell.*	Xenophon *Hellenica*

List of Figures   **Page No.**

List of Tables   **Page No.**

List of Maps   **Page No.**

List of Graphs   **Page No.**

Chapter One – Introduction

Much ink has been spilt on the disastrous Expedition to Sicily undertaken by the Athenians in 415, but a fresh examination of the reasons for the failure of an enterprise which (I will argue) could and should have ended successfully is still a worthwhile endeavour. For such an analysis can highlight problems inherent to democracies when waging warfare in the ancient world and can also cast light both on stresses and factionalisation within Athenian society and on the identity of those who truly had access to the levers of power. Indeed, although much has been written on the failures of leadership, such as the folly of having three generals jointly commanding one expeditionary force and the ineptitude of the general Nicias in the closing stages of the venture,[1] the question of the extent to which problems within the city's democratic institutions contributed to the disaster has not been adequately answered. A fresh study of the failure of the Expedition with an examination of the machinations of the various democratic organs of Athens will reveal fundamental flaws and breakdowns within these structures that have been previously overlooked and which contributed to the failure of the Expedition. It will also turn out that a power struggle between the mass and the élites of Athenian society exacerbated these flaws and fissures in the democratic structures and contributed to the failure of the Sicilian Expedition. These ruptures in society impacted upon the planning for the Expedition and, as a result, the venture was not properly resourced. Most crucially, social tensions meant that the Athenians neglected to send adequate cavalry forces to Sicily, despite having previously identified the need for such forces as crucial: this proved to be a fatal flaw.

Although much has been written on the Expedition, nothing new has been produced for many decades, the last serious books dedicated solely to the topic being Green's *Armada From Athens* of 1971 and Kagan's coverage of the campaign in *The Peace of Nicias and the Sicilian Expedition* of 1981. Both works are narrative in their approach and, whilst both are masterful examples of the genre, they offer little in the way of analysing exactly why the Expedition actually failed, a gap that has not adequately been filled as yet. With a few notable exceptions, there have been relatively few journal articles dedicated to the topic in the past few decades: instead, the subject has often been subsumed into a wider evaluation of Greek military campaigns with little discussion of why the Expedition failed, beyond talk of inept leadership or hubristic Athenian overreach. Pritchard's *Athenian Democracy at War* (2019) contains pertinent material about the bellicosity of the democracy and how the Athenians prepared for war, Van Wees's discussion of the political, social and economic context of Greek war-making in *Greek Warfare* (2004) is certainly relevant to study of the Sicilian Expedition, and Brice's chapter on the Sicilian Expedition in *The Oxford Handbook of Warfare in the Classical World* (2013) contributes to understanding the use of cavalry during the Expedition: but all of these works are too broad in scope to engage in detailed discussion of what went wrong. The same is true of the flurry of

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[1] Kagan (1981) 372 for but one example

compendiums on Thucydides during recent decades.[2] Meanwhile Foster's chapter on Thucydides in *Brill's Companion to Military Defeat in Ancient Mediterranean Society* (2018) and two new commentaries on Thucydides' Books Six and Seven (Hornblower 2008 and Pelling 2022) are more concerned (respectively) with the reception of Thucydides by his audience and textual, linguistic and literary exegesis than with military analysis.

Works of the sort just listed are also apt not to acknowledge the uniqueness of the venture. The number of military personnel involved in the Expedition, the great distance travelled to mount it, and the unique nature of the warfare it involved when they got there, along with the political atmosphere in Athens at the time, all necessitate an individual study of the campaign rather than one that subsumes it into a wider evaluation of Greek warfare.

One more specific area of Greek warfare that *has* received some attention lately is the use of cavalry, and Bugh's *The Horsemen of Athens* (1988) and Spence's *The Cavalry of Classical Greece* (1993) have helped to change the previous hoplite-centred mindset of military historians. But the implications of this re-evaluation still need to be properly applied to an assessment of the outcome of the Sicilian Expedition. The same can perhaps be said of another topic, namely naval warfare. The unique topography of the Sicilian littoral and innovative technological developments in the sphere of naval warfare meant that fighting at sea during the Expedition was not as straightforward as in previous Athenian military ventures, but the insights produced by the intensive study of trireme construction and use set in train by Morrison and Coates' *Athenian Trireme* (first edition: 1986; second edition: 2000) have not yet had much impact on the discussion of the Expedition.

Moving away from military matters, it is part of the argument of this thesis that failings within Athenian democratic structures also contributed to the failure of the Expedition. A detailed examination of those structures will, therefore, be necessary. Again, large-scale discussion of Athenian organs of government has been lacking lately, the most recent detailed examination of the workings of these structures being Rhodes' *The Athenian Boule* (1972) and *Athenian Democracy and Modern Ideology* (2003), and Hansen's *The Athenian Assembly in the Age of Demosthenes* (1987). Both authors have much to teach us about the institutional and political mechanics of the democratic system, but neither they nor the authors of later smaller-scale treatment of particular aspects are much concerned with their subject's bearing on the outcome of the Sicilian Expedition. This is a gap that needs to be addressed.

These considerations suggest that there needs to be a fresh evaluation of the Athenian Expedition to Sicily and the reasons for its failure. There will be two main lines of investigation, political and military, and the thesis has two broad aims. One is to show that the Athenian

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[2] Hornblower (2011); Rood (1998); Balot, Forsdyke and Foster (eds. 2017); Foster and Lateiner (2012) and Rengaskos and A Tsakmakis (Eds.) (2006a and b) being notable examples.

Expedition to Sicily was not a fanciful notion doomed to failure from its conception, but rather an enterprise which could and should have succeeded. The other is to show that the Expedition's failure was connected with fissures in Athenian society and flaws in the democratic system: the former gave rise to rival factions and the latter permitted the conflict between those factions to create a situation in which mediocrity flourished and, when placed in a position of command, fatally damaged the venture's military viability.

After a survey of source material, the main body of the thesis begins with a discussion of the problems inherent in working with Athenian calendrical structures. These problems are complex and cannot be addressed without going into some detail, but the discussion is necessary, because understanding Athenian calendars is a prerequisite for establishing a timeline for 416-415 (when the Expedition was planned and launched) and working out the chronology as accurately as the sources permit is a prerequisite for historical narrative and explanation. An account of the historiography of the topic will be followed by identification of the various calendars in use in Athens, explanation of how they were derived and, crucially, analysis of how they drove elements of the Athenian constitution. The difficulty of aligning dates given by ancient sources with the modern Julian calendar will be addressed and the attempt will then be made to construct a detailed timeline of events in the run up to and during the Sicilian Expedition. This timeline will be referenced throughout the thesis as events pertaining to the Expedition are examined.

After chronology comes a discussion of the formal political institutions of Athens and an examination of the tensions between different elements of the Athenian citizen body at the time of the Expedition. Ober's work on mass and élite will be evaluated as part of a wider investigation of tensions between the various strata of Athenian society. This examination will highlight rifts in Athenian society that were important in 415. Next, Forrest's seminal paper of 1975 is the starting point for an enquiry into whether a generational divide in Athens at the time of the Expedition contributed to the tension and schisms in the city. The chapter will conclude by asking whether the schisms and tensions in Athenian society impacted upon the Sicilian Expedition in ways that affected its outcome and will use the ostracism of Hyperbolus as a case study to demonstrate the impact of such divisions.

A study follows of two disruptive events that occurred just prior to the Expedition, the mutilation of the Herms and the denunciation of Alcibiades and others for involvement in profanation of the Mysteries. Although these events have often been treated as inter-linked, they will be examined independently in order to show that they were perpetrated by different groups and had separate aims. Once the impact of both events on the Expedition has been ascertained, the earlier discussion of chronology will be drawn upon to create a detailed timeline of events for both the profanations and the mutilations as well as for the subsequent investigations. This timeline will

add to the chronological framework and highlight exactly where the events sit in relation to the preparation for the departure of the fleet to Sicily.

Once the first half of the thesis has laid the ground by assessing the political landscape in Athens at the time of the Expedition and providing a chronological framework, the focus then turns in the second half to Sicily and military matters.

An examination of an Athenian expedition to Sicily twelve years earlier, in 427, will ascertain whether any of the reasons for the failure of the 415 Expedition are linked to that earlier venture. Next, a study of the geopolitical situation in Sicily in 415 will evaluate whether lack of appreciation of the situation in Sicily at the time of the Expedition caused problems for the Athenians.

After this, a detailed study of the campaign itself will examine whether it is the case that military failings on the ground resulted in the failure of the Expedition or that prior events and circumstances had already made failure inevitable by the time the Athenians made landfall in Sicily. Among other things this will involve consideration of military tactics and strategy and an examination of the impact on the Expedition of the absence of certain military resources.

After an analysis of events on the ground, the role of the cavalry will be examined in detail. The relatively recent work of Bugh and Spence will be related to the context of the Expedition, as will older works such as that of McInnes. This will lead to a consideration of military tactics and strategy and an examination of whether or not the absence of cavalry had a significant impact on the Expedition. We shall also ask why the Athenians failed to supply the expeditionary force with adequate numbers of cavalry and whether social and societal tensions influenced the decision not to send sufficient cavalry forces to Sicily.

Chapter Two - Sources

2.1   Sources

Before starting with an examination of the timeline of the Expedition it is important to highlight challenges in the source material.

Among literary sources that provide substantial material about the Expedition or the environment in which it took place only three are contemporary with the events in question: Thucydides, Andocides and Aristophanes. Xenophon was also alive at the time, but he says nothing about the Expedition *per se*, only about the later activities of some of the protagonists. The other sources were all written several hundred years after the event, clearly drawing on other, older sources which are now lost to us. The lost works that we know about include the *Sikelika (Sicilian History)* of the fourth century Syracusan historian Philistus and the history of Sicily penned by Timaeus of Tauromenion in the fourth and third centuries which was cited by both Plutarch (who also criticised it) and Diodorus.[1]

Contemporaneity is not the only issue. Literary texts from any date may have agendas about the material they are reporting and also be subject to specific generic constraints or tendencies. This is certainly true of our sources relating to the Sicilian Expedition, which belong to four distinct genres. Two of the authors involved (Thucydides and Diodorus Siculus) were writing continuous multi-focal historical narrative, two others (Nepos and Plutarch) were writing biographical narrative, and another contemporary author (Andocides) was writing forensic self-defence that relates to only a small part of the overall story but covers it in a much greater degree of detail than any of the other sources. Finally, Aristophanes was writing comedy and, although he has much to say about the personalities involved in the Expedition and the events at the time that is not found elsewhere, all of his work is distorted by the prism of caricature and comedy.

Only through detailed examination of the ancient authors can we attempt to understand their literary agendas and the political standpoints that might have influenced their writings. Achieving such an understanding will enable us to evaluate more clearly the events that occurred both in the run-up to and during the Sicilian Expedition and thus help us to a better appreciation of the reasons for its failure. The only really detailed account of the Expedition itself comes from Thucydides but there are inconsistences and omissions that need to be examined before we can form a proper view of the nature and limitations on his narrative.

2.2   Thucydides

By far the most important source relating to the Sicilian Expedition is Thucydides' *Histories.* To understand Thucydides, one must first assess the potential influence of his personal

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[1] Greenwood (2017) 175-6

circumstances and examine his authorial agenda. He was an Athenian aristocrat and general who was sent into exile after the battle of Amphipolis in 424-423 and subsequently wrote a history of the Peloponnesian War. Although he said little about his own personal history, he did record that he owned gold mines at Scapte Hyle in Thrace[2] and he also tells us that his father's name was Olorus[3]. Herodotus notes that the name Olorus is connected with Thrace and Thracian royalty,[4] before going on to confirm the existence of the mines at Scapte Hyle.[5] This, together with other fragmentary evidence, suggests that Thucydides' family owned a considerable estate in Thrace: this gave him the leisure to pursue his historical project and most likely also provided him with a place to write. Plutarch notes that, following his death, Thucydides' ashes were interned in the family vault of Cimon,[6] the famed Athenian *strategos* and politician of the early Delian League. Cimon, son of Miltiades, had a maternal grandfather named Olorus, suggesting a Thracian family connection between the two that would link Thucydides to the old aristocracy supplanted by the radical democracy.

Thucydides is our primary source for all information pertaining to the Peloponnesian War (up to 411) and in the initial stages of the war the role of Pericles and his influence on Athenian policy is highlighted again and again by the historian. No other source comes close to praising Pericles to the extent that Thucydides does: the possibility that Thucydides exaggerated his influence, perhaps to emphasise the failures of the non-aristocratic rulers that followed him must at least be entertained and, if that is so, highlights a strong pro-aristocratic leaning. This then has an impact upon our reading of the events leading up to the departure of the Expedition and makes it important to contrast Thucydides' account with that of other authors. If he has indeed inflated Pericles' importance, then he may well have downplayed the achievements of the leaders who came after him, bringing his claim that the Athenians were failed by the leaders who came after Pericles into question.

Thucydides lived through the time of Sicilian Expedition and wrote within a decade or two of it taking place, but it is important to remember that he did not take part in the events and was removed from the action, probably in exile in Thrace. As Thucydides was nowhere near Athens during the course of the Expedition, he relied on other people for information about events there before and during the Expedition and about events in Sicily. One possible source for some of this information can be conjectured. The Athenian *strategos* Alcibiades, who was one of the commanders of the Athenian Expedition, was in Eastern Thrace, both for the attack on Selymbria in 410[7] and again for several years during his second exile following the defeat at Notium in

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[2] Thuc. 4.105.1

[3] Thuc. 4.104.4

[4] Hdt. 6.39.1

[5] Hdt. 6.46.1

[6] Plut. *Cim.* 4.1

[7] Xen. *Hell.* 1.1.16-22

406.[8] Thucydides was (presumably) living elsewhere in Thrace at this time. No surviving evidence brings them together but, although Westlake has difficulties with Alcibiades being a source for Thucydides,[9] it is not inconceivable that they met and conversed. Indeed, this view point was argued by Brunt in the 1950s[10] and followed up a decade later by Delebecque who pinpointed a meeting between the two in Thrace 406-5.[11] Nýlvt recently revisited the question and found in favour.[12] The matter is by no means settled (Andrewes,[13] Gribble[14] and Gomme[15] are all sceptical), but such a meeting would explain the differing stances Thucydides has towards Alcibiades in Books Two and Six. The *Histories* was never completed and the portion that was written shows signs of never having been thoroughly revised. Cornford's claim that Books Six and Seven are the only finished books in the entire history may be an overstatement,[16] but it is certainly possible that these two books were revised following a meeting between Thucydides and Alcibiades, whereas Book Two was not. If so, the depiction of the Expedition and its failure could well reflect Alcibiades' own narrative, spun to put him in a positive light.

Thucydides' *Histories* also contains contrasting opinions of Nicias, another of the commanders of the Expedition, and this may be another indication that the historian was in the process of revising his work when he died. If this is indeed the case, it is important to ascertain which is the more likely true reading of events, the more hostile approach to Nicias or the softer revised approach. When relating Nicias' death, Thucydides says that "ἥκιστα δὴ ἄξιος ὢν τῶν γε ἐπ' ἐμοῦ Ἑλλήνων ἐς τοῦτο δυστυχίας ἀφικέσθαι (of all the Hellenes of my time, he least deserved to come to so miserable an end, since the whole of his life had been devoted to study and the practice of virtue)".[17] Before this, however, Thucydides is hostile to Nicias and critical of his generalship throughout the Sicilian Expedition. He criticises Nicias' piety when he refused to leave the island until 28 days after an eclipse, saying that he was "over-inclined to divination and such things".[18] Whilst it is natural for anyone, no matter how hostile to him and his poor generalship, to feel sympathy at Nicias' ignoble end, the phrase and change of tone suggests something more and Thucydides is perhaps reflecting on and revising his previous harsh comments. This is important in understanding the reasons for the failure of the Expedition as, according to Thucydides' narrative, Nicias' poor leadership and indecisiveness contributed a great deal to the Expedition's demise. Ferrario has argued that throughout his account

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[8] Xen. *Hell.* 1.5.17

[9] Westlake (1968) 231

[10] Brunt (1952)

[11] Delebecque (1965) 231-3

[12] Nýlvt (2014)

[13] *HCT* 5. 3-4

[14] Gribble (1999) 162-3, 188 and 197 n.102

[15] *HCT* 2.196 – Gomme argues Books Six and Seven were completed a long time prior to 404

[16] Cornford (1907) 55

[17] Thuc. 7.86.5

[18] Thuc. 7.50.4

Thucydides is urging the reader to blame the demos for the failure of the Expedition and not Nicias,[19] but, although there may be some truth in this, Thucydides' account of Nicias' generalship is generally negative, making his final assessment somewhat surprising. If Thucydides was indeed in the process of revising his opinion of Nicias, a reassessment of Nicias' role in the Expedition would seem to be necessary as part of an evaluation of the reasons for its failure.

Thucydides' potential aristocratic bias and his changes of opinion about Alcibiades and Nicias all suggest that he was not producing a neutral narrative. This is exemplified in a different way by his imaginative reconstructions at various points of the narrative: examples include the departure of the fleet from the Piraeus, the destruction of the Athenian Fleet in the grand harbour at Syracuse and the bloody demise of the Athenian force at the river Assinarus. Hornblower points out that Thucydides did not see for himself the fleet depart for Sicily,[20] so the very vivid picture he paints is his own imaginative reconstruction based on someone else's recollections. Hornblower also points out that some of the events depicted by Thucydides have echoes in other works:[21] for example, the story of the Segestans moving the same stock of borrowed silver from house to house to dupe the Athenian ambassadors[22] is somewhat similar to Herodotus' story about the Persian satrap Oroites, who filled chests with stones and put a layer of gold on top in order to deceive Polycrates' emissary Maeandrius.[23] So Thucydides' story of the Expedition may contain an element of artistic licence, and it may be that he was either consciously or unconsciously embellishing the information at his disposal in order to create a more epic narrative. The fact that in the Archaeology of Book One Thucydides holds up the Trojan War as the first great naval expedition and in Books Six and Seven allows the reader to dwell on parallels between the Sicilian Expedition and the war in Troy[24] suggests an active engagement with Homer.[25] The danger, as Mackie has pointed out, is that the parallels are overstated and the facts get lost in a sea of mythic allusion.[26]

An important point to consider when examining the element of imaginative reconstruction within Thucydides' work is the inclusion of speeches. In the introduction to his work the historian famously states that "my method has been, while keeping as closely as possible to the general sense of the words that were actually used, to make the speakers say what, in my opinion, was

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[19] Ferrario (2014) 135

[20] Hornblower (1987) 93

[21] Hornblower (1987) 23

[22] Thuc. 6.46.3-4

[23] Hdt. 3.123.2. A very similar story resurfaces much later in a completely different context in Nepos' biography of Hannibal (9.2-3)

[24] Allison (1997) 499-500

[25] So, notwithstanding the programmatic claims in 1.20-22, Thucydides' story of the Expedition may contain an element of artistic licence.

[26] Mackie (1996) 108

called for by each situation".[27] This clearly has serious implications: the potential for misrepresentation is self-evident. Book Six contains more speeches than any other book in the *Histories*. There are ten speeches, making up around 38 percent of the whole,[28] and, given that these speeches include the crucial debates between Alcibiades and Nicias during the run-up to the Expedition and the debate between Hermocrates and Athenagoras at Syracuse, any inaccuracies could paint a very different picture from the true nature of the events. That said, it is important to reflect that it is not unexpected for Book Six to have such a significant number of speeches. As Pelling points out,[29] the book examines the outbreak of a conflict: this involves exploring the mindset of the protagonists, and Thucydides used speeches to provide his insight. In addition, Thucydides' readers would not have been surprised by the number of speeches here or elsewhere in Thucydides' work, as they were used to exactly the same thing in Herodotus and Homer. More surprising to the audience would have been that Thucydides draws attention to the fact that they may not be verbatim. From this, it can be argued, we can infer that Thucydides' account is written in good faith and that there is no intent to deliberately misrepresent. We have to take Thucydides at his word when he says that he has checked his reports with as much thoroughness as possible and set out to discover the truth.[30] At the same time, even if we do accept that Thucydides really was trying to report the views expressed as accurately as possible, the reader must be alive to the possibility of slippage and bear in mind that Thucydides was also certainly dressing up the expression of those views in a linguistic and rhetorical form that was his own.[31]

So, although it is by no means clear (and often depends on the reader's standpoint) whether the reliability of Thucydides' work is undermined by the inclusion of generic story-types or the use of echoes of Homer and other authors to add stature by literary association, as well as the possibility of unintentional misrepresentation, the reader of Thucydides must be alive to the possibility of misinformation.

There may also be issues with both the completeness and the accuracy of Thucydides' narrative. One example is a papyrus fragment covering the events of 415-413 BC that was uncovered among the *Oxyrhynchus Papyri*[32] which seems to contradict some of Thucydides' account. There are two instances in the text, known as P.Oxy. 411, where it notably contradicts Thucydides. It is claimed that in 415, after his arrival in Sicily, Alcibiades established good

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[27] Thuc. 1.22.1

[28] Pelling (2022a) 22

[29] Pelling (2022a) 22-23

[30] Thuc. 1.22.2

[31] This remains substantially true, notwithstanding some attempts at characterisation of individual speakers, not least in the Sicilian Debate (Thuc. 6.9-18): see Tompkins 1972.

[32] A group of manuscripts discovered at an ancient rubbish dump near Oxyrhynchus in Egypt during the late-nineteenth and early twentieth century.

relations with nearly all the cities on the island,[33] whereas all our other sources state that Alcibiades achieved little in Sicily and that bringing the city of Katana over to the Athenian side was his sole success. The second instance concerns the Athenians' attempts to bring Alcibiades back to Athens to face trial. The author here develops the story further and suggests that Alcibiades was already aware that he had been condemned *in absentia* and that the Athenians would not accept his defence.[34] Alcibiades is thus portrayed as a victim of the Athenian demos rather than a criminal and a traitor. P. Oxy. 411 is admittedly an obscure document, but there are other instances of inconsistences between Thucydides and other authors.

Both Thucydides[35] and Diodorus[36] state that during the Expedition Alcibiades could not persuade the citizens of Rhegion (a city in Southern Italy near the Straits of Messina - see map 5) to join the Athenians, whereas Plutarch says that Alcibiades captured Rhegion.[37] The reasons for this discrepancy are unclear, especially considering that Plutarch seems to use Thucydides as the basis for all his work, but it does again suggest that other sources, which Plutarch seems to have believed in preference to Thucydides and Diodorus, may have detailed some success in Sicily for Alcibiades.

These divergences from Thucydides, however slight, all serve to remind us that the historian cannot be taken at face value and that his narrative must constantly be challenged. Indeed, his claim that the Athenians were ignorant about Sicily[38] is suspect, especially given the numbers involved in the expedition to Sicily nine years previously. Nichols argues that Thucydides' emphasis on the Athenians' ignorance of Sicily is there to highlight the Athenian desire to conquer the island at all costs[39] and may be a literary device rather than a historical fact.

So, although Thucydides is by far our most important source for the Sicilian Expedition, it is clear that his work is not without problems. His desire to downplay the achievements and emphasize the failures of the non-aristocratic leaders who followed Pericles, the discrepancies between his account and those of other authors, the omission of plainly relevant episodes such as the ostracism of Hyperbolus, the dramatic reconstruction of events and the elements of 'Homeric' colour must temper our reliance of Thucydides. He is our principal source, but he must be approached with some caution.

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[33] P. Oxy. 411 iii. 57-61

[34] P. Oxy. 411 iii. 84-90

[35] Thuc. 6.50-52

[36] Diod. 13.3.5

[37] Plut. *Alc.* 10.2

[38] Thuc. 6.1.1

[39] Nichols (2015) 121

2.3 Andocides

Another contemporary source, though only for some of the events leading up to the Sicilian Expedition, is Andocides, an Athenian who was born around 440 BC. Although it has been claimed that he was a member of the wealthy Kerykes clan (*genos*), Davies has argued that this claim is without foundation and Andocides' true lineage remains unknown.[40] In 415 Andocides was arrested in connection with the mutilation of the Herms. He was released after turning informer and naming four people involved in the profanation of the Mysteries, all of whom were put to death. But he was unable fully to clear his own name and chose to leave Athens. He was only able to return and resume his citizen rights under the general amnesty following the overthrow of the Thirty. He soon attained a position of some importance, becoming a member of the *Boule* and an influential participant in Assembly debates. In 400, however, Callias (with whom he was in dispute over the marriage of the daughter of his uncle)[41] and his supporters prosecuted Andocides for violating the decree of Isotimides by attending the Mysteries. The speech *On the Mysteries* that he gave in his successful defence against this charge survives. Andocides seems to have been a key player in the affairs of the Mysteries and the Herms and, although probably not involved in the mutilation of the Herms,[42] he *was* guilty of profanation of the Mysteries and secured immunity by denouncing relations and friends.[43] His primary purpose in *On the Mysteries*, therefore, was to seek acquittal on what were serious charges, not to provide the historian with information about events at the time of the start of the Sicilian Expedition. It would not help his case to lie about matters of public record, so straightforward information that comes into that category is likely to be reliable, but one must be wary about the way in which he uses it to put himself in a good light and deflect suspicion on others.

2.4 Xenophon

The only other historical writer relevant to us who was alive during the Sicilian Expedition is Xenophon, an Athenian soldier and historian who would have been around 15 years old in 415. Although his *Hellenica* deals with the period following the Expedition and is nowhere near as important to the study of the venture than Thucydides or Andocides, it is still of some importance. He provides information about the later activities of some of the key players of the Expedition, notably Hermocrates and (crucially) Alcibiades, and this is of value inasmuch as it contributes to a more holistic view of their characters and their aims. Of particular interest are his description of Alcibiades' triumphant return to Athens in 407, in which he makes a show of objectivity by

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[40] The claim that Andocides was a member of the Kerykes genos comes from the 'Lives of the Ten Orators', a work of unknown authorship contained within Plutarch's compilation known as the *Moralia* ([Plut.] *X orat.* 834c). Davies and others have argued that this is incorrect and that we remain in ignorance of the genos of Andocides' family. See Davies, *APF* 27.

[41] MacDowell (1962) 328

[42] MacDowell (1962) 176

[43] MacDowell (1962) 171

reporting both positive and negative views of the causes and consequences of his exile, and his account of Alcibiades' justified but unsuccessful attempt to persuade the Aegospotami generals to move their fleet to a less dangerous location.

2.5   Aristophanes

Also alive during the Sicilian Expedition, although writing in a different genre, was the comic playwright Aristophanes, active from 427 – 386. Many of his comedies provide a window into life in Athens before, during and after the Sicilian Expedition as well as depicting some of the politicians and influential personalities of the time. Little is known of the life of Aristophanes other than what he reveals in his plays and the only other source which gives a glimpse of the man himself is Plato's *Symposium*, where Aristophanes is portrayed as "devoting his whole life to Dionysus and Aphrodite".[44] Throughout his plays Aristophanes caricatures and lampoons leading politicians, especially populist and demagogic leaders such as Cleon and Hyperbolus, as well as ridiculing other prominent figures such as Euripides and Socrates. Any attempt to categorise Aristophanes, however, runs into contradictions in his work and, given the paucity of biographical information we have about his personal life, it is almost impossible to characterise the man.

The information that Aristophanes gives us is often in the form of snippets revealing the political leanings of individuals or how they were perceived by the demos (or at least Aristophanes' take on how they were perceived). Tantalising glimpses into daily life can also be useful to the historian: for example, we know from Aristophanes that attendance at the Assembly was often low, as citizens hid in the market hoping to avoid being summoned.[45] These windows into Athenian life are invaluable in studying the Sicilian Expedition, as they are often the only source that reveals social tensions within Athens. But, although Aristophanes is a key source and provides information which is absent in other sources, it must always be borne in mind that he gives us a reflection of Athenian life and society that is distorted by the prism of comedy and satire. Still, Aristophanes' caricatures of prominent personalities can not only give them a human face but also help to fill in the gaps in other sources. Most notably, Aristophanes' attacks on Hyperbolus assist the attempt to ascertain some of the facts surrounding his ostracism, an event notably ignored by Thucydides.

One particular problem caused by the distorting lens of comedy is, as Sidwell has observed, loss of intertextuality. The author draws on some event known to the audience without explicitly making reference to it and the adding of intertextual layers is as likely to occur in Aristophanes as in modern comedy. The example cited by Sidwell is from the TV cartoon series *The Simpsons*, where Homer Simpson is clubbed by baby Maggie and the scene then unfolds visually and

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[44] Pl. *Symp.* 177e

[45] Ar. *Arch.* 19-22

musically precisely in terms of Hitchcock's *Psycho*.[46] The viewer who has not seen *Psycho* will still be able to follow the narrative and some of the humour but will not grasp the intertextual layer. In Old Comedy, too, we must be aware that the author's veiled reference to events which are familiar to his audience but not to us, may be more complicated than we can know.

Of his 11 surviving plays, 9 contain references to the Sicilian Expedition or key individuals involved in the Expedition or aspects of Athenian society pertinent to the event. This serves to highlight, not only the importance of Aristophanes as a source, but also how the Expedition permeated all aspects of Athenian life. The dominance of the Expedition, however, can lead to dangerous generalisations which must be guarded against. Newiger, for example, argued that Aristophanes' *Birds* as a whole refers to the Sicilian Expedition and is intended as a criticism of Athenian imperialism.[47] But, as MacDowell points out, there is no explicit mention of Sicily in the entire play and Newiger's whole argument is based on the fact that the play was produced in 414 whilst the Expedition was underway so therefore must be a target for criticism.[48] MacDowell acknowledges that there are oblique references to the Expedition in the play, as one would expect, but to suggest the entire play is a criticism of the Expedition is a gross overstatement. In fact, Sidwell takes the opposite viewpoint to Newiger and argues that *Birds* is an attack on those who opposed the Expedition.[49] This is a nice demonstration of the difficulty of interpreting Aristophanes.

2.6   Diodorus Siculus

Moving to non-contemporary authors, we come first to Diodorus Siculus, a Sicilian Greek historian who wrote the monumental *Bibliotheca Historica* between 60 and 30 BC. The work covers the history of the Greeks from mythic times up to 60 BC. The name *Bibliotheca* translates as 'library' and is an acknowledgement that the work is a composite of many other older sources, now lost to us. One of Diodorus' main sources for the period of the Sicilian Expedition, and indeed a significant proportion of his work, was Ephorus of Cyme (c. 405 – 330 BC), a student of Isocrates who wrote a 30-book universal history, which is now lost to us.[50] Ephorus' work was widely quoted in antiquity and was generally complimented for its accuracy,[51] although was criticised for his depiction of military operations.[52]

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[46] Sidwell (2009) xi

[47] Newiger (1983) 53-54

[48] MacDowell (1995) 223

[49] Sidwell (2009) 248

[50] Green (2010) 5; *OCD* 529

[51] For but a few examples see - Plut. Mor. *De Stoic.* 1043d – Alexander rated Ephorus so highly he wanted him to accompany him on campaign; Strabo 8.4, 9.4, 13.3, 14.1 – Strabo refers to him as 'indisputably noteworthy' and quotes him at length throughout his work.

[52] Polyb. 12.25f

In his treatment of the Peloponnesian War Diodorus largely confirms and expands on what we find in Thucydides, and that is also true in relation to Sicily. In addition, as Diodorus supplies a continuous narrative, his work often fills in gaps left, intentionally or otherwise, by Thucydides, and in some cases offers motives where Thucydides has provided bare facts. For example, he notes that the Athenians had always coveted Sicily on account of its agricultural richness,[53] that, before approaching Athens, the Egestans tried to solicit the help of Syracuse and then Carthage,[54] and that Carthage had previously fought many campaigns to capture Sicily and failed.[55] Hawthorn has argued that the Athenians may have been hoping to defeat Sparta and move against Sicily and Italy – he points to inscriptions revealing alliances with Western Sicily from the 450s,[56] which supports Diodorus' suppositions regarding how long the Athenians had been interested in Sicily.

2.7   Plutarch

The most important of our later sources from Roman times is Lucius Mestrius Plutarchus, better known as Plutarch, who was a Greek historian, philosopher and biographer who was born around 45 AD to an ancient Theban family at Chaeronea in Boeotia. He travelled widely in Asia Minor and later took up a priesthood in Delphi before becoming a student in Athens. In Athens he became interested in philosophy, taking up a Platonic standpoint. He took Roman citizenship, although lived for the majority of his life in his homeland of Greece. Late in his career he wrote a number of historical works, including his *Parallel Lives*, designed to draw comparisons between prominent Greeks and Romans, including Nicias and Crassus and Alcibiades and Coriolanus. The motive behind writing these works was his interest in character, and, as Pelling points out, Plutarch is a moralist and should be read as such.[57] Not all of the sources he used are known and, although it is clear he had read Thucydides' *Histories*, he diverges from his narrative on numerous occasions and also enhances the picture painted by Thucydides of various events, suggesting he had access to other detailed sources now lost to us. It is important to remember however, that Plutarch's emphasis is on the biography of his subjects and those actions or words that might reveal character, and not the wider military or political events in which the subject was involved. Plutarchan narrative often ignores or passes quickly over important historical events.[58] There is a significant amount of military narrative in *Life of Nicias*, because military events are an important element in picturing Nicias' character, but Plutarch is selective and only reports on

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[53] Diod. Sic. 12.54.1

[54] Diod. Sic. 12.82.7

[55] Diod. Sic. 12.83.6

[56] Hawthorn (2014) 33

[57] Pelling (2000) 46

[58] Duff (2015) 131-133

events that directly impact upon Nicias' character. As a result, we do not get a truly accurate picture of how the battles and wider campaign unfolded.

Plutarch's work is important to us in that it reveals otherwise unknown biographical details of some of the key players in the Sicilian Expedition, most notably Nicias and Alcibiades, and gives us an insight into their characters and what drove them to make the decisions they did. But Plutarch's moralising tone must give us pause for thought and the reader must be wary of Plutarch's judgements. For example, Plutarch makes a comment which can be read as arguing the disaster in Sicily would have engulfed Alcibiades had he been in sole command.[59] Plutarch imagines Nicias losing the ostracism and thus leaving Athens "before the disaster which finally overtook him", suggesting events would have been the same had Nicias been removed by ostracism. This presumes Alcibiades would have made the same mistakes that Nicias did, which is questionable, as the natures of the two men as depicted by Plutarch and Thucydides are very different. It could be argued that, with Alcibiades in sole command of the army, there is no reason why the Expedition could not have been a success and that it was continual mistakes made by the commander on the ground, Nicias, which contributed to the disaster.

One of Plutarch's distinctive contributions as a source is that he provides material about Alcibiades from before the Sicilian Expedition and indeed dating right back to his childhood. This gives us a more rounded picture of the man. Plutarch regularly highlights deficiencies in Alcibiades' childhood, perhaps to show that his nature had always been the same and that there was little chance of redemption. Bad behaviour followed by laughter is common in Plutarch's depiction, and his treatment of older lovers in his youth must also have created enemies. It would seem possible that these enemies harboured a grudge against Alcibiades and, given the opportunity, would act against him. The accusations against Alcibiades in 415 which had such an adverse impact on the Sicilian Expedition could well have roots in his earlier youthful bad behaviour.

Another of Plutarch's distinctive contributions is that he sometimes offers alternate theories or suppositions about a particular matter and gives his reasons for thinking one is more likely than the other. The most notable example relating to the Sicilian Expedition is in his various depictions of the ostracism of Hyperbolus, an event which he relates in three of his *Lives*.[60] The ostracism is usually seen as a result of a secret pact between Nicias and Alcibiades, but in his *Alcibiades* Plutarch notes that according to some accounts it was not with Nicias that Alcibiades made a pact, but with Phaeax.[61] Plutarch is at pains to remain impartial, but his comment that "I have set forth at greater length elsewhere [i.e. in the lives of Nicias and Aristides] the facts which have come to light concerning this affair" suggests that he believes it is more credible that the

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[59] Plut. *Nic.* 11.7

[60] Plut. *Nic.* 11; *Alc.* 13; *Arist.* 7

[61] Plut. *Alc.* 13 – Plutarch also gives the source for this alternate narrative - Theophrastus

pact was between Alcibiades and Nicias and that the city was split into two factions each supporting one of the two.

2.8   Nepos

Cornelius Nepos was a Roman biographer who lived during the first century BC. Most of his works are now lost to us, but his *De Excellentibus Ducibus Exterarum Gentium* (Great Generals of Foreign Nations) survives in its entirety and contains a chapter on Alcibiades. By Nepos' own statement he wrote biography, not history, and his work is addressed to the general public and can be seen as intended to entertain and produce a moral reaction, rather than educate.[62]   He makes mention of Thucydides, Xenophon and Plato's *Symposium*, but clearly had access to other sources now lost to us. Nepos argues that the Sicilian Expedition and the declaration of war on Syracuse was entirely due to Alcibiades' influence, which differs from Thucydides' interpretation.[63] This is, of course, entirely to be expected in a biography of Alcibiades and serves to highlight the problems inherent with using biography as a historical source.

2.9   Epigraphy

As well as the literary sources available to us, epigraphic sources are also vital to any serious study of the Sicilian Expedition. The propensity of the Athenians to put decrees and other forms of document on stone has ensured that vital information has been preserved, but the use of epigraphy is not without problems. Epigraphic evidence is often fragmentary and the dating of inscriptions is often fraught with difficulties and controversy. When, as is often the case, we have epigraphic evidence of an event or decree with no date attached to it the whole corpus of Athenian history can become skewed if the wrong date is ascribed to it. Changes in Attic letter forms during the fifth century have been used to attempt to date some epigraphical texts, following a study by Meiggs in 1966.[64] This approach is hazardous, however, and Smart argued that older letter formations continued to be used on epigraphic texts even when newer forms were in widespread use.[65] Science was brought to bear on the matter and in 1990 Chambers, Galluci and Spanos published a ground-breaking article[66] demonstrating that the use of photo-enhancement and laser scanning techniques could reveal hitherto worn and hidden lettering on the stone. This technology has been used to challenge the traditionally accepted dates of some epigraphical documents, with significant historical ramifications.

This will all be examined in detail in <u>section 7.3</u>, but the reshuffling of chronology as a result of the redating of epigraphic documents has had a profound impact on our understanding of the

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[62] Rolfe (1929) xiii

[63] Nep. *Alc.* 3

[64] Meiggs (1966)

[65] Smart (1972)

[66] Chambers, Gallucci, Spanos (1990)

events leading up to the Sicilian Expedition, most notably Athens' relationship with Egesta, and epigraphical study must take a prominent place in any study of the Expedition.

Evidence from epigraphy also gives us vital information about key decisions by the *Boule* and the Assembly during the run-up to the departure of the Expedition, as well as records of payments to key individuals: all of this in turn assists in the construction of a more accurate time-line of events.

The study of epigraphy is a dynamic discipline and new finds are continually coming to light which expand our knowledge and often affects our understanding of events. The constantly updated website *Attic Inscriptions Online*[67] founded by Stephen Lambert in 2012 has been utilised extensively in this study, as has the compendium of inscriptions by Meiggs and Lewis,[68] and the more recent compendium by Osborne and Rhodes.[69]

2.10   Overview of Sources

It can be seen that the ancient sources need careful navigation when reviewing and analysing the details of the Sicilian Expedition and the reasons for its failure. Our most prominent source, Thucydides, is surprisingly silent on a number of key issues in his narrative of the Expedition, such as the ostracism of Hyperbolus, possibly to suit his own aristocratic agenda. Circumstantial evidence suggests that he may have known Alcibiades personally and that the latter may well have been a source for much of Book Six, giving rise to suggestions of bias in his account of the Expedition. Andocides also clearly gives a biased account, whose sole aim is to portray himself in a good light and clear his name. Although his work contains much historical information not contained elsewhere, the context in which it is presented means that it must be treated with caution. Xenophon wrote about events that took place after the Expedition, but he sheds light on the personalities and drives of the key players and can be seen as sympathetic to Alcibiades. Our other sources are writing several centuries after the Expedition and clearly had access to other sources, now lost. It is also important to note what these later writers were aiming for. Diodorus was compiling a history of the Greek world since the distant past (albeit one in which his own Sicilian origin made him take a special interest in Sicily), whereas Plutarch and Nepos were both writing a form of biography in a style which often glosses over major events in favour of moralistic anecdotes intended to educate and moralise. But without our literary and epigraphic sources we would, of course, know nothing at all about the Sicilian Expedition. However problematic they may be, the historian has no option but to use them in a properly critical fashion in the hope that some sort of reliable conclusions can be reached about what happened – and whether it could have turned out differently.

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[67] https://www.atticinscriptions.com

[68] Meiggs and Lewis (1969)

[69] Osborne and Rhodes (2017)

Chapter 3 – Athenian Temporal Reckoning and the Difficulties in Creating a Timelime of the Sicilian Expedition

3.1   Introduction to Athenian Temporal Reckoning

Any examination of the Sicilian Expedition must include an inquiry into the chronology of the events. This examination will aid our understanding of when events occurred, and will also help shed light on persons and groupings who were in positions of influence at key junctures not only throughout the Expedition itself but also during the events leading up to it. An understanding of any persons or groups who were in a position to hinder the Expedition is vital to any analysis of the reasons for the Expedition's failure.

The task of compiling an accurate timeline is fraught with difficulty, however, partly because of the fragmentary and sometimes contradictory nature of the evidence but also because of inherent problems in matching dates given in source material to exact dates in our modern calendar. In addition, in spite of a multitude of journal publications on the subject,[1] no satisfactory starting point exists for any student looking to research the topic, which makes a cursory examination of the topic all but impossible. Nevertheless, an examination of the temporal measurement systems in Athens will form an important part of this study, as only with an understanding of the Athenian calendrical structures does it become possible to attempt to ascribe dates given in inscriptions and ancient texts to dates in the modern Julian calendar. An understanding of the Athenian calendar will enable us to ascribe dates to key events and will also help us ascertain which officials were in office at various junctures during the run-up to the Expedition.

Our current understanding of the Athenian calendrical structure is by no means complete and Athenian temporal reckoning has been a controversial topic, as will be highlighted shortly. The matter is further complicated by the fact that every Greek *polis* used its own unique and independent calendar. Each possessed its own determinates and methodologies and they began on many different dates. Delphi's calendar began with the first New Moon after the Summer Solstice; Boeotia and Delos began their calendars after the Winter Solstice; the calendar of Chios commenced with the Vernal Equinox, whereas the calendars of Sparta, Rhodes, Crete, and Miletos all began with the Autumnal Equinox.[2] This impacts our understanding of the Athenian calendar as we cannot rely on potential comparators as models and our understanding of the calendars of other Greek *poleis* is even less complete than our knowledge of the calendars of Athens.

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[1] Merrit and Pritchett are the two primary authors of journals on the subject, as referenced below. Both published a vast array of articles throughout the twentieth century.

[2] Samuel (1969)

The only common point of reference is that all Greek *poleis* originally regulated their calendars by the moon. A lunar (synodic) month, is on average 29.53 days long, but this may vary by up to 13 hours.[3] A twelve-month lunar year therefore contains 354.36 days, whereas a solar year contains 365.24 days. The Greeks understood from a very early time that a lunar year fell 11 days short of a solar year.[4] Any strict lunar calendar would be approximately one synodic month out of synchronisation with the solar year every three years and would drift through the seasons in 33-year cycles. Many Greek *poleis*, rather than abandon lunar reckoning, got round this problem by the practice of intercalating (adding) an extra month periodically to align the lunar and solar calendars. Our understanding of exactly how often these extra months were added and where within the year they were inserted is incomplete and has been a subject of heated debate.[5] It is clear, however, that intercalation of days into a calendar makes the process of ascribing Julian dates to events in the ancient world extremely difficult, especially when the process and timing of intercalations is not completely understood.

In truth, the term 'Athenian Calendar' is something of a misnomer as the Athenians never used one single method to mark the passage of time. In Athens it appears that at least three calendars were in continuous and simultaneous operation during the fifth century (the seasonal, festival and prytany calendars), and there is no clear consensus among scholars as to the operation and functioning of these calendars, as much of the evidence is incomplete. A fierce and often vitriolic and acrimonious debate raged across various journals throughout the entire second half of the twentieth century between the adherents of the two main theories of how the Athenian calendar functioned. Throughout the early part of the twentieth century Professor Benjamin Meritt of Princeton University was the leading scholar of Athenian temporal systems, but in 1947 his former research assistant, W.K Pritchett published, along with Professor O Neugebauer, a study entitled *The Calendars of Athens* which challenged some of Meritt's assumptions and set forth new hypotheses in certain areas of calendar studies. This study set up a fierce and bitter debate which raged unabated across numerous journals and publications until Meritt's death in 1989. Pritchett continued publishing works on Attic time reckoning into the twenty-first century, before his death in 2007. The Pritchett-Neugebauer hypothesis on the calendrical cycles of ancient Athens is now the most commonly cited theory: it was used in the most recent overview of the Athenian temporal system[6] and is accepted by most scholars as being the most accurate interpretation of temporal measurement in ancient Athens.

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[3] The moon travels around the earth and back to the same place, on average, in 27.32 days (a sideral month). During these 27 ⅓ days however, the Earth will have moved with reference to the sun and it will take the moon approximately another two days to catch up with the sun again for conjunction. See Samuel (1969) 5 for more detail.

[4] Planeaux (2021) 197

[5] This was one of many debates which raged between Merrit and Pritchett and will be referenced below.

[6] Samuel (1969) 57-64

Pritchett and Meritt agree on many aspects of the Athenian calendar and their differences of opinion are often very nuanced and hinge on interpretations of inscriptions. In short, however, Meritt adopts a position where the Athenians used a flexible mathematical system and relies heavily on epigraphic evidence,[7] whereas Pritchett favours a calendar driven by observations of the moon and leans heavily on the descriptions of the lengths of months given by Pseudo-Aristotle in the *Constitution of the Athenians.*[8]

In 2021, however, Planeaux published *The Athenian Year Primer*, in which he argued that the two primary calendars in use in Athens (the festival and prytany calendars – see sections 3.3 and 3.4 below) were driven by positional astronomy and that both were anchored to observed astronomical events. Planeaux argues that, given the complexities involved in astronomical calculations, both calendars regularly drifted away from their anchor points and were brought back into line by the Archon, who would be presented with calculations and observations from his astronomers and subsequently added or subtracted days to align the calendars to the skies.[9] By using computers to reconstruct how the night sky would have appeared in the fifth century, Planeaux has tied significant calendrical dates to observed astronomical phenomena (for example, the first day of the Prytany Year being 37 days after the morning setting of the star Arcturus, an event that also marked the beginning of summer proper).[10] Planeaux's theory, however, has no hard documentary or epigraphical evidence to support it and on one level he can be seen to be inventing a system to fill in the gaps in our understanding. He is at pains, however, to point out clear and irreconcilable errors in both the theories of Merrit and Pritchett and argues that the Athenians must have regularly deviated from their own rules in calendrical reckoning to suit their whims and purposes and that it was only by anchoring their calendars to astronomical observations that they could prevent the sort of calendrical misalignments that would have rendered the calendars useless. This is an important claim. If it is correct, it means that there is no satisfactory method of ascribing accurate Julian dates to events in fifth century Athens that does not involve a linkage with astronomical phenomena.

3.2   The Seasonal Calendar

According to the Pritchett-Neugebauer hypothesis the first calendar in use in Athens was the lunar regulatory calendar which was controlled by the observation of the moon: the reckoning involved was said to be κατὰ θεόν, a phrase that can be paraphrased as "according to the moon".[11] The first visible sighting of the moon's crescent in the evening would mark the beginning of the month, with the New Year of the regulatory calendar falling at the first sighting of

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[7] Merrit (1961) as a starting point, with a multitude of subsequent articles refining his position.

[8] Neugebauer and Pritchett (1947), Pritchett (1963) and, again, a multitude of subsequent articles refining Pritchett's position.

[9] Planeaux (2021) 160

[10] Planeaux (2021) 161-2

[11] Pritchett (1963) 313. See also Samuel (1969) 57-58

the moon's crescent after the summer solstice, making the calendar a lunar one, albeit with solar aspects. The only purpose of this calendar, argue Pritchett and Neugebauer, was to regulate the Festival Calendar, the primary calendar of Athens. As the Festival Calendar regularly had days inserted and removed at the whim of the Archon (as detailed below in section 3.3), a regulatory calendar was required to bring it back into line with the seasons after the insertion and removal of days. There is no evidence that this regulatory calendar, if it indeed actually existed, served any other purpose than as a standard by which to control the lengths of the years in the other calendars and there is no indication that any public religious or secular occasions were determined by the lunar regulatory calendar. Pritchett and Neugebauer argue that this calendar had its own days and months which were identical in name to those of the Athenian Festival Calendar, but because of variances and intercalations in the Festival Calendar, which will be discussed below in section 3.3, the two calendars did not continuously map on to each other exactly. The κατὰ θεόν calendar, argue Pritchett and Neugebauer, is what the Festival Calendar would look like if the Archons did not continually tamper with it and add and subtract days.[12] Planeaux takes Pritchett's theory of a regulatory calendar a step further and proposes a detailed celestial calendar with solar, lunar and other astronomical elements that was used to anchor the other main calendars in use in Athens, providing a necessary framework which regularly brought them back into alignment with the night sky.[13]

Meritt, by contrast, dismissed the notion of a schematic regulatory calendar.[14] He postulated that the nineteen-year Metonic Cycle (see section 3.6 below) was used to regulate the Athenian calendars, not an additional annual regulatory calendar.[15]

It is true that the term κατὰ θεόν is not present in any inscriptions until the second century BC[16] and most scholars, with the notable exception of Planeaux, now reject the idea of an annual regulatory calendar and make no mention of it,[17] as there is no documentary or epigraphical evidence for the existence of such a calendar. It is clear, however, that there was some form of ancient seasonal calendar which did not calculate dates in successive years but simply noted specific astronomical phenomena within a given year, although this would not be regarded as a true calendar in the modern sense of the term. A seasonal calendar emerged as the Greeks needed to mark the beginnings of weather changes to regulate agriculture. This calendar observed the first and last risings above the horizon of certain stars and constellations in relation to the equinoxes and solstices to mark important dates. The Greeks then tied these first and last

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[12] Pritchett (1963) 313

[13] Planeaux (2021) 169

[14] Merrit (1961) 204

[15] Meritt (1964) 230-242

[16] Samuel (1967) 64

[17] E.g. Hannah (2005)

appearances to certain tasks. Hesiod, for example, tells farmers to harvest when the Pleiades rise.

> When the Pleiades, Atlas' daughters, start to rise
> begin your harvest; plough when they go down
> For forty days and nights they hide themselves
> and, as the year rolls round, appear again
> when you begin to sharpen sickle blades.[18]

This seasonal calendar which we find in Hesiod is known as the παράπηγμα (*parapegma*),[19] and may well be what Pritchett and others appear to have taken to be a separate regulatory calendar.

A seasonal calendar also appears in Thucydides. Indeed, it is his normal way of placing events within the year: alternatives such as the first visible rising of Arcturus or the winter solstice or calendrical dates only appear very rarely.[20] He explicitly contrasts the accuracy of the seasonal calendar with the vagaries of political calendars (awareness of the problem of interpreting calendrical dates is not confined to modern scholars), but it is an inexact method of temporal reckoning that makes ascribing Julian dates to specific events almost impossible. That said, however, the seasonal calendar is still of relevance to a study of the Sicilian Expedition, as Thucydides' references to winter and spring in 416/15 can be used to conjecture a date in the Prytany Calendar for various events in the run up to the Expedition. This is discussed in more depth below in section 3.7.

3.3   The Festival Calendar

The second calendar in use in Athens was the Archon's Calendar, also known as the Festival Calendar, so called because religious festivals in Athens were set for dates in that calendar. This was a matter of importance beyond the purely religious sphere. The Athenians had a lot of festivals (Pseudo-Xenophon says there were more than in any other Greek *polis*,[21] and a scholiast to Aristophanes' *Wasps* suggests that a sixth of the year in Athens was given over to them)[22] and this had an impact on political life: Pseudo-Xenophon observes that it was difficult to communicate with the *Boule* or the *Ecclesia* since their operations were continually suspended because of religious celebrations.

The Festival Calendar commenced in mid-summer, approximately at the end of June in our modern calendar, and used 12 lunar months, namely:

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[18] Hes. *Op.* 11. 383-404

[19] See Hannah (2005) 46-7 and 59-70 for discussion of *parapegmata.*

[20] Thuc. 2.78.2 and 7.16.2

[21] Xen. [*Ath. Pol.*] 3.2

[22] Pritchett (2001) 37

Hekatombaion (Ἑκατομβαιών);

Metageitnion (Μεταγειτνιών);

Boedromion (Βοηδρομιών);

Pyanepsion (Πυανεψιών);

Maimakterion (Μαιμακτηριών);

Poseideon (Ποσειδεών);

Gamelion (Γαμηλιών);

Anthesterion (Ἀνθεστηριών);

Elaphebolion (Ἐλαφηβολιών);

Mounichion (Μουνιχιών);

Thargelion (Θαργηλιών);

Skirophorion (Σκιροφοριών).

Each month in the festival calendar had either 29 or 30 days, loosely running alternately. Months with 29 days are termed as 'hollow' (κοῖλος) months, although how the Athenians reckoned which months were to be hollow and which were to be full is unclear.[23] In addition, an extra month was added periodically to keep the year in line with the seasons. This additional thirteenth month was usually, but not always, a second Poseideon, which ran immediately after the regular month of Poseideon in mid-winter. The years with 13 months are known as intercalary years and had 384 days, as opposed to the regular years which had 354/5 days (depending on the number of hollow months).

Exactly how the Athenians decided which years were ordinary and which were intercalary is not clearly understood. Meritt postulates that the Athenians used a nineteen-year Metonic Cycle (see section 3.6 below) to determine intercalary years, so that the Athenians inserted an extra month in 7 of every 19 years.[24] The selection of these 7 years from each 19-year cycle does not appear to conform to any discernible cyclical pattern. Merrit argues that the Athenians added these 7 intercalary years whenever and wherever they pleased, as long as they intercalated 7 years in every 19.[25] Pritchett, whilst acknowledging the presence of intercalary years, does not accept the use of the nineteen-year cycle and highlights the considerable irregularity of intercalation. He suggests that there was no clear pattern of intercalation. This complicates even further any attempt to use the Festival Calendar to establish Julian dates, and it is Pritchett's viewpoint which prevails amongst most scholars.[26]

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[23] See Merrit (1977b) for overview.

[24] Merrit (1961) 4

[25] Merrit (1961) 4 – Merrit has also argued that the first Metonic Cycle of 19 years contained 8 intercalary years which would have had to have been compensated by placing only six intercalated years in a subsequent 19-year cycle.

[26] Samuel (1969) 59

In his recent study, however, Planeaux sides with Meritt and argues that the Metonic Calendar was indeed used to determine which years were to be intercalary with 7 years in every 19 being intercalary. Pritchett's objection to the Metonic cycle being a vehicle for calculating the insertion of intercalary years was that there is no discernible fixed pattern in the choice of which seven years were intercalated. Planeaux counters that by arguing that Meton's system, along with his celestial calendar, was an idealistic system, which the Athenians strove to follow where possible, but deviated from on a regular basis for practical reasons. As soon as it became apparent to astronomers that the deviations had brought the calendars out of step with the celestial calendar, the Archon would add or subtract days to bring them back in line. Planeaux's line of argument is thus that, although the Athenians had a system of determining which years were to be intercalated, in practice it was not strictly followed, although steps were always taken to realign the calendars once misalignments became apparent. The reasons for not following the system strictly are unclear, but Planeaux assumes that the Athenians did whatever seemed best at the time to keep the calendar in line with the seasons, even if it put them out of step with the Metonic cycle. Errors and misalignments were then compensated for by the Archon when they became apparent. Planeaux also points out that the Athenians had a system in use prior to the creation of Meton's calendar (the double octaeris cycle)[27] and expecting them simply to abandon it in 432[28] for a new calendar whose premise would not be proven correct for 19 years is unrealistic.[29] There would, most likely, have been wrangling over which system to use, at least at first, with the possibility of both systems being used alternately making any accurate reconstruction difficult.

The picture is further complicated by the fact that the Eponymous Archon was free to add days to the calendar and the evidence appears to suggest that this happened on a regular basis to ensure that the city's festivals, which were fixed to specific dates, fell at a time that suited the Archons.[30] By intercalating an extra two extra days, for example, the Archon could move the timing of a festival back by two days. This process would work as follows. If the Archon decided to insert an extra day after the seventh day of the month of Hekatombaion then the extra day would be designated Hekatombion 7 *embolimos* before moving on to Hekatombaion 8. In effect the calendar would pause for a day before resuming. Pritchett puts it eloquently:

> Whereas in modern times, if a performance or festival is postponed, we assign a new
> calendar day for the postponed performance [....] festivals of the ancient Greeks were

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[27] The intercalation of three lunar months over an eight-year period which was followed by many ancient civilisations. As the solar year exceeds the lunar year by approximately 11 ¼ days, over eight years this will result in a misalignment of 90 days (11 ¼ x 8 = 90). This is compensated by the intercalation of 3 months of 30 days over an eight-year period, usually the third, fifth and eighth year. There are significant margins of error in these calculations however which Meton attempted to erase in his cycle intended to replace the double octaeris. Samuel (1969) 37

[28] The year in which Meton's 19-year cycles begins – see <u>section 3.6.</u>

[29] Planeaux (2021) 54

[30] See Pritchett (1999) 79-83 for an overview.

celebrated on the original calendar date, regardless of the length of the postponement. Certain dates were sacred to certain gods. If the seventh day was sacred to Apollo then his festival had to fall on that date, regardless of the phase of the moon.[31]

There is an instance of Elaphebolion 9 being repeated on four successive days, the first designated as Elaphbolion 9 *embolimos* and then the second as Elaphbolion 9 second *embolimos*, and so on before finally moving on to Elaphebolion 10.[32] This example of four intercalary days is extreme (and is admittedly from 271/0). But it demonstrates the willingness of Archons to insert extra days into the calendar to suit their purposes, in this case extending the time allocated to theatrical performances during the Dionysiac festival. Evidently the preparations for the festival of 271/0, presumably celebrated with special splendour, as shown by the fact that the *agonothetes* Thrasykles rebuilt the upper part of the choragic monument of his father Thrasyllos to commemorate it, consumed more time than had been allowed, and the four extra days had to be inserted in order that the *pompe* might still be held on Elaphebolion 10.[33]

To ensure that the festival year had 354/5 days (or 384 in an intercalary year) the Archon would also have to subtract days to compensate for any added days. The process for subtracted days (known as *exairesimoi*) is much less clear than that of adding days, mainly because no inscriptions or decrees were issued on subtracted days, because they did not exist. Although our knowledge of the procedure is unclear, there is plenty of evidence showing that the subtraction of days did happen. In the *Athenian Constitution*, Pseudo-Aristotle describes how in 403/2, a certain Archinos, wanting to prevent those who had fought on the side of the Thirty emigrating from the city "took away the remaining days for registration",[34] thus compelling them to remain. If true, this highlights the point that intercalation could be used for a range of purposes, although the example cited is controversial. We know little of Archinos and he disappears from the historical record almost as quickly as he appears.[35] Merrit suggests that he subtracted days from the calendar[36] but Rhodes doubts that the period allowed for registration was defined in terms of calendar dates,[37] although he does not explain what the alternate method of definition would have been. He also suggests that Archinus achieved the reduction either by an assembly decree or by informal pressure on registration officials to close the list.[38] But Rhodes' apparent doubts about the use of the Festival Calendar here seem unfounded. As has been shown, the Festival Calendar would have been the means by which most Athenians ran their lives and would

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[31] Pritchett (1999) 81

[32] Dinsmoor (1954) 299

[33] Dinsmoor (1954) 309

[34] Arist. [*Ath. Pol.*] 40.1

[35] See *CAAP* 431 for details of Archinos in the historical record.

[36] Merrit (1961) 206-7 n11

[37] Presumably Rhodes doubts that the Festival Calendar would have been used to provide registration dates and that the unalterable Prytany Calendar would have been utilised for this purpose.

[38] *CAAP* 474

almost certainly have been the one by which dates for registration were communicated to the demos, and it is therefore entirely possible that Archinos persuaded the Archon to change the calendar. There is also evidence from the fragmentary *Symposiac Questions* of Plutarch to suggest the Athenians permanently removed the second day of Boedromion from the calendar as it was thought to be the day on which Poseidon and Athena contended for Athens.[39] The title of the question is *Why do the Athenians take out the second day of the month of Boedromion?* Unfortunately, most of the text of the answer is lost, but what does remain contains the sentence "You have forgotten that we have abolished the second day of Boedromion, not in regard to the moon, but because it was thought to be the day of which Poseidon and Athena contended for Athens". [40] We do, however, have an inscription of the fifth century which contains a date of Boedromion 2,[41] showing that the removal of Boedromion 2, if it happened at all, occurred after 407. Finally, Diodorus Siculus notes that "The Thebans [of Egypt] do not intercalate months or subtract days as most of the Greeks do."[42]

We also have further evidence in Thucydides for the lack of synchronicity with the lunar cycle. When the one-year armistice between Athens and Sparta was signed in 423 Thucydides relates "…that the armistice should last for one year, beginning on that very day, the fourteenth of the month of Elaphebolion"[43] and that the Spartans made the agreement on "…the twelfth of the Spartan month Gerastius."[44] Here there is a difference of two days between the two dates, with the Athenian month running two days ahead of the Spartan. Two years later, however, when the Peace of Nicias was agreed Thucydides reports that "the treaty comes into effect from the 27th day of the month of Artemision at Sparta…and at Athens from the 25th day of the month of Elaphebolion".[45] This time the Athenian month is running two days behind the Spartan one, suggesting that one or both of the two states has inserted or removed days from their calendars in the intervening period.[46] The evidence for the Spartan calendrical system is limited, almost exclusively derived from literary sources and frustratingly incomplete. Plutarch reports that the ephor Agesilaos inserted a thirteenth month and collected taxes for it,[47] which suggests both an established intercalary system and official power to intercalate when deemed necessary. In the example above from Thucydides, however, it is impossible to say whether the Athenians or the Spartans have intercalated.

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[39] Pritchett (1963) 343

[40] 9.6 (740F)

[41] *IG* I³ 377 - Payments from the treasury of Athena, 408/7-407/6 BC – line 42

[42] Diod. Sic. 1.50

[43] Thuc. 4.118.12

[44] Thuc. 4.119.1

[45] Thuc. 5.19.1

[46] Pritchett (1947) 239

[47] Plut. *Agis* 16.1

The most telling evidence for state interference in the Festival Calendar comes from Aristophanes. In his play *Clouds*, first performed in 423 and revised between 420 and 417, the chorus conveys a series of complaints from the Moon about the way Athenians ignore her pivotal role in setting festival dates.

