

DAVID M. PRITCHARD (ed.). *War, Democracy and Culture in Classical Athens*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. xviii + 460, ISBN 9780521190336.

Editors of conference proceedings often assert that their collections offer fundamentally new or novel approaches on some topic that scholars have overlooked or neglected for too long. In the case of the essays assembled by David Pritchard, such an assertion rings resoundingly true. There are many publications on ancient war and warfare, with much attention to new military strategies and tactics that various generals employed on particular campaigns, as well as the impact that new equipment and technology had on the battlefield. So too the Athenian democracy has been extensively studied. It has also sometimes been argued that Athens became a democracy because it established itself as a naval power. Few works, however, consider the impact that the Athenian democracy had on the wars of classical Greece, Did democracy make Athens more militaristic and cause the wars of the classical period to escalate in magnitude and scale? To what extent can Athens help us better understand more generally the dynamics between democracy and military conflict? Does democracy lead to or is it a brake on war and violence? Bringing together classicists, historians, archaeologists, and political scientists to explore these questions from a variety of different perspectives, Pritchard has done the field a great service. As to be expected, the essays sometimes reach very different conclusions, which, unfortunately, are glossed over in the introduction in order to impress upon the reader how much democracy contributed to the militarization of Athens. Such a conclusion is only partially true and does not give the reader a full sense of the range of opinions expressed in the volume or the points of disagreement between the authors, which make the book such a valuable resource.

In response to the Realists who attempt to separate military history from political and social history and regard military policy as independent of internal politics, Pritchard shows in Chapter 1 (“The symbiosis between democracy and war: the case of ancient Athens”) that the democracy led to Athenian military victories because it allowed for an unprecedented level of participation by non-elite citizens in the military campaigns of the city. He further argues that the military hyperactivity of fifth-century Athens was a direct consequence of the democracy. Yet warfare increased after the Athenians expelled the Pisistratids as they continued the process of urbanization that was already long under way and developed those institutions that were the hallmark of the classical *polis*. Militarization was

a product of state formation and empire building. It occurred as part of a general shift that was taking place throughout the Greek world in the wake of the Persian invasions. Pritchard too narrowly associates the militarism that plagued classical Greece with the Athenian democracy. This increase in warfare, which affected much of the Greek world, should be linked to the other contemporary political developments, which ancient historians have used to distinguish the classical period from the archaic period. The Realists may be wrong to discount the importance of domestic concerns for specific military conflicts, but we also cannot disregard the significance of geopolitical considerations.

In Chapter 2 (“Thucydides on Athens’ democratic advantage in the Archidamian War”), Josiah Ober uses Thucydides’ account to explain why democracies can compete effectively against authoritarian regimes in military conflicts. He begins with the Corinthian assessment of Athens in Book 1 and the speeches of Pericles to show that the Athenians constructed a democratic culture that promoted participation in the decision-making process, and through a system of awards and punishment, citizens were given incentives to use their personal resources for the collective good rather than live as “freeriders” and withhold their contributions from the community. While authoritarian regimes do not have to worry about the problem of freeriders because they can coerce the population to contribute, democracies have a military advantage so long as they can encourage the citizens to cooperate and prevent them from opting out. Democracies can more easily adopt new policies and change military strategies, when necessary, because knowledge and information is circulated to a wider audience and in ways which are less hierarchical, and thus more transferable. Ober then discusses Athenian military operations at Mytilene in 428/7 and Pylos in 425 to demonstrate this point. In both instances, the Athenians were successful because the soldiers adapted their tactics and improvised as the situation demanded, and they had the technical expertise to carry out a wide range of military operations and even change their method of fighting to achieve these victories. Of course, Athens still lost the Peloponnesian War, but Persia, not Sparta, deserves most of the credit for the Athenian defeat. In spite of its meager resources, classical Athens was remarkably successful on the battlefield because of the democracy for the reasons Ober suggests. Yet as long as the democracy remained confined to the walls of the *polis*, Athens could hold out only so long against authoritarian regimes, which could not adapt as easily to new situations and circumstances, but they had substantially more resources at their disposal.

