

### The Hellenic Disaster in Egypt

For a long time there has been a dispute about the gravity of the disaster suffered by the Athenians and their allies in Egypt in 454 BC. Thucydides i 104 and 110.4 says that 200 ships sailed there (a figure now commonly accepted); that, six years later, a further force of 50 arrived just after the disaster; and that the majority of these was lost. As all the ships which were already in Egypt at that time were also lost the total would seem to be about 230–40.

This was generally accepted by scholars of the last century, but in this century many scholars have come to doubt so overwhelming a loss in relation to the League's total resources. This scepticism is made possible by Thucydides' failure to say specifically how many ships were actually in Egypt when the disaster befell—whether, in fact, 200 had remained there for six years (Thuc. i 109 says that the Athenians and their allies remained, but this is not conclusive for 200 nor for 6 years). The main reasons for doubting this are Athens' naval success against Corinth and Aegina in the Saronic Gulf during the year or so immediately after the 200 ships reached Egypt, and her subsequent success against the Phoenician fleet in 450, so soon after the disaster. This scepticism has become virtually an orthodoxy over the last half century, but R. Meiggs in *The Athenian Empire* (Oxford 1972)<sup>1</sup> after examining the evidence eventually inclined against the 'reductionalist' view: in this he has been supported by J. M. Libourel in *AJP* xciii (1971) 605–15. But some of the old arguments seem to have been undervalued and some new points seem worth making.<sup>2</sup>

#### 1 The ancient sources

It is the confusion and uncertainty of these which have permitted, even required, the weighing of circumstantial evidence in the search for truth. On balance the written sources favour a large figure but one cannot tell on what they are based. Thucydides' omission of a specific figure at the crucial point certainly makes it possible (and many would say natural) to infer a loss of all the 200 ships which went to Egypt at the outset (plus the majority of the 50 ships which sailed out just after the debacle). This inference may have been the sole basis for the figure in the fourth century sources—Isocrates (viii 86) and Ephorus (if Diodorus was using Ephorus); but Meiggs 474, in order to avoid the criticism that such an inference is invalid, suggests that it might derive from an independent fifth-century source, Hellanicus. Diodorus, in any case, has a characteristic confusion all of his own, with alternative figures of 300 (xi 71.5) and 200 (74.3). This discrepancy can hardly be papered over by saying that with the higher figure he has added in 'the majority' of the 50 'relief' ships: this would be peculiar mathematics, and a more fundamental confusion is clearly involved.

The fifth-century source Ktesias<sup>3</sup> and the late source

Justin inclined towards a lower estimate, but their accounts contain confusions and difficulties of their own. Ktesias, based in Persia, and writing a Persian history, should have had access to information and the inclination to give us a detailed account. One might have expected very high figures from him, affected by patriotic Persian estimates, but instead his account, though presenting difficulties, is not so affected, and contains some plausible detail, such as the name of the Athenian commander of a force of 40 ships. Many scholars have been prepared to pluck this detail out of the mess (with the addition of a conjectured 20 allied ships in accordance with the usual 1:2 ratio of allies to Athenians in the fleet), as an acceptable figure for the fleet left in Egypt after the very outset. To the ultimate loss of these 60 ships must of course be added the 30–40 out of the 50 'relief' ships (Thuc. i 110.4).

Justin, for his part, contributes the view that Athens needed to have most of her ships back from Egypt before she could handle the war in the Saronic Gulf (iii 6.6). This sounds like a sensible thought of his own, or of his source, not something derived from a history; any such historical source would naturally have worked out the consequences of this in full, thus reducing the final figure of loss in 454, but there is no trace of any source so doing.

#### II Arguments from military probability

It is clear from Thucydides i 104 that the whole fleet of 200 ships went to Egypt when the appeal came from Inaros, and that he had already won a land victory: he now required help against the Persian fleet at their bases on the coast or up the Nile. The Athenians needed to discover and deal with such ships and to secure control of the river. This they promptly did, as Thucydides tells us: an inscription from Samos (ML 34) also records a capture by Samian ships of 15 Phoenician vessels, which seems to have occurred in the neighbourhood of Memphis, well up-river. The Nile would have been cleared up to that point and there is no evidence of any action or enemy force higher up the river. The task was now to besiege the enemy-held part of the White Fort, and for this only a small force of ships would be needed—to intercept any possible supplies and reinforcements or break-out attempts. What should the Athenian admiral do with the bulk of his ships?

It has been pointed out<sup>4</sup> that the Nile is too narrow for a full fleet action by triremes: the fleets in the Samian action were small. In the battles at Salamis and in the Great Harbour of Syracuse the Persians and the Athenians respectively were vastly handicapped by the narrow space and could not fight as they wished:<sup>5</sup> in Egypt there was also a risk of being attacked from the banks of the river by missiles, arrows and fire. If the whole allied fleet remained up-river there was also the danger of its being trapped there by the arrival of a Phoenician fleet at the mouths of the Nile, which might block the river by various means.<sup>6</sup> It is not clear what

<sup>1</sup> Cf. 101–8, 439–41 and 473–7. For earlier discussions cf. P. Salmon *La Politique Égyptienne d'Athènes* (Brussels 1965) 152 n. 6.

<sup>2</sup> I am indebted to Sir Kenneth Dover for reading a first draft of this piece and making searching and valuable comments which have led me to re-think or re-phrase several crucial points. He should not, of course, be saddled with responsibility for this final version.

