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Fascicolo 22. Aprile 2025 Storia Militare Antica e Bizantina (6)

a cura di Marco Bettalli, Elena Franchi e Gioacchino Strano



Società Italiana di Storia Militare

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Bronze statue (2nd/3rd century AD) of the genius of a legion. Enns (Upper Austria). Museum Lauriacum. Foto 20912 Wolfgang Sauber, GNU Free Documentation License Wikimedia Commons

The dog barks around the hedgehog Reassessing the κύκλος in ancient naval warfare

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ABSTRACT: This study aims to analyze at length what has been defined as one of the tactical formations of naval warfare in the Classical period: the $\kappa \acute{o} \kappa \lambda o \varsigma$. Taking the distance from the reading mainstream among scholars, the following contribution intends to review the battle of Artemision, Patras and Corcyra, seeking to understand the reasons behind the employment of this tactic.

Keywords: Naval Warfare, Kykaos, Artemision, Phormio, Patras, Corcyra.

Introduction

he winds intensified their blow and the sea rippled, rendering the Peloponnesian fleet unable to maintain their position anymore. As Phormio had expected, the situation shifted in their favour: the enemy was obstructing each other losing the formation carefully researched. What ensued became a sort of nightmare for the men embarked: the Athenians, displaying their naval skills, started to row around their circular formation and, upon Phormio's signal, rammed an enemy flagship. Then the complete disorder took place and the Athenians kept on ramming other ships which were rendered unusable. The first naval battle of the Peloponnesian war ended with a victory of only twenty Athenian triremes against the Peloponnesians who doubled them. The formation called κύκλος turned into a disaster.

It is not unchallenging to have an idea of what happened. A very realistic analogy, which inspired the title of this paper, was proposed many years ago by Bernard W. Henderson: «Imagine a dog trying to get at hedgehog rolled into a

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ball»¹. In some situations, certain Greek fleets, adopting the posture analogous to the hedgehog, opted for the κύκλος, which is usually rendered as "circle". Extant sources describe this formation in only three naval battles: Artemision in 480, Patras in 429 and Corcyra 427. Reading these battles' accounts, Herodotus and Thucydides respectively, scholars have established a substantial connection between the battle of Patras and the Herodotus' account regarding the Artemision². The battle of Patras, which provides the most detailed narrative of this tactic – as sketched at the beginning and subsequently examined at length - has become the starting-point through which scholars interpret the Herodotean description. According to this prevailing reading, the naval engagement against the Persians represents the first time where this tactic appeared in ancient naval warfare among the Greeks. Moreover, according to the mainstream interpretation, the κύκλος emerged as a possible option³ to face the opponent who opted for the more well-attested and, as a consequence, more studied battle manoeuvre: the so-called διέκπλους.

The aim of this paper is to offer a reading of these three battle focusing on the presence, real or presumed, of this tactic, in order to set the $\kappa \dot{\nu} \kappa \lambda o \varsigma$ in the broader field of naval warfare during classical period.

¹ Bernard W. HENDERSON, *The Great War between Athens and Sparta*, New York, Arno Press, 1927, p. 98.

² Cf. William L. RODGERS, Greek and Roman Naval Warfare. A Study of Strategy, Tactics, and Ships Design from Salamis (480 b.c) to Actium (31 b.c), Annapolis, The United States Naval Institute, 1937, p. 132; Donald KAGAN, The Archidamian War, Ithaca – London, Yale University Press, 1974, p. 109; Simon HORNBLOWER, A Commentary on Thucydides. Volume I. Book I-III, 1991, p. 364; John S. MORRISON – John F. COATES – Boris RAN-KOV, The Athenian Trireme. The History and Reconstruction of an Ancient Greek Warship, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 68-69; John R. HALE, Lord of the Sea. The Epic Story of the Athenian Navy and the Birth of Democracy, London, Penguin Publishing Book, 2009, pp. 159-160; Jennifer T. ROBERTS, Athens, Sparta and the Struggle for Ancient Greece, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2017, p. 92; RAHE Paul A., The Second Attic War. The Grand Strategy of Classical Sparta 446-418 B.C., New Heaven – London, Yale University Press, 2020, p. 109.

³ John S. MORRISON – John F. COATES – Boris RANKOV, The Athenian Trireme, cit. pp. 71-72; Owen REES, Great Naval Battles of the Ancient Greek World, Pen & Sword Maritime, Philadelphia, 2019, pp. xiii-xiv.

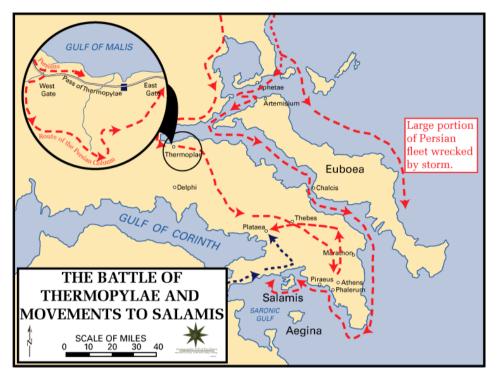


Fig. 1. Battle of Thermopylae and movements to Salamis, 480 BC. The Department of History, United States Military Academy. Public Domain. Wikimedia Commons.

