

## SPARTA, ITS FLEET, AND THE AEGEAN ISLANDS IN 387–375 BC

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**Abstract:** The naval politics of Sparta in the period between the Corinthian and Boeotian Wars is a problem that barely features in modern studies on classical Greek history. The article tries to partially fill this gap, through analysis of the scant sources. The author argues that Sparta did not withdraw completely from maintaining its own presence in the Aegean Sea after conclusion of the King's Peace. From the few testimonies, especially of Xenophon and Polyaeus, we can conclude that Sparta even kept a fleet (albeit small) in this period. This means that some kind of influence on insular *poleis* could have been exerted. Possible examples of Spartan actions, like on Thasos, are also disputed. However, all bridgeheads in the Aegean that Sparta probably had were lost in the first phase of the Boeotian War. This puts into question the quality of Lacedaemonian leadership, in terms of both political and military command. The article was prepared as a part of grant: *The Aegean Islands 8<sup>th</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> c. BC – 4<sup>th</sup> c. AD. Centre or Periphery of the Greek World*. Project ID: 2012/07/B/HS3/03455.

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The years between the Corinthian War and the Boeotian War (387–378) were a time of relative quiet in Greece, so rare in the 4th century.<sup>1</sup> After the Peace of Antalcidas (387/6), Sparta managed to maintain the status of the most powerful *polis*. It had the land forces of the Peloponnesian League at its disposal, which gave it an unquestionable advantage over potential opponents. The campaigns of the 380s against Mantinea, Phlius, and Olynthus, as well as the occupation of Thebes, meant that the Spartan *arche* seemed to be very well established in the Greek world.<sup>2</sup> All of this went to waste as a result of the next conflict, during which the famous Battle of Leuctra was fought, usually regarded as the symbolic end of the Spartan hegemony. However, a considerable number of earlier

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<sup>1</sup> Buckler 2003, 178–180.

<sup>2</sup> Sinclair 1978, 37–38; Seager 1994, 156–157; Kulesza 2003, 274–277; Rhodes 2009, 223–224, 245–246.

battles took place in the Aegean and Ionian Seas, where Sparta's opponent was Athens, which was actively expanding the Second Athenian Confederacy at that time.

Historians have devoted a great deal of attention to the Spartan policy towards the Aegean Islands in the early period, directly after the defeat of Athens in 404 and during the Corinthian War.<sup>3</sup> However, the period after the Peace of Antalcidas has only rarely been studied.<sup>4</sup> The reason for this is undoubtedly the extremely meagre amount of source materials. Therefore, the question arises whether this should be interpreted as a sign of Sparta practically abandoning an active maritime policy after 386. This view certainly has a solid basis and is accepted by many scholars. There are, however, mentions which indicate the opposite.

The account of Diodorus of Sicily is of fundamental importance for our knowledge about the beginnings of the Second Athenian Confederacy, although it is not free from controversy. He mentions the island states of Chios, Mitylene, Methymna on Lesbos, and Rhodes as the *poleis* which left Sparta and joined the Athenians.<sup>5</sup> However, it is difficult to accept without reservations that these members of the Second Athenian Confederacy had been Sparta's allies just a short time before joining the league. Other sources also seem to contradict this. For example, Chios had signed a separate, bilateral defence treaty with Athens in 384/3.<sup>6</sup> Isocrates, in turn, mentions Chios, Mitylene and Byzantium as the states which still maintained good relations with Athens during the signing of the King's Peace (387/6).<sup>7</sup>

What is very significant in the context of our reflections is the declaration included in the Decree of Aristotle, which, it is accepted, is the basis of the agreement forming the new league. It says that the Lacedaemonians should leave the Greeks free and autonomous (ὅπως ἂν Λακεδ[αιμό]νιοι ἐῶσι τὸς Ἑλληνας ἐλευθέ[ρ]ος [καὶ] αὐτονόμος).<sup>8</sup> Therefore, the member states evidently regarded Sparta as a significant threat to their sovereignty. The islanders' fears should have had some bases, which may have resulted from Sparta's actual behaviour at the time. The fears must have been strong enough for individual states to be ready to tie themselves politically to Athens, despite the undoubtedly bad reputation of their previous *symmachia*.