<sup>3</sup> Ktesias 63–7.

<sup>4</sup> Notably by H. D. Westlake, *Essays on the Greek historians and Greek history* (Manchester 1969) 66; cf. also F. E. Adcock, *PCPS* cxxxiii–v (1926) 4.

<sup>5</sup> Hdt. viii 60, Thuc. vii 36.4.

<sup>6</sup> Dover observes that any admiral would have to be sure that he would have early warning of any such enemy enterprise before taking his fleet up-river. This is no doubt true, but it is not clear what sort of

advantage would accrue from detaining so many triremes at Memphis which might counter-balance these hazards: this is a point noted by Meiggs himself in an earlier discussion in *JHS* lxxiii (1943) 22, n. 8. Surely the instinct of the admiral would be to extricate his main force from the potential trap and get it out on the open sea which was its natural medium and where it could be useful. Its prime task would be to ensure that no new fleet was being prepared in Phoenicia; if there was, to take action; and finally to return for orders to Athens. The casualty list of the Erechtheid tribe (ML 32) shows that such action did take place in Phoenicia after Cyprus and Egypt but before the fighting against Aegina and Corinth back in Greece. Those who think that the main fleet remained in Egypt have to say that a squadron was sent from there for this purpose: but this would have been reckless, since a full Phoenician fleet might have been ready to confront them. When Kimon received a request for help in Egypt in 450 whilst he was expecting a clash with the Phoenicians, he sent 60 ships to Egypt whilst the remainder (after Kimon's death) met and defeated the Phoenicians off Cypriot Salamis. This showed the correct balance of forces required for the same two operations, as noted by Adcock (n. 4) 4.

Finally, when his check on Phoenicia was accomplished, the admiral would have been due to return to Athens, since the breach with Sparta must have occurred before his departure and there might be urgent need for his fleet. In fact the naval actions in the Saronic Gulf did take place after the action in Phoenicia but in the same year, as the casualty list shows; there is no good objective reason to doubt the order of the names nor does Meiggs 105 do so. Whether the Athenians and allies possessed enough ships to take on the Peloponnesians if none of the ships returned from Egypt is a matter to be discussed below.

A further difficulty in the belief that a full fleet of 200 ships remained in Egypt is the need to explain why it did not move out to sea to meet the Persian fleet which accompanied Megabyzos' army in 456, whilst the rebel Egyptian army was still undefeated and therefore did not need protection. The assembly and progress of this force had been lengthy and it could not have moved so fast as to trap them by surprise up-river. But if the Greek fleet was small it is possible to see why it restricted itself first to the siege of the White Fort and, subsequent to the rebel defeat on land, to the protection of Prosopitis. It would hope for rescue by a larger fleet from Athens.

A final argument based on military probability concerns the size of the force which would have been required to defend the whole circumference of the island Prosopitis after the arrival of the Persian fleet and army in 456. The Persian victory on land led to a stalemated siege of about 18 months until the final disaster, which came when the canal protecting one side of the island was drained. Meiggs and Libourel argue warning could be expected. If Persia would have to muster a special fleet for this purpose then ample warning could be expected. But if there was a standing force available in Phoenicia and it sailed without an accompanying land force, then news of its departure could hardly reach Memphis in time for precautionary action—in the absence of a system of fire-beacons.

If the Greek fleet at Memphis was small, this would not be too serious since it could rely on the larger fleet which was on the open seas to keep watch for any such development and come to the rescue: but if the main fleet was at Memphis and news failed to reach it in time, this could have been disastrous indeed.

that it would have needed 200 ships rather than just 50/60 to safeguard the 50–60 miles of the perimeter against the many Persian ships and troops. It should be noted that if such large forces were needed merely to defend Prosopitis the Greeks could not have controlled 50 or so miles of the Nile north of it, although Meiggs 104 assumes that they did.

F. K. Kienitz in *Die politische Geschichte Ägyptens* (Berlin 1953) 71 must surely be wrong to say that Persians now controlled the river completely whilst the rebels and Greeks only held the island, since the Persians would then have had a chance to land freely round the whole lengthy perimeter. If the Greeks forsook their ships to fight as improvised infantry this would not have sufficed even if there were 40,000 of them (the crews of 200 ships rather than 50–60), since the draining of the canal exposed them to defeat. Clearly it was the barrier of water that was crucial, combined with the ability of the Greek fleet to make that barrier effective in some way. It may be that the topography helped. Meiggs 103 himself comments on the inaccessible marshes of the Delta, which enabled Amyrtaeus to continue in revolt even after the disaster of 454 (and in 450 Kimon thought 60 ships would give him sufficient help).<sup>7</sup> So it might have been the case that much of the periphery was impenetrable even when the Nile was low and that only a limited number of landing points existed, which 50/60 ships could suffice to guard in normal conditions, as Kimon judged in 450. But in 454 the draining of the canal must have increased the danger points beyond the Greeks' control.