> But you don't keep your calendar correct, it's totally out of sync. As a result, the gods are always getting mad at her, whenever they miss a dinner and hungrily go home because you're celebrating their festival on the wrong day, or hearing cases or torturing slaves instead of sacrificing. And often, when we gods are mourning Memnon or Sarpedon, you're pouring wine and laughing. That's why Hyperbolus, this year's sacred ambassador, had his wreath of office blown off by us gods, so that he'll remember well that the days of your lives should be governed by the Moon.[48]

This shows quite clearly that the Athenians were well aware that their Festival Calendar was misaligned with the seasons, as a result of constant intercalation. Although Aristophanes highlights the point, the manner in which he does so suggests that the issue did not seem to bother the Athenians.

Another interesting case is provided by the return of Alcibiades from exile in 407. This coincided with the festival of Plynteria, which was being celebrated in the Piraeus as he sailed in to harbour.[49] The Plynteria was a minor state festival in honour of Athena which few Athenians knew much about, as the associated rituals were ἀπόρρητα (unspeakable, i.e. secret)[50] and could be conducted by a few officials acting on behalf of the rest of the population.[51] This being so, the sources about it are limited and indirect. Since *plynein* means 'to wash, clean', it has been suggested that it involved actual or symbolic washing, something that would give the festival an association with impurity, as 'dirt' was cleansed from sanctuaries and statues.[52] Plutarch's narrative has the goddess Athena "veiling herself from Alcibiades" and "rejecting him".[53] This suggests (although the sources are vague) that Alcibiades came upon the rites of the Plynteria at the exact moment they were being conducted on the shores of the Piraeus and that their 'unclean' nature made Alcibiades' return ill-omened. Given his previous association with acts of sacrilege and the need to distance himself from that association, it seems implausible that Alcibiades would mark his return from Athens by knowingly putting himself into such an awkward position and it also seems unlikely that a man of his civic prominence in Athens was unaware of

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[48] Ar. *Nub.* 615-626 Of note, we do not know whether these lines belonged only to the revised version or whether they were contained in the original as we do not know the date at which Hyperbolus was *hieromnemon*.

[49] Xen. *Hell.* 1.4.12 and Plut. *Alc.* 34.1-2

[50] Plut. Alc. 34.1-2

[51] Nagy (1994) 276

[52] Nagy (1994) 276

[53] Plut. *Alc.* 34.1-2

the festival, no matter how minor. Plutarch suggests that the Plynteria was among a group of festivals legally classified as "ἀποφράδων τὴν ἡμέραν" – unlucky or disastrous days[54] on which it was unlikely the Assembly or *Boule* would meet: this is the sort of thing a political figure would know. Thus, it seems very unlikely that Alcibiades would not have taken this into account when timing his return to Athens. Nagy has postulated that forces hostile to Alcibiades had engineered an intercalation in the Athenian calendar which intentionally resulted in the day of the Plynteria Festival shifting to coincide with his return.[55] As a sort of parallel Nagy cites an instance in 325/4 where the Plynteria was moved by the intercalation of days in order to stop it coinciding with state business.[56]   If Nagy's theory is correct, and it certainly seems plausible, Alcibiades' enemies set a trap for him by delaying the Plynteria by the intercalation of a day or days into the calendar. Since both Xenophon and Plutarch report a large crowd in the Piraeus gathered to witness Alcibiades' return,[57] it seems that neither Alcibiades nor his supporters were aware that this was the day of the Plynteria,[58] and this in turn suggests that an intercalation could occur without the fact being generally known: the process was evidently not as public as it might seem at first glance.

All of this shows that the Festival Calendar was liable to be out of step (sometimes significantly) with the seasons and thus with the *parapegma* and moon, and that the Athenians were well aware of this. Despite this it seems clear that it was the Festival Calendar, which Plutarch attributes to Solon,[59] that drove the lives of the ordinary Athenians. Within each month the days were divided into three decades (i.e. three groups of ten days, or two groups of ten and one of nine in a hollow month). The days of the first decade were expressed in terms of the 'rising' month: the first day of the month was designated that of the new moon (νουμηνία), while days in the rest of the first decade were numbered second, third, fourth etc. of the 'month as it became established' (ἱσταμένου μηνός). For example, the second and third days of the month would be designated δευτέρα ἱσταμένου and τρίτη ἱσταμένου respectively. The middle decade was numbered the eleventh, twelfth and so on and marked the period of the full moon. The final decade was numbered backwards as it led to the end of the month – the 21st of the month was called the tenth, the 22nd the ninth, and so on, of 'the month as it waned' (μηνὸς φθίνοντος). The final day of the month was the ἔνη καὶ νέα (i.e. both old and new to signify the transition from one lunar cycle to the next).[60] It is generally accepted that the day δευτέρα φθίνοντος (29th day as it waned) was the day omitted in a hollow month, although Merrit has argued that it was the second

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[54] Plut. *Alc.* 34.1

[55] Nagy (1994)

[56] Nagy (1994) 282

[57] Xen. *Hell.* 1.4.13 and Plut. *Alc.* 32.4

[58] Nagy (1994) 283

[59] Plut. *Sol.* 25.3

[60] Clarke (2008) 22-23

day of the third decade, ἐνάτη φθίνοντος (22nd day).[61] Pritchett and Samuel identify the 29th of the month as the day omitted in hollow months because of a scholion written by the fifth century AD neoplatonist philosopher Proclos on Hesiod's *Works and Days*, [62] which affirms that some months have 30 days and some have 29, when the day before the thirtieth is omitted by the Athenians. The exact wording of the text, which has given rise to numerous interpretations, is as follows:

ἄρχεται οὖν ὁ Ἡσίοδος ἐκ τῆς τριακάδος, καθ'ἣν ἡ ἀληθής ἐστι σύνοδος, ὁτὲ μὲν οὖσαν τριακάδα ἄνευ ἐξαιρέσεως, ὁτὲ δὲ κθ', ὅτε καὶ ὑπεξαιρεῖται ἡ πρὸ αὐτῆς ὑπὸ Ἀθηναίων[63]

Meritt argues that, as Hesiod is referring to the Boeotian Calendar in *Works and Days*, the reference to the Athenians must be a corruption in the scholion and does not represent what Proclos originally wrote.[64] Rejecting the premise that Hesoid's comments apply to the Athenian calendar, Meritt suggests that the months of the Festival Calendar, at the time of the Expedition, were as follows: [65]

1. νουμηνία
2. δευτέρα ἱσταμένου
3. τρίτη ἱσταμένου
4. τετρὰς ἱσταμένου
5. πέμπτη ἱσταμένου
6. ἕκτη ἱσταμένου
7. ἑβδόμη ἱσταμένου
8. ὀγδόη ἱσταμένου
9. ἐνάτη ἱσταμένου
10. δεκάτη ἱσταμένου
11. ἐνδεκάτη
12. δωδεκάτη
13. τρίτη ἐπὶ δέκα
14. τετρὰς ἐπὶ δέκα
15. πέμπτη ἐπὶ δέκα
16. ἕκτη ἐπὶ δέκα
17. ἑβδόμη ἐπὶ δέκα
18. ὀγδόη ἐπὶ δέκα
19. ἐνάτη ἐπὶ δέκα
20. εἰκάς, εἰκοστή, εἰκάδες, δεκάτη προτέρα

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[61] Merrit (1977b) 240-41

[62] Hes. *Op.* 765 and 817

[63] Procl. *In. Op.* 765

[64] Meritt (1974) 268

[65] Meritt (1974) 277

In a Full Month	In a Hollow Month
21. δεκάτη ὑστέρα	21. δεκάτη ὑστέρα
22. ἐνάτη φθίνοντος	22. ὀγδόη φθίνοντος
23. ὀγδόη φθίνοντος	23. ἑβδόμη φθίνοντος
24. ἑβδόμη φθίνοντος	24. ἕκτη φθίνοντος
25. ἕκτη φθίνοντος	25. πέμπτη φθίνοντος
26. πέμπτη φθίνοντος	26. τετρὰς φθίνοντος
27. τετρὰς φθίνοντος	27. τρίτη φθίνοντος
28. τρίτη φθίνοντος	28. δευτέρα φθίνοντος
29. δευτέρα φθίνοντος	29. ἕνη καὶ νέα
30. ἕνη καὶ νέα	

Pritchett and Samuel both follow a strict interpretation of the scholion, however, and maintain that, with the second to last day being the one omitted in a hollow month, the last decade of such a month should be read as follows: [66]

21. δεκάτη ὑστέρα
22. ἐνάτη φθίνοντος
23. ὀγδόη φθίνοντος
24. ἑβδόμη φθίνοντος
25. ἕκτη φθίνοντος
26. πέμπτη φθίνοντος
27. τετρὰς φθίνοντος
28. τρίτη φθίνοντος

29. ἕνη καὶ νέα

Pritchett's interpretation is usually accepted by scholars today[67] and, when one considers that Proclus studied and spent most of his life in Athens,[68] it seems perfectly plausible that he uses the Athenian Calendar as a frame of reference when commenting on Hesiod. Furthermore, Pritchett has forcefully argued that there is no literary or epigraphic evidence to suggest that the 22nd day was the one omitted.[69] Nonetheless, although the majority of scholarly opinion sides with Pritchett, in his recent study of the Athenian Calendar, Planeaux suggests that the omitted day must have been earlier in the month than the 29th. Homicide trials, when required, took place just prior to each νουμηνία and the Areopagus Council set aside the final four days of each month to hold these trials as this was a period when the moon failed to appear in the sky making

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[66] Samuel (1969) 60; Pritchett (1963) 350. Insert adapted from Meritt (1974) 277

[67] Samuel (1969) ; Hannah (2005) ; Clarke (2008)

[68] *OCD* 1250

[69] Pritchett (2001) 67

the day (ἡμέρα) impure, or polluted (ἀποφράς). Planeaux convincingly argues that removing an impure day seems improbable[70] as these impure days were set aside by the Areopagus for the holding of homicide trials. These trials processed some of the most elaborate rituals and procedures in Athenian jurisprudence and had to take place when the moon failed to appear in the sky. Moving these impure days does not seem to be an option. In addition, the *Khalkeia* and *Diosoteria* festivals both fell in the final days of two separate months, also making their movement improbable.[71] Although the argument is far from conclusive it does suggest that it may be Merrit's interpretation which is correct and that Pritchett was wrong to rely on the scholion.

Planeaux has gone on to postulate that, by making observations of the moon throughout the month, the Athenians would be able to make an informed prediction after the moon vanished from view during the morning of the 20th as to whether the current on-going synodic month would contain 29 or 30 days. The evidence would be presented to the Archon who would then declare the current civil month full or hollow by sunrise on the 21st and post the notice in the agora.[72] Although the mathematics and astronomy in Planeaux's theory are correct, it does present serious practical difficulties. If the Archon did not declare until sunrise on the 21st whether the on-going month had 29 or 30 days, this would present difficulties to the people of Attica even if the day to be omitted was the 29th (eight days away) and would especially problematic if (as Planeaux holds) the day to be omitted was the 22nd (i.e. the very next day).

If the actual length of the month was not declared until its course was almost run, people wishing to come from the more distant parts of Attica towards the end of the month for festivals or to lodge court-deposits or settle debts might be uncertain about when to make the journey.

It is clear that, although Planeaux's theory answers many questions regarding the Athenian calendars, there are still practical difficulties that need to be ironed out. No current theory of Attic time reckoning is free from inconsistencies and these inconsistences must be balanced when attempting to reconstruct exact dates in fifth century Athens. There will always be a margin of error in any calculation.

3.4   The Prytany Calendar

Although it was the Festival Calendar that regulated the lives of the ordinary Athenians, political and legal proceedings were driven by the third calendar in use in Athens, the Prytany Calendar. The date of the introduction of this calendar has been the cause of much debate. Keil and Merrit

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[70] Planeaux (2021) 75

[71] Planeaux (2021) 44

[72] Planeaux (2021) 145-148 Planeaux suggests that in the event of any disruption to calculations, such as two weeks of inopportune heavy cloud cover, any errors could be retrospectively corrected by the Archon once presented with the astronomical data.

attribute it to Cleisthenes and his reforms at the end of the sixth century,[73] whereas Rhodes ascribes it to the reforms of Ephialtes in the mid-fifth century (around 461). He argues that, as the prestige of the Archons was under attack at the time, it would make it a suitable juncture for the creation of an alternative to the old archontic year.[74] Pritchett is in agreement with Merrit here, however, and favours a date of 502/1,[75] a year of the great Panathenaia and the date when the *Athenian Constitution* states that an oath of office was instituted for the *boule* of Five Hundred and the ten *strategoi* were first appointed by tribe, one from each tribe.[76] The Prytany Calendar was based on the terms of service of each of the Athenian tribes as *prytaneis* (executives) of the *Boule*. During the fifth century, when there were ten tribes in Athens,[77] the Pritchett-Neugebauer hypothesis holds that the Prytany Year had 366 days with the first 6 months having 37 days and the final 4 months having 36 days.[78] The most important text used in the formulation of this hypothesis is *IG* I³ 369, an inscription found on the acropolis which contains a record of the numerous loans made to the Athenian State from sacred treasuries over a period of the four successive prytany years from 426-423. It has become known as the *Logistai Inscription.* From the inscription it can be calculated that the four years in question contained 1464 days. 1464 divided by 4 is exactly 366 showing that a prytany year at this time had 366 days. In addition, the inscription records the amount of the principal loaned to the state, the interest accrued on these payments as computed up to the last day of the quadrennium, and the day of the prytany month on which the loan was made. As each record shows the date the loan was paid along with the number of days remaining in the quadrennium, tables can be constructed enabling the computation of days in each prytany. For example, the table for the first year (426/5) is shown below.

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[73] Keil (1894) 74-5; Merrit (1961) 71-2, 124-6

[74] Rhodes (1972) 224-5

[75] Pritchett (2001) 146-7

[76] Arist. [*Ath. Pol.*] 22.2

[77] The ten tribes of the fifth century were as follows:
- Erechtheis (Ἐρεχθηΐς),
- Aigeis (Αἰγηΐς),
- Pandionis (Πανδιονίς),
- Leontis (Λεοντίς),
- Acamantis (Ἀκαμαντίς),
- Oineis (Οἰνηΐς),
- Kekropis (Κεκροπίς),
- Hippothontis (Ἱπποθοντίς),
- Aiantis (Αἰαντίς),
- Antiochis (Ἀντιοχίς)

[78] Pritchett and Neugebauer (1947) 94-108

Number of Prytany	Number of Days in Prytany	Date of Loan	Number of days outstanding
I	37		
II	37	4 [31]	1424 1397
III	37		
IV	37	5	[1349]
V	37		
VI	37		
VII	36		
VIII	36	5 [10]	1202 1197
IX	36		
X	36	7	

Table 1: Dates of Loans Made to the Athenian State by the Sacred Treasuries in 426/5

Similar tables for the subsequent three years all indicate that the first 6 prytanies had 37 days and the final 4 had 36. In addition, Pritchett and Neugebauer also cite *IG* I³ 376, an inscription which details the Erechtheum payment accounts for 408/7. These payments enable us to ascertain the daily rate of pay for the architect and the sub-secretary. This daily rate then enables us to work out the number of days in each prytany, and the computations again come out as 37 days for the first 6 prytanies and 36 for the remaining 4.[79] This would suggest that this numbering of prytany months was in use during the Expedition and the years approaching it. It also corresponds closely, but not exactly, to the arrangement detailed in the *Athenian Constitution* for the fourth century. Pseudo-Aristotle tells us that "each tribe's members in turn, as determined by lot, form the prytany, the first 4 for 36 days and the remaining 6 for 35 days each."[80] The *Athenian Constitution* details an arrangement that was in use in the fourth century, after the reforms of 407 which brought the festival and prytany calendars in line by making them coterminous. Prior to the reforms of 407, however, details are uncertain and we can only turn to reconstructions and theories such as those proposed by Pritchett and Neugebauer. The close correlation between the proposed theory and that detailed in the *Athenian Constitution* is, however, taken by Pritchett and Neugebauer as an indication that their theory is correct.[81]

It must be noted, however, that Merrit does not accept this theory[82] and Rhodes, in his commentary on the *Athenian Constitution*, states that he believes Pritchett has too much faith in

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[79] Pritchett and Neugebauer (1947) 96

[80] Arist. [*Ath. Pol.*] 43.2

[81] Pritchett and Neugebauer (1947) 97

[82] Merrit (1971) 101

the *Athenian Constitution*.[83] In addition, in his recent study of the Athenian calendar, Planeaux makes the very obvious, but seemingly previously ignored, point that, if the Prytany Calendar was fixed at 366 days, the first day of the calendar would very quickly drift away from the summer solstice and the start of the civil calendar.[84] According to Pritchett's hypothesis the Prytany Year would drift, and on that basis Planeaux rejects the notion that the quadrennium (426-23) analysed by Pritchett and Neugebauer indicates some norm.[85]

It must further be noted that, although it was not until 407 that the Athenians made the Festival and Prytany Calendars coterminous (so that Hekatombaion 1 = Prytany I.1), it would seem a fairly safe assumption (albeit unattested) that prior to 407 the two calendars started and ended on roughly the same date. Given that the Festival Year was named after the Eponymous Archon and started when he took office, it would make no sense for the incoming *Boule* to begin their tenure at a date which was months away from the beginning of the Archon's term of office. We have seen that according to the *Athenian Constitution*, the Prytany Year had 354 days. We have also established that the years of the Festival Calendar could have three different lengths (384 in an intercalated year or 355/354 in an ordinary year depending on the number of hollow months). This leaves a problem with overlaying the two calendars as they would soon get completely out of synchronisation. Planeaux postulates that festival years which had 355 days would have a corresponding Prytany Year where one month had 37 days or else had 5 months of 36 days rather than the usual 4. He further postulates that in intercalary years, the Prytany Calendar would have 6 months of 38 days and 4 of 39.[86] Although the mathematics work, there is no hard documentary or epigraphical evidence to suggest that this was the case. In the absence of any suggestion of how the Athenians kept the two calendars aligned, however, any attempt to reconcile them is pure supposition. In fact, the earliest inscription we have giving the day in terms of the festival and prytany calendars is on the Choiseul Marble (*IG* I³ 377), which records payments from the treasury of Athena.[87] The dating of this inscription, however, caused a bitter and vitriolic debate between Pritchett and Merrit, which resulted in the two scholars questioning each other's ability to translate Greek and read inscriptions.[88] The obverse face of the Choiseul Marble contains accounts from 410/09. The rest of the stone is extremely weathered and Pritchett has ascribed some lines to 408/7 and 407/6. If correct, then this stone is a record which bridges the period point where the Athenians transitioned to coterminous calendars. However, the arguments over the Choiseul Marble run very deep and have little bearing on the study of the Sicilian Expedition, given that the dates in question on the Marble are all after the Expedition had

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[83] Rhodes, *CAAP* 519

[84] Planeaux (2021) 200

[85] Planeaux (2021) 200

[86] Planeaux (2021) 2-3

[87] Pritchett (2001) 182

[88] Merrit (1974) 271; Merrit (1977b) 230; Merrit (1979) 151 are but three examples.

concluded. The Sicilian Expedition lies squarely in the period before the Festival and Prytany Calendars were coterminous.

Planeaux has noted through reconstructions of the night sky over Athens in the fifth century that the tenth month of the Prytany Year in 422/1 began the day after the morning setting of the star Arcturus (an astronomical event which is known as AS α Boö[89] and marks the beginning of summer). From this Planeaux hypothesised that the Athenians used a significant or obvious astronomical event to guide the Prytany Year and that this event was the morning setting of the star Arcturus (AS α Boö) Planeaux makes a supposition that Athenian astronomers reported the AS α Boö to the *Boule* and the next prytany I.1 always fell on the 37th day after the AS α Boö.[90] The astronomical calculations for this are, however, not conclusive and over a 16 year period it can be seen that the supposition is correct (i.e. Prytany I.1 fell on the 37th day after the AS α Boö) on eight occasions, but on the other eight years the calculation is off by one day. Planeaux argues that this discrepancy is a result of retroactively calculating Julian leap years for the period in question, as such leap years align with the vernal equinox and not AS α Boö. Again, although Planeaux's astronomical calculations are correct, without documentary or epigraphical evidence it remains possible that the start of the tenth prytany month after AS α Boö to within a day may be nothing more than a coincidence, albeit a rather striking one.

The order in which the ten tribes held their respective *prytaneis* was determined by annual lot and the order would have differed from year to year.[91] The counting of days using the Prytany Calendar, however, is slightly confused. In the fourth century the days were numbered in succession from beginning to end, using ordinal numbers (i.e. the thirty-fourth day of the prytany – τετάρτηι καὶ τριακοστῆι τῆς πρυτανείας). In fifth century inscriptions, however, cardinal then ordinal numerals were used in the formula ἐσεληλυθυίας ἡμέρας τῆς πρυτανείας and there is an instance of indication of date by notation of the days remaining in the prytany and a reference to the last day as a τελευταία.[92] There are, however, no recorded instances of manipulation of the Prytany Calendar by the insertion or deletion of days, such as those which are well attested in the Festival Calendar.

We do have some, occasionally conflicting, evidence regarding which administrative bodies used which calendar, as some appear to have used the Festival Calendar, with others using the Prytany Calendar. The Areopagos tried murder cases on the two or three impure (ἀσέληνοι) days at the end of the lunar month of the Festival Calendar, which as Pritchett points out, must

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[89] AS α Boö is a modern astronomical term and not an ancient Greek term. It is an abbreviation of the 'Acronychal Setting of α Boötis'. Acronychal is the astronomical term for morning and α Boötis is the designation given to the star Arcturus by Johann Bayer in 1603 AD (meaning the brightest star in the constellation Boötis). Therefore, AS α Boö means the morning setting of Arcturus.

[90] Planeaux (2021) 161-2

[91] Arist. [*Ath. Pol.*] 43.2

[92] Samuel (1969) 63

pre-date the Prytany Calendar, suggesting the courts continued to use a lunar calendar after the introduction of the prytany solar calendar.[93] As mentioned previously, the last day of the month of the Festival Calendar was fixed for the lodging of deposits by intended litigants. We do, however, have plenty of evidence to suggest that the majority of financial dealings (such as the *Logistai Inscription*, above) were done by the Prytany Calendar, something perhaps explained in part by the stability of this calendar compared to that of the festival year. In addition, as Rhodes points out, the *Boule* was regarded as generally responsible for the financial well-being of Athens[94] and there was a general rule that all public debts whether sacred or secular were to be discharged in the presence of the *Boule*,[95] making the Prytany Calendar the natural calendar by which to administer financial dealings. We have a complete stele[96] from 367/66 which gives the *poletai*[97] record of that year and a list of confiscated property. The stele records the sale and registration of a house by the Festival Calendar, but mining concessions, a loss of civic rights by a debtor and salary payments by the Prytany Calendar.[98] Both Aeschines and Demosthenes refer to the meetings of the Assembly in terms of the Festival Calendar,[99] and in Lysias we are told that the fresh cheese market was held on the last day of the festival month.[100] We have marriage and divorce documents referring to the Festival Calendar and this all serves to highlight that the Festival Calendar must have been used for a general indication of time, whereas the more stable Prytany Calendar was used for activities such as financial transactions which needed a more stable footing.

3.5   The Olympic Calendar

As well as the Festival and the Prytany Calendar there is also evidence for two other calendars in Athens. Firstly, there was the Olympic Calendar, which only counted years. This was devised in order to provide a common frame of reference when reconciling historical events recorded by the local calendars of the numerous Greek *poleis*. This calendar became popular with later historical writers such as Diodorus and is used sporadically by Thucydides and Xenophon.[101] Plutarch credits the fifth century sophist Hippias of Elis with the first recording of a canonical sequence of Olympic victors.[102] Hippias also determined that the first games were held at Olympia in the summer of the year now termed 776 BC. Therefore, the year of the first Olympiad is termed Ol.

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[93] Pritchett (2001) 33

[94] Rhodes (1972) 89

[95] Rhodes (1972) 94

[96] Agora XIX P5

[97] The *poletai* were the officials responsible for selling public contracts such as for collecting taxes and for working sacred land and the silver mines, as well as for selling confiscated property.

[98] Crosby and Young (1941)

[99] Pritchett (2001) 34

[100] Lys. 23.6

[101] Thuc. 3.8.1 and Xen. *Hell.* 1.2.1

[102] Plut. *Num.* 1.4

1.1 and signifies 776/5 BC. As there were four years between each Olympiad the sequence runs as follows:

Ol. 1.1 = 776/5 BC
Ol. 1.2 = 775/4 BC
Ol. 1.3 = 774/3 BC
Ol. 1.4 = 773/2 BC
Ol. 2.1 = 772/1 BC and so on.

The Olympic Calendar appears only to have been used for historical purposes as its inherent imprecision (for example the exact starting point of each year is uncertain) makes it inadequate for daily use, along with the fact it contains no months or days of its own.

There has been much discussion about the exact start of the year of the Olympiad (and as such the start date of each Olympic Games). The scant evidence we have focuses on two Alexandrian scholia of Pindar which refers to dates in the Egyptian calendar and claims the Olympiad festival fell at full moon alternately after 49 and 50 months, but scholars now reject the evidence in the scholia as unreliable.[103] The only satisfactory evidence we have comes from Herodotus: this indicates that the festival fell in mid-summer,[104] and Samuel has shown that the festival culminated with the full moon.[105] This is important to us as the Olympics of 416 (the 91st Olympiad) will be seen to be a key event in the run up to the Sicilian Expedition. By this reckoning it is likely to have taken place in July of 416 culminating with the full moon at the end of the month.

3.6   The Metonic Calendar

Finally, there was a nineteen-year solar-lunar calendar (ἐννεακαιδεκαετηρίς) introduced by the fifth century Athenian astronomer Meton, who had an observatory behind the podium of the Pynx on Lykabettos Hill and who is roundly lampooned by Aristophanes.[106] Following an observation of the summer solstice in 432 BC on 28 June (by our Julian calendar) he calculated that 19 solar years (6939.562641 days) almost exactly equals 235 lunar months (6939.539757 days). Once rounded, each cycle counted 6,940 full days with the cycle erring one full day every 219 years. Meton had calculated that following the end of his 6940-day cycle the sun and moon would be in the same positions in the sky in which they had started and so this 19 year cycle was termed the Metonic Calendar, with the first cycle running from the Summer Solstice of 432 to the Summer

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[103] Samuel (1969)

[104] Hdt. 7.206; 8.26

[105] Samuel (1969) 194

[106] Ar. *Av.* 992-1019

Solstice of 413.[107] Merrit and Planeaux suggest that, using this calendar, the Athenians could systematically and accurately align their two astronomical calendars (solar and lunar) by having 125 full months and 110 hollow months (125 x 30 + 110 x 29 = 6940) and intercalating 7 years during the course of the cycle (235 = 19 × 12 + 7). Meton's calendar would either have used a repeating sequence of 15 and 13 alternating full and hollow months,[108] or a continuous series of full months with an omission every 63 days.[109] Both of these sequences are compatible with Meton's calendar and one of them would have had to have been utilised to make it work. Scholars have argued over which cycle is correct for decades[110]

Pritchett and Neugebauer, however, whilst recognising the existence of the Metonic Calendar, reject its utility in the restoration of the Athenian calendar. Whereas Merrit and others have used it to identify which years of the Festival Calendar were intercalary years, Pritchett and Neugebauer maintain that there is no fixed arrangement of ordinary and intercalary years and also reject Merrit's theory that each 19-year Metonic cycle must contained seven intercalary years.[111] Planeaux further points out that, although he views Meton's achievements as outstanding and fascinating, the utility of these achievements in solving the problems plaguing the Attic Festival and Prytany calendars is tangential. Although, by using Meton's calculations, the Festival and Prytany calendars can be perfectly aligned by intercalating over the 19-year cycle, it turns out that the dates that would need to be omitted over the 19 years to produce the requisite number of hollow months include a significant number of festival days and impure days – days that the Athenians would not have removed from their calendars. If the option of 15 and 13 alternating months is followed, then days from the Lenaia, City Dionysia, Eleusinian Mysteries and other festivals would have to be omitted.   A similar pattern emerges when the option of an omission every 64th day is adopted.[112] This being so, Planeaux suggests that the Metonic calendar should be rejected as a means of aligning the Festival and Prytany calendars.[113]

Dinsmoor made the suggestion that the Metonic Solar Year should be equated with the Prytany Year following the introduction of the Metonic Calendar in 432, and in fact further argued that Meton himself introduced the conciliar year.[114] This argument has not been accepted, however, and Merrit has shown that the conciliar calendar was in use at least as far back as 447 and probably originated at the time of Cleisthenes' reforms.

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[107] Planeaux (2021) 51 See also Theophr. *Signs.* 4; Ael. *VH* 10.7; Diod. Sic. 12.36.2 and Ptol. *Alm.* 3.1 H205

[108] i.e. back-to-back full months every 15th and 13th month in succession.

[109] i.e drop every 64th day thus creating a hollow month.

[110] Planeaux (2021) 51

[111] Pritchett and Neugebauer (1947) 7-10

[112] Planeaux (2021) 85; 328-347 for the full plotting of both cycles.

[113] Planeaux (2021) 81

[114] Dinsmoor (1931) 329 n1

3.7   Aligning 416-414 with the Julian Calendar

The fact that there were at least five separate calendars in use in Athens, coupled with disagreement about and incomplete understanding of their operation makes it extremely difficult to assign dates in the Julian Calendar to events recorded in ancient Athens. This difficulty is compounded by the fact that the Prytany and Festival Calendars were not coterminous until the reforms of 407. After this date the Prytany Calendar began on first visibility after summer solstice (i.e. Hekatombaion 1). Prior to this, however, the starting point cannot be determined with confidence for every year.

Nonetheless in his book *Athenian Financial Documents* (and later refined in *The Athenian Year*) Meritt constructed a table which aligns the date of the first day of the Festival Calendar (Hekatombaion 1), the first day of the conciliar year (Prytany I 1) and the equivalent Julian date. We know that Meton's first cycle began on the summer solstice of 432 on Skirophorian 13, which Meritt also takes to be Hekatombaion 1 of the archonship of Pythodoros (432/1). He argues that, since this day was the beginning of his new astronomic calendar, it is hardly conceivable that Meton began at variance with the Festival Calendar and it may therefore be taken as certain that in 432 the new year (Hekatombaion 1) began with that date. We also know from astronomical calculations that the crescent moon was first visible on 17 July in the Julian calendar, and thus Meritt's first anchor point is July 17 432 = Hekatombaion 1 = Skirophorion 13.[115] Next, the *Logistai Inscription* (*IG* I³ 369 – discussed above in section 3.4), which details various loans and interest calculated over a quadrennium 426/5 – 423/2 and enables the alignment of the Festival and Prytany calendar for those years,[116] was used to provide further anchors. Meritt takes it the first day of the Prytany Calendar was the summer solstice on the basis that it must have been regulated roughly as a seasonal year.[117] This allowed him to fix Hekatombaion 1 of 422/1 using the *Logistai Inscription*. We know from the inscription that the eighth day from the end of Skirophorion was the same as the twentieth day of Prytany X and we know that the new moon which began the following festival year was near the end of that June. Astronomical calculations show that the new crescent was first visible on June 28 and this is therefore the date Merrit takes as the beginning of the festival year of 422/1. He then uses the sequence of ordinary and intercalary years derived from Dinsmoor's study of the order of full and hollow months after the introduction of Meton's nineteen-year cycle, reinforced with epigraphic evidence from payments made by the state,[118] to provide the dates for the years 422 down to 411 which covers our period of interest. His calculations are as follows:

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[115] Meritt (1961) 215

[116] See Planeaux (2021) 38 for a succinct example.

[117] Meritt (1961) 216

[118] Merrit (1932) 152-176

		FESTIVAL YEAR			CONCILIAR YEAR		
		Attic inter-calation	Date of Hekatom-baion 1	Number of days	Date of Prytany I 1	Number of days	Julian inter-calation
	433/2	I	June 28	384	Hek. 7 = July 4	365	O
First Metonic Cycle	432/1	(O)	July 17	355	Skir. 17/18 = July 4	365	O
	431/0	(O)	July 7	354	Skir. 27/28 = July 4	365	O
	430/29	(I)	June 26	384	Hek. 9 = July 4	366	I
	429/8	(O)	July 14	354	Skir. 20/21 = July 4	365	O
	428/7	(I)	July 3	384	Hek. 2 = July 4	365	O
	427/6	(O)	July 22	354	Skir. 12/13 = July 4	365	O
	426/5	(I)	July 11	384	Skir. 23/24 = July 4	366	I
	425/4	O [38]	July 29	355	Skir. 5/6 = July 4	368	O
	424/3	O	July 19	355	Skir. 18/19 = July 7	365	O
	423/2	O	July 9	354	Skir. 28/29 = July 7	365	O
	422/1	I	June 28	384	Hek. 10 = July 7	366	I
	421/0	O	July 16	354	Skir. 21/22 = July 7	366	O
	420/19	O	July 5	354	Hek. 4 = July 8	366	O
	419/8	I	June 24	384	Hek. 16 = July 9	365	O
	418/7	O	July 13 [37]	354	Skir. 26/27 = July 9	366	I
	417/6	I	July 1	384	Hek. 9 = July 9	365	O
	416/5	O	July 20	355	Skir. 19/20 = July 9	365	O
	415/4	I	July 10	384	Skir. 29/30 = July 9	365	O
	414/3	I	July 29	384	Skir. 10/11 = July 9	366	I
Second Metonic Cycle	413/2	O	Aug. 16	354	Tharg.22/23= July 9	365	O
	412/1	O	Aug. 5	354	Skir. 3/4 = July 9	(365)	O
	411/0	O [38]	July 25	354	⟨Skir. 14⟩ = July 9	(– –)	O
	410/09	O	July 14	355	(Skir. 15) = June 29	(370)	I
	409/8	(I)	July 3	384	(?) Hek. 1 = July 3	(384)	O
	408/7	(O)	July 22	354	(?) Hek. 1 = July 22	(354)	O
	407/6	O	July 11	354	Hek. 1 = July 11	354	O
	406/5	(I)	June 30 [39]	384	Hek. 1 = June 30	384	I
	405/4	(O)	July 18 [40]	355	Hek. 1 = July 18	355	O
	404/3	(–)			Hek. 1 = July 8	(– –)	O

Table 2: The Seasonal Year. Merrit (1961) 218

Although his findings are not universally accepted (and were indeed roundly rejected by Pritchett who wrote a long rebuttal of it),[119] he identifies the first day of the Prytany Year of 415/14 as July 9 (Skirophorion 29/30 in the Festival Calendar). This makes it possible to attempt to place the events leading up to the Sicilian Expedition into specific prytanies.

On the basis of Meritt's deductions and the Pritchett-Neugebauer hypothesis that the first six months of the Prytany Year had 37 days and the final 4 months 36 days, the following tables can be constructed giving the approximate dates for the prytanies of 416/15 and 415/14. (Note that there is no Julian leap year to contend with here. By our modern calendar the years 413 and 417 would have been leap years containing a February 29.)

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[119] Pritchett (1963) 319-325

Prytany I	July 8 – August 13 (416BC)
Prytany II	August 14 – September 19
Prytany III	September 20 - October 26
Prytany IV	October 27 – December 2
Prytany V	December 3 – January 8 (415BC)
Prytany VI	January 9 – February 14
Prytany VII	February 15 – March 22
Prytany VIII	March 23 – April 27
Prytany IX	April 28 – June 2
Prytany X	June 3 – July 8

Prytany I	July 9 – August 14 (415BC)
Prytany II	August 15 – September 20
Prytany III	September 21 - October 27
Prytany IV	October 28 – December 3
Prytany V	December 4 – January 9 (414BC)
Prytany VI	January 10 – February 15
Prytany VII	February 16 – March 23
Prytany VIII	March 24 – April 28
Prytany IX	April 29 – June 3
Prytany X	June 4 – July 9

Table 3: Prytany Months 416-414

Given that this table has been constructed using two conflicting theories, there will undoubtedly be a margin of error in its use. For example, the start date for the table is Merrit's computation that Prytany I day 1 of 415/14 was July 9. Counting backwards using the Pritchett- Neugebauer hypothesis about the length of prytany months gives us Prytany I day 1 of 416/15 as July 8. Merrit, however, believes this to be July 9 as he ascribes 365 days to the Prytany Year not 366. Nevertheless, the table is the best that can be constructed given the evidence we have and a margin of error must be accepted. It should be noted that this table has been constructed specifically for the purposes of this thesis and that no comparable table has been found in the modern literature. Scholars have on occasion attempted to ascribe individual events to dates in the Julian calendar (and these will be referenced throughout), but no complete table for the years in question appears to exist.

In his recent study of Athenian temporal systems Planeaux has mapped the dates in the Festival Calendar for 416/15 and 415/14 to our modern Julian calendar. Planeaux has used computer

reconstructions of the Athenian skies of the period to determine which lunar (synodic) months had 29 days and which had 30 days and used this data to determine which months were hollow and which were full, arguing that the Athenians would have known through astronomical observations by the 21st of the month whether the on-going sideral month had 29 or 30 days, and that once they had that information the Archon would have declared the on-going month hollow or full. Planeaux's detailed and extensive calculations are also linked to Meton's 19-year cycle, which he uses to determine that the year 415/14 was an intercalary year, containing an additional month of Skirophorion.[120] (Merrit's calculations, following Dinsmoor, identify the intercalary month as an additional Hekatombaion at the start of the year rather than an additional Skirophorion at the end. [121] Without evidence it is impossible to determine which is correct so the later month has been followed here.) Planeaux's calculation represents the ideal calendar based on astronomical calculations but, given that we know the Athenians were prone to making alterations to the Festival Calendar to suit their purposes, there is again a margin of error in these findings, even considering that Planeaux argues that the Athenians used the ideal calendar as an anchor to which they returned as soon as they were aware of any deviations from it. Like many of Planeaux's suppositions, his claims regarding which months were full and which were hollow are scientifically sound but have no supporting documentary evidence. That said, however, using evidence determining the length of the sideral month would seem to be sound and this has been done here to determine the lengths of the months of the years 416/15 and 415/4 and map them to Julian dates.

Year 416/15 (Archon Arimnestos)

Month	Hollow or Full	Julian Date of 1st of Month
Hekatombaion (Ἑκατομβαιών)	H	19 Jul 416 BC
Metageitnion (Μεταγειτνιών)	F	17 Aug
Boedromion (Βοηδρομιών)	H	16 Sep
Pyanepsion (Πυανεψιών)	F	15 Oct
Maimakterion (Μαιμακτηριών)	H	14 Nov
Poseideon (Ποσειδεών)	F	13 Dec
Gamelion (Γαμηλιών)	H	12 Jan 415 BC
Anthesterion (Ἀνθεστηριών)	F	10 Feb

[120] Planeaux (2021) 336

[121] Merrit (1932) 172-3

Month	Hollow or Full	Julian Date of 1st of Month
Elaphebolion (Ἐλαφηβολιών)	H	12 Mar
Mounichion (Μουνιχιών)	F	10 Apr
Thargelion (Θαργηλιών)	F	10 May
Skirophorion (Σκιροφοριών)	H	9 Jun

Year 415/14 (Archon Charias)

Month	Hollow or Full	Julian Date of 1st of Month
Hekatombaion (Ἑκατομβαιών)	F	8 Jul 415 BC
Metageitnion (Μεταγειτνιών)	H	7 Aug
Boedromion (Βοηδρομιών)	F	5 Sep
Pyanepsion (Πυανεψιών)	H	5 Oct
Maimakterion (Μαιμακτηριών)	F	3 Nov
Poseideon (Ποσειδεών)	H	3 Dec
Gamelion (Γαμηλιών)	F	1 Jan 414 BC
Anthesterion (Ἀνθεστηριών)	H	31 Jan
Elaphebolion (Ἐλαφηβολιών)	F	1 Mar
Mounichion (Μουνιχιών)	H	31 Mar
Thargelion (Θαργηλιών)	F	29 Apr
Skirophorion (Σκιροφοριών)	H	29 May
Skirophorion II (Σκιροφοριών)	F	27 Jun

Table 4: Festival Calendar Months 416-414

This is mapped against the Prytany Calendar and Julian Calendar below in tables 5 and 6.

It will be seen in Chapter 8 that, with the exception of the eclipse which prevented the rapid departure of the Athenians from Sicily in 413, there are no other details for which Julian equivalences of the Prytany or Festival Calendars would be useful. That being so, tables have only been constructed for the years 416/15 and 415/14, as it is here that issues around precise chronology are most apparent. In addition, it is a matter of debate whether 414/13 was an intercalary year or not and it is also a Julian leap year. These intricacies coupled with the limited

usefulness of a table for 414/13 resulted in a decision to construct tables for 416/15 and 415/14 only.

Thucydides states that it was in the winter of 416/5 that "the Athenians resolved to sail again against Sicily with larger forces than those which Laches and Eurymedon had commanded, and, if possible, to conquer it".[122] This decision must have been made fairly early on in the winter of 416 as by early spring an Athenian delegation had been sent to and returned from Egesta.[123] It had been Egesta that made the initial request for Athenian aid in their struggle against the city-state of Selinus. The delegation was sent to Sicily to ascertain the position of the war between Egesta and Selinus and also to see first-hand whether the Egestans had the money with which they had promised to pay for Athenian aid.[124] On this basis a date of November / December 416 would seem reasonable for the decision to have been made, and we can tentatively assign this to Prytany IV. We know from Thucydides that the Expedition finally sailed in late June: "After this, when it was already midsummer, they put to sea for Sicily".[125] This would place the departure of the Expedition in Prytany X of 416/15, with the wrangling in the Assembly prior to the Expedition taking place in Prytanies IX and X and probably extending back into Prytany VIII.

3.8   The Calendars and the Constitution

The attempt to construct a timeline of events before and during the Expedition entails an understanding of when the Assembly met in the run up to the Expedition's departure. This brings us to the relationship between the calendars and the operation of the city's democratic institutions.

The *Athenian Constitution* states that the Assembly met four times in each prytany.[126] Although the *Athenian Constitution* was written in the fourth century, there is no evidence to suggest that the process of government was any different in the late fifth century. The first meeting was the principal assembly at which there is a vote of confidence in the officials and the defence of the country and food supplies are discussed. The second assembly was devoted to supplications and the remaining two assemblies were devoted to other business including religious matters and matters concerning heralds and embassies.[127] There also appears to have been a mechanism to call extra-ordinary assemblies, although the sources are unclear on the matter. There is certainly evidence of an extra-ordinary assembly held in 339 which authorised Demosthenes to negotiate an alliance with Thebes,[128] although there is no clear evidence for the

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[122] Thuc. 6.1.1

[123] Thuc. 6.6 – 8.8

[124] Thuc. 6.6.3

[125] Thuc. 6.30.1

[126] Arist. [*Ath. Pol.*] 43.4-6

[127] Arist. [*Ath. Pol.*] 43.6

[128] Dem. *De cor.* 169-79

facility of extra-ordinary assemblies at the time of the Expedition. Thucydides notes that at the beginning of the war Pericles "summoned no assembly or special meeting of the people".[129] This passage has been interpreted by both Harris and Gomme to suggest that Pericles saw to it that no extra meetings of the Assembly were held in addition to the four scheduled meetings.[130] This would suggest that extra-ordinary assemblies could indeed be held in the fifth century as well as the fourth.

The timing of the four assemblies held in each prytany is also uncertain. Epigraphic evidence for the period of the Expedition is scant. However, if one looks at the entire period during which there were 10 tribes, we have 41 dated records of meetings of the Assembly, of which nine were held on the 11th of the month (using the Festival Calendar, not the Prytany Calendar) and 13 were held on the 29th or 30th of the month.[131] Although the Prytany Calendar regulated the majority of administrative procedures in Athens, it seems likely that the demos was much more familiar with the Festival Calendar and in any case the dates of meetings of the Assembly had to be tied to the Festival Calendar so that they would not clash with important festivals. The Prytany Calendar was an innovation created in either 502 or 461[132] and used exclusively for the running of the *Boule* and Assembly. As Hansen stresses, everyone would know it was the 16th of Pyanopsion, although no one except the members of the *prytaneis* themselves would offhand recognise the 33rd day of Prytany III.[133] This being so, even though the number of regular meetings of the Assembly was set at four in a prytany month, the dates of those four meetings would have been linked to the Festival Calendar. It would make sense to hold meetings on days when there would be a high concentration of citizens in Athens. The 11th of the month was a few days after a series of festival days (1-4 and 6-8)[134] and would give time for the *probouleumata* (preliminary decree) to be prepared by the *Boule*, which like the Assembly could not meet on festival days.[135] In addition, Aristophanes shows how important the last day of each month in the Festival Calendar (the ἕνη καὶ νέα) was for economic transactions. In the play *Clouds*, Strepsiades claims "that day I fear and dread above all others, the last day of the month, 'Old and New Day'! All my creditors swear that if I don't pay up they're going to hand in their court deposits".[136] On this evidence it would seem that the last day of the month would see a high concentration of citizens in Athens all aiming to undertake financial transactions, making it an ideal date to hold an assembly. So, although Pritchett claims that "no student of calendar equations has endorsed a theory that the *ekklesia* met according to days in the Festival

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[129] Thuc. 2.22.1

[130] Harris (1986) 374; *HCT* 2 76

[131] Hansen (1993) 110

[132] Hansen (1993) 109

[133] Hansen (1993) 109

[134] Harris (1986) 340

[135] Hansen (1993) 111

[136] Ar. *Nub.* 1134 (see also 1179 and 1197 for similar examples)

Calendar",[137] the evidence, albeit circumstantial, suggests that the Festival Calendar did have a significant bearing on the dates of the sitting of the Assembly.

The Prytany Calendar also drove other key events in Athens. For example, Merrit has shown that the normal time for leasing sacred properties was during the ninth prytany, because it was the end of the fiscal year as far as precinct rentals were concerned.[138] The *Athenian Constitution* tells us that "the election of generals, cavalry, commanders and the other military officers is held in the assembly, in whatever way the people see fit: this election is held by the first prytany after the sixth in whose term of office there are good omens."[139] The *Athenian Constitution* is unclear about the term of office of these officials, but Rhodes suggests that the term of office began at the start of the Festival Calendar and that the duration of these offices was the same as that as the Archon for that year.[140] As regards what would constitute 'good omens' we have little to go on, although we can infer from Aristophanes that thunder, lightning and an eclipse did not prevent the election of Cleon.

> …we protested
> With knitted brow we thundered, lightning flared,
> The moon forsook her path, the sun declared
> That, if that villain won, he'd quench his flame.
> And you elected Cleon just the same!*[141]*

3.9   Payments made to the *Strategoi*

A piece of Pentelic marble uncovered near the acropolis once formed part of the treasury accounts of the Goddess Athena and records payments made by the treasurers to the *strategoi* commanding the Sicilian Expedition just before they set sail (*IG* I³ 370 – see Fig 1 below and Appendix 1 for translation).[142] Although fragmentary, this has been reconstructed and can be used to help determine the *prytanizing* tribe when the corresponding payments were made, although the results are not without controversy.

The marble covers payments for the years 418/7 – 415/4 and the information concerning the year 416/15 in particular is very poorly preserved. West has postulated that the stele records four payments made some time between Thargelion 27 and Skirophorion 14, in the tenth prytany, beginning about two weeks after the mutilation of the Herms.[143] Furthermore, the

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[137] Pritchett (2001) 235

[138] Meritt (1936) 180

[139] Arist. [*Ath. Pol.*] 44.4

[140] Rhodes, *CAAP* 537

[141] Ar. *Nub.* 579-87

[142] *IG* I³ 370

[143] West (1925) 4

reconstructed stele shows that the payments were made during the prytany of Kekropis, enabling him to deduce that the *prytanizing* tribe for the tenth prytany of 416/15 was Kekropis. In his reconstruction of the fragmentary text, however, West has made speculative supplements to the text which are now mostly rejected by scholars.[144] In particular, Osborne and Rhodes reject the proposal that the marble can be used to establish any dates in 416/15: the only thing the text establishes is that the payments were made to the generals during the prytany of Kekropis.[145] Given that the payments are the last ones recorded for that year, however, it is not unreasonable to conclude that they were made during the final prytany month, which can thus be assigned to Kekropis. But West's claim that the payments occurred between Thargelion 27 and Skirophorion 14 is unjustified, and, using the information determined in table 3 above, the most we can say is that the payments were made sometime between 25 Thargelion and 1 Hecatombaion = 3 June - 8 July 415.

Moving to 415/4, details of payments to other generals for activities in Sicily and in other campaigns show that that the third prytany of that year was held by the tribe of Aiantis, the second prytany by Erechtheis, the fourth prytany by Kekropis, and the eighth prytany by Antiochis.
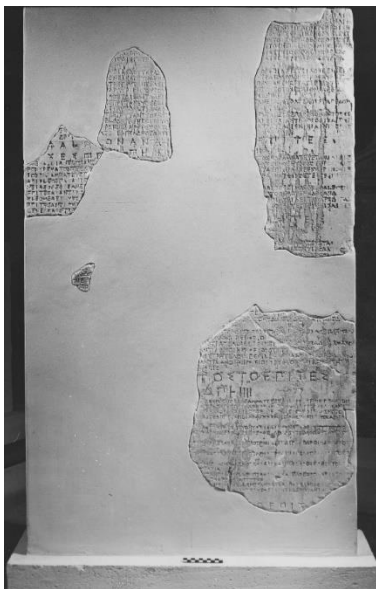
Figure 1: *IG* I³ 370 (http://aleshire.berkeley.edu/holdings/photos/7298). See Appendix 1 for translation.

An incidental feature of *IG* I³ 370 is that three of the four payments in 416/5 were made not only to the generals (Nicias, Lamachus, Alcibiades) but also to a certain Antimachus of Hermos. Although it has been claimed that Antimachos was another *strategos* in office in 416/5, it seems more likely that he was a πάρεδρος ('assistant').[146] Pseudo-Aristotle tells us that the three

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[144] Meiggs and Lewis (1969) 235, Osborne and Rhodes (2017) 421

[145] Osborne and Rhodes (2017) 421

[146] West (1925) 4

senior archons appointed two *paredroi* of their own choice (i.e. not elected),[147] and the *Hellenica Oxyrhyncia* reports that Conon (not at the time officially an Athenian general) employed two *paredroi,* Athenians who were evidently important and trusted individuals, to engineer a political coup in Rhodes,[148] but the most relevant parallel for Antimachus is perhaps provided by the references to assessors in other treasury accounts, where in most cases they are deputies or assistants to the *Hellenotamiai.* When an individual *Hellenotamias* receipted for money to be transferred to generals away from Athens on an expedition, one assessor apparently shared responsibility with him. On two other occasions when money was paid to generals prior to an expedition we have a record of a *paredros* going on the expedition with the generals, presumably to release the *Hellenotamiai* from all responsibility for such sums.[149] The precise role of the assessor during the expedition can only be a matter of supposition. West suggested that a new office of strategic *paredros* was created to check the full powers hastily granted to the generals before the mutilations and profanations came to light, [150] but it is more likely that the *paredros* was sent as a guarantee that the generals would use the funds at their disposal in a proper manner.

3.10   Final Tables

Now we have discussed the chronology of the build-up to the Expedition and have all the information available to us, it can be displayed in tabular form for ease of reading and to best discern any patterns. These tables will be referenced throughout the thesis.

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[147] Arist. [*Ath. Pol.]* 56.1

[148] *Hell. Oxy.* 15.1

[149] West (1925) 4

[150] West (1925) 5

Prytany	Julian Equivalent	Festival Calendar	Tribe	Events
Prytany I	Jul 8 – Aug 13 (416BC)	20 Skir – 26 Hek		91st Olympiad (where Alcibiades was triumphant)
Prytany II	Aug 14 – Sep19	27 Hek – 4 Boid		
Prytany III	Sep 20 - Oct 26	5 Boid – 12 Pyan		Eleusinian Greater Mysteries
Prytany IV	Oct 27 – Dec 2	13 Pyan – 19 Maim		Delegation sent from Athens to Segesta
Prytany V	Dec 3 – Jan 8 (415BC)	20 Maim – 27 Pos		
Prytany VI	Jan 9 – Feb 14	28 Pos – 4 Anth		Proposal to conduct ostracism
Prytany VII	Feb 15 – Mar 22	5 Anth – 11 Elaph		Election of *Strategoi* Eleusinian Lesser Mysteries
Prytany VIII	Mar 23 – Apr 27	12 Elaph – 17 Moun		Assembly Meetings to Discuss Expedition (Second meeting on 13 April) Ostracism of Hyperbolus
Prytany IX	Apr 28 – Jun 2	18 Moun – 24 Thar		Assembly Meetings to Discuss Expedition
Prytany X	Jun 3 – Jul 8	25 Thar – 1 Hek	Kekropis	Mutilation of the Herms Ζητηταί Appointed Denunciation of Alcibiades Departure of Expedition

Table 5 Festival and Prytany Calendar months for 416/415

415/14

Prytany month	Julian Equivalent	Festival Calendar	Tribe	Events
Prytany I	Jul 9 – Aug14 (415BC)	2 Hek – 8 Met		
Prytany II	Aug 15 – Sep 20	9 Met – 16 Boid	Erechtheis	
Prytany III	Sep 21 - Oct 27	17 Boid – 23 Pyan	Aiantis	Eleusinian Greater Mysteries
Prytany IV	Oct 28 – Dec 3	24 Pyan – 1 Pos	Kekropis	
Prytany V	Dec 4 – Jan 9 (414BC)	2 Pos – 9 Gam		
Prytany VI	Jan 10 – Feb 15	10 Gam – 16 Anth		
Prytany VII	Feb 16 – Mar 23	17 Anth – 23 Elaph		Eleusinian Lesser Mysteries
Prytany VIII	Mar 24 – Apr 28	24 Elaph – 29 Moun	Antiochis	
Prytany IX	Apr 29 – Jun 3	1 Thar – 6 Skir		
Prytany X	Jun 4 – Jul 9	7 Skir – 13 Skir II		

Table 6   Festival and Prytany Calendar months for 415/414

3.11   Timeline of the Mutilations and Profanations

The events of the mutilations of the Herms and the profanation of the Mysteries will be analysed in depth at Chapter 5, but it is important at this juncture to establish the timeline for these two events. Although the broad outline has been established in the final tables above, these two events merit a detailed timeline of their own.

According to the *Athenian Constitution*, the election of *strategoi* for the following year took place during the seventh prytany, provided that the omens were favourable. [151] Although this reference is dated to the fourth century there is no reason to suggest it was different in the fifth century. This places the election of Alcibiades, Nicias and Lamachus for 415/14 to the seventh prytany of 416/15. Based on the calculations outlined above this would have been between 5 Anthesterion – 11 Elaphebolion in the festival calendar (Feb 15 – Mar 22)

At the meeting of the Assembly where the decision to send an expedition to Sicily was reaffirmed,[152] according to Plutarch, one of the orators who spoke in favour of the Expedition was Demostratos.[153] In Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* the magistrate exclaims:

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[151] Arist. [*Ath. Pol.*] 44.4

[152] Thuc. 6.8.3-26.1

[153] Plut. *Nic.* 12.6 ; *Alc.* 18.3

> I remember once in the Assembly – Demostratus, curse him, was saying we ought to let the Sicilian Expedition sail, and this woman, dancing on the roof, she cried "O woe for Adonis"[154]

This would seem to place the meeting of the Assembly at the time of the festival of Adonis. Although Plutarch suggests the festival of Adonis occurred later,[155] as preparations for sailing were well advanced, MacDowell suggests that Plutarch was unaware of the dates of the festival and, in any case, Aristophanes is a more reliable witness than Plutarch in this instance, given his proximity to events.[156] MacDowell places the Adonia in Mounichion 416/15, which based on the calculations previously outlined would have been 10 April – 9 May. MacDowell notes that *IG* I³ 370 (previously discussed in [section 3.9](#) and at [Appendix 1](#)), an inscription detailing payments from the treasury of Athena, indicates that the first payment to Alcibiades, Nicias and Lamachus was made in the later part of the eighth prytany of 416/15. Although MacDowell does not present his reasoning, as *IG* I³ 370 does not explicitly state that the payments to the generals were paid in the eighth prytany, based on the calculations above, Prytany VIII ended, on 17 Mounichion (27 April) which would have been in the middle of festival of Adonis by MacDowell's reckoning, so that these are initial payments to the generals, just after the Expedition had been reaffirmed, seems reasonable. In addition, MacDowell notes that there is evidence of a close connection between Adonis and Eros and that the festival of Eros was on 4 Mounychion (13 April).[157] Moreover, in a study of the Adonis festival, Dilion has also concluded that 4 Mounychion is a possibility for the date of the Adonia given its connection with Eros and Aphrodite and is clear that Aristophanes' placing of the festival in the spring is reliable evidence.[158]

Meanwhile, Thucydides records that the meeting which originally decided on sending an Expedition was held four days earlier than the one which reaffirmed it.[159] Based on the above calculations this must have been at the end of Elaphebolion or the beginning of Mounychion (early April). Given the evidence available it seems reasonable to place the second Assembly which reaffirmed the decision to send the Expedition on 4 Mounychion (13 April).

The date of the mutilations themselves has always been contentious and on first inspection Andocides' and Plutarch's accounts seem incompatible. Plutarch states that one of the informants (whom he does not name) was shown to be lying when

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[154] Ar. *Lys.* 391-6

[155] Plut. *Alc.* 18.2

[156] MacDowell (1962) 186

[157] MacDowell (1962) 187

[158] Dilion (2003) 15

[159] Thuc. 6.8.2

> …he was asked how he recognised the faces of the mutilators of the herms, [and] replied "By the light of the moon", a detail which gave away his whole story since the night in question had been the last of the lunar month, when there was no moon.[160]

Andocides, however, when describing the evidence given to the council by a certain Diocleides, claims that there were roughly 300 men involved in the mutilations and that he saw them operating in groups of 5, 10 and 20. Andocides goes on to claim

> He [Diocleides] recognised the faces of the majority as he could see them in the moonlight[161]

Although some see this as evidence that the moon was full on the night of the mutilation, not new as claimed by Plutarch, MacDowell argues that Andocides never claims that the moon was full on the night of the mutilations, only that Diocleides said it was. Furthermore, it was only on the second day of questioning that Diocleides was asked how he saw the faces of the men, and given the pressure of an inquisition and the surprise of the question he could easily have answered that he saw them by the light of the moon when it was actually by lamplight.[162] It seems incredible that anyone planning to commit the mutilations would have done it on the night of the full moon when they could best be identified. If we accept that the mutilations took place on the new moon, the last day of the month, it must have occurred on the night of 29 Thargelion (8 June).

Merrit has fixed the date of the denunciation of Alcibiades as ten days after the mutilation and the departure of the fleet three days later, although Merrit's choice of dates here is arbitrary and based on no clear evidence.[163] Thucydides states that the fleet departed "when it was already midsummer", which would be during the tenth prytany of the conciliar year.[164] The orator Isaeus writing in the fourth century, adds that the fleet departed during the Archonship of Arimnestos, which ended on Skirophorion 30 (July 7).[165] Given that Thucydides states that the fleet sailed "when it was already midsummer",[166] that would tentatively placing the sailing at some point between midsummer's day (21 June - 13 Skirophorion) and the end of Archonship of Arimnestos (July 7 - Skirophorion 30)

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[160] Plut. *Alc.*20.8. Diod. Sic. 13.2.4 also mentions the first day of the new moon (νουμηνία), though in a passage that also speaks of Alcibiades and is arguably conflating the mutilations with the profanations.

[161] Andoc. 1.16

[162] MacDowell (1962) 188

[163] MacDowell (1962) 189

[164] Thuc. 6.30.1

[165] Is. 6.14.

[166] Thuc. 6.30.1

Putting these dates into tabular form, and combining them with the data obtained earlier in this chapter, produces the following:

Event	Date (Festival Calendar)	Date (Prytany Calendar)	Julian Equivalent	Prytany Tribe
Election of *strategoi* for 415/14	Between 5 Anthesterion – 11 Elaphebolion	Seventh Prytany	Feb 15 – Mar 22 415	Unknown
Assembly Meeting which decided on the Sicilian Expedition	At the end of Elaphebolion	Eighth Prytany	10 April 415	Unknown
Assembly meeting which reaffirmed Sicilian Expedition	4 Mounichion	Eighth Prytany	13 April 415	Unknown
Mutilation of the Herms	29 Thargelion	Tenth Prytany	8 June 415	Kekropis
Sailing of the Expedition	Between approx. 13 Skirophorion and 1 Hekatombaion	Tenth Prytany	Between approx. 21 Jun – 7 July 415	Kekropis

Table 7: Events in the Run-Up to the Sicilian Expedition

Dover has a different reconstruction with the mutilation occurring on May 25 and the departure of the fleet on June 4.[167] This discrepancy is based on the belief that the mutilations took place on a night where the moon was full rather than new, but the fact that he has the fleet sailing before midsummer undoes his argument, as Thucydides states that the fleet put to sea "when it was already midsummer".[168]

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[167] *HCT* 4. 287

[168] Thuc. 6.30.1

Chapter 4 – Division and Tension in Athens

4.1   Introduction

With a detailed timeline established. the next stage is to examine the divisions in Athenian society and political life around 415 to ascertain what impact they had on the preparations for and execution of the Expedition and assess the extent to which they were responsible for its ultimate failure. A cursory reading of the sources suggests there may have been some tension between the Assembly and the *Boule* at the time of the Expedition, so this will be a primary focus of the investigation. We also need to consider how far such tension matches deeper fault lines within the democracy. This will involve looking at relations between mass and élite in the city and at some of the characteristics of élite society (especially clubs and societies) that damaged those relations. It will also be necessary to consider whether there was a significant and potentially damaging generational divide between young and old.