It is worth noting here that the moment of signing the treaty between Athens and Chios coincided with the initial period of Sparta's increased interference in the internal affairs of the individual *poleis*: after the attack on Mantinea (385), and before the aggression against Thebes (382), Olynthus (382–379), or Phlius (379). In all the instances apart from Olynthus they were landlocked cities. When Chios entered into an agreement with Athens in 384, therefore, it did not have to have serious fears about these Spartan actions. We can consequently surmise that they were caused by some other Spartan moves around the mid-380s.

<sup>3</sup> E.g. Accame 1951, 96–97, 142–147; Hamilton 1979, 292–298, 302–311; Fornis 2008, 238–244, 263–268.

<sup>4</sup> Parke 1930; Seager 1974; Sinclair 1978.

<sup>5</sup> Diod. 15.28.3.

<sup>6</sup> IG II<sup>2</sup>, 34–35.

<sup>7</sup> Isoc. 14.27–28. See Accame 1941, 32–37; Hamilton 1979, 179; Stylianou 1998, 252–253.

<sup>8</sup> IG II<sup>2</sup>, 43, ll. 9–10.

Let us try to identify the reasons behind the fears of the inhabitants of the Aegean Islands. First of all, they may have been related to the fact that Sparta maintained a navy, which was a key means of military pressure. However, the issue remains problematic due to a lack of mentions in the sources about using ships in the period between the armed conflicts. Sparta's use of vessels is not attested prior to the Boeotian War (379–371). During the war, the first instance of the Lacedaemonian fleet being used on a large scale was in the Battle of Naxos (376). Xenophon mentions in this context that prior to the whole campaign of 376, the Spartans had to gather the ships from the beginning, which clearly suggests that they did not have an organised fleet at their disposal at that moment.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, there are good reasons to conclude that the fleet was disbanded after the King's Peace was signed.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, the same author clearly suggests that Sparta already owned vessels in 377; he describes Thebes, which was suffering from a shortage of food, attempting to bring in corn by sea from Thessaly. This was prevented by Alcetas, a Spartan harmost who was staying in the city of Oreus in the north of Euboea. He intercepted a transport of Theban supplies using the triremes at his disposal. Rather paradoxically, this success was the beginning of Alcetas' demise. As a result of a coincidence, the prisoners captured during the expedition managed to break free and killed the harmost, and the city took the side of Sparta's opponents.<sup>11</sup> Xenophon emphasises the fact that Alcetas secretly manned the triremes while the Thebans were busy with their purchase. This is connected with a stratagem attributed to the Spartiate by Polyainos and Frontinus.<sup>12</sup> In order to make it more difficult for the enemy to find out the size of his forces at Oreus, the harmost trained his seamen using only one of his vessels. This ploy probably resulted from the wish to hide his advantage from the opponent, who, according to Xenophon, had only two triremes.

The account of Diodorus Siculus is an important piece of our picture of this situation. The historian mentions Oreus' pro-Spartan attitude while describing the activities of the Athenian strategos Chabrias on Euboea (377). The other *poleis* on the island reportedly all took the side of Athens, and joined the emerging Second Athenian Confederacy.<sup>13</sup> The exception was Oreus, which had been helped by Sparta through its commander, Therippides, in getting rid of the local tyrant, Neogenes.<sup>14</sup> Faced with resistance, Chabrias plundered the territory of Oreus/Histiaea (the two names are used interchangeably by the author) and fortified a hill called Metropolis, where he left a garrison, and then sailed off towards the islands, which he won over to the Athenian side.<sup>15</sup> The most natural time to place the events described by Diodorus seems to be between those included in

<sup>9</sup> Xen., *Hell.* 5.4.60–61.