But an interesting alternative has been put to me by Dr A. B. Lloyd. He notes that the area of Prosopitis was located between the Canopic and Phatnitic/Sebennytic branches of the Nile with a waterway between the two branches as the northern boundary, cf. his *Commentary on Herodotus Book ii* 1–98 (Leiden 1976) 187. Dr Lloyd now suggests that the southern part of the Delta is less marshy than the northern and that this makes my suggestion unlikely. His solution is that the Athenians could have established blocks at the points where the waterway met the two branches of the Nile; thereby they could deny the Persian fleet, coming from the north, entry into the waterway itself and the branches of the Nile to the south of these blocks, thus leaving all the waters surrounding the island inviolate. That the Athenians could have maintained such blocks even if they only had 60 ships seems to me reasonable given the relative narrowness of the channels and Athenian skill and morale. Even if, during the many months of the siege, the Persians, who now controlled most of Egypt, were able to build and launch ships in the south and bring them up to Prosopitis, this would merely require a third block—at the bifurcation of the Nile. This is an attractive suggestion but some doubts remain:

- (a) We cannot be sure of the changes of river courses and marsh areas over the centuries, as Lloyd's discussion of Prosopitis in his *Commentary* shows; so certainty on this issue is impossible.
- (b) More serious is a problem that confronts all attempts at solution: even if Persian triremes could not gain control of the waters round the island by open naval combat, why could they not use their

<sup>7</sup> The main Persian fleet was, of course, on the open sea near Cyprus, not wasting itself senselessly in the Nile.

large army, marshalled on the opposite bank, to cross on small rafts and coracles at hundreds of points simultaneously in the 60 mile circuit—preferably at night or dawn? This would be explicable if there were only a few firm landing places in marshy land which could easily be guarded, but if this was not the case it can only be explained by Persian inertia, since triremes were not gun-boats and could only sink small craft by chasing and ramming them.

Certainty is impossible, but I hope to have shown that the situation does not prove the presence of 200 Greek ships. The sending of only 50 in 454 is indeed a puzzle if it was known in Athens that a large force of Persian ships was in the area. Even if it was thought in Athens that the allied fleet still controlled at least one branch of the Nile right to the sea (Meiggs 104) the relief force would still be at risk of interception at sea by the Persians during its approach. The apparent insouciance of the commander of the relief force suggests that the Athenians were over-confident about the situation even as it was before the draining of the canal. If the allied fleet really controlled the 50–60 miles of the Nile to the sea (in spite of the enemy's control of the banks) why could they not have escaped by this route when the canal was drained? But such control without any base north of Prosopitis seems impossible, as a voyage to the sea would take over 12 hours even if unopposed, and there would be no safe place to rest or replenish water before the return. Constant patrolling would therefore be out of the question. Once again, it must be remembered that a trireme was not a self-sufficient gun-boat with a small crew, berths and ample supplies.

### III *Total Hellenic resources*

The problem here is how the Athenians could have taken on a major naval campaign against the Peloponnesians if there were still 200 ships in Egypt; how the League could have survived the loss of nearly 250 ships and 50,000 men without total disruption; and, finally, how it could have been able to produce a fleet of 200 in the year 450 (over and above regular Athenian squadrons at key points like Naupactus, Piraeus and the Hellespont area) which was able to help Amyrtaeus and to defeat the Phoenician fleet off Cyprus. There does not seem to be any sign in our evidence of massive depletion of manpower or heavy financial outlay to build a large number of new ships, since Athenian manpower was high in 431 and the Treasury of the League was very full *c.* 443/2 when the building of the Parthenon was under discussion.

Estimates have to be made of the number of ships possessed by Athens and her allies on the one hand and the Peloponnesians on the other. We have no precise figures, but a fair amount of helpful material. Meiggs argues from the basis that Athens probably had about 200 triremes at the time. (They only rose to 300 in the early years of the Archidamian war: Thuc. i 13.8, ii 17.)

Her allies are harder to assess. Thucydides i 99.3 tells us that many of them had settled for payment of tribute, and this is confirmed by the Quota Lists, so only the three major ones—Chios, Samos and Lesbos—need to be seriously considered. The highest figures we have for them are from the first few years of the fifth century,

when the Ionians mustered their fullest strength in revolt against Persia: Herodotus vi 8 gives Chios 100, Samos 60, and Lesbos 70 ships. All subsequent figures are smaller. In 440 Samos fought Athens for independence but could only raise 50 triremes: Lesbos produced 25 and Chios 30 to help Athens at that time, and later 30 between them, so 85 in all (Thuc. ii 56.2). The most likely conjecture is that at the time of the Egyptian expedition they would have had about 50 triremes each and would have been normally expected to contribute about half of these to a full League fleet, i.e. 20–25 each. (Thuc. iii 3.4 indicates the existence of a contributory norm for an ally.) We often find a ratio of about  $\frac{2}{3}$  Athenians to  $\frac{1}{3}$  allied ships, as in the Sicilian expedition where there were 60 Athenian to 34 allied. The relief squadron in 454 might have been 35 Athenian to 15 allied.

As against this, Corinth was able to produce 90 ships against Corcyra in 432. It is unlikely that she had less in 459, before her drubbing by the Athenians in the war over Aegina. Herodotus (vi 89) tells us that she had been able to hand over 20 ships to Athens, thus raising her to a total of 70 to enable her to fight Aegina (which therefore had 70 ships). It is unlikely that Corinth would have been willing, by doing this, to reduce her own fleet below that of Aegina, her deadliest enemy; so a figure of 90 seems likely for her at this time, too. Athens captured 70 ships in the final action in *c.* 459<sup>8</sup> (besides those sunk in the two battles): most of the 70 were probably from Aegina, as her allies could have escaped home. Neither she nor Corinth had sent all their ships to Salamis. Herodotus specifically notes this in the case of the former.<sup>9</sup>

In a war to save Aegina from Athens Corinth could expect the support of all the Peloponnesian allies which had fleets if, as many scholars believe, the Peloponnesian League formally declared war; but at the very least of her local allies who are said by Thucydides to have helped her in the land-fighting—Sicyon, Epidaurus, Hermione and Troezen. Of these, Sicyon provided 15 ships at Salamis, Epidaurus 11, Troezen 5 and Hermione 3.<sup>10</sup> So 193 ships could be expected to fight for Aegina, with the possibility of some 30 or 40 more if Sparta and Elis took part. The Athenians could not be certain that they would not participate, so a force of 223–233 had to be allowed for.