In Chapter 3 (“Democratizing courage in classical Athens”), Ryan Balot follows a similar approach. He begins by rightly, in my opinion, calling into question that Athenian militarization can be associated directly with the new democracy. Other ancient states, which were not democratic, also went

to war regularly (e.g., Persia, Macedon, Rome). Here the volume would have benefited from a chapter that explored war and the economy. As Finley pointed out long ago, war was the greatest source of revenue for the ancient state. It often alleviated internal social conflicts. Such problems were certainly not unique to democracies, but the emergence of the Athenian democracy created new social tensions that warfare helped reduced. If Athens had not become militaristic, it is quite likely that the fledgling democracy would have suffered more civil unrest. Balot also raises doubts about the distinctiveness of the Athenian thalassocracy and the common assertion that Athens became a naval power because of the democracy. While this is also true, the success of the navy certainly made it easier to extend privileges to the Athenian rowers, who were primarily from the lowest economic classes. Athens may not have been a naval power because it was a democracy, but unlike other naval powers, Athenian rowers had extensive political rights and privileges because of the democracy. Balot then suggests that the structure of the democracy caused the Athenians to develop a more self-reflective notion of courage because political institutions provided the Athenians an opportunity to speak freely and to criticize each other. While debate sometimes resulted in an overly aggressive view of courage, democratic ideology was riddled with contradictions and often allowed Athenians to adopt a less aggressive concept of courage, which Balot regards as necessarily more praiseworthy. To be certain, the kind of open debate that democracies facilitate can sometimes promote a positive and constructive understanding of courage, but it is unclear why this is necessarily the case. Aggression is sometimes rational, and while Sparta promoted a more aggressive sense of courage, classical Athens was certainly not less aggressive. If so, there seems to be a disconnect between military policy and attitudes and beliefs about courage and manhood.

Chapter 4 (“Cavalry, democracy and military thinking in classical Athens”) by Iain Spence and Chapter 5 (“Light troops in classical Athens”) by Matthew Trundle examine military innovations during the fifth and fourth centuries. Spence shows that classical Athens chose not only to expand its navy but also to rely more extensively on cavalry. He argues that major cavalry reforms were implemented during the *Pentecontaetia* and the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War to support Periclean military strategy. So the democracy was responsible for expanding the role of both the lower *and* upper classes in Athenian military operations. This conclusion helps support the claim that military reforms of the fifth century were a consequence of the democracy and not vice versa. Similarly Trundle shows that peltasts were used frequently in the fourth century, particularly in mercenary armies, but such troops were usually foreigners, and they were not normally or regularly granted citizenship. In contrast to the citizen rowers who gained greater privileges in the fifth century, a similar phenomenon did not happen

for peltasts. Their military importance neither caused citizens to become peltasts nor peltasts to receive citizenship. These findings suggest that we cannot assume *thetes* were granted greater privileges because of Athenian naval victories.