<sup>10</sup> Sinclair 1978, 45; Cartledge 1987, 303–304.

<sup>11</sup> Xen., *loc. cit. Hell.* V.4.56–57.

<sup>12</sup> Front., *Strat.* 4.5.19; Polyain., 2.7.1. Only the Latin author specifies the circumstances.

<sup>13</sup> Diod. 15.30.1. There is a mention in Plutarch (*De glor. Athen.* 350f) of Timotheos liberating Euboea. If this is true, then it should probably be connected with the information in Diodorus about his appointment as strategos in 378 (Diod. 15.29). Additionally, a separate inscription on Euboea's acceptance to the Confederacy has survived (IG II<sup>2</sup>, 44). See Rhodes 2009, 269.

<sup>14</sup> Diod. 15.30.1; 3–4. According to him, Neogenes captured power with the help of Jason of Pherae. For the policy of the Thessalian king in this context, see Sprawski 1999, 65–67.

<sup>15</sup> Diod. 15.30.5. With regard to Metropolis, the location of this name on Euboea is also mentioned by Stephanus Byzantinus (*s.v. Metropolis*), although he gives no details.

Xenophon's account. Therefore, Alcetas became a harmost after the defeat of Neogenes with Therippides' help and was killed after the departure of Chabrias, who landed on the island in 377.<sup>16</sup> Histiaea joined the Second Athenian Confederacy before 376.<sup>17</sup>

Despite its unfortunate ending, the entire episode shows that the Lacedaemonians were already using vessels at the beginning of the Boeotian War, prior to the Battle of Naxos. The ships' origin remains an open question; Alcetas' triremes may have been built and manned in Laconia or later, on Euboea. The latter option is, however, clearly suggested by Xenophon using the verb *πληρώω* in his narration with regard to Alcetas' activities (LSJ: *to man ships*).<sup>18</sup> Similarly, it is unknown to what extent the harmost's activities were the effect of his initiative and to what extent they were the result of orders he received from his authorities. However, the latter certainly thought it advisable to maintain a constant presence on the faraway island. It is unlikely that the reason for this was anything other than the wish to control the shipping lane due to the very strategic location of Oreos.<sup>19</sup> What is also significant is that Alcetas was not the first (probably the second) harmost in this city; therefore the effort to create and maintain the outpost on Euboea must have already been made by Sparta. There is a hypothesis which identifies Therippides (and we know of no other man of this name) with Herippidas (who we are familiar with), the commander of a Spartan garrison in Thebes, who capitulated when he was besieged by rebels in 379. If this theory is correct, the beginning of the Spartan intervention should be dated to the same year. The problem is that the information about his participation in the Theban events comes only from Plutarch, who was a much later author. What is even more problematic is the fact that the fragment of the text which is of key importance to us is damaged, and the Spartiate's name is the result of an emendation by the contemporary editor,<sup>20</sup> which makes it difficult to form a definitive opinion on the matter.

The Spartan fleet therefore existed in some shape or form prior to 376, but the question about its strength remains an open one. What may be helpful here is to reflect on the time it took to assemble the forces fighting at Naxos (ca. 60–65 vessels).<sup>21</sup> We know from Xenophon that in the early spring of 376 Sparta was involved in ground operations. It was then that Cleombrotus' unsuccessful attempt to attack Boeotia took place.<sup>22</sup> Only after this fiasco, as a result of the insistence of their allies, did the Spartans decide to put up ships in order to block the inflow of provisions to Athens.<sup>23</sup> However, the author does not specify how much time passed between taking and executing the decision. On the other hand, we know the exact date of the Battle of Naxos: the 16th day of the Attic month of

<sup>16</sup> This hypothesis is accepted by Seager (1994, 172–173), Stylianou (1998, 279–280), and Buckler (2003, 243–245) among others. For the general chronology of the events, including different theories and their criticism, see Sprawski 1998, 54–56; 1999, 65–66.