It is difficult to see how Athens could have launched her attack on Halieis and Aegina if the 200 ships (roughly 140 Athenian, 60 allied) were still in Egypt. She would then have only had 60 of her own ships available and, if she called on her allies to produce every single ship they possessed (a very hard demand in an unpopular cause), this might have scraped up a further 90, leaving Athens still outnumbered by her foes who were fighting for survival, by a minimum of 43 and possibly 73 or 83.<sup>11</sup> The great skills and assurance which

<sup>8</sup> Thuc. i 105.2.

<sup>9</sup> Hdt. viii 46.1.

<sup>10</sup> Hdt. viii 43.

<sup>11</sup> Libourel 607 argued that the Peloponnesians would not have dared to confront the Athenians if they and their allies had only left 50–60 ships in Egypt. There seem to be serious flaws in this argument:

(i) He estimated the Athenian fleet at 300 which seems too high at this date, as Meiggs implicitly agrees, so it was not as overwhelming as he suggests.  
(ii) More important is that Athens was the aggressor anyway and

later enabled Athens to take on superior forces with confidence cannot have been developed yet, since the contrast between the new Athenian style and the old Corinthian and Corcyrean style came as a surprise in 432 at Sybota (Thuc. i 49). The old style was like a land-battle with grappled ships: the Athenians had by then acquired new naval skills for manoeuvres, as Phormio was soon to show. (Thuc. ii 83.4–84.4, 90.1–92.2).

Another difficulty for Meiggs is that the Athenian quota in the fleet against Corinth and Aegina would be markedly less than that of the allies—an unparalleled situation and surely very dangerous when the allies were being required to fight their former allies of the Persian War for the first time, even if the League synod had voted to do so. Aegina's heroism at Salamis had surpassed even that of Athens (Hdt. viii 93.1). If Athenians were also less than half the crews even in their own ships the risk of disloyalty would be great.

Meiggs 107–8 attempts to meet these problems by suggesting that Athens might have sent only 100 triremes in the League fleet which went to Cyprus and Egypt, whilst the allies produced the other hundred. This would certainly have been much out of line with normal practice, as we have seen. Meiggs thus has 100 triremes at Athens for the Aegina campaign, but clearly they would need to be supplemented and Thucydides tells us specifically that there were allies in this fleet. But if they had already sent 33 ships each to Egypt they could only produce now about 50 between them, making with the Athenians 150 in all; hardly a fleet large enough to tackle an enemy force which might be 83 ships superior.

Meiggs clearly feels the need to reduce the manpower losses of Athens, since subsequent events and her population figures in 431 do not square easily with a loss of nearly 140 ships, plus about 33 of the relief squadron—some 34,000 men in all, which would be about three-quarters of Athens' citizen population.<sup>12</sup> If his figure of only 100 Athenian ships in Egypt and 25 relief ships is accepted this would be reduced to 25,000, and he rightly points out that a further reduction must be made for non-citizen oarsmen: these would be mercenaries hired from the allies and metics rather than slaves.<sup>13</sup> Meiggs 108 suggests that these might consti-

Aegina had no choice but to resist, whilst Corinth could not accept the drastic change in the balance of seapower if Athens gained control of Aegina. Corinth's willingness to undergo great danger in this cause is shown by her invasion of the Megarid by land shortly afterwards, which led to disaster (Thuc. i 105–6).

<sup>12</sup> The size of the Athenian citizen-body implied here needs justification. The basic source is Thuc. ii 13–6 where hoplites (including metics) are put at 29,000. Busolt (*Gr. Ges.* iii 2.884 ff.), after allowing for metics and adding the two upper classes, puts the citizens excluding thetes at c. 22,000–25,000. Ed. Meyer preferred c. 35,000 and Beloch c. 20,000, but Busolt showed the objections to both. Subsequently scholars have generally followed Busolt's figures, though they have explained them in varying ways: cf. Gomme, *HCT* ii ad. loc. and A. H. M. Jones, *Athenian democracy* (Oxford 1957) 161–77.

All scholars, including Meyer and Beloch, accept a thetic population of c. 20,000 (cf. Ar. *Vesp.* 709), so the estimates for the total citizen-body only vary between c. 42,000 and 45,000: this is not significant for present purposes. The figure at the time of the Egyptian Expedition was certainly not larger than this—probably a little smaller, since in 500 it is referred to by Herodotus v 97 and viii 65 as 30,000 in c. 500 BC.