4.2   Democratic Institutions

By the time of the Expedition to Sicily in 415 the democratic institutions in Athens consisted primarily of the Assembly (ἐκκλησία) and the *Boule* (βουλή). The Assembly, which met on the Pnyx, a hill to the west of the acropolis, was the sovereign body in the state in the fifth century. In his study of the Athenian Assembly, Hansen argues that following the limitation of the powers of the Assembly in 404 it was no longer sovereign,[1] but concedes that from the time of Pericles to the revolution of 404, a period which covers the Sicilian Expedition, the Assembly probably was the true sovereign in the state.[2] Little is known of the role of the Assembly prior to the reforms of Cleisthenes and Ephialtes, but it is likely that prior to 462 the Assembly, as a body of citizens, met in the agora to discuss political matters.[3] After Ephialtes' reforms, however, the Pnyx, a hill 400 meters south west of the agora was used for most meetings. The right to attend the Assembly was limited to adult male Athenian citizens, but was not conditioned by ownership of land or property. In the fifth century an Athenian male citizen came of age upon reaching eighteen when he was enrolled in his deme and inscribed in the deme's roster.[4] Excavations have shown that the Pnyx could hold 6000 citizens in the period 460-400.[5] Later in the fourth century 6000 citizens were required for a quorum, but the number 6000 is already attested in fifth century sources in connection with ostracism and the popular courts.[6] Hansen argues that in his play *Acharnians* of 425 Aristophanes suggests that attendance was often poor when he makes Dicaeopolis say

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[1] Hansen (1987) 101-7

[2] Hansen (1987) 94

[3] Hansen (1987) 12

[4] Hansen (1987) 7

[5] Hansen (1987) 17

[6] Hansen (1987) 17

> whenever the assembly holds a meeting
>
> and all the seats are empty just like now,
>
> while everyone's in the market
>
> and trying to avoid the summoner.[7]

Thucydides also suggests that an attendance of 5000 was difficult to achieve during the Peloponnesian War because of military expeditions and other forms of employment abroad,[8] but we do know from Andocides that 6000 jurors tried the case against Speusippus who, as a member of the *Boule*, made an illegal proposal by attempting to try suspected profaners of the Mysteries in the *Heliaea* without further preliminary investigation.[9] Aristophanes indicates that there was a pool of 6000 jurors[10] and Plutarch tells us that 6000 votes were required for an ostracism to be valid, and cites the example of Hyperbolus,[11] suggesting that the Athenians could muster 6000 bodies in the fifth century when required.

The Assembly was usually called by the *prytaneis* (although the *strategoi* may have been empowered to convene the Assembly)[12] and they also presided over sessions in the Assembly in the fifth century along with their chairman, the *epistatēs tōn prytaneōn.* According to the *Athenian Constitution* the Assembly was supposed to meet four times each prytany, resulting in 40 ordinary meetings a year, in accordance with the Prytany Calendar.[13] Whether additional meetings could be held or not is unclear, but Hansen argues that there was a limitation on the number of Assemblies convened in a year and that no more than 40 were permitted.[14] There were some fixed items on the agenda for all four meetings held during a prytany. No additional matters could be debated unless the *prytaneis* had placed the topic on the agenda for the session of the Assembly. The *prytaneis* could not place any topic on the agenda without prior consideration by the *Boule*. This preliminary consideration by the members of the *Boule* resulted in a provisional decree called a *probouleuma* or sometimes *boulēs psēphisma*. This provisional decree was a prerequisite for any decree passed by the people and also for the election of magistrates and other officials. This principle seems to have been a cornerstone of the democracy – nothing without a *probouleuma*. If a proposal was made in violation of this principle, it was incumbent on any other citizen present to lodge a protest and bring a public action (*graphē paranomōn*) against the proposer. As Hansen points out, this calls the sovereignty of the Assembly into question and raises the question whether it was simply rubber stamping the

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[7] Ar. *Arch.* 19-22

[8] Thuc. 8.72.1

[9] Andoc. 1.17

[10] Ar. *Vesp.* 662

[11] Plut. *Arist.* 7.4-5

[12] Hansen (1987) 25

[13] Arist. [*Ath. Pol.*] 43.3-4

[14] Hansen (1987) 20

decisions of the *Boule*. A meticulous study of the decrees passed by the Assembly has, however, revealed that the *Boule* often abstained from drawing up specific *probouleumata* and restricted itself to an open *probouleuma* by which the issue was presented to the people without any suggestion of a policy recommended by the *Boule.* Furthermore, in cases where the *Boule* did submit a specific *probouleuma*, alternative proposals could be moved from the floor during the debate and when the vote was taken the *demos* could prefer one of the alternative proposals rather than that laid down in the *probouleuma*.[15]

More important for the study of the Athenian Expedition in 415, however, is the *Boule*. As will be seen, the *Boule* played a key role in the run-up to the Expedition and some tension between the *Boule* and the Assembly can be discerned at this time. Plutarch and Pseudo-Aristotle's *Athenian Constitution* state that the *Boule* was a council originally created by Solon in 594/3 in order to conduct prior consideration of the Assembly's business.[16] The *Athenian Constitution* also states that the council comprised 400 men, 100 from each of the 4 tribes at the time and that the council's main purpose was to guard the laws and watch over most of the city's affairs; it corrected wrongdoers and had full power to punish and chastise.[17] Given that the council also deliberated in advance of the Assembly, no matter was allowed to be brought before the people without having been considered first by the council.[18] The council evolved over time, and in 508/7 Cleisthenes replaced it with a council of 500 men, 50 from each of the 10 new tribes. Membership was notionally open to all but the lowest of the four property classes, the *thētes*.[19] In all its iterations, the *Boule* appears to have acted as a counter-weight to another institution of government, be it the Areopagus in the time of Solon or the Assembly at the time of the Expedition.

Our information on the *Boule* in the fifth century is incomplete. Indeed, Thucydides only mentions deliberations in the *Boule* once in his entire history, namely the episode in 420 where Alcibiades discredits the Spartan envoys by tricking them into denying before the Assembly what they had previously told the *Boule* about their authority to negotiate with the Athenians.[20] Although Thucydides uses this episode to emphasise the perfidy of Alcibiades and his powers of persuasion, it also serves to highlight possible tensions between the Assembly and the *Boule*. When Alcibiades hears the Spartans tell the *Boule* that they have come with "full powers to reach an agreement on all matters in dispute",[21] he becomes afraid the Spartans may win the demos on to their side, and he persuades the Spartan heralds to make no mention of their full powers to

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[15] Hansen (1987) 35-6

[16] Arist. [*Ath. Pol.*] 8.4 and Plut. *Sol.* 19. 1-2

[17] Plut. *Sol.* 19. 2-3

[18] Plut. *Sol.* 19. 1

[19] Arist. [*Ath. Pol.*] 21.3

[20] Thuc. 5.45. On the absence of the *Boule* in Thucydides see Hornblower (2005), esp. 257-9 on Sicily.

[21] Thuc. 5.45.4

the Assembly. The Spartans actually went further than this and in response to a question flatly denied to the Assembly that they had full powers to make an agreement. The reason why the Spartans thought they could say one thing to the *Boule* and another to the Assembly has surprisingly not been examined by scholars. Thucydides states that Alcibiades had promised the Spartans that he would give Pylos back to them in return for their compliance,[22] and the Spartans may well have believed that the *Boule* would back Alcibiades in this action, against the wishes of the people and the Assembly. Although the whole episode was a ruse by Alcibiades, the fact that the Spartans bought into it so easily does suggest that they were aware of certain tensions between the two bodies and believed that they could play one off against the other. The fact that none of the *bouleutai* [23] countered the denials of the Spartans to the Assembly points in the same direction. Although the reasons for this are unclear, it may well be that, like Alcibiades, the *bouleutai* did not want a deal but feared the Assembly would make one, and this allowed Alcibiades to persuade them to keep silent whilst the Spartans made their false claim – after which he double-crossed everyone by denouncing the Spartans in front of the demos.

Aside from Thucydides' reference, the only other depiction we have of the *Boule* from the fifth century is a comic one,[24] namely the scene in Aristophanes' *Knights* of 424 where the Paphlagonian attempts to denounce the Sausage Seller to the council.[25] The piece in question represents the council as more concerned with their own dinners than with public policy and easily taken in. Aristophanes also has them rejecting a peace proposal and letting the war with Sparta continue, out of fear that peace could increase the price of their sardines.[26] MacDowell has taken this as the picture of a democratic council of ordinary citizens chosen by lot,[27] but instead it could be argued that what we see is a less representative body, uninterested in public policy but susceptible to bribery. In addition, if Vickers' controversial supposition that the Sausage Seller is a depiction of Alcibiades is correct,[28] then Aristophanes' scene also accurately prefigures the affair of the Spartan envoys by some nine years. Although one must be careful in ascribing attributes displayed in Athenian comedy to individuals or groups, the fact that Aristophanes believed his audience would accept the portrayal of the *Boule* as selfish and uninterested in public policy indicates the possibility of friction between the demos and the *Boule*.[29]

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[22] Thuc. 5.45.2

[23] The 500 members of the Boule are known as the *bouleutae.*

[24] MacDowell (1995) 101

[25] Ar. *Eq.* 667-82

[26] Ar. *Eq.* 672-4

[27] MacDowell (1995) 101

[28] Vickers (2008) 37 – and supported by Sidwell (2009) 158

[29] See Sidwell (2009) for discussion on how Aristophanes' comedies work in political terms. Sidwell argues that *Knights* is an attack on Alcibiades and his close ally Eupolis – 158-9. The point here is that in making this attack Aristophanes conjures up an image of the *Boule* that would have resonated with his audience.

Although the two examples cited are admittedly isolated, they can both be read as showing a *Boule* that was more self-interested than the Assembly, did not act in the demos' best interest, and was indeed at odds with the Assembly. If that view is correct, the *Boule* was clearly not simply a microcosm of the Assembly, and its composition needs to be examined in detail.

The *Athenian Constitution* states the *Boule* expelled by the Four Hundred in 411 was εἰληχυῖαν τῷ κυάμῳ (elected by lot)[30] and Thucydides corroborates this.[31] As Rhodes points out, selection by lot seems to be the essential characteristic of a democratic *Boule*.[32] Upon closer inspection, however, this democratic characteristic looks to be illusory and membership of the *Boule* at the time of the Expedition appears to be significantly less representative of the demos as a whole than membership of the Assembly.

There has been little, if any, new scholarship on the *Boule* in recent decades and Rhodes' 1972 study remains the definitive treatment of the topic.[33] As part of this study Rhodes conducted a detailed examination of how Athenian citizens were selected annually for membership of the *Boule*. Aeschines, a fourth century Athenian orator and statesman, writes in *Against Timarchus* that prostitution disqualified a man from every aspect of public life.[34] He also writes that those guilty of the maltreatment of parents, desertion from the army or throwing away one's shield, or squandering one's inheritance were all barred from speaking in the Assembly.[35] Rhodes points out that membership of the *Boule* is linked to speaking in the Assembly, as was membership of public offices in general, so it is reasonable to infer that individuals guilty of these offences would be disqualified from membership of the *Boule*.[36] In addition, according to the orator Dinarchus, a metic speechwriter of the fourth century, the rhetors and *strategoi* in Athens were required to have legitimate children and to own land within the boundaries of Attica. In a speech delivered in 323, he notes that in Athens "the laws demand that the orator or general who expects to get the people's confidence shall observe the laws in begetting children, shall own land within our boundaries…".[37] As Rhodes supposes, this too may have been required of *bouleutai*.[38] In addition, Rhodes notes the comment in the *Athenian Constitution* that "to those registered in the labourer's class he [Solon] gave only membership of the Assembly and jury-courts",[39] which suggests that membership of the *Boule* was restricted to those of the first three property classes

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[30] Arist. [*Ath. Pol.*] 32.1

[31] Thuc. 8.69.1

[32] Rhodes (1972) 6

[33] Rhodes (1972)

[34] Aeschin. *In Tim.* 19-20

[35] Aeschin. *In Tim.* 28-30

[36] Rhodes (1972) 2

[37] Din. I. *Dem.* 71

[38] Rhodes (1972) 2

[39] Arist. [*Ath. Pol.*] 7.3

only.[40] The author of the *Athenian Constitution* states that Solon had divided the citizens into four classes by an assessment of wealth: the five-hundred-bushel class; the cavalry; the rankers; and the labourers.[41] Although not stating it explicitly, the *Athenian Constitution* seems to suggest that only the wealthier classes could stand for election to the *Boule* under the 'Solonian Constitution'. Notwithstanding the debate about whether Solon did actually set up the *Boule* and how the author of the *Athenian Constitution* knew this,[42] it would appear that, when the *Athenian Constitution* was written in the fourth century, the less wealthy members of society were denied the opportunity to sit in the *Boule*, and there is no reason to suppose that the situation was any different in the later part of the fifth century, at the time of the Sicilian Expedition. Finally, we know from Lysias' speech decrying the refusal of a pension to an invalid tradesman that physical infirmity apparently disqualified a man from the archonship,[43] and it is hypothesised that this restriction may well have also applied to the *bouleutai*.

Although many of these sources are from the fourth century and some of the evidence is circumstantial, it seems reasonable to infer that the poorer strata of Athenian citizens would have been barred from standing for selection by lot to the *Boule*. Since in addition the *bouleutai* needed to be regularly available, and indeed permanently available for a tenth of the year during their tribe's tenure of the prytany, it seems certain that there would have been a bias towards wealthier citizens and that the demography of the *bouleutai* would strongly favour the richer classes and the city-deme residents. Although members of the *Boule* were paid for their services, the *Athenian Constitution* tells us that at the time of writing in the latter half of the fourth century pay was five obols,[44] which was less than the one or one and a half drachmae paid for attendance in the Assembly.[45] Although we do not know what the rate of pay was at the time of the Sicilian Expedition, we can infer from the rate a century later and the fact that pay was not introduced at all until the 450s,[46] that membership of the *Boule* was not financially incentivised to a degree that would have enticed the lower strata of society.   All this adds to the evidence that *Boule* was something the richer classes were much more likely to participate in than the poorer citizens and that the two bodies consequently differed in the degree to which they represented the entire citizen body.

Although there is nothing explicit in our sources, it is not unreasonable to suppose that a *Boule* more likely to be made up of individuals possessing more wealth than the average member of the demos would often be at odds with a more representative and populist Assembly. This might

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[40] Rhodes (1972) 2

[41] Arist. [*Ath. Pol.*] 7.3

[42] See *CAAP* 153 for further discussion of this topic.

[43] Lys. 24. *Pens. Inv.* 13

[44] Arist. [*Ath. Pol.*] 62.2

[45] Rhodes (1972) 5

[46] Rhodes (1972) 5

be supported further by indications that in a number of instances during the run-up to the Expedition the *Boule* appeared to be at odds with the demos or at least acting separately from it.

A number of secret meetings were held by the council in 415 to discuss matters over which one would expect the Assembly to have jurisdiction. One such meeting is reported by Diodorus: it was held just prior to the Expedition and attended by the generals in order to discuss what to do with Sicily when it has been conquered:

> At this point, then, the generals met in secret session with the Council to discuss what policy they should adopt, should they conquer the island. They decided that the other inhabitants should merely be made subject to individual assessments of tribute, to be delivered annually to Athens[47]

Diodorus is the only source to mention this meeting, and his evidence is usually ignored by scholars for this reason.[48] Normally, meetings of the *Boule* were open to the public and we have numerous accounts, notably from Demosthenes and Aeschines, of public debates in the *Boule*.[49] The *Boule* was entitled, however, when it chose, to meet in secret and a number of references from various sources exist pointing to these clandestine meetings.[50] For example, Diodorus notes that Themistocles outlined a plan to enable the rebuilding of the walls of Athens at a secret meeting of the *Boule*.[51] That meeting occurred at a time of political emergency (there was the prospect of a dangerous showdown with Sparta on the issue), but the same could perhaps have been said in 415, when a major expedition was being launched against the background of the Hermocopid and Mysteries scandals. If Diodorus is right, one might infer that the *Boule* was in favour of outright conquest of Sicily but not declaring this to the demos at large.

Whatever the truth about the meeting reported by Diodorus, the *Boule* certainly held a secret meeting when Dioclides offered to reveal the names of those who had been involved in the mutilation of the Herms: this meeting resulted in the decision to arrest Andocides and others.[52] Interestingly the generals were excluded from this meeting and were summoned afterwards. Rhodes glosses over this,[53] but it is a key point, especially if Sinclair is right in his supposition that the *strategoi* were *ex officio* members of the *Boule*,[54] as one would expect them to be present at this meeting. It may well be the case that factions within the *Boule* were conspiring against a key individual that year who was to become embroiled in the controversy of the

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[47] Diod. Sic. 13.2.5

[48] Green (2010) 166 n.6

[49] Eg. Dem. 8.4; Dem. 19.17; Aeschin. *In Ctes.* 125

[50] Rhodes (1972) 40-42

[51] Diod. Sic. 11.39.5 – Themistocles *confidentially* informs the council of his plan, inferring that this part of the meeting at least, was not held in public.

[52] Andoc. 1. 45

[53] Rhodes (1972) 41

[54] Sinclair (1988) 81

Mysteries and the Mutilations – Alcibiades. Tellingly, when Alcibiades was first accused of profanation by the *Boule*, he demanded an immediate trial by the Assembly. This was refused and, after he had departed with the fleet and arrived in Sicily, it was decided to recall him but he absconded and was subsequently condemned *in absentia.* Isocrates, defending Alcibiades' son to a popular jury, seems to suggest that it was the *Boule* which condemned him *in absentia*, not the Assembly.[55] He states that οἱ δὲ συστήσαντες τὴν βουλὴν καὶ τοὺς ῥήτορας ὑφ᾽ αὑτοῖς ποιησάμενοι πάλιν ἤγειρον τὸ πρᾶγμα καὶ μηνυτὰς εἰσέπεμπον ("but his accusers united the council and having made the public speakers subservient to themselves, again revived the matter and suborned informers").[56] By contrast, Thucydides does not reveal which organ of the democracy condemned Alcibiades *in absentia*.[57] There is no reason for us to disbelieve Isocrates, however, and his comment that the accusers of Alcibiades had united the council is key here. Rhodes dismisses this point, arguing that there is nothing remarkable in Alcibiades wanting to be tried by the Assembly and stressing that the penal powers of the *Boule* were limited and that until 360 the final hearing of an *eisangelia* (impeachment) was in the Assembly.[58] But the fact that Alcibiades initially demanded an immediate trial by the Assembly may suggest that he felt he would not get fair treatment in the *Boule* but would be acquitted by the Assembly, with the demos taking his side against a *Boule* that was actively working against him. In the end, the *Boule,* as investigating authority, appears from the evidence of Isocrates to have taken the decision to condemn Alcibiades without a public debate.

Following the initial accusation against Alcibiades, the charges were immediately heard by the *prytaneis* in the *Boule*, and after that a commission of enquiry (ζητηταί) was established and the *Boule* given full powers to deal with the situation. This meant that it could give immunity from prosecution to new informers.[59] Although Alcibiades' offence was described as a violation of "rules and regulations established by the Eumolpids, Kerykes and the Priests of Eleusis", none of the Eleusinian functionaries were involved in bringing the charges against Alcibiades or in accepting the complaint or in trying the case. The charge was brought by Thessalus son of Cimon, who did not belong to the Eleusinian priesthood.[60] This point is highlighted by Ostwald, who uses it as evidence that enforcement of νόμιμα and καθεστηκότα lay with the state, but it can also be seen as evidence of a politically motivated trial. This case was in fact the last *eisangelia* held in Athens for impiety.[61] Another person exiled in 415 for impiety was Adeimantus, yet in 407/6 we find him as a colleague with Alcibiades in the expedition against

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[55] Rhodes (1972) 187

[56] Isoc. 16.7

[57] Thuc. 6.60-61

[58] Rhodes (Pers Com 2015)

[59] Ostwald (1986) 167

[60] Ostwald (1986) 167

[61] Ostwald (1986) 535

Andros and a year later he was one of the generals captured by Lysander at Aegospotami.[62] Ostwald suggests this indicates he was a capable general whose devotion to the state was questioned, but it could well indicate that Alcibiades and his close circle were being targeted in a politically driven trial in 415.

To sum up, we have seen that members of the *Boule* tended to be from the wealthier part of the citizen body and that it was less representative of Athenians at large than the Assembly. Aristophanes felt that a portrayal of this body as self-interested and uninterested in the public good would resonate with his audience. There is also evidence to suggest the *Boule* was holding clandestine meetings on the eve of the Expedition to Sicily and, when charges were brought against Alcibiades, it was the *Boule* that was given full powers to deal with the situation. There is circumstantial evidence to suggest that the charges and subsequent enquiry were politically motivated: Alcibiades' attempt to side-step the *Boule* by insisting on a trial in the Assembly was unsuccessful. This raises the possibility that the *Boule* was working, against the wishes of the Assembly, to bring down the one of the architects and leaders of the Sicilian Expedition. Even though Alcibiades was working to the same aim as the *Boule*, the thought of him bringing about the outright conquest of Sicily and the elevation in status this would bring him was perhaps too unpalatable for the *bouleutai*. It may be possible that Alcibiades desired the conquest of Sicily for his own glory whereas the *bouleutai* coveted the potential tribute and natural resources that the subjection of Sicily would afford Athens.

4.3   Mass and Élite

Having established that the social profile of the *Boule* was different from that of the Assembly and that there may have been tensions between the *Boule* and Assembly in 415, we need to examine why such tensions existed. This brings us immediately to the relationship between mass and élite in classical Athens.

Where power really lay in Athens in the fifth century has long been a matter of debate. In an essay in 1915 Michels convincingly argued that democracy needs organisation and that this came from the élite in the form of the old aristocracy.[63] Finley later attacked this theory,[64] but he did not answer the question of why the Athenians allowed the élites to guide and run them on occasion.[65] In 1973 de Laix argued that the *Boule* was dominated by aristocrats until the end of the fifth century and made all the decisions and that the Assembly simply rubber stamped them.[66] This work was written partly to counter Gomme who had argued that the Assembly ran

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[62] Ostwald (1986) 545

[63] Michels (1915)

[64] Finley (1983) and (1985)

[65] Ober (1989) 14-17

[66] de Laix (1973)

Athens.[67] In recent times the topic has become strongly associated with the work of Josiah Ober. Across a series of books (*Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens*, 1989; *Democracy and Knowledge*, 2008; *The Rise and Fall of Classical Greece*, 2015), Ober has set out the thesis that power in classical Athens really was vested in a citizen body that had wrested power away from the aristocracy by the end of the fifth century.[68] On the basis of an examination of the discourse between élite and non-élite citizens in legal and political rhetoric, Ober has concluded that direct popular rule was a reality in classical Athens. Although Ober's works are key texts for anyone wishing to understand the socio-political relationship between the mass and the élite in Athens at this time, there are a number of important faults which undermine his case and Ober's own political bias clearly influences his argument. Indeed, Rhodes has accused Ober of abandoning scholarly impartiality in favour of democratic advocacy,[69] and Hansen criticises him for over-emphasising the democratic dimension of Athenian politics and argues it is wrong to see the audience in the theatre as constituting a political gathering on a par with the Assembly, as Ober sometimes does.[70] Indeed, Ober neglects the important point that political leadership required leisure, which the demos did not have in abundance.

Ober has claimed that the prevalence in political and legal speeches of descriptive terms that emphasise the speaking ability of Athenian leaders suggests that political speech was the major part of their leadership roles.[71] The familiar term for political leadership was προστάτης τοῦ δήμου (leader of the people) and although the politicians of Athens could be referred to as either δημαγωγοί ('they who lead the demos') or ἡγεμόνες ('they who lead'), they are mostly described with terms that refer their speaking ability and their advisory function: examples include οἱ λέγοντες (the speakers),[72] ῥήτωρ (rhetor),[73] δεινὸς λέγειν (one clever at public address),[74] κράτιστα λέγων (the most able speaker),[75] σύμβουλος (advisor)[76] and δημηγοροῦντες (public speakers).[77] When contrasted with modern English terms such as president, minister, director, governor and chairperson, they highlight that in Athens direct public communication was the primary locus of power, whereas in the modern world power is exercised as a direct function of the office held.[78] Ober goes on to argue that the frequency and casualness with which many of these terms were used in the plural suggests that rhetors were a recognisable set of men who

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[67] Gomme (1951)

[68] Ober (1989); (2008) and (2015)

[69] Rhodes (2003) 60-62; 72-76; 82-3

[70] Hansen (1999) 63

[71] Ober (1989) 107

[72] Eg. Lys. 18.18, 28.9, 29.6; Dem. 1.28, 22.37, 24.198, 25.41

[73] Eg Lys. 32.27

[74] Eg. Lys. 12.86, 14.38, 30.24; Isoc. 21.5; Dem. 22.66; Din. 1.113; Aeschin. *In Ctes.* 3.215; Dem. *Ex.* 45.2

[75] Dem. 18.320

[76] Very widely used – see Ober (1989) 107

[77] Dem. 19.251

[78] Ober (1989) 107

played a special role in the political life of Athens. Not every speaker in the Assembly had to be a rhetor, but the rhetors themselves constituted a specific group of people exercising political leadership. They spoke frequently in the Assembly and secured the passage of decrees, but this was granted by the goodwill of the demos, not by legal prerogative.   Ober points out that in oligarchies only he who rules addresses the people but, in a democracy, whoever so wished could speak when it seemed right to him.[79] Thus, Ober's argument suggests that, as anyone with the appropriate communication skills could advocate decrees or laws binding on the people, ultimate power must really lie with the people themselves.

Although Ober is correct when he stresses the importance of public oratory, it can be argued that he overstates the role of the Assembly and neglects other public arenas where persuasive speaking was also relevant, most notably the *Boule*. In *Mass and Élite*, Ober argues that the demos took closer control of the organs of government and exerted pressure on the aristocracy to conform to increasingly clear popular notions of correct social and political behaviour. He also puts forward Connor's argument that Pericles was the first to notice this and so distance himself from the normal social round of the élite citizen. [80] Although this argument does have some merit, it is, like much in Ober's work, an overstatement and an attempt to transpose modern notions of class on to an ancient system of government, where it is not relevant, in order to create parallels between Athens and the American Revolution. Ober himself notes that the *strategoi* and the vast majority of the expert orators came from an élite background.[81] In addition, he points out that politicians such as Aeschines were eager to stress their connection with the aristocracy,[82] and, if this point is combined with an analysis of Nicias who, although having no clearly attested relationship with the old aristocracy, always sought to adopt its style and values in order to further himself,[83] then it is clear that the perception amongst the people in Athens was that true power still rested with the élite at the time of the Expedition. That is not to say that the élite felt entirely at ease: this is evident in the law courts where, as Ober points out, élite litigants would often attempt to hide their true status. But, although Ober is right to highlight this situation, he is wrong to claim that the demos ran the show exclusively. The discussion of the Assembly and *Boule* in the previous [section](#) shows that, although both groups were supposedly drawn from the entire citizen body, they were not identical in terms of political demography and that the role of the *Boule* in government not only made political tension possible but also ensured that the populist Assembly did not have exclusive access to the levers of power.

This being so, any tendency for a *Boule* with aristocratic leanings to be at loggerheads with a populist Assembly in the run up to the Expedition could be a contributory factor to its failure and it

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[79] Ober (1989) 109

[80] Ober (1989) 86

[81] Ober (1989) 15

[82] Ober (1989) 118

[83] Sinclair (1988) 41

is this theory that will be examined here. Ober claims that it was the defeat in Sicily which finally upset the equilibrium between mass and élite,[84] but it seems more likely that it was events in the run-up to the Expedition which upset that equilibrium and that this then contributed to the catastrophic defeat in Sicily.

Fragments of decrees relating to the Expedition (from at least two marble stelai) were found on the acropolis and are collectively known as *IG* I³ 93. There are several points of interest in this document.

First, the fragment now labelled fragment B refers to the initial assembly meeting to discuss the Expedition, [85] and lines 5-6 of the fragment read

5 [στ – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – –]ọσθον δὲ καὶ τõν χσυμμάχον hοποσ–

6 [– π]όλες ἐς τὲμ βολὲν τὲν Ἀθεναίο[ν]

Lambert and Osborne translate this as:

. . . let also as many of the allies. . . [cities?] to the Athenian Council[86]

Rhodes suggests that this shows that it is possible that the Athenians were directing the allied cities to inform the *Boule* directly (i.e. not the Assembly) how many sailors they could provide.[87] If this is correct it shows that the *Boule* was given a significant role in the preparations for the Sicilian Expedition by the Assembly. The logistical complexity of planning such a venture may have led the Assembly to let the *Boule* take charge of managing the practicalities and formulating the way in which they would subsequently be presented to the Assembly. This would give the *Boule*, which we have already seen desired the conquest of Sicily, an opportunity to manipulate proceedings. In addition, it is not unreasonable to presume that, when the *Boule* acquired an investigative role in the affairs of the mutilation of the Herms and profanation of the Mysteries, this accentuated its sense of importance and that this subsequently spilled over into other areas, such as the preparations for the Sicilian Expedition, a development that led to overreach. This of course is supposition which is impossible to prove conclusively, but, as Osborne and Rhodes point out, it is unusual for some of the material we have regarding the Sicilian Expedition (most notably *IG* I³ 93) to be inscribed, as decisions which led to immediate action were not normally inscribed; only those decisions whose effect was on-going – treaties, regulations etc – were inscribed.[88] The recording of decisions taken regarding the Expedition seem to be a reflection of the exceptional importance and the controversial nature and complexity of the whole affair. In such politically heightened times, the *Boule*, as the steering committee of the Assembly and thus

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[84] Ober (2008) 42

[85] Meiggs and Lewis (1969) 239

[86] https://www.atticinscriptions.com/inscription/IGI3/93

[87] Rhodes (1972) 120

[88] Osborne and Rhodes (2017) 426-7

the state, would tend to feel especially important and it is not beyond the realm of possibility that they might use the opportunity to push their own agenda – the military conquest of Sicily – whilst not revealing their objectives to the wider demos.

The next point of interest in *IG* I³ 93 is in fragment C, which raises issues surrounding funding the expedition.[89] Lines 1-3 of this fragment read:

10 [. . .] βολὲν καθότι ἄριστα κ[– – – – – – – – ἐά]–
11 ν τε ἀπὸ τõ τιμέματος δοκει [– – – – – – – – ἐάν]
12 τε τὲμ πόλιν ἀναλõν hόσον α[– – – – – – – τὰ]–

10 the Council as best - - -
11 and if it decides to - - - from the valuation - - -
12 and if having spent as much for the city as (?) - - -[90]

Rhodes suggests that it is possible that the *Boule* was to make a *probouleuma* on whether the ships were to be fitted out at the expense of the trierarchs or of the state,[91] an issue which would no doubt cause friction amongst the trierarchs.

A third interesting feature of *IG* I³ 93 is that it apparently envisages a debate in which the Assembly will be asked to choose between sending one general to lead the Sicilian Expedition or sending more, indicating there was some friction in Athens regarding how to run the whole operation. Meiggs and Lewis argue that the leaving of the matter to the Assembly shows that the *Boule* had not agreed on which possibility to choose for its *probouleuma*.[92] If correct, this shows that, as well as friction between the *Boule* and the Assembly, there may have been some friction within the *Boule* itself. It appears that even within the *Boule* there was dissent as to whether to allow Alcibiades to lead the Expedition alone or to attempt to temper his excesses and prevent him getting sole share of the plaudits, should the Expedition be a success. Although it was not unheard of for military expeditions to have more than one commander (indeed the original Sicilian Expedition of 427-4 ended up with three commanders; Pythodurus, Sophocles and Eurymedon) it makes little sense militarily and often resulted in a convoluted command structure and confused lines of communication. It is doubtful that the suggestion of having more than one commander came from a military standpoint and was much more likely intended to stymie Alcibiades' ambitions. Lines 1-4 of fragment B of *IG* I³ 93, which refers to the initial Assembly meeting regarding the expedition, read:

1– – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – –γαν [. . . .]ν[. . . . .]ν | [. . . .]ο | ο[. . . .]
2[– – – – – διαχεροτονεσαι τὸν δεμ]ον αὐτίκα μάλα εἴτε δοκει hένα στρατ[εγ]–

[89] Meiggs and Lewis (1969) no.78 237-240, Osborne and Rhodes (2017) no. 171 422-428
[90] https://www.atticinscriptions.com/inscription/IGI3/93
[91] Rhodes (1972) 120
[92] Meiggs and Lewis (1969) 240

3[ὸν – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – –] ηελέσθαι τύχει ἀγαθει νυνὶ hοίτινε[ς] α–

4– – – – – – – – – – – – – – – – –τọ[.] τὸς πολεμίος hος ἂν δύνονται πλει–

1 - - -

2 - - - the People - - - immediately whether it decides to choose

3 one general [or more ...?] for good fortune now who

4 - - - who are most capable - - - the enemy[93]

Before the affair of the Mysteries and the Mutilations, Alcibiades had operated almost exclusively in the Assembly, where he had arranged block seating for his supporters[94] and had previously been a very vocal supporter of Cleon,[95] factors that could not have endeared him to the oligarchic factions in Athens, despite his own aristocratic connections and upbringing. Cornford feels that Alcibiades was behind the Melian massacre just prior to the Expedition:[96] this is plausible, since he was certainly a *strategos* in that year and his involvement would tie in with what we know of his character. (Ostwald may even be correct in holding that Thucydides' source for the Melian Affair was Alcibiades.)[97] If this supposition is correct, it places Alcibiades at the scene of an affair which must have resonated in Athenian society. The reception of Euripides' *Trojan Women*, which can be seen as a commentary on the massacre of the Melian male population and enslavement of the women and children and which won second prize at the Dionysia in 415, suggests that some felt the affair had brought shame on the city. If Alcibiades was indeed behind the massacre, that could have made many fear that his plan to subjugate Sicily was a step on the road to tyranny and thus strengthened opposition to him. Fear of Alcibiades' ambitions could explain why the demos voted for additional *strategoi* to lead the expedition: having three generals with equal power makes little sense from a military standpoint but would act as a check on Alcibiades. It could also explain why the *Boule* over-reached its authority by excluding the *strategoi* from meetings and becoming sole investigator of the affairs of the Mysteries and Profanations.

Furthermore, it is not known if anyone else other than Nicias and Lamachus was even considered for command of the Expedition. Indeed, for 415/14 we only have the names of four of the ten *strategoi*. The name Telephonos is known through the inscription *IG* I[3] 370 (Payments from the treasury of Athena mentioned above in section 3.9 and translated at Appendix 1) but his actual assignment is unknown. Alcibiades, Lamachus and Nicias were all re-elected as *strategoi* and Thucydides notes that they were all appointed to the extra-ordinary post of *stratēgos autokratōr* (στρατηγοὺς αὐτοκράτορας) in the assembly held in the Spring of 415 in preparation

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[93] https://www.atticinscriptions.com/inscription/IGI3/93

[94] Ostwald (1986) 321-2

[95] Ostwald (1986) 293

[96] Cornford (1907) 187

[97] Ostwald (1986) 310

for the Sicilian Expedition.[98] This is the first recorded instance of this position and Fornara suggests it was created specifically for the Sicilian Expedition.[99] What remains unclear is whether the position, which removed the generals from the purview of the state,[100] was fixed by a time limit. Fornara suggests that it was not and that they were intended to serve as *autokratōr* until removed by decree.[101] That would account for the fact more than 10 *strategoi* can be identified for 414/13 (the *autokratōrs* plus 10 elected *strategoi* were in place that year). Fornara identifies 11 *strategoi* for that year, but Develin lists 14 names with two generals elevated extraordinarily (Menandros and Euthydemus), although believes that Nicias and Lamachus were members of the regular college of generals.[102]

It can be seen, then, that there is clear evidence of tension between the *Boule* and the Assembly at the time of the Expedition in at least two areas. Circumstantial evidence suggests that the *Boule* was using its newly acquired power and status to orchestrate a military conquest of Sicily, whilst keeping its aims hidden from the Assembly which might have vetoed it at this stage. In addition, a clear antipathy towards Alcibiades can be discerned, even though he too yearned for the conquest of Sicily: since Alcibiades was popular with the Assembly, this is another way in which *Boule* and Assembly diverged.

4.4   Generational Divide and Political Groupings

If the *Boule* was acting against the Assembly and targeting Alcibiades, we need to ascertain who or what was driving it to do so. It is clear that at the time of the Expedition to Sicily a number of social and political groupings were active in Athens. These groupings may have been in a position to influence the *Boule* and inflame tensions, so understanding the background to them is important.

Whilst it is known that there were what we would term political clubs operating in Athens at the time of the expedition, the make-up and background to these clubs is not completely clear and still the subject of much debate. It is known that *hetaireiai*[103] were operating in the city. These were dining or drinking clubs comprised of congenial men, usually of roughly the same age and social standing.[104] These clubs are not indisputably attested before the fifth century, but Herodotus perhaps refers to their existence in the seventh century when he describes the conspiracy of Cylon, the Olympic victor who tried to become tyrant of Athens. Herodotus states

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[98] Thuc. 6 8.2

[99] Fornara (1971) 64

[100] Fornara (1971) 64

[101] Fornara (1971) 64

[102] Develin (1989) 152-3

[103] *Hetaireia* is a classical term for a 'friendship group', but the term *hetairos* appears in Homeric epic to indicate a special relationship between friends and also occurs in lyric poetry: Hobden (2013) 11 n.29

[104] Connor (1971) 26

that Cylon προσποιησάμενος δὲ ἑταιρηίην τῶν ἡλικιωτέων καταλαβεῖν τὴν ἀκρόπολιν ἐπειρήθη[105] ("...collected a band of friends (*hetaireia*) and tried to seize the Acropolis"), although the possibility that he is using contemporary terminology to describe an earlier phenomenon cannot be discounted. Murray has argued that the *hetaireiai* are the continuation of old aristocratic warrior groups. With the military function of the aristocracy taken over by the hoplite solider, aristocratic warrior groups of this sort were transformed into leisure groups who met at *symposia*.[106] The activities of these groups were as varied as the dispositions of their members. No doubt some talked about politics and which individuals to support, whilst others were content simply to enjoy each other's company. Calhoun, who wrote a doctoral thesis on the *hetaireiai* which was published in 1908 and remains very influential, also maintains that the political clubs were an early development and argues that they were in existence by the time of Isagoras and Cleisthenes, as Aristotle shows that both had clubs supporting them.[107] Connor, however, has argued that these political clubs were a more recent development: he suggests that the rivalry between Pericles and Thucydides son of Melesias in the mid-fifth century led to two camps of followers in the form of groups or 'clubs' and points out that Plutarch sees this as the start of the division between demos and oligarchy.[108] Although one must be wary of speaking of 'camps' and ascribing them characteristics similar to those of modern political parties, the argument makes interesting reading. Plutarch's reasoning is that the aristocrats in Athens wanted someone capable to blunt Pericles' authority, fearing that his grip on the political systems in Athens could become an outright monarchy. They therefore put forward Thucydides, who was able to create a balance of power in Athens by grouping the aristocrats into a single body, whereas previously they had been dispersed in their *hetaireiai* among the mass of the people at the Assembly, thus diluting their influence. By separating and grouping them into a single body in the Assembly, Thucydides was able to concentrate their strength.[109] Plutarch says that the rivalry between Pericles and Thucydides cut a deep gash in the state, and caused one section of it to be called the Demos, or the People, and the other the *Oligoi*, or the Few. Plutarch also notes that Pericles chose this moment to hand over the reins of power to the people to a much greater extent than ever before and deliberately shaped his policy to please them.[110] Connor's argument that the *hetaireiai* were formed from the rivalry between Pericles and Thucydides was developed to counter the view of Vischer who claimed that political clubs were an Isagorian development to resist Cleisthenes, but Connor misses the point that the supporters of Isagoras and Cleisthenes were already organised into clubs. Although Calhoun's work must be treated with caution, as it is

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[105] Hdt. 5.71.1

[106] Murray (1990) 136

[107] Calhoun (1913) 11-12

[108] Connor (1971) 63 – Plut. *Per.* 11

[109] Plut. *Per.* 11

[110] Plut. *Per.* 11

dogmatic and often without supporting evidence, it suggests the bodies were already in existence by the fifth century, rather than an innovative development.

Whatever the origins of these clubs, it would seem that with the decline of the aristocracy by the beginning of the fifth century they were often little more than bunches of disaffected grumbling aristocrats bemoaning their lot, but that, when they combined their resources, they could form a formidable force in Athenian politics.

Connor argues that *hetaireiai* organised the ostracism of Themistocles, an achievement that illustrates their political power and organisational ability,[111] as well as highlighting their long history. He also argues that members of the *hetaireiai* were disaffected with the *nouveaux riches* in politics such as Cleon and Hyperbolus during the last three decades of the fifth century and that this disaffection turned some into revolutionaries.[112] Unlike today, when individuals tend to belong to one political party at a time, it was possible for the disaffected aristocrats to belong to multiple *hetaireiai* [113] so they could further their aims in numerous areas, and this will become evident when examining the affairs of the profanation of the Mysteries and the mutilation of the Herms.

By the time of the Sicilian Expedition, then, we can see that clubs and *hetaireiai* were long established and had a history of getting involved in political disputes.

Also linked to the *hetaireiai* are the *genē* – a loose and imprecisely understood term most probably used to denote lineage and also used in a quasi-precise sense to denote a set of families or individuals who identified themselves by the use of a collective plural name.[114]

In archaic Attica certain *genē* appointed their own priests to serve at public cults and were associated with state festivals. The hierophant of the Eleusinian Mysteries was always from the Eumolpid *genos*, although it would seem that five distinct *genē* had a role in the Mysteries.[115] Calhoun argued that, prior to Cleisthenes, Eleusis was probably regulated by the aristocracy.[116] But evidence suggests that the Eleusinian Mysteries and other festivals were reshaped in the sixth century and Eleusis itself shows signs of major building works dating from this period,[117] and these changes may be linked to democratic reforms; and certainly after Solon the membership of a *genos* became less important as qualification for office became wealth and not birth. The *genē* then faded into being merely cultic organisations,[118] and it would not seem

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[111] Connor (1971) 25

[112] Connor (1971) 197

[113] Calhoun (1913) 30

[114] *OCD* 630

[115] Parker (1996) 57-62

[116] Parker (1996) 124-5

[117] Parker (1996) 76,98

[118] Parker (1996) 76

unreasonable, but remains conjectural, to suggest that some of them associated with them became subsumed into the *hetaireiai* as the disaffected aristocracy grumbled about their fate at drinking parties.

The differing arguments and points of view about the origins of the *hetaireiai* and their relationship to *genē* serve to highlight the uncertainty surrounding the phenomenon. This makes it more difficult to identify the forces working against the Sicilian Expedition as it prepared to depart Athens. As will be shown, it seems likely that disaffected and disenfranchised aristocrats had a lot to lose from the expedition and most likely vehemently opposed it, but pinpointing how this opposition manifested itself and was organised is very difficult.

That the political clubs and *hetaireiai* are important in our study of the Sicilian Expedition is, however, fairly certain, because Calhoun has shown that they could influence who was selected to serve in the *Boule*:[119] this potentially accentuated the council's aristocratic leanings and perhaps put it at odds with a more populist Assembly. Calhoun highlights a fourth century example from Demosthenes where a club, which included a member of the *Boule* named Eubulides, was able to control a deme meeting of the Halimusians at which they struck the name of Euxitheus from the deme roll. Eubulides had a grudge against Euxitheus after he had given evidence against him in an earlier trial and, by deliberately drawing out the day's proceedings by making speeches and drawing up resolutions, Eublides was able to wait until the supporters of Euxitheus had left for the day and then vilify him and demanded his expulsion.[120] Although the meeting was held in Halimus, many of the demesmen actually lived in Athens, some 35 stades (4 miles) away, and the majority left the meeting early in order to get to Athens or to their farms before dark. Eubulides arranged for his supporters to remain and, after manipulating proceedings so that the expulsion vote was held at the end of the day, ensured that the vote went against Euxitheus. It seems reasonable to suggest that Eubulides and his supporters belonged to some form of organisation or club given the level of planning required for the expulsion vote to succeed. Calhoun argues that, since Eubulides and his club could control that meeting, there is no reason why they could not also control that year's election meeting of the deme and ensure the success of their candidates. This would mean that, if the clubs combined on any policy, it would be possible to secure the selection of many of the associates and councillors from their respective demes. Calhoun notes that the *Boule* contained a large proportion of oligarchic sympathisers in 404,[121] and this may well have also been the case in 415 given that membership was biased towards the wealthy. When charges relating to the Mysteries were brought against Alcibiades in 415, Thucydides says that they were taken up by those who

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[119] Calhoun (1913) 130-1
[120] Dem. 57.8-13
[121] Calhoun (1913) 130

disliked him and thought his removal would allow them to control the demos.[122] This evokes the idea of an oligarchic coalition,[123] and the possibility that they united and took action to discredit Alcibiades by removing him from a position of leadership in the Sicilian Expedition cannot be discounted.

But there were arguably political clubs on both sides of the conflict. Alcibiades clearly cultivated a following of influential people[124] and was himself associated with *hetaireiai* which, as Calhoun points out, must have had similar tendencies to him.[125] Indeed, there are several examples of riotous behaviour, including one in which a group led by Alcibiades invaded the house of Anytus and carried off his tableware.[126] Crucially, Alcibiades also packed the Assembly with his followers, presumably from his clubs.[127] Thucydides highlights this when describing the debate in the Assembly concerning the launching of the Sicilian Expedition. He has Nicias claim that "it is with some real alarm that I see this young man's party sitting at his side in this assembly, all called in to support him".[128] This goes a long way to explaining the tensions between the Assembly and the *Boule*, as Alcibiades appears to have been able to dominate the Assembly with his supporters and his oratorical demagogy, whilst the aristocrats who feared Alcibiades' rise had more influence in the *Boule*. The fact that Alcibiades later called for the political clubs that had conspired against him in 415 to be broken up demonstrates the power these shadowy bodies had in the run-up to the Expedition.[129]

The figure of Alcibiades himself draws attention to another divide in Athens, that between generations. Born in 450, he was still only 35 when the Expedition was launched but had been publicly visible, even notorious, for some years before that. His youthful rise to prominence coincided with the increasing impact of sophistic education on young men from well-off backgrounds. Davidson argues that this began to be a notable phenomenon when Euathlus, a young student of Protagoras successfully prosecuted Thucydides son of Melesias for corruption, a trial that Davidson dates to the 420s.[130] Euathlus was acting as *sunēgoros*, a state-appointed official who prosecuted former magistrates and held one of the few public positions open to those aged under thirty.[131] Aristophanes mentions this prosecution several times in his comedies and refers to it as a conflict between old and young in the *Acharnians*, produced in 425:

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[122] Thuc. 6.28-29

[123] Connor (1971) 72

[124] Connor (1971) 24-5

[125] Calhoun (1913) 25

[126] Plut. *Alc.* 4

[127] Calhoun (1913) 116

[128] Thuc. 6.13.1

[129] Thuc. 8.81.2

[130] Ar. *Ach.* 709; Ar. *Vesp.* 592; Davidson (2006) 61. The idea of sophistic young people can already be seen in the fragments of Aristophanes' *Daitaleis* (perhaps 427 BC).

[131] Davidson (2006) 61

> Can it be right that someone old and bending,
>
> Like poor old Thucydides, should be contending,
>
> Against that 'Scythian Wilderness', the young
>
> Son of Cephisodemus, glib of tongue?[132]

As ever, Aristophanes presents a window into the atmosphere on Athens at the time – a window distorted for comic effect, admittedly, but a window nonetheless. In fact, Aristophanes returns to this theme of conflict between old and young several times in his comedies in the years before the Sicilian Expedition. Lines 526-735 of *Wasps* (produced in 422) stage a contest between a young man named Bdelycleon and a representative of the non-élite elderly, named Philocleon. The contest is a debate about whether the non-élite elderly, who inspect the genitals of new citizens at age assessments, really rule like kings or are actually subordinates. Although the subject of the debate is absurd, the notion of the young getting the better of the old is serious. When the chorus sing

> Why, that would mean admitting that old men have had their day,
>
> There'd be no more use for us, they'd mock us to our faces[133]

Aristophanes is showing us a divide opening up in Athenian society, with the young pushing impatiently to take roles that had been traditionally reserved for the old.

A year before, in 423, Aristophanes' *Clouds* has sophistic education of the young as its main theme. The *agōn* in this play features 'righteous discourse' personified as an old wind bag (τυφογέρων)[134] and a Cronos,[135] who taught previous men (ἀλλ' ἐπίδειξαι σύ τε τοὺς προτέρους ἅττ' ἐδίδασκες).[136] 'Unrighteous discourse', with a new brand of education (καινὴν παίδευσιν)[137] and the brand-new ideas he has uncovered (γνώμας καινὰς ἐξευρίσκων),[138] debates with 'righteous discourse' to comic effect, and the youthful element comes out on top again.

Davidson argues that Aristophanes keeps returning to this theme because the new education of the sophists upset the principle of the young waiting their turn for political power and resulted in the likes of Alcibiades seeking power before it was due. This, argues Davidson, was not the standard generational gap which every society constantly undergoes but a revolution which turned the established order upside down and created a fissure in Athenian society.

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[132] Ar. *Ach.* 706-9

[133] Ar. *Vesp.* 540-1

[134] Ar. *Nub.* 908

[135] Ar. *Nub.* 929

[136] Ar. *Nub.* 935

[137] Ar. *Nub.* 936-7

[138] Ar. *Nub.* 896

In *Wasps* the young protagonist is characterized as an enemy of Cleon. This illustrates one line of argument in Forrest's influential 1975 paper on 'An Athenian generation gap', which sees the rise of sophistry in part as a reaction to the demagogy associated with figures like Cleon. The extraordinary economic trajectory of Athens since the 450s had pushed low born 'vulgar' men such as Cleon to real authority by the 420s. Seeing men such as Cleon or Hyperbolus rise to ascendancy in Athens, young aristocrats flocked to the sophists who offered them a substitute for what they lacked in real political life – but also potentially the skills to make a mark. Sophistic education thus not only appealed to the young but also fed on and increased the class resentment they felt towards Cleon and his ilk[139] and thus widened divisions in Athenian society. Forrest says it is no surprise that the critique of rhetoric in Plato's *Gorgias* is dramatically dated to 427[140] and that the upper class critique of democracy in Pseudo-Xenophon's *Athenian Constitution* should be dated to this decade.[141] In his study of filial relations in Ancient Athens Strauss has argued that the intergenerational conflict highlighted by Forrest can be explained only in part as contemporary expressions of an age old motif, and that there was something specific about this period of Athenian history which heightened tension between the generations. Strauss points to the death of Pericles in 429 as being a watershed, marking a changing of the guard. He also points out that the plague in Athens in the 430s would have likely had a more adverse effect on men in their twenties than teenagers. These teenagers were now coming of age and becoming prominent due to the higher mortality rate of the generation above them during the plague.[142] This intergenerational tension existed alongside tension between political societies in Athens in the decade prior to the Expedition. As a result, we discern not only tensions between young and old (with the young seeking political power before their allotted time and the old trying to prevent them attaining this power) but also the resentment that entrenched aristocrats felt towards the 'unworthy' who could now grasp the levers of power. This rejection of the new 'low class' of politicians is summed up in a fragment of Eupolis' play *Demes* written in 416, just before the Expedition:[143]

> Once upon a time our city's generals came from the best families, first by wealth and first by birth. We used to pray to them as if they were gods – and so they were, and we prospered. But now we go on campaign at random, electing as our generals – garbage.[144]

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[139] Forrest (1975) 43

[140] Forrest (1975) 42

[141] Forrest (1975) 44

[142] Strauss (1993) 136-148

[143] Although see Storrey (2003) for discussion on the dating of the play, which some scholars date to immediately after the Expedition in 413/12.

[144] Frg. 117 (12) - cited in Forrest (1975) 41-2

And the figure of Alcibiades now encapsulates the youthful aristocratic fight-back against this deplorable state of affairs.

But the youthful arrogance of Alcibiades added to tensions in the city in other ways. Around this time (although the exact date is uncertain) Alcibiades' wife Hipparete initiated divorce proceedings against him – the only known instance of a wife bringing a divorce case against her husband against his wishes.[145] Hipparete was the sister of Callias and the daughter of Hipponicus, one of the richest men in Athens,[146] who had made his fortune from silver mining. Plutarch recalls a story about Alcibiades striking Hipponicus in public for no other reason than that he had agreed with some friends to do it as a joke.[147] This action would have generated great indignation and, although Alcibiades later married his daughter, Plutarch notes that it may have been Hipparete's brother, Callias who betrothed her to Alcibiades, not Hipponicus himself.[148] Callias himself was later prominent in prosecuting Andocides in 400, although he was accused by Andocides of participating in the profanation of the Mysteries himself. Clinton argues that Callias may have held the position of Daduch within the Eleusinian priesthood in 415 and would have been among the priests called upon to curse Alcibiades following his trial.[149] Alcibiades had clearly mistreated his wife and subjected her to public humiliation. He had even brought a female slave back from Melos, keeping her in his house as a concubine and fathering a child with her.[150] This humiliation of Hipparete would have fuelled tensions with her family and perhaps led to the divorce proceedings. As Todd points out, we cannot be certain that Hipparete did not receive support from her natal family,[151] indeed she may well have been encouraged by her family to petition the Archon for divorce herself (i.e. without resorting to a man) in an attempt to humiliate Alcibiades. Although this attempt failed (as Alcibiades himself seized his wife bodily whilst she was going to fulfil legal formalities and dragged her back to his house through the agora, where no one dared challenge him), it cannot have endeared Alcibiades to a very powerful family: its members may have pulled strings with the *Boule*, especially if it is the case that Hipparete died not long before the events of 415 and this stirred up memories of the episode.[152]

Isocrates says that Alcibiades' son lost his father to exile (in 415) and his mother to death when he was very young, while Plutarch synchronizes Hipparate's death with a trip Alcibiades made to Ephesus.[153] Since both a trip to Ephesus and Alcibiades' keenness to get ten talents from Callias

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[145] Plut. *Alc.* 8

[146] Brulé (2003) 119

[147] Plut. *Alc.* 8

[148] Plut. *Alc.* 8

[149] Clinton (1974) 49

[150] de Souza (2014) 174

[151] Todd (2003) 215

[152] Plut. *Alc.* 8

[153] Isoc.16.45, Plut. *Alc.* 8

on the occasion of his son's birth[154] make sense in the context of his preparations for the Olympics of 416,[155] one may infer that the child was born in 416 and that his mother died not long afterwards. So, it is entirely possible that Hipparete died in 416-415, not long after attempting to initiate a divorce, and that this resulted in Alcibiades being exposed to the enmity of her natal family during the months immediately before the launch of the Expedition.

The relevance of both generational and class issues to the Expedition is clear. In Thucydides' version of the crucial assembly debate Alcibiades boasts that the glory of Athens has been increased by his personal achievements in that most aristocratic of pursuits, Olympic chariot-racing, while Nicias says that it is the younger generation in Athens who are eager for war in Sicily, whereas the older generation are more cautious.[156] Plutarch expands on this, describing the ostracism vote between Alcibiades and Nicias in 417 as a contest between young and old.[157] Meanwhile Euripides' *Suppliants*, produced a few years earlier in 423, also speaks of young men wanting war (and of democracy allowing young people to be heard),[158] and we may sense that the emergence of a politically significant generation gap coincided with a more bellicose tone in Athenian politics: the year 427 saw a number of aggressive campaigns, of which the original invasion of Sicily was but one, and in 424 Aristophanes accuses Hyperbolus of seeking the conquest of Carthage.[159] Disillusionment with Pericles' previous policy of containment and a willingness to try something more positive and daring may have been a young man's attitude.

The Athens that launched the Sicilian Expedition was in theory a homogeneous political entity. In practice, however, that entity had a number of fault lines. The *Boule* and the Assembly appear to be at odds. Powerful and wealthy oligarchs could manipulate membership of the *Boule* which was already skewed towards the wealthy. Alcibiades had begun to use his clubs to control the Assembly, prompting his wealthy opponents to increase attempts to control the *Boule.* Conflict between young and old and between entrenched élite and *nouveaux riches* added a further layer of tension – and a complicating one too: for young aristocrats might find themselves sharing a taste for imperial aggression with 'new politicians' who were not of their class and, whatever their own age, had supporters who were not of their generation, while older men of whatever class might be cautious about war and older men from the wealthier part of society particularly hostile because of its potential cost. There was a powder keg here and, as will be seen in the next chapter, the profanations of the Mysteries and the mutilations of the Herms provided the spark

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[154] Plut. *Alc.* 8.6

[155] *APF* 19; Gribble (2012) 56

[156] Thuc. 6.12 1-2

[157] Plut. *Nic.* 11.1

[158] Eur. *Supp.* 443-4

[159] Ar. *Eq.* 1304-5

that ignited it and derailed the Sicilian Expedition. Before that, however, there is one further sign of pre-expedition conflict to be examined.

4.5   The Ostracism of Hyperbolus

This was the ostracism of Hyperbolus in (probably) 415. There had not been a successful ostracism vote for some time and there would never be another one,[160] so the political circumstances were clearly exceptional. Since these circumstances obtained in the immediate run-up to the Expedition, their nature is of great importance. Investigation of the question is hampered by the strange fact that Thucydides offers no information at all about the episode. But Plutarch mentions it on three separate occasions in his *Lives*, and an examination of what he reports exposes political instability and polarisation in Athens on the very eve of the Sicilian Expedition.

Hyperbolus was the son of Antiphanes and belonged to the deme Perithoidae.[161] He was typical of the political leaders that followed Pericles in the mid-to-late fifth century in that he was a demagogue and came from outside the aristocracy, being from among the *emporoi* or the rising *nouveau riche* mercantile class. In Aristophanes' *Peace* first performed in 421, the god Hermes states that, after the death of Cleon, Hyperbolus wished to establish himself as the leader of the people and that he was a lamp-seller by trade.[162] Connor has shown that the Greek term for *nouveaux riches* – νεόπλουτος – comes into use at this time and would have been applied as a negative term to newly prosperous men like Hyperbolus, who came from outside the traditional aristocracy and used their wealth to seek political power.[163] Aristophanes is using the term lamp-seller in a pejorative way, implying that Hyperbolus is not fit for power. Fuqua has argued that Hyperbolus wished to use his position as leader of the demos as a stepping stone to the generalship, but that the policies of Alcibiades blocked this move.[164] In Aristophanes' *Knights*, performed in 424 at the Lenaea where it won first prize, Hyperbolus is also accused by the leader of the chorus of knights of seeking the conquest of Carthage:

> Girls, have you heard the rumour? That a hundred ships or so
> Against the Carthaginians are being urged to go?
> Hyperbolus proposes this, an evil man and sour[165]

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[160] See Kosmin (2015) 151-2 for discussion on how Hyperbolus' ostracism was a ritual breakdown which ended the procedure forever.

[161] Fuqua (1965) 165

[162] Ar. *Pax* 681-4; 690

[163] Connor (1971) 155

[164] Fuqua (1965) 169

[165] Ar. *Eq.* 1301-1304

This is a charge later levelled at Alcibiades by Thucydides,[166] and it would seem that Hyperbolus and Alcibiades occupied much the same political ground and must have been in competition with one another. Although Thucydides is silent, there seems little doubt that a conflict between Hyperbolus and Alcibiades developed after Cleon's death in 422, which could only be resolved to Hyperbolus' satisfaction by the removal of Alcibiades by means of ostracism.[167] As Fuqua goes on to explain, Hyperbolus, as the political heir to Cleon, would also be opposed to Nicias. Hyperbolus posed the same threat to Nicias as Cleon had in the previous decade and Nicias must have viewed the rise of Hyperbolus with some apprehension. Thus, Hyperbolus found himself at odds with both of the major political figures of the period and manoeuvred to remove one of them. The removal of Alcibiades, undoubtedly Hyperbolus' preferred option, would have given him leadership of the radical democrats, whereas the removal of Nicias would have also given Hyperbolus an advantage as it would have created a distinct power vacuum resulting in a major realignment of Athenian politics.[168] Fuqua was writing in the 1960s and his argument has been challenged recently by Forsdyke, who argues that Hyperbolus' ostracism was not élite manipulation,[169] and by Barbato who argues that Hyperbolus' framing of Alcibiades was a fourth century invention.[170] Both Forsdyke and Barbato's arguments involve discounting Plutarch's testimony and indeed Barbato refers to Plutarch as a 'filter' through which the event has been viewed.[171] This is true of all ancient literary sources, however, and as insufficient argument for discounting Plutarch is offered, his account cannot simply be ignored.

Thucydides makes but one reference to Hyperbolus in the entirety of his *History* and this reference is completely out of political and chronological context. He tells us in Book Eight that Hyperbolus was

> …a wretched character (μοχθηρός), who had been ostracised, not because anyone was afraid of his power or prestige, but because he was a thoroughly bad lot (διὰ πονηρίαν) and a disgrace to the city.[172]

The language used in this statement is unusual. The epithet μοχθηρός is not used anywhere else in the *History* and, along with διὰ πονηρίαν, it derives from Aristophanes, who refers to Hyperbolus directly in seven plays produced between 424 and 405.[173] Indeed, Old Comedy pays an awful lot of attention to Hyperbolus: Hermippus, Plato, Eupolis, Cratinus, Leucon and

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[166] Thuc. 6.15.2

[167] Fuqua (1965) 160-70

[168] Fuqua (1965) 170

[169] Forsdyke (2005) 173

[170] Barbato (2021) 515

[171] Forsdyke (2005) 170-1; Barbato (2021) 515

[172] Thuc. 8.73.3

[173] Ar. *Ach. 846*; *Eq.* 1304, 1363; *Nub.* 551, 557-8, 623, 876, 1065; *Vesp.* 1007; *Pax* 681, 921, 1319; *Thesm.* 840; *Ran.* 570

Polyzelus all also make him the butt of jokes.[174] This makes Thucydides' silence all the more baffling, but it may have influenced the author of the Aristotelian *Athenian Constitution*, who does not include Hyperbolus in his account of ostracisms or corrupt demagogues, even though he had been labelled as a demagogue as early as the beginning of the fourth century. Writing around 355, the Athenian rhetorician Isocrates demonstrates the depths to which Hyperbolus' reputation had sunk by the latter half of the fourth century by coupling him with Cleophon,[175] a demagogue who is mentioned in the *Athenian Constitution* as the man whose drunken behaviour prevented the Athenian Assembly from accepting the terms of the Spartan peace overtures in 406 after the Battle of Arginusae.[176]

Plutarch mentions the ostracism of Hyperbolus on three separate occasions. In his *Life of Nicias* he notes that the feud between Alcibiades and Nicias had grown so bitter that it was decided by the people to resort to an ostracism. He further remarks that the whole city of Athens was split into two factions, backing either Alcibiades or Nicias and that Hyperbolus, whom he describes as among the most reckless and unscrupulous of characters, calculated that if one of his opponents were to be banished, he might become a match for the survivor. So, Hyperbolus tried to inflame public feeling against both, but Nicias and Alcibiades came to a secret agreement and by setting their supporters to work combined to divert the ostracism from themselves onto Hyperbolus.[177] Plutarch then repeats this story in his *Life of Alcibiades*.[178] But in this version he notes that according to some accounts it was not with Nicias that Alcibiades made a pact, but with Phaeax. Plutarch is at pains to remain impartial, but his comment that "I have set forth at greater length elsewhere [i.e. in the life of Nicias] the facts which have come to light concerning this affair" suggests that he believes it is more credible that the pact was between Alcibiades and Nicias and that the city was split into two factions each supporting one of the two. Plutarch also mentions the ostracism of Hyperbolus in his *Life of Aristides*, in a general discussion about the practice of ostracism. Again, he says that Alcibiades and Nicias as the two most powerful men in Athens combined their rival factions and arranged matters so that Hyperbolus was ostracised.[179]

Fuqua has argued that Hyperbolus' ostracism came about as a result of a period of stagnation in Athenian politics. The argument goes that in the three years between the battle of Mantinea in 418 and the launching of the Sicilian Expedition in 415, Nicias and Alcibiades appear to have awaited developments from abroad and consolidated their domestic support.[180] Hyperbolus used this period of inactivity to cast aspersions on both Nicias and Alcibiades and demand that

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[174] Baldwin (1974) 151

[175] Isoc. *De Pace* 75

[176] Arist. [*Ath. Pol*] 34

[177] Plut. *Nic.* 11

[178] Plut. *Alc.* 13

[179] Plut. *Arist.* 7

[180] Fuqua (1965) 176

the current hesitation stop.[181] Fuqua goes on to argue that the arrival of the ambassadors from Egesta in 416 provided Hyperbolus with this opportunity.[182] Smart adds that the arrival of the ambassadors began a four-way power struggle between Nicias, Hyperbolus, Phaeax and Alcibiades, with Nicias opposed to helping Egesta and the other three all wanting to get involved to further their own ends, but refusing to accede to any proposal which gave any one of them more control of the enterprise than the other two. Although Fuqua's argument is an interesting one, it fails to take account of the Melian episode in 416 and also the treaty between Athens and Egesta, which, as we will see below in section 7.3, can be tentatively dated to 418/7. To suggest that this was a period of stagnation is to overstate the case. What is more likely is that, rather than this being a period of stagnation, the ascendancy of Alcibiades proved to be too much of an obstacle to Hyperbolus' ambitions and an ostracism was seen by him as the only means by which he could remove him.