Artemision, first day

Meanwhile, the Persians were inspecting the remaining triremes⁴ when, as soon as the opportunity arose, a renowned deep-sea diver, whose name was Scillias of

⁴ Hdt. VIII 8.1. At the beginning, the Persians had 1207 triremes (Hdt. VII 89.1; 184.1), helped by 120 other from the area of Thrace. But, after the first storm, they lost 400 ships (Hdt. VII 190) and 15 were captured by the Greeks (Hdt. VII 194.1). Cf. Pietro VANNICELLI, *Resistenza e Intesa. Studi sulle guerre persiane in Erodoto*, Bari, Edipuglia, 2013. pp. 50-62; Christopher TUPLIN – Bruno JACOBS, «Military Organization and Equipment», in Bruno Jacobs – Robert Rollinger (eds.), *A Companion to the Achaemenid Persian Empire. Volume II*, Hoboken, Wiley Blackwell, 2021, pp. 1175-1177 with further references. For the logistic of a such mobilization John HylAND, «The Achaemenid Military System and Its Campaign Logistics», in John Hyland – Khodadad Rezakhami (eds.), *Brill's Companion to War in the Ancient Iranian Empires*, Leiden, Brill, 2024, pp. 174-175. On the localization of their naval base vd. Paul W. WALLACE, «Aphetai and the Battle of Artemisium», in Alan L. Boegehold et al. (eds.), *Studies Presented to Sterling Down on his eightieth birth-day*, Durham, Duke University, 1984, pp. 106-110.

Scione, deserted to bring up to date the Greeks on the enemy's manoeuvres. Despite Herodotus' rational scepticism regarding the story of Scillias' adventurous escape from the Persian side⁵, the Greeks gathered a frightening development: two hundred triremes had already set sail to circumnavigate the eastern side of Euboea and round the southern headland, aiming to reach the Hellenic fleet from the south⁶. Although scholars have entertained doubts about the feasibility of this strategy in broad terms and the logistical timing for such circumnavigation⁷, the Greeks did not know otherwise and were not able to verify the Scillias' account in a short time. If the Persians carried their deceptive plan out, the Greek coalition, which was already outnumbered, would be helpless. Then it is no wonder that they started to discuss viable alternatives before it got too late. After an extensive debate – during which the possibility of withdrawal may have come up again⁸ –, the Greeks camped for that day. As midnight passed, they resolved to sail southward to pre-empt the encircling fleet. However, within the Herodotus' elaborate timeline which tracks what happened at Thermopylae at the same time⁹, the exact moment when the Greeks did not encounter the two hounded trireme remains unclear. Yet, by late afternoon¹⁰, they had revised their strategic plans.

⁵ Hdt. VIII 8.2: «οὐκ ἔχω εἰπεῖν ἀτρεκέως». Vd. Donald LATEINER, The Historical Method of Herodotus, Toronto – Buffalo – London, University of Toronto Press, 1989, p. 63.

⁶ At Thermopoylae, Artemision and Salamis the Persians always attempted to carry out an encirclement (cf. Hdt., VII 213-218; VIII 7-13; 76; 79-82).

⁷ For the debate cf. Charles HIGNETT, Xerxes' Invasion of Greece, Oxford, Oxford Clarendon, 1963, pp. 386-392; George CAWKWELL, The Greek Wars. The Failure of Persia, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005, pp. 93-94. For a major confidence in Herodotus' account cf. Andrew R. BURN, Persia and the Greeks. The Defence of the West, c. 546-478 B.C., New York, St Martin's Press, 1962, pp. 395-399; Peter GREEN, The Greeo-Persian Wars, Berkeley – Los Angeles – London, University of California Press, 1998, pp. 128-129. Cf. Herbert HÖRHAGER, «Zu den Flottenoperationen am Kap Artemision», Chiron, 3, (1973), pp. 51-59 for further topographical problems.

⁸ Hdt. VIII 9.1: «Τοῦτο δὲ ἀκούσαντες οἱ Ἔλληνες λόγον σφίσι αὐτοῖσι ἐδίδοσαν. Πολλῶν δὲ λεχθέντων ἐνίκα τὴν ἡμέρην ἐκείνην αὐτοῦ μείναντάς» cf. Hdt. VIII 4-6. Steven SIDE-BOTHAM, «Herodotus on Artemisium», *The Classical World*, 75, 3, (1982), pp. 177-186 has risen doubt on the possible withdrawal, arguing that the Greek tried to trap the Persians in the "narrow waters".

⁹ Vd. the table made David Asheri, *Erodoto. Le Storie. Libro VIII. La vittoria di Temistocle*, Milano, Mondadori, 2010² pp. 216-218 with further references.