<sup>13</sup> This is well discussed by M. Amit, *Athens and the sea* (Brussels 1965) 30–49.

tute 50 per cent of the crews and thus reduce Athens' losses to 'below 10,000', but it looks more like 12,500—or 12,000 if only 20 Athenian relief ships were lost: still nearly a third of Athenian citizens, thus equalling the number of citizens (i.e. adult males) lost in the Plague. Meiggs' estimate of 50 per cent non-Athenian sailors may seem slightly high for such an early date (461), so here, as in his estimate of the contribution of allied ships, he is stretching his calculations to the very limit of what might be possible: even so, the Athenian loss is such that it should have left much more mark.

In contrast, if only 40 Athenian ships were lost in Egypt plus 25 relief, and the crews were 33–40 per cent aliens, then Athenian citizen losses would have been somewhere between 8,000–9,000—about a fifth of the total citizen body—surely enough to rate as a major disaster for the city:<sup>14</sup> whilst the allies in Athenian mercenary service would lose 4,000 to 5,000 men and, in addition, Samos, Chios and Lesbos 20 ships between them in Egypt and 10 relief, i.e. 6,000 men—which would justify Thucydides' description of it as a disaster for the 'Hellenes'. As for ships, Athens would still have 135 and the allies a total of 120, so the fleet of 200 in 450 would not require an extensive building programme. We find no trace of such a programme in the evidence: it seems that it was not, for example, exploited as an argument against the building of the Parthenon.

#### iv *Diadochoi*

Meiggs does not discuss the argument from Thucydides' use of the word *διάδοχοι* to describe the 'relief' squadron of 50 ships that was largely destroyed after the disaster. Adcock 4 pointed out that it should mean 'relief' in the sense 'replacement' as in the changing of the guard ('for this relief much thanks') and not in the sense of rescue (as in the Relief of Mafeking) for which the appropriate Greek word would be *βοήθεια*. The implication is that the squadron of 50 was sailing out to *replace* the force already there, not to reinforce it.

Some scholars have translated *διάδοχοι* as 'reinforcements' without attempt at justification: but Libourel argued that there are a few cases where it should mean reinforcements, notably Hdt. ix 21. In this passage a force of 3,000 Megarians in the Greek army at Plataea finds that part of its position is highly exposed to the attack of Persian cavalry because it is on level ground. They ask for other soldiers to be sent to take over the position (*διάδοχοι*). The Greek commander calls for volunteers to go to this place and take over from the Megarians (*διάδοχοι* again). Three hundred picked Athenians were those who took over (here the cognate verb *ὑπεδέξαντο* is used). Libourel argues that 300 could not have taken over a front held by 3,000, so they must be reinforcements. There was certainly no way in which the Megarians could have asked, or been allowed, to

<sup>14</sup> Dr N. L. Young of the Imperial War Museum Research Dept. informs me that in the 1914–18 war the best estimate for the percentage of deaths among mobilized troops was: France 16 per cent, Germany 16 per cent, Russia 14 per cent. It must be remembered that these are percentages of mobilized men and not of total adult male population, so the percentage of losses would be much lower in relation to the total adult male population. Only in the Second World War was there a much higher figure—the losses of the Russians (again only mobilized Russians) estimated at between 30 per cent and 37.5 per cent.

quit the battle line entirely, since the Greeks could not spare any manpower.

The Megarian claim that they could not hold their line 'on their own' might seem to be a simple request for reinforcements, as Libourel claims, but it was at one particular point that they were suffering, and Pausanias the commander-in-chief calls for volunteers to go to 'this place' and take it over, not for reinforcements to strengthen the whole Megarian front. So *διάδοχοι* would be used in the strict sense at that spot, whilst the

rest of the Megarian front would, incidentally, be reinforced by the relieved Megarians. It would have been possible, by more precise phrasing, to make this totally clear, but I suspect that the story was fed to Herodotus by Athenian sources who wished to leave some ambiguity which might lead unwary readers to believe that an Athenian was worth ten Megarians. (There are many stories of clearly Athenian origin in Herodotus' account of Xerxes' invasion which denigrate people who were Athens' enemies at the time he wrote.<sup>15</sup>) All