<sup>17</sup> IG II<sup>2</sup>, 43, l. 114. See Cargill 1981, 37; Buckler 2003, 245.

<sup>18</sup> Xen. *Hell.*, 5.4.56.

<sup>19</sup> Sprawski 1999, 63–64; Buckler 2003, 243.

<sup>20</sup> For the whole theory, see Parke 1927, 159–163.

<sup>21</sup> Xenophon (*Hell.* 5.4.61) estimates the number of the Spartan *symmachia*'s vessels put up for the 376 campaign to be 60 ships. Diodorus, on the other hand (15.34.5.), writes that at Naxos alone it had 65 triremes at its disposal.

<sup>22</sup> Xen., *Hell.* 5.4.59.

<sup>23</sup> Xen., *Hell.* 5.4.60.

*boedromion*, i.e. the month bridging September and October.<sup>24</sup> It would therefore seem that assembling a fleet of considerable size progressed rather efficiently. This may suggest that they already had vessels, which needed to be gathered together. However, if Sparta had quite numerous triremes, then why do we know so little about them?

An analysis of Sparta's next naval activities may provide an answer to the above question. After the defeat at Naxos, the Peloponnesian League twice (at Alysia in 375 and during the attack against Korkyra in 373) sent fleets of a similar size of around 60 vessels, but it must be remembered that each time the member states contributed. In the case of Mnasippos' unsuccessful expedition to Korkyra (373), Xenophon mentions eleven states which supplied the triremes.<sup>25</sup> The explanation for the problem of the Spartan fleet may be in the number of the states involved in putting it up. Most likely the Spartans had some, not very numerous, vessels, which they also kept during peacetime, and so did their allies. This was completely sufficient in order to assemble a considerable number by the joined forces. Crucially, the economic burden of the individual cities was not too high in such a case.

At this point, it is worth making a comparison with the earlier conflicts. Thucydides, describing the plans to build a Peloponnesian fleet in 413, writes that Sparta was to put up 25 vessels out of the total of one hundred.<sup>26</sup> Naturally, the fleets of the *symmachia* from the times of the Peloponnesian War were much larger. After the Battle of Knidos (394), the number of vessels decreases considerably. In 387, Antalcidas gathered over 80 triremes in Hellespont, including the 20 sent by Dionysus the Elder from Sicily. Out of the remaining 60, some were provided by the Persians, and some captured from the Athenians.<sup>27</sup> It is therefore easy to estimate the actual contribution of Sparta and its allies from the Peloponnesian League at 60 or fewer vessels. In order to put up a larger fleet it was necessary to obtain external support, preferably from Persia, which was evidently missing after the Peace of Antalcidas.

Let us now move on to an analysis of possible mentions in the sources about the Spartan policy concerning the Aegean Islands. An inscription from Thasos has survived to our times, which gives contemporary historians some grounds to conclude that a Spartan intervention took place there. We cannot be certain, however, because the text only mentions that Athens gave privileges (*ateleia*) to people exiled from Thasos on the charge of philo-Athenian sympathies.<sup>28</sup> Naturally, the exile must have been executed by the authorities, which were decisively anti-Athenian, and therefore presumably pro-Spartan. Demosthenes also seems to address the matter in his speech against Leptines, mentioning the privileges given by the Athenians to the exiles from Thasos.<sup>29</sup> However, the exile itself was not necessarily related to a Spartan intervention. It may have been the initiative of the citizens of Thasos, at most inspired by Sparta. The latter option is even more probable on the basis of the silence of the sources about any military intervention. Placing

<sup>24</sup> Plutarch gives the dating in several places (*Phoc.* 6.1.3; *Camill.* 19.3; *de glor. Ath.* 349f) and Polyaeus (3. 11.2.).

