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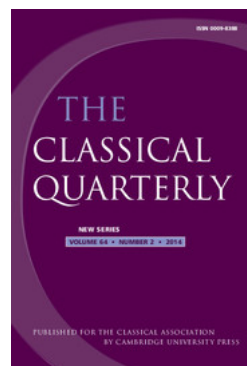
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ON THE EGYPTIAN EXPEDITION OF 459-4 B.C.

It appears to be a generally accepted opinion among modern historians that the expedition which the Athenians led up-Nile in 459 B.C. in support of the Egyptian insurrection against Persia was an exceptionally large one, numbering no less than 200 sail. Modern authors also seem to imply, though they may not say so explicitly, that the whole of this armada was involved in the catastrophe which overtook the rebels in 454 B.C.¹

The evidence for this traditional view is derived from the following texts:

Thucydides I. 104: Ἰνάρως δὲ . . . ἀπέστησεν Αἰγύπτου τὰ πλείω ἀπὸ βασιλέως Ἀρταξέρξου, καὶ . . . Ἀθηναίους ἐπηγάγετο. οἱ δὲ (ἔτυχον γὰρ ἐς Κύπρον στρατευόμενοι ναυσὶ διακοσίοις αὐτῶν τε καὶ τῶν ξυμμάχων) ἦλθον ἀπολιπόντες τὴν Κύπρον.

Diodorus XI. 71. 4: οἱ δὲ Ἀθηναῖοι . . . ἐψηφίσαντο τριακοσίαις τριήρεσι βοηθεῖν τοῖς Αἰγυπτίοις.

Ibid. XI. 74. 2: καταπλευσάντων δὲ τῶν Ἀθηναίων ἐς τὴν Αἴγυπτον μετὰ διακοσίων νεῶν.

Isocrates, *De Pace* § 86: εἰς Αἴγυπτον μὲν γε διακόσιαι πλεύσασαι τριήρεις αὐτοῖς τοῖς πληρώμασι διεφθάρησαν.

If these passages could be supposed to create a consilience of evidence, their joint testimony would be conclusive. But probably the statements of Isocrates and Diodorus are nothing more than inaccurate repetitions of Thucydides. [Diodorus' account of the Pentecontaëtia is notoriously a mere réchauffé of Thucydides, supplemented by more or less unfortunate guesswork. Isocrates' allusions to events of the fifth century never betray any trace of independent research. His method is simply to take over the established tradition and to manipulate it according to the exigencies of his case: in the previously quoted passage, where he is arguing against Athenian imperialism, it would be his cue to exaggerate the extent of the disaster in Egypt.] It may be assumed, therefore, that in spite of the divergences

¹ Ed. Meyer alone goes so far as to mention expressly that the Greek fleet may have been reduced in numbers during the course of the campaign (*Geschichte des Altertums*, III. p. 606).

[After the completion of the present article the author has found his views confirmed in

Cavaignac's recently published *Histoire de l'Antiquité*, vol. II. pp. 71, 72, where the total Greek force is estimated on the authority of Ctesias at 40 sail. But the point is not argued by Prof. Cavaignac at any length.]

between Thucydides and our other two informants no independent authority can be assigned to the latter: our appeal must be to Thucydides alone.

What then does Thucydides tell us? Merely this, that the Greek armament was 200 strong *at the time when it lay off Cyprus previous to the expedition up-Nile*. He does not say that the *entire* Greek fleet proceeded from Cyprus to Egypt, or that the force dispatched to Egypt was maintained at its original strength after the first campaign in that country.

So far therefore as Thucydides' evidence goes, it need not be supposed that the Greeks ever kept a fleet of full 200 ships in Egypt. Some further considerations may show that the total of the Greek force was considerably smaller in numbers.

In the first place we have an independent version of the Expedition by Ctesias,¹ in which the contingent of the Athenians operating in Egypt is estimated at no more than 40 sail. In view of the normal preponderance of Athenian craft in the fleets of the Delian League, the total strength of the Expedition cannot on this reckoning have exceeded 60 ships or thereabouts.

Now it is usual to dismiss Ctesias' story as a tissue of fantastic falsehoods. Certain it is that his *Περσικά* are full of sad blunders, and that his account of the Egyptian Expedition is vitiated by the obviously exaggerated numbers which he assigns to the Persian forces then engaged. But extravagances like these should serve to bring into stronger relief the sobriety of Ctesias' estimates of the Greek fleet. To take a similar case, the figures which Herodotus gives for the army of Xerxes are as absurd as any of Ctesias' romancings, nevertheless his estimate of the Greek squadron at Artemisium or Salamis is usually accepted as approximately correct.

Another way of discrediting Ctesias' account is to suppose that his text is corrupt, and that the numeral M (40) is a mistake for Σ (200).² Unfortunately for this theory, the numeral of Ctesias' text is represented by a word and not by a letter symbol. A confusion between *τεσσαράκοντα* and *διακόσιοι* is out of the question.

In the absence of any cogent objection which can be brought against them Ctesias' figures must be allowed to carry their due weight.

From the same author we further learn that the Greek force at the time of its capitulation in 454 B.C. numbered 6,000 men.³ If this was the remnant of the complements of 200 triremes the slaughter among the Greeks previous to surrender must have been simply terrific. The crews of a fleet of 200 triremes would amount to 40,000 men. If only 6,000 of these survived at the end of the Expedition the casualties must have worked out at 85 per cent. But it is hardly possible to account for losses on so large a scale. In the first three years of the war the rebels had it all their own way, and during its

¹ *Persica*, bk. 14 § 63 (ed. Gilmore).