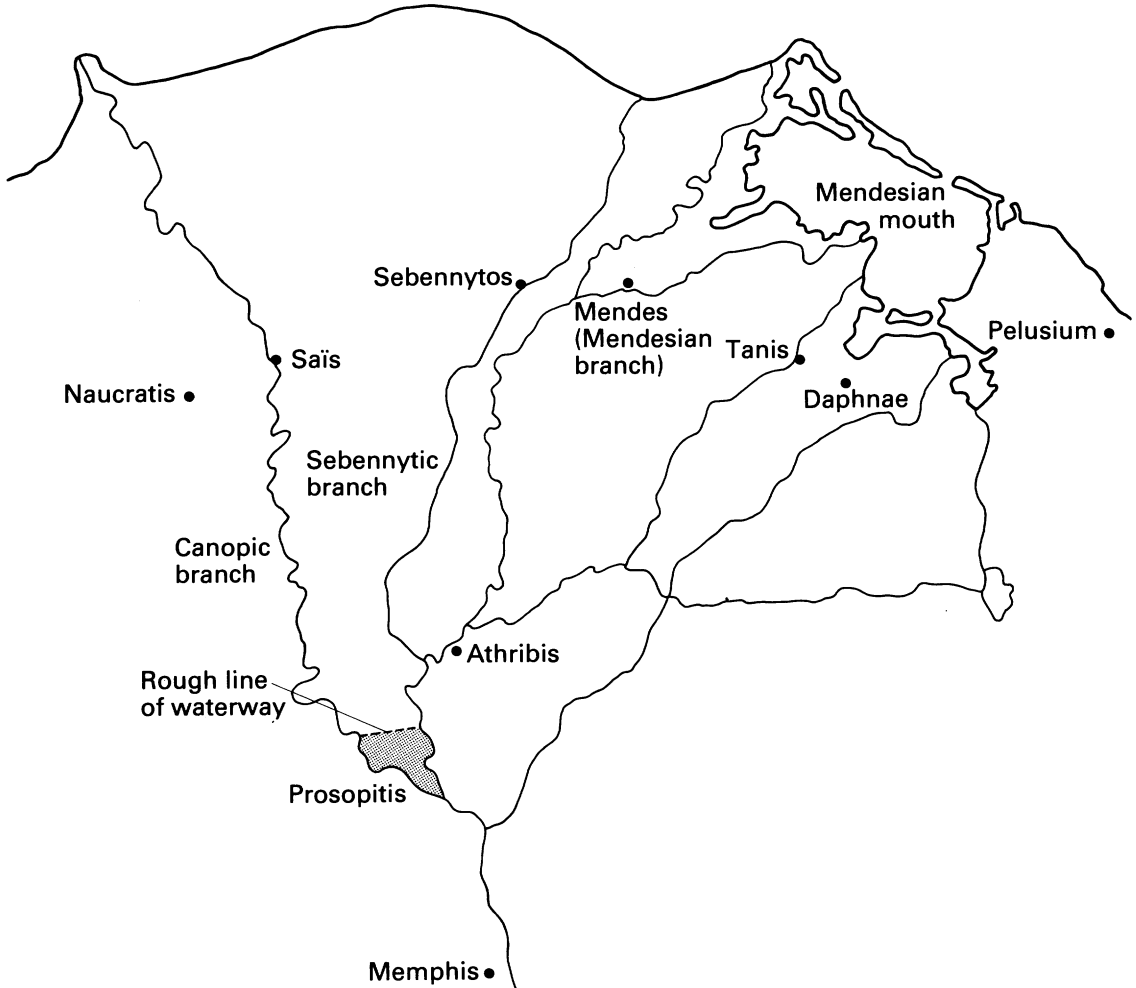
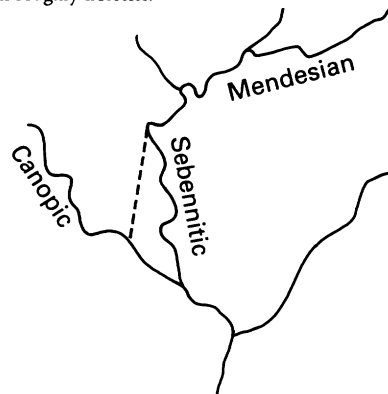


FIG 1. For the position of the waterway forming the N. side of Prosopitis see n. 15.

<sup>15</sup> Hdt. viii 94 (Corinth—but Herodotus shows doubt), ix 80.3 (Aegina). As the Mendesian branch is so far east, near the stronghold that guarded the eastern approach to Egypt, the relief force would be running great risks: and even if they had succeeded in passing up it they would still not have reached Prosopitis itself, only the Sebennytic branch about 10 miles to the north or south of the island, as the map shows. If the conjectural position of the waterway on the map should be questioned and it be suggested that the island might have reached up to the point where the Mendesian branch diverges from the Sebennytic—the answer is that this seems impossible. The point of divergence is c. 30 miles from the southern point of the island and the gap between the Canopic and Sebennytic branches is very wide at this point (30 miles): if the length of the Canopic bank back to the southern point of the island is added this involves another c. 30 miles making a total circuit of 90 miles which is much too much. Herodotus ii.41.5 puts the circuit at 9 schoinoi which Meiggs assesses at under 60 miles. Nor can one try to reduce the 90 mile circuit by postulating a very lopsided island as shown in the accompanying sketch since no one would make a cutting from branch to branch of the Nile except

by the shortest possible route. The shape of the island must therefore have been roughly isosceles.



in all, it seems unlikely that the word could be used by Thucydides in a way different from its normal root meaning, and one that would crucially distort that meaning.

If the 50 ships are a relief force, the advocates of 200 ships in Egypt might suggest that it was only a partial relief of one quarter of the fleet: Greek soldiers and sailors were certainly unaccustomed and hostile to distant and protracted campaigns. It might have been thought necessary to relieve crews and change generals, as Westlake (n. 4) 64 observed, from time to time rather than to keep them from their homes and families for six unbroken years. The organising of a fair scheme would have been complex, involving as it did mercenaries working alongside citizens, but not impossible. So the use of the word is not decisive on the size of the fleet in Egypt. But the belief of Meiggs and Libourel that they were reinforcements faces a great difficulty—in addition to the philological one already discussed. If 200 ships had sufficed for 6 years, why did they send more now? If they were to cope with Megabyzos why was the force so little and so late? The arrival of Megabyzos was in 456—and after 458 there was no serious naval opposition to Athens in Greek waters, whilst raids on the coast of the Peloponnese were surely less important than helping and perhaps rescuing their men in Egypt. Those who think that there were only about 60 ships in Egypt could expect about 200 to have been available to send: but even those who think there were 200 already there could expect the same if Meiggs' figures are accepted, since the fleet which beat Aegina and Corinth would be available. But it is difficult to see why, if an allied fleet of 200 was already there, it should not have given a better account of itself against the Persians: whereas 50/60 would have naturally expected help from Athens and might reasonably have restricted itself to defence.