¹⁰ Hdt. VIII 9.1-2: «δείλην ὀψίην γινομένην τῆς ἡμέρης φυλάξαντες αὐτοὶ ἐπανέπλεον ἐπὶ τοὺς βαρβάρους». If we translate δειλή as "afternoon", it will be misleading, since we miss an interesting detail: δείλη does not mean the hours after the midday but when it's already

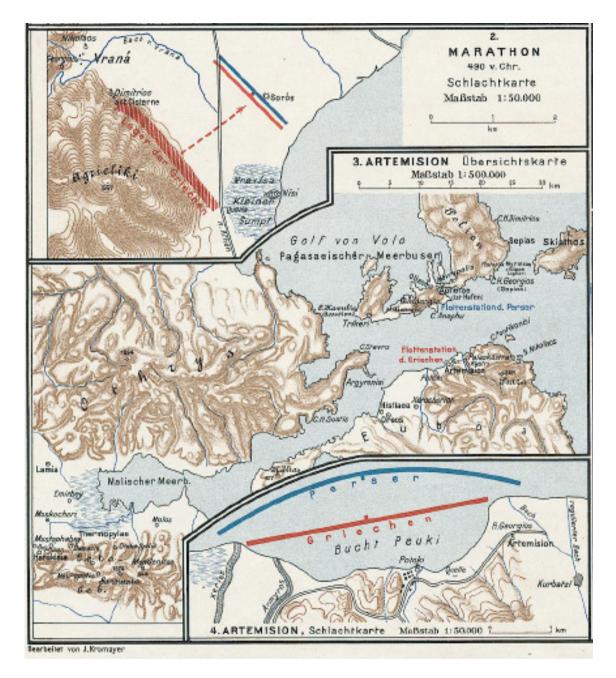


Fig. 2. Battle of Artemision, from Johannes Kromayer u. Georg Veith, Schlachten-Atlas zur Antiken Kriegsgeschichte, Vierte Lieferung, Griechische Abteilung, I, Leipzig, Wagner & Debes, 1926.

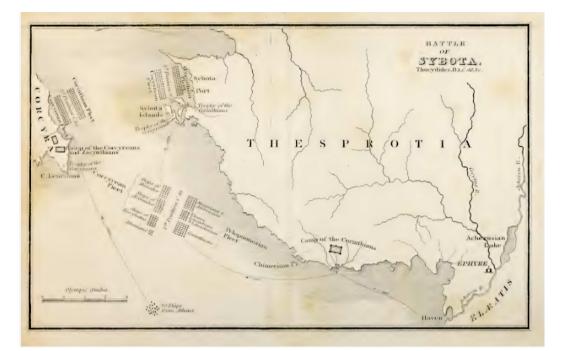


Fig. 3. Battle of Sybota. From Thucydides, *Maps and Plans illustrative of Thucydides, containing Northern Greece, Southern Greece, Coast of Asia Minor*, etc. Oxford: J. Vincent, ca.1825

What next followed was the first day of indecisive engagements, which enclosed all the problems that arose for the question of $\kappa \dot{\kappa} \kappa \lambda o \varsigma$ and his purported first emergence in ancient naval warfare. According to Herodotus, the Greeks started rowing against the Persians with a main strategic intent: they wanted to try out the enemies ($\dot{\alpha}\pi \dot{\alpha}\pi\epsilon\iota\rho\alpha\nu \alpha\dot{\upsilon}\tau\tilde{\omega}\nu \pi o\iota\eta\sigma\alpha\sigma\theta\alpha\iota$), their way of war ($\tau\eta\varsigma \tau\epsilon \mu\dot{\alpha}\chi\eta\varsigma$) and their $\delta\iota\epsilon\kappa\pi\lambda o \upsilon\varsigma$, essentially testing how the Persians might breach their battle line. At first sight, this motive might seem rash and thoughtless, but, given the absence of the expected two hundred triremes and cognizant of their numerical inferiority, the Greeks might grab the chance playing the disadvantages down¹¹.

11 Cf. John LAZENBY, «The Strategy of the Greeks in the Opening Campaign of the Persian

getting darker, just before the night (cf. Hdt. VII 167.4; VIII 9.6; IX 101.8; Thuc. III 74.2; IV 69.3; VIII 26.1; Xen. *Hell*. I 1.5; *Anab*. I 8.8; II 2.74; III 3.1; VII 2.16; *Cyr*. V 4.16). However, it is not night but the moment when every military actions stop (cf. Xen. *Anab*. III 4.34; 5.2) and the soldiers have dinner (Xen. *Hell*. IV 1.22; 6.6; *Anab*. IV 2.1; VII 3.1). If so, the Greeks opted for a short engagement before the night.

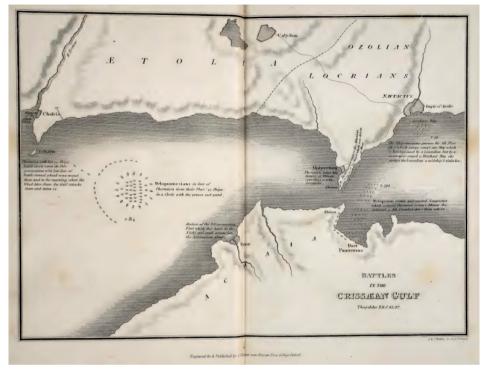
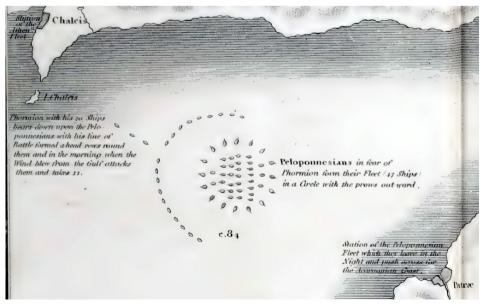


Fig. 4 a. Battles in the Crissaean Gulf. From Thucydides, Maps and Plans, cit.