² K. W. Krüger, *Philologisch-historische Studien*, I, p. 163, followed by Busolt, *Griechische Geschichte*, III, p. 306, n. 2.

³ *Ibid.* § 65. Ctesias calls these 6,000 survivors *Ἕλληνες*, not *Ἀθηναῖοι*. Accordingly they represent the *total* surviving remnant of the Expedition.

later stages there was only one battle in the open field. A residue of 6,000 men is more in keeping with an initial total of 60 than of 200 triremes.¹

Another piece of evidence which points in the same direction is the famous 'Erechtheis inscription.'² This best of authorities informs us that the operations of the Greeks in 459 B.C. extended to Phoenicia no less than to Egypt and Cyprus. Now we can hardly suppose that the Greek fleet visited Phoenicia before putting in at Cyprus, for this island was obviously the proper base of operations for an attack upon the Phoenician coast. Still less is it probable that the invaders made their way from Cyprus to Egypt by skirting Phoenicia, for this course would have involved a *détour* along three sides of a rectangle against the seasonal winds and currents.³ It follows that the Athenians on arriving at Cyprus *divided their forces*, one section being told off to operate on the Phoenician coast, another perhaps remaining on guard at Cyprus. It may furthermore be assumed that the squadron which was dispatched into Phoenician waters was of considerable strength, because the duty of providing against an attack by a fleet issuing from Tyre or Sidon was of very great importance. On this reckoning therefore the squadron which sailed to Egypt must have fallen far short of 200 sail.

The importance of guarding against an attack by a Persian fleet issuing from a Levantine port is illustrated by the course of events in the fourth year of the Expedition. In 456 B.C. a new Persian armament recruited in Cilicia, Cyprus and Phoenicia (Diodorus XI. 75. 2), and numbering nominally 300 sail (Ctesias, *ad loc.*), appeared in Egyptian waters, and although nothing explicit is recorded as to its activities, there can be little doubt that its presence at the scene of war was a decisive factor in the catastrophe of the Expedition. So long as the Greek fleet maintained its control over the main branches of the Nile, there could be no question of the Persian land forces cutting off its retreat or placing it under efficient blockade. If the Greeks eventually submitted to being penned up in the island of Prosopitis, this can only mean that in the meantime their fleet had lost its command over the two principal arteries of the Nile, between which Prosopitis is situated. Whether the Greek vessels were worsted in a set battle or were driven to land without offering resistance cannot be ascertained: in any case it is clear that the intervention of the new Persian fleet in 456 B.C. must have contributed in no small degree to the final discomfiture of the invaders.

Lastly, it must be borne in mind that at the time of the Egyptian Expedition the Athenians were waging a highly critical war against their most powerful enemies in homeland Greece. In 459 B.C. they came to blows

¹ According to Thucydides (I. 110), only a small proportion of the Greek force got safe home. This does not contradict the view put forward above, for the Persians broke the terms of the capitulation (Thucydides, *ad loc.*; Ctesias, §§ 67-8) and slaughtered off part of the surviving 6,000.

² I.G. I. 433; Hicks and Hill, No. 26.

³ The summer winds blow from N. from Cyprus to Egypt, and from S.W. along the coast of Syria. The current travels E. along the shore of Africa, N. (as a rule) along the Syrian coast, and W. along the coast of Karamania.—*Mediterranean Pilot*, vol. II., pp. 7-8, 12.

with Corinth; in 458 B.C. they were confronted with a coalition whose combined squadrons amounted to 150 or more triremes.¹ At this time the Athenian navy available for active service can hardly have numbered more than 300 galleys.² In view of this situation it is incredible that Pericles, who more than any Athenian statesman understood the need of maintaining at all costs the supremacy of Athens in the Aegean Sea, should have locked up nearly 200 Athenian vessels in a distant and speculative enterprise like the Egyptian Expedition and exposed his home fleet to the risk of being crushed by superior numbers.³

It is also difficult to understand why the enemies of Athens did not fall upon her with renewed vigour if the disaster of 454 B.C. had involved a fleet of no less than 200 ships. The loss of a similar number of vessels on the Sicilian Expedition of 415-3 B.C. was the signal for a determined and successful onset upon the 'tyrant city.' If no such attack was delivered after the failure of the Egyptian Expedition, this can only mean that the venture was on a more modest scale.

We may therefore conclude that the Egyptian Expedition was a less gigantic undertaking than has commonly been supposed, and that considerably less than 200 triremes were involved in the final disaster.

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¹ In 443 B.C. the Corinthians levied 133 ships on themselves and their colonists (Thuc. I. 46). There is no apparent reason why they should not have raised as many in 458 B.C. To this fleet must be added the navy of Aegina, which amounted to more than 30 triremes in 480 B.C. (Herodot. VIII. 46).

² In 431 B.C. Athens possessed 300 seaworthy galleys (Thuc. II. 13). A confused passage in

Andocides, *De Pace*, § 5, seems to convey that in the twenty or thirty years which followed the Persian invasion the Athenian navy was merely kept up to its previous strength of 200 sail.

³ The Athenians committed a mistake of this kind in sending out the two expeditions to Sicily in 415-3 B.C. But Peisander and Charicles should not be compared for statesmanlike prudence with Pericles.