Smart also argues that this power struggle between Alcibiades and Hyperbolus led to the ostracism of Hyperbolus and that it was not until Alcibiades' spectacular success at the Olympic Games of 416 that he could take up the Egestan cause and be confident of outdoing Phaeax and securing control of the expedition.[183] Smart also sees Phaeax and Andocides as being behind the mutilation of the Herms as an attempt to prevent Alcibiades leaving with the Expedition and there is some circumstantial evidence in favour of this argument.[184]

Both Fuqua and Smart believe that the ostracism took place in 416, but the dating of the event is problematic and has caused much scholarly debate. We have a fragmentary inscription of an amendment proposed by Hyperbolus with a text implying a date at the very end of 418/17.[185] As ostracisms were proposed in Prytany VI and undertaken in Prytany VIII,[186] Hyperbolus must have been ostracised after 418/17. If Nicias and Alcibiades were among the potential victims, then 415 is the latest year it could have occurred, so that only leaves 416 and 415 as potential years for the ostracism.

Fuqua has argued for 416 based on a fragment from the historian Theopompus found in a scholion to Aristophanes' *Wasps*.[187] The fragment refers to the death of Hyperbolus and says:

> they ostracised Hyperbolus for six years. After sailing down to Samos and making his home there he died. They put his corpse in a wine bag and sank it into the sea[188]

[181] Fuqua (1965) 177

[182] Fuqua (1965) 176-7

[183] Smart (1972) 143

[184] Smart (1972) 143

[185] *IG* I³ 85 – see Rhodes (1994) 86-87 and Woodhead (1949) 78-83

[186] Arist. [*Ath. Pol.*] 43.5

[187] Fuqua (1965) 166-7

[188] Schol. Ar. Vesp 1007=Theopomp. *FGrH* 115 F 96(b)

Although this text seems to suggest that Hyperbolus was ostracised for only six years rather than the usual ten, Rhodes rejects the inference because, although the notion is attractive, there is no evidence at all to suggest that the period for which Athenians were ostracised was ever anything but 10 years.[189] According to Thucydides, Hyperbolus died in 411 so Fuqua has counted back in Athenian years to reckon the ostracism took place in 416. (It is five and a half years between the death of Hyperbolus in the autumn of 411 and Prytany VIII of 417/16 by direct count, but by inclusive reckoning of archon years (417/6-412/11) we get a figure of six.)[190]

Rhodes,[191] Raubitschek[192] and others, however, have used the speech *Against Alcibiades* to argue that 415 is the year of the ostracism. This speech is known to us as Andocides IV and has been attributed variously to Andocides, Phaeax or Lysias. It is connected with an ostracism and is written as if it was by one of the potential victims: since the others are Nicias and Alcibiades, Rhodes argues that the putative speaker is very probably Phaeax.[193] The speech envisages that the decision to hold an ostracism has already been taken and that today is the actual day of the vote. Since the speaker attacks Alcibiades and refers to the Olympic Games of 416, at which Alcibiades entered seven teams in the chariot race, the ostracism in question must be in 415.

Smart argues that the piece is a tract by Phaeax denouncing Alcibiades which was circulated by his friend Andocides in 416 and was probably the thing that prevented Alcibiades being granted sole command of the expedition.[194] Furley, by contrast, thinks Andocides was the author of *Against Alcibiades*, and sees it as a pamphlet put out in the summer of 415 to condemn Alcibiades after the departure of the Sicilian Expedition.[195]

Rhodes, however, points out that it would be very perverse to write an attack on Alcibiades in summer 415 without saying anything about the Expedition or the mutilations and profanations. Rhodes suggests that the speech was written after the war as a rhetorical exercise but that the assumption of the writer is that the ostracism took place in 415.[196] If Rhodes is correct, then the ostracism took place in Prytany VIII of 416/415, which as shown in chapter three above would have been between March 23 and April 27 415, in the immediate run-up to the Expedition.

Rhodes' view has the advantage of taking the putative character of *Against Alcibiades* as a speech delivered in the immediate context of an ostracism at face value. But it does entail admitting that its author made a mistake. The speaker refers to Athens' treatment of Melos after

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[189] Rhodes (1994) 88

[190] Fuqua (1965) 167-8

[191] Rhodes (1994) 88-91

[192] Raubitschek (1948) 192-3

[193] Rhodes (1994) 88

[194] Smart (1972) 143

[195] Furley (1989) 142-3

[196] Rhodes (1994) 91

its capture in 416 and denounces Alcibiades for having bought a captured Melian woman prisoners and had a son by her.[197] But this son could not have been born before the eighth prytany of 416/15, so this is not an argument that someone attacking Alcibiades at the time of an ostracism in 415 could have used. But this error is probably not a sufficient reason to reject the view that *Against Alcibiades* is valid evidence for the date of Hyperbolus' ostracism.

Around 30 ostraca have been uncovered from excavations in Athens that pertain to this ostracism. 5 against Alcibiades, 5 against Phaeax, 3 against Hyperbolus, 1 against Nicias, 8 against Cleophon, 1 against his brother Philinus, 3 against the Charias who would serve as *strategos* in 413/12, 1 against a Charias who may be the Archon of 415/14, 1 against a Crates, and 1 each against two otherwise unknown men, Myrrhinicus and Phileriphus.[198] The fact that Nicias, Phaeax and Alcibiades are named suggests that the two scenarios outlined by Plutarch (Alcibiades forming a pact with Nicias, and Alcibiades forming a pact with Phaeax) both remain possible. But it would seem more credible that the pact was between Alcibiades and Nicias, given that they were the leaders of the hawkish and dovish factions (to use modern terminology and also accepting that Nicias was against the Sicilian campaign rather than pro-peace in general), at least as Thucydides outlines it in the debate prior to the Expedition.

Although Hansen has argued strongly that there were no groups of followers in the Assembly whose votes could be controlled by a leader,[199] the fact that Nicias and Alcibiades managed to join forces to persuade the majority of the demos to ostracise Hyperbolus counters his view, and, as argued above, it seems likely that Hyperbolus was attempting to gain the leadership of the radical democrats. A law passed in 410/9 which required members of the *Boule* (but not the Assembly) to sit in the seats assigned to them and a passage in Aristophanes' *Ecclesiazusae* (Assembly Women) in which the women plan to sit together in the assembly both prove Hansen's argument flawed.[200]

> A ticket first we must each procure,
> Then sit together to make quite sure
> That we vote with our sisters…[201]

The question of political groupings in Athens has been addressed by Rosenbloom. He notes that, although Hyperbolus and other demagogues who held office in Athens following the death of Pericles had a legal democratic mandate, they lacked the ideological and symbolic validation of

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[197] Andoc. 4. 22-23

[198] Rhodes (1994) 85-6

[199] Hansen (1987) 72-86

[200] Rhodes (1994) 93

[201] Ar. *Eccl.* 296-9

their right to exercise political power,[202] in that the demos still looked to the old aristocratic élite for leadership, even though power rested legally with the new order. These leaders were termed *ponēroi* (bad, vile, useless, inauthentic) in contrast to the other type of leader, the *chrēstoi* (good, noble, useful, genuine) whose status derived from some combination of wealth, military prominence, conspicuous expenditure, education and aristocratic culture.[203] Rosenbloom argues that Hyperbolus, who was regularly humiliated by the comic playwrights as a barbarian, slave, lamp seller and sycophant, attempted to defend the demos by the ostracism of *chrēstoi* who were accused of attempting to subvert the democracy.

Rosenbloom goes on to argue that Alcibiades' use of his victory in the Olympics of 416 to consolidate his political leadership recalled Cylon's bid to turn his victory into a tyranny at Athens.[204] In addition, his arrogation of Diomedes' or Teisias' Olympic victory in the four-horse chariot race duplicated the conduct of Peisistratos who took the credit for Cimon, son of Stesagoras' Olympic victory in 532.[205]   As Rosenbloom points out, Olympic victory conferred a mystique upon the victor and tyranny was sometimes the reward for victories so great they exceeded society's ordinary capacity for compensation.[206] The years following Pericles' death saw the rise of a new democratic political élite, although Rosenbloom argues that this also resulted in the development of a new aristocratic style in politics as the traditional aristocratic factions also sought to redefine themselves.[207] This is also noted by Morris who observes that around 420 the aristocracy began to muscle in on *polis* iconography using grave imagery to depict themselves as leaders of the *polis*.[208] Alcibiades' Olympic victory and subsequent actions directed scrutiny to the culture behind this group. Nicias and Phaeax belonged to this group, which defined itself by conspicuous expenditure, and Rosenbloom suggests that Hippocles and Charias (the Archon of 415/4) did as well.[209] If Rosenbloom is correct in his assertion that Alcibiades' Olympic victory was the trigger for the *ostrakophoria*[210] then it must have taken place in the eighth prytany of 416/15.[211] This would go some way toward explaining the initial uncertainties around the number of generals that would lead the Expedition, as two of them were facing ostracism during the planning, and strengthens Rhodes' argument that the ostracism took place in Prytany VIII of 415, just prior to the launch of the Expedition.

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[202] Rosenbloom (2004a) 57

[203] Rosenbloom (2004a) 56

[204] Hdt. 5.71; Thuc. 1.126.3-12; Paus. 1.28.1

[205] Hdt. 6.103.2

[206] Rosenbloom (2004a) 74

[207] Rosenbloom (2004a) 78

[208] Morris (1994) 74

[209] Rosenbloom (2004a) 78

[210] The process of the demos casting individual votes on ostraca is known as ostrakophoria.

[211] Rosenbloom (2004a) 77

The mutilations of the Herms and the profanations of the Mysteries which occurred in Prytany X of 416/15, shortly after Hyperbolus' ostracism can be seen as an extension of the *ostrakophoria*, as the informers were *ponēroi* because of their low status in the community and because of their use of public institutions to threaten the persons, property and citizenship of high-ranking Athenians for private profit. The youth Andromachus who received a 10,000-drachma reward for revealing the names of 11 men who performed the Mysteries at Pulytion's house was a slave, and possibly Alcibiades' slave.[212]

Hyperbolus' attempt to ostracise Alcibiades met with failure, and Plutarch consistently claims that this was because the supporters (*hetaireiai*) of Alcibiades and Nicias joined forces to ostracise Hyperbolus.[213] Rosenbloom argues, however, that the *hetaireiai* were not numerous enough to decide an *ostrakophoria* and that the *chrēstoi* retained the hearts and minds of the demos. The citizens with traditional claims of leadership were a hallmark of ancient Athenian culture, as opposed to the new economy, legal system and government which lost out in the *ostrakophoria*.

Rosenbloom's argument is a detailed one, but it is key to our investigation into the failure of the Sicilian Expedition. In summary Rosenbloom argues that Hyperbolus orchestrated an *ostrakophoria* to attain legitimacy from the demos for himself and his class (the *ponēroi*). His primacy in the courts, Assembly and *Boule* failed to give him the political capital required for hegemony.[214] Hyperbolus used the mechanism of ostracism, which had fallen into disuse in the decades prior to 415, possibly due to the introduction of the *graphē paranomōn* in 427. Hyperbolus' plan failed when the c*hrēstoi* unified around Alcibiades, despite their misgivings about his designs, to protect their class. The unified c*hrēstoi* brought about the ostracism of Hyperbolus, a case of landed élites putting aside their differences to prevent the hegemony of the new class of *ponēroi*. This ostracism resulted in Hyperbolus' supporters seeking revenge by going after Alcibiades and having him removed from the leadership of the Sicilian Expedition, thus removing a capable general from the venture. So it can now be seen there were at least two groups bent on attacking Alcibaides; rich *Bouleutai* and the *ponēroi* who were supporters of Hyperbolus.

Rosenbloom's argument adds much to our understanding of the ostracism of Hyperbolus. But his assertion that the *hetaireiai* of Nicias and Alcibiades were not numerous enough to decide an *ostrakophoria* is suspect. Plutarch is quite clear that the city was split between Nicias and Alcibiades and the decision to launch an expedition to Sicily must have been an extremely polarising event. In addition, Rosenbloom grants Hyperbolus' followers the power to manipulate events but argues that Nicias and Alcibiades' followers were not numerous enough to do so, which seems absurd. Although Plutarch does not reveal his sources and his version should not

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[212] Andoc. 1.12-14, 27-28

[213] Plut. *Alc.* 13.7 and Plut. *Nic.* 11.5

[214] Rosenbloom (2004b) 341

be accepted uncritically, it does seem likely that Nicias and Alcibiades managed to come to a secret arrangement to combine their support to ostracise Hyperbolus and that this abuse of the system, when it became clear what had happened, turned the Athenians away from using the practise again. That Thucydides fails to mention it is because it was a matter of internal Athenian politics, not (at least as Thucydides sees it) a part of the "war fought between Athens and Sparta"[215] that is the focus of his history. In spite of his overstatement, however, Rosenbloom make an important point in noting that the new generation of political leaders in Athens might have lacked legitimacy in the eyes of many of the demos, even though they had legal legitimacy. Hyperbolus' struggle to gain the backing of the demos failed spectacularly and provided an opportunity for Alcibiades' egotistical and imperial ambitions.

Although we have seen that Athens was rife with division on the eve of the conflict, Thucydides does not give any hint of any opposition to the venture within Athens once it begins. He does have Nicias argue against the sending of forces to Sicily in the debate with Alcibiades in the Assembly (which will be examined below in section 8.2.1.1), but he goes not go into any detail about opposition to the Expedition within Athens after this point, and indeed the depiction of all of Athens coming to wave off the fleet from the Piraeus[216] suggests that the city was united behind the enterprise. Some scholars, however, have identified passages in Aristophanes that suggests to them that not the whole city was united behind the enterprise. Newiger for example argued that Aristophanes' play *Birds* as a whole refers to the Sicilian Expedition and is intended as a criticism of Athenian imperialism.[217] As the main enterprise in *Birds* is to abandon Athens and set up a city somewhere else, Newiger, who considers that all of Aristophanes' plays are aimed at some political or sociological target,[218] sees this as a comment about Athenian imperialism.[219] As MacDowell points out, however, there is no explicit mention of Sicily anywhere in the play and Newiger's entire argument is based around the fact that the play was produced in 414 whilst the Expedition was underway and therefore must be a target for criticism.[220] He points out that there are oblique references to the Expedition in the play (there are two passing references to Nicias[221] and a joke about a summons server arriving by ship,[222] which may or may not be a reference to the Salaminia being sent to recall Alcibiades from Sicily),[223] but this is only to be expected given the Expedition's prominence at the time and to suggest the entire play is a criticism of the Expedition is a gross overstatement. In fact, Sidwell takes the opposite viewpoint to Newiger and

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[215] Thuc. 1.1.1

[216] Thuc. 6.30.2

[217] Newiger (1983) 53-54

[218] MacDowell (1995) 223

[219] Newiger (1983) 53-54

[220] MacDowell (1995) 223

[221] Ar. *Av.* 363 and 639

[222] Ar. *Av.* 145-7

[223] Thuc. 6.61.6

argues that *Birds* is an attack on those who opposed the Expedition, as the play has an intellectual theme tied to a Socratic group and a focus on those who escaped punishment for their involvement in the mutilation of the Herms. [224] All of these arguments are tenuous and prove nothing for or against the existence of internal opposition to the Expedition – though they do serve to demonstrate how varied are the interpretations to which Aristophanes can be subject (as discussed above in). The most one can say is that the fact that a character in the play urges the company not to suffer from μελλονικιᾶν (translated by Dunbar in 1995 as "Nicias-dithers") does suggest that Nicias' unsuitability to command was widely known in Athens.[225]

What an examination of events has shown, then, is that the arrival of the embassy from Egesta not only provided an opportunity to end the stalemate in Athenian politics between Alcibiades and Hyperbolus which had existed since 418 but may well have been the inspiration for the ostracism. It also highlights how polarised the city was, seemingly evenly split between the faction led by Alcibiades, which was eager for the military adventurism that Pericles had forbidden, and the faction led by Nicias, which saw the expedition as folly. This even split led to a stasis which Hyperbolus tried to end, resulting in his ostracism. The ostracism only enflamed tensions in the city as the followers of Hyperbolus were determined to get their revenge on its architect, Alcibiades – and this despite the fact that Hyperbolus had once had the very dreams of Athenian hegemony in the Western Mediterranean that Thucydides attributes to Alcibiades. These were not auspicious circumstances in which to embark upon turning those dreams into reality. Yet, as we shall see in the next chapter, there was worse to come.

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[224] Sidwell (2009) 248

[225] Ar. *Av.* 639, with Pelling (2022b) 181

Chapter 5 - Mutilation of the Herms and the Profanations of the Mysteries

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter revealed a number of potentially dangerous fault lines in the Athenian body politic while political and practical preparations were being made for the Sicilian Expedition. The ostracism of Hyperbolus had already brought some of the dangers into view. We now turn to two sets of events that had a huge impact on the Expedition, namely the profanation of the Mysteries and the mutilations of the Herms. The impact and fall-out from these two events had far-reaching consequences in that they eventually resulted in the removal of the most gifted of the generals leading the expedition, Alcibiades, part way through the campaign. The removal of Alcibiades saw the less capable Nicias in charge during the latter stages of the Expedition and he made a serious of calamitous decisions (or indecisions) which adversely affected the Expedition.

Even in antiquity the identity and aims of the perpetrators were not entirely clear, but it does seem that the mutilations and the airing of accusations about the profanations were both a deliberate attempt to sabotage the Expedition. Although it will be argued that the mutilation of the Herms and the profanations of the Mysteries are completely separate events,[1] it is impossible to untangle them completely when analysing their impact on the Sicilian Expedition. The two main sources for an examination of these affairs are Thucydides, who devotes a few paragraphs in a matter-of-fact fashion, and a speech from Andocides dated from 399 BC. Andocides was an aristocratic politician who was arrested and charged with impiety on the grounds of taking part in the mutilations of the Herms and the profanation of the Mysteries in 415, but turned informer in an attempt to free himself. Unable to clear his own name he was sent into exile. He returned to Athens in 411 following the establishment of the Four Hundred after the oligarchic coup but went into exile again soon after. Following the general amnesty proclaimed after the overthrow of the Thirty in 403/2, Andocides returned to Athens but was charged with offences involving the mutilations and the profanations in spite of the amnesty. The speech *On the Mysteries,* which is Andocides' defence against these charges, provides much of the information we have about these affairs. Thucydides, when discussing the event, mentions that "one of the prisoners" turned informer and, although it is clear he is talking about Andocides, he never mentions him by name.[2] Hornblower notes that non-naming is a method of indicating contempt or disapproval,[3] and Dover has suggested this indicates that Thucydides was not satisfied that Andocides' account was the whole truth of the matter.[4] This all serves to highlight the difficulties inherent in trying to get to

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[1] Following MacDowell (1962)

[2] Thuc. 6.60.2

[3] Hornblower (2011) 152

[4] *HCT* 4. 337

grips with the affair and suggests that even in the fifth century Thucydides was unable to get to the bottom of it.

5.2   The Mutilation of the Herms

Thucydides reports that preparations for the Sicilian Expedition began immediately after the Assembly had decided on sending forces to Sicily and had voted that the generals should have full powers.[5] While these preparations were ongoing it was found one morning that nearly all the stone Herms in the city had been disfigured overnight. The Herms were stone pillars with a sculpture of the head of a bearded man atop. A stone phallus was prominent about half way up the pillar. The statues were representations of the god Hermes and were set up at crossroads, street corners, borders and boundaries and placed in front of temples, near to tombs, and outside houses and other public buildings. Thucydides says that the Herms were a national institution and that the whole affair was taken very seriously.[6] To understand how serious an affair this was it is important to understand something of the role of the Herms in Athens.

No ancient source details the date or circumstances of their invention, although they were clearly in existence by the end of the sixth century. In the Platonic *Hipparchus,* Socrates claims that the Herms in Athens were set up by Hipparchus (brother of the tyrant Hippias) after he brought the Homeric epics to Attica and instituted their rhapsodic recitation at the Panathenaia.[7] In this text Socrates goes on to claim that the Herms were also set up in the countryside to educate the rural folk. Each Herm was set up halfway between the city and each of the demes and inscribed with a verse of Hipparchus in which he tried to surpass the Delphic oracle with lines such as 'Pass, thinking just thoughts' and 'Don't deceive a friend'.[8] Although the actual authorship of the *Hipparchus* is disputed, it predates the *Athenian Constitution* and the basic idea of the Herm's function as a milestone is attested by the survival of one of them near modern Koropi which declares in a second person address that it is halfway between the city and the deme of Kephale. Only the left side of the Herm survives and Hipparchus' name and maxim are lost.[9]

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[5] Thuc. 6.26.1

[6] Thuc. 6.27.3

[7] Pl. [Hipparch.] 228b1-229e3.

[8] Osborne (2010) 351-4

[9] For a detailed discussion of this Herm, which is now in the Istanbul Archaeological Museum, see Altmann (1904). The Herm is thought to be a first or second century AD Herm made in the style of Hipparchus' Herms.
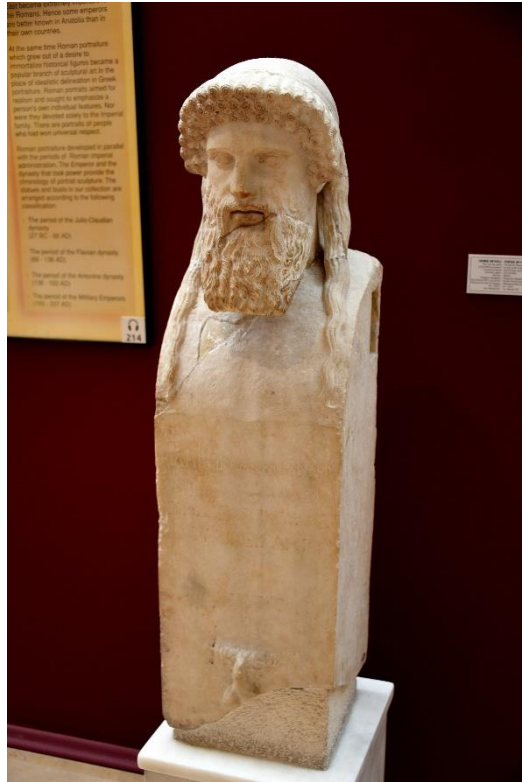
Figure 2: The Pergamon Herm

(https://www.worldhistory.org/image/8687/statue-of-hermes-of-alkamenes-from-pergamon/)

Osborne has shown, however, that the Herm is much more than a milestone. According to his analysis, the Herm is a liminal monument which interrupts the passage of the traveller who must stop and meet its gaze. Thus, every journey in Attica becomes a communication with both the statue and by implication the god Hermes.[10] The religious character of the Herm means that the act of mutilation was sacrilegious and hence shocking to the Athenians. In the case of the surviving Herm from Koropi the positioning of the text means that the traveller from the city is told 'you are halfway to Kephale' and reminded of Hipparchus and given an instruction on proper behaviour (it is presumed, given that the text is now lost). The traveller from Kephale is given the reminder and instruction first and then told he is halfway to the city. Osborne has argued that this shows that the Herms promote ideology – the man from Kephale is instructed 'think just thoughts, you are coming to the city' whilst the man from the city is told 'you are coming to a country village, so think just thoughts'. The maxims cannot be divorced from political behaviour or from the projected and actively promoted split between town and country by which the Peisistratids divorced politics from daily life and hence made easier the acceptance of their domination of the former.[11]

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[10] Osborne (2010) 351

[11] Osborne (2010) 353

The Herms became so ingrained in the Athenian mind they began to be used as victory monuments. Thucydides noted that Cimon set up a monument bearing three Herms after the capture of Eion on the Strymon,[12] and a Herm is also supposed to have been set up prior to the victory at Marathon.[13] In fact, Draganić has argued that the Herms erected by Cimon following the victory at Eion had a special place in Athenian democracy as they symbolised Athenian naval power and the beginning of Athenian hegemony in the Aegean. Due to their significance, the Herms of Eion were the protectors and symbols of democracy.[14] These Herms did not represent an individual general, argues Osborne, but rather the entire demos, and they acted as a celebration of the entire *polis*.[15] The fourth century Athenian statesman and orator Aeschines records the inscriptions carved on these three Herms and asks: "Is the name of the generals anywhere here? Nowhere; only the people".[16] As a consequence of the Herms being linked with the demos, they became ubiquitous by the later part of the fifth century: the archons set up Herms at the entrance to the city and eventually most houses had a Herm by the front door, in each case marking the passage from one area or sphere to another. The Herms were an inescapable companion to outdoor activity every time an Athenian set foot outside his house. This goes some way to explain why the Athenians reacted so strongly to their mutilation in 415: an unchanging and ubiquitous part of everyday life (and thus the natural order of things) had been violently damaged. Moreover, Furley argues that the importance of Hermes Hegemonios[17] to military commanders suggests that a large Athenian expedition might indeed have felt insecure if deprived of the protection of this god.[18] If Furley is correct, the mutilations can be seen as a direct attack on the Expedition and an attempt to prevent its sailing.

Although Thucydides (who was not in Athens in 415) states that nearly every Herm in the city was damaged,[19] the Athenian historian Cratippus (a contemporary of Thucydides) is quoted as saying that only the Herms around the agora were damaged.[20] If this is true, the mutilation becomes a political gesture against the magistrates and generals, as the Herms in the agora were closely associated with both.[21] Thucydides seems to suggest that the Herms were disfigured by having their faces cut about[22] (τὰ πρόσωπα), but some believe that a passage in

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[12] Thuc. 1.98.1

[13] Osborne (2010) 359

[14] Draganić (2010) 45

[15] Osborne (2010) 361

[16] Aeschin. *In Ctes.* 3.185

[17] The epithet Hegemonios (leader or guide) was in use from at least the early fourth century BC (Ar. *Plut.* 1159) and the usage may well stretch back to before the launching of the Sicilian Expedition, Osborne sees particular significance in the Eion Herms in this connection. (Osborne (2010) 355-62)

[18] Furley (1996) 20

[19] Thuc. 6.27.1

[20] [Plut.] *X orat.* 834d

[21] Osborne (2010) 364

[22] Thuc. 6.27.1

Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, which was produced in 411, shows that it was the genitalia of the Herms that were mutilated: a party of Athenian delegates sporting erect phalli are told by their leader to cover themselves as "you wouldn't want your sacred emblems mutilated, would you?"[23] Taking this view, Sommerstein argues that τὰ πρόσωπα in Thucydides should be translated "the front parts".[24] But when Aristophanes links erect phalli to the mutilation of the Herms he may simply be linking the most prominent aspect of the Herms to the characters in his play, so that the audience make the association to the Herms. It could still be the case in reality that it was their faces that were mutilated. If it had been the phalli of the Herms which were mutilated, it seems very surprising that this is not mentioned by Thucydides. As Crawley-Quinn points out, however, the site of the mutilation is not of direct relevance. The Herms were attacked because of their democratic symbolism[25] and it matters not what part of them was mutilated.

Irrespective of whether the genitalia were damaged, the mutilations figuratively unmanned the Athenians and made them impotent and, as Osborne points out, the eve of the departure for Sicily was the worst possible time for such a deed to be perpetrated, since it inevitably interrupted military planning and damaged public confidence.[26] A case for seeing the mutilations as nothing more than the product of youthful high spirits can and has been made,[27] but the level of planning required and the timing of the incident would suggest that is was a carefully orchestrated and deliberate attack on the democracy and the Expedition to Sicily. Given that no other monuments were attacked, it is clear that the Herms were chosen because of their democratic and military significance and that an attack on them signified hostility not only to the Expedition but to democratic policy (i.e. Alcibiades' imperialism) in general.[28]

An examination of those accused can help shed light on the motives of those involved in the event and confirm that it was a deliberate attack against the Sicilian Expedition. The information in the sources about the prosecution of those involved in the mutilations of the Herms is, however, combined with information about the prosecution of those involved in the profanation of the Mysteries (which is discussed separately below in section 5.3) and, though revealing, it must be treated with caution.

Ostwald has shown that of the list of 64 names of those implicated in the mutilations and the profanations that can be collated from Andocides, 27 are identifiable. Of those 27, only 6 belong to an older generation with the remaining 21 being aged 25-35.[29] If this ratio applied to those

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[23] Ar. *Lys.* 1093-4

[24] Sommerstein (2002) 238

[25] Crawley-Quinn (2007) 90 n21

[26] Osborne (2010) 366

[27] *HCT* 4. 285-6

[28] Draganić (2010) 45

[29] Ostwald (1986) 539-541

implicated about whom we have no information, it shows that both the profanations and the mutilations were a relatively youthful enterprise. It has therefore been suggested that mutilation of the beards of the Herms was a symbolic attack on the older generation. As Jordović points out, it was largely the younger generation that supported the Expedition, though Alcibiades countered this and asked for co-operation between generations,[30] so it is possible that the mutilations were a rejection of Alcibiades' plea for cooperation and a direct attack on the older generation. But this seems unlikely since the timing of the mutilations suggests that it was a attempt to prevent the Expedition sailing rather than an attack on those who did not want it to happen.

A different approach focuses on political affiliation. Ostwald has shown that of the 27 identifiable individuals we know the political orientation of 13 and that all of them demonstrate antipathy towards the Athenian Democracy. This led him to argue that younger aristocrats who had been tinged with sophistic teaching were the main instigators of both the mutilations of the Herms and the profanation of the Mysteries and that these incidents led the democratic establishment to suspect an oligarchic coup.[31] The problem with this hypothesis is that it combines the data for the those convicted of the mutilations of the Herms with those accused of the profanation of the Mysteries and treats both events as devised by a single source – something that is not self-evidently true. When Davidson looked just at those who were accused of the mutilation of the Herms, he found that the majority were over the age of 30.[32] He then argued that the mutilators snapped off the beards of the Herms and that this symbolically made the Herms younger. Emphasising that the rise of Alcibiades was linked to sophistic teaching of the young[33] and that, as we saw in the previous chapter, a generational chasm was emerging in Athens, he postulated that the mutilation was a deliberate attempt by the older generation to prevent an expedition that was seen as a rash design of the young: they may have feared that the expense of the Expedition would cripple them and they were also worried about the rise of Alcibiades and his courting of the younger νεανίσκοι. Awkwardly, however, Alcibiades himself was one of those accused of taking part in the mutilations, a point to which we shall return later.

In his account, Andocides notes that the one of the ringleaders of the mutilation of the Herms, Euphiletus, pretended to have been given responsibility for destroying the Herm dedicated by the Aegeid tribe.[34] McGlew thinks that this may be very significant: if the Herms were targeted on account of their tribal affiliation, the *hetaireiai* may have meant the mutilation to indicate their dissatisfaction with the Cleisthenic tribes for failing to mediate between popular desires and the

[30] Jordović (2007) 8

[31] Ostwald (1986) 549-50

[32] Davidson (2006) 63

[33] Davidson (2006) 61

[34] Andoc. 1.61

political arena.[35] There is no indication that the *hetaireiai* were causing problems or being monitored prior to 415, and the Sicilian Expedition may have been a turning point in their emergence as a political force. McGlew goes on to argue that the Expedition showed that the *hetaireiai* were willing to endanger the city to satisfy their members' own economic and personal interests and, following the acceleration of their politicisation from the 420s,[36] this marked the point where the *hetaireiai* began to express their hostility openly, in the form of the mutilations.[37] McGlew's argument is that the mutilations were not designed specifically to derail the Expedition, but were an anti-democratic enterprise designed to disrupt the links between the *polis* and the *oikos* which were fundamental to democracy.

Another approach finds an external instigator. Plutarch reports a view that Corinth was responsible for the mutilations:

> A story was put out that it was the work of the Corinthians – Syracuse being a colony of theirs – who were hoping that the Athenians might be influenced by these portents to delay the expedition or even call it off.[38]

Pelling postulates that this view came from the knowledgeable fourth century writer Philochorus.[39] But, although the Syracusan connection gave the Corinthians an interest in disrupting things, there is no other evidence that Corinth was behind the mutilations, and the truth may be that some Athenians simply believed they were because of a sense of paranoia resulting from the charged atmosphere in the city at the time.

In the days following the mutilations the *Boule* and the Assembly met several times to discuss the matter,[40] a commission of enquiry (ζητηταί) was set up, and a motion to offer a reward of a thousand drachmas for information leading to the arrest and conviction of those responsible was passed by the Assembly. The members of the commission included Peisander and Charicles, both of whom are described by Green as 'moderate democrats',[41] though they were later heavily involved in the oligarchic revolution of 411. Other members were Nicias' brother Diognetus and Androcles, who seems to have replaced Hyperbolus as the demagogic leader of the masses. Androcles was mocked by the comic playwrights for being of low birth and being poor or *nouveau riche*. He was regarded as a vindictive prosecutor and was accused of various kinds of immorality including being a male prostitute. The comic playwright Cratinos called him δοῦλος

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[35] McGlew (1999) 19

[36] Mitchell (2015) 171

[37] McGlew (1999) 16

[38] Plut. *Alc.* 18.2

[39] Pelling (2000) 25

[40] Green (1971) 115

[41] Green (1971) 115

(slave), πτωχός (beggar) and ἡταιρηκώς (man who has prostituted himself) and Telecleides and Ekphantides referred to him as βαλλαντιοτόμος (thief / cut purse),[42] all of which suggest he was a less than reputable individual. Plutarch also describes him as "Alcibiades' mortal enemy",[43] as both sought leadership of the demos. So, although the committee was ostensibly designed to represent all major political groupings in Athens, it can be seen to have contained elements implacably hostile to Alcibiades – although, admittedly, Alcibiades had made so many enemies it would have been difficult to put together a committee where none of the members had any hostility towards him.

But this was not true of all its members. Peisander, although attacked by the comic playwrights, was never characterised as poor or of low birth (references to him as a 'muleteer' and a 'donkey' may indicate that he possessed substantial agricultural holdings)[44] and we can deduce that he was an opponent of the Peace of Nicias from a passage in Aristophanes' *Peace* in which the Chorus cry out to Hermes on behalf of those seeking to save peace:

> O Hermes, lover of men, most generous of the blest,
> If you hate Peisander's shaggy brows and crests with strange devices,
> Be gracious to us, and henceforth with never-flagging zest,
> We'll honour you with great processions and sacrifices.[45]

Hostility to Nicias could go along with support of Alcibiades, and there is literary evidence to suggest that Peisander was indeed one of Alcibiades' supporters. Thucydides and Plutarch both record that, later on, following Alcibiades' exile, Peisander was chosen to head the deputation to Athens advising his recall.[46] Woodhead argues that this shows he had taken the lead in opposing Phrynichus and was regarded as thoroughly loyal to Alcibiades' cause.[47]

The reward of a thousand drachma did not loosen any tongues, so Peisander had the sum raised to ten thousand drachmas. Green surmises that this was to overbid the bribes that potential informants were getting from those with something to hide.[48] Plutarch records that at this time the comic poet Telecleides accused Charicles of handing out a thousand drachmas to silence one informer and Nicias of increasing the bribe to four thousand.

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[42] Macdowell (1962) 81-2

[43] Plut. *Alc.* 19.3 (quoting Telecleides)

[44] Eupolis, *Maricas* frg 182 and Hermippus, *loc cit*: noted in Woodhead (1954) 133

[45] Ar. *Pax* 396-9

[46] Thuc. 8.28.2; Plut. *Alc.* 19

[47] Woodhead (1954) 136

[48] Green (1971) 116

> Charicles gave him a mina to stop him telling
>
> How he was his mother's first child, born in a purse
>
> But Nicias, Niceratus' son gave him four.
>
> I know the reason too, but I'm not telling;
>
> For Nicias is a man I trust.[49]

We do not know the reason Nicias paid such a sum and what information he was trying to keep from becoming wider knowledge (or indeed if the accusation is just), but it adds to the mystery surrounding the whole affair. Plutarch does note that Nicias was renowned for giving gifts to those he believed could do him harm,[50] but for Nicias (whose brother was on the investigating committee) and Charicles, who was on the committee, to pay bribes to silence an informer is very strange and presumably could only indicate the informer was either about to implicate Nicias personally or someone he wished to protect.

5.3   The Profanation of the Mysteries

The Eleusinian Mysteries (Ἐλευσίνια Μυστήρια) were rituals of the fertility cult of the goddess Demeter and were one of the biggest festivals in the Athenian calendar. In mythology Eleusis was the place where the goddess Demeter came in search of her daughter, Persephone, and where she recovered her with the aid of local inhabitants or the ruling family. In gratitude Demeter 'showed the rites' to the inhabitants of Eleusis and either restored corn to the earth or bestowed it on mortals for the first time.[51] Away from mythology, the actual origin of the cult of Demeter is unclear. It was previously thought to be a Mycenaean cult, but archaeology has shown this to be incorrect and work in recent decades has found that the earliest votives on the site are of eight century date,[52] but also that the site only became recognisable as a cult centre in the sixth century, when an initiation hall was built.[53] The reason for this change in the sixth century has not been satisfactorily identified and remains a subject of intense debate. Sourvinou-Inwood argues for a major change in the character of the Eleusinian cult in the late seventh/early sixth century as it took an eschatological turn away from the bleak portrayal of the afterlife as depicted by Homer. The reasons for this are unclear. But it has been postulated, on archaeological evidence, that Eleusis was independent of Athens until the sixth century,[54] and

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[49] Plut. *Nic.* 4.4

[50] Plut. *Nic.* 4.4

[51] For translation and commentary of the Hymn to Demeter, see Foley (1994)

[52] Sourvinou-Inwood (1997) 133

[53] Parker (2011) 255

[54] Sourvinou-Inwood (1997) 133

the change in relationship between the two communities correlates with the change in the character of the cult at this time. Sourvinou-Inwood argues that the change in the character of the cult from an agrarian based one to an eschatological one is tied to the Cylonian crisis of the early sixth century.[55] Whatever the truth about this, it is clear that by the later part of the fifth century the Mysteries had evolved into a highly ritualised event involving huge throngs of people and that it permeated many aspects of Athenian life.

Individuals were admitted to participate in the Mysteries for a fee of 15 drachmae,[56] and, although the cult was administered by Athens, it was open to anyone who could speak Greek and all classes of society could be admitted, including women and slaves.[57] The Eleusinian Mysteries were split into two sections, the Lesser Mysteries and the Greater Mysteries. Although the evidence is sketchy, it would appear that the Lesser Mysteries took place in Athens on the 20th day of the month of Anthesterion (Jan/Feb) and were a purification for initiates before they could take part in the Greater Mysteries, which were held at Eleusis seven months later during Boedromion (Sept/Oct).[58] The Lesser Mysteries were held at the sanctuary of 'the mother at Agrai' (a figure whom Parker describes as distinct from Demeter though readily identified with her).[59] From the account inventories for Eleusis it appears that many more people took part in the Greater Mysteries than in the Lesser Mysteries in 407/6,[60] so it seems that initiates only took part in the Lesser Mysteries once before progressing to the Greater Mysteries on an annual basis.

Very little information survives about what went on at the Lesser Mysteries. During the preliminaries to the Greater Mysteries some seven months later on 14 Boedromion, unspecified 'Sacred Objects' in baskets were brought from Eleusis to the Eleusinion in Athens, accompanied by the priests and priestesses of the Eleusinian cult and escorted by *ephebes*.[61] The next day initiates gathered in the agora at Athens and a proclamation was read by Eleusinian officials inviting those who so wished to be initiated into the Mysteries and announcing the exclusion of non-Greek speakers and those polluted by blood guilt.[62] On the next day, 16 Boedromion, those wishing to be initiated (μύσται) were purified in the sea at Phaleron. Each initiate carried a sacred sacrificial piglet into the sea and ritually bathed it. On 17 Boedromion sacrifices to Demeter and Kore took place in Athens, which included the piglets, which were eaten by the initiates as a last

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[55] Sourvinou-Inwood (1997) 154-9

[56] Parker (2005) 342

[57] Parker (2011) 251

[58] Parker (2005) 344

[59] Parker (2005) 344

[60] Parker (2005) 344: *IG* I³ 386.144-6

[61] Although the term originally meant boys who were entering puberty, *Ephebes* were boys who in their eighteenth year had entered a two-year period of military training (*OCD* 527).

[62] Parker (2005) 347

meal before a fasting period. The initiates then went home for two days of introspection before several thousand accompanied a priestess in a vast procession to Eleusis on Boedromion 19-20. The priestess escorted the 'Sacred Objects' back to Eleusis along the Sacred Way stopping at fixed points along the way.[63] Both sexes were mixed throughout this procession and hostility to the hierarchy seemed to prevail on the journey.[64] It also seems that during the procession priests of important Athenian *polis* cults took part and walked together with the Eleusinian priesthood. Notably the priestess of Athena seems to have walked alongside the priestess of Demeter and Kore.[65] It has been argued that there were in fact two processions: on 19 Boedromion there was the procession proper, escorting the sacred objects with the religious personnel, some *ephebes* and civic dignitaries, while on 20 Boedromion there was a procession in which the *mystai* were led from the shrine of Dionysus by a priest known as the Iacchagogus who led a statue of Iacchus, the patron god of the initiates. The procession was met at some point by the *ephebes* who marched out of Eleusis and then escorted them all back to Eleusis.[66] Although the sacred objects were returned in the first procession, it is clear that the Iacchus procession was the one that mattered and this took the initiates *en masse* to Eleusis. Herodotus' suggestion that the procession could have involved 30,000 people cannot be taken seriously as it stands:[67] the author of the story was symbolically assimilating the crowd of initiates to the entire Athenian citizen body[68] to make what Demaratus and Dicaeus allegedly saw in 480 an omen of Athenian victory at Salamis. We have no other direct evidence about the size of the procession. The account inventories for 407/6 tell us that there were around 2,200 initiates that year,[69] but, if initiates from previous years joined the Iacchus possession, even though were not going to be re-admitted into the rites, the number making the journey to Eleusis would be higher – and perhaps a lot higher. It is even possible that it was sometimes high enough to make the symbolic assimilation to the Athenian citizen body not entirely ridiculous numerically speaking. Of course, since not all Athenians were initiates and not all initiates were Athenians it was a serious misrepresentation in other respects.

The final period of the Mysteries involving the initiates after the arrival of the procession at Eleusis is unclear and may have taken place over one or two nights. The final rite appears to have taken place in a large unique building known as the Telesterion where all the initiates gathered. In the centre of this building was an enclosure named the Anaktoron where some

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[63] Parker (2005) 346-7

[64] Parker (2005) 350

[65] Clinton (1974) 35-36

[66] Sourvinou-Inwood (1997) 145

[67] Hdt. 8.65.1

[68] cf. e.g. Hdt. 5.972

[69] *IG* I³ 386.144-6 – see Cavanaugh (1996) 211

scholars have located the Hierophant's chair.[70] In many Greek festivals women seem to have had a major role in the all-night festival and dancing.[71] Whilst a lot of the meaning and symbolism of the Mysteries is now lost, it is clear they were linked to the rebirth cycle and the overall aim would seem to be an enhanced afterlife.[72] Aristotle said that the Mysteries were an experience, not a form of learning,[73] and this would seem to suggest that the shared experiences of the highly ritualistic procession and its culmination at Eleusis would bestow a feeling of exclusivity on the initiates.

The social status of initiates into the Eleusinian Mysteries did not rise, and in fact it has been suggested that it actually decreased.[74] Despite this 2,200 people joined the cult in 408/7 after the disasters of the Peloponnesian War had decimated Athens.[75] It would seem that a sense of exclusiveness was something conferred by initiation and it perhaps was this that those who took part in the profanations were attempting to achieve. This sense of exclusivity would seem to have been imbued by the central experience of viewing the Mysteries, rather than being a member of a select club, given that the large numbers of Athenians who appear to have been initiates.

The central role of the Athenian state in the Eleusinian cult seems clear. It was the *polis* which regulated the Mysteries and had authority over them. Furthermore, the Mysteries had a prominent place in the Athenian Festival Calendar and would seem to be the largest festival of the year given the number of those who attended. The involvement of the *ephebes* who had a paramilitary position in Athenian society speaks to the central involvement of the state. The very fact the Athenian archon basileus was responsible for the conduct of the Mysteries also highlights the role of the *polis*.[76] On return from Eleusis the archon basileus reported to the *prytaneis* and then the *Boule* actually met and conducted business at the Eleusinion on the day after the Mysteries.[77]

It is clear, then, that the Eleusinian Mysteries played a central part in the lives of both the people and the state of Athens, and it is not surprising that, when accusations were made that certain prominent persons in Athens were parodying the events of the Mysteries in their own home, the atmosphere in the city, already febrile following the mutilation of the Herms, became dangerously

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[70] Parker (2005) 351

[71] Parker (2005) 166-7

[72] Parker (2005) 359

[73] Parker (2005) 158

[74] Ustinova (2013) 105

[75] Ustinova (2013) 105

[76] Sourvinou-Inwood (1997) 145

[77] Arist. [*Ath. Pol.*] 57.1

charged, especially as the first to be accused was one of the commanders of the Sicilian Expedition.

Andocides describes how, a few days after Peisander had the raised reward for providing information about the mutilations to ten thousand drachmas, which Merrit postulates would be on or around June 17, the Assembly met in the docks in Piraeus to give audience to the three generals about to leave for Sicily. Merrit has fixed the Assembly meeting 10 days after the night of the mutilation,[78] but he gives no evidence for this date and, although it seems quite reasonable, examination of Merrit's work suggests that it is an arbitrary choice. In terms of the workings detailed in chapter 3, Merrit postulates that the assembly took place on day 15 of Prytany X, which was the 9th of Skirophorion. During this assembly meeting a certain Pythonicus, who is otherwise an unknown figure, stood up and cried out:

> "Countrymen you are sending forth this mighty host in all its array upon a perilous enterprise. Yet your commander, Alcibiades, has been holding celebrations of the Mysteries in a private house and others with him; I will prove it. Grant immunity to him whom I indicate, and a non-initiate, a slave belonging to someone present, shall describe the Mysteries to you. You can punish me as you will, if that is not the truth."[79]

Pythonicus made no reference at all to the mutilations of the Herms and seems to have set out simply to denounce Alcibiades. That he did this just as the Expedition was about to sail suggests it was a deliberate attempt to torpedo the Expedition just as it began. Indeed, Lamachus' flagship was already lying offshore at its moorings,[80] and Green suggests the ship would have been in full view of the Assembly.[81] Alcibiades denied the charges at great length, but the Assembly felt that a full investigation was in order. The profanation of the Mysteries was a completely separate matter from the mutilation of the Herms, but because of the (almost certainly deliberate) timing of Pythonicus' denunciation the two became inextricably linked in the minds of the Athenians, and indeed in the minds of many historians since.

Following his denunciation, Alcibiades immediately denied all the charges, so the *prytaneis* who were presiding over the Assembly cleared the meeting of all those not initiated into the Mysteries. The slave indicated by Pythonicus was brought before the Assembly. His name was Andromachus and he was the slave of Archebiades,[82] the son of Polemarchus.[83] Immunity was

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[78] Merrit (1932) 171

[79] Andoc. 1.11

[80] Andoc. 1.11

[81] Green (1971) 116

[82] Later lover of Alcibiades the younger: Lys. 14.27

[83] Andoc. 1.12

granted to Andromachus, who then confirmed that the Mysteries had been blasphemously parodied in the house of a wealthy resident alien named Pulytion. Andromachus testified that Alcibiades, Niciades and Meletus had been the actual celebrants but that others had been present and witnessed what had taken place.[84] Andromachus provided the names of ten actual participants and of four slaves, including himself, who had also been present.[85] Given the size of the list of participants and witnesses it is unlikely that this was a false accusation. There are just too many participants and witnesses for the story to be false. Anyone making a false accusation would have to be sure that all of those accused did not have an alibi which would prove their innocence. In addition, of the ten accused, nine fled and one was arrested and executed.[86] The accusations were perfectly timed, given the fevered religious atmosphere that had resulted from the mutilations of the Herms. In addition, this was at the time of the feast of Adonis where, as Plutarch says:

> In many parts of the city women were carrying about little images which looked like dead men being taken out for burial, and at the same time they imitated funeral rites and beat their breasts and sang dirges.[87]

The overwrought atmosphere resulting from the festival and the mutilations was an ideal breeding ground for distrust and suspicion and, whether by accident or design, the accusation about profanations of the Mysteries turned the people against Alcibiades. The previous debates about the Sicilian Expedition had resulted in a sort of collective mania in Athens. In his depiction of the atmosphere in Athens just prior to the Expedition, Thucydides states that "there was a passion for the enterprise which affected every one alike" (καὶ ἔρως ἐνέπεσε τοῖς πᾶσιν ὁμοίως ἐκπλεῦσαι)[88] and Rogkotis has shown that the negative overtones of the language here by Thucydides suggests that he perceived the Athenians' state of mind on the eve of the Sicilian Expedition to be dangerous, if not pathological.[89] The passion for the Expedition coupled with the religious agitation generated by the mutilation of the Herms, the reported profanations and the Adonis festival had indeed created a dangerous collective mindset. Thucydides also mentions that there was a small Spartan force marching north to the Isthmus of Corinth some 40 miles southwest of Athens when the Herms were mutilated.[90] Although Thucydides states that this was coincidental, it can only have heightened anxiety in the city at the time and Thucydides seem to intimate that many thought the Spartan force was Alcibiades' doing.

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[84] Andoc 1.13

[85] Andoc. 1.13

[86] Andoc. 1.13 This figure includes Alcibiades who later fled and was condemned *in absentia.*

[87] Plut. *Alc.* 18.2. See also section 5.5.

[88] Thuc. 6.24.3

[89] Rogkotis (2006) 63-64

[90] Thuc. 6.61.2

A series of further accusations followed, as detailed by Andocides. A metic named Teucrus was granted immunity and denounced a further twelve individuals (including himself) for profanation. The other 11 immediately fled the city. Next, a woman named Agariste, who was the wife of Alcmaeonides, denounced Alcibiades and others for performing the Mysteries in Charmides' house, next to the Olympieum.[91] Again, those denounced immediately fled, with the exception of Alcibiades. Finally, Lydus, a slave of Pherecles of Themacus, denounced his master and others (including the father of Andocides) for celebrating the Mysteries at the house of Pherecles.[92]

Not mentioned by Andocides, although noted by Plutarch, is another denunciation by Thessalus the son of Cimon. This denunciation describes a profanation in Alcibiades' own house, where Alcibiades himself wore the robes of the high priest; Pulytion acted as the torch bearer and Theodorus as herald and Alcibiades addressed the rest of his companions as initiates and novices.[93] The reason for Andocides' omission is unclear, as this impeachment was still on record in Plutarch's lifetime. However, it may well be that Andocides had been present and he did not want to incriminate himself. Marr has postulated that Thessalus' charge was primarily directed against Alcibiades and belongs to the period after the Herms investigation was complete as renewed attempts were being made by Alcibiades' enemies to implicate him in the Mysteries scandal.[94]

None of our sources indicate exactly how many people were involved in the profanations. Aurenche[95] and Dover[96] have each painstakingly compiled a list of around 70 names, but, as Ostwald points out, not all of the people on the list can have been incriminated. That is true, for example, of the only woman, Agariste. [97] She was the third person to come forward,[98] but her denunciation does not necessarily make her a participant in the Mysteries and there is no evidence to suggest she needed immunity from prosecution.[99]

Neither Andocides nor Thucydides specifies what the profanations actually entailed or what part of the rite was parodied. Lucian, the Greek satirist of the second century AD, says the slang expression for the profanations was σχήματα – gestures or dancing.[100] This suggests that it was

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[91] The Temple of Olympian Zeus whose construction was begun in 561 but abandoned unfinished as a hubristic folly following the deposition of the tyrant Hippias in 510.

[92] Andoc. 1.15-17

[93] Plut. *Alc.* 19.1, 22.2

[94] Marr (1971) 328

[95] Aurenche (1974) 191-228

[96] *HCT* 4. 277-80

[97] Ostwald (1986) 537

[98] Andoc. 1.16

[99] Ostwald (1986) 538; MacDowell (1962) 75

[100] Lucian *Salt.* 15

the final rite of the Mysteries, probably a dance performed by the Hierophant in the Anaktorion, which was enacted in the profanations.

Why did those involved engage in unauthorized performances of part of the mystery rituals? The people in question all came from the upper echelons of society but, although the *hetaireiai* of which they were part could potentially look to exert political influence, there is no reason to think that that is relevant here. The performances were done in secret in private residences, the goings-on were not meant to become public knowledge, and they cannot have been intended to have any political impact, whether on the Expedition or on anything else. McDowell was thus correct to argue that there was no political purpose,[101] but he left the actual purpose unclear. The performances occurred on a number of occasions and in various different locations, so we are not dealing with a one-off joke. The enactments were part of an ongoing process that must have brought those who took part a perceived benefit. One possible view is that the exercise was an entirely serious one: those participating were seeking to reproduce in the privacy of their own homes whatever beneficial religious experience was felt to come from participation in the official Mysteries. Another, but not necessarily inconsistent, view would stress the sense of exclusive group-identity that could come from such behaviour: participants were claiming for themselves a special (albeit secret) position within the wider body of initiates and indeed Athenian society as a whole. In support of this one may adduce a passage from Plato's *Symposium* (218B) in which Alcibiades remarks that all those at the party partook in a philosophic mania and frenzy, stressing they had been initiated into an exclusive group, as opposed to servants and others who were ignorant.[102] The party Plato describes is set just before the Expedition and this, as Gribble notes,[103] cannot be a coincidence. The spectacle of Alcibiades talking about initiation must evoke the scandal of 415 (the hint is strengthened by the fact that two other people present, Phaedrus and Erixymachus, were accused of involvement in the other scandal of that year, the mutilation of the Herms),[104] and Plato perhaps invites us to see that Alcibiades and others had been influenced back then by a desire for exclusivity.[105]

Whatever the purpose behind the profanation, the accusations, coming on the eve of the sailing of the Expedition, served to destabilise the venture and ensured that it sailed under an inauspicious cloud. The reasons for the timing and the reasons behind the claims has been debated endlessly by scholars. Connor has argued that the stream of denunciations came from a

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[101] MacDowell (1962) 192

[102] Ustinova (2013) 110

[103] Gribble (1999) 26

[104] Davidson (2006) 63

[105] There may be a parallel in the '*Kakodaimonistai*' mentioned in Lysias (frg. 195), who deliberately transgressed religious norms, perhaps for the bonding effect.

coalition of unnamed politicians whose common cause was the removal of Alcibiades, probably as each wanted the leadership of the demos for himself.[106]

Marr, by contrast, sees tribal and familial rivalries as the crux of the denunciations.[107] Andocides' family had been closely connected with the Alcmaeonids for over a century and several of his own family were in the list of people denounced by Dioclides for taking part in the mutilations.[108] Marr argues that Dioclides' account was concocted by Alcibiades' friends who hoped that, by slandering prominent members of important families, they would induce the commission quietly to drop the whole affair.[109] Marr argues that following Dioclides' denunciations it is reasonable to assume that Andocides and his family then stood shoulder to shoulder with the Alcmaeonids and that as a result of Dioclides' story, both families ended up hostile to Alcibiades.[110] Marr further argues that the denunciations by Agariste, the wife of Alcmaeonides, must be seen as a clear case of Alcmaeonid retaliation,[111] as one of those named by Dioclides had been Callias, the son of Alcmaeon.[112]

Although Connor's and Marr's theories are distinct, there is no reason they cannot both have substance. An initial attempt to remove Alcibiades from a position of prominence could have been seized upon by those wishing to grind axes and, in a charged atmosphere of religious fervour and with denunciations gathering pace, there was a perfect opportunity for those wishing to air long-standing grievance to continue familial vendettas.

The Athenian *genos* of Kerykes, who traced their lineage to Hermes, supplied the Eleusinian Dadouchos and the Hierokeryx for the Mysteries. Andocides may have been a member of the Kerykes, and Callias, the man behind his trial in 400, was certainly from that *genos*, which possibly makes the affair an internal family feud.[113] The Eleusinian priesthood's opposition to Alcibiades' return in 411 may provide further evidence for politically and religiously motivated action against Alcibiades.[114] The incident in 411 is the only recorded instance of direct collective intervention by a religious interest group in Athenian history and Parker has shown that the *genē* which supplied the priesthood of Eleusis are involved in all the most conspicuous examples of

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[106] Connor (1971) 72

[107] Marr (1971) 328

[108] Andoc. 1.47

[109] Marr (1971) 328

[110] Marr (1971) 328

[111] Marr (1971) 328

[112] Andoc. 1.47

[113] Furley (1996) 49. The claim that Andocides was a member of the Kerykes genos comes from the 'Lives of the Ten Orators', a work of unknown authorship contained within Plutarch's compilation known as the *Moralia* ([Plut.] *X orat.* 834c). Davies and others have argued that this is incorrect and that we remain in ignorance of the genos of Andocides' family. See Davies, *APF* 27. See also section 2.3.

[114] Furley (1996) 40

priestly influence.[115] That must be balanced, however, with the fact that, when the demos voted to curse Alcibiades in exile, one of the priestesses, a certain Theano, daughter of Menon, refused to do so saying that it was not her job,[116] and, when the state finally voted to revoke the priestly curse on Alcibiades in 407, Theodoros, the acting Eleusinian Hierophant, commented that he had never wished harm on Alcibiades in the first place, as long as he did not injure the state.[117] Furley has argued that this shows that, on the one hand, the priesthood was capable of opposing the wishes of certain politicians and expressing a political opinion in their own right, whilst, on the other, they submissively complied with any measure voted by the demos.[118] What is clear is that a powerful family had reason to act against Alcibiades, especially considering that Callias was Alcibiades' brother-in-law and that people had not forgotten the wrongs done by Alcibiades to his wife and her father (see above in Chapter 4).

Furley has postulated that, in the run up to the launch of the Expedition, Eleusis became a symbol for peace and that the cult set out to thwart Alcibiades' bellicose designs. Furley draws attention to the 'First Fruits' decree which was found, almost perfectly preserved, on stelai at Eleusis. The decree notes the arrangements for the collection of two portions of the harvest of wheat and barley (the 'first fruits') to be dedicated to the 'two goddesses' of Eleusis, Demeter and Kore. Furley argues that the first fruits decree was passed sometime between 423 and 415 and that it involved sending first fruits to Eleusis and replenishing granaries following the ravaging of the fields by the Spartans in the preceding years. Plutarch reports that, when Alcibiades proposed an expensive war in Sicily, the priests argued against it,[119] although he does not specify which priests. Furley argues that Plutarch probably meant the main priestly clans at Athens, the Eumolpids and the Kerykes, who were closely connected with Eleusis and the interpretation of sacred law. On this basis the 'First Fruits Decree' may actually be an attempt to thwart Alcibiades and promote peace. Furley offers a hypothesis that Alcibiades' campaign of derogatory performances of the Mysteries in private homes was a means by which he sought to minimise this opposition, at least amongst his friends.[120] Furley's hypothesis is an interesting one, but has little evidence to support it and is probably overstated. Although the supposition that the priests at Eleusis opposed war seems reasonable, the notion that Alcibiades set out to undermine this opposition by deliberately mocking them in a series of profanations is itself undermined by the fact that the profanations were done in secret and it seems unlikely that Alcibiades had any need to attack the priests of Eleusis to influence a circle of friends who

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[115] Parker (2005) 93

[116] Plut. *Alc.* 22.4

[117] Plut. *Alc.* 33

[118] Furley (1996) 40 – it is also important to note that there was no distinct religious establishment at Athens: priests were (mainly) noble Athenians, and office-holders (*archai*)

[119] Plut. *Nic.* 13.1

[120] Furley (1996) 38-39

already backed him. Furthermore, it is important to note that the dating of the 'First Fruits' decree is a matter of scholarly debate and there is no current consensus. Osborne and Rhodes for example date the decree to 435 or earlier and reject the possibility that it could date from the time immediately preceding the Expedition. They draw on epigraphic arguments (including the 3-barred sigma) and also point out that there is no mention of *epistatai* (overseers) in the decree, whereas other decrees[121] from Eleusis at the time preceding the Expedition make mention of the *hieropoioi* (sacred officials) handing over the money from the first fruits to the *epistatai*.[122] That said however, even if Furley's contention that the First Fruits decree dates from the period immediately preceding the Expedition is wrong however,[123] it does not completely invalidate his argument that the Eleusinian cult became a symbol of peace in Attica which found itself in opposition to Alcibiades. In Aristophanes' play *Lysistrata* there are many instances where the women swear by Demeter and Kore in connection with their peace plot, [124] suggesting that Eleusis may well have been a symbol for peace.