Fig. 4 b. Particular, showing the Peloponnesian kyklos,



Through this enterprise, they avoided the risk of being too much outnumbered: this is not the only occasion that a naval battle started earlier than expected and one of the two opponents aimed to try the enemy out¹². In this regard, the Persian reaction was predictable: cognizant (such as the Greeks) of their superior rowing capabilities as well as their numerical advantage, then, as Herodotus highlights and his reader would expect, they disregarded the enemy's action¹³. The Persians, as a consequence, began to "encircle" the Greek fleet. Considering the hundreds of ships involved in this action, it is likely the Persians attempted to outflank their opponents. The Greeks, however, opted for the following escamotage: upon the first signal – as common practice for communications and issuing orders in ancient naval warfare too¹⁴ - they turned ship sterns toward enemy triremes, moving their poops closer together. This preliminary countermeasure, at first sight, could resemble what we know of the κύκλος employed in the other two occasions we will scrutinize in the next sections: as we have seen in the introduction, the majority of scholars have put forward this parallel, linking the Artemision battle with the events of 429. According to them, the same strategy took place in both episodes even the situations had some noteworthy dissimilarity. What followed in the battle, however, should be approached with circumspection. Indeed, as John

War», Hermes, 92, 3 (1964), pp. 274-275; Christopher Pelling, «Speech and narrative in the Histories», in Carolyn Dewald - John Marincola (eds.), The Cambridge Companion to Herodotus, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 110-111 n. 30, pp. 103-121.

¹² In the context of naval warfare, the verb $\dot{\alpha}\pi\sigma\pi\epsilon_{\mu}\phi\omega$ is employed by the ancient historians whenever one fleet tried to engage the enemy when the latter did not have the full fleet (Thuc. IV 24.3; cfr. the reflection put forward by Gylippos in Thuc. VII 21.2; VII 36.1) or was at a disadvantage (Thuc. VII 17.4).

¹³ Hdt. VIII 10.1: «Όρῶντες δέ σφεας οι τε ἄλλοι στρατιῶται οι Ξέρξεω καὶ οι στρατηγοὶ έπιπλέοντας νηυσὶ ὀλίγησι, πάγχυ σφι μανίην ἐπενείκαντες ἀνῆγον καὶ αὐτοὶ τὰς νέας». This behaviour, where the Persians looked the Greek strategy as a sign of madness, was the same at Marathon (Hdt. VI 112.2) and the opinion of Mardonios (Hdt. VIII 140). On this topic vd. the study of Harry C. AVERY, «Herodotus 6.112.2», Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association, 103, (1972), pp. 15-22.

¹⁴ Hdt. VIII 111.1: «Τοῖσι δὲ ἕλλησι ὡς ἐσήμηνε… δεύτερα δὲ σημήναντος». For the verb σημαίνω in classical warfare see Peter KRENTZ, «The Salpinx in Greek Warfare», in Victor D. Hanson (ed.), The Classical Greek Battle Experience, London, Routledge, 1991, pp. 110-120 who argues for the employment of a trumpet in naval warfare too. For the $\sigma \alpha \lambda \pi i \gamma \xi$ vd. Elena FRANCHI, «La Salpinx a Sparta antica tra realtà e rappresentazione», in Guido Raschieri (ed.), Il terzo suono. Dialoghi al crocevia delle tradizioni orali. Vol. 2, Trento, Università degli Studi di Trento, 2023, pp. 161-182 with further bibliography.



Fig. 5 a. Corcyra, From Thucydides, Maps and Plans, cit.

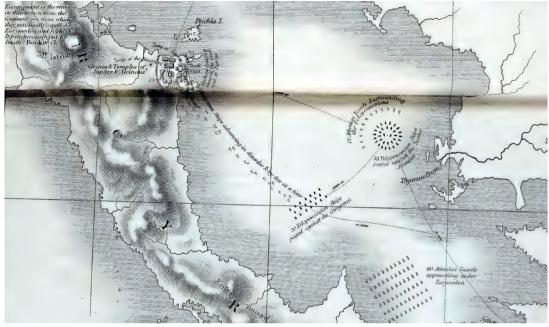


Fig. 5 b. Particular, showing the Peloponnesian kyklos,

Lazenby has persuasively argued on more than one occasion¹⁵, if the pattern was the Thucydidean account of 429, at Artemision the execution of a complete circle with 270 triremes stationaries would have required a radius of 4 km.