<sup>25</sup> *Xen., Hell.* 6.2.

<sup>26</sup> *Thuc.* 8.3.2.

<sup>27</sup> *Xen., Hell.* 5.1.28.

<sup>28</sup> IG II<sup>2</sup>, 33.

<sup>29</sup> *Dem.* 20.61.

the episode in time is also problematic, because neither of the mentioned sources gives information about it. Some clues are provided by a mention in the inscription about the Mantineans, who had received analogous privileges in Athens. It is usually assumed that they were people exiled from Mantinea after 385.<sup>30</sup>

At this point we need to address the issue of our general knowledge about the history of the island. After the Peloponnesian War it obviously came under the influence of Sparta, but Thrasybulus' efforts led to the Lacedaemonian garrison being removed and an alliance with Athens being signed in 389/8.<sup>31</sup> We also know that Thasos joined the Second Athenian Confederacy ca. 375, i.e. relatively late.<sup>32</sup> The question that therefore arises is what happened in the period between those two events. It is possible that Thasos underwent a political re-orientation towards Sparta at that time. The consequence of this would have been the exile of the people mentioned in the inscription in question. Some historians, however, completely reject this possibility. They argue both the inscription and Demosthenes' mention refer to the much earlier events of 408, when we hear about fighting on the island and about Thasos joining an alliance with the Lacedaemonians. In their opinion, what supports this theory is especially a lack of clear information about the events on the island in the mid-80s and prosopographical factors.<sup>33</sup> They draw attention to the fact that Xenophon refers to the outlaws from Mantinea in 385 as the *argolid-zontes*, which suggests Argos, not Athens, as the final destination where they sought shelter.<sup>34</sup> According to them, the reference to the Mantineans in the inscription concerns the people exiled from the *polis* after the events of 418.<sup>35</sup> This theory, however, is even more problematic, because we read nothing about an exile from Mantinea in this period. Moreover, Xenophon is in fact silent on the subject of the place to which his *argolid-zontes* from 385 headed. There is, therefore, no reason not to assume that it was Athens. The mention about the exiles from Thasos who were going to obtain the same *ateleia* as the Mantineans does seem to fit the mid-380s quite well.

More information about the Spartan policy concerning the islands may come from Isocrates. In *Panegyricus* he very enigmatically mentions the disputes between the Spartans and the Athenians about the Cyclades.<sup>36</sup> The narration uses the present tense, which may suggest that the author is referring to a specific, current situation (i.e. ca. 380). However, *Panegyricus* presents the general character of the Athenian-Spartan relations. One example is a passage about an armed confrontation between the two states, even though they were at peace at the time.<sup>37</sup> It is therefore difficult to say definitively whether Isocrates only meant the current state of affairs. It is equally possible that the fragment about the islands refers to slightly earlier events, e.g. from the times of the Corinthian War. Some historians formed the hypothesis that Isocrates is referring here to the alleged dispute about the island of Delos. In 393/2 it found itself under the Athenian domination,

<sup>30</sup> IG II<sup>2</sup>, 33, II. 7–8. See Osborne 1981, 48–57.

<sup>31</sup> Xen., *Hell.* 5.1.7; Dem. 20.59; IG II<sup>2</sup>, 24.

<sup>32</sup> Cargill 1981, 37, 42.

<sup>33</sup> E.g. Pouiloux 1954, 194–203.

<sup>34</sup> Xen., *Hell.* 5.2.6.

<sup>35</sup> Pouiloux 1954, 194–195.

<sup>36</sup> Isoc. 4.136: ἀλλὰ περὶ μὲν τῶν Κυκλάδων νήσων ἀμφισβητοῦμεν.