Although it is unlikely that we shall ever know how many of these accusations were malicious, there seems little doubt that the Mysteries were being enacted in the houses of some of the great and good of Athens. Plutarch tells us that it was Androcles, the mortal enemy of Alcibiades, who was wheeling out these witnesses and that as a result "the people were in an ugly mood and their anger turned against Alcibiades."[125] Plutarch goes on to say that, although alarmed at first, given the anger of the demos, Alcibiades soon discovered that all the soldiers and sailors about to depart for Sicily with him were on his side, as was the force of 1,000 Argives and Mantinean infantry, who openly declared that it was only on Alcibiades' account that they were going to Sicily.[126] The loyalty of the troops is often glossed over by scholars, but this is a key point, given that Nicias was unable to maintain the loyalty of the troops in Sicily once he was in sole command. Had Alcibiades not been removed as a result of Androcles' scheming, the outcome of the Expedition could have been very different. The troops and sailors who remained with Alcibiades were drawn from the very demos that was now turning against him. It was only their close association with the man himself that engendered their loyalty, for they were privy to exactly the same information and rumours that the rest of the demos were hearing.

According to Plutarch, the loyalty of his troops emboldened Alcibiades, and he insisted that he be allowed to defend himself there and then in front of the Assembly. Androcles realised the danger

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[121] *IG* I³ 32 for example.

[122] Osborne and Rhodes (2017) 230-238

[123] For a detailed discussion of the 'First Fruits' decree (*IG* I³ 78) and the contention surrounding its dating, see Cavanaugh (1996)

[124] Ar. *Lys*. 148 for example.

[125] Plut. *Alc.* 19.1

[126] Plut. *Alc.* 19.1

of this and produced more speakers who were "not known to be ill-disposed towards him [Alcibiades] – but detested him no less than his acknowledged enemies". They argued that he ought to sail now and not delay the Expedition and then defend himself on his return.[127] Despite Alcibiades' protestations that this was preposterous, the Assembly sided with the orators and the fleet, and Alcibiades was ordered to sail. As previously noted in section 4.2, although Thucydides does not reveal which organ of the democracy later condemned Alcibiades *in absentia*,[128] Isocrates seems to suggest that it was the *Boule* which later condemned him, not the Assembly.[129] He writes "but his accusers united the council and having made the public speakers subservient to themselves, again revived the matter and suborned informers".[130] The fact that Alcibiades demanded an immediate trial by the Assembly, despite the fact that the mood of the people was turning against him suggests that he believed he would be acquitted and that the demos would take his side against a *Boule* that was actively working against him with Androcles. It may also suggest he felt he could not get a fair hearing in the *Boule*.

It appears, then, that the profanations were carried out by discontented aristocrats attempting to demonstrate their exclusivity and that they did not have a political motive. The same cannot be said, however, about the mutilation of the Herms which arguably had a very political motive, that of stopping the Expedition to Sicily. MacDowell has argued that the mutilations were planned in advance to stop the Sicilian Expedition, as the oligarchs wanted Athens to remain at peace because war was expensive.[131] Their gambit failed but it created a febrile atmosphere in Athens which was exploited by Androcles in a piece of political opportunism. For no other reason than to claim leadership of the demos, he denounced Alcibiades for his part in the profanations. When it became clear that Alcibiades retained the support of the army, and fearing that he might win back the support of the demos, Androcles let the Expedition sail, with charges sitting hanging over Alcibiades. This ensured the successful prosecution of Alcibiades, but helped condemn the Expedition to failure.

5.4   The Attic Stelai

The profanations and the mutilations resulted in a vast windfall for the Athenian state, although at the cost of destabilising the leadership of the Expedition. Excavations conducted in the south east corner of the agora in Athens have uncovered a huge number of inscriptions detailing the sale of confiscated property of the profaners of the Mysteries and also the mutilators of the Herms. These inscriptions were carved on 10 or 11 stelai, which are called, somewhat

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[127] Plut. *Alc.* 19.1-2

[128] Thuc. 6.60-61

[129] Rhodes (1972) 187

[130] Isoc. 16.7

[131] MacDowell (1962) 192

misleadingly 'The Attic Stelai'. The name comes from the second century AD Greek scholar and rhetorician, Julius Pollux. Pollux wrote of "The Attic Stelai, which are situated at Eleusis and on which the property of those who were impious with the Goddesses and were sold up by the state were written up".[132] It is now understood that the stelai were erected, not in Eleusis, but rather in the Eleusinion in the south east corner of the agora at Athens.[133] The fragments of these stelai were organised by Pritchett in the 1950s[134] and have been added to with new finds ever since. The stelai detail the confiscation and subsequent sale of the property of all of those found guilty of participating in the two affairs and casts a good deal of light on their status. The sale appears to have taken place in the spring of 413 and it has been estimated that it brought in 1000 talents, a figure close to the annual yield of tribute from the states of the empire at this period.[135] These huge sums may explain why the prosecutions were pursued so energetically and how the Athenians were able to fund extensive reinforcements during the Expedition. Had Alcibiades not been removed, however, the reinforcements may never have been needed in the first place.

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[132] Pollux 10.97

[133] Lewis (1966) 178

[134] Pritchett (1953)

[135] Lewis (1966) 188

Chapter 6 - The Original Sicilian Expedition

6.1   The Campaign of 427-424

As a prelude to the disastrous expedition of 415, the earlier Athenian invasion of Sicily in 427 has attracted comparatively less attention from scholars than its successor, perhaps because though unsuccessful, it did not end in disaster or plainly change the course of the war. An analysis of the events of this campaign can, however, highlight some of the reasons for the failure of the ill-fated expedition of 415, as some of the lessons from the problems and issues encountered in this first expedition were not learnt by the next generation of Athenians.

The account by Thucydides is itself a disconnected narrative of geographically separate events interspersed with other events in the third book of his history and unusually there is no attempt to give a synoptic picture or explain the problems of strategy. Diodorus also describes the invasion.[1] He states that his source is Ephorus[2] and he does not appear to draw on Thucydides, but the resulting narrative is brief, lacking in analysis and not free from error, as he places the entire expedition into a single year,[3] whereas Thucydides makes clear that the Athenians were in the region for three full campaigning seasons until 424.[4]

Scholars have attempted to flesh out the events of 427-4, but given the lack of analysis from Thucydides this has often proved problematic. A deep-seated tendency to view Sicily and mainland Greece separately results in a distorted view of Sicily as distant and alien, when in reality mainland Greece and Sicily were part of the same world. A lot of the information we have on Sicily is based on archaeology, whereas we have much more documentary and epigraphical evidence from mainland Greece (and particularly from Athens). This has contributed to a split in scholarship with academics such as Evans and de Angelis focusing on Sicily in isolation, while more mainstream scholars focus on the documentary evidence coming from the mainland. A much more holistic viewpoint is required, as the two areas shared the same cultural viewpoint. Thucydides' comment at the beginning of Book Six that the Athenians were "for the most part ignorant of the size of the island and of the numbers of its inhabitants"[5] does not stand up to scrutiny, and, as will be shown below in section 8.2.1.1 Nicias had extensive dealings in Sicily and there were several treaties between Athens and the various city states of Sicily and southern Italy, not to mention the embassy to Sicily which was led by Phaeax in 422 (see section 6.2 below). All of this suggests regular contact between Athens and Sicily.

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[1] Diod. Sic. 12.54.4-5

[2] See section 2.6 for discussion of Ephorus.

[3] Diod. Sic. 12.54.4-7

[4] Thuc. 3.86; 88; 90; 103; 115-6; 4.1-2; 24-5; 58-65

[5] Thuc. 6.1.1

Lomas has recently written an article which explores the way in which Greek settlements outside the Aegean are studied and points out that scholars prefer to use neutral terms such as 'colonialism' rather than more loaded terms such as 'colonisation'.[6] As she points out, however, this needs to be reconsidered and it will be shown in [chapter 7](#) that the Greek presence in Sicily was very much the result of a process of colonisation which began in the eighth and seventh centuries and by the fifth century had resulted in a situation in which large cities in coastal areas were trading and maintaining loose ties with the mother cities in the Aegean, while the native Sicilians had been forced inland.

What is clear from Thucydides' narrative is that the Athenians had an old alliance (παλαιὰν ξυμμαχίαν) with the Sicilian city of Leontini,[7] a full offensive and defensive agreement which dated back to the 450s and had been renewed perhaps as recently as 433/2.[8] Both Thucydides and Diodorus state that Leontini and Syracuse were at war in 427, but neither state the cause. It appears that in that year Syracuse launched an attack on her neighbour, and the war leapt quickly over the narrow strait to Italy. Thucydides states that all the Dorian cities of Sicily with the exception of Camarina were allied with Syracuse, whilst the Chalcidian cities of Sicily, whose people were of Ionian heritage, along with Camarina and the Italian city of Rhegium were allied with Leontini.[9] Evans points out that Thucydides' description of Leontini's allies is problematic as by this time in Eastern Sicily the 'Chalcidian cities' would have consisted of only Catane.[10] Later in the war the citizens of Camarina desired to be regarded as neutral; Camarina neither had a large population nor did it occupy a strong defensive position.

When it became clear that Leontini was in danger, the city sent an embassy led by the sophist Gorgias to ask the Athenians to honour their treaty and send help. In response Athens sent a fleet of 20 ships under the command of Laches, even though they were busy fighting their own war against Sparta and its allies. Thucydides gives three reasons for the Athenian intervention: firstly, the treaty with the Leontines, which they felt compelled to honour; secondly, to prevent Sparta having access to grain reserves on the island; and, finally, as a preliminary test to see if they could bring Sicily under their control.[11] Westlake has argued that this passage expresses Thucydides' personal opinion on what drove the Athenians,[12] but Kagan is probably closer to the mark when he maintains that Thucydides is simply selecting some of the arguments that were put forward in the Assembly.[13] If so, this serves to highlight the political divisions and lack of clear

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[6] Lomas (2010) 175-6

[7] Thuc. 3.86.3

[8] Kagan (1974) 181-2

[9] Thuc. 3.86.1

[10] Evans (2016) 93 n3

[11] Thuc. 3.86.4

[12] Westlake (1969) 107-8

[13] Kagan (1974) 182

leadership in Athens following the death of Pericles.[14] It may also explain why Thucydides does not raise the question of what instructions were given to the generals in 3.86, as, given how disparate the reasons for sending the fleet were, it is not an unreasonable presumption that the instructions were ill-focused and not worthy of comment. Although these motives given for the expedition are vague, the third, and also possibly the second, seem geared to gaining dominion over Sicily and, indeed, it can be argued that the first invasion of Sicily marks the beginning of a more aggressive war policy, as was mentioned previously in Chapter 4.

The year 427 saw a number of aggressive campaigns of which Sicily was only one.   This is three years before Hyperbolus is accused in Aristophanes' *Knights* of aiming for the conquest of Carthage,[15] and the shift towards aggression potentially highlights disillusionment with Pericles' previous policy of containment and a willingness to try something more proactive and daring. Diodorus also claims that the purpose of the expedition was to ascertain whether Athenian control of Sicily was feasible in the long term as "for a long time now the Athenians had been covetous of Sicily on account of its agricultural richness".[16] Thucydides makes no mention of any dissent about the expedition and from this we can deduce that Nicias was in favour, or at least did not openly dissent. The fact that 12 years later Nicias was so opposed to the Sicilian Expedition suggests that perhaps he had learnt the lessons of this first expedition but was unable to dissuade the younger generation from their hawkish path. We can also pose the question whether the events that followed the first expedition affected Nicias' judgement in 415-3 and helped cement the failure of the later Expedition. Nicias was well aware of the consequences of failure and this may well have resulted in his over-cautious approach to the whole campaign.

The small Athenian force of 20 ships was Athens' first recorded foray into the west and marks a new and significant development in their war policy. In spite of this however, Thucydides' account is sketchy and fragmented and does not do justice to its importance. Thucydides is deliberately selective in what he writes ("here I shall merely refer to what is most noteworthy: the operations of the Athenian alliance and the measures taken by the enemy" [17] – a comment seemingly without parallel in the rest of his work) and there remains much that is not explained. Westlake has argued that Thucydides downplays the expedition in order to highlight the action taken against the generals at the end of campaign.[18] However, a simpler explanation would be that this is another part of his work that Thucydides never fully completed, perhaps due to a lack of adequate sources.

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[14] Thuc. 3.86.2. The fact that the motives in question were not necessarily incompatible does not alter this.

[15] Ar. *Eq.* 1300-4

[16] Diod. Sic. 12.54.1

[17] Thuc. 3.90.1

[18] Westlake (1969) 105

A further fleet of 30 ships left Athens in 427 to sail around the Peloponnese and was commanded by the Athenian general Demosthenes. Before heading to Sicily the ships were used in the defence of Corcyra against the Spartans, who had launched an all-out assault of 60 ships against the island. The delay in the arrival of Athenian ships in Sicily emboldened the Locrians who were allied with Syracuse and, before the Athenians arrived, they took to the sea and established control of the Straits of Messina. This deprived the Athenians of a harbour on either side of the straits and prevented them initially from playing a large part in Sicilian affairs, both militarily and diplomatically. By 426, however, the Athenian forces, along with a further 20 ships provided by the allies of Athens, mainly Rhegium, whose city the Athenians used a base throughout the campaign, had gained control of the straits and many of the Sicels[19] had come over to them. The delay in Corcyra emphasises the point that any fleet sailing from Athens to Sicily would have to traverse numerous flash points, which could easily draw them in, delaying any planned action in Sicily.

On the back of the Athenian success in taking control of the straits in 426, the Athenian Assembly voted to send another 40 ships. Again, no opposition is recorded by Thucydides or Diodorus. The combined Athenian fleet was now equal in size to that launched with great fanfare in 415, but Thucydides still downplays the event, and, since no details are given about the size of the Syracusan fleet, we cannot tell whether the Athenians had a significant numerical advantage. By the time the Athenian reinforcements arrived in 425, however, the original forces and their allies had become weary of war and the Sicels had lost confidence in the Athenians, especially after the siege of Naxos, when the Athenians had left the city undefended, forcing the Naxians and allied Sicels to fight off the assault unaided.

In the end, the Sicilians made peace with Syracuse in 424 and asked the Athenians to do the same. The Athenian generals were left with little choice. They still had no base in Sicily, the allies they had come to defend were no longer willing to fight, and their own force was inadequate to conquer Sicily. As Kagan argues, the generals were well within their rights in believing that the aims of the expedition had been achieved, namely to protect the allies of Athens, to prevent Syracuse from controlling all of Sicily, and to study the prospects of further gains.[20] On their return to Athens, however, the generals found themselves on trial, charged with accepting bribes to withdraw when they were in a position to subjugate the island, and they were all convicted. This was not an unusual charge and was often levelled at unsuccessful commanders, including Cimon 40 years earlier for not invading Macedonia.[21] The mistake of the generals, it seems lay

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[19] The Sicels were the original inhabitants of Sicily forced to move inland away from the coast following the waves of Greek settlements in the eighth century. See Chapter 7 for more details.

[20] Kagan (1974) 268

[21] Plut. *Cim.* 14

in failing to appreciate how public opinion in Athens would react to the conclusion of peace in Sicily.[22]

The differing opinions about whether the commanders of the expedition of 427-4 were successful can be ascribed to a lack of clarity about the aims of the expedition when it was launched. Unlike Thucydides, however, Diodorus has no account of the *strategoi* being accused of corruption and simply states that the Leontines made diplomatic overtures to the Syracusans and reached an agreement with them at Gela in 424. The Athenian triremes accordingly sailed back home.[23]

Map 1: Sicily and South Italy (https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/abs/thucydides/map-4-sicily-and-south-italy/05BF89F2E7840592EE8A65400AA71591)

Of note, at the same time that the first campaign in Sicily was underway in the summer of 427/6, the Athenian *strategos* Demosthenes was persuaded by the Messenians to attack Aetolia on the north coast of the Gulf of Corinth. As well as Aetolia constituting a threat to Naupactus it was felt that if Demosthenes conquered the Aetolians then it would be easy to win over to the Athenian side all the continental tribes in the area. Demosthenes is portrayed as sole agent throughout this episode, with no reference made to any instructions from, or need to consult the Assembly. With the Aetolians forewarned of the invasion however, the attack failed with the Athenians put to flight and the "men perished by every form of death".[24] Thucydides then revealingly notes that "Demosthenes stayed behind either at Naupactus or in the area, since he was afraid to face the Athenians after what had happened."[25] This is important, especially when viewed alongside the

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[22] Westlake (1969) 120

[23] Diod. Sic. 12.54.7

[24] Thuc. 3.98.3

[25] Thuc. 3.98.5

condemnation of the *strategoi* who led the campaign in Sicily, as it highlights attitudes of the Assembly towards generals perceived to have failed, and also reveals that the *strategoi* themselves are beginning to fear public reaction to failure.

6.2   Phaeax's Embassy to Sicily

Following the return of the fleet to Athens, peace between Leontini and Syracuse broke down in 422. Athens sent a delegation of three envoys led by Phaeax to encourage Sicilian cities to break ranks with Syracuse and to make a combined military effort against her. This embassy was unsuccessful and Phaeax and the others returned to Athens. Thucydides covers the whole episode in a few lines[26] which are quite isolated from the main narrative at this point (Cleon's campaign in the north Aegean). Evans has suggested that the piece was derived from another source and is possibly a late insertion.[27] The brevity of the account and a number of puzzling issues give rise to this supposition. Evans has noted that the order in which the delegation visit the cities of Sicily is very strange and makes little sense: first they sail to Camarina, then Acragas and finally into Gela before leaving the ships to make an overland trek whilst the two triremes to make the highly risky journey along the Syracusan coast to the rendezvous back with the delegation at Catane.[28] Evans has postulated that, rather than make such a convoluted and risky journey, it is more probable that the representatives of the cities named were all present on the same occasion and met Phaeax at Catane, since Thucydides explicitly places the Athenians there.[29] Evans even muses that the whole episode may not have happened at all and is simply a plot device inserted by Thucydides to maintain interest in Sicilian affairs. There is no evidence for this, however, and the whole notion can be discounted, or else it would bring into question whether Thucydides had any credibility as a source at all. Evan's first supposition is more likely – that Thucydides' source got confused or was misinformed about where the delegation met the Sicilians. The point exemplifies the fact that the Thucydidean narrative is too abbreviated at this juncture and the reader ends up misinformed.

Phaeax himself is a shadowy figure: much like Hyperbolus he was a major player in Athenian politics who gets scant attention from Thucydides. From Plutarch we learn that he was of noble birth, entered politics around the same time as Alcibiades and, along with Nicias, was Alcibiades' chief rival.[30] Plutarch also claims that, according to Theophrastus, the fourth century Greek scholar, it was Alcibiades and Phaeax who were involved in the ostracism that led to Hyperbolus' banishment, although he goes on to state that most writers disagree and claim in was a collusion

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[26] Thuc. 5.4-5
[27] Evans (2016) 109
[28] Evans (2016) 109
[29] Evans (2016) 109
[30] Plut. *Alc.* 13.1

of Nicias and Alcibiades which resulted in the ostracism of Hyperbolus.[31] The role of Phaeax and the ostracism of Hyperbolus has been examined elsewhere; the key point here is that he was a figure of some political substance and led an embassy to Sicily in 422, which followed a three year campaign by a large Athenian force on the island. This goes a long way to rebutting Thucydides' claim that in 415 the Athenians " ἄπειροι οἱ πολλοὶ ὄντες τοῦ μεγέθους τῆς νήσου καὶ τῶν ἐνοικούντων τοῦ πλήθους - were for the most part ignorant of the size of the island and the numbers of its inhabitants…".[32] Why Thucydides makes this claim is not known, but it is clear that the expedition of 427 and the subsequent embassy would have greatly added to the Athenians' knowledge of the island and ignorance cannot be included in a list of excuses for the later Expedition's failure. Hornblower suggests that if we give the adjective its literal meaning of 'lacking experience of' or 'unacquainted with' then Thucydides is simply stressing the few Athenians had personal first hand knowledge of.[33] Even if this is true it is an unsatisfactory explanation for such a comment as it could be applied to very many places where the Athenians campaign, Egypt as but one example. Given Thucydides' limited coverage of the events of 427 (in comparison to the Expedition of 415) however and the fact that he makes no mention of the island following Phaeax's departure until Book Six, the simplest explaination would seem to be that Thucydides lacked sources that could provide him with detailed information about the island's pre-415 history,[34] not that the Athenians in general were ignorant of Sicily.

6.3   Impact on the 415 Expedition

It can be seen that in the original expedition to Sicily of 427 some of the seeds of the failure of the great Expedition of 415 are evident. The lack of direction given to the leaders of the expedition regarding their aims and objectives hampered the activities of the commanders. This lack of direction can be traced back to the discord in Athens and vacuum of political leadership following the death of Pericles. In addition, the punishment of the generals after the expedition, which seems to have come as a surprise (they do not appear to have thought they had been unsuccessful), may have coloured Nicias' thinking ten years later, especially as he was a close friend of Laches who had also apparently been criticized for his actions in Sicily.[35] We can well imagine that it made him both hostile to the prospect of a new expedition to Sicily and, once he had been compelled to lead that expedition, very unwilling to return home unsuccessful. Meanwhile the Athenian mindset that led to the generals' conviction may also be relevant to their decision to return to Sicily in 415. Thucydides notes that:

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[31] Plut. *Nic.* 11.7

[32] Thuc. 6.1.1

[33] Hornblower, *Comm. on Thuc. 3.* 260

[34] And even what happens among the Sicels 415-413 is reported with great vagueness and brevity.

[35] Ar. *Vesp.* 240-244, 894-897. For Nicias' friendship with Laches see Pl. *Lach.* 194a.

> "…they thought nothing could go wrong with them; that the possible and the difficult were alike attainable, whether the forces employed were large or wholly inadequate. It was their surprising success in most directions which caused this state of mind and suggested to them that their strength was equal with their hopes."[36]

What Evans deems to be 'Athenian arrogance'[37] may also have left a lasting impression on her allies. Thucydides notes that the harbour at Messina was taken very easily by the Syracusans in 424 and that around the same time there were 'party struggles' in Rhegium.[38] Evans suggests that this may reflect unhappiness at the Athenian presence caused by excessive demands for aid and an inappropriately high-handed attitude towards communities they were supposed to be helping.[39] Evans points to Thucydides' lack of clarity about what was happening in Rhegium as evidence for his interpretation,[40] and, although Thucydides says nothing about Athenian high-handedness, Athens' treatment of allies in the Aegean gives colour to the suggestion. If Evans' theory is correct, it would go a long way towards explaining why the Athenians found it so hard to find allies when they returned in 415.

The fact that the Sicilian cities decided to settle their differences and then informed the Athenian commanders that the peace would apply to them as well was a lesson which was not learnt by the Athenians. It shows that despite their apparent disunity the Sicilians were capable of uniting, when necessary, although it took them a long time to do so, and this was a point the Athenians failed to account for in the expedition of 415.

The episode also functions to highlight historiographical problems in Thucydides. An investigation of the expedition reveals the size and importance of the campaign, yet Thucydides downplays the events and omits much important detail. This may be a result of the lack of sources; but Thucydides does provide a lengthy speech for Hermocrates at the conference of Gela in 424,[41] so he did have some engagement with the topic and must have had a source for this speech. This perhaps makes it more likely that Thucydides' scant coverage of the military details of the 427-424 campaign is a deliberate attempt to play down the whole episode in order to increase the impact of the 415 Expedition in the mind of the reader. Yet there are hints of what is to come. Hermocrates is made to say that the Athenians "are sure to come back again with a larger force", which the reader knows is an accurate prediction,[42] and it is hard for that same reader to encounter what Thucydides says in 4.65.4 about the Athenians' sense of invincibility

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[36] Thuc. 4.65.4

[37] Evans (2016) 98

[38] Thuc. 4.1;.24-25

[39] Evans (2016) 98

[40] Evans (2016) 98 n9

[41] Thuc. 4.59-64

[42] Thuc. 4.60.2. The comment has led to some scholars questioning the authenticity of the speech. See *HCT* 3. 515 and 525 and Hornblower, *Comm. on Thuc.* 2. 223.

without thinking of the way that prediction played out. In any event, this examination has shown the importance of the 427 campaign to the Athenians and also that it contains some of the seeds of the failure of the 415 Expedition.

Chapter 7 - The Geopolitical Situation in Sicily in 415

7.1   Eighth century Greek Settlement of Sicily

As noted above in section 6.1, the history of Sicily during the archaic and classical periods is one of colonisation from the Aegean and colony cities maintaining ties and trade agreements with the mother cities back in the Aegean. Understanding this process is important if one wishes to attempt to comprehend the mindset and worldview of the inhabitants of Sicily at the time of the Expedition in 415.

During the eighth century BC life in Greece began to change as existing and new developments merged to bring about a major cultural and political transformation.[1] Population increased rapidly and may have even doubled during the course of the century, with serious ramifications including increased demand and competition for resources. Over the course of the next two and a half centuries tens of thousands of Greeks left their homeland for greener pastures abroad, ostensibly for agricultural reasons, although other causes such as trade and political discontent cannot be ruled out.[2] Some 500 permanent settlements were established in the Mediterranean: the process began in Southern Italy and Sicily and this area remained the most intensely settled throughout the period.[3] At roughly the same time and certainly by the sixth century the Phoenicians also began to be active in Sicily, and, whilst they had no exclusive settlements of their own, secure evidence exists for Phoenician residents in Greek Sicilian cities by the sixth century.[4] Whilst there was also a native Sicilian population (later known as Sicels) of around 100,000 in approximately 100 settlements at the time of the Greek expansion there is no evidence of a violent conquest and the native Sicilians appear to have moved inland away from the coastal regions. Some of the Greek settlements went on to found additional *poleis* of their own in Sicily. The major settlements in Sicily, along with details of the origin of the settlers and time of settlement is listed below in table 8 and a map of Archaic Sicily can be seen in map 2.

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[1] Morris (2009)

[2] de Angelis (2016) 49 – Morris puts the figure at 10,000 in colonies by 700BC - Morris (2000) 57 and Scheidel puts the total figure at between 30000-60000 adult male emigrants – Scheidel (2003) 134-5

[3] de Angelis (2016) 48-9

[4] de Angelis (2016) 50

Settlement	Mother City	Time of Settlement
Zankle (Messina)	Pirates from Cumae in South Italy, reinforced by Euboean Settlers	Third Quarter of Eighth Century
Naxos	Euboea	735 BC
Leontinoi	Naxos	729 BC
Catana	Naxos	After 729 BC
Syracuse	Corinth	734 BC
Megara Hyblaia	Megara	734 BC
Gela	Rhodes and Cretans	688 BC
Himera	Zankle (Messina) and Syracusian exiles	After 688 BC
Selinous	Megara	651 BC (Diod. Sic.) Or 628 BC (Thuc.)
Akragas	Gela	580 BC (last archaic settlement)

Table 8: Archaic Settlements in Sicily – derived from de Angelis (2016); Thuc. and Diod. Sic.
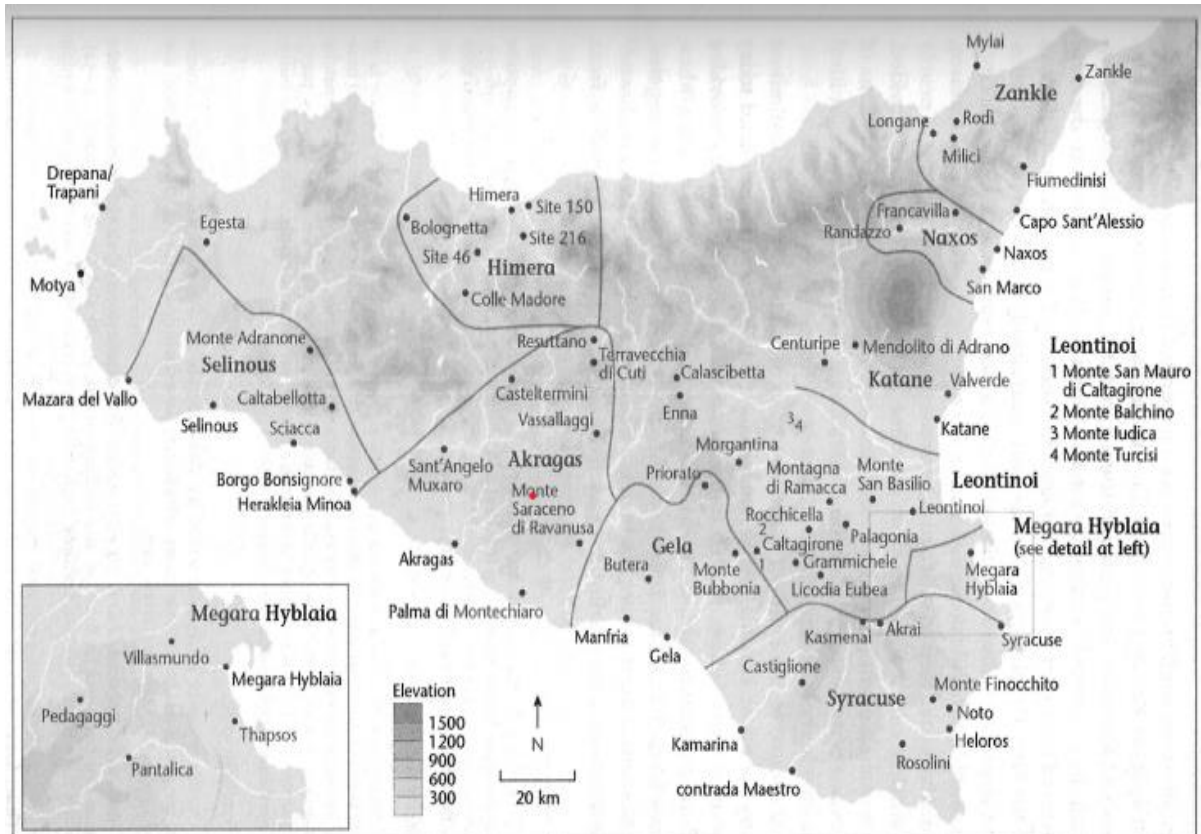
Map 2: Archaic Settlements in Sicily (de Angelis 67)

Evans takes issue with the precise dating of 734 for Syracuse and shows that, although it is conceivable that Syracuse was founded during the last three decades of the eighth century, this is by no means certain.[5] Evans points out that the date of 734 is an extrapolation by Thucydides obtained from an unnamed source, probably Antiochus of Syracuse, and may be the product of Syracusan propaganda. Antiochus is generally considered to have lived in the fifth century BC and his work was directly accessed by Thucydides.[6] Strabo writing at the end of the first century BC tells us that Syracuse was founded by Archias who sailed from Corinth at around the same time Naxos and Megara were founded.[7] Archias went to Delphi along with a certain Myscellus and the god asked them both whether they chose wealth or health. Archias chose wealth and was granted Syracuse, while Myscellus chose health and was granted Croton. The Crotoniates took up their abode in a city that was exceedingly healthy and Syracuse became so exceedingly wealthy that a proverb was applied throughout the Greek speaking world to the excessively extravagant, that "the tax of the Syracusans would not be sufficient for them".[8] Evans points out

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[5] Evans (2016) 3

[6] Evans (2016) 3 and n10

[7] Strabo 6.2.4; cf. 6.1.12

[8] Strabo 6.2.4

that this suggests that Syracuse was founded around the same time as the city of Croton in Magna Graecia and that Croton's foundation is traditionally dated in 710 BC, some 20 years later than the figure derived from Thucydides.[9] Diodorus' account of the settlement of Syracuse comes in Book Eight of his history, which only exists in fragments. He does recount and expand on Strabo's tale of Myscellus consulting the oracle at Delphi, although he does not mention Archias at this point, at least in the fragments remaining.[10] Diodorus also makes the arrival of the Greeks in Sicily contemporaneous with Rome's first kings which can tentatively be placed at the end of the eighth century and does not conflict with Strabo's account. Evans has further argued that in spite of the slight discrepancy in the dating of the foundation of Syacuse between Thucydides and Strabo, both used Antiochus as their source, making him the ultimate source for information about the earliest period of Syracuse.[11]

7.2   Sicily in the Fifth Century

During the centuries following the Greek settlement in Sicily, the island underwent a period of centralisation and expansion roughly in line with what was happening elsewhere in the Mediterranean. The brothers Kleander and Hippokrates who jointly ruled Gela as tyrants appear to be have been the first to attempt political centralisation and captured Syracuse in 485, making it their capital. The city of Syracuse also expanded to accommodate an influx of population from conquered territories and became an imperial capital. Meanwhile in central Sicily the *polis* of Akragas embarked upon a programme of centralisation and expansion, often acting in concert with Syracuse. By the 480s Akragas and Syracuse held sway in eastern and central Sicily, which caused alarm, not only amongst the Greek and native communities there but in Carthage, which had extensive interests in the west of the island. This resulted in a showdown between the three players culminating with the battle of Himera in 480. The outcome was a decisive victory for the Syracuse/Akragas axis over Carthage's forces, leading to a delineation of political spheres between Greeks and Carthaginians in Sicily roughly down the middle of the island. The Sicilian communities which were able to exercise a degree of independence after this time were those larger *poleis*, such as Selinous and Zankle which allied themselves to one of the big players.[12]

As the fifth century progressed the power of the tyrannies began to wane, possibly due to fiscal irresponsibility,[13] and, when they were eventually overthrown in 465, Carthage loosened its grip in order to focus its attentions on other matters such as extending its hinterland in northern Africa. A map of the spheres of influence at this time can be seen below in Map 3. All this was occurring at the same time that Athens was becoming the major power in Aegean Greece and

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[9] Evans (2016) 6

[10] Diod. Sic. 8.17

[11] Evans (2016) 5

[12] de Angelis (2016) 102

[13] de Angelis (2016) 192-3

the impact of the city's expansionist activities was likely to be felt soon in southern Italy and Sicily. The failure of the Athenian expeditionary force in Egypt in 454[14] meant that Athens would have to look elsewhere for access to grain supplies. Although not stated explicitly in any of the sources, it would be surprising if Athenian eyes and ambitions did not turn towards the west and the fertile lands of Sicily at this point.
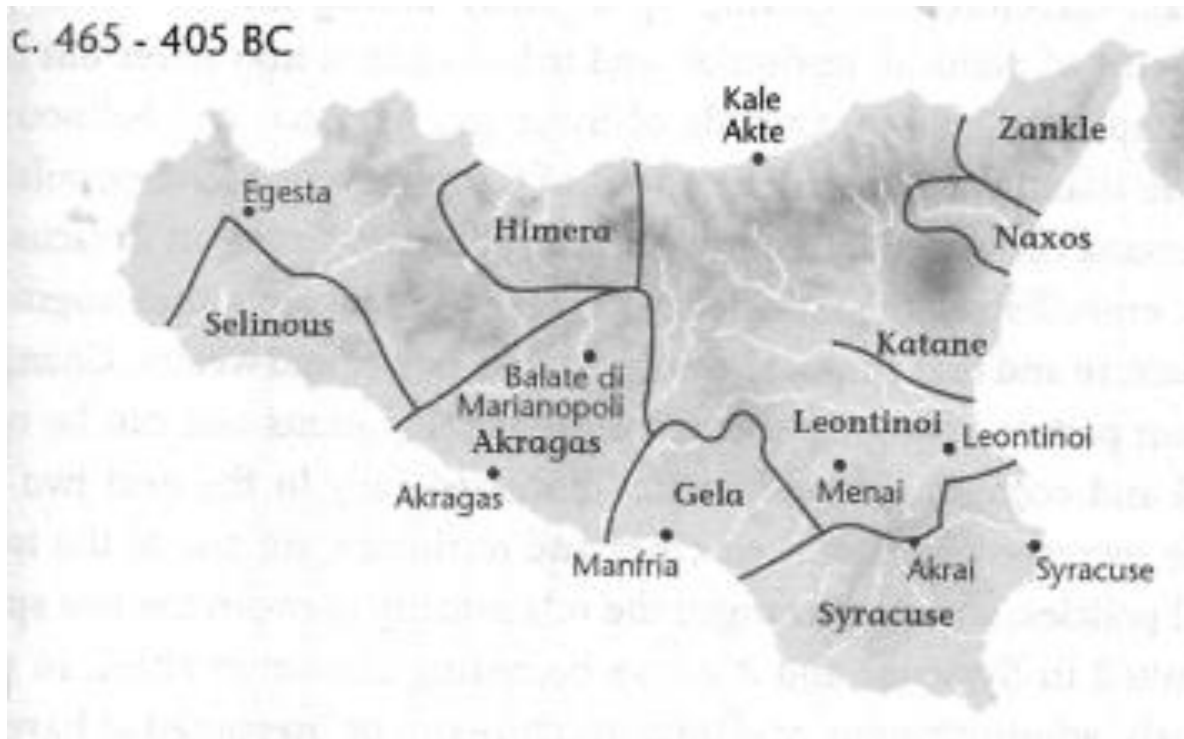
Map 3: Spheres of Influence in 465 (de Angelis (2016) 109)

By the mid-fifth century, then, power in Sicily resided with the *poleis*. The tyrants had gone and Carthage's attention was diverted elsewhere. Although the various city states all had a mother city responsible for the original colonisation, centuries of tyranny, expansion and migration within Sicily had loosened affiliations and loyalty to the mother city. As the century progressed the island fragmented into city states, but the island's topography and frontier conditions meant that Sicilian Greek societies were never closed in the way that they often were on the Greek mainland: demographic influxes came from all over, both inside and outside Sicily, and these conditions impacted the nature and character of society in Greek Sicily.[15] The decades after the fall of the tyrannies had been one of upheaval, involving population displacements and violent political turmoil.[16] De Angelis has argued that Alcibiades' comment that the Sicilians were a

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[14] Thuc. 1.109-110

[15] de Angelis (2016) 220

[16] See Diod. Sic. 11.67-68, 72-73, 76, 86-92, 12.8, 29

rabble with no social cohesiveness was designed by Thucydides as a subtle dig at the Athenians for eventually losing the war in Sicily,[17] but the comment itself is not too far wide of the mark.

As detailed in chapter 6, in the summer of 427 the Athenians sent 20 ships to Sicily to support the people of Leontini in their quarrel with Syracuse and 30 more ships were later dispatched, arriving in Sicily in 425. The combined force was unable to achieve anything before the summer of 424 when the Sicilian cities themselves decided to settle their differences and informed the Athenian commanders that the peace would apply to them as well. The Athenians had no choice but to return to Athens. This shows that despite their apparent disunity the Sicilians were capable of uniting, when necessary, although it took them a long time to do so, and this was a point the Athenians failed to account for in the Expedition of 415.

When the Athenians launched their Expedition against Sicily in 415 their ships sailed west along the foot of Italy towards Sicily, remaining in sight of land for the most part. The area can be seen in map 4. Although Thucydides says little of this journey, he is explicit that as they sailed down the Italian coast the Athenians received nothing from the Italian cities other than water and anchorage, and not even this from Tarentum and Locri. Upon arrival in Rhegium, on the Straits of Messina, the Athenian forces regrouped and to their surprise found that they were not to be admitted to the city and that the people of Rhegium did not immediately join forces with them, as they had expected. This point will be developed further when we look at the dynamics of the Expedition in chapter 8.
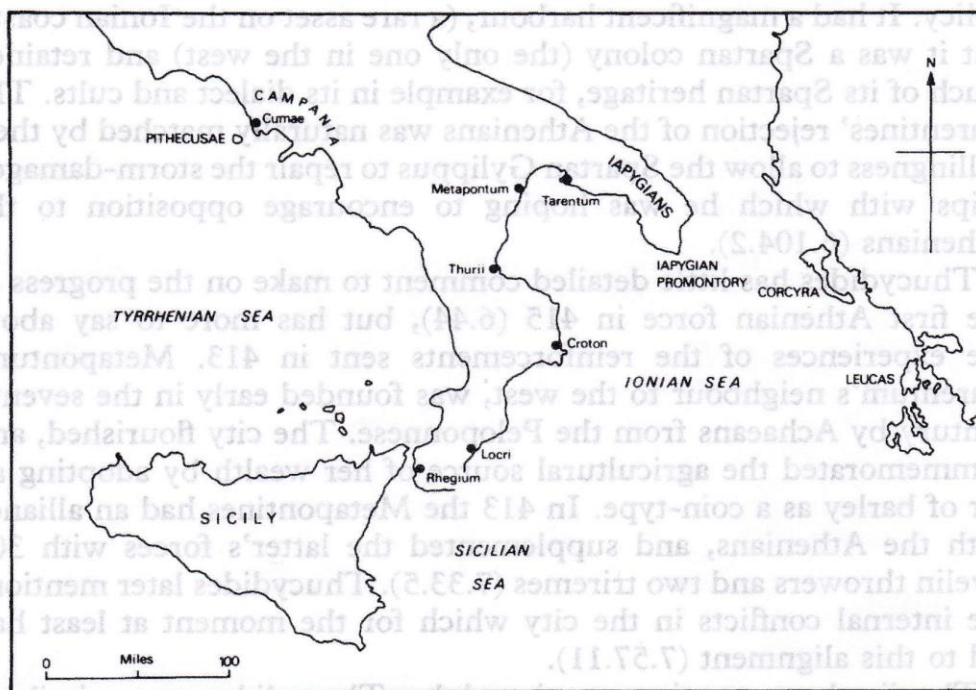
Map 4: Southern Italy in 415 (Rutter (1986) 146)

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[17] de Angelis (2016) 209

When the initial Greek fleet arrived in Sicily in 415, they found a disunited island with many large city states, often at war with each other. In addition, Carthage, the other major player in the region had her attention diverted away toward her North African territories. The fragmented nature of the island arguably made it ripe for the taking, especially given the size of the invasion force and the noted diplomatic skills of Alcibiades.

7.3   Athens and Egesta

As helping Egesta in her dispute with the Selinuntines was the main pretext for launching the expedition,[18] understanding Athens' relationship with Egesta is especially important. An analysis of this can help us to understand whether Athens' relationship with Egesta was longstanding or only a relatively recent development. This in turn will help us to understand the mood in Athens in 415 better. If Athen's relationship with Egesta was relatively new and a direct result of Egesta's appeal for aid it could be a symptom of the sort of instability in Athenian politics that might imperil the successful conduct of an enterprise such as the conquest of Sicily. If, however, the relationship with Egesta was longstanding, it would add a degree of legitimacy to the Expedition and suggest a strategic interest in Sicily, rather than just a piecemeal approach, making treaties with cities in the west which may or may not become useful allies in the future. In this instance, we might then expect a greater awareness of Sicilian conditions, a greater degree of preparedness for the Expedition and a more politically stable environment for its execution.

At the beginning of Book Six Thucydides remarks that the Athenians

> aimed at conquering the whole of it [Sicily], though they wanted at the same time to make it look as though they were sending help to their kinsmen and to newly acquired allies there. They were particularly encouraged by a delegation from Egesta in Athens at that time, who were most eager to secure Athenian intervention.[19]

The Egesteans said they would supply sufficient money to finance the entire war[20] and Athenians with their interest clearly piqued sent a delegation to Sicily to see if the money really existed. Thucydides stresses the financial aspect and highlights the fact that the Egestean claims of being able to finance the Expedition were untrue.[21] In terms of the legitimacy of the Expedition, Thucydides goes on to mention a treaty between Athens and Leontini which the Egesteans invoke, but strangely not one with Egesta itself:

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[18] Thuc. 6.8.1-4

[19] Thuc. 6.6.1.

[20] Thuc. 6.6.2 – presumably meaning funding the settling of the Selinus-Egesta quarrel rather than the conquest of the entire island.

[21] Thuc. 6.8.2

ὥστε τὴν γενομένην ἐπὶ Λάχητος καὶ τοῦ προτέρου πολέμου Λεοντίνων οἱ Ἐγεσταῖοι ξυμμαχίαν ἀναμιμνήσκοντες τοὺς Ἀθηναίους ἐδέοντο σφίσι ναῦς πέμψαντας ἐπαμῦναι.[22]

Warner translates this as*: "*so the Egestaeans reminded the Athenians of the alliance made in the time of Laches, during the war in which Leontini was concerned."[23] However Smart insists that the paragraph must be translated as: "So that the Egestaians, making repeated mention of the (sc. Athenian) alliance concluded with Leontini at the time of Laches and the previous war…".[24] Smart's translation means that the Egestians appeal not to an alliance between themselves and Athens but to one between Leontini and Athens, and this raises questions about Athens' relationship with Egesta. If there was no treaty between Athens and Egesta, then it would seem that Egesta was but a fig leaf for an attempt at conquest.

It is clear that Athens had a degree of interest in the west prior to the 420s, as the treaty with Leontini was renewed at 433/2, as was that with Rhegium,[25] but evidence for a direct relationship with Egesta is less clear. This is an important point as it would reveal something of the general mood of Athens. The absence of such a relationship may indicate that the Athenians embarked on a rash invasion of Sicily, with greed blinding them to the pitfalls that awaited them. Indeed, Alcibiades' comments during the Sicilian Debate have more than a little rashness about them: "The Peloponnesians have never had so little hope of success against us as they have now…they can do us no harm" and "This is the way we won our empire" are but two examples.[26] If evidence for a treaty could be found, however, the Expedition would have more legitimacy, especially if the treaty were a long-standing one, the charge that the Athenians were blinded by greed is harder to make, and reasons for the failure of the Expedition must be sought elsewhere. In order to resolve this issue it is necessary to examine the relationship between Athens and Egesta.

Some commentators such as Classen, Poppo-Stahl, Busolt and Raubitschek have supported the deletion of Λεοντίνων from Thucydides' text and have supposed a renewal of an alliance between Athens and Egesta dating from the original Athenian Expedition to Sicily in 427/6.[27] There are linguistic difficulties with this supposition, however, and more tellingly there is no mention of a previous treaty in Thucydides' account of the 427-424 campaign or elsewhere in the *History*, although this is not decisive, given the overall paucity of detail in Thucydides' account of that campaign.

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[22] Thuc. 6.6.2.

[23] Warner (1954) 412.

[24] Smart (1972) 133.

[25] *IG* I³ 54 and *IG* I³ 53 respectively. See Osborne and Rhodes (2017) 282-7

[26] Thuc. 6.18

[27] Smart (1972) 133

The evidence we do have concerning a treaty between Athens and Egesta comes in the form of two inscriptions, *IG* I³ 11 and *IG* I³ 12. *IG* I³ 11 was discovered on the Acropolis and first published by Ulrich Köhler in 1867.[28] The stele is fragmentary but refers to a *prytanizing* tribe, the name of an Archon and a proposal that there be an alliance between Athens and the Egestaians. There are instructions for taking an oath and an invitation to the Egestaian embassy to a public reception in the *prytaneion,* and the decree ends with an amendment by a certain Euphemos concerning the reception of future embassies from Egesta.[29] Unfortunately the name of the *prytanizing* tribe is unclear, as is the name of the Archon, which makes dating the stele problematic. The only thing that is clear is that the Archon's name ends with the letters – ων.

IG I³ 12 was also discovered on the Acropolis and published by Köhler in 1879.[30] It was not until 1943, however, that Raubitscek concluded that the two fragments (*IG* I³ 11 and *IG* I³ 12) were most probably connected, on account of the size and spacing of the lettering.[31] This stele contains an appendix to the first stele, giving what is most likely a list of ambassadors from Egesta. It then moves on to a new decree which records an alliance between Athens and Halikyai, a small Sikel settlement in the neighbourhood of Egesta, on the same terms as that on which the alliance with Egesta had already been made.[32]

The date of the decree has been controversial since its discovery. The name of the Archon given in *IG* I³ 11 has been the focus of the debate. In the period from Ephialtes' reforms in 461/1 to the Sicilian Expedition in 415 there were five Archons whose names ended in – ων: Ἄβρων (458/7); Ἀρίστων (454/3); Ἐπαμείνων (429/8); Ἀρίστων (421/0) and Ἀντιφῶν (418/7). This gives five possible years in which the stele could have been inscribed. A close inspection of the letter spaces on *IG* I³ 11 before the - ων reveals traces of what might be a phi (φ) or a rho (ρ) as the antepenultimate letter of the Archon's name, further preceded by an iota (ι) or a beta (β).[33] Accepting these as traces of inscribed letters, rather than merely scratches, rules out three of the five Archons listed above, leaving just Ἄβρων (458/7) and Αντιφών (418/7) and narrowing our search down to two possible years. Conventional scholarship has subsequently taken the 458/7 date, partially on the grounds that Thucydides does not mention such a treaty but mainly on epigraphical grounds.[34] Meiggs' study of the changes in Attic lettering between the archaic and classical period had formulated the hypothesis that three-barred sigmas did not appear in inscriptions after c. 445 and that tailed rounded rhos did not appear after 438.[35]

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[28] Köhler (1867) 16-18

[29] Smart (1972) 129

[30] Köhler (1867) 30-5

[31] Raubitschek (1944) 10-14

[32] Smart (1972) 130

[33] Smart (1972) 130

[34] Smart (1972) 131 n17 for list of scholars in favour of date of 458/7.
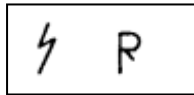
[35] Meiggs (1966) 86-98

Figure 3: Three Barred Sigma and Tail Rounded Rho.

Figure 4: Three Barred Sigma and Tail Rounded Rho in *IG* I³ 11 (Tracy (2014) 107)

As both appear in *IG* I³ 11 it was inferred that the archon referred to must be Ἄβρων dating the treaty to 458/7. The argument is further strengthened by the fact that the letter forms on *IG* I³ 12 conform to later letter forms of around 420. Raubitschek believed that *IG* I³ 11 referred to a treaty between Athens and Egesta in 458/7 which was renewed in 427/6 and thus inscribed below the earlier inscription on what is now *IG* I³ 12.[36] In a seminal paper of 1972, however, Smart agued the correct reading of the Archon on *IG* I³ 11 was Αντιφῶν, which dates the decree to 418/7 and means that a treaty between Athens and Egesta was made in the years immediately preceding the Expedition. Smart countered Meiggs' argument from letter forms by a supposition that the effects of the war and plague in Athens would have resulted in an exodus of masons, leaving only more conservative and older craftsmen available to meet the ever-increasing demands for inscriptions and record-keeping. Given these circumstances it is not surprising, argues Smart, that we find older letter forms suddenly appearing in public inscriptions.[37] Although this argument seems somewhat tenuous, Smart points to examples of three earlier Athenian stelae, dating from the thirty years between 520 and 489, where the older

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[36] Raubitschek (1944) 14 n10

[37] Smart (1972) 138

inscriptions have more advanced and modern letter forms than those found in the earlier. In this example Smart looks at two inscriptions generally acknowledged to be dated from 520, an inscription on the altar of Apollo in the Pythion and an inscription on a dedication at the Ptoion sanctuary in Boiotia, and compares them to an inscription on a memorial of Kallimachos, polemarch at Marathon, which is dated to 490/89. Even though the third inscription was written some 30 years later than the first two, it is the first two inscriptions that have more advanced letter forms. The only explanation is that the first two inscriptions were carved by a craftsman ahead of his contemporaries and that the final inscription was carved by an older craftsman, using more traditional letter forms and ignoring (or else unaware of) of the newer letter forms that were coming into use.[38] Having established that letter forms are not a reliable method of producing a *terminus ante quem* for inscriptions Smart goes on to argue that a date of 458/7 for the inscription on *IG* I³ 11 does not make sense as this would suggest that Athens had a desire to secure influence and subsequently dominate and control Sicily as far back as 460, which is not a position supported by Thucydides' text. A date of 418/7, however, would still necessitate a re-evaluation of how the Athenians came to involve themselves in Sicily, as it would indicate that the Athenians were directly involving themselves in Sicilian affairs in the years running up to the Expedition – which is also not something supported by Thucydides' text. Smart's position was accepted and reinforced by Mattingly, who argued that historical considerations must outweigh evidence of letter forms,[39] but many other scholars, such as Merrit and Henry disagreed and dogmatically dated the treaty between Athens and Egesta to 458/7.[40]

This debate continued unresolved until Chambers, Gallucci and Spanos used enhanced laser photography on the inscription and concluded that the antepenultimate letter of the Archon's name could not be a rho but could be interpreted as a phi:[41] this strengthened the argument for the Archon's name being Αντιφῶν, dating the decree to 418/7. Although not all scholars concur, the work done by Chambers, Gallucci and Spanos does seem to be conclusive and the inscription on *IG* I³ 11 is now agreed by most scholars to date from 418/7,[42] which means that an alliance was in place between Athens and Egesta at the time of the Expedition.

Thucydides' silence about a treaty between Athens and Egesta in 418/17 remains puzzling. But with the treaty with Egesta now dated with reasonable certainty to 418/7, the idea of a long-term Athenian preoccupation with Sicily dating back to 460 is much less certain. Pericles' policies in the 430s focused on Macedonia, Thrace, the Hellespont and the Black Sea rather than looking west. The Sicilian Expedition of 427, argues Smart, was born more of a fear of the Syracusans

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[38] Smart (1972) 138

[39] Mattingly (1976) 42-43

[40] Henry (1978) 99; 101-2

[41] Chambers, Gallucci, Spanos (1990)

[42] Rhodes is a notable convert following the work done by Chambers, Gallucci and Spanos and has argued that it necessitates a review of the dating of many inscriptions of the fifth century. See Rhodes (2008) and also Tracey (2014).

coming to the aid of the Spartans than a desire to conquer Sicily.[43] The actions of Laches, the leader of that military venture, suggest that he understood the mood of the Assembly not to be leading to the conquest of Sicily. The reception he received on return, however, suggests something changed in Athens whilst the expedition was away. The Athenian success at Pylos in 425, where Athenian forces smashed the myth of Spartan invincibility in two hard fought battles that seemed to turn the tide of the whole war in their favour, occurred in this period[44] but, although it is clear these victories greatly increased the Athenians' self-confidence, the improvement in their position did not last long, as the next years brought a substantial defeat at Delium (424), a serious Spartan threat to Athenian control in the North Aegean, and the death of Cleon at Amphipolis (422). Smart points to the rise of two groupings at this time. The first were manufacturers who owed their livelihood to the fleet and whose will was made articulate in the Assembly by the likes of Cleon and Hyperbolus. The second group consisted of young upper-class aristocrats interested in power such as Phaiax and Alcibiades. The conquest of Sicily appealed to both these groups and, as their representatives became more prominent in the Assembly, the idea entered Athenian political consciousness.[45] The first manifestation of this was the condemnation of the generals who led the expedition in 424 for failing to conquer Sicily, something that was not an aim of the enterprise, and the second was the embassy of Phaiax in 422. But Nicias gained some considerable authority after the death of Cleon and, following the establishment of the Peace of Nicias in 421, it seems he was able to contain the calls for a further assault on Sicily. As a result, it would appear that between 421 and 418, before Alcibiades got involved, Sicily was once again neglected by Athens. Smart argues that at the beginning of his political career Alcibiades preferred to leave Sicily to Phaiax and concentrate on the Argive Alliance.[46] It was only after the failure of this policy at Mantineia and the arrival of the ambassadors from Egesta in 418/7 that Alcibiades saw an opportunity and turned his attentions to Sicily.[47]

The rider in *IG* I³ 11 by Euphemos concerning the reception of future embassies suggests that Euphemos expected more embassies from Egesta and was making provision for their proper reception. That it was necessary for Euphemos to insert this rider may show that the original embassy from Egesta ran into some difficulties. This suggests that the power struggle in Athens between those who wanted to conquer Sicily and those who saw the venture as foolhardy was already going on well before we see it in the speeches of Nicias and Alcibiades before the Assembly in 415 and may have been an element in Athenian politics ever since 424. The arrival of the embassy from Egesta in 418/7 provided an opportunity for those in favour of conquest to

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[43] Smart (1972) 140

[44] Thuc. 4.1-41

[45] Smart (1972) 141

[46] Smart (1972) 142

[47] Smart (1972) 141-2

put down a marker. But only when Alcibiades turned his attention to the matter and secured his position as leader of the hawks following the removal of Hyperbolus did Athens then embark on the venture.

Cawkwell draws attention to a passage in Andocides' speech *On the Peace with Sparta*, written in 392, that is interesting in this context. Andocides claims that Syracuse requested Athens' friendship and alliance but that Athens chose to make an alliance with Segesta and go to war:

> An urgent request came to us from Syracuse; she was ready to end our differences by a pact of friendship…But once more we chose war instead of peace, Segesta instead of Syracuse.[48]

Thucydides makes no mention of such an approach, but, if Athenagoras was in charge of the democratic faction in Syracuse in 416 and had heard of the Segestan appeal to Athens, it would have made perfect sense to use diplomatic means to seek to prevent intervention.[49] Andocides' statement is often ignored or derided by historians, but he had no obvious reason to invent the embassy, especially when his audience would have been aware of the events leading up to the Expedition. If Andocides' claim is true, it strengthens the argument that Athens was intent on war in Sicily, whatever the pretext.

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[48] Andoc. 3.30

[49] Cawkwell (1997) 88

Chapter 8 – The Dynamics of the Campaign

8.1   Introduction

The previous chapters have examined the general political circumstances in Athens and Sicily before and during the immediate run-up to the launch of the Expedition in summer 415 and drawn attention to various matters that were potentially damaging to the outcome of the enterprise. It is now time to turn to an examination of decisions that were made by the Expedition's commanders during the Expedition and assess their contribution to the final disaster. This will be done by conducting a detailed analysis of events, as detailed by Thucydides in Books Six and Seven, whilst also drawing on other less detailed sources. The focus will be on the leadership qualities of the commanders and the possibility that things could have been done differently during the course of the campaign in ways that might have altered its outcome. Since the first full presentation of the character and views of two of the leaders comes in Thucydides' report of the definitive debate in the Assembly about sending the Expedition to Sicily, it is with that we start.

8.2   Analysis of Books Six and Seven

8.2.1   Book Six

8.2.1.1 The Sicilian Debate

Athens' relationship with Egesta leads directly into the Sicilian debate. This is Thucydides' depiction of the debate in the Assembly which ensued following the request for aid from the Egestan ambassadors.

There were, in fact, two Assembly meetings. At the first, the Athenians voted to send 60 ships under the command of Alcibiades, Nicias and Lamachus to help the Egestaeans, restore Leontini, and arrange other things in Sicily as best suited Athenian interests.[1] For the pursuit of these aims the generals were made *autokratōres* (i.e. given full powers). There is no previous attestation of such a thing, so the arrangement was either an innovation or one that was very rarely put in place. What precisely it means, whether the three men ever became supernumerary to the normal board of ten generals and how long the status was supposed to last are matters that have been much debated.[2] But the important thing is that the title clearly signalises the special importance attached to the enterprise and perhaps awareness that the distance between Sicily and Athens might make it necessary for the generals to operate with some independence. There must, therefore, have been a considerable debate at this first Assembly meeting, but of this Thucydides says nothing. Five days later a further Assembly met to discuss implementation

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[1] Thuc. 6.8

[2] Fornara (1971) 64; Develin (1989) 148; Hornblower *Comm. on Thuc.* 3. 317

of the decision to intervene in Sicily. It is the debate at this Assembly (which resulted in a great increase in the size of the expeditionary force) that Thucydides reports at length.

The two protagonists are Nicias, who is against intervention, and Alcibiades, who is an advocate for military intervention in Sicily.

Thucydides states that Nicias believed the whole enterprise was a pretext for conquering Sicily,[3] and then goes on to relate Nicias' very lucid and rational arguments for not getting involved. Nicias argues that the Egestans do not even speak the same language as the Athenians[4] (the Egestans were part of the non-Hellenic Elymi and thus *barbaroi*)[5] and his statement in Warner's translation "Egesta … an ally of ours, we say*…*"[6] could be seen to be casting doubt on the merits of any treaty with Egesta, or the reasons behind Athens forming an alliance with Egesta. Indeed, Dover suggests that this remark likely shows that Nicias is expressing scepticism about the primary ostensible purpose of the Expedition.[7]   Following his speech Nicias implored the president of the Assembly (the *prytanis*) to put the question of the Expedition to the vote again and allow the Assembly to debate it.[8] If the *prytanis* was worried about overturning the decree at the previous Assembly approving the expedition, Nicias assured him he would not be charged with violating the laws because there were so many witnesses to his actions, which implies Nicias was asking the official to do something which may have been illegal. This point has been debated among scholars and Harris points out that the Assembly could not pass any motion which had not received the prior approval of the *Boule*.[9] The reason for Nicias' attempt to circumvent the *Boule* is unclear and in any case most of those who spoke after Nicias were in favour of the Expedition and did not want to go back on a decision which had already been passed.[10] Dover supposes that Thucydides is implying that the action which Nicias requests could in some circumstances be illegal, but not in the present instance.[11]   Although some decrees included sanctions against their own reconsideration, there is no evidence for a general law to this effect, and the Mytilenean debate did not raise the issue of legality. Hornblower agrees with Dover on this point and points out that it was quite constitutional for the Assembly to rescind a decision after a new debate and a new vote.[12] Pelling, however, suggests that it is unclear whether Thucydides' use of the word ἐπιψηφίζειν means 'to put to the vote again' or

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[3] Thuc. 6.8.3

[4] Thuc. 6.11.7

[5] Cartwright (1997) 232

[6] Thuc. 6.10.5

[7] *HCT* 4. 233

[8] Thuc. 6.14

[9] Harris (2014) 67

[10] Thuc. 6.15.1

[11] *HCT* 4. 240

[12] Hornblower, *Comm. on Thuc.* 3. 336

'repeal'. Revisiting an issue was not illegal and Pelling postulates Nicias may be projecting onto a nervous *prytanis* his own apprehensiveness about a vindictive demos.[13]

It is very possible that Thucydides is emphasising the point here to make it clear that Nicias and his supporters were very strongly against the Expedition. By highlighting Nicias' questioning of the pretext for the Expedition and then his attempt to annul the vote in favour of it, Thucydides is showing that there was a path the Athenians could have taken which would have avoided disaster in Sicily: all they had to do was reject the request of the Egestan ambassadors, but unfortunately the backing for Alcibiades was too strong at this point. Thucydides seems to be emphasising that this is a crucial moment, not only because if the Athenians had not gone to Sicily then disaster would have been averted, but also because from this point on the Athenians started to take decisions that led to a disastrous outcome. He is using his narrative to construct a picture of the mistakes which led inexorably to the failure of the Expedition.

Following on from this, Nicias seems to sense that he will not win the argument about staying out of Sicily and states that "the next best thing is to make a demonstration of our power and then after a short time, go away again".[14] It is as if Thucydides is here acknowledging that the Athenians should have stayed out of Sicily entirely, but, if they could not do that, then they should have followed Lamachus' advice (which we shall see when the Athenians arrive in Sicily in [section 8.2.1.3](#)) to strike against Syracuse immediately, and this is a theme to which Thucydides returns several times during his account of the Expedition. In fact, Thucydides doubles down on this in Nicias' second speech where he discusses the practicalities of the Expedition. He makes a number of prescient comments about the conduct of the war, saying that "the greatest advantage they [the Syracusans] have is in the number of their own horses"[15] and that the Athenians must not "…be restricted in our movements by the numbers of their cavalry".[16] Pelling points out that this is the first hint from Thucydides that cavalry will play an important role in the Expedition but the insight about the tactical importance of cavalry is subordinated to the difficulty the Athenians may have in persuading Sicilian cities to take their side.[17] Thucydides also has Nicias suggest the Sicilian cities may be "frightened of us and combine amongst themselves leaving us with no friends except the Egestaens to provide us with cavalry".[18] Although Nicias correctly foresees the importance of cavalry, he does not consider shipping sufficient cavalry from Athens or envisage them having more than a defensive role: instead he appears to assume the cavalry will have to

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[13] Pelling (2022a) 140. The *prytanis* here is more accurately described as the ἐπιστατὴς τῶν πρυτανέων – the member of the duty *prytanis* whose turn had come in the daily rotation (*OCD* 1269). As nobody could do this more than once in a lifetime the individual may have felt overawed and nervous of being held accountable for the result.