Thereafter, we are inclined to argue that the Greeks aimed to prevent the Persian triremes from rowing around their wings. The deeply-rooted idea of a first definite $\kappa \dot{\nu} \kappa \lambda \alpha \zeta$ in ancient naval warfare begins to fall apart. Moreover, despite several criticism on his nautical expertise¹⁶, Herodotus inserts further explicative details which corroborate the reading just advanced. Since the Greeks had already deployed their triremes closer together, following the second signal – while we cannot assert it was a well-established practice, it was a clear evidence of

¹⁵ John F. LAZENBY, «Essays and Reflections: Naval Warfare in the Ancient World: Myth and Realities», *The International History Review*, 9, 3, (1987a), p. 450; ID., «The Diekplous», *Greece & Rome*, 34, 2, (1987b), p. 174 n. 15; ID., *The Defence of Greece 490-479 B.C.*, Warminster, Aris & Phillips, 1993 pp. 138-140

¹⁶ The critic of George B. GRUNDY, *The Great Persian War and Its Preliminaries. A Study of the Evidence, Literary and Topographical*, London, John Murray, 1901, pp. 333-334 on Artemision is illustrative.

some planification before this enterprise – they took part in the action. Through the expression ἕργου εἴχοντο, Herodotus does not suggest the Greeks went into action maybe rowing toward the enemy, as some reconstructions supposes, but more simply that, given the inescapable proximity to the Persians, they were engaged in the fight¹⁷. The Greeks either sustained this initial clash or a simply initial moment had to deal with the solely tempted $\delta_{16}\kappa\pi\lambda_{00}$. Thought parallel traditions are inclined for a plan dreamed up for the first time by single person¹⁸, the countermeasure opted by the Greek fleet had the triremes kept stationary and with the rams turned toward the enemies. No additional actions seem to have been planned, such as the intervention of faster triremes or similar as we will see. The Greeks only sought to withstand the situation as possible invalidating the enemy's manoeuvres. Still, the following consequence of this plan was not completely clear: as Herodotus notices, the battle's outcome in that day remained inconclusive. Perhaps influenced by their previous experience at the battle of Lade¹⁹, the Persians were unprepared for this way of war. It should not be forgotten that Greeks captured thirty triremes before the day went out. Regarding other details on this preliminary fight, especially concerning tactics and battle's developments, Herodotus is sparing and remains consistent with his well-known approach to warfare²⁰. Besides the fact that the father of History does not call

¹⁷ We do not follow the accounts of George N. L. HAMMOND, «The Expedition of Xerxes», in John Boardman – George N. L. Hammond – David M. Lewis – Martin Ostwald (eds.), *The Cambridge Ancient History. Second Edition. Volume IV. Persia, Greece and the Western Mediterranean c. 525 to 479 B.C*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 554 and, more recently, Paul A. RAHE, *The Grand Strategy of Classical Sparta. The Persian Challenge*, New Haven – London, Yale University Press, 2015, pp. pp. 230-232 which are a sort of free interpretations of Herodotus' account in order to fully reconstruct this battle.

¹⁸ For the question of Heracleides of Mylasa vd. the debate and the bibliography in David Asheri, *Erodoto*. cit. pp. 210-211.

¹⁹ Hdt. VI 12. Cf. John MYRES, «The Battle of Lade, 494 B.C. (Herodotus VI. 6-17. With map)», *Greece & Rome*, 1, (1954), pp. 50-55; Donald LATEINER, «The Failure of the Ionian Revolt», *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*, 31, 2, (1982), pp. 149-150; Herman T. WALLINGA, «The Ionian Revolt», *Mnemosyne*, 37, 3/4, (1984), pp. 401-437.

²⁰ On this topic cf. Suzanne SAïD, «Guerre, intelligence et courage dans les histoires d' Hérodote», Ancient Society, 11/12, (1980), pp. 83-117; J. COBET, «Herodotus and Thucydides on War», in Ian S. Moxon – John D. Smart – Anthony J. Woodman (eds.), Past Perspectives. Studies in Greek and Roman Historical Writing. Paper presented at a conference in Leeds, 6-8 April 1983, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986, pp. 1-18; Laurence TRITLE, «Warfare in Herodotus», in Carolyn Dewald – John Marincola (eds.), The Cambridge Companion to Herodotus, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 209-223.

this plan as $\kappa \dot{\nu} \kappa \lambda o \varsigma$, a main clue that he is talking about a different arrangement as compared with a known contemporary formation, we can summarise what is emerged as follows: classifying what happened at Artemision as a "classical" $\kappa \dot{\nu} \kappa \lambda o \varsigma$ disposition would be misleading, indeed the Greeks were organised for sustain the short fight cognizant of their enemies and how they fought due to a superior fleet. The reader in front of the Artemision's account rightly asks what purpose the Greeks carried out this measure and, following the narrative arranged by Herodotus, it seems they did not want to defeat the enemy. The situation could not afford this goal and they opted for a confined fight which enabled them to capture some enemy ships.