<sup>37</sup> Isoc. 4.133: [...] οἱ τινες οὕτω περὶ μικρῶν κινδυνεύομεν.

and after the King's Peace it was to regain independence. Suspicions of a conflict about Delos are based on an analysis of epigraphic material related to the management of the local sanctuary.<sup>38</sup> However, the evaluation of the changes in the local administrative customs is far from clear, and it cannot be ruled out that the Athenians may also have maintained their influence in the sanctuary after the King's Peace was signed.<sup>39</sup> Most importantly, even if they were indeed removed, this need not have been connected with a Spartan intervention, which is not mentioned by any source. Therefore connecting Delos to the mentioned enigmatic remark in Isocrates (which does not necessarily concern the situation in the 380s) remains an assumption based on very weak foundations.

Further information about the Spartan policy concerning the Aegean Islands in 387–378 can be searched for in the sources covering the period of the Boeotian War. In 376, immediately before the Battle of Naxos, the Spartan fleet operated from the region of Aegina, Keos, and Andros, but it is difficult to say whether it had permanent bases in these places, with the exception of the first one. Xenophon writes enigmatically about the Lacedaemonian fleet literally being in the vicinity of Aegina, Keos, and Andros (*τοῦ ναυτικοῦ ὄντος τοῦ Λακεδαιμονίων περί τε Αἴγιναν καὶ Κέω καὶ Ἄνδρον*).<sup>40</sup> The author also later mentions that Aegina was used for launching raids against Attica, but says nothing about the other two islands. This either indicates that the Spartans were repelled from Keos and Andros (attested in the 370s as members of the Second Athenian Confederation), or that their presence there was not constant.<sup>41</sup> Polyaeus describes the manoeuvre employed by the Athenian strategos Diotimos, who was escorting a supply of grains when he was attacked by the Lacedaemonian triremes near Chios.<sup>42</sup> The incident can be connected with the period of the Boeotian War.<sup>43</sup> Considering the distance (less than 100 kilometres), it seems perfectly plausible that vessels operating from Andros were able to reach the eastern parts of Chios.<sup>44</sup>

According to Diodorus, after the campaign on Euboea in 377 Chabrias headed to the Aegean Sea, where he secured for his homeland Peparethos, Skiathos, and some unspecified islands. Previously (i.e. before the outbreak of the conflict between Athens

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<sup>38</sup> See Beloch 1922, 144; Parke 1930, 73; Sinclair 1978, 43–44. In 385–377/376 we can observe a lack of customary dedications of Athenian Amphictyons, put up in the sanctuary during festivals celebrated every four years. It is frequently accepted that those festivals were held in the periods when the island was under the Athenian control. Therefore, after the King's Peace the island fell out of the Athenian sphere of influence until 377/376.

<sup>39</sup> As V. Chankowski (2008, 202–219) shows, in the case of Delos we cannot speak of any regularity which would enable us to draw conclusions about the political situation on the island.

<sup>40</sup> Xen., *Hell.* 5.4.61.

<sup>41</sup> Stylianou (1998, 307) and Buckler (2003, 247) believe that the Spartans had bases in these locations. Cartledge (1987, 304) is of a different opinion; according to him Andros and Keos already belonged to the Second Athenian Confederacy at that time.

<sup>42</sup> Polyaeus. 5.22.1.

<sup>43</sup> Diotimos is attested during this conflict in an extant dedication from a statue of Chabrias, erected after the victory at Naxos. See Burnett/Edmonson 1961, 79–81.

<sup>44</sup> On the basis of information preserved in ancient literature it is known that a military vessel could travel ca. 260 km during a “long day” (Xen., *An.* 7.37), and in extreme cases it was even possible to cover a distance of up to 350 km over 24 hours (Thuc. 3.49.3.). See Morrison/Williams 1968, 209; Casson 1995, 293–295.

and Sparta) they had supposedly been subordinated by the Spartans.<sup>45</sup> No other source confirms Diodorus' account, although some historians connect the information about the Spartan control over the islands with the activity of Therippides (Herippidas?) and Al-cetas.<sup>46</sup> Assuming that this information is correct, the Spartans must have taken specific steps in order to build footholds near the Thessalian coastline. Diodorus also mentions that before the Battle of Naxos the Athenians besieged the city. This indicates the pro-Spartan orientation of this island as well, which is directly stated in the *scholion* to the Panathenaic oration.<sup>47</sup> The sea battle did not come to pass as a result of Sparta coming to Naxos' rescue. This clearly shows that the island must have been of great importance to them.