[14] Thuc. 6.11.4

[15] Thuc. 6 20.4

[16] Thuc. 6.21.1

[17] Pelling (2022a) 162

[18] Thuc. 6.21.1

be supplied by friendly Sicilians[19] – and is worried that there may be no such friends except the Egestaeans. It is easy to dismiss these comments as Thucydides using hindsight to embellish an attempt by Nicias to scare the demos out of undertaking the enterprise, but an alternative view is that Thucydides is highlighting a reason for the Expedition's failure (the Athenians failed to bring the Sicilian cities with them and, as we shall see in chapter 9, cavalry was one of the deciding factors in the Expedition) and that, when he makes Nicias say at the end of his speech that the Athenians have "to become masters of the country on the very first day they land in it",[20] he is again underlining to his audience that it was Lamachus' strategy that should have been followed. In the same part of the speech Nicias states that the Athenians "must act on the assumption that we are going off to found a city among foreigners and among enemies".[21] Many have seen this as a clear indication that the Expedition was an attempted colonisation of Sicily,[22] while Harrison, by contrast, argues that Thucydides is inverting the myth of the Athenian evacuation of the city during the Persian Wars,[23] but it may simply be that Thucydides, with hindsight, is emphasising that the Athenians will find few friends in Sicily and therefore need to strike quickly.

The Sicilian Debate is also our first indication that Nicias is knowledgeable on Sicilian affairs, and this point is expanded upon by other authors and by Thucydides himself later in his history. Thucydides highlights the point during the siege of Syracuse when he says that there was a pro-Athenian faction in Syracuse that sent messages to Nicias.[24] Moreover, Nicias had detailed and reliable knowledge of Syracuse's financial plight[25] and the other generals suspected that he had a special source of information about what was going on in the city.[26] Finally, Thucydides points out that Hermocrates' ruse to delay the Athenian retreat succeeded because Nicias was already in communication with some Syracusans and was therefore not suspicious when he received a further message.[27] All of this circumstantial evidence suggests that Nicias had some sort of link with Sicily, but what is telling is that Nicias' knowledge derived from private sources which were unknown even to his colleagues.

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[19] This point will be examined in detail in chapter 9, however the Athenians fail to take even cavalry men with them in the first fleet which sailed to Sicily (or at least none are recorded by Thucydides).

[20] Thuc 6.23.2

[21] Thuc. 6.23.2

[22] In particular, see Avery (1973)

[23] Harrison (2000) 93

[24] Thuc. 7.48.2

[25] Thuc. 7.49.1

[26] Thuc. 7.49.1

[27] Thuc. 7.73.3

Trevett[28] and Green[29] have taken the view that Nicias was a *proxenos* of Syracuse, as such a link would provide a neat explanation for the quantity and quality of Nicias' information.[30] That Nicias held this position is affirmed in Diodorus. In his account of the debate at Syracuse in 413 about the treatment of the captured Athenians one of the speakers, a certain Nikolaos, uses the argument that Nicias was the Syracusan *proxenos* at Athens and always looked after the interests of Syracusan metics there as an argument for sparing his life.[31] There is no mention of this in Thucydides or Plutarch, but we have no reason to doubt it. If Diodorus is right, Plutarch's omission, coming some 500 years after the event, can perhaps be forgiven, but Thucydides' failure to mention this is remarkable and, along with his ignorance of the 418/7 treaty between Athens and Egesta (see section 7.3 above), must bring in to question how well informed he was about events.   Trevett argues that the claim that Nicias was *proxenos* may ultimately derive from the *Sicelica* of Philistus, a historian who might be expected to be well informed on the recent history of his city.[32] If Nicias was indeed a *proxenos* for Syracuse, it would explain his reluctance to command the Expedition and it also gives point to his fear that, if they abandoned the Expedition, he and his colleagues would be charged with taking bribes.[33] If the generals who led the first expedition were charged with taking bribes and subsequently exiled or fined,[34] how could the Syracusan *proxenos* hope to avoid the same suspicions and fate? If true, this goes some way toward explaining Nicias' extreme reluctance to abandon the Expedition and his refusal to sail following the eclipse,[35] as he knew the consequence would be exile or worse. But, as Trevett argues, it might also explain why the Athenians were so keen to have Nicias as one of the generals commanding the Expedition in the first place, given that he would have local knowledge and perhaps be able to use his contacts in the city to win Syracuse over without a fight.[36] But, although Nicias might at first glance have been an ideal general to lead troops in Sicily, using him proved counterproductive: mindful of the fate of the generals who led the expedition of 427-424, he was always afraid of being accused of taking bribes or not taking the fight properly to Syracuse and, as will be seen, this impacted his decision making.

Thucydides' depiction of Alcibiades' speech at this debate is also informative, as it highlights several key themes. Dover points out that the speech demonstrates the persuasive nature of Alcibiades and, more particularly, that its power lies in his unhesitating generalisation on matters

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[28] Trevett (1995) 246

[29] Green (1971) 5

[30] A *proxenos* is loosely defined as a city's official friend in another city: Wallace (1970) 189. See also *OCD* 1268

[31] Diod. Sic. 13.27.3

[32] Trevett (1995) 246

[33] Thuc. 7.48.3-4

[34] Thuc. 4.65.3

[35] Thuc. 7.50.4

[36] Trevett (1995) 247

of historical fact and the dogmatic confidence with which he interprets the present or the future.[37] Alcibiades' elaborate sophistry is on show here and goes a long way to explain how he was able to command the loyalty of so many soldiers and Athenian citizens. After haughtily emphasising his own accomplishments and brilliance, Alcibiades rejects Nicias' defeatism and asserts that the Athenians can utilise the vigour of his youth and Nicias' reputation for being lucky.[38] Thucydides may be attempting to highlight that a joint command was one of the reasons for the Expedition's failure, but as Pelling has pointed out, Alcibiades was at least 36 years old at this point, had been *strategos* three times (420/19; 419/18; 416/15) and had commanded two missions,[39] so his stress on his youth may be Thucydides' way of emphasising his liberal use of the truth.

Alcibiades then rebuts Nicias' comments regarding Sicily and stresses that he expects the non-Hellenic Sicilians to join the Athenian attack on Syracuse.[40] This expectation was certainly justified, but, as will be seen, the Athenians were slow in bringing the Sicels on board and Thucydides may be using Alcibiades' speech to make that point. Also justified, though exaggerated, were his assertions that the population of Sicilian cities, being from mixed backgrounds, lacked cohesion and the capacity for concerted action and that actual civil strife was common. In making Alcibiades rehearse these points, Thucydides is drawing attention to factors that the Athenians should have turned to their advantage but, through the over-cautiousness of Nicias, in fact failed to exploit.

8.2.1.2 The Debate at Syracuse

The Debate at Syracuse is Thucydides' account of how the news of the launch of the Expedition from Athens was initially received in Syracuse. Thucydides claims that news of the Expedition arrived from many quarters but for a long time none of it was believed.[41] He goes on to give an account of an assembly in Syracuse where the possibility of an Athenian invasion was debated. The two speakers in Thucydides' account are Hermocrates, a statesman and general, and Athenagoras, who is described as the leader of the democratic faction (δήμου...προστάτης) and a man who had great influence amongst the Syracusan people.[42] The debate is clearly intended to mirror the previous debate in Athens between Nicias and Alcibiades and gives an insight into the situation in Syracuse just prior to the arrival of the Athenians. Hermocrates, as Hornblower points out, is clearly admired by Thucydides, not least for his belief in Sicilian unity,[43] and is given a larger number of full-length speeches in the *History* than any other non-Athenian.[44]

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[37] *HCT* 4.246

[38] Thuc. 6.17.1

[39] Pelling (2022a) 137

[40] Thuc. 6.17.6

[41] Thuc. 6.32.3

[42] Thuc. 6.35.2

[43] Hornblower (1987) 70

[44] Hornblower (1987) 70

Thucydides says that Hermocrates "considered he knew what the real facts were",[45] and he exhorts the Syracusans to prepare for an Athenian invasion which is on its way. Few believe him, however, and Athenagoras steps forward to argue that it is not likely that the Athenians are coming and that, even if they were, Sicily would be well equipped to deal with them.[46] Finally an unnamed general stands up, chastises the two speakers for attacking each other, and refuses to let anyone else speak. He then concedes that "there is no harm" in making some preparations and begins, in an almost half-hearted way, to make arrangements to send envoys to other Sicilian cities to gauge wider opinion.[47] Pelling points out that this is a gentle reminder that Syracuse is not quite Athens after all: a general can stifle popular debate and, apparently, order diplomatic undertakings on his own account.[48]

As with much at the beginning of the Expedition, Thucydides' omissions are of great importance. Hermocrates is given clear precedence at the debate and, although much of what he says is correct, it is only with the benefit of hindsight that we know this. Intriguingly, as Kallet points out,[49] Thucydides states that Hermocrates "<u>considered</u> that he knew what the real facts were - ὡς σαφῶς οἰόμενος εἰδέναι τὰ περὶ αὐτῶν",[50] rather than unambiguously stating that "he knew what the real facts were". This, as Kallet points out, is to build in ambiguity and to cast doubt on the power of the truth that Hermocrates claims to know. Furthermore, Hermocrates' anti-democratic oligarchic credentials would have endeared him to Thucydides, whereas Athenagoras is clearly intended to be a Syracusan version of Cleon. He is depicted as dismissing the issue of an Athenian invasion and turning the assembly into an anti-oligarchic platform, claiming that "this [an oligarchy] is what the rich men and the young men among you are aiming at; but in a great city these things are beyond your reach…".[51] Westlake suggests that Thucydides deliberately sets out to create a negative image of Athenagoras,[52] and this is borne out by the harsh treatment Thucydides gives other demagogues in his history. Athenagoras is almost a caricature in which the ignorance, overconfidence and violent prejudice of the speaker are highlighted.[53] The main point to draw out of the Syracusan debate, however, is that Athenagoras' speech clearly shows how deeply divided Syracuse was. Athenagoras claims that "our city rarely enjoys a period of tranquillity, and is involved in continual party strife and struggles more within herself than with the enemy".[54] Alcibiades had referred to this strife in

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[45] Thuc. 6.32.3

[46] Thuc. 6.36-7

[47] Thuc. 6.41.3-4

[48] Pelling (2022a) 203

[49] Kallet (2001) 67

[50] Thuc. 6.32.3

[51] Thuc. 6.39.2

[52] Westlake (1968) 194

[53] Westlake (1958) 249

[54] Thuc. 6.38.3

his debate with Nicias when he said that the city "was in a case of violent party strife".[55] This is a clear weakness that the Athenians should have been able to exploit during their campaign, and Cawkwell goes so far as to suggest that, had Alcibiades been in command, the Syracusans could have been forced to allow the people of Leontini to occupy their own city. Cawkwell points to the fact that the Syracusans were very close to coming to a settlement with the Athenians just before the Spartiate commander Gylippus arrived on the scene to aid the Syracusans, and were having discussions on peace terms amongst themselves and with Nicias, before Gylippus put a stop to it.[56]

Interestingly, Thucydides has Athenagoras proclaim "I know certainly they will not have any horses with them, nor will they get any here",[57] and that the Athenians will "be unable to move in any direction because of our cavalry".[58] Although it is not particularly accentuated in this section, Thucydides takes the opportunity to allude again to one of the key reasons the expedition failed, namely the lack of Athenian cavalry, something that will be examined later in chapter 9.

8.2.1.3 The Athenians Arrive in Sicily

Just prior to their arrival in Sicily, the three Athenian commanders sent three ships to Egesta to ascertain whether the promised money existed. When the ships returned bearing news that the money did not exist and only 30 talents were available, they were discouraged.[59] This suggests that, although Nicias had cast doubt on the existence of the money during the Sicilian Debate,[60] the other two generals had believed in its existence. Although the fact that they sent ships to Egesta to verify the existence of the money suggests a level of doubt, the depth of disappointment portrayed by Thucydides and the comment that the other two generals had not expected it at all[61] indicates a major miscalculation by Alcibiades and Lamachus. They knew that a conquest of Sicily would be expensive and such a drain on the state could prove to be very unpopular, making the venture a less populist campaign then perhaps had been hoped. Nicias had said in his speech to the Assembly that Egesta would have no money and that Athens should be prepared to become master of the country on the first day.[62] On arrival, however, Nicias never goes beyond the aims of helping Egesta and restoring Leontini, even though, as Hunter points out, it must have been clear to all three generals that aid to Egesta and the restoration of Leontini were pretexts for conquering the island.[63]

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[55] Thuc. 6.17.2

[56] Cawkwell (1997) 89

[57] Thuc. 6.37.1

[58] Thuc. 6.37.2

[59] Thuc. 6.46.1-2

[60] Thuc. 6.22

[61] Thuc. 6.46.2

[62] Thuc. 6.23.2

[63] Hunter (1973) 185

Thucydides also comments that the generals were discouraged at the refusal of the people of Rhegium to join them, as they were considered the likeliest of people to win over considering they were of the same race of the Leontinians and had always been on good terms with Athens.[64] In fact, Thucydides has stated on two separate occasions prior to this point that Rhegium fought in conflicts on the same side as Athens, and Thucydides also points out that the Rhegians were "constantly well-disposed to Athens".[65] This suggests a major strategic miscalculation by the Athenians which contributed to the failure of the Expedition as it seems they expected Rhegium to ally with them. The reason for Rhegium's refusal to join the Athenians is not elaborated, but it is clear that the generals did not know the area as well as they thought and perhaps the high-handedness of the Athenians in the previous expedition of 427-424 had left bad memories among the Rhegians (see Chapter 6 above). It is clear that Alcibiades and Lamachus had been blinded by the promise of Egestan talents and that all three generals had failed to do their homework when it came to Rhegium. As Dover points out, however, there is epigraphical evidence of a formal alliance between Rhegium and Athens dated from 433/2, where Rhegium promised "to oblige the Athenians if they need anything",[66] although, along with his omissions regarding the 418/7 treaty with Egesta and Nicias being a *proxenos* of Syracuse, Thucydides fails to mention this. It may well be that Thucydides was unaware of this treaty. He seems to deliberately use language that suggests friendship, but falls short of a formal alliance. Use of a term such as allies would have added more force to the generals' disappointment with Rhegium failing to join with them. Even with the epigraphical evidence of such an alliance, however, it appears that the Athenians were ill prepared and had not considered the possibility that the Rhegians would not immediately honour the treaty agreed 18 years earlier. It seems likely that the Rhegians were waiting to see how the situation developed before committing themselves.

As mentioned above in section 2.2 both Plutarch and P. Oxy.411 give accounts that differ from that in Thucydides. P. Oxy.411 claims that Alcibiades managed to effect good relations with most of the cities in Sicily,[67] and Plutarch goes as far to claim that Alcibiades captured Rhegium.[68] As mentioned previously, however, both of these accounts can be discounted. P. Oxy.411 is probably a student essay in rhetoric and Plutarch's account, whilst intriguing, is not backed up by any other sources, whereas Diodorus corroborates Thucydides' account.[69]

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[64] Thuc. 6.46.2

[65] Thuc. 3.86.5, 3.88.1 and 4.25.1

[66] *HCT* 4.312; *IG* I³ 53

[67] P. Oxy. 411 iii. 57-61

[68] Plut. *Alc.* 10.2. This is odd since Rhegium was supposedly an ally of Athens.

[69] Diod. Sic. 13.3.5

Once it was clear that Egesta had no money and that Rhegium would not aid them, the three generals discussed what to do next.[70] Nicias suggested sailing to Selinus, forcing a settlement between Selinus and Egesta, and then returning to Athens. Alcibiades wanted to encourage the Sicilian cities to revolt from Syracuse. Lamachus wanted to sail straight to Syracuse and launch an attack whilst the enemy remained unprepared. With the benefit of hindsight and knowledge of the debate at Syracuse, it is clear that Lamachus' plan had the greatest chance of success and, if enacted, could have resulted in the Athenian conquest of Syracuse, with the whole island following shortly afterwards. Hunter has suggested that Thucydides has embellished the material he got from an informant in order to emphasise his personal opinion that the Athenians should have attacked immediately, while respecting the fact that they adopted a different strategy,[71] and Westlake argues that Thucydides was aiming to show the difference between the three generals and by implication suggesting that having three generals in charge was a mistake.[72] Westlake also points out, correctly, that the account is over-condensed.[73] But, in any event, we must assume that Thucydides did not just fabricate the options of the generals but had some sense of what they had said from an informant, perhaps even Alcibiades himself.

Continuing the theme of paying for the Expedition, Hornblower makes much of *IG* I³ 291.[74] This inscription is very fragmentary but has been long held to record detailed financial contributions from Sicilian and South Italian allies to Athens in 415.[75] Rhegium and Naxos are listed, as are the Sikels. The amount supplied by Rhegium is large (over 50 talents) and the total provided to Athens by all the allies is at least 271 talents of silver. The dating of the inscription is controversial and based on letter forms, which, as we have seen [above](#), can be problematical.[76] The dating of *IG* I³ 291 to 415 was originally put forward by Merrit,[77] and further advanced by Dover,[78] and remains the majority viewpoint amongst scholars. This stance however was challenged in 1987 in a paper by Ampolo, reviving an idea of Cavaignac.[79] Ampolo argued that it is difficult to reconcile Thucydides' claim of Rhegium's neutrality with an inscription detailing the payment of huge sums of money to Athens from the city[80] and instead dated the inscription to the first Sicilian Expedition of 427-4. Ampolo's argument was noted and apparently accepted by Lewis[81] and as Hornblower himself points out, the original dating of the inscription to 415 would

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[70] Thuc. 6.47-50

[71] Hunter (1973) 186-7

[72] Westlake (1968) 174-5

[73] Westlake (1968) 175

[74] Hornblower, *Comm. on Thuc.* 3. 458-460

[75] *HCT* 4.200

[76] Smart (1972)

[77] Meritt, Woodhead, and Stamires (1957) 198-200

[78] *HCT* 4.200

[79] Cavaignac (1908) XXX

[80] Ampolo (1987) 7

[81] *CAH* 5. 409 n.108

necessitate a modification of Kallet's argument concerning the poor financial state of the Athenians in Sicily during the early stages of the Expedition,[82] although Kallet herself does not discuss the inscription in her 2001 study of money and finance in Thucydides.[83] Indeed, if the inscription is from 415, the detail it contains is not only conspicuously absent from Thucydides, but roundly contradicts him, as Thucydides is at pains to emphasise the poor financial state of Athens at this time.[84]   Hornblower however states that the case against 415 has not been made conclusively and as such the dating of *IG* I³ 291 should remain at 415. Both Dover and Hornblower draw a distinction between military aid and financial payments and argue that a state could be impartial yet still make contributions to a belligerent *polis*.[85] In spite of Dover and Hornblower's ascertains however, the amounts detailed here are simply too high for this to be plausible. If this was indeed the case, we would expect Thucydides to make a comment and his silence on the matter here is particularly telling, especially as a date of 415 directly contradicts his depiction of Athens' financial state at the time. For these reasons, along with the unreliability of using letter forms as a guide to epigraphical dating, it seems more likely that the inscription dates to 427. Hornblower however does note that the inscription has not had as much scholarly attention as *IG* I³ 11 (see section 7.3 above),[86] inferring that there is more study required here. If *IG* I³ 291 does indeed date from 427, then this would mean that there is no evidence of financial contributions to Athens in 415 by allied city states, and that the Assembly and the generals leading the Expedition had indeed seriously miscalculated the level of support they would receive on arrival in Sicily.

8.2.1.4 Recall of Alcibiades

Alcibiades' recall to Athens to face charges following the profanation of the Mysteries and the mutilation of the Herms is well known but there are discrepancies between the account given by Thucydides and that of Plutarch. This is a key point, as the removal of a capable and influential general in the middle of the campaign was a huge blunder and understanding what actually happened is vital. Furthermore, Alcibiades went on to advise the Spartans and was instrumental in ensuring that Athenian cavalry forces were kept tied up at Decelea and in getting the Spartans to send a general to assist the Syracusans. Both of these interventions contributed markedly to

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[82] Hornblower, *Comm. on Thuc.* 3. 459

[83] Kallet (2001) – previously, however, Kallet had simply registered Ampolo's argument with a neutral comment of "if correct…"
– See Kallet (1993) 153 n1

[84] Thuc. 6.31.5

[85] *HCT* 4.200; Hornblower, *Comm. on Thuc.* 3. 460

[86] Hornblower, *Comm. on Thuc.* 3. 461

the failure of the Expedition. As Cawkwell points out, it makes a very great difference if Alcibiades was driven by the Athenians themselves to do what he did.[87]

Following the recall Thucydides states that Alcibiades "had crossed immediately from Thurii in a merchant ship and gone first to Cyllene in Elis and then, on the invitation of the Spartans themselves, to Sparta".[88] This account is corroborated by Diodorus.[89] Plutarch, on the other hand, states that Alcibiades was in Argos when he received news of his condemnation: "he was living at Argos, for he had crossed over to the Peloponnese immediately after escaping from Thurii".[90]

We have another account of the event written in the early fourth century by Isocrates, the Athenian rhetorician and court room speech writer, for Alcibiades' son. Isocrates also states that Alcibiades' sentence "outlawed him from all of Greece". [91] This corroborates Plutarch's account to the extent of saying that Alcibiades was sentenced to exile rather than death, which is what Thucydides says. The key point, however, is that Thucydides' account has Alcibiades as a deserter, whereas Plutarch's has him as a reluctant exile. Although both Thucydides' and Plutarch's accounts result in Alcibiades driven in to the arms of the Spartans, the distinction between the two is important. If Plutarch is correct, then the Athenians not only removed their most capable general but, by outlawing him from all of Greece, drove him into the arms of the Spartans, where he did irreparable damage to the Expedition. Thucydides, however, paints a much blacker picture of Alcibiades, in which he goes straight to Sparta of his own volition intent on inflicting revenge on the Athenians. We either have an Alcibiades driven to exile, eventually working against Athens reluctantly or a much darker disaffected, vengeful Alcibiades running to Sparta at the first opportunity to further his own ambition.

8.2.1.5 Athenian Victory Before Syracuse

Following Alcibiades' recall and subsequent flight, Nicias and Lamachus split their forces, taking one half each by lot and sailed for Selinus and Egesta.[92] Thucydides says that the aim was to discover whether or not Egesta would produce the money, further emphasising that the Athenians had not expected to finance the entire expedition themselves, which again highlights their lack of preparedness. The force sailed along the coast of Sicily and put in at Himera, the only Hellenic city in those parts.[93] Again, the Athenians were refused admittance, showing they

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[87] Cawkwell (1997) 90

[88] Thuc. 6.88.9

[89] Diod. Sic. 13.5.2-3

[90] Plut. *Alc.* 23.1

[91] Isoc. 16.9

[92] Thuc. 6.62.1

[93] Thuc. 6.62.2

had been overly optimistic in their assessment of who would join them and give them aid in Sicily. As Connor points out, the Athenians were continuing diplomatic efforts to win allies in Sicily and to prevent concerted action on behalf of Syracuse, even after Alcibiades, the architect of that strategy, had been removed.[94] Having allies could never be a bad thing, of course, but it does seem that the remaining generals were not able to adapt and come up with a new plan following Alcibiades' departure, so even in the very short term the absence of Alcibiades began to have an impact on the Expedition. Following their failure to enter Himera, the Athenians captured the city of Hyccara, which was at war with Egesta, and then gave the captured city over to the Egestans. Thucydides also states that, following this, Nicias sailed direct to Egesta to receive 30 talents and "conduct some other business there".[95] The nature of this 'other business' is never revealed, but it might be another hint that Nicias had pre-existing connections in Sicily. The Athenians then tried to capture the city of Hybla in Gela by assault but failed. Thucydides reports that this failure raised the morale of the Syracusans, [96] and he goes on to say that the Syracusans gained confidence with every day that passed.[97] The Syracusans expected the Athenians to make an immediate attack and, when they did not do so, began to think less of the Athenians and be surer of themselves. Once again the reader is invited to think that Lamachus' initial plan of a direct assault on Syracuse at the start of the Expedition would have been the Athenians' most likely chance of success.

During the winter of 415 the Athenians tricked the Syracusans into launching an all-out attack on the Athenian forces encamped at Catana. According to Thucydides' description the Syracusans fell for the ruse rather easily and their army was cut in two and put to flight.[98] Syracusan cavalry prevented the defeat from becoming a rout and drove back the hoplites who pressed the pursuit of the fleeing army. When the Athenians first arrived in Sicily Thucydides lists an inventory of troops, and in his list are thirty horses on one horse transport. Mention is also made of 480 archers and 700 slingers.[99] When we get to the winter of 415 and the attack at Catana, however, there is no mention of these forces. It is not clear what happened to the horses and later the same year Thucydides says that the Athenians had none.[100] It may well be that these thirty horses were never intended to be used as cavalry forces, but were to be used by heralds as part of Alcibiades' diplomatic push. In fact, the lack of Athenian cavalry is conspicuous from this point onward in the narrative and will be explored in detail in chapter 9. As well as the cavalry, Thucydides makes no mention during the attack at Catana of the Athenian archers and slingers. As Dover points out the job of the slingers and archers was to prevent battlefield domination by

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[94] Connor (1984) 181

[95] Thuc. 6.62.4

[96] Thuc. 6.63.2

[97] Thuc. 6.63.2

[98] Thuc. 6.70.2

[99] Thuc. 6.43

[100] Thuc. 6.64.1

the enemy cavalry.[101] Thucydides, however, does not pause for any comment of his own and leaves any reflection on the matter to his readers. It is not clear why the Athenians did not deploy cavalry and slingers and archers at Catana. If they were available, then the lack of deployment is a clear failure of leadership. If they were not available, then this can only have been down to some previous tactical reverse to which Thucydides does not tell us about. Had the Athenians been able to follow up their victory it is entirely possible that they could have ended Syracusan resistance there and then. As it was, unable or unwilling to prevent the Syracusans from escaping because of lack of cavalry,[102] the Athenians returned to Catana and remained there for the rest of the winter.

With the Athenians unable to press their advantage, the Syracusans regrouped and recuperated over the course of the winter. Thucydides states that "they [the Athenians] thought that they were not yet in a position to carry on the war..",[103] although, as Kallet correctly points out, it is not clear whether this is the view of the Athenians as a whole or of the cautious Nicias.[104] The Syracusans were terrified that the Athenians would raid their treasury at Olympieium and sent a garrison to guard it.[105] This suggests that had the Athenians been properly resourced or more daring they could have captured the treasury which would have gone some way toward compensating for the lack of Egestan funding toward the expedition. Thucydides simply states that "the Athenians did not go to the temple",[106] although Plutarch narrates a story that Nicias deliberately held back and allowed the Syracusans to garrison the temple as he feared divine retribution for the sacrilege of plundering the temple.[107] If Plutarch's version is correct, then it was Nicias' excessive piety that led to the Syracusans holding the temple and its treasures, providing a morale boost to the Syracusans and preventing the Athenians from obtaining much needed monetary resources. Pausanias, writing over 500 years later, comments that the Athenians did capture the temple but left the priest and the treasure unharmed.[108] He may be drawing on Diodorus who also states that the Athenians "gained control of the Olympieion" the day before.[109] Pausanias, Diodorus and Plutarch are all stressing the overly pious nature of the Athenian forces, which of course reflects on Nicias and highlights how his nature prevented the Athenian forces from making important gains. All three, however, may, as Pelling has

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[101] *HCT* 4.346

[102] Thuc. 6.71.1

[103] Thuc. 6.71.2

[104] Kallet (2001) 106-7

[105] Thuc. 6.70.4

[106] Thuc. 6.71.1

[107] Plut. *Nic.* 16

[108] Paus. 10.28.6

[109] Diod. Sic. 13.6.4

postulated, be drawing from an earlier source which Thucydides is tacitly correcting,[110] but there is no evidence to support this.

8.2.1.6 The Debate at Camarina

Following the defeat at Catana Thucydides describes how the Syracusan general Hermocrates reorganised the Syracusan military command structure making it more streamlined.[111] Fifteen generals had commanded the forces at Catana resulting in too many men giving orders, which led to chaos and indiscipline in the ranks, once again highlighting that, in military terms, a split command is folly. The Syracusans also raised fortifications and walls at Syracuse and destroyed the now abandoned Athenian camp at Catana.[112] This organised response by the Syracusans once again underlines the Athenian mistake in not taking the fight immediately to Syracuse. The longer they remained in Sicily, sitting back or attempting diplomatic overtures to Sicilian cities, the stronger and more organised the Syracusans became.

Hearing that the Athenians were sending representatives to the city of Camarina to seek support, the Syracusans also sent an embassy to Camarina to oppose the move. Athens had made an alliance with Camarina during the first expedition of 427[113] and the Syracusans were fearful that the Camarinans would now join with the Athenians. Thucydides describes in detail the speeches made by Hermocrates for the Syracusans and Euphemus for the Athenians. Hermocrates emphasises Athenian imperialism by highlighting Athens' treatment of its subject cities in eastern Greece and goes on to make the case for Sicilian unity. Euphemus' reply is implicitly to accept that Athens is a tyranny but to argue that Athenian self-interest dictates that Athens will support the freedom of cities in Sicily, even though they subjugate cites in eastern Greece. By seeking to justify imperialism Euphemus is, as Connor argues, reinforcing the belief that Athens has crossed the boundary of restraint and embarked on a venture which is already profoundly changing her.[114]

In the end, Camarina chose neutrality and would not back either Athens or Syracuse. As Hunter points out, she feared both sides and was waiting to see which emerged as stronger.[115] Thucydides had previously intimated that Camarina was weighing up whether or not to support the Athenians even before Alcibiades departed.[116] If Athens had attacked Syracuse immediately

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[110] Pelling (2022a) 256-7

[111] Thuc. 6.72.5

[112] Thuc. 6.75.2

[113] Thuc. 6.75.3

[114] Connor (1984) 184

[115] Hunter (1973) 99

[116] Thuc. 6.52.1 – Just after their arrival in Sicily news reached the Athenians that Camarina would come over to them but when they sent a herald the Camarinians refused to receive them. This suggests there were competing factions in the city, for and

in a show of strength, then Camarina might well have renewed the treaty from the first Athenian Expedition of 427 and thrown her lot in with the Athenians, making the conquest of the island a more realistic prospect, as other city states would have undoubtedly followed.

8.2.1.7 More Athenian Success at Syracuse 415/4

In the spring reinforcements arrived from Athens, and additional forces were provided by Egesta, the Sicels, the Naxians and others. This gave the Athenians a much-needed cavalry force of 650,[117] although it can be argued that this was too little and too late. As Hornblower points out, a cavalry force of 650 was scarcely more than half the enemy's total cavalry.[118] If the Athenians had planned properly (and been properly resourced) and had possessed a cavalry force of this size during the winter of 415 then Syracuse would have most likely been defeated, handing the Athenians victory and making the Expedition a success. As Kallet has stressed, the Athenian strategy was based on local provisioning and the resourcing of the Expedition was inadequate.[119] This goes some way toward explaining the agitated state of the three generals when it became clear that Egesta did not have the money to fund the Expedition that they had previously promised.

One matter requiring comment is a possible discrepancy between what the generals on the ground had asked for and what was granted. Thucydides states that the generals specifically asked for money and cavalry (χρήματα καὶ ἱππέας)[120], but the Assembly voted to send "the support (τὴν τροφήν) and the cavalry".[121] Dover has argued that *trophē* means money for the purchase of food,[122] whereas Pritchett argues that Thucydides uses the two terms interchangeably as synonyms.[123] Kallet, however, points out that, although by using the definite article (τὴν τροφήν - the support) Thucydides intends us to understand that the Athenians were making a kind of equivalence between money and support, it does not follow that he regarded the terms as designating funds that were identical in composition and quantity, and it may be that he is alerting the reader to the insufficiency of the city's response.[124] It seems reasonable to suppose that the failure of the Assembly to support the generals on the ground contributed to the eventual failure of the Expedition. The commanders recognised they needed cavalry

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against the Athenians.

[117] Thuc. 6.98.1. Diodorus (13.44.1-2) states that at some point 800 cavalry were provided by Campania to help Athens. This will be explored in Chapter 9, however this force is not mentioned by Thucydides. This number of cavalry, as Pelling points out (Pelling (2022a) 307), would have made a huge difference to the Athenian forces and Diodorus' claim can be discounted.

[118] Hornblower, *Comm. on Thuc.* 3. 527

[119] Kallet (2001) 112

[120] Thuc. 6.71.2

[121] Thuc. 6.93-4

[122] Dover (1965) 93

[123] Pritchett (1971) 3-6

[124] Kallet (2001) 107-8

reinforcements but the Assembly failed to provide it. The Athenians did send 250 cavalrymen and equipment, but without horses as it was expected that these could be procured in Sicily.[125]

Despite all this, however, the Athenians set about constructing forts and blockade walls, and the Syracusans gave up the idea of risking regular battles with the Athenians and began building counter walls to cut off Athenian supplies. Although one of the skirmishes around Syracuse resulted in the death of Lamachus,[126] the Athenians have the upper hand at the end of Book Six. Thucydides points out that overtures were made to Nicias by the Syracusans at this point.[127] Nicias was now in sole command of the Athenian army, but very soon in Book Seven the Spartan general Gylippus will arrive and reverse the situation on the ground.

8.2.1.8 Summary of Book Six

Westlake is correct when he says that Book Six is a factual summary of events,[128] with little analysis. The facts that Thucydides presents, however, have an undercurrent of an over-confident and under-prepared Athens. There were ample chances to try to end the war quickly, but Athenian dithering and the recall of Alcibiades slowed their momentum. There also is a clear picture of indecisiveness and poor decisions amongst the Athenians which caused the Syracusans to grow stronger each day as they set about actively improving their defences. Athens clearly had the opportunity to emerge victorious from the Expedition but did not grasp the opportunity. In Book Seven Thucydides narrates the ultimate outcome of Athenian dithering.

8.2.2 Book Seven

8.2.2.1 Gylippus Arrives in Syracuse

Book Seven opens with the arrival of the Spartan general Gylippus in Syracuse. Whilst in exile in Sparta, Alcibiades had urged the Spartans to send a Spartan general to lead the Syracusan resistance to the Athenian Expedition.[129] Although Thucydides states that the Spartans "set their minds on…sending help immediately to the Sicilians",[130] their choice of commander arguably suggests that intervention in Sicily was not a high priority for the Spartans. Thucydides relates that the Syracusans sent a delegation to Sparta asking for help, but that the Spartan ephors were not very willing to send any military assistance.[131] It was Alcibiades' speech, according to Thucydides, that persuaded them otherwise, although it would seem they preferred to send a tarnished general, who was dispensable. Gylippus' father Cleandridas, according to Plutarch,

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[125] Thuc. 6.94.4

[126] Thuc. 6.101.6 – however see section 8.2.2.1 below for Diorodus' differing account of Lamachus' death.

[127] Thuc. 6.103.3

[128] Westlake (1968) 178

[129] Thuc. 6.91.4

[130] Thuc. 6.93.2

[131] Thuc. 6.88.10

had been banished from Sparta and had a death sentence passed against him *in absentia* for being corrupted by Pericles and accepting a bribe to call off a planned Spartan attack on Attica in 446.[132] Aelian, a Greek writer on military affairs who lived in Rome in the second century AD (admittedly writing some 600 years later, but with access to sources now lost to us) suggests that his mother may have been a Helot, making him a *mothax* and thus not able to achieve Spartan citizenship.[133] Thucydides makes no mention of this, and only gives the briefest of biographical detail and sheds little light on Gylippus' personality. Westlake has pointed out that this is consistent with Thucydidean practice.[134] The issue is important. If Gylippus was not only the son of a disgraced father but also of less-than-fully Spartiate status, we might well infer that the Spartans did not regard the mission as very important or at any rate thought it too dangerous to risk sending a full Spartan citizen. And perhaps a similar conclusion can be drawn even if Aelian is wrong. We cannot know for sure what impact Cleandridas' disgrace thirty years earlier had on Gylippus, but Sparta was not a particularly forgiving society and there must have been citizens with less blemished family records available. Conversely, it may be that the Spartans had reason to know that Gylippus was well suited to such a task, but we have no evidence to suggest this beyond the fact that he was successful. For Gylippus turned the tide of the war in favour of the Syracusans by bringing in abundance the main quality Nicias and the Athenians were lacking – military leadership. Green points out that, although it was Alcibiades who advised the Spartans to aid the Syracusans, they did not allow him to carry out that advice himself, nor even to accompany those who did.[135] As Pelling points out there were limits to Sparta's trust.[136]

Thucydides relates that Gylippus and Pythen were sailing along the coast from Tarentum to Ephizephyrian Locri with the reinforcements, having received news that Syracuse was not yet completely blockaded by the Athenians and that it might still be possible to get an army into the city by way of Epipolae. The two generals decide to push on to Himera so that they could take a force from the city and "any other troops they could get to join them" and go into Syracuse by land. [137] Thucydides says they were encouraged to undertake this potential risky voyage because (as Warner translates) "the four Athenian ships which Nicias had in the end sent out when he heard they were at Locri, had not yet arrived at Rhegium".[138] The dithering of Nicias, it is implied, emboldened Gylippus to carry out a risky, yet ultimately successful manoeuvre.

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[132] Plut. *Per. 22*

[133] Ael. *VH* 12.43

[134] Westlake (1968) 278

[135] Green (1971) 168

[136] Pelling (2022a) 301

[137] Thuc. 7.1.1

[138] Thuc. 7.1.2 – The Greek used by Thucydides is καὶ ἔδοξεν αὐτοῖς ἐπὶ τῆς Ἱμέρας πλεῖν, ἄλλως τε καὶ τῶν Ἀττικῶν τεσσάρων νεῶν οὔπω παρουσῶν ἐν τῷ Ῥηγίῳ, ἃς ὁ Νικίας ὅμως πυνθανόμενος αὐτοὺς ἐν Λοκροῖς εἶναι ἀπέστειλεν. Where Warner (and agreed with by Pelling ((2022b) 91)) translates ὅμως as "in the end", Dover argues it could just as easily be "despite his original neglect" (*HCT* 4. 379). Hornblower tempers this somewhat, but points out that the use of ὅμως is a reference back to 6.104.3
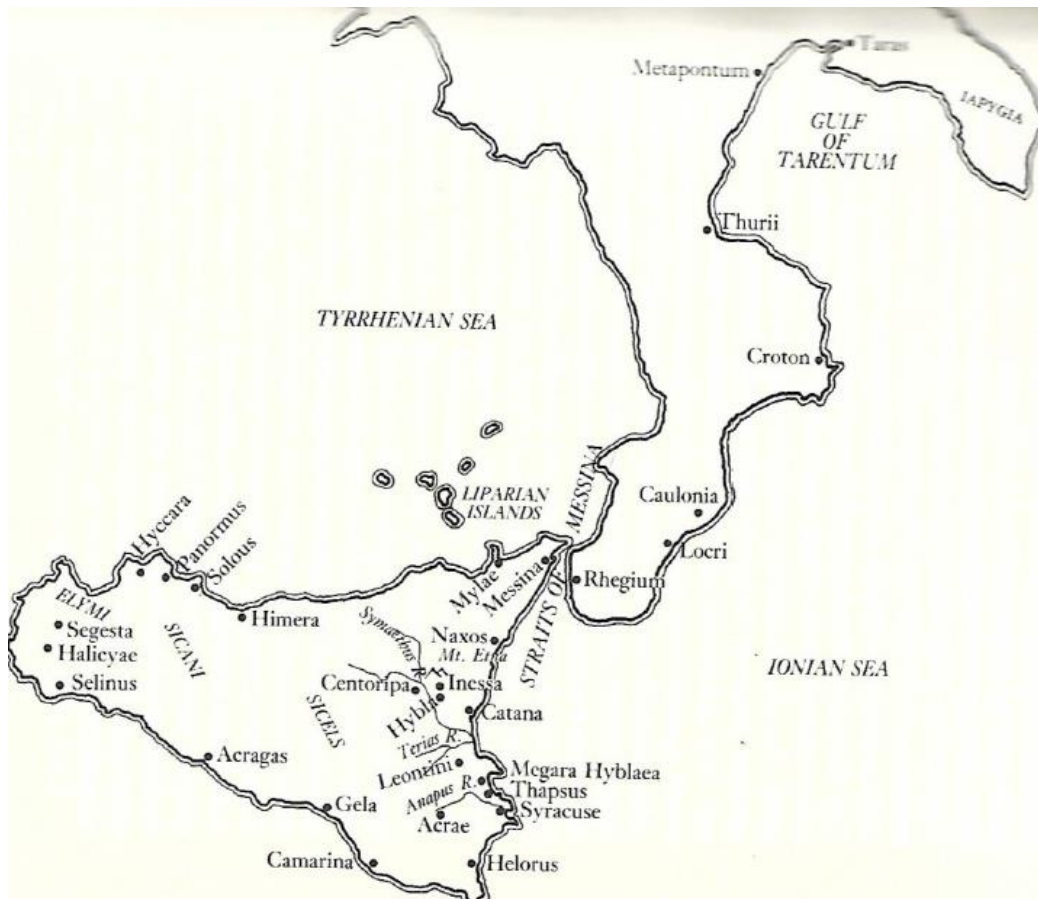
Map 5: Sicily and Southern Italy. Kagan (1981) 161

Gylippus and his fleet arrived unhindered at Himera (see Map 5 above) and he quickly persuaded the town to join him in the war and to follow them with their own forces to Syracuse.[139] Thucydides also mentions that the Geloans and some of the Sicels came over to Gylippus at this point, adding that the Sicels were much more willing to do so following the death of Archonidas, king over some of the Sicels, who had been a friend of Athens.[140] The ease with which Gylippus began to gather supporters and allies further emphasises the point that by dithering and not attacking Syracuse immediately on arrival the Athenians had sowed the seeds of their own destruction. Had they attacked Syracuse immediately from a position of strength, then unpreparedness of the Syracusan forces would likely have resulted in both a swift Athenian victory and the subsequent subjugation of the cities that later allied with Syracuse. The ease in which Gylippus gains allies in contrast to the Athenians is not adequately explored by

where Nicias is said to have despised the small numbers of the enemy's ships and thus posted no guards. Hornblower states that the usage of ὅμως is a 'correction in stride' and the relevant words should be translated as "Nicias…although he had despised them at first, now sent out" (Hornblower, *Comm. on Thuc.* 3. 542). However exactly ὅμως is glossed in English, there is an element of criticism of Nicias' delay that is consistent with Nicias' depiction by Thucydides elsewhere and an inescapable suggestion that, had Nicias behaved differently, the outcome of the Expedition might have been very different.

[139] Thuc. 7.1.3

[140] Thuc. 7.1.4 – Pelling argues that Archonidas and his brother Demon were almost certainly *proxenoi* of Athens ((2022b) 92), which if true, further undermines Thucydides' claim that the Athenians were ignorant of Sicily.

148

Thucydides but could well be linked to the potential high-handedness and arrogance of the previous expedition of 427-4 (see Chapter 6).

Thucydides then lists the troops Gylippus had at his disposal: 700 of his own sailors and marines (who had arrived unarmed, but had been given arms by the Himerans); 1000 hoplites and light troops; 100 cavalry from Himera; some light troops and cavalry from Selinus; a few Geloans and about 1000 Sicels.[141] Diodorus more or less corroborates this with a figure of 3000 infantry and 200 cavalry overall.[142]   Kagan has pointed out that the force sent from Sparta was pitifully small, consisting of only four ships, two Corinthian and two Laconian, and inadequately equipped:[143] this further emphasises the point that the Spartans did not set much store by the venture and probably did not expect Gylippus to succeed. Kagan also remarks that Thucydides uses the term Laconian, not Lacedaemonian, which suggests that the ships were supplied not by Spartiates but *perioikoi*, non-Spartan Laconians and the men were *neodamodeis* and helots.[144] From this we can infer that no Spartiate soldiers went to Sicily. Although *perioikoi* were a normal part of the Spartan army and it would not be expected for Sparta to send significant numbers of full citizens on such a venture, regardless of their political commitment to it, the complete absence of full Spartiates does indicate a lack of commitment from the Spartans to the Syracusans and perhaps a lack of confidence in Gylippus' abilities.

Gylippus' Corinthian counterpart, Gongylus arrived in Syracuse first, just as the Syracusans were holding a public debate about how they could end the war.[145] Although this timing suited Thucydides' need for dramatic effect, it serves to highlight how close the Athenians were to victory and how Nicias had managed to squander the Athenian position. Gongylus gave fresh heart to the Syracusans and restored their confidence by telling them Sparta had sent Gylippus to be their Commander-in-Chief.[146] After capturing a Sicel fort, Gylippus himself arrived in Epipolae and moved against the Athenian fortifications. Adding to the dramatic effect, Thucydides states that Gylippus arrived "in the nick of time" (κατὰ τοῦτο τοῦ καιροῦ - lit. at this point of the critical moment),[147] as the Athenians had almost completed building a double wall down to the harbour which would have placed Syracuse in very great danger indeed (see map 6 below). Dover, in fact, calls this moment "the turning point of the whole campaign".[148] Whilst preparing for battle Gylippus immediately realised that the Syracusan troops were disorganised and incapable of matching the Athenians, so he withdrew them to the high ground

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[141] Thuc. 7.1.5

[142] Diod. Sic. 13.7.7

[143] Kagan (1981) 257

[144] Kagan (1981) 257-8

[145] Thuc. 7.2.1

[146] Thuc. 7.2.1

[147] Thuc. 7.2.4

[148] *HCT* 4. 380

of Temenitis.[149] Nicias, instead of mounting an attack, kept his troops in a defensive position by the wall. The next day, rather than launch an all-out attack, which would have failed due to the disorganised state of the Syracusans, Gylippus drew up his forces so they prevented the Athenians from sending for help. He then won a few minor victories, sending a detachment to capture the fort at Labdalum, whilst the Syracusans captured an Athenian ship moored off the harbour.[150] Although these were minor victories, they would have helped raise the morale of the Syracusans, which had been at rock-bottom before his arrival.

Following this, Gylippus set the Syracusans to work building a counter wall to prevent the Athenians completing their wall (see map 6 below). Nicias, however, lacking the dynamism of Gylippus, decided that the prospects of the Athenians on land were less hopeful than they had been prior to Gylippus' arrival,[151] moved the fleet and a body of troops across to Plemmyrium, and built three forts in which the Athenians subsequently stored most of their equipment. Thucydides marks this point as the time from when the Athenian crews began to suffer considerable hardship: water became in short supply and marauding Syracusan cavalry (which the Athenians had no means of countering) constantly caused casualties in the Athenian ranks every time they foraged for fuel.[152] The moving of resources to an exposed position suggests a lack of consideration from Nicias about his supply lines and logistics that would soon deplete his troops' morale.

Whilst this was going on Gylippus decided to seize the initiative and attacked, fighting the Athenians at close quarters between the two lines of fortification. Thucydides gives little detail about the battle, other than that the Syracusans were defeated. Diodorus interestingly marks this battle as the one where the Athenian general Lamachus[153] was killed, whereas both Thucydides and Plutarch place Lamachus' death in a skirmish prior to Gylippus' arrival.[154] This may well be because one of Diodorus' sources[155] felt it made a better story to keep Lamachus alive until the arrival of Gylippus rather than have him disappear in a relatively anonymous skirmish. Given Thucydides' proximity to the event, it is his account which is the more likely. In any event, Nicias now faced Gylippus as the sole Athenian commander. Gylippus subsequently called his troops together and told them that the defeat was not their fault but his. He recognised that he had brought their lines too far inside the fortified area, depriving them of the use of their cavalry and javelin throwers. He then proposed a second attack and led his hoplites out further from the fortifications on this occasion, giving his javelin throwers and cavalry room to operate.

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[149] Thuc. 7.3.3

[150] Thuc. 7.3.4-5

[151] Thuc. 7.4.4

[152] Thuc. 7.4.6

[153] Diod. Sic. 13.8

[154] Thuc. 6.101.6 and Plut. *Nic.* 18.3. Plutarch undoubtably used Thucydides as his source.

[155] Potentially Ephorus – see section 2.6

Recognising his initial mistake and adapting his tactics, Gylippus was successful in his second attack and thus made clear his worth as a commander. The Athenian left wing was routed by the Syracusan cavalry and the rest of the Athenian army retreated behind the fortifications. With the Athenian forces pinned back the Syracusans were able to complete their counter wall and deprive the Athenians of any chance of investing the city.[156]
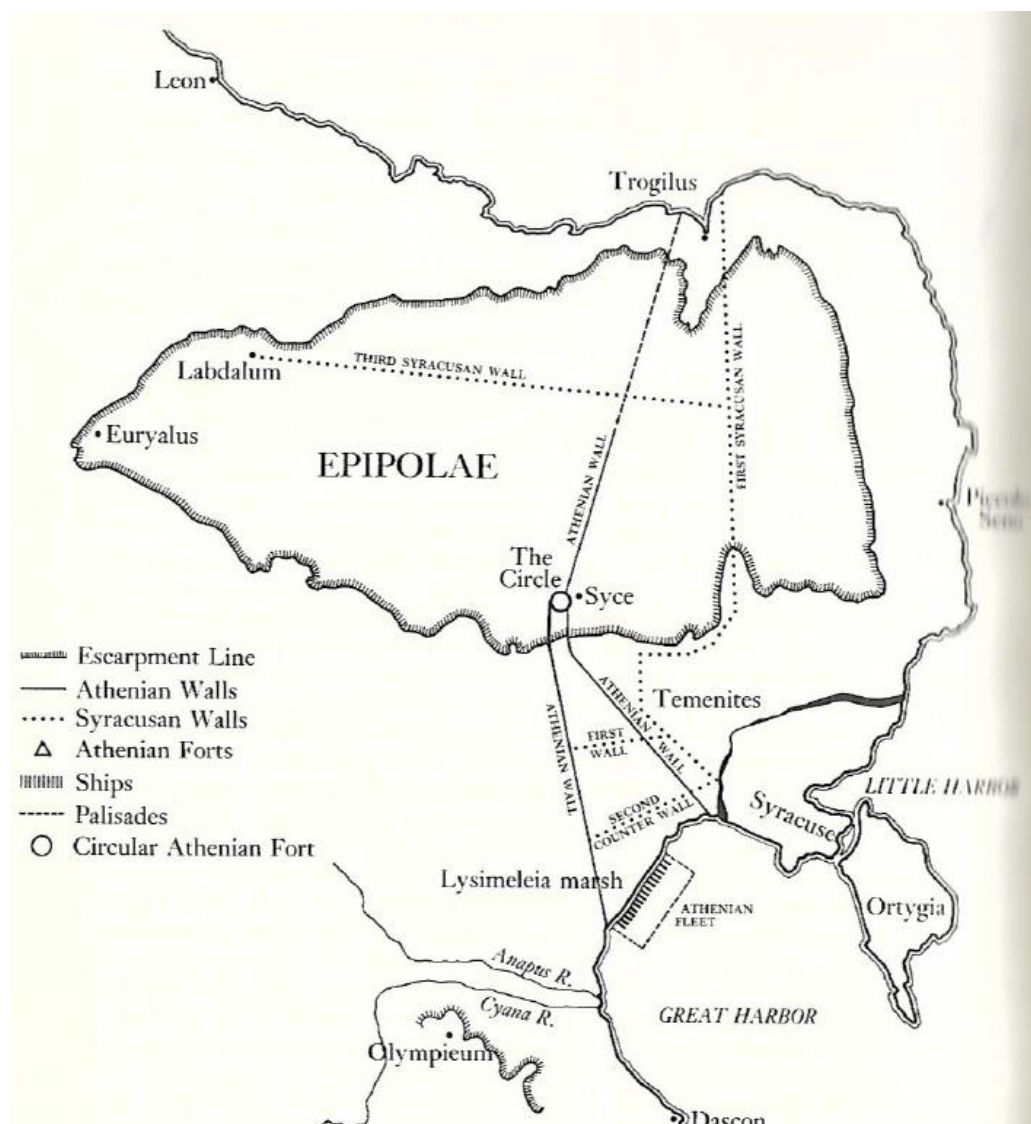
Map 6: The Siege of Syracuse. Kagan (1981) 232

This new-found confidence was a direct result of the influence of Gylippus and his dynamic leadership. Following his victory, Gylippus went to other parts of Sicily to recruit more troops and to attempt to win over the cities of Sicily that had not yet declared their hand. Diodorus claims that 3000 soldiers were recruited from the Himerans and Sicans.[157] Delegations were sent to

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[156] Thuc. 7.6.4

[157] Diod. Sic. 13.8

Sparta and Corinth to ask for more troops. At the same time the Syracusans began to man a fleet and train their crews to challenge the Athenians at sea.[158] Nicias was well aware of the new-found strength of the Syracusans and sent an urgent dispatch to Athens insisting that, without very considerable reinforcements, the expedition could not possibly survive.[159] This seems an incredible statement from a general who only a few days previous stood on the verge of conquering Syracuse. Although his position had become dire, it was no worse than the situation the Syracusans were in prior to the arrival of Gylippus, which had been turned around by strong leadership. Had strong leadership been demonstrated by the Athenians from the outset, with a direct attack on Syracuse, victories being followed up and proactivity employed rather than procrastination, then the Athenians would not have been in this position. Rather than relaying his words to messengers, as he had with previous dispatches, Nicias sent a written letter back to Athens, which arrived in the winter of 414.

8.2.2.2 Letter of Nicias

Thucydides presents in detail the text of the letter sent by Nicias which was read out by the clerk of the city. We must be careful when examining this, for as Westlake has pointed out, the letter is clearly Thucydides' language and not Nicias'[160] and, as with other speeches in the histories, it foreshadows future events.[161] Nicias proceeds to blame everyone but himself for his current predicament[162] and points out on no less than four occasions that Gylippus is raising more troops and will continue to do so.[163] He emphasises the inadequacy of local support for Athens.[164] Since, as Kallet has pointed out, the Athenian strategy was based on local provisioning,[165] the inadequacy of the Athenian strategy is here laid bare. The lack of cavalry, the failure to anticipate which cities would join them as allies and the inadequate resourcing (Nicias asks for a great deal of money to be sent to Sicily in his letter)[166] are indicative of poor leadership from both the generals leading the campaign and from the Assembly and *Boule* that sent them. At no point in the letter does Nicias lay out a strategy for getting out of the mess the Athenians are in, indeed, as Nichols points out, he lacks an independent vision and asks the Athenians what he should do,[167] which is hardly the action of a great military leader; from the outset of expedition Nicias seemed to lack a strategy of his own. Westlake has also highlighted things in the letter that are conspicuous by their absence. Nicias does not explain why he did not press the overwhelming

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[158] Thuc. 7.7.4

[159] Thuc. 7.8.2

[160] Westlake (1968) 190

[161] Westlake (1968) 192

[162] Westlake (1968) 194

[163] de Romilly (2012) 13

[164] Kallet (2001) 153

[165] Kallet (2001) 112

[166] Kallet (2001) 111

[167] Nichols (2015) 147

advantage of Athens in the spring of 415 nor why he failed to intercept Gylippus and his troops before they made contact with Syracuse.[168] These failings, even though Nicias was probably sensible in not drawing them to the Assembly's attention, are put into stark relief by their omission and underline Nicias' failings as a commander.

After hearing the contents of Nicias' letter, the Athenians, instead of demonstrating the bold leadership which was needed by relieving him of his command, appointed two of the officers in Sicily, Menander and Euthydemus to share command with him, further complicating the command structure. Thucydides makes no mention of a debate in the Assembly here and, as Hornblower points out, gives the overwhelming impression of an Assembly acting unanimously, instantaneously and impetuously, with the whole decision to reject Nicias' demands and send reinforcements being taken in minutes.[169] This cannot possibly be the truth of the matter, and Thucydides' representation of things is deliberately loaded to make the Athenians appear rash and unthinking. Menander and Euthydemus were to be temporary appointments until the arrival of another military and naval force which the Athenians voted to send out, partly from the citizens on the lists for calling up and partly from the allies.[170] The Athenians also sent out 20 ships round the Peloponnese to block further reinforcements reaching Syracuse, although it is difficult to see how effective such a force could be in this expanse of water. The generals Demosthenes and Eurymedon were also sent to share the command with Nicias. Eurymedon had prior experience in Sicily from the first expedition of 427[171] (although had been fined on his return and may have been out of favour since)[172] and for this reason perhaps should have been sent with the first expedition to provide the benefit of his experience. As it was, he was sent immediately with 10 ships and 120 talents of silver. Demosthenes, the outstanding general of the Archidamian War, stayed behind to organise the reinforcements, intending to set sail at the beginning of spring.[173] Demosthenes is portrayed by Thucydides as an excellent general with many positive leadership qualities on numerous occasions throughout the *Histories*.[174] The good opinion of him held by Athens' allies,[175] by Cleon[176] and by Aristophanes[177] contrasts with the depiction of Nicias throughout the Sicilian campaign. Thucydides may be suggesting here that the outcome of the expedition could have been different had Demosthenes led it from the start. In any case, as election of *strategoi* was held in Prytany VII (see Chapter 2 above), the appointment of these

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[168] Westlake (1968) 193

[169] Hornblower, *Comm. on Thuc.* 3. 568

[170] Thuc. 7.16.2

[171] Cartwright (1997) 255 and Thuc. 4.2.2; 4.65.3

[172] *HCT* 4.393

[173] Thuc. 7.17.1

[174] Thuc. 3.95.1, 3.97.2, 3.112.3; 4.3.2, 4.8.3, 4.9, 4.29.2

[175] Thuc. 7 57.10

[176] Thuc. 4.29.1

[177] Ar. *Eq.* 54

generals cannot have been made at an ordinary election, although the Athenians had on many occasions previously given temporary and local military command to anyone they chose (Cleon's temporary command in Pylos in 425 being a case in point).[178] The temporary *strategoi* sent to Sicily would not have formed part of the board of ten *strategoi* voted in annually,[179] but would be *strategoi* in the generic rather than specific sense.[180] The presence of additional temporary commanders can only have served to complicate the command structure and convolute decision making.

Gylippus' successes in Sicily also emboldened the enemies of Athens further afield. The Corinthians prepared to send a force of hoplites to Sicily and the Spartans were doing the same thing with troops drawn from the rest of the Peloponnese.[181] The Spartans also prepared to invade Attica. Although they had decided to do so after being asked by the Syracusans and the Corinthians (to say nothing of Alcibiades' constant urgings to fortify Decelea),[182] the prime motivation in their decision to prosecute the war with more vigour was the thought of the Athenians being unable to fight on two fronts at once. Gylippus' victories in Sicily had given the Spartans energy to act. As Hunter has shown, it was only after Athens' first real reverse in Sicily, which Gylippus brought about, that the Spartans threw themselves into the war with the fortification of Decelea.[183] Reinvigorated and convincing themselves that Athens had broken the treaty, the Spartans spent the winter organising their forces and conscripting more troops from the Peloponnese to be sent out in merchant ships to Sicily.[184] If the Athenians had anticipated a quick victory in Sicily it had not come about and, as their forces became entrenched, the Spartans were encouraged to prosecute the war more vigorously and tie down Athenian military forces in Attica to prevent them being sent as reinforcements to Sicily.

8.2.2.3 Fortification of Decelea

Emboldened by events in Sicily, the Spartans invaded Attica in the spring of 413 under the command of King Agis, laying the countryside waste and occupying Decelea, a place approximately 14 miles from Athens and visible from the city itself.[185] Alcibiades had constantly urged the Spartans to fortify Decelea to control and threaten the plain and the Spartans now did so with gusto. At the same time, the Spartans and their allies sent reinforcements to Sicily to aid Syracuse. The Spartans sent 600 hoplites (helots and *neodamodeis*) under the command of the

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[178] Thuc. 4.29.1

[179] *HCT* 4.391-2

[180] *HCT* 4.392

[181] Thuc. 7.17.3-4

[182] Thuc. 7.18.1

[183] Hunter (1973) 125

[184] Thuc. 7.18.4

[185] Thuc. 7.19.2

Spartiate Eccritus,[186] the Boeotians 300 hoplites, the Corinthians 500 hoplites and the Sicyonians 200 hoplites. Whilst the reinforcements were sent out in merchant ships, the Corinthians kept 25 triremes at anchor opposite the Athenian fleet at Naupactus. This ensured that the Athenians had to give their full attention to the triremes and leave the merchant ships alone, allowing them to reach Sicily unhindered.[187]

At the same time the Athenians sent 30 ships under the command of Charicles to Argos to ask for more hoplites under the terms of their alliance. Demosthenes was sent out to Sicily with a fleet of 65 ships and 1200 hoplites.[188] Rather than head straight to Sicily, which was a strategic necessity at this point given Nicias' predicament, Charicles and Demosthenes were instructed to join their forces and attack the coasts of Laconia. Many scholars have judged the Athenians harshly for needlessly wasting time by sending these much-needed reinforcements on this 'side mission',[189] but Hornblower cautions that this view has the benefit of hindsight and points out that a Spartan army was now causing damage in Attica:[190] this 'side mission' of Charicles and Demosthenes was a response to that and also intended to encourage Helots to desert by providing a fortified isthmus where they could gather.[191] Hornblower has a point, but all evaluations of events in warfare are made with the benefit of hindsight and the delay in sending reinforcements to Sicily did have an impact on the Expedition. Gylippus was now getting reinforcements from Sicily and the Peloponnese and the Athenians needed reinforcements of their own, immediately. In any event, after the Sicilian defeat, the situation in Athens was so dire that the Athenians had no option but to abandon the fortified isthmus created for the Helots and this just emphasises that prioritising it over reinforcements for Sicily was the wrong decision militarily.