It is difficult to believe that the 50 ships were sent in response to an emergency—and their conduct on arrival appears to confirm this.<sup>16</sup> It looks, remarkable as it seems, as if Athens did not really appreciate what had happened, and that the relief is part of a routine.

#### v *Comparison with the Sicilian Disaster*

The strength of Thucydides' language ('the enterprise of the Hellenes was ruined') and also the use of the same phrase as for the Sicilian Disaster, that 'few returned home out of many' seem to have been the reason that finally swayed Meiggs against the 'orthodoxy of reductionalism'.<sup>17</sup> How justified is this reaction?

In both passages (i 100 and vii 87) Thucydides refers to 'Hellenic' not to specifically 'Athenian' disasters, so Meiggs' attempt to reduce the Athenian casualties,

<sup>16</sup> Westlake (n. 4) 71 n. 35 suggests that the arrival of the relief force at the mouth of the Mendesian branch of the Nile, which is not one of the three main branches, may suggest that it was trying to slip past enemy positions: but this fails to explain why so small a force was sent, if the danger was known, or how it could be expected to get through to Prosopitis if the land was in enemy hands.

<sup>17</sup> Westlake 67–8 is also impressed by the language but attributes it to ignorance and emotionalism (73). He also fails to add allied ships to the 40 Athenian ships in the main force.

designed as it is to explain Athens' continuing strength in the years after 454, merely intensifies the problem of how the allies, whose casualties he greatly increases, exhibited similar strength—most notably Samos in her powerful revolt of 440 which Athens found it hard to subdue.

If a comparison is to be made between the casualties in Egypt and Sicily Meiggs, as we have seen, argues for the loss of 235–240 ships and therefore about 47,000–48,000 Hellenic lives. Indeed, he even suggests (101) that there might have been 40 marines on each of the original 200 ships instead of the more usual 20: this would push the total casualties up by 4,000—to about 51,000–52,000 in all.

As against this, Thucydides vii 75.5 gives a figure of 40,000 on the fatal final march from Syracuse and Isokrates viii 86 puts the total loss at that figure. Although there is dispute about the details of these figures there do not appear to be grounds for arguing that Thucydides put the total loss a great deal higher, even if casualties that occurred before the march are added (and it may be that some of the 40,000 were slaves and therefore deductible, as non-Hellenes). So why should he say that this, not Egypt, was the greatest Hellenic disaster?<sup>18</sup>

If only 100 ships or so were lost in 454 with about 20,000 men, as reductionalists argue, then this mystery is solved, but matters are more complicated than that. Sir Kenneth Dover has pointed out to me that the Sicilian Disaster is described first from the victors' viewpoint, as the greatest Hellenic achievement, and only secondly as 'the most calamitous to the defeated'. So the Persian defeat of Athens in Egypt was not in Thucydides' mind (since it was not a 'Hellenic' achievement). If one wonders about the Greek defeat of Persia in 480–79, Dover suggests that a defeat of barbarians would also not be a 'Hellenic achievement'; but it does not seem clear to me that this phrase must apply to war between Hellenes only and not also to Hellenic war against barbarians. If it is argued that the 480–79 Greek victory ranked below that of Syracuse because barbarians were inferior to Greeks, this hardly squares with the Spartans' pride in Thermopylae and Plataea or the Athenians' in Salamis. Perhaps it was inferior in the other respect mentioned by Thucydides—that in Sicily the destruction was 'utter destruction'. This was not true of the Persians in 490, 480 or 479, since large numbers of their forces escaped on each of these occasions.

<sup>18</sup> Although Thucydides' account of the Sicilian Disaster clearly possesses many aspects of language and thought in common with Greek Tragedy, as has been well shown by Colin Macleod in his *Collected Essays* (Oxford 1983) 140–58, there is no suggestion by him that Thucydides was seduced by the muse of Tragedy from his loyalty to the muse of History. Macleod notes that the tragic construction of the history and interpretation of events was not at all contrary to Thucydides' aims as a historian. Thus the heightened emotion of the writing should not breed scepticism about his facts and figures: Dover in *HCT* iv shows no such tendency.

Nor do I accept Westlake's suggestion (73) that Thucydides was quite unable to get reliable information about casualties in 454, since it was so recent and casualty-lists should in any case have been available: nor can I believe that his treatment of this topic was affected by his profound shock as a six-year-old.

But clearly it is not possible to argue that Thucydides was implying any comparison between the Egyptian and Sicilian Disasters, and Meiggs invokes language not figures. If one looks at the language one finds that the phrase 'few escaping out of many' is also used (as Meiggs himself points out (105 n. 2) of an Ambraciot defeat in which the operation was, of course, on a much smaller scale. Finally it remains necessary to argue that Thucydides' language on Egypt fits the reductionalist view. Surely it is true that the affairs of the Hellenes were destroyed in Egypt in 454 even if 'only' 100 ships and 20,000 men perished, as against the monstrous number of 230-40 ships and 46,000-48,000 men?

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### Family quarrels

Much has been written already about the dispute between Mantitheos and Mantitheos-Boiotos (henceforth Boiotos), sons of Mantias of Thorikos; but the currently accepted chronology needs some modification and the relations between institutions and strategies have not been fully explored.