It seems, therefore, that around 379 Sparta had a number of friendly or subordinated island states which formed a sort of cordon along the eastern coast of continental Greece, including Thasos, Histiaea, Peparethos, Skiathos, Andros, Keos, Aegina and Naxos. Sparta also controlled Olynthus and the entire Chalkidiki Peninsula, subordinated as a result of a campaign conducted in 382–379.<sup>48</sup> In the majority of cases the distances between the cities closest to each other did not exceed the daily reach of a trireme (the longest stretch between Andros and Skiathos is ca. 200 km). This does not mean that Sparta maintained permanent manned bases in all these locations. The available sources are all silent on this subject, which is not surprising in the light of the terms of the King's Peace concerning the autonomy of the individual *poleis*.<sup>49</sup> The only exception is Histiaea, which was manned only at the time of the outbreak of the Boeotian War. It was later, in 376, that forces were introduced on Aegina, and probably Keos and Andros.

An analysis of Sparta's attested (or likely) interventions in 387–379 reveals some interest in the northern part of the Aegean Sea and the Thracian coast. It was a continuation of the earlier policy, starting from the Peloponnesian War (Brasidas' campaigns).<sup>50</sup> In the early 370s, on the brink of the conflict with Athens, efforts were made to increase the Spartan influence in the area of northern Euboea. Spartan actions may, therefore, have resulted from the wish to strengthen their own position in the region before the outbreak of the next war.

An analysis of the later strategy adopted in the confrontation against Athens in 378–375 can also lead to some interesting conclusions concerning the Lacedaemonian footholds on the Aegean Islands. Initially, the Spartans' top priority was to defeat Thebes. Only after they failed to do so did they decide to shift the majority of their efforts to a different front. According to Xenophon they were persuaded by the allies' demands, drawing their attention to how easily Athens could be blockaded from the sea and consequently starved into submission.<sup>51</sup> The concept of forcing the opponent to submit through attacking their grain supplies was a practical copy of the earlier Peloponnesian

<sup>45</sup> Diod. 15.30.5.

<sup>46</sup> Sinclair 1978, 46.

<sup>47</sup> Diod. 15.34.4; *scholia Panath.* 173.16 (p. 282): σὸν ναυσὶ πολιορκῶν Νάξου Χαβρίαζ, Λακεδαιμονίων οὔσαν σύμμαχον.

<sup>48</sup> Rhodes 2009, 246–247.

<sup>49</sup> Xen., *Hell.* 5.1.30; Diod. 14.110.3.

<sup>50</sup> Rhodes 2009, 126–128.

<sup>51</sup> Xen., *Hell.* 5.4.60.

and Corinthian wars, during which it had proved to be a successful strategy. At that time, however, it had been executed in more distant Hellespont, which was easily the best place to cut Athens off from its critically important supplies. Theoretically, a single mention in Polyaeus can be linked with the Boeotian War. He mentions the Spartan commander Ischolaos being besieged by Chabrias in the Thracian city of Drys.<sup>52</sup> The episode is frequently linked with the Boeotian War, even though the author does not provide any information that might make dating possible.<sup>53</sup> It is equally possible that these events happened during the Corinthian War. This is much more convincing, if only because of Sparta's activity in the region, which is attested by other sources.<sup>54</sup> Chabrias' presence in Thrace in ca. 390 is also documented, in an inscription about an agreement with the Thracian King Seuthes.<sup>55</sup>

It remains an interesting question why the blockade in 376 was attempted relatively close to the coast of Attica, in much less advantageous conditions. Considering their earlier experience, the Spartan decision should not be explained away with just a lack of awareness of geostrategic conditions, especially since the person largely responsible for the success during the Corinthian conflict, Antalcidas, was still alive. Even so, we have practically no information suggesting that the Spartans attempted to blockade Hellespont. There must have been specific reasons for choosing to form the blockade near Attica.