Meanwhile, in Sicily, Gylippus came to Syracuse with a force mustered from the cities he had been able to persuade to help. He then gathered the Syracusans together and told them they ought to man as many ships as possible and try their fortune in a battle at sea.[192] The language used here is interesting. As Westlake has pointed out, Thucydides nowhere explains Gylippus' legal status concerning command over Syracusan forces,[193] and the language used here (καὶ ξυγκαλέσας τοὺς Συρακοσίους ἔφη χρῆναι πληροῦν ναῦς ὡς δύνανται πλείστας καὶ ναυμαχίας ἀπόπειραν λαμβάνειν)[194] suggests that he is advising rather commanding. Writing some 600 years later Polyænus states that Gylippus manipulated the Syracusan leaders into committing

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[186] Thuc. 7.19.3

[187] Thuc. 7.19.5

[188] Thuc. 7.20.2

[189] Green (1971) 250; Rood (1998) 179

[190] Hornblower, *Comm. on Thuc.* 3. 587

[191] Thuc. 7.26.2

[192] Thuc. 7.21.2

[193] Westlake (1968) 278 n1

[194] Thuc. 7.21.2

sole management of the war to him by tricking them into believing there was an Athenian spy amongst the Syracusan generals,[195] but this is not corroborated elsewhere. Whatever his legal status, Gylippus, aided by his enthusiastic supporter, the Syracusan general Hermocrates, managed to persuade the reluctant and dubious Syracusans to face the mightiest naval power in the region in a sea battle. This is a key achievement and cannot be understated. The fact he persuaded the Syracusans to put to sea and take on the Athenians only serves to emphasise Gylippus' powers of persuasion and tactical acumen. It is easy to gloss over this, as we know the result of the encounters between the Syracusans and the Athenians at sea, but before the event to take the Athenian fleet head on would be seen by most to be a fool's errand.

The Syracusan fleet was readied for action and 35 triremes in the Great Harbour sailed against the Athenians and another 45 sailed from the smaller harbour, where the dockyards were, to join them, whilst at the same time threatening Plemmyrium so the Athenians would have to face a two-pronged attack. The night before the Syracusan triremes sailed, Gylippus led his whole infantry force out in the darkness in order to be ready to launch a surprise attack against the forts at Plemmyrium while the naval battle was taking place.[196] Seeing the Syracusans put to sea the Athenians quickly manned 60 ships. They sent 25 to fight the 35 Syracusan ships in the Great Harbour and the rest to meet the ships sailing round from the dockyard. The action took place immediately in front of the mouth of the Great Harbour, with one side trying to force a way in, with the other side trying to keep them out. Thucydides gives little detail about the battle itself, other than saying that for a long time neither side gave way.[197] Whilst this was going on Gylippus launched his surprise attack on Plemmyrium, caught the Athenians off guard and captured the three forts there. Again, giving little detail about the sea battle and tactics used, Thucydides states that, when Gylippus captured the first fort the Syracusans had the upper hand in the sea battle, but when the remaining two finally fell the Athenians were winning.[198] The Syracusan ships initially forced the Athenians away from the entrance to the Great Harbour and sailed inside. But, once within the confines of the harbour, they fell into disarray and were routed by the Athenians who sank 11 Syracusan ships and lost just 3 of their own.[199]

Thucydides writes that the Syracusans "entered in disorder and, falling foul of one another, handed victory to the Athenians (οὐδενὶ κόσμῳ ἐσέπλεον καὶ ταραχθεῖσαι περὶ ἀλλήλας παρέδοσαν τὴν νίκην τοῖς ᾿Αθηναίοις). As Hornblower notes, this is another example of the theme of Syracusan disorder that recurs in Books Six and Seven[200]– a theme that reminds us that, if the Athenians had acted immediately against Syracuse, as Lamachus proposed, the

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[195] Polyænus 42

[196] Thuc. 7.22.1

[197] Thuc. 7.22.2

[198] Thuc. 7.23.1

[199] Thuc. 7.23.3-4

[200] Thuc. 7.23.3 with Hornblower, *Comm. on Thuc.* 3. 582; see also Thuc. 6.98.3 and 7.3.3.

Syracusans would not have had time to overcome their ill-discipline and the Expedition might not have ended in failure.

Although they were defeated in the naval battle, the Syracusans held the forts at Plemmyrium, dismantling one but restoring and garrisoning the other two. In addition, the Athenians had been using the forts as a general store and they were loaded with supplies, including corn and the masts and other equipment for 40 triremes. Thucydides called the capture of Plemmyrium "the greatest and the principal cause of the deterioration of the Athenian army".[201] It left Athenian supply lines exposed: convoys were no longer safe at the entrance to the harbour, as the Syracusans had ships waiting to intercept them, the Athenians now had to fight to bring any supplies in at all. This event brought about a further decline in the Athenians' morale.[202] The capture of Plemmyrium had been a masterstroke by Gylippus, even at the expense of defeat in a naval battle whose purpose was to deflect attention from the attack on the forts at Plemmyrium.

Following their capture of Plemmyrium the Syracusans sent out 12 ships, one to the Peloponnese to exhort the Spartans to prosecute the war even more vigorously and the other 11 up the coast of Italy to intercept boats laden with stores en route to the Athenians in Sicily.[203] Thucydides does not state where the Syracusans got the information about Athenian supply boats from, but does say that the Syracusans destroyed most of the supply boats as well as destroying a quantity of timber at Caulonia which was intended for Athenian ship-building.[204] The Syracusans clearly had information about Athenian supply lines and, under Gylippus' direction, acted on this to the detriment of Athens, both materially and in terms of morale. Meanwhile minor skirmishes continued around the harbour in Syracuse. The Syracusans once again showed their proactivity and desire to defend their city by driving stakes into the seabed in front of the dockyards to prevent the Athenian ships ramming the Syracusans ships at anchor there. The Athenians pulled up most of these stakes using divers, but the Syracusans eventually managed to replace them. Thucydides also mentions "a number of other expedients …skirmishes were constantly going on and all kinds of stratagems were used".[205] This all suggests that the forces were evenly matched at this point and constantly facing off against one another. The Athenians had clearly lost the strong advantage they had in the spring of the previous year. The Syracusans also redoubled their diplomatic offensive, sending delegations of Corinthians, Ambraciots and Spartans to various cities with news of the capture of Plemmyrium and stressing the need to destroy the Athenians before reinforcements arrived.[206]

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[201] Thuc. 7.24.3

[202] Thuc. 7.24.3

[203] Thuc. 7.25.1

[204] Thuc. 7.25.2

[205] Thuc. 7.25.8

[206] Thuc. 7.25.9

At this time, Demosthenes finally sailed from Aegina with his relief force and joined Charicles in the Peloponnese before sailing to Laconia with Argive hoplites on board. Instead of sailing straight to Sicily to aid Nicias, they laid waste part of Epidaurus Limera before landing in Laconia and laying waste part of the country. They then fortified an isthmus in the area so that the Helots would have a place to desert to and so that raiding parties would have a base from which to operate.[207] Once this was done Demosthenes sailed on to Corcyra to pick up allied forces and advance to Sicily. Charicles returned home with the 30 ships once the isthmus was fortified.[208]

Thucydides relates that after Demosthenes had sailed from Athens, 1300 peltasts from the Dii, a Thracian tribe, arrived in Athens. They had been intended to sail with Demosthenes but arrived too late and were sent home.[209] Whilst this adds to the general sense of a mix of incompetence and bad luck surrounding the whole Expedition, Thucydides goes on to explain that the Thracians were sent home rather than help deal with the attacks made on Athens from Decelea because their services were too expensive as each man was paid a drachma a day.[210] Kallet has argued that Thucydides stresses this point as it is linked to financial difficulties that Athens was now suffering and that the Spartan occupation of Decelea was weakening Athens financially,[211] just as Alcibiades had known it would. Indeed, financial difficulties were so bad for Athens at this point, that they imposed upon all their subjects a tax of five percent on all imports and exports by sea.[212] Thucydides emphasises the effect of the occupation of Decelea, stressing that the Athenians were deprived of their whole country and that 20,000 slaves deserted as a result. (Although many scholars accept this figure, Hornblower disputes it and points out that Thucydides does not explain how he arrived at that figure.)[213] Thucydides says that the occupation of Decelea was one of the chief reasons for the decline of Athenian power[214] and their failure to use the Thracian peltasts would seem to indicate that they were suffering severe financial difficulties as a result of fighting a war on two fronts. Thucydides questions why the Athenians did not immediately order the return of the Expedition from Sicily at this point, noting that instead they were laying siege to Syracuse, a city as big as Athens, whilst Attica was being ravaged from Decelea.[215] Although this is a valid judgement with hindsight, it ignores the various opportunities that Athens had to capture Syracuse and indeed the disarray that city was in when the Athenians arrived in Sicily. By this point the Athenians were too invested to withdraw and the

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[207] Thuc. 7.26.2

[208] Thuc. 7.26.3

[209] Thuc. 7.27.2

[210] Thuc. 7.27.2

[211] Kallet (2001) 122, 130

[212] Thuc. 7.28.4

[213] Hornblower (1987) 36

[214] Thuc. 7.27.3

[215] Thuc. 7.28.3

fact that they were on the cusp of victory before the arrival of Gylippus would have made the investment even harder to abandon.

An Athenian general, Diitrephes, was appointed to command the Thracians from Dii on their return voyage with orders to do as much damage to the enemy as they could during their voyage along the coast, sailing through the Euripus.[216] A quick raid on Tanagra was followed by landing further north in Boeotia near the settlement of Mycalessus. A dawn raid caught the city off guard and the Thracians burst in, sacking the houses and temples and butchering the inhabitants, sparing no one.[217] Thucydides is at pains to emphasise the bloodthirsty nature of the raid, highlighting the massacre of all the boys in a school and stating that the disaster which fell upon the city was "more complete than any, more sudden and more horrible".[218] Following the atrocity, the few remaining inhabitants of the city were rescued by the Theban army which arrived just as the Thracians were withdrawing to their ships. The Thebans took away their booty and drove them down into the Euripus and the sea. Thucydides is at pains to point out that the Thracians who turned and fought the Thebans at this point did so creditably, whereas those who had remained behind to plunder the town were destroyed.[219] Although the massacre of the inhabitants of Mycalessus was abhorrent even by the standards of the day, its inclusion in the *Histories* seems strange as it has no bearing on the war and Mycalessus itself was of no strategic importance. It may be that, by emphasising the bloodthirsty nature of the Dii, Thucydides is intimating that they could fight well and could have been of use in Sicily (ill-discipline notwithstanding). It has also been suggested that the atrocity had a particular impact on Thucydides as he himself was of Thracian origin,[220] but it is more likely, as Connor points out, that, by juxtaposing the massacre at Mycalessus with the occupation of Decelea, Thucydides is suggesting that financial resources and expenditures and human resources and expenditures are incommensurable and cannot be judged on the same standard.[221] To underline this, the language used by Thucydides to describe the financial expenditure in Decelea is of a type usually used for human death - χρημάτων τ' ὀλέθρῳ[222] and αἱ δὲ πρόσοδοι ἀπώλλυντο.[223] Conversely, the language used to describe the deaths in Mycalessus, both at the school massacre and in the subsequent killing of the Thracians by the Thebans, is laced with financial metaphors from the conventional φειδόμενοι,[224] to the more unusual μέρος τι ἀπανηλώθη.[225]

[216] Thuc. 7.29.1

[217] Thuc. 7.29.4

[218] Thuc. 7.29.5

[219] Thuc. 7.30.2

[220] Cartwright (1997) 258

[221] Connor (1984) 258

[222] Thuc. 7.27.3

[223] Thuc. 7.28.4

[224] Thuc. 7.29.4

[225] Thuc. 7.30.3

This in turn focuses attention on the financial problems Athens now faced as a result of the Expedition.

8.2.2.4 Athenian Defeat in the Great Harbour

On his way to Corcyra Demosthenes put in on the Acarnanian mainland and met Eurymedon, who was on his way back from Sicily, where he had been sent during the winter with money for the army. Eurymedon informed him of the capture of Plemmyrium by the Syracusans. They were also joined by Conon, the commander at Naupactus, who told them that the 25 Corinthian ships stationed nearby were readying for battle. Demosthenes and Eurymedon gave Conon 10 of their fastest ships to join with his 18 ships at Naupactus to fight the Corinthians. Eurymedon now appears to have abandoned his original intention of returning home and joined with Demosthenes: indeed, Thucydides says that Eurymedon shared the command to which Demosthenes had been appointed,[226] although he does not explain the legal basis for this. Although Eurymedon's actions here were not unhelpful to the Athenian cause, the Athenians were once again diluting their command, which can lead to confusion and disorder. Eurymedon then sailed to Corcyra and ordered them to man 15 ships while Demosthenes raised troops from the Acarnanian area.[227]

At this time, Nicias learnt that reinforcements were being sent to the Syracusans from 'various cities' in Sicily following numerous Syracusan embassies sent to spread the word of the capture of Plemmyrium. He persuaded the Sicels who controlled the route to Syracuse to bar the way and not let the reinforcements through.[228] The Sicels did as Nicias asked and organised an ambush in which they killed around 800 enemy troops, although the Corinthian representative survived and led the other 1500 survivors to Syracuse.[229] The Camarinaeans also arrived with reinforcements for Syracuse at this time, as did the Geloans.[230] Thucydides says that "practically the whole of Sicily joined together……[and] came in with Syracuse against the Athenians".[231] Whilst it may have seemed that way to the Athenians, it is somewhat of an exaggeration, for, as Cartwright points out, Naxos, Catana, Egesta and most of the Sicels still fought for Athens.[232] Notwithstanding Thucydides' exaggeration, however, the impact of Gylippus persuading many Sicilians to come out in favour of Syracuse cannot be overstated. As Hunter points out, the cities in Sicily adhered to the stronger power[233] and, as Gylippus' leadership began to take effect on the Syracusan war effort, the cities flocked to him. Had the Athenians demonstrated a show of

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[226] Thuc. 7.31.5

[227] Thuc. 7.31.5

[228] Thuc. 7.32.1

[229] Thuc. 7.32.2

[230] Thuc. 7.33.1

[231] Thuc. 7.33.2

[232] Cartwright (1997) 259

[233] Hunter (1973) 99

force on their initial arrival in Sicily and attacked Syracuse immediately it seems likely that these cities would have come over to them instead. The lack of leadership and Nicias' dithering were now having an adverse effect, which combined with the lingering memory of Athens' high-handedness in the previous expedition of 427, was swelling the ranks of the opposition.

Meanwhile, Eurymedon and Demosthenes crossed the Ionian Gulf with the reinforcements, adding to them by calling on old alliances and friendships (the origins of which are unknown but were clearly unaffected by the 427 expedition)[234] on the Italian mainland at Choirades and Thurii as they passed through.[235]

Eurymedon and Demosthenes left Thurii and ordered the fleet to sail along the coast to the territory of Croton, while they reviewed the army by the river Sybaris and then led it through the territory of Thurii. When they reached the river Hylias the people of Croton sent them messengers informing them they would not allow the army to march through their country.[236] This must have been demoralising for the army as yet another supposed ally refused them aid and they marched down river to the sea, where they were met by the fleet and embarked.

With the Athenian reinforcements delayed, the Syracusans became "anxious to make another attack on land and sea".[237] Under the leadership of Gylippus and the tutelage of the Corinthians (who had tried out the idea in an inconclusive battle with the Athenians at Naupactus), they made several modifications to their triremes such as cutting down the length of their prows to make them more solid and strengthening the ships at this point. This adaptation was meant to suit the tactical environment: by strengthening their prows they gave their ships an advantage when fighting in the restricted space of the Great Harbour. They knew that the Athenian tactic was not to ram head on but to row around and ram an enemy ship amidships. The confined space of the harbour would not give them sea room to do this and the limited room to manoeuvre would enable the Syracusans to strike the Athenian ships head on. As the Athenian prows were of a softer construction, striking prow to prow, which had previously been regarded a sign of a lack of skill in the steersman, gave the Syracusans a distinct advantage: head-on attack would drive the Athenians back and, with nowhere to go in the confines of the harbour but on to the shore, they would crowd together and fall into a state of confusion.[238] This brilliant innovation was not matched by any creative thinking on the Athenian side: they continued to use conventional tactics and did not adapt to their surroundings.

The first day of action seems to have resulted in a stalemate following minor skirmishes where the two sides tested each other's strength and resolve. Other than the sinking of two Athenian

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[234] *HCT* 4.413

[235] Thuc. 7.33.3-4

[236] Thuc. 7.35.2

[237] Thuc. 7.36.1

[238] Thuc. 7.36.3-6

ships, Thucydides states that "neither side was able to accomplish anything worth speaking of".[239] As Hornblower points out, however, the juxtaposition of Athenians and Syracusans in Thucydides' word order here highlights the point that, even at this stage, for the Syracusans to sink an Athenian ship was a remarkable feat:[240] the Syracusan victory was far from inevitable and they came from a weak, defensive position, to one which eventually destroyed the entire Athenian fleet.

On the following day the Syracusans made no move at all and Nicias ordered the Athenians to refit all their damaged ships and had a line of merchant ships anchor outside the stockade at a distance of approximately 200 feet apart to form an enclosed harbour to which Athenian ships could retreat safely, should they get into difficulties,[241] which reveals a defeatist mindset on the part of Nicias. On the third day the Syracusans once again engaged the Athenians on land and sea simultaneously. The sea battle was finely matched for most of the day and seemed to be heading for a stalemate. Towards the end of the day, however, a Corinthian steersman named Ariston had an idea. He persuaded the naval commanders to send word to the city and have the market of Syracuse moved down to the quayside as quickly as possible. The sailors of the Syracusan fleet all got ashore, had a meal close to their ships, and then returned back on board. This enabled the Syracusans to launch a final attack, at a time when the Athenians thought the action had concluded for the day. Having seen the Syracusans back away and disembark, the Athenians were under the impression they had returned to their city because they were beaten. When the Syracusans suddenly manned their ships again and sailed out to attack the Athenians were thrown into a state of great confusion. Most had not eaten and it was only with considerable difficulty that they put out against the enemy again. The two fleets faced off against each other, but eventually the Athenians decided to launch an attack, rather than tire themselves out waiting. The Syracusans met this attack prow to prow, exactly as they had planned, and their modified prows proved decisive. The Syracusan ships' beaks stoved in the Athenian bows to a considerable distance and the javelin throwers also did a lot of damage to the Athenians. In addition, the Syracusans launched numerous small boats which went about the Athenians fleet, slipping under their oars and launching weapons at the Athenian sailors.[242] The Athenian ships turned and fled, returning to the safety of their artificial enclosed harbour. Although two of the pursuing Syracusan ships got too close to the Athenian barrier and were destroyed, the Syracusan victory was undisputed. Seven Athenian ships were sunk and many disabled, with most of their crews captured by the Syracusans.[243]

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[239] Thuc. 7.38.1

[240] Hornblower, *Comm. on Thuc.* 3. 615

[241] Thuc. 7.38.2

[242] Thuc. 7.40.5

[243] Thuc. 7.41.4

Thucydides calls Ariston "the best (ἄριστος) steersman in the Syracusan fleet",[244] which may or may not be a deliberate pun on his name (Hornblower thinks not),[245] and other sources link him with technical or tactical innovations in earlier and later battles that are uncredited in Thucydides,[246] but his stratagem in the current battle is certainly another example of a crucial contrast between the Athenians and their opponents: Gylippus and his troops were able to adapt to the changed circumstances of fighting in a confined harbour, whereas the Athenians continued to use traditional tactics of ancient naval warfare that were ultimately found wanting. Bereft of leadership they had conceded naval superiority to the Syracusans, who were now full of confidence and felt quite capable of dealing with the enemy forces on land.[247]

8.2.2.5 Athenian Defeat at Epipolae

Before the Syracusans could launch another attack, however, Demosthenes and Eurymedon arrived with reinforcements. Seventy-three ships (Diodorus claims more than 80),[248] 5000 hoplites and a huge force of javelin throwers was a force almost as large as the original one sent in 415, and its arrival threw the Syracusans and their allies into dismay.[249] As Syracusan confidence began to ebb, Athenian confidence began to return. Demosthenes took stock of the situation and it is clear from comments by Thucydides in this passage that he blamed Nicias for the situation the Athenians found themselves in. "It was impossible for him to let matters drift and find himself in the same position as Nicias had been in"; "Nicias had appeared formidable...but…instead of attacking Syracuse at once, he spent the winter in Catana"; and "he brought himself into contempt and allowed Gylippus to steal a march on him…".[250] These all paint a picture of an indecisive commander who had lost the backing of his men.

There has been some debate amongst scholars about whether the opinions here are those of Demosthenes or of Thucydides, or indeed of both.[251] It is clear that the passage should be read in connection the debate between the three generals in Book Six about the best course of action.[252] Dover has argued that Thucydides' comments in Book Seven can be interpreted in one of two ways. Either he is condemning the failure of Nicias and Lamachus for not pressing the advantage gained by the surprise attack in the harbour described at the end of Book Six,[253] and instead squandering their advantage by wintering in Katane, or he is condemning the three

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[244] Thuc. 7.39.2

[245] Hornblower, *Comm. on Thuc.* 3. 616

[246] Plut. *Nic.* 25.4 (tactics in the final sea-battle, in which he died), Diod. Sic. 13.10.2 (the redesign of ship's prows to permit head-on ramming).

[247] Thuc. 7.41.4

[248] Diod. Sic. 13.10

[249] Thuc. 7.42.1-2

[250] Thuc. 7.42.3

[251] Hornblower, *Comm. on Thuc.* 3. 622

[252] Thuc. 6.47-49

[253] Thuc. 6.64-71

generals' adoption of Alcibiades' plan in preference to Lamachus' plan of a direct assault on Syracuse.[254] There is no reason, however, why both interpretations cannot be correct. The failure to press home the advantage the Athenians had at the end of Book Six clearly contributed to the failure of the Expedition, as it allowed Gylippus to come and change the dynamic of the whole campaign. In addition, as Dover points out, the whole tone of this passage strongly suggests that Thucydides thought Lamachus was right in his initial plan. Dover admits that this is not immediately reconcilable with Thucydides' comments in Book Two, where he attributes the failure of the Expedition to the recall of Alcibiades.[255] If Lamachus' plan was correct that means Alcibiades' plan, which was adopted, was the wrong one. Dover squares the circle by arguing, probably correctly, that Thucydides changed his opinion when he wrote Book Two at the end of the war under the influence of Alcibiades' activities between 411-407.[256] Dover is arguing that Thucydides believes that the wrong plan was adopted by the three generals but this would have been recoverable and victory would still have remained possible had Alcibiades been present.

Demosthenes immediately realised that, if Athenian forces could control the way up to Epipolae, they could easily capture the Syracusan counter-wall, so he sent Athenian troops to devastate the land round the river Anapus[257] and then launched a number of attacks on the counter-wall using siege engines. But all of these were repulsed by the Syracusans, so, rather than wait around any longer, he elected to make a direct attack on Epipolae. In order to make the ascent unobserved he assembled the whole army (along with Eurymedon and Menander, but leaving Nicias behind in the Athenian fortifications, possibly due to illness), led it up to Epipolae at night, and captured the Syracusan fort there. Most of the garrison of the fort escaped to the three camps at Epipolae. The troops in the camps came out to attack but were routed by the Athenians who then pressed on to the counter-wall. Gylippus and his troops came up from the outworks and joined the battle, but were forced back. The daring and audacity of the night attack had taken the Syracusans by surprise, but eventually became the Athenians' undoing and was proved to be a bad strategy. The Athenians ploughed through the rest of the enemy army, but began to lose cohesion in the darkness. The Boeotians were the first force to stand up to the advancing Athenians and charged them, putting them to flight.[258] In the darkness this retreat turned into full blown chaos. The darkness and noise made it impossible to tell who was who and many Athenians were attacked by their own side. The way down from Epipolae was a narrow one and many Athenians lost their lives falling down the cliffs. Some of the Athenians who made it down the narrow pass made it back to the Athenian camp, but many still were

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[254] *HCT* 4.420

[255] Thuc. 2 42.3

[256] *HCT* 4.421

[257] Thuc. 7.42.6

[258] Thuc. 7.43

rounded up and killed by the Syracusan cavalry at daybreak.[259] Thucydides makes no comment on the Athenian leadership during this battle, but it is clear that Demosthenes did nothing to improve the situation of the Athenians.

It is not clear whether Demosthenes was impatient to make his mark and rushed in headlong without assessing the terrain or the situation, or whether he assessed that the situation the Athenians were in was dire and that only a bold gamble might change things. In any case the night attack on Epipolae was a farce and had an easily predicable outcome. Battles were not usually fought at night in the ancient world, and for good reason. The attack on Epipolae was the only battle by night between large armies during the whole of the Peloponnesian War[260] and ended in disaster. Even with a bright moon, the retreating Athenians had no way in the darkness of finding their own people other than asking for the watchword and in doing so revealed it to the enemy.[261] Under the strong leadership of Gylippus the Syracusans remained a compact force, not falling into the disorganised state of the Athenians and avoiding panic.

This victory restored Syracusan confidence which had taken a temporary dip on the arrival of the huge Athenian reinforcements. Gylippus wasted no time in capitalising on the victory by sending 15 ships to Acragas, a Sicilian city which had sided for the Athenians but was destabilized by internal political conflict, to see if they could bring the city on to the Syracusan side. Gylippus himself went elsewhere in Sicily to raise yet another army.[262]

Following the defeat at Epipolae, the Athenian generals assessed the situation and the morale of the troops. The soldiery hated the idea of staying in Sicily and many were ill. Thucydides describes the unhealthy, marshy conditions the troops were living in[263] and his description suggests that malaria may have been prevalent amongst the troops.[264]

Demosthenes, having seen his venture at Epipolae fail, voted to return the whole force home to Athens where they could be put to better use fighting against the Spartans at Decelea.[265] Although with hindsight this looks like a wise suggestion, it is on the face of it a startling one from a general who has just arrived in Sicily with a huge new army. Demosthenes had, it is true, embarked on the dangerous gamble of a night attack and it had failed spectacularly. But, as the new arrival on the scene and man with a high reputation as a military commander, he was still in principle the person best placed to provide the inspiration the Athenians needed to turn the

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[259] Thuc. 7.44.8

[260] Thuc. 7.44.1

[261] Thuc. 7.44.4

[262] Thuc. 7.46

[263] Thuc. 7.47.1

[264] It is uncertain as to how far Sicily was malarial in antiquity (*HCT* 4.424) and Thucydides makes no mention of the condition in the previous years. Hornblower argues that the illness may have been due to poor nutrition, (Hornblower, *Comm. on Thuc.* 3. 632*)* but Thucydides' comment that the illness was seasonal (Thuc. 7.47.2) makes it more likely to be malaria.

[265] Thuc. 7.47.3

situation around and bring the attack on Syracuse to a successful conclusion. If he could think of nothing to suggest except to abandon the expedition entirely, the situation was indeed hopeless. Was he right? The modern historian is apt to share Demosthenes' view, but the modern historian cannot see all the facets of the situation that might have presented themselves to Demosthenes and may still wonder whether he missed a possible solution. But all the sources now available to us (above all Thucydides' narrative) are much too governed by what actually happened to make it possible to answer that question.

Nicias meanwhile, was appalled by the disaster and blamed Demosthenes for his foolhardiness: so Plutarch says,[266] and it is easy to believe, even if Thucydides does not comment on the matter. There were likely to be tensions within the joint command structure of the Athenians that made rational decision-making difficult. Nicias did, of course, accept that the situation was bad, but he argued that a withdrawal would be viewed very dimly in Athens (he feared, with good reason, that he would be put to death if the Expedition returned to Athens and he voted to remain in Sicily)[267] and also that the situation was not irrecoverable: he had grounds for believing that, if the Athenians persisted with their siege, the Syracusans' position would become worse than theirs and they might still be compelled to capitulate.[268] That he believed this was due to receipt of intelligence from a party in Syracuse that wanted to betray the city to the Athenians. The identity of this fifth column in Syracuse is completely and frustratingly unknown, though Dover postulates that they were wealthy citizens of Leontini who had become Syracusan citizens but still longed for an independent Leontini.[269] One reason for the mystery is undoubtedly that Nicias never shared all the details with the other generals: either the details were quite unconvincing or (more probably) Nicias did not wholly trust his colleagues. Both possibilities cast Nicias' leadership in a bad light, and one may add that, if there *was* lack of trust amongst the Athenian commanders, this would probably have been recognised by the common soldiery and would have been corrosive to their already depleted morale.

Unable to persuade the others that total withdrawal was the correct option, Demosthenes suggested that the army should at least abandon the siege of Syracuse, move to Thapsus or Catane, and conduct the war on a different basis. With this Eurymedon agreed, but for the moment they yielded to Nicias' obstinate belief that the Syracusans' position was actually very precarious, thus showing greater trust in him than he did in them.

Both Nicias and Demosthenes use financial arguments to make their point and, as has already been mentioned, Kallet has argued that Athens was under financial pressure at this point[270] and

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[266] Plut. *Nic.* 22

[267] Thuc. 7.48.3-4

[268] Thuc. 7.48.2

[269] *HCT* 4.425

[270] Kallet (2001) 122

that the expedition was under-resourced.[271] Demosthenes said he thought it was wrong to waste the resources of Athens in Sicily, whereas Nicias insisted that he was being told that the Syracusans were hugely in debt and that the Athenians "should not be defeated by money, in which they were far superior".[272] As Kallet points out, both men are making money, rather than men or power, the prime concern. She also observes, quite correctly, that Thucydides makes it clear that money was not the problem: rather it was disagreement among the generals, the privileging of money above all other considerations, and the consequent lack of decisiveness.[273] Kallet draws attention to the fact that Thucydides implies Athenian supplies were sufficient at this point.[274] In fact it was only now, after two years in Sicily and following the arrival of reinforcements, that the Athenians did have sufficient resources. Had they been properly equipped when they first arrived in 415 the Syracusans would likely have been crushed in a first strike. The lack of cavalry on arrival was notable and the Athenian plan to draw up a cavalry force from local resources was lamentable. If the logistics of the expedition been thought through properly, this situation would never have been allowed to develop. In spite of this however, not long afterwards, when the Athenians call a council of war after the Syracusans blocked the harbour, Thucydides tell us that the Athenians had run out of food.[275] That suggests that, when Thucydides implies that the Athenians have sufficient supplies, he is actually talking about money: what they lacked was the means of turning that into adequate provisions.

Following their victory, Gylippus and Sicanus returned to Syracuse. Whilst Sicanus had been unsuccessful in his attempt to persuade the city of Acragas to switch sides in the conflict, Gylippus had once again raised another huge army in Sicily. The Syracusans prepared to make another attack on the Athenians by land and sea simultaneously. Seeing the Syracusan forces reinforced with yet more troops and aware that the sickness amongst their own troops was getting worse, the Athenian generals finally gave orders as secretly as possible for everyone to be prepared to sail out from the camp when the signal was given. Even Nicias was not against to this, although he still opposed an open vote.[276] When everything was ready for the Athenians to flee, however, there was a fateful total eclipse of the moon, which enables us to pinpoint the exact date – 27 August 413 BC. The Athenians took this event so seriously that they urged the generals to delay their departure. Nicias, however, who Thucydides states was "rather over-inclined to divination and such things", said that, until they had waited for the 27 days recommended by the soothsayers, he would not even join in any further discussion on how the move could be made.[277] Although the Greeks were a superstitious people, as evidenced by

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[271] Kallet (2001) 112

[272] Thuc. 7.48.6

[273] Kallet (2001) 157

[274] Kallet (2001) 156-7

[275] Thuc. 7.60.2

[276] Thuc. 7.50.3

[277] Thuc. 7.50.4

Thucydides' comments about prophecies and oracular utterances at the start of the Peloponnesian War,[278] Thucydides is suggesting here that Nicias should have known better and risen above such superstition. There are other examples of Greek generals delaying decisions and military manoeuvres while their situation deteriorates as they await signs from the gods,[279] but by saying Nicias was "rather over-inclined", Thucydides is, in a very understated way, claiming that he went well beyond the extent to which religion could normally be expected to affect military decision-making and emphasising that his poor leadership turned a defeat into an unmitigated disaster. Plutarch reports that the standard procedure in events such as this, as Autoclides mentions in his commentaries, was to delay action for no more than three days.[280] He also notes that Nicias' chief soothsayer, Stilbides, who kept much of Nicias' superstitious fears in check, had just died. As a result, and contrary to Thucydides' report that the soothsayers advised Nicias to wait for a full cycle of the moon, Plutarch intimates that it was Nicias who persuaded the Athenians to wait for 27 days, not that Nicias was advised to say this by other soothsayers.[281]

When the Syracusans heard what was happening in the Athenian camp they increased the pressure on their enemy. They wanted to force the Athenians to fight at sea, so manned their ships and put their crews into training. They also made an attack on the Athenian walls where they routed a small force of hoplites sent out to meet them before withdrawing. The next day, however, the Syracusan fleet of 76 ships sailed out and at the same time attacked the Athenian wall with their ground forces. The Athenians immediately put out 86 ships to meet them and the two fleets came to close quarters and action. Eurymedon, in command of the Athenian right flank, sailed out from the main body with the intention of encircling the enemy, but he got his tactics all wrong. The Syracusan fleet defeated the Athenian centre and then forced Eurymedon and the ships with him into a narrow bay in the harbour. Eurymedon was killed and all the ships with him were destroyed. The Syracusans then drove back the whole Athenian fleet and forced their ships ashore.[282] Gylippus led a charge along the breakwater with the intention of destroying the Athenian crews as they disembarked, but the Etruscans saw this and charged Gylippus' troops, driving them into the marshes. More Syracusan troops arrived, however, and the Athenians came out to meet them, driving them back. They rescued most of their beached

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[278] Thuc. 2.8.2

[279] The topic of the role of religion in military decision making is discussed in depth at Parker (2016). Notable examples of delays whilst awaiting divine approval include the Spartan king Agesipolis delaying an attack against Argos in the 380s until two separate oracles at Olympia both confirmed that it was safe for him to reject the truce that existed between Sparta and Argos (Xen. *Hell.* 4.7.2-3) and also when Xenophon's army delays at Calpes Limen, when, though eager to march away, it is held up for three days by a failure to get good omens, and suffered extreme discomfort from lack of supplies during this delay (Xen. *An.* 6.4.12-5.2).

[280] Plut. *Nic.* 23

[281] Plut. *Nic.* 23

[282] Thuc. 7.52.2

ships, although 18 were captured by the Syracusans and the crews of these ships were all put to death.[283] Despite saving most of their ships, this was a huge reverse for the Athenians and a great victory for the Syracusans. The Athenians were utterly disheartened and the Syracusans were now convinced of their superiority over the Athenian forces, which had initially seemed overwhelming. So convinced of their superiority were the Syracusans that their mindset shifted from one of survival to one of preventing the enemy from escaping at all.

8.2.2.6 Syracusan Victory at Sea

The Syracusans immediately began to block up the mouth of the harbour with a line of triremes and merchant ships at anchor to prevent the Athenians from sailing out of the harbour. Seeing this, the Athenian generals called a council of war. Thucydides tells us here for the first time that the Athenians had run out of supplies,[284] which is surprising as he had previously implied that Athenian supplies were sufficient in the discussion between the Athenian generals following the defeat at Epipolae during which Nicias states that the Athenians should go on fighting and not be defeated because of money, in which they were far superior.[285] They decided to abandon the upper walls, build a cross wall close to their ships, thus enclosing a small space to accommodate their stores and the sick, and then to use the rest of the army to man every available ship and to fight it out at sea. If victorious they could proceed to Catana, where their provisions were stored and if not, they would burn their ships and march away by land to the nearest friendly place they could reach.[286] It is strange that Thucydides had not highlighted the Athenian predicament regarding their provisions earlier. Ensuring supply lines are kept open is a key tenet of warfare and Nicias and Demosthenes had failed miserably on that front. Thucydides does mention previously that with the capture of the forts at Plemmyrium convoys were no longer safe and that the Athenians had to fight to get supplies in,[287] but it is a big jump to go from that statement to the Athenians then completely running out of food. Thucydides' explanation for the lack of focus on the dwindling supplies is unclear.

The Athenians managed to man about 110 ships and loaded them with archers and javelin throwers. Seeing the despondency in his men, Nicas attempted to rally spirits with a speech. The speech is a rather rambling affair and Nicias constantly reminds his men of their dire predicament and emphasises that they will need fortune to be on their side if they are to carry the day - καὶ τὸ τῆς τύχης κἂν μεθ᾽ ἡμῶν ἐλπίσαντες στῆναι.[288] He states that the forthcoming battle will be a fight for survival "if we win this battle with our ships each man can see again his native

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[283] Thuc. 7.53.3

[284] Thuc. 7.60.2

[285] Thuc. 7.48.6

[286] Thuc. 7.60.2

[287] Thuc. 7.24.3

[288] Thuc. 7.61.3

city (ἢν γὰρ κρατήσωμεν νῦν ταῖς ναυσίν, ἔστι τῳ τὴν ὑπάρχουσάν που οἰκείαν πόλιν ἐπιδεῖν)",[289] which must have made the men see how bad their predicament was. What had been a war of conquest which was expected to be achieved easily had now become a battle for their very survival. This must have made them question their leaders and the promises they had made. How had things allowed to have become so bad? Nicias then discusses a change of strategy from previous battles. The Athenians were to use grappling irons to prevent enemy ships from backing away once they had been charged.[290] Although this strategy seems reasonable at first glance, it was too little too late. In addition, Nicias also elected to have large numbers of archers, men and hoplites on the deck during the sea battle. He concedes that out that in the open sea this would over-weigh the ships, but claims that in the harbour will be effective as they are in-effect fighting a land battle at sea.[291] This is completely incorrect as, of course, a large mass of men will overload a ship whether it is on the high seas or operating in the littoral or in a confined harbour. Nicias lacked the ability to think dynamically and adapt quickly and effectively to situations. This late change of strategy smacks of desperation rather than being the bold stratagem of a daring leader and could not have inspired confidence in the troops. In fact, this number of hoplites fighting on the deck of a ship is unprecedented and in close quarters they would not have been able to control their weapons,[292] and, as de Romilly points out, it is this change of tactics which leads to the Athenian defeat.[293] As a result of Nicias' inflexibility and indecisiveness throughout the campaign, however, it is impossible to envisage any bold stratagem that could have been brought to bear at this point.

After seeing the Athenians make preparations, Gylippus realised that the Athenians were preparing to fight at sea. Thucydides tells us that Gylippus had been told of the Athenian intention to use grappling irons and had guarded against this by stretching hides over the prows and upper parts of their ships to prevent the grappling irons from gripping.[294] Thucydides does not tell us how Gylippus knew of the Athenian plan, but it suggests that malcontents in the Athenian camp were passing information to the Syracusans. Gylippus then gave a speech to his men, full of fire and brimstone, exhorting them to "go into battle with anger in their hearts"[295] and take vengeance on the Athenians. Although we must be wary in analysing the speeches here, as the words are clearly those of Thucydides rather than Nicias and Gylippus, we must assume that the words, as Thucydides himself states at the beginning of his work, were "keeping as closely as possible to the general sense of the words that were actually used, [making the

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[289] Thuc. 7.61.1

[290] Thuc. 7.62.3

[291] Thuc. 7.62.4

[292] Hunter (1973) 112

[293] de Romilly (2012) 93

[294] Thuc. 7.65.2

[295] Thuc. 7.68.1

speakers say] what was called for by each situation."[296] So, if Thucydides puts lacklustre and uninspiring words in the mouth of Nicias, we must assume the speech actually given was lacklustre and uninspiring. And the same goes for Gylippus: a stirring and motivational speech in Thucydides must denote an actual stirring and motivational speech given by Gylippus. Nicias' speech, as Hunter points out, is "the counsel of despair".[297] As Stahl has shown, modern scholarship has now abandoned the 'mouthpiece-of-the-author' theory about Thucydides' speeches in favour of a more nuanced approach which allows for a more scientific and analytical approach with Thucydides being a historian, not only of the history of war but of the intellectual history of the parties involved in that war.[298] This approach leads to the unavoidable conclusion that Nicias' motivational oratory powers were severely lacking in comparison to Gylippus.

The Athenian ships then put out from their own camp and sailed straight for the barrier across the mouth of the harbour to try to fight their way out. In a remarkably powerful and moving passage Thucydides vividly describes the confusion and chaos of a cramped naval engagement in the Great Harbour of Syracuse, something which inevitably evokes the battle of Salamis.[299] Connor states that Thucydides "moves the reader beyond tactics and strategy to an awareness of the psychological importance and implications of the battle".[300] Whilst this is undeniably true, the insufficient attention to strategy and tactics are frustrating when one is trying to analyse the battle from a military viewpoint. There is no mention of how successful Gylippus' tactics of stretching hide over the prows of the Syracusan ships were and no analysis from Thucydides of how effective Nicias' new tactics were, although, as mentioned above, de Romilly reckons that Nicias' tactics were responsible for the defeat. Thucydides does not attribute blame and simply tells us that the battle hung in the balance for a long time before the Syracusans broke Athenian resistance and chased their ships back to the land. The entire Athenian fleet, excepting those ships which had been captured ran on to the shore and the men fled from their ships towards the camps.[301]

8.2.2.7 Destruction of the Athenian Expedition

The final section of Book Seven describes in vivid and harrowing detail the final destruction of the Athenian Expedition. Following their defeat in the harbour the Athenians were so demoralised they wanted to flee inland there and then. Demosthenes persuaded Nicias that the best course of action was to man the ships again and try to force their way out of the harbour.[302] When the order was given, however, the men refused. Leadership had irrevocably broken down and the

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[296] Thuc. 1.22.1

[297] Hunter (1973) 109

[298] Stahl (1973) 62

[299] Connor (1984) 197

[300] Connor (1984) 197

[301] Thuc. 7.71.6

[302] Diod. Sic. 13.18.2

mass of the soldiery made the decision to retreat inland.[303] Hermocrates realised what they were doing and tried to persuade the Syracusan magistrates to build road blocks and garrison the pass to prevent the Athenians escaping. The magistrates, whilst seeing the wisdom of his plan, refused to give the orders as their soldiers and citizenry were out celebrating their victory and were holding a festival to Heracles that day.[304] Undeterred, Hermocrates sent men at dusk towards the Athenian line to call out and pretend to be friendly to the Athenians. They told the Athenians not to flee that night as the Syracusans had blocked all the walls and then left. The Athenians believed this lie, as they thought the men calling out were the Syracusans who were friendly to Nicias and often brought news about what was happening in the city. It was not until two days after the naval battle that the Athenian troops finally began to move. Nicias saw the discouragement and despair of the men and tried to lift their spirits with a speech,[305] but Thucydides reports no words of Demosthenes. Whether this is a deliberate omission to bring Nicias back to the forefront as the Expedition marches inexorably towards its destruction, to highlight the fact the he shoulders most of the blame, or simply because Demosthenes, bereft of leadership said nothing, can never be known.

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[303] Thuc. 7.72.4. Diodorus suggests that Nicias had already concluded that the best course of action would be to abandon the ships and retreat through the interior of Sicily.

[304] Thuc. 7.73.2

[305] Thuc. 7.77
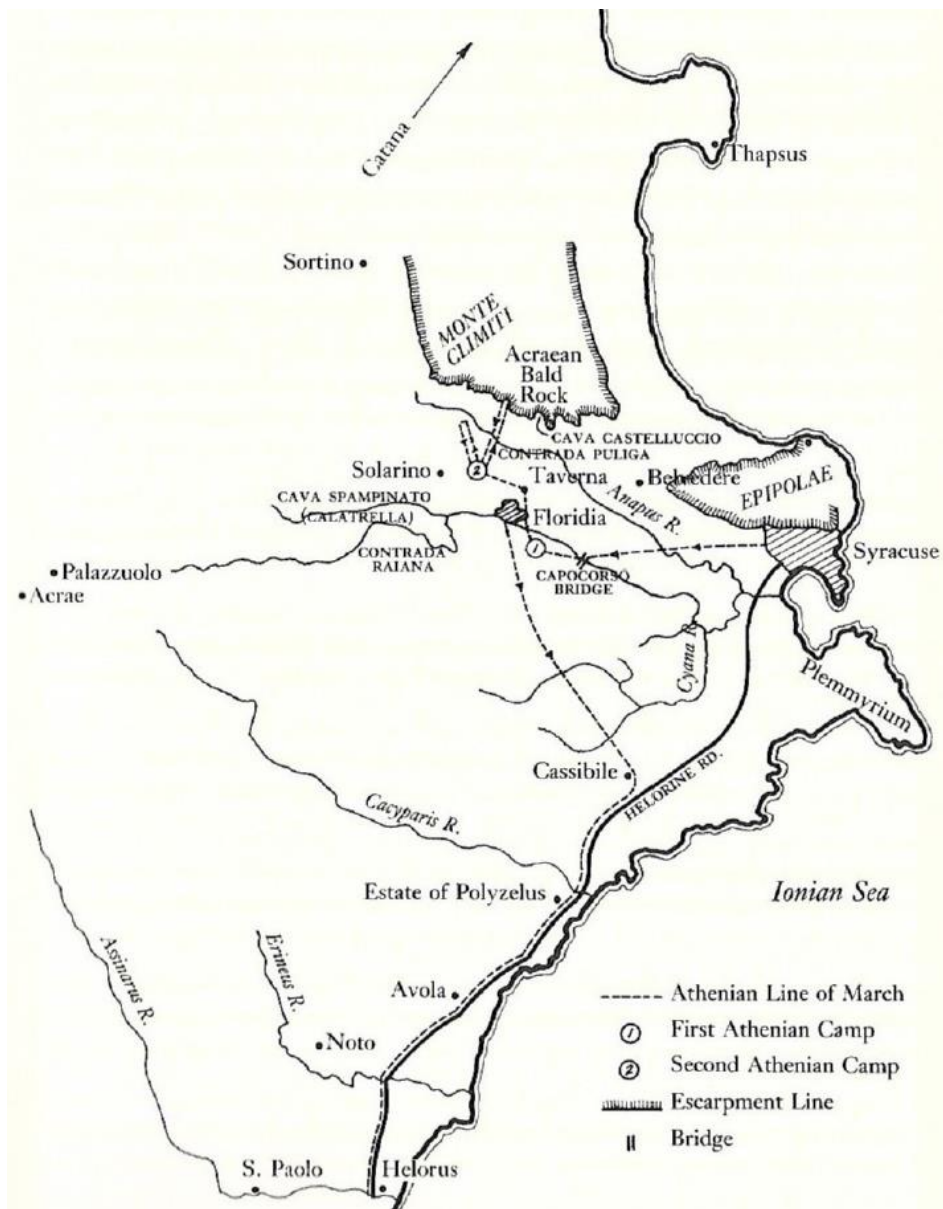
Map 7: The Athenian Retreat from Syracuse. Kagan (1981) 343

The bedraggled army marched in a hollow square, with Nicias leading the troops at the front with Demosthenes' men at the rear. The hoplites were on the outside and the baggage handlers and general mass of the army in the centre of the square.[306] The Athenian troops reached the river Anapus where they routed the Syracusan detachment guarding it. Crossing the river, the Athenians advanced onward, whilst the Syracusans fortified a pass called the Acraean cliff which lay ahead of them. When the Athenians attempted to transverse the Acraean cliff the Syracusans and their allies launched volley after volley of javelins from both sides and forced the Athenians back. Whenever the Athenians tried to advance, they were attacked from every side.

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[306] Thuc. 7.78.2

Nicias and Demosthenes decided to turn around under cover of darkness and head towards the sea, in the opposite direction to the port guarded by the Syracusans. This would take the army toward the other side of Sicily towards Camarina, Gela, and away from Catana. This was a fateful decision. Whilst marching at night, the two sections of the army got separated, with Nicias' troops keeping together and marching ahead, whereas Demosthenes' troops got separated and marched in some disorder.[307] The next morning when the Syracusans found the Athenians had gone, they accused Gylippus of deliberately letting them escape and quickly hurried after them. They quickly caught up with Demosthenes' troops and attacked them at once. The Syracusans surrounded them and forced a surrender of all 6000 men under Demosthenes' command. The prisoners were forced to give up all the money in their possession, which they threw into the hollows of shields, filling four of them.[308] Kallet has estimated that this would total somewhere between 10 and 12 talents of silver:[309] which is not much at all for 6000 men and highlights the bedraggled state of the Athenians at this stage. The next day the Syracusans caught up with Nicias' men and invited them to surrender. Nicias sent a herald promising that in return for letting them go, the Athenians would pay back all the money Syracuse had spent on the war, offering hostages to guarantee payment. Gylippus and the Syracusans refused and continued to attack.[310] The next day Nicias led his army on to its final destruction. Pressing on to the river Assinarus the Athenians attempted to cross and at this point all discipline broke down. As the enemy continued to attack the men rushed to the water, wanting to cross first. In the stampede many were trampled underfoot, some were killed by their own spears and others still were swept away with their baggage. Syracusan troops stationed themselves on the opposite steep bank to hurl spears down at the Athenians and the Peloponnesians finally came down into the river and slaughtered the Athenian troops floundering in the water.[311] Nicias surrendered himself to Gylippus, but Thucydides clearly states that there were many Athenians who escaped and found refuge in Catana.[312] Many of these men undoubtedly found their way eventually back to Athens, which is why we have to take Thucydides' work at face value. There would have been survivors living in Athens who would have read his *Histories* and pointed out untruths and inconsistencies.

Against the wishes of Gylippus, Nicias and Demosthenes were put to death. Thucydides states that some Syracusans were afraid that Nicias would reveal he was in contact with a fifth column within the city and persuaded the allies to execute him. Plutarch reports a different version of events, as recorded by Timaeus, which has Hermocrates sending a warning to Nicias and

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[307] Thuc. 7.80.4

[308] Thuc. 7.82.3

[309] Kallet (2001) 175

[310] Thuc. 7.83.3

[311] Thuc. 7.84.4-5

[312] Thuc. 7.85.4

Demosthenes informing them of their sentence with the result that they subsequently committed suicide with the connivance of one of the guards.[313] Thucydides puts the total number of Athenians taken prisoner as 7000 and, after enduring months of suffering imprisoned in the stone quarries, they were eventually sold into slavery.[314] The number of Athenians killed during the campaign is inestimable. Thucydides states that in the final battle "a considerable part of the army were killed outright, since this had been a very great slaughter – greater than any that took place in this war."[315]

In one of his most notorious and much analysed remarks, Thucydides opines that Nicias was "a man who, of all the Hellenes in my time, least deserved to come to such a miserable end…".[316] As Dover points out anyone reading the *Histories* up to this point is hardly likely to have formed a favourable view of Nicias.[317] What Thucydides means here, without the irony which some commentators have detected, is that Nicias did not deserve the great misfortune of being executed in cold blood by the enemy to whom he had surrendered.[318] Hornblower puts it succinctly when he explains that it is the manner of his death that Thucydides finds deplorable,[319] irrespective of his conduct during the expedition. Paraphrasing Thucydides' line, however, Nicias can also be seen as the man who least deserved to lead an expedition such as was launched by the Athenians. A failure of military leadership on his part and an unfathomable lack of judgement on the part of the Assembly in entrusting him with this venture and subsequently keeping him in command when it became clear that both his sickness and ineptitude were imperilled the Expedition condemned the Athenians to failure. Pausanias states that Nicias' name was omitted from the Athenian casualty lists on the grounds that he had surrendered of his own free will rather than fighting on.[320] Although Nicias' reputation was rehabilitated somewhat in the fourth century, Pausanias' comment shows that the Athenians at the time put the blame squarely on him.

8.2.2.8 Conclusion

An analysis of Books Six and Seven has brought many of the strands which contributed to the failure of the Expedition into sharp relief. Although the Expedition did not get off to the most auspicious of starts, and, as has already been shown, was damaged by divisions and tensions

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[313] Plut. *Nic.* 28

[314] Thuc. 7.86-7

[315] Thuc. 7.85.4

[316] Thuc. 7.86.5

[317] *HCT* 4.462

[318] *HCT* 4.462-3

[319] Hornblower, *Comm. on Thuc.* 3. 742

[320] Paus. i.29.3

before it started, as well as by events in Athens, a review of the dynamics of the campaign has highlighted many faults which contributed to its downfall.

It has been shown that in the headlong rush to invade Sicily a number of planning assumptions were made which proved to be incorrect and adversely impacted upon the Expedition. Local politics in Sicily was severely misjudged and the Athenians had expected a number of Italian and Sicilian cities to ally with their forces and provide reinforcements and aid. When this support did not materialise, the Athenians found themselves at a disadvantage. It had been presumed that Rhegium (a previous ally of Athens), Himera (the only Hellenic city in northern Sicily), and Croton would offer support to the Athenian forces, but this never materialised, possibly as a result of the memory of high-handedness on the part of the Athenians during the previous expedition of 427-4, and the Athenians found themselves deprived of much need support.

In addition, during the debate in Athens Nicias made reference to the possibility that the Egestans would be unable to finance the Expedition as they had promised, and Alcibiades drew attention to the fact that Syracuse was split by political division. Both of these claims were correct, although it is impossible to say whether they were prescient comments actually made by the two generals at the time or simply the product of artistic licence on Thucydides' part. The promised Egestan funding never materialised and, as has been shown, problems of finance and resourcing severely impacted the Expedition. In addition, although Thucydides is at pains to highlight the fragmented nature of Sicilian politics, this was never satisfactorily exploited by the Athenians.

Inadequate resourcing is a key theme and it is clear throughout that, in the haste to convene the fleet, resourcing and planning has not been adequate. Too much reliance was placed on resources being able to be sourced in Sicily and, when the Sicilian cities failed to throw in their lot with the Athenians, the inadequacy of this policy was laid bare and Nicias was unable to maintain clear supply lines throughout the expedition: the result was that the Athenians eventually ran out of food.

Thucydides also stresses the difference in opinion between the three generals regarding strategy upon arrival in Sicily and in response to finding that the Egestan money did not exist. This again highlights the flaw in having a split command and also draws attention to the fact the wrong strategy was chosen. Throughout Books Six and Seven Thucydides repeatedly reminds us that, had Lamachus' proposal of a direct assault on Syracuse been adopted, then the outcome of the Expedition could have been very different. An immediate attack would have badly discountenanced the unprepared and divided Syracusans and made it much more likely that other Sicilian cities would have then sided with Athens.

The removal of Alcibiades is a key juncture in the Expedition, and Thucydides' portrayal of events leads to the suggestion that, had the Athenians not removed him, he could have led the

Expedition to a very different outcome.   Notwithstanding the two different versions of Alcibiades which Thucydides portrays (in Book Two and Book Six), the audience would have been well aware of his exploits and achievements following his return from exile in 407, and the message this gives about military competence is in stark contrast to the weaknesses of Nicias, the man who was left in command after Alcibiades' departure. Nicias' defeatist mindset and strategic passivity are brought to the forefront following the removal of Alcibiades and the death of Lamachus. The failure to follow up victories, the failure to capture the Olympieum Treasury, the failure to prevent the completion of the Syracusan counter wall and the move to Plemmyrum all stand out when compared with the achievements of Gylippus. Above all there is the fact that Nicias had the opportunity to forestall Gylippus' arrival in Sicily and squandered it.

Finally, in the battle in the Great Harbour Nicias' passivity and lack of tactical acumen is exemplified when he fails to adapt the Athenian tactics to the conditions of the harbour and this resulted in the loss of the entire fleet.

In spite of all these failures, however, it is clear that the Athenians had the means and opportunity to defeat Syracuse and make the Expedition a success. Indeed, in Book Six Thucydides depicts several occasions where the Athenians have the Syracusans on their knees, metaphorically speaking, only to fail to deliver the killer blow. It was only when Gylippus arrives on the scene and demonstrates the leadership which Nicias sorely lacked that the tide turned in favour of the Syracusans. The failure to deliver a killer blow, however, is key to the failure of the Expedition, and this analysis has highlighted the lack of Athenian cavalry as a major factor which prevented the Athenians delivering a *coup de grâce*. This now needs further analysis.

Chapter Nine - Cavalry in the Athenian Expedition

9.1   Introduction

When the Athenian Expedition set out from the Piraeus with great fanfare in the summer of 415 the fleet contained a single horse-transport carrying thirty horses. Thucydides reports this as a matter of fact and does not pass any judgement. The transport is listed as part of the inventory of what Warner translates as the Athenians' "Great Armament"[1] which finally crossed from Corcyra to Sicily in a fleet of 134 ships. The horse transport appears last and almost seems to be an add-on or afterthought, and the thirty horses seem strikingly few when contrasted to the many thousands of men. It may be reading too much into the text to construe the way this is presented as an implicit comment on Thucydides' part, but, as the account of the downfall of the Expedition unfolds, it becomes abundantly clear that the lack of calvary in the Athenian forces is a key factor in their defeat. Indeed, Donald Kagan remarks that "Nicias' great failure was not in wasting time either in the summer of 415 or the winter of 415/414, but in failing to provide cavalry for the Athenians whenever they chose to fight and besiege Syracuse".[2] Kagan, however, fails to provide an analysis of why Nicias, and indeed the Athenian Assembly, chose to neglect cavalry warfare. A much closer analysis of how the lack of substantial cavalry forces impacted the Expedition is necessary to assess whether Kagan is correct and how this situation was allowed to come about.

9.2   Athens' Tactical Disadvantage

By 415 cavalry was a mainstay of Syracusan warfare and before the first battle at Syracuse the Syracusans had "at least" 1200 cavalry in their ranks.[3] One of the main reasons for the importance of the cavalry to the Syracusans was its remarkable capacity to make direct attacks on the left wing of closed infantry lines. During his first successful assault against the Athenians, Gylippus deployed the Syracusan cavalry against the Athenian left flank and successfully routed it. This victory enabled the rest of the Syracusan army to drive the Athenians back behind their fortifications, thereby allowing the Syracusans to complete the building of their counter wall and prevent the Athenian circumvallation of the city (see Map 6 above).[4] In this instance there was no Athenian cavalry to drive the Syracusan cavalry off the battlefield, and the Syracusan cavalry were able to deploy their tactics unhindered and to great effect. Indeed, the importance of this event was later underlined when Nicias drew attention to it in his letter to the Athenians of 414 asking to be relieved of command.[5]

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[1] Thuc. 6.43

[2] Kagan (1981) 241-2

[3] Thuc. 6.67.2

[4] Thuc. 7.6.2-3

[5] Thuc. 7.11.2

In the winter of 415/14, after the Athenian army had faced constant harassment from Syracusan horsemen, Nicias finally requested cavalry forces and the Athenians duly sent 250 horsemen and thirty mounted archers as reinforcements in the spring of 414.[6] The horsemen brought all their equipment with them; but no horses were sent and it seems that the Athenians expected to procure horses locally.[7] Later that year, 400 horses were brought into the Athenian camp from Segesta and other Sicilian allies and eventually the Athenian cavalry force on Sicily numbered 650 horsemen.[8] There was evidently a growing awareness among the Athenians of the problems that a deficiency in cavalry was posing, but even so the Athenians still only had just over half as many horsemen as the Syracusans had at the start of the Expedition. It is true that Diodorus claims that a further 800 Campanian cavalry were hired by Sicilian Chalcidians for the Athenians during the Expedition,[9] but Thucydides makes no mention of these troops. Although it is possible that he was unaware of them, it is more likely either that they arrived too late to take part in the fighting (and were therefore ignored by Thucydides) or that Diodorus is simply wrong.

The cavalry forces newly arrived from Athens were immediately put to work and marched up to Syce, a plateau to the northwest of Syracuse, where together with a hoplite unit they routed a Syracusan cavalry unit.[10] This illustrates the effectiveness of cavalry forces when working in conjunction with infantry troops, but even following the reinforcements of 414, the ratio in the Athenian forces was 16:1 in favour of hoplites,[11] demonstrating an over-reliance on the infantry. In spite of the victory at Syce, however, the Syracusan cavalry went on to play a key role in further engagements between the two forces. In 413, after the night attack at Epipolae, the Syracusan cavalry harassed the retreating force led by Nicias and Demosthenes by constant attacks and missile fire.[12] Later, when the Athenians set out to reach Catana across land following their defeat in the harbour, they were repeatedly harassed by the Syracusan cavalry acting in conjunction with light-armed javelin-men.[13] When the two parts of the Athenian army became separated, it was the Syracusan cavalry that surrounded Demosthenes' group with the result that, harried by continuous missile attacks, it was forced to surrender.[14] Following this, the Syracusan cavalry then helped to drive Nicias' group to its bloody defeat at the river Assinarus.

There is no mention of Athenian cavalry in Thucydides' depiction of the retreat overland following the defeat in the Great Harbour, other than the horseman Nicias was permitted to send to verify

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[6] Thuc. 6.71.2; 6.94.4

[7] Thuc. 6.94.4

[8] Thuc. 6.98.4

[9] Diod. Sic. 13.44.1-2

[10] Thuc. 6.98.2

[11] Spence (1993) 174-5 – corresponding figures are not available for the Syracusan forces.

[12] Thuc. 7.44.8; Koolen (2013) 8

[13] Thuc. 7.78.3,6

[14] Thuc. 7.81.2

the surrender of Demosthenes,[15] so it must be presumed the that the remaining Athenian cavalry played no significant part during the retreat. We do know from other authors that some cavalrymen and their horses survived the Expedition (see section 9.8 below), but we must assume that they were not numerous enough to prevent the harrying by Syracusan cavalry and light-armed troops during the retreat.

Thucydides uses other examples to reinforce the point that not having the means to repel cavalry was a serious strategic miscalculation. On first arrival in Sicily the Athenians made a raid on Syracusan territory but lost a few stragglers from their light troops when the Syracusan cavalry turned up.[16]

Most crucial, however, was the victorious Athenian attack against Syracuse in 415, when the Syracusan cavalry stopped the Athenian hoplites pursuing the fleeing Syracusan army:[17] this prevented a Syracusan defeat from turning into a devastating rout that could well have ended the campaign there and then with an Athenian victory. Had the Athenians possessed horses at this juncture they could have nullified the Syracusan cavalry, or at least held them up whilst their hoplites pursed the fleeing Syracusan troops.

In addition, the skirmish outside the walls of Syracuse which saw the death of Lamachus (as Thucydides narrates it) was as a result of an action by the Syracusan cavalry which again prevented an Athenian success becoming a decisive victory.[18]

The successful use of Syracusan cavalry from Olympieium to prevent Athenian foraging will be examined below, and, in addition to this, the use of cavalry was key when the Syracusans pressed home their advantage as the Athenians faced defeat. When the Syracusans made a joint land and sea attack on the Athenians in 413 the cavalry was instrumental in forcing back the Athenian hoplites as the Syracusans attacked the Athenian fortifications, so much so that a trophy was erected to commemorate it.[19]

The Greek author Polyænus, who wrote on military strategy some 700 years later, does make the assertion that Nicias used caltrops (wooden spikes fixed into the ground) to great effect, routing the Syracusan cavalry and their commander Ekphantos at the battle by the Olympieium,[20] but this can be discounted. As Dover points out, Thucydides attaches such importance to the Syracusan cavalry that he could not have easily remained silent and passed over such an effective counter-measure.[21] Dover argues that Polyænus' assertion can be traced

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[15] Thuc. 7.83.1

[16] Thuc. 6.52.1-2

[17] Thuc. 6.70.3

[18] Thuc. 6.101.6

[19] Thuc. 7.51 and 54

[20] Polyænus, *Strat.* 1.39.2

[21] *HCT* 4. 346

back, via the fifth/fourth century Syracusan historian Philistos, to a contemporary rumour of a type that people at war readily believe, excusing their own failure (as the battle at the Olympieium was to the Syracusans)[22] by attributing to the enemy the use of an unexpected weapon.[23]

The history of the Expedition thus makes it abundantly clear that the inability of the Athenians to counter the Syracusan cavalry was a severe military limitation.