Patras and the first emergence of the κύκλος

In the late summer of 429, the Spartan-allied fleet owing forty-seven triremes departed from Patras to reach the other troops already involved in Acarnania, where Cnemus, the appointed navarch for that year, should have waited for them. The original plan encompassed a double expedition against the Acarnanias owing the army and the fleet, with the latter joining Cnemus as soon as possible²¹. On the opposing coastline, however, the Athenian strategos Phormio²², commanding only twenty triremes, was cognizant that the enemies were about to cross the gulf over at any moment. Despite the Peloponnesians' attempts at concealment through nocturnal departure, the Athenians started sailing along the coast waiting for the opponents offshore in the centre of the gulf. The allies of Sparta did not expect any engagement with Phormio given their superior number, but the Athenian strategos was waiting for that moment, self-confident of the renowned Athenian naval skills²³. When they glimpsed that the Athenians would not back down,

²¹ Thuc. II 80-81; The Spartiate, however, did not wait the fleet, choosing to advance. The result was the inconclusive battle of Stratos: Thuc. II 81.3-8. Michael P. FRONDA – Chandra GIROUX, «Spartan Strategy in the Early Peloponnesian War, 431-425 B.C.E.», *Phoenix*, 73, 3/4, (2019), p. 305; Paul A. Rahe, *Sparta's Second Attic*, op. cit., pp. 106-107.

²² On this strategos cf. John R. HALE, «General Phormio's Art of War: a Greek Commentary on a Chinese Classic», in Charles D. Hamilton – Peter Krentz (eds.), Polis and Polemos: *Essays on Politics, War, and History in Ancient Greece in Honour of Donald Kagan*, Claremont, Regina Books, 1997, pp. 85-103; Ugo FANTASIA, «Formione in Acarnania (Thuc. II 68, 7-8) e le origini della guerra del Peloponneso», *Incidenza dell'Antico*, 4, (2006), pp. 59-98; Elisabetta BIANCO, «Formione, stratego *nautikotatos», Historikà*, 13, (2023), pp. 53-84.

²³ The generals often valued if it was safe or not to engage battle against a superior enemy vd. Roel KONUNENDIJK, «Playing Dice for the Polis: Pitched Battle in Greek Military



Fig. 6. *Olympias*, a reconstruction of an ancient Athenian trireme. Athens, Park of Maritime Tradition in Floisvos, in Palaio Faliro. Credit Jackson 2022. CC-BY-SA-4.0.

the Peloponnesians, guided by three Corinthian generals, opted for a formation distinctly identified as κύκλος by Thucydides. As soon as the Peloponnesians started moving for that formation, the Athenian historian provides a clear-cut and detailed account²⁴. The Peloponnesians obtained the κύκλος from the standard navigation line-ahead, where the admiral ship stopped first, so to be followed by "dominoes" of the other triremes. Each triremes, in turns, positioned themselves, one by one, pointing its rams outward (τὰς πρώρας μὲν ἔξω), whilst the stern was oriented inward (ἔσω δὲ τὰς πρύμνας). Based on the side where the circle was drawn, the stern was then tilted in part towards starboard or port, as much as it was sufficient in the direction of nearby triremes. The orientation aimed to create a sort of large perimeter in which the triremes represented their rams at end

Thought», *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 151, 1, (2021), pp. 17-18 with further bibliography.

²⁴ In order to give a reading of this tactic, scholars simply translate Thuc. II 84. Cf. Bernard W. HENDERSON, The Great War, op. cit., p. 97; William L. RODGERS, Greek and Roman, op. cit. pp. 131; Karl-Joachim Hölkeskamp, «La guerra e la pace», in Salvatore Settis (ed.), *I Greci. Storia cultura arte e società. 2. Una storia greca. II. Definizione*, Torino, Einaudi, 1997, pp. 508-509; Boris RANKOV, «Ancient Naval Warfare, 700 BC-AD 600», in Michael Whitby – Harry Sidebottom (eds.), *The Encyclopedia of Ancient Battles*, Hoboken, Wiley Blackwell, 2017, p. 29

of each ray. In the middle of this "hedgehog", five triremes, which Thucydides identifies as τὰς ἄριστα πλεούσας – to put in another way: these triremes were better rowed²⁵ – were ready to take part in the action ($\delta\pi\omega\varsigma$ ἐκπλέοιεν διὰ βραγέος παραγιγνόμενοι, εἴ πῃ προσπίπτοιεν οἱ ἐναντίοι). Whenever the Athenians tried to ram the Peloponnesians stationed to form the κύκλος, the five triremes would have help ramming in turn. In the end of this description, Thucydides limits himself to draw attention to the aim of this formation, reporting that the Peloponnesians avoided providing any chance for the enemy διέκπλους (ὡς μέγιστον οἶοί τ' ἦσαν μὴ διδόντες διέκπλουν). This latter detail is pivotal to getting the Thucydidean point: while some scholars have argued that the κύκλος was the defensive countermeasure against the Athenians, it raises up the problem of how there was the further Peloponnesian step in order to overwhelm the enemy or simply to drive him apart. Thucydides' silence on this matter has led us to a reassessment of traditional interpretation where the κύκλος was the classical countermeasure against the $\delta_{1}\epsilon_{\pi}\lambda_{0}$ out. The silence of the historian, however, is not complete, providing a crucial insight. At the beginning of the battle's account, Thucydides expressly states that the Peloponnesians were sailing not to engage in a naval battle but were organised to transport troops²⁶ and then, when Phormio was preparing the battle, they were compelled to face it²⁷. The situation, repeatedly emphasized by the historian throughout the account, bringing his reader to deduce to the following conclusion: the κύκλος was not simply a defensive formation itself but the only one feasible countermeasure to adopt under the circumstances. We can even call the κύκλος a surviving effort.