Chapter 6 (“Affirming Athenian action: Euripides’ portrayal of military activity and the limits of tragic instruction”) by Sophie Mills and Chapter 7 (“Ridiculing a popular war: old comedy and militarism in classical Athens”) by David Konstan consider the impact of drama on Athenian views concerning war. Both show how drama provided the Athenians with a safe forum to question the militarism of their own society. The plays, however, had a limited impact on Athenian military policy because the dramatists employed various devices (e.g., epic time, fantastical plots, foreign settings, etc.) to distance the audience from the problems that the characters faced on stage. Mills compares how warfare is depicted in the *Trojan Women* to other plays by Euripides that focus on Athens, and she suggests in the latter case the wars are described quite positively. Euripides may force the Athenians to reflect on the horrors of war, but he avoids directly critiquing Athenian military policy. Konstan argues that the Athenians viewed courage and bravery so positively that Aristophanes had to frame his objections in a way that did not appear cowardly. In the later stages of the war, he turned to more fantastical plots and protagonists, such as Lysistrata, who were outsiders, to voice this criticism. Although Aristophanes offers only fantastical and utopian solutions to the Peloponnesian War, Konstan suggests that this does not mean his opposition was not serious. To illustrate his point, he uses the *New York Times* editorials by Paul Krugman, who spoke out against the U.S. war in Iraq but did not offer practical solutions once the fighting had begun. The problem, however, is that Krugman’s editorials were not comic. So his opposition was obviously serious. The same cannot be said for Aristophanes. A comparison with a modern comedy, such as the *Daily Show* or *The Colbert Report* on the *Comedy Channel*, would have better served Konstan’s case.

The next section consists of two chapters on Attic oratory: Chapter 8 (“War in the law-court: some Athenian discussions”) by Alastair Blanshard and Chapter 9 (“Athenian militarism and the recourse to war”) by Peter Hunt. In Lysias 9 and 16 and Demosthenes 50, disagreement is expressed concerning the manner troops are selected for military campaigns and the payment for the trierarchy. Although there certainly was not a causal link between these specific disputes and the military reforms that subsequently took place, Blanshard suggests these speeches help us understand the political climate that led to the new military policies. Hunt’s chapter in some ways would have been better grouped with Ober’s and Balot’s since he is interested in explaining the relationship between the democracy and Athenian militarism. Turning to funeral speeches, he suggests that Athens

suffered a vicious cycle. Because speeches delivered for fallen soldiers made the Athenians overly optimistic about their military effectiveness, war led to more war. Hunt's observations on Athenian optimism are compelling, but I find the connection with Athenian militarism too loose. He relies primarily on Athenian policy in the age of Demosthenes to make his case, but the Athenians had good reasons to view Philip as an existential threat. As Hunt argues, one cannot easily prove that Athens was more militaristic than other contemporaneous cities, such as Corinth, for example, because it is difficult to determine what Corinth would have done if it had to face the same situation as Athens (233). By the same argument, it is difficult to determine what a non-militaristic Athens would have done. Perhaps Athens would not have geared for war with Philip so soon if it were less militaristic or less optimistic about its chances, but sooner or later there still would have been a war.

The next section considers "Soldiers in privately purchased art." In Chapter 10 ("Democratic ideology, the events of war and the iconography of Attic funerary sculpture"), Robin Osborne argues that the much studied Dexileos' monument was the first private cenotaph with a relief celebrating the actions of a single soldier in the midst of battle. Since he cannot make the case on the basis of style or technique, as is the normal practice of art historians, he uses historical arguments. Osborne suggests that Dexileos' relatives needed a new iconography in order to fight against the criticism and animosity that the cavalry faced after the Thirty (260, 263). To honor Dexileos as a knight was certainly a way of asserting that knights too could be good Athenians in spite of their past association with the Thirty. But one could view this monument as merely the continuation and further development of a trend that had already started during the Peloponnesian War. At least as early as 409, private monuments, without relief, were set up for fallen soldiers (251 n. 21). Moreover, the Dexileos' monument is somewhat defensive since the date of Dexileos' birth was included so that the viewer would not assume that he had been an oligarchic sympathizer. In some ways then, the iconography maintains the democratic narrative above the cavalry, and its message is more equivocal than Osborne's analysis would suggest.