9.3   The Development of Syracusan Cavalry

The success with which the Syracusans deployed their cavalry against the Athenians makes it clear that they had developed and enhanced their tactics since the Greek Sicilian colonies had been settled a few hundred years earlier (see Chapter 6).

Some of the tactics utilised by the Syracusan cavalry, as detailed by Thucydides, resemble the tactics Arrian ascribes to the Numidians and Celtiberians, whose horsemen also attacked closed lines or marching hoplites by quickly riding to and fro whilst hurling javelins.[24]   During the retreat following the defeat in the Great Harbour Thucydides describes how the Syracusan cavalry harried the fleeing Athenians:

> Meanwhile the Syracusans went on and fortified the pass that lay ahead of them. It was a place where there was a steep hill with a rocky ravine at each side of it, and it was called the Acraean cliff.

> Next day the Athenians went forward, and the cavalry and javelin throwers of the Syracusans and their allies came up in great numbers from both sides, hampering their march with volleys of javelins and cavalry charges on their flanks.[25]

Admittedly Arrian is writing over 500 years after the Expedition, but the tactics he describes are recognisable in the Syracusan tactics used during the Athenian invasion of 415: the Syracusans had indeed used foreign ideas to develop and improve their cavalry tactics. Appian states that "the Numidians practice themselves in throwing the javelin and attack and flight",[26] and the methods employed by the Syracusans here seem very similar. Koolen has argued that it is likely that the Syracusans had more or less adopted this Numidian mode of combat as they had been enemies of the Carthaginians for so long.[27] Xenophon describes the Syracusans using the same tactics against a Theban army in 369, [28] and lays stress on the riders' equestrian skills.

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[22] Thuc. 6.70.2

[23] *HCT* 4. 346

[24] Arr. *Tact.* 40

[25] Thuc. 7.78.5-6

[26] App. *Pun.* 2.6

[27] Koolen (2012) 91

[28] Xen. *Hell.* 7.1.21

(Interestingly the Syracusan force on this occasion also included Celtic and Iberian light-armed troops.)

Strabo attests to other Iberian tactics such as training horses to climb mountains and to kneel down on a word of command.[29] Koolen argues these were likely to have been adopted by Sicilian cavalry,[30] but they are not mentioned directly by Thucydides during his account of the Sicilian Expedition.

9.4   Athenian Awareness of Syracusan Cavalry

Further evidence for the strength of Syracusan cavalry, and of how the Athenians should have been aware of the threat it posed, comes from Herodotus' account of a Spartan-Athenian embassy sent to the Syracusan tyrant Gelon in anticipation of Xerxes' invasion of Greece in 480.[31] Although Gelon offered a force including 2,000 cavalry and 2,000 light horsemen to assist the Greeks, his offer was eventually rebuffed as he insisted on supreme command of all Greek forces.[32] One of the attractions to the Greeks of an alliance with the Syracusans, as Koolen infers from the sources, was their large and well-trained cavalry and their units of *hamippoi*, foot soldiers who were able to fight alongside the lines of cavalry in its attacks on enemy or infantry.[33] The use of *hamippoi* was an Iberian tactic and is a further illustration of the impact of foreign influences upon Syracusan cavalry tactics. It is impossible to say how detailed a knowledge of Herodotus' work the Athenian Assembly members had in 415, but it is reasonable to suppose that something of the circumstances was remembered. It was a well-known fact that, as things turned out, the fighting against Xerxes in 480 coincided with a Carthaginian invasion of Sicily: one view, indeed, was that it was the prospect of this invasion, not an argument about overall command, that dissuaded Gelon from answering the mainland Greeks' plea for help. The remarkable synchronism of Gelon's crucial victory over Carthage at Himera and the Greeks' victory over Xerxes at Salamis[34] ought to have ensured that the story of the embassy to Gelon and the resources that he might have supplied (but fortunately for himself and for Sicily did not) remained familiar.

But, whether or not that was the case, the Athenians were given clear notice of the threat posed by Syracusan cavalry in Nicias' speech to the Assembly in 415.[35] In that speech Thucydides has him say that "the greatest advantage they [the Syracusans] have over us is in the number of their

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[29] Strabo 3.4.15

[30] Koolen (2013) 8

[31] Hdt. 7.158-60

[32] Hdt. 7.158-60

[33] Koolen (2013) 9

[34] Hdt. 7.166

[35] Thuc. 6.20.4

horses" [36] and warn that "we [the Athenians] must not to be restricted in our movements by the numbers of their cavalry" (καὶ μὴ ὑπὸ ἱππέων πολλῶν εἴργεσθαι τῆς γῆς).[37] Although a sceptic may point out that Thucydides is writing retrospectively and knows how the Expedition unfolded, there is no reason not to take Thucydides at his word here. We should accept that Nicias actually raised the point at this Assembly and not suppose that the historian is putting his own analysis of the outcome into Nicias' mouth to turn him into a 'tragic warner'. Thucydides' audience would have contained many who were present at this Assembly and would be able to remember what Nicias said. That is not to say that Thucydides is beyond embellishing some of Nicias' words to force home a point: Hornblower has pointed out the recurrence in Thucydides of the verb εἴργω (hinder, prevent, restrict) in both Nicias' speech at the Athenian Assembly and in his own narrative of the Athenian attack on Syracuse at 6.70.[38] During the campaign the Syracusans used their cavalry to hinder the Athenian infantry numerous times, always to great effect, but perhaps most notably during the Athenian attack against Syracuse in 415 which was mentioned above in section 9.2. Of the inability of the Athenians to follow up their victory Thucydides says: "The Athenians did not pursue them far. They were prevented from doing so by the numbers of still undefeated Syracusan cavalry: καὶ ἐπὶ πολὺ μὲν οὐκ ἐδίωξαν οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι (οἱ γὰρ ἱππῆς τῶν Συρακοσίω πολλοὶ ὄντες καὶ ἁήσσητοι εἶργον…)".[39]

Through thematic correlation and linguistic repetition Nicias' words to the Assembly at 6.21 can be seen to foreshadow events to come. In short, Thucydides uses Nicias' speech to highlight the disastrous impact that not being able to counter the Syracusan cavalry had on the Athenians. In addition, in his depiction of the capture and fortification of Plemmyrium by the Athenians, Thucydides points out that, as a result of this victory, the Syracusans stationed one third of their cavalry at the village of Olympieium to prevent foraging by the Athenians.[40] Throughout Book Seven, Thucydides' conjunction of Olympieium and cavalry always goes with Syracusan success against foragers,[41] and this serves to highlight how the Syracusan cavalry continued to be an obstacle to Athenian success and how they prevented the Athenian consolidating their advantage. This prevention of Athenian victory by the cavalry is highlighted again by the episode in 415 where the Athenians deceived the Syracusans into setting out to make an attack on Catana thus allowing the Athenians to make an attack on Syracuse relatively unopposed. The Athenians selected a position for battle where the Syracusan cavalry would have the least chance of doing them damage. Following the Athenian victory on the battlefield, however, the Syracusan cavalry prevented the Athenian hoplites from following up their success and achieving

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[36] Thuc. 6.20.4

[37] Thuc. 6.21.1

[38] Hornblower (2011) 481

[39] Thuc. 6.70.3.

[40] Thuc. 7.4.6

[41] Thuc. 7.13.2; 37.3; 42.6

total victory.[42] Thucydides shows that the Athenians could win a victory on a prepared battlefield, but they would never be able to exploit such a victory because that would always involve going into the enemy's space which was protected by their cavalry. This is in stark contrast to the Syracusans following up their victory in the Great Harbour by using cavalry to harass and ultimately destroy the Athenian forces retreating over land.

In spite of Nicias' prescient assessments, however, the Athenians took no adequate steps to ensure that the Expedition either took with it and/or was guaranteed to be able to source locally a sufficiently large cavalry force to have a chance of countering the threat. The upshot was that Nicias' prediction of the Athenians being restricted by the Syracusan cavalry came true and the question of why the Athenians allowed this to happen needs to be examined.

Although Thucydides depicts Nicias as having foreseen that a lack of cavalry would present severe limitation on the Athenians, he did not in the end ask for any cavalry forces. Put on the spot by a request to spell out what forces were needed, he spoke only of hoplites (and hoplite-transport ships), archers and slingers "and anything else that seemed necessary".[43] Given that the generals heading up the campaign did not ask for cavalry forces it is not surprising that the Assembly did not send any. This consideration however, only makes the lack of cavalry more conspicuous. Why did Nicias not ask for cavalry after he had previously identified the need for them?

Rood has advanced the argument that any cavalry possessed by the Athenians was useless due to the difficulties involved in transporting horses overseas,[44] and by implication suggests that the reason the Athenians did not send cavalry to Sicily was that the distances concerned made it too difficult and risky a venture. But Thucydides cites examples of Pericles sending horses over sea as part of military expeditions,[45] and Roberts has shown that, although it was difficult to transport horses by sea, it was done regularly.[46] Although only thirty horses were brought from Athens to Sicily in 415, it is clear that the Athenians had the ability to transport many more: what they lacked, apparently, was the inclination. In the first year of the Peloponnesian War the Athenians had selected ten old triremes and converted them into horse carriers (ἱππαγωγοί) – see figure 5 below. This conversion was achieved by dismantling the rowing seats of the lower two tiers of oarsmen and sealing up the oar ports, which left an enclosed space of around 80 feet long by 16 feet wide. This empty hold would now accommodate 30 horses with 15 tethered along either side spaced around 5 feet apart. Storage spaces were also included for food and water, as well arms and equipment for the cavalrymen. The sterns of the vessels were fitted with removeable

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[42] Thuc. 6.64-66

[43] Thuc. 6.25

[44] Rood (1998) 166

[45] Thuc. 2.56.2 (300 cavalry), 4.42.1 (200 cavalry)

[46] Roberts (2017) 190

sections and gangways so that horses could be easily led or ridden out on to the beach when the ships came into shore.[47] These ships were a major innovation in naval architecture and the names they were given on commission, such as Hippodromia (ἱππόδρομος - horse race), Hipparche (Ἱππαρχη - queen of horses) and Hippocampe (ἱππόκαμπος - a mythical monster half horse and half fish), suggest that in the two decades prior to the expedition the Athenians fully intended to start sending their cavalry to war zones overseas.[48] Although it is not known how many of these horse carriers were still in active service in 415, the fact that only one was sent to Sicily suggests that, despite Nicias' warnings, the need for cavalry was overlooked or that it was deemed too difficult to send more given the distance to Sicily. If this is true, then the Athenians had clearly forgotten that Datis had managed to bring his horse carriers all the way from Cilicia to Marathon.[49]
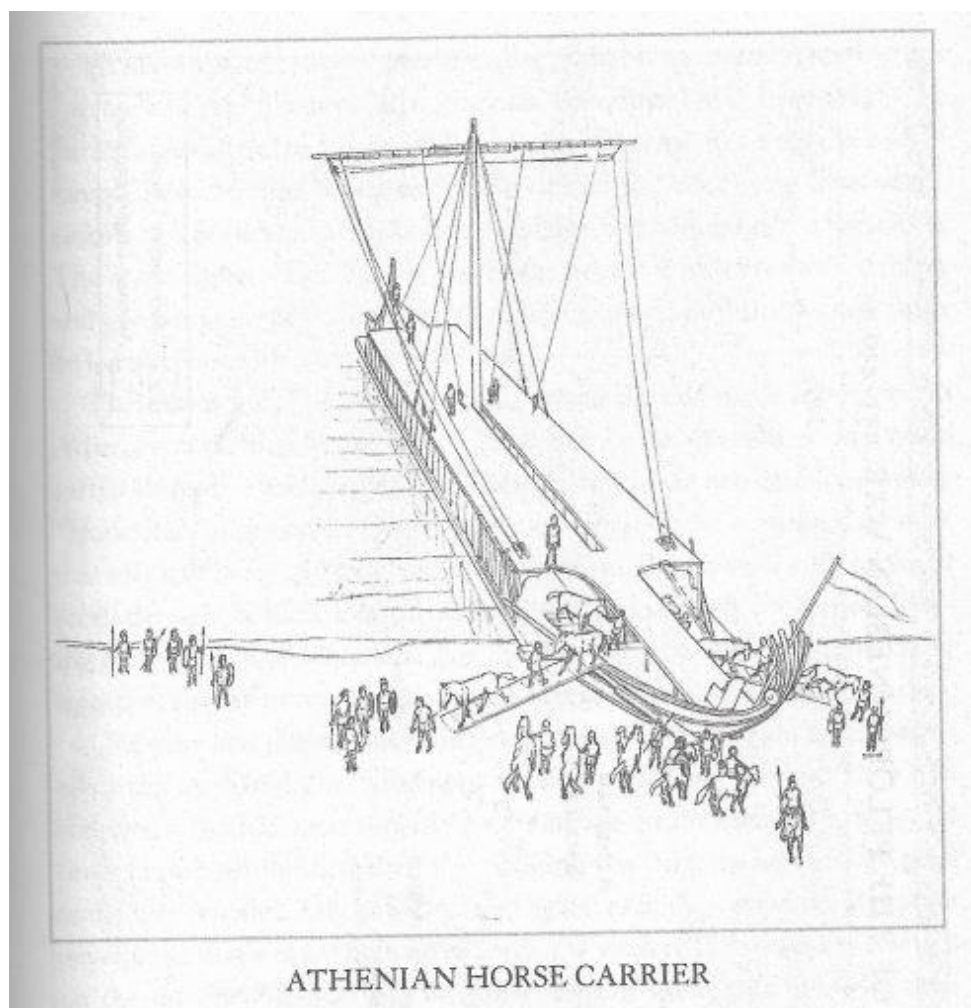

ATHENIAN HORSE CARRIER

Fig 5: Hale (2009) 149

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[47] Hale (2009) 149-151

[48] Hale (2009) 151

[49] Hdt. 6.95; 6.101

So, it can be seen that transporting horses was possible and had been done previously. But, even if the Athenians had decided that transporting a large number of horses over such a distance was not something they wished to attempt, they could still have despatched Athenian cavalrymen and looked to secure horses for them as soon as they reached Sicily. The original invasion force as detailed by Thucydides in his 'Great Armament'[50] did not, however, include any cavalrymen. Thirty horses were sent on one horse carrier,[51] but without mounts it must be presumed the horses were intended for another purpose than cavalry, most likely to be used by heralds for Alcibiades' diplomatic missions. Some horses were eventually procured from Egesta and elsewhere,[52] but this was after the deficiency in cavalry had already resulted in set-backs on the battlefield and was clearly preventing the Athenians from achieving their strategic aims. If the Athenians were going to solve their cavalry deficit by local procurement, they needed to have done it from the outset. But there is no evidence that they attempted to do so or that the original invasion force included cavalrymen without mounts. An alternative approach would have been to forget about *Athenian* cavalrymen and make a concerted effort on arrival to secure independent cavalry units from Sicilian and Sicel allies. But there is no evidence in Thucydides or any other source that they attempted to do that either. Prior to embarking on the Expedition, the Athenians apparently did not address the cavalry issue at all.

9.5   Athenian Cavalry Developments in the Fifth Century

Although the Athenian Cavalry remained numerically and tactically inferior to Syracusan Cavalry, the fifth century had seen advances in cavalry warfare in Athens that make their omission from the Expedition puzzling. In Pericles' time, a decision was made to give the cavalry much more prominence: sometime between 445 and 431 BC the Athenian cavalry was increased in size from 300 to 1200, a figure that was made up of 1000 cavalrymen and 200 mounted archers.[53] The reasons for this increase have been debated by scholars and two broad answers have been suggested.

The first argument runs that the increase in the size of the Athenian cavalry was prompted by the invasion of Attica by Pleistoanax in 446 and by the hostility of Boeotia. Bugh points out that the Athenians may have been forced to acknowledge that their 300 cavalrymen could not possibly stop a serious Spartan invasion, particularly if it was supported by Boeotian cavalry,[54] and in a

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[50] Thuc. 6.43

[51] Thuc. 6.43

[52] Thuc. 6.98.1

[53] Bugh (1988) 75

[54] Bugh (1988) 76

1975 essay,[55] which was later further developed by Bugh, [56] Ober had already asserted that Pericles' war policy involved convincing the Athenians that the cavalry would limit the damage done to rural Attica and contended that Pericles expanded the cavalry to prevent Spartan forces having uncontested mobility in Attica. Even though any such claim by Pericles would be revealed as misleading by the second year of the war, as Spartan forces ravaged Attica, it would have appeared plausible prior to the Spartan incursions and may well have persuaded the Athenians to increase the size of their cavalry. In fact Pericles' strategy of temporarily abandoning Attica to the invading Spartan forces made an increase in the size of the cavalry inevitable: the policy would have been politically insupportable without the possibility of saying that at least some sort of armed response was being offered, and that would have been impossible without establishing an enhanced cavalry. In Bugh's development of Ober's argument, he contends that Pericles intended that the enhanced cavalry force was not just for the defence of Attica, but to be used in offensive expeditions against Athens' hostile neighbours.[57]

The second explanation proposed for the increase in the size of the Athenian cavalry is based on the fact that Pericles needed aristocratic support (or at least neutrality) for his reforms and maintains that the expansion of the cavalry was how he went about this.   Bugh contends that Pericles pushed expansion of the cavalry as part of a policy of inclusion that invited the aristocracy to participate in the dividends of empire. Pericles himself had aristocratic heritage and had his two sons, Paralos and Xanthippos, taught to be the foremost *hippeis* in Athens, according to Plato.[58] At this time Pericles was involved in a power struggle with Thucydides, son of Melesias, and it has been suggested that, by increasing the size of cavalry, Pericles garnered aristocratic support for himself, not only by the increase in the size of the corps but also by virtue of the consequent multiplication of command positions: for, as a result, a large number of the positions of power which were filled by direct election now became available to the aristocracy.[59] An alternative viewpoint is that Pericles' enhancements of the cavalry were an attempt at reconciliation with the aristocracy after the ostracism of Thucydides son of Melesias in 444. Plutarch claims that as a result of the ostracism of Thucydides Pericles effected the dissolution of the opposing *hetaireiai* (the groupings that had been organised against him) and removed political differences by merging them into one. As a result, the city became united under Pericles' leadership and he now personally controlled all issues in which the authority of Athens was involved, including the army.[60]   The increase in the size of the cavalry may well have been a part

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[55] Reprinted in Ober (1999) 72-85

[56] Bugh (1988) 80

[57] Bugh (1988) 80

[58] Pl. *Meno* 94B

[59] Bugh (1988) 77

[60] Plut. *Per.* 14.2-15.1

of that process and, although it seems clear that the military considerations of countering a prospective cavalry incursion from Boeotia was almost certainly the factor which initally prompted the increase of the size of the Athenian cavalry, the prospect of Pericles manipulating the policy to draw aristocrats to his cause cannot be discounted.

Whether it was a result of the fear of being vulnerable to Boeotian cavalry leading to contingency planning for a future conflict with the Spartans or a by-product of the conflict between Pericles and Thucydides, son of Melesias or a combination of the two, it is clear that by the 430s the cavalry had increased markedly in size and was held in high regard by the Athenians.

In this context it is interesting that the Panathenaic cavalcade on the outer wall of the cella of the Parthenon glorifies horsemen (figure 6). These horsemen have long been a subject of scholarly

Figure 6: Parthenon Frieze, West Slab IV 7-8 (Bugh (1988) 269)

debate. Some, following Michaelis,[61] see them as part of an idealised and artistic representation, whereas Boardman discerns a commemoration of the 192 hoplites who died at Marathon, raised in status to heroes by their placement on horseback.[62] For Osborne they promote the values of the *polis* and are a depiction of how Athenian males liked to think of themselves,[63] while Jenkins has argued that the frieze represents the *polis* itself and epitomises the physical city.[64] But Pollitt took a different view and saw them as a literal representation of Pericles' horsemen and an

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[61] Michaelis (1871) 214-5

[62] Boardman (1977)

[63] Osborne (1987) 103-4

[64] Jenkins (2021) 147-9

advertisement of Pericles' expansion of the Athenian cavalry.[65] Bugh raises the same possibility,[66] but, given that the Parthenon was completed around 440 BC, only four years after the ostracism of Thucydides (albeit with work on the decorations going on until around 432), it seems more likely that the frieze was originally intended to glorify the pre-reform corps of 300 cavalrymen. [67]

Whatever the horsemen in the frieze are exactly intended to represent, it is clear that Athens had acquired a decently substantial cavalry establishment by 431, and the question about how this might have contributed to the Sicilian project in 415 is a significant one. An examination of the history of its use and performance since 431 may cast light on the Athenians' failure to deploy it in 415.

In the period 431- 416 the Athenians deployed cavalry on a number of occasions, both in defence of Attica and in expeditions sent elsewhere, whether in retaliation for the Spartan invasions of Attica[68] or for other reasons. Apart from at Megara and Delium in 424, the numbers involved were fairly small (300 or fewer) and, when their actions are recorded at all, which in many cases they are not,[69] their achievements were mixed. They had some success in containing light-armed troops during Spartan invasions of Attica,[70] though defeats are also recorded in this context in the first year of the war,[71] in one case when hoplites came to support Boeotian cavalry against which they had initially been holding their own. Furthermore, a force of 200 sent as part of a raid-in-force of Corinthian territory in 425 helped to bring a lengthy hoplite battle to a victorious conclusion. The force sent by Athens on this occasion consisted of 80 ships, 2000 hoplites and 200 cavalry who were sent on horse transports. [72] Although the distance to Corinth was considerably less than it was to Sicily, this episode nevertheless shows that the Athenians were capable of sending significant numbers of cavalry overseas in transports. The expedition to Corinth was not without considerable risk, however, as the landing took place at night, in order to catch the Corinthians, who were forewarned about the expedition, by surprise. The expedition landed on a beach some seven miles from Corinth and two and a quarter miles from the Isthmus and escaped initial detection. When the Corinthians finally realised the Athenians had made landfall, they sent a force to oppose them. The two armies fought to a standstill and yielded no ground for a long time, but eventually the Corinthians were finally routed

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[65] Pollitt (1997) 53

[66] Bugh (1988) 77

[67] Spence connects Pericles' reforms directly to the frieze and sets a *terminus ante-quem* of 438 (Spence (1993) 10-15, however Bugh places completion of the frieze in 440 (Bugh (1988) 77). See also Jenkins (2021) 150 for a summary of the positions.

[68] Thuc. 2.31.3; 2.56.2

[69] For example Thuc. 2.31.3; 2.56.2; 4.53.1; 5.84.1; 6.7.3; 6.31.2

[70] Thuc. 3.1.2

[71] Thuc. 2.19.2; 2.22.2

[72] Thuc. 4.42-44

as the Athenians had the advantage of the cavalry (with the Corinthians having no cavalry at all).
As Gomme points out, the success of the Athenian cavalry is rather dryly reported by Thucydides
here.[73] Aristophanes, however, celebrates this victory (and underlines the fact that the
Athenians were capable of transporting horses overseas) in *Knights* when the chorus of
cavalrymen celebrate their military success. The leader of the chorus remarks of his noble
steeds:

> We wish to praise (for praise is due) the many valiant deeds
> Of derring-do we know about, done by our noble steeds.
> Invasions they've been through with us and battles by the score;
> Yet at their prowess nautical we marvel even more…
> They leaped aboard their transport-ships just like so many men
> They took their oars as we do and they hollered 'Yo-neigh-ho!
> Lay to! Pull Harder! What's all This? Gee up there, make her go!'
> They disembarked at Corinth, where the young ones by and by
> Went hunting for some fodder when they'd dug a place to lie…[74]

Although it is uncertain to what degree the audience would have agreed with the leader of the
chorus, it is clear that, when writing these lines, Aristophanes felt that the climate of opinion in
Athens was generally favourable to the cavalry and, as Spence remarks, this is borne out by the
fact that *Knights* won first prize at the Lenaian festival in 424.[75]

Success against good quality enemy cavalry was also achieved outside Megara in 424, when
600 Athenian cavalry engaged and defeated 600 Boeotian cavalry while they were harassing
light armed troops.[76] But later the same year at Delium an Athenian cavalry contingent of
unknown but perhaps quite substantial size played no perceptible role in the main battle (perhaps
for topographical reasons) and certainly did nothing to stop a detachment of Boeotian horsemen
throwing the victorious Athenian right wing hoplites into disorder or to protect fleeing Athenian
forces from Boeotian and Locrian cavalry. [77] Also unsuccessful were the Athenian cavalry
deployed in Chalcidice in 429. Fighting alongside light armed troops, 200 Athenians were
defeated by Chalcidian cavalry and light troops.[78] No hoplites were involved at this stage, but in a
subsequent engagement the Athenian horsemen were unable to prevent Chalcidian cavalry and
light armed getting the better of Athenian hoplites: the light armed harried them with false flight

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[73] *HCT* 2.489

[74] Ar. *Eq.* 595-601

[75] Spence (1993) 212

[76] Thuc. 4.68.5

[77] Thuc. 4.96.2

[78] Thuc. 2.79

tactics and the cavalry eventually routed them. [79] Seven years later Athenian cavalry were involved in a more serious defeat at Amphipolis (which will be discussed further below in section 9.6), and the best that could be said on the 300 horsemen at Mantinea in 418 was that they did something to reduce the losses sustained by Athenian hoplites who had been surrounded by victorious enemy troops.[80]

This record shows that the Athenians considered cavalry an appropriate component for strategically defensive and offensive operations, but were inclined to send relatively modest numbers abroad except to close destinations (600 in the Megarid, maybe up to 1000 at Delium) and were only occasionally rewarded by tactically successful outcomes: indeed it is not entirely unfair to say the cavalry's greatest success was in a battle where the other side had no horsemen at all. Facing an enemy in Sicily that was strong in cavalry (and light armed troops), the Athenians might well concede that they were at a disadvantage. But their horsemen had, on occasion, performed well against more expert opponents and, in any case, their experience should have taught them that dispensing with cavalry altogether was not a viable solution. They themselves had deployed cavalry to contain the threat posed by an army invading their territory. They knew the Syracusans would do the same. And they knew that countering that response required the use of cavalry either independently or in conjunction with other types of troops. They also knew that, if it came to a major set-piece battle with the Syracusan army, cavalry had a role in defending the flanks of a hoplite array (if that could not be achieved by exploiting local topography) and in affecting the ultimate outcome when the tide of battle turned against one or the other side's infantry forces.

In short, confronting the problem of Syracusan cavalry strength by pretending the problem did not exist was an irrational response for which the Athenians had no good excuse.

Why, then, was this the response they adopted – a response in which even Nicias was complicit inasmuch as he failed to request that cavalry be part of the expeditionary force? Back in 424 the Athenian cavalry had a high profile in Athenian public consciousness (to judge from Aristophanes' *Knights*, not just in the passage alluding to the battle at Corinth mentioned above but in the whole construction of the play around a chorus of horsemen) and strategic decision-making (to judge from the comparatively large cavalry forces at Megara and Delium). Had something changed in this respect by 415? Why had Athens moved so far from employing quite big cavalry forces abroad that she now effectively decided to employ none at all?

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[79] Thuc. 2.79.6

[80] Thuc. 5.73.1

9.6   Athenian Aversion to Cavalry

In fact, Athenian aversion to the use of cavalry in 415 appears to have been well known. During the debate at Syracuse, Athenagoras is represented as saying "I know that they will not bring cavalry with them and they will find none here".[81]

It seems that something may have happened to cause the Athenian cavalry to fall from favour, with the result that they were not deployed in sufficient numbers in 415. Although Aristophanes sang the praises of the cavalry in 424, cavalrymen never have a prominent position in any of Aristophanes' plays after *Knights*. If it is the case that Aristophanes decided to pick out the cavalry in 424 because of the high esteem in which they were held by the Athenian demos, the fact they never appear prominently again suggests there had been a change in the Athenian perception of the cavalry sometime after 424 and before the Sicilian Expedition of 415. In fact, it will be shown below that some of Aristophanes' works immediately after *Knights* indicate a shift in way the cavalry were perceived. The most likely cause of this shift of public feeling is the battle of Amphipolis in 422, which ended in disaster and the death of Cleon and may have resulted in a negative perception of the cavalry.

Cleon's force at Amphipolis included 300 Athenian cavalry and 1200 hoplites.[82] No other force sent from Athens in the classical period had so many cavalry in proportion to foot soldiers.[83] The reason for Cleon taking so many cavalry is unclear and it does not seem to be strategically sound, given that a siege was anticipated. Indeed, it turned out to be disastrous. At Amphipolis the generals on both sides were initially hesitant to engage. Cleon was awaiting reinforcements from native princes but became aware of murmurings from his men reflecting on how cowardly and ignorant he was. To check these remarks, he went out to examine the position and was marching past the gates of Amphipolis when Brasidas made a sortie and routed the Athenians, killing Cleon in the process.[84] Just prior to the rout, when Cleon decided to retreat and await reinforcements, he ordered his forces to retire slowly on the left wing. Thucydides says ὡς δ᾽ αὐτῷ ἐδόκει σχολὴ γίγνεσθαι, αὐτὸς ἐπιστρέψας τὸ δεξιὸν καὶ τὰ γυμνὰ πρὸς τοὺς πολεμίους δοὺς ἀπῆγε τὴν στρατιάν ("then, thinking that he had plenty of time in hand, he personally began to lead away the right wing, making it wheel around, and so exposing its unarmed side to the enemy").[85] When the unexpected attack by Brasidas came, the right wing on which Cleon and the hoplites had been stationed stood its ground. Thucydides notes that "the left wing…immediately broke and fled".[86] MacInnes has shown that this left wing was almost

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[81] Thuc. 6.37.1

[82] Thuc. 5.2.1

[83] MacInnes (1911) 194

[84] Thuc. 5.7-12

[85] Thuc. 5.10.4

[86] Thuc. 5.10.8

certainly where the cavalry were situated and thus it was their cowardice in fleeing the battle that caused the disaster at Amphipolis.[87] Why Thucydides does not explicitly say this is not immediately clear, but it may be that his informant was one of the aristocratic cavalrymen who got away and that his own bias against Cleon kept him from moderating in a critical spirit the partisan account of his informant.[88] In any case, it is clear that after Amphipolis the Athenian democracy refrained from using the aristocratic cavalry in foreign operations, even if it was at the cost of great tactical advantage: that was certainly the case in Sicily, and it may also account for the paucity of cavalry sent to Mantinea. The only other times the Athenians used the cavalry after Amphipolis were close to home, as at Decelea, where they could be observed, or else in conjunction with a democracy such as Argos, where there were checks against the aristocratic cavalry countermanding orders.

The perception of *hippeis* in Athens was as a wealthy, aristocratic and youthful section of society,[89] and this may have led some to associate the cavalry as a whole with anti-democratic tendencies.[90] Following the disaster at Amphipolis this feeling may well have been exacerbated and mixed with accusations of pro-Spartan sympathies. Three passages in Aristophanic plays from 422-421 are of interest here. In *Wasps* (produced in 422) Aristophanes has the chorus of old men cry "there will come along a rich man, one of those who are betraying Chalcidice",[91] and Bdelycleon, an allegorical representative of young aristocratic Athens, is described as ξυνὼν Βρασίδᾳ, "in cahoots with Brasidas".[92] In Aristophanes' *Peace*, produced a year later in 421, the charge of being in league with Brasidas (ὡς φρονοί τὰ Βρασίδου) is brought by the god Hermes against any men of importance in Athens.[93] The evidence, although circumstantial, points to a fear of a pro-Spartan fifth column in Athens that consisted of the aristocrats and, by implication, the cavalry. The events of the Battle of Amphipolis in 422 served to exacerbate this feeling and this goes some way to account for the Athenian's reluctance to deploy cavalry in 415.

We also have indications that Cleon became involved in a bitter dispute with the Athenian cavalry in the early 420s. The animosity between the two parties is first noted in Aristophanes' *Acharnians*, performed at the Lenaian festival in 426, and then in *Knights*, performed in 424 at the same festival.[94] Bugh postulates that Cleon's status as a *neoploutos* trying to pass himself off as a cavalryman, along with his association with the new war tax, brought resentment among

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[87] MacInnes (1911) 194

[88] MacInnes (1911) 195

[89] Spence (1993) 191

[90] Spence (1993) 193

[91] Ar. *Vesp.* 288

[92] Ar. *Vesp.* 475

[93] Ar. *Pax* 640

[94] Bugh (1988) 107 – the chronology and details for the conflict have to be reconstructed from the scholia to the comedies. See *FGrH* 115 F94 and Connor (1968) 50-59

the aristocratic classes.[95] If this is true, it could account for the cavalry refusing to obey Cleon's orders at Amphipolis.

Bugh says MacInnes' charge of cowardice against the cavalry at Amphipolis is without merit,[96] seemingly on the grounds that Thucydides does not mention it. Given that Thucydides fails to provide any explanation for the under-provision of Athenian cavalry for the Sicilian Expedition, even though he deliberately uses Nicias and Athenagoras' comments to highlight the impact of the lack of Athenian cavalry forces, his silence on any possible charge of cowardice by the cavalry at Amphipolis cannot be taken as decisive.

Spence also says that MacInnes' theory of cavalry cowardice at Amphipolis is not proven,[97] even though it neatly fits Spence's own theory that Athenian attitudes towards the cavalry affected its use. Given the dramatic shift away from the use of cavalry after 422, however, the evidence, albeit circumstantial, would seem to suggest that Amphipolis had an effect on Athenian tactics. Aristocratic cowardice at Amphipolis and a subsequent grudge held by the demos may ultimately have stymied the Athenian forces in Sicily. The works of Aristophanes shows that there was a sudden shift in public perception of the *hippeis*, who were now seen as "in league with Brasidas", i.e. pro-Spartan. As a result, even knowing the threat posed by the Syracusan cavalry, the Assembly did not send their own cavalry to counter the enemy's most potent force, as they did not trust them.

Between 422 and 415 there are only three recorded instances of Athenian cavalry being used overseas, and none are on the scale of what was used at Amphipolis. 'Some' Athenian cavalry were deployed in Elis in 420, alongside 1,000 Argives and 1,000 Mantineans. But they saw no action, and stayed at Harpina during the Olympic festival.[98] As previously mentioned 300 Athenian cavalry were deployed in 418 at Mantinea under allied command. Twenty mounted archers were sent on the original expedition to Melos in 416[99] and, finally, Athenian cavalry (numbers not reported) were used alongside Macedonian cavalry at Methone in 416/5 to raid the territory of Perdiccas.[100] Table 9 below highlights the decline of the use of cavalry by Athenian forces after 422, compared to the number of engagements before that date.

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[95] Bugh (1988) 107-108

[96] Bugh (1988) 98

[97] Spence (1993) 214-5

[98] Thuc. 5.50.3

[99] Thuc. 5.84.1

[100] Thuc. 6.7.3

Year	No. Of Calvary Engagements	Name of Battles	Notes
432	1	Macedonia	Not mentioned by Thuc. Detail found on inscription *IG* I³ 365
431	3	Attica X2	Thuc. 2.19.2; Thuc. 2.22.2
		Megarid	Alluded to at Thuc. 2.31.3
430	3	Peloponnese	Thuc. 2.56 / Plut. *Per.* 35.1
		Potidaia / Chalkidike	Thuc. 2. 58.1 ; 6.31.2
		Megarid	Alluded to at Thuc. 2.31.3
429	2	Chalkidike	Battle of Spartolos Thuc. 2.79; Is. 5.42
		Megarid	Alluded to at Thuc. 2.31.3
428	2	Attica	Thuc 3.1.2
		Megarid	Alluded to at Thuc. 2.31.3
427	1	Megarid	Alluded to at Thuc. 2.31.3
426	1	Megarid	Alluded to at Thuc. 2.31.3
425	2	Corinth/Solygeia	Thuc 4.42-3
		Megarid	Alluded to at Thuc. 2.31.3
424	3	Kythera	Thuc 4.53.1
		Megara	Thuc. 4.68
		Delion	Thuc 4.93-4; Plut. *Alc.* 7.4; Diod. Sic. 13.69-70
423	0		
422	1	Amphipolis	Thuc. 5.2, 7-10
421	0		
420	1	Elis	Thuc. 5.50 – no action taken
419	0		
418	1	Mantineia	Thuc. 5.61-73; Diod. Sic. 13.69-70 – allied command
417	0		
416	2	Methone	Thuc. 6.7 – used with Macedonian cavalry
		Melos	Thuc. 5.84.1 – 300 mounted archers

Table 9: Athenian Cavalry Engagements and Movements Between 432 and 416 (Data derived from Spence (1993) 83 and 138)

When placed in graphical format the figures from the table do show a trend away from cavalry engagements after 422 (although admittedly using very low figured data sets).
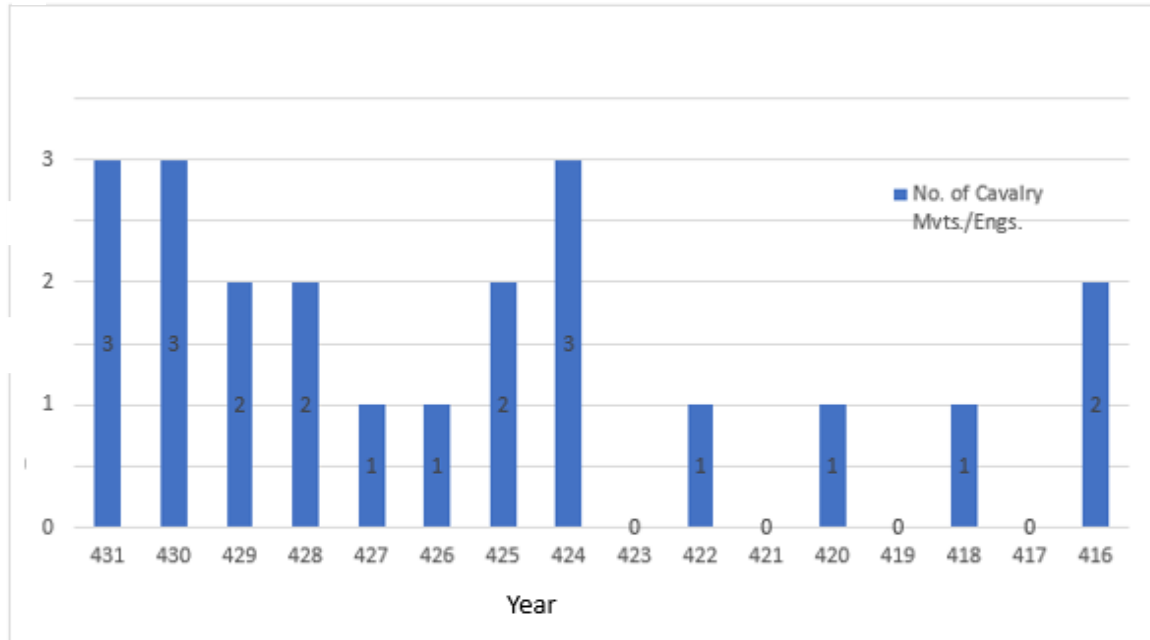
Graph 1: Athenian Cavalry Engagements and Movements 432 - 416

In the years following the Sicilian Expedition, Athenian cavalry appears to have been used extensively in offensive operations, suggesting that the Athenians had learnt their lesson. There were, for example, cavalry in Thrasyllus' expeditionary force to Anatolia in 409[101] and the table below demonstrates the extent to which the Athenians again deployed cavalry in 411-404. The table excludes the daily sorties which the cavalry undertook against Decelea between 413-404,[102] but still shows a marked upturn in cavalry operations after the Expedition, and this in spite of the preponderance of naval warfare in this period. Indeed, Xenophon states that Athens spent the substantial sum of forty talents a year on cavalry.[103] Admittedly he was writing some 50 years after the Sicilian Expedition and following much political upheaval in Athens, but this sum, coupled with evidence of the number of offensive cavalry expeditions undertaken, suggests that cavalry regained prominence and prestige within the Athenian military not long after the Sicilian Expedition, and the aversion to it in 415 can only have been a blip arising from events at Amphipolis – one that came at the worst possible time and had dire consequences. Low has argued that after 395, during the Corinthian War, the Athenians were again averse to using

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[101] Xen. *Hell.* 1.2.5. The hostility of the rich to war in the 390s (cf. Ar. *Eccl.* 197-8) may also be a factor telling against cavalry deployment.

[102] Thuc. 7.27.5

[103] Xen. *Eq. mag.* 1.19

cavalry (and indeed hostile to them as a class), primarily as the cavalry class was linked in the Athenian mind to the atrocities of the Thirty,[104] but it can now be seen that the attitude to the cavalry was a cyclical process, with their standing much reduced after the events at Amphipolis, restored after it was recognised their absence cost the Athenians dear during the Sicilian Expedition, and reduced again after the events of the Thirty.

Year	No. Of Calvary Engagements*	Name of Battles	Notes
411	1	Attica	Thuc. 8.71.2
410	1	Athens/Ionia	Diod. Sic. 13.52.1; Xen. *Hell.* 1.1.33-4
409	2	Nisaia/Kerata Ephesus/Abydos	Xen. *Hell.* 1.2. 1-17
408	2	Chalkidike/Bithynia Selymbria	Xen. *Hell.* 1.3.3-7 Xen. *Hell.* 1.3.10
407	2	Attica Ionia	Diod. Sic. 13.72.7 Xen. *Hell.* 1.4.21
406	0		
405	0		
404	4	Phyle Phyle Eleusis Mounychia	Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.2-3 Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.4-7 Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.8 Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.24

*excluding daily sorties against Dekelea which occurred 413-404 (Thuc. 7.27.5)

Table 10: Athenian Cavalry Engagements Between 411 and 404 (Data derived from Spence (1993) 84)

9.7   Decelea

By the time of the siege of Syracuse, the Athenian forces on the ground were at least calling for reinforcements in the form of cavalry. By this point, however, it was too late and the cavalry forces in Athens were all caught up in the defence of Attica from Spartan troops occupying Decelea. Following his defection to the Spartans, Alcibiades urged them to occupy Decelea, a deme in northern Attica, claiming "it is the thing of which the Athenians have always been the

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[104] Low (2002) 106

most frightened".[105] The Spartans followed Alcibiades' advice and in the spring of 413 King Agis captured Decelea and built a fort that was provocatively visible from Athens itself, some 13 miles to the south.[106] From this base the occupiers were able to control rural Attica, cut off the primary land routes for foods imports into Athens, and deprive the Athenians of the revenue from the silver mines at Laurium.
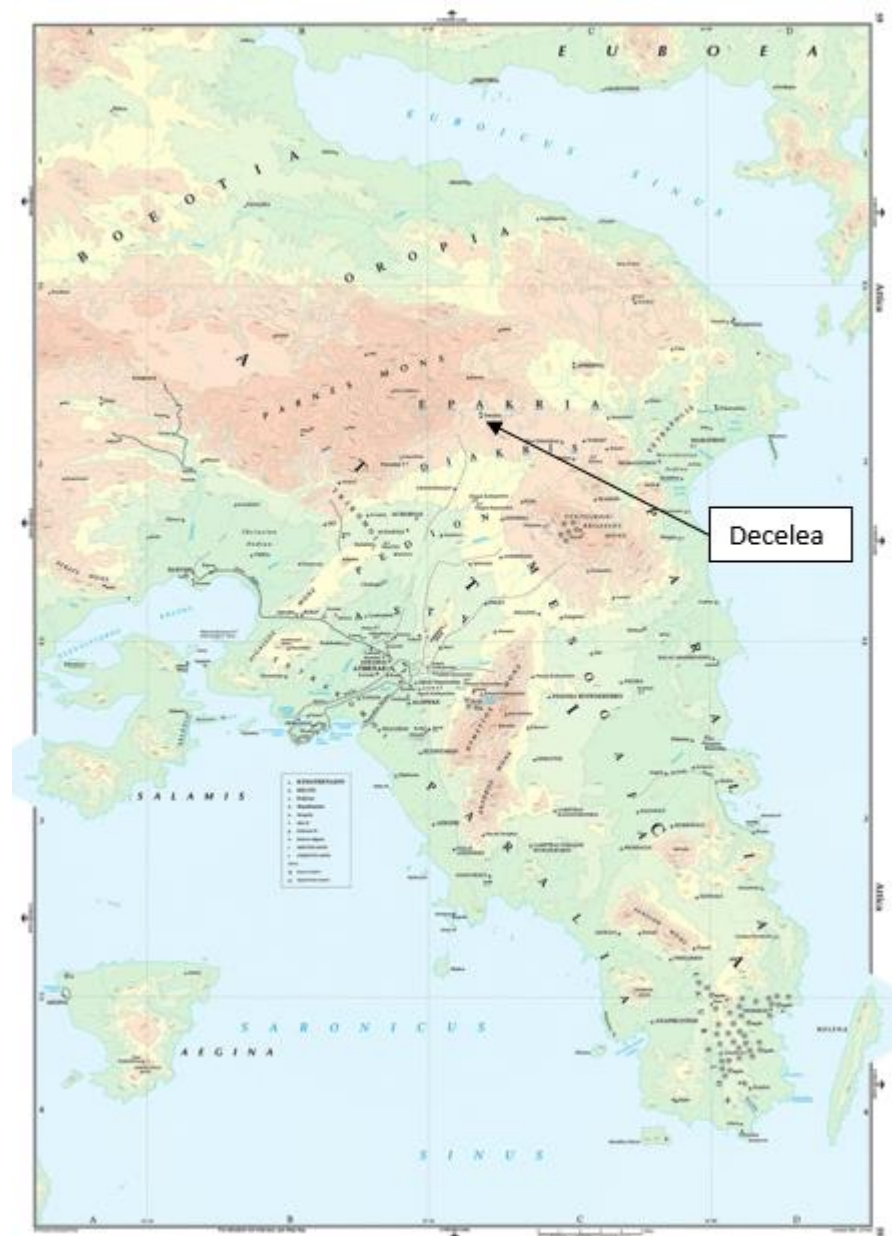
Map 8: Location of Decelea (Talbert (2000) 59)

The capture of Decelea was a military masterstroke and tied up Athenian cavalry in Attica, preventing their redeployment to Sicily. Bugh calls the efforts of the Athenian cavalry against

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[105] Thuc. 6.91.6

[106] Thuc. 7.19.1

Decelea "the supreme test",[107] because they now had to contend not with occasional invasion forces but with a permanent garrison that continually sent out raiding parties and provided encouragement and refuge to deserting slaves.[108] During this period the Athenian cavalry patrolled Attica and went out against the Decelean garrison every day, with the rocky Attic soil taking a heavy toll on the horses.[109] Although Thucydides does not spell it out explicitly, it seems that, as the advice to capture Decelea came from Alcibiades, it was the Athenian himself who recognised that the lack of cavalry amongst the forces on Sicily was a major impediment and that, by tying up any potential reinforcements in constant engagements at Decelea, he severely hampered any prospect of Athenian success in Sicily. Alcibiades himself was a cavalryman at Delion in 424 (Plutarch recalls how he refused to retreat with the main Athenian force, which had been routed, and stayed to protect Socrates' withdrawal)[110] and his son served with the cavalry in the early fourth century.[111] So he was well placed to pinpoint the root of the Athenian problems in Sicily and to take steps to prevent any rectification of the situation.

What this does not explain, however, is why the Athenians did not take cavalry with them in the first place, before the Spartans occupied Decelea. Bugh's argument that it is not surprising that the Athenians declined to send horses given the distances involved (especially as it involved crossing the treacherous Straits of Otranto)[112] does not really stand up to scrutiny. The fact that the Athenians sent one horse transport shows that making the journey was feasible, in spite of the risk, and the headlong rush into the invasion that Thucydides describes hardly conjures up a picture of caution and risk aversion. Indeed, the amphibious landings which took place at night near Corinth in 425 (described above in section 9.5) show that the Athenians were not averse to risk when transporting horses by sea. Bugh argues the 30 horses sent in the original invasion force were not cavalry forces all at, but rather for the use of the heralds that Alcibiades intended to send on diplomatic missions to the more inaccessible and distant areas of the interior of Sicily,[113] but, even if this is true, it simply shows that the Athenians were perfectly capable of sending horses to Sicily but chose not to do so in large numbers.

The truth is that the Athenians had every reason from the outset to recognise the importance of a substantial cavalry force for the task in hand but deliberately chose not to send one.

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[107] Bugh (1988) 82

[108] Thuc. 7.27.4-5

[109] Thuc. 7.27.5

[110] Plut. *Alc.* 7.4

[111] Spence (1993) 291

[112] Bugh (1988) 101-102

[113] Bugh (1998) 100

9.8 First Hand Accounts from the Cavalry

There are two first-hand accounts of cavalrymen who were part of the Athenian contingent in Sicily.

The first is found in the twentieth speech of the Lysianic corpus, *For Polystratos*. The speaker, Polystatros's second son (who remains unnamed), was defending his father against a charge of hostility against democracy. Polystratos had been appointed registrar by the Four Hundred for the enrolment of the Five Thousand, although he appears to have been moderate in his views and acted against his will: he placed as many as nine thousand on the list and after holding a seat on the council for only eight days he went to Euboea where he took part in engagements at sea which immediately preceded the overthrow of the oligarchs. On his return he found himself prosecuted for acts against democracy on two separate occasions. On the first he was condemned to pay a fine, and on the second his son speaks on his behalf in the text from the Lysianic corpus. In this defence Polystratos's son explains that he himself was a cavalryman in Sicily, and this gives us a first-hand account. Polystratos's son is using the fact that he and his brothers were cavalrymen to highlight the patriotism that they shared with their father. He also goes on to explain that, when the army was destroyed, he escaped to Catana. At Catana he harried the enemy and used the plunder he took from them (30 minae) to dedicate a tithe to the goddess (Athena) and ransom such soldiers as were in the hands of the enemy. Following this he was captured and forced to serve as a cavalryman for the Cataneans,[114] although this cannot have been for long as he was clearly back in Athens by the time of the speech in 410. It is possible that this son of Polystratus went on to serve with Xenophon as part of the 10,000. An Athenian called Lycius son of Polystratus appears in *Anabasis* as a cavalry commander,[115] and it is not impossible that Lycius is a son of the Polystratus of Lysias 20, given he had three sons, and only two of them are named in the speech.

The second account is found in Pausanias, who gives some details about an Athenian cavalry commander at Syracuse, a certain Kallistratos, who, after the massacre at the Asinaros river, cut his way through the enemy at the head of his horsemen, leading them to safety at Catana. He then turned back to Syracuse the way he had come and found plunderers still in the Athenian camp. He managed to strike down five or six of the enemy before he and his horse died of their wounds.[116] The provenance of this story is unknown, and no one else mentions it, except for the author of the *Vitae decem oratorum* once ascribed to Plutarch[117] although in this text the author mistakenly conflates this Kallistratos with a fourth century politician of the same name.[118]

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[114] Lys. 20.25

[115] Xen. *An.* 3.3.20. (He recurs without patronymic at 4.3.22,25, 4.7.24.)

[116] Paus. 7.16.3

[117] [Plut.] *X orat.* 844b

[118] Bugh (1988) 104

The reports in Lysias and Pausanias suggest that a certain proportion of the Athenian cavalry escaped to Catana led by the *hipparch* Kallistratos, which raises the possibility that Thucydides' sources for what happened in Sicily may well have come from surviving Athenian cavalrymen. It also, once again, highlights the point that it was cavalry forces that were most likely to escape the assaults of the Syracusan forces and that, had the Athenians had more cavalry in Sicily, they would have been able to counter the Syracusan assaults.

9.9   Conclusion

To conclude, the cavalry was the most effective weapon in the Syracusans' arsenal in 415, with tactics honed from several centuries of interaction with cultures famed for calvary warfare. It is also clear that the Athenians were well aware of the advantage the cavalry gave to the Syracusans. Athenian cavalry at this time, although nowhere near as advanced as that of the Syracusans, had developed over the preceding few decades following intervention from Pericles. One of the main uses of Athenian cavalry at this time was to harry the opposition's cavalry and deny them room to manoeuvre on the battlefield. Although the Athenians clearly had the means to send cavalry forces to Sicily, they chose not to, and the thirty horses that were sent in the initial invasion seem likely to have been intended to send heralds on diplomatic missions for Alcibiades. The cowardice of the cavalry at the battle of Amphipolis in 422 and the perception of the *hippeis* as pro-Spartan anti-democrats seem likely to have prevented their initial deployment. Following initial Athenian reverses in Sicily the commanders on the ground called for reinforcements to be sent in the form of cavalry, to counter the threat from the Syracusans. By this time, however, Alcibiades, now firmly in the Spartan camp following his defection, had effectively tied up the Athenian cavalry in the protection of the Attic plain from raids from Decelea. No reinforcements were available to be sent to Sicily and as the tide of war turned against the Athenians their lack of cavalry condemned them to defeat.

Chapter Ten - Conclusion

Over the course of the preceding chapters it has been shown that the Athenian expedition to Sicily was a venture which could, and should, have succeeded. Whether the Athenians could have then subsequently held the island is a question beyond the scope of this enquiry, but it has become abundantly clear that the initial subjugation of the island was well within their capabilities.

By the late fifth century it is clear that tensions and divisions within Athens were rife, and there is evidence of some tension between the Assembly and the *Boule*, with the composition of the *Boule* skewed towards the wealthier members of Athenian society, belying the notion of it being representative of wider Athenian society. With the wealthier members of society eyeing up the benefits of a conquest of Sicily, yet still fearful of the ambitions of Alcibiades, the *Boule* operated clandestinely to promote the conquest and subjugation of Sicily whilst maintaining a public pretence of only getting involved to support their ally, Egesta.

Since the *Boule* supported imperialist aims they should have been natural bedfellows of the flamboyant aristocrat Alcibiades, who was rising to prominence (and notoriety) and pushing the Expedition as a vehicle for his own ambitions. In spite of his aristocratic background, however, Alcibiades operated in, and manipulated, the Assembly. Despite the democracy, power was still perceived to rest with the élite and Alcibiades used this perception, along with the heightened generational divide in the city, to bolster his support amongst the masses.

As he rose in power and prominence Alcibiades drew the ire of the *nouveaux riches* in the *Boule* and also of the old aristocracy of which he was a member. The aristocracy, now operating through the *hetaireiai*, viewed the Expedition as an experiment of the hated democracy and set out to oppose it.

Then, in a push for power, the demagogue Hyperbolus aimed to ostracise Alcibiades, but his plan backfired, resulting in his own exile, leaving a clear path to power for the flamboyant aristocrat. In a last attempt to halt the Expedition the *hetaireiai* organised the mutilation of the Herms, which they hoped would put an end to the venture. When it failed to do so, the profanation of the Mysteries, which had been undertaken by Alcibiades and other aristocrats, was exploited and Alcibiades was denounced in front of the Assembly, although he still managed to remain in command and the Expedition sailed under a cloud.

It was soon evident that the Athenians had not fully planned or resourced their great venture and the generals in command were surprised when many of their supposed allies, most notably Rhegium, failed to co-operate with them, perhaps remembering Athenian high-handedness during the previous expedition of 427. More disappointment followed when the promised Egestan talents failed to materialise, leaving the inadequate resourcing of the Expedition laid bare.

Following this, the three generals convened to form a plan, each having their own ideas. Throughout the remainder of his work Thucydides is clear that the plan of Lamachus, that of direct assault on Syracuse, should have been adopted and would likely have resulted in the success of the Expedition. For the longer the Athenians remained in Sicily without attacking the Syracusans, the more the morale of the Sicilians increased. Even so, when the Athenians finally

attacked Syracuse, after drawing their forces out to Catana, they were only prevented from delivering a *coup de grâce* by the Syracusan cavalry, which they could not counter.

In spite of this, the Athenians began a blockade and circumvallation of the city. Even when Lamachus was killed in a skirmish leaving Nicias in sole command, they were still on the cusp of victory and the Syracusans were in despair. The arrival of Gylippus, however, provided the Syracusans with much needed leadership, far in excess of what Nicias could provide to the Athenians.

The contrast between Nicias and Gylippus was stark. Gylippus was innovative, bold and adaptive, whereas Nicias dithered, procrastinated and held back. Gylippus prevented the Athenian circumvallation of the city and then the tide began to turn. The Sicilian cities started to flock to the Syracusan cause and Sparta and her allies were emboldened. Gylippus persuaded the Syracusans to face the Athenians at sea and, when he captured Plemmyrium, the Athenian supply lines were compromised. Momentum was now clearly with the Syracusans and even the arrival of Demosthenes and Eurymedon could not stem the tide. Indeed, in a desperate throw of the dice, Demosthenes orchestrated a night attack on Epipolae which ended disastrously. Finally, accepting the hopelessness of their predicament, Nicias agreed to a withdrawal and the personal consequences which that might bring. The eclipse of 27 August 413 put paid to that, however, and Nicias' extreme piety prevented the withdrawal, leading to the defeat in the Great Harbour and the final crushing and bloody defeat at the river Assinarus.

Throughout the *Histories* Thucydides paints a picture of an overconfident and under-prepared Athens, but there is much more to the story than that. The tensions and infighting in Athens created a situation where self-seeking aristocrats such as Alcibiades could rise to prominence and threaten the very fabric of the city. The only leader the city could put in position as a check to Alcibiades was the mediocre Nicias, and when he found himself in sole command and facing the energetic Gylippus the Expedition began to founder.

In spite of all the obstacles the Athenians seemingly placed in their own paths, however, they still managed to come close to achieving the defeat of the Syracusans, something that would have undoubtedly resulted in the conquest of Sicily. On a number of occasions victory was within their grasp, only for the opportunity to be squandered due to poor leadership or lack of resources.

Most crucially, however, the tensions in Athenian society and the memory of the battle of Amphipolis prevented the Athenians from deploying cavalry, which was a military necessity in a venture of this magnitude. Not trusting the cavalry, they sent none, and by the time the need for them was appreciated Alcibiades had tied up the Athenian cavalry at Decelea preventing their deployment. The absence of Athenian cavalry prevented the Athenians from defeating the Syracusans early in the campaign. The enemy then grew stronger the longer the conflict went on. Having no cavalry of their own, the Athenians were unable to counter the Syracusan cavalry and gradually lost their foothold on the island, resulting in the bloody conclusion at the river Assinarus.

Having previously identified cavalry as the key requirement for the subjugation of the island, the fact that they subsequently did nothing about it was a shocking and unforgivable abdication of responsibility on the part of the Athenians and was the key factor in the failure of the Expedition.

Appendix 1: Translation of *IG* I³ 370

416/5 BC

[The Athenians expended in the archonship of Arimnestos *(416/5)*] and under the Council for which Ar- was first secretary. We the treasurers

of the sacred monies of Athena, [Dexitheos of Phlya *or* Thria and his colleagues, for whom Lysikles] son of Drakontides of Bate

38   was secretary . . . of Pallene . . .

Uncertain number of lines missing

46   ≥ 20 dr..

in the prytany of Kekropis^{VII} . . .

. . .

In the prytany of Kekropis^{VII} . . . day of the prytany, to the generals

50   [Alkibiades son of Kleinias of Skambonidai, Lamachos son of Xenophanes of Oe, Nikias] son of Nikeratos of Kydantidai and to the deputies

. . . ≥ 3 dr. 1 ob..

[In the . . . day], to the generals for Sicily, Alkibiades, Lamachos,

[Nikias, and . . .] Antimachos of Hermos 30 tal..

[In the . . . day], to the generals for Sicily, Alkibiades, Lamachos,

55   [Nikias, and . . .] Antimachos of Hermos ≥ 14 tal. 1,400 dr. *but* ≤ 14 tal. 2,300 dr..

[In the . . . day], to the generals for Sicily, Alkibiades, Lamachos,

[Nikias, and . . .] Antimachos of Hermos, in Kyzikene gold . . . staters

. . . ≥ 3 dr. 3½ ob..[7]

Total payment in the period of

60   office . . . ≥ 16 dr. 4 ob.

415/4 BC

[The Athenians expended in the archonship of Charias *(415/4)* and under the Council for which] -ides was first secretary. The treasurers of the sacred monies

[of Athena Leochares of Alopeke and his colleagues, for whom Telea]s son of Telenikos of Pergase was secretary, handed over to the

generals Telephonos [of - and his colleagues and to the Greek treasurers and] their deputy, Pherekleides of Piraeus, the People having voted

the immunity,[2] in the prytany of Aiantis^{IX}, the third prytany, on the - day of the prytany, 11 tal. 3,787 dr. 4½ ob., and in Kyzikene

65 gold, 248 staters: the value of these is . . .

We lent to the Greek treasurers and their deputies . . . Aristokrates of Euonymon and his colleagues 9 tal.; and these

gave it to the Games-masters for the Panathenaia, Amemptos . . . and his colleagues, in the prytany of Erechtheis^{I}, the second prytany,

on the twentieth day of the prytany.

In the prytany of Kekropis^{VII}, the fourth prytany, on the sixth day of the prytany, to the Greek treasurers and their deputies, Aristokrates

70 of Euonymon and his colleagues for the soldiers in [Melos] ≥ 20 dr.[6]

In the prytany of Antiochis^{X}, the eighth prytany, on the tenth day of the prytany, to the Greek treasurers and their deputies, Aristokrates

of Euonymon and his colleagues for the soldiers in M[elos] ≥ 60 dr.[6]

In the prytany of Antiochis^{X}, the eighth prytany, on the third day of the prytany, to the Greek treasurers and their deputies, Aristokrates

of Euonymon and his colleagues 300 tal.; and these gave it to the force [in Sicily].[7]

75 In the prytany of Antiochis^{X}, the eighth prytany, on the twentieth day of the prytany, to the Greek treasurers and their deputies, Aristokrates

of Euonymon and his colleagues for the ships to [deliver?] the money to Sicily, 4 tal. 2,000 dr..[7]

In the prytany of Antiochis^{X}, the eighth prytany, on the second day of the prytany, to the Greek treasurers and their deputy, Philomelos of Marathon

and the general in the Thermaic Gulf . . . and on the same day to the Greek treasurer(s) and

their deputy, Philomelos of Marathon, and the general in Eph- *or* Heph-

80 Total payment in the

period of office ≥ 353 tal..

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