²⁵ Cf. Thuc. I 48.4; 48.7; VII 34.3; VIII 104.3; Xen. Hell., I 6.16; 6.19; Diod. XIII 39.3.

²⁶ Thuc., II 83.2: «οἱ δὲ Κορίνθιοι καὶ οἱ ξύμμαχοι ἕπλεον μὲν οὐχ ὡς ἐπὶ ναυμαχία, ἀλλὰ στρατιωτικώτερον παρεσκευασμένοι ἐς τὴν Ἀκαρνανίαν» is pivotal. For the expression στρατιωτικώτερον παρεσκευασμένοι cf. John S. Morrison – Robert T. Williams, Greek Oared Ships 900-322, 1968, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1968, pp. 247-248; Lionel Casson, *Ships and Seamanship in the Ancient World*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1971, pp. 92-93; John S. MORRISON – John F. COATES – Boris RANKOV, *The Athenian Triremes*, op. cit. 151-152; Matteo ZACCARINI, «Dalla "triere leggera" alla "triere pesante": l'evoluzione della flotta ateniese tra Temistocle e Cimone», *Rivista di Studi Militari*, 2, (2013), p. 23 n. 49.

²⁷ Thuc., II 83.1: «ἀλλ' ἠναγκάσθησαν περὶ τὰς αὐτὰς ἡμέρας τῆς ἐν Στράτῷ μάχης ναυμαχῆσαι πρὸς Φορμίωνα» where the keyword is ἀνάγχη repeated then in Thuc., II 83.3: «οὕτω δὴ ἀναγκάζονται ναυμαχεῖν κατὰ μέσον τὸν πορθμόν». For the concept of ἀνάγχη during battles in Thucydides vd. Martin Ostwald, ANAFKH in Thucydides, Atlanta, Scholars Press, 1988, p. 13

Corcyra: the stasis on the sea

When the civil strife at Corcyra had reached a complicated turn, the internal factions remained unsuspecting of a coming fleet from Sparta and her allies overnight. On this point, Thucydides simply writes that the Peloponnesians, under the navarch Alcidas and the advisor Brasidas²⁸, had dropped the anchors at the Sybota's port on the mainland²⁹. When it was nearly dawn, Thucydides reports that fifty-three triremes sailed toward Corcyra (ὁρμισάμενοι δὲ ἐς Σύβοτα λιμένα τῆς ήπείρου ἅμα ἕω ἐπέπλεον τῆ Κερκύρα). The reader, however, gropes in the dark regarding their real will, whether the Peloponnesians intended to engage in a naval battle or rather to conduct operations on the island. In the city, the citizens were in turmoil unsure of how to face the coming enemy. They started to embark on the sixty triremes and set sail against the enemies: time losing all the Athenian attempts to dissuade the islanders from taking time to sail together. As soon as some triremes were scattered around two of them defected, meanwhile in the other triremes the crews fought among themselves³⁰: the civil strife transposed on the fleet would suggest possible preexisting arrangements between Peloponnesians and the oligarchic faction. On the opposite side, as soon as it was ascertained what was taking place, the Peloponnesians launched only twenty triremes against a superior fleet which was in complete confusion. The remaining Peloponnesian thirty-three triremes sailed against the Athenian ones which had only twelve ships, including the notorious Salaminia and Paralos³¹.

Facing the numerical disadvantage, the Athenians avoided breaking through the enemy line so as to not be outnumbered and overwhelmed, instead focus-

²⁸ On these two Spartiates vd. Joseph ROISMAN «Alkidas in Thucydides», *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*, 36, 4, (1987), pp. 385-421 and the final the appendix regarding the advisors' role. On Brasidas with further bibliography see Ian PLANT, «Brasidas and Thucy-dides: Hero and His Historian», *Dialogues d'Histoire Ancienne*, 49, 2, (2023), pp. 11-36.

²⁹ For the topography vd. George N. L. HAMMOND, «Naval Operations in the South Channel of Corcyra 435-433 B. C.», *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 65, (1945), pp. 26-37.

³⁰ On the identification of these persons Ugo FANTASIA, «Corcira, 427-425 a.C.: anatomia di una *stasis*, in Cinzia Bearzot – Franca Landucci (eds.), "*Partiti" e fazioni nell'esperienza politica greca*, Milano, 2008, pp. 187-189.

³¹ Cf. Lionel CASSON, Ships and Seamanship, op. cit. pp. 92-93; Vincent GABRIELSEN, Financing the Athenian Fleet. Public Taxation and Social Relations, Baltimore, The John Hopkins University Press, 1994, p. 109; John NASH, Rulers of the Sea. Maritime Strategy and Sea Power in Ancient Greece 550-321 BCE, Berlin – Boston, De Gruyter, 2023, p. 65.