In Chapter 11 ("The warrior *loutrophoroi* of fifth-century Athens"), Patricia Hannah examines the imagery on these vases to better understand Athenian representations of the citizen soldiers. She shows that the vases often have scenes of battles between mixed forces, contemporary equipment is regularly depicted, and the horrors of war are not detailed to emphasize the social purpose of fighting. Static scenes of soldiers either before or after battle appear on the vases, and the battle scenes usually show the troops just as the fighting has begun. While some view the varied scenes as highlighting the differences among the forces, Hannah believes the unity of the troops is stressed because, in spite of their differences, they are fighting for a common cause. In Chapter 12 ("I am Eurymedon: tensions and ambiguities in Athenian

war imagery”), Margaret Miller offers a new interpretation of the Eurymedon vase. She follows those who view it as statement on the Greek victory against the Persians, but regards both figures on the vase as problematic. Drawing on other vases that show poor and destitute individuals in a similar fashion as the Greek figure on the Eurymedon vase, Miller argues that the vase ridicules this figure for his lower social status. So the vase then celebrates the Greek victory from an elite perspective which is condescending to the Greek and Persian figures.

The last section of the book concerns the public burial of fallen soldiers. Chapter 13 (“Commemoration of the war dead in classical Athens: remembering defeat and victory”) by Polly Low could just as easily be grouped with the section on visual representations while Chapter 14 (“*Aretê* and the achievements of the war dead: the logic of praise in the Athenian funeral oration”) by Sumio Yoshitake has more in common with the chapters on Attic oratory. Low argues that public monuments for the war dead figured less prominently in Athenian culture than other military commemorations because the Athenians did not want to focus on the costs of war. To reach such a conclusion, she depends primarily on references in Attic oratory to public monuments, but perhaps the monuments to the war dead were so common or references to them would not have contributed to the arguments that the speakers had to make in their individual cases. The *epitaphios* clearly became an important literary tradition because the sentiment expressed on the occasion of the public funeral was so evocative and resonated so much with the audience. Moreover, if the public memorials for the war dead were not powerful *exempla* for the Athenians, it is hard to explain the clustering of private monuments in the very same vicinity. On the other hand, the Athenians had many ways to celebrate their wars, as Low points out, and modern scholarship tends to focus too much on the importance of the public burial in the Athenian political imaginary. In Chapter 14, Yoshitake suggests that the *epitaphios* did not simply honor the city or the fallen soldiers. Since they served as a metonymy for the whole army, all soldiers who fought on the campaign for which the dead gave their lives were, by extension, also honored, and thus the *epitaphios* was more consolatory than is sometimes believed.

In the final chapter (“Epilogue: does democracy have a violent heart?”), John Keane looks at the history of democracy and violence and outlines what he believes are some positive developments that can break the cycle. He disagrees with those who think that war is systemic to democracy. However, he does believe that the mapping of democracy onto the *polis* and the nation state has led to the militarization of participatory and representative democracies. For Keane, the solution is the development of democratic institutions that “denature” war by calling into question the necessity of military solutions to solve political problems. He suggests that

we now live in the age of “monitory democracy” with subnational, national, and international organizations seeking to prevent military conflicts from breaking out, stop them when they have, and hold those responsible for the atrocities on the battlefield. According to Keane, accountability is a feature intrinsic to democracy, as classical Athens shows. So democracies may have a violent history, but they also provide the resources that are needed to stop this violence. Yet as long as war provides a way for some to obtain an advantage, no matter how short term, and individuals live in conditions that make them desperate, this monitoring may be able to stop a war, but it cannot put an end to war.

Pritchard and the individual authors are to be commended for tackling such complex questions on the relationship between the Athenian democracy and its wars and for showing us how the ancient experience can help us better understand the modern entanglement between democracy and war. The volume is especially useful because the contributions differ in their approaches and their conclusions so that the reader must confront the ambiguities in the evidence. As to be expected with such a work, there are always questions that could have been addressed or given more attention, and to be fair, there is very little that the contributors do not discuss. Still, the volume would have benefitted from a more formal discussion on the economy as a middle way to advance our understanding of the relationship between war and the Athenian democracy. Perhaps it has been so difficult to determine whether war made the democracy possible or vice versa because the relationship is not one of direct causation.

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