The current view (APF 9667, largely following J. Rudhardt, *Mus. Helv.* xix [1962] 39-64) has Boiotos born, in wedlock, c. 382; by c. 381 Mantias would have divorced Boiotos' mother Plangon and remarried, Mantitheos being born c. 380. Mantitheos entered the deme Thorikos and married c. 362; Boiotos succeeded in getting Mantias to present him to his phratry in autumn 359 and in summer 358, by which time Mantias was dead, presented himself to the deme under the name Mantitheos. Demosthenes xxxix is dated to autumn 348, [D.] xl to 347.

The problem with this chronology is that it leaves Boiotos kicking his heels for an uncomfortably long time between reaching eighteen, the age at which he should have entered a deme, and starting proceedings against his father, a delay which would have been particularly foolish if he could indeed demonstrate that he was born well before his father's marriage to Mantitheos' mother, and one which would have put him in a very awkward position in Athenian society.<sup>1</sup> It is clear that he had not been introduced to any phratry and deme other than those of Mantias; Mantitheos makes the most of the fact that Boiotos had taken part in boys' choruses in the tribe Hippothontis, to which his mother's family belonged (xxxix 22) and would not have failed to take advantage of inscription in a corresponding phratry or deme if it had taken place.

Boiotos' case seems to have been that he had the necessary qualifications for citizenship and was being deprived of it by Mantias' failure to have him

<sup>1</sup> Some continue to argue (most recently, K. R. Walters. *Class. Ant.* ii [1983] 314-36) that as the son of two Athenian parents Boiotos was entitled to citizenship even if he was born out of wedlock, and that Mantias never acknowledged him and his brother as legitimate sons. This view ignores the fact that recognition by Mantias led to an equal division of his estate between the three sons (cf. M. H. Hansen, *Demography and democracy* [Systime, Herning, Denmark 1985] 73-6). In the mind of Mantitheos at least, recognition, citizenship and inheritance were indissolubly connected. The view that Boiotos was only seeking recognition as a *nothos* would make his behaviour particularly difficult to explain on the current chronology.

inscribed in the deme Thorikos (xxxix 2 τῆς πατρίδος ἀποστρεψίθαι). We do not know under what rubric such a suit would have fallen, except that it was a *dikē* and not a *graphē*; in any case Mantias was not keen to face a court (xxxix 3), so the question of rubric scarcely arose.<sup>2</sup>

Boiotos claimed to be older than Mantitheos, and all the latter can say in reply is that he has always looked younger (xxxix 27). He knows this argument is weak. Boiotos' assertion that Mantias had given him his own father's name, Mantitheos, as befitted a first born son, at a formal naming ceremony (*dekatē*) ten days after his birth, was accepted by the deme and, eventually, by a court; since his witnesses were not kin of Mantias (xxxix 22, cf. xl 59), his argument may have rested less on the *dekatē* rite than on proof that he had been called Mantitheos throughout his boyhood.<sup>3</sup> His claim that Mantias gave him the name Boiotos, when presenting him to his phratry, as an insult (xxxix 32) points the same way. (In reality Mantias was surely trying to avoid embarrassment. An adopted son is given a new name on presentation to the phratry in Isaios vii 17.) Boiotos' story evidently was that soon after his birth and *dekatē* his parents had quarrelled and this had led Mantias to reject Plangon's sons (xxxix 22-3, xl 29); when Mantitheos grew up he had made sure that this attitude persisted (xxxix 27, xl 45).

It has been recognised that the ambiguity of the relationship between Mantias and Plangon—which persisted or was renewed during his brief period of marriage to Mantitheos' mother (xl 8-9, 27, cf. xxxix 26)—was connected with the fact that her father Pamphilos I died heavily indebted to the state. Part of the debt was still unpaid in 347/6 (xl 22). Boiotos asserted that at Pamphilos' death Mantias had claimed part of the debtor's property as owed to him for Plangon's dowry (xl 20), and this is very probably true, although of course the claim does not prove that Mantias and Plangon were married. We find a similar ambiguity over Aphobos' marriage to Onetor's sister in Demosthenes' suits against his guardians. It is not impossible that Mantias left Plangon at home with her three brothers (at least two of whom were still childless and presumably unmarried in 359). By claiming the dowry but not taking Plangon to his own home, Mantias could have secured the family some property while remaining sufficiently detached to avoid involvement in their ruin.<sup>4</sup> Plangon and her brothers were not

<sup>2</sup> Even if young men between the ages of 18 and 20 were already in c. 360 debarred from appearing in court except in cases concerned with inheritance and similar matters (such as rights to *genos* priesthoods), which is not certain (Rhodes, *Comm. Ath. Pol.* 509), suits concerning entry to the deme must have been included in the permitted category. Rhodes (501) thinks that appeals against rejection by the deme—and presumably also suits such as Boiotos threatened—would have had to be brought by a parent or guardian, but this seems to me unnecessarily legalistic. Boiotos had older and more experienced supporters, predictably characterised by Mantitheos as sycophants.

<sup>3</sup> Note that the boyhood acquaintances of Boiotos who testify that he took part in boys' choruses in the tribe of his mother's family, Hippothontis, (xxxix 24) were not asked to testify that he was called Boiotos at that time.

<sup>4</sup> Rudhardt argues that if Mantias had put in an official claim for Plangon's dowry Mantitheos could not have asserted that there was no proof of it (xl 21). But Athenian litigants do not produce documentary evidence of such transactions from state records; they