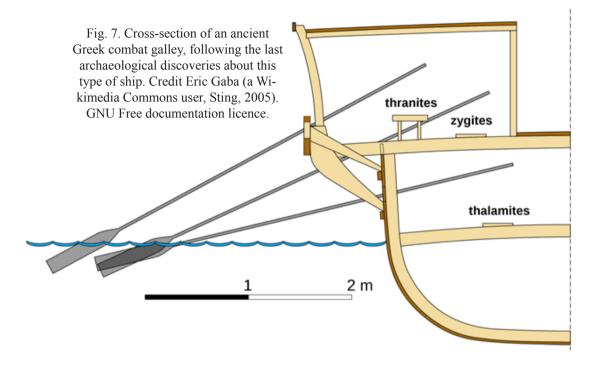
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ing the manoeuvres against one wing. Following the loss of only one trireme, the Peloponnesians, quite unexpectedly, adopted a circle formation, marking the second and last one κύκλος of which we have information among sources. What cause this choice remains unclear: the Peloponnesians might still be traumatised by the nightmarish crossing two years before³² or, as we are more inclined to believe without excluding both options, this choice indicates their limited preparedness for naval engagement. The Athenians, as expected given the last time, responded by encircling the enemy ($\pi\epsilon\rho i\epsilon\pi\lambda\epsilon\sigma\nu$ καὶ ἐπειρῶντο θορυβεῖν). On the opposite wing, the twenty Peloponnesian triremes became at first cognizant of the impending perils, so they joined their fellows³³. In front of the ensued enemy, the Athenians judged it preferable to pull out avoiding risks. At this point, Thucydides highlights that the Peloponnesians instead of sailing against Corcyra – maybe this was the fear of the Athenians and their allied islanders – opted for coming back to Sybota. During this fight, they had captured thirteen triremes. The next day, the Athenians and the islanders were ready for the worst, embarking themselves to fight again but the Peloponnesians did not sail against Corcyra for a second time. They likely thought the thirteen triremes were a good haul, since, from the beginning, the Spartan authorities had sent Alcidas to increase their fleet ($\pi\lambda$ έον τὸ ναυτικὸν ποιήσαντες ἐς τὴν Κέρκυραν πλεῦσαι στασιάζουσαν)³⁴. Given the Peloponnesians' reaction in front of their superiority and the problems which had arisen in the opposite side, we can draw some conclusions regarding the circle employed in that battle. Sparta and her allies were not in a position to defend themselves despite their superior number and, in light of their behaviour the next day too, it is likely they were not really prepared for the naval battle which was won through the defections and the strives on the enemy side. On this point, it is not to be excluded that some pre-arrangement and premeditation in agreement

³² Bernard W. HENDERSON, *The Great War*, op. cit. p. 118: "*Phormio's drum was still beating in their ears*". The psychological trauma during that occasion is highlighted by John LAZENBY, *The Peloponnesian War. A Military* Study, London – New York, Routledge, 2004, p. 56

³³ Thuc., III 76.3: «γνόντες δὲ οἱ πρὸς τοῖς Κερκυραίοις καὶ δείσαντες μὴ ὅπερ ἐν Ναυπάκτῷ γένοιτο, ἐπιβοηθοῦσι, καὶ γενόμεναι ἀθρόαι αἱ νῆες ἅμα τὸν ἐπίπλουν τοῖς Ἀθηναίοις ἐποιοῦντο». We do not follow the critics against Alcidas by Barry S. Strauss, «Sparta's Maritime Moment», in Andrew S. Erickson – Lyle J. Goldstein – Carnes Lord (eds.), China goes to Sea. Maritime Transformation in Comparative Historical Perspectives, Annapolis, Naval Institute Press, 2009, p. 42 since Thucydides is silent on this point

³⁴ Thuc. III 69.2. Vd. Peter A. BRUNT, «Spartan Policy and Strategy in the Archidamian War», *The American Historical Review*, 87, 1, (1965), p. 272.



with the Peloponnesians. In conclusion, even at Corcyra such as a Patras, $\kappa \dot{\nu} \kappa \lambda o \zeta$ should be regarded differently compared to major scholars' agreement.

Conclusion

In order to summarize the historical events that emerged in the previous pages, we believe it is compelling to retrace some points. At Artemision, a real circle, as it is described by Thucydides, did not took place: the analogies, even at first sight fitting for some points, do not hold the different situation and the Herodotean description. On that occasion, the Greeks withstand the fight as possible nullifying the enemy's manoeuvres on their wings, but a complete circle was not achieved and maybe not even researched. The $\kappa \dot{\nu} \kappa \lambda o \zeta$ had only two real occurrences at a single two-year interval, challenging prevailing scholarly interpretations of its role as a standard defensive counter to the $\delta i \epsilon \kappa \pi \lambda o \omega \zeta$. As a consequence, the $\kappa \dot{\nu} \kappa \lambda o \zeta$ was not a defensive escamotage employed whenever the enemy used the breaking through, yet, following the precise description advanced by Thucydides, it was a sort of survival strategy employed by a fleet compelled into an unplanned naval engagement.

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Cristo appare a San Mercurio e a Santa Caterina di Alessandria nell'atto di calpestare Giuliano l'Apostata la cui morte, supplicata da San Basilio difronte ad un'icona di San Mercurio, fu attribuita all'intercessione del santo. Icona del laboratorio di Georgios Klontzas, Creta, ca 1560/70. Yale University Art Gallery, ID 255. Connecticut, U. S. Wikimedia Commons

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