It seems that in the period prior to the confrontations with the Athenians Sparta must have been considerably weakened in terms of logistics, mainly with regard to the availability of the advance bases from which the fleet could operate. It is most likely that the Lacedaemonians no longer had these in 376. This is odd in the light of the earlier analysis, which suggests that they should have had at their disposal at least a few friendly places from which their fleet could potentially operate. Although they were too distant for the blockade of Hellespont, they may have been the basis of a further offensive directed against the Black Sea Straits. Therefore, these positions must probably have been lost by Sparta earlier. It seems that the key period was the first two years of the conflict with Athens (378–376), when Sparta was not very involved at sea. During this period, the opponents carried out a large-scale diplomatic and military offensive, during which they won many allies. The aforementioned *poleis* tied to Sparta, seeing its passivity, gradually joined the other side one by one. In 376, the extent of the Lacedaemonian influence probably shrank to include Aegina, Keos, and Andros. As a result, operating in the north of the Aegean Sea became impossible. Although Spartan supporters managed to stay in power in Histiaea/Oreos, they did so only in the short term, because the city joined the Second Athenian Confederation prior to 375. After the Battle of Naxos, Keos and Andros also became members of the Confederation.<sup>56</sup> Thasos and Olynthus with Chalkidiki are

<sup>52</sup> Polyaeus. 2.22.3.

<sup>53</sup> Kirchner 1899, 2019; Welwei 1998; Bianco 2001, 58.

<sup>54</sup> Parke 1930, 61, note 50. The information that Drys was supposedly only founded by Iphicrates (see Rehdantz 1845, 64) seems untrue (Pritchett 1974, 67).

<sup>55</sup> IG II<sup>2</sup>, 21.

<sup>56</sup> Cargill 1981, 61.

also attested as members of the Second Athenian Confederation.<sup>57</sup> Combined with the earlier alliances and the possession of Skyros, Lemnos, and Imbros (guaranteed by the King's Peace), this meant that the Athenians had virtually full control of the lanes to the straits. The only ally which remained on Sparta's side was probably Aegina.

What is interesting in this context are the conclusions of many historians concerning the internal divisions of the Spartan elites, resulting from different conceptions of conducting foreign policy. A hypothesis has been put forward that Sphodrias' famous march in 378, which led to the outbreak of an open war with Athens, was a provocation of the party connected with King Cleombrotus.<sup>58</sup> The party supposedly derived from a group of followers of the deceased Lysander, who supported sea expansion and maintaining Spartan influence in the Aegean Sea region. For that reason, the party was interested in a war against Athens rather than Thebes, and was opposed to the "continental" policy promoted by Agesilaos. In my opinion, however, the history of the conflict shows that even if such a party did exist, it had limited opportunities to implement its conception. During the first years of the conflict with Athens, Sparta did not undertake any specific action in the Aegean Sea aimed against the Athenians. The war at sea was treated as being of clearly secondary importance in comparison to the struggle on land, and as a result Sparta gave some footholds up without a fight and worsened its own position.

There is one more fundamental factor of the struggle in the 370s which should be taken into consideration in our reflections on the Spartan naval policy. In the previous two wars, the Athenian fleet was either neutralised before the blockade of Piraeus (Aegospotami in 405) or was in the clear minority (Antalcidas in Hellespont in 387). In 376 there was evidently an attempt to blockade Athens without winning a clear naval advantage first. Both Xenophon and Diodorus, in the already cited passages, clearly state that the forces of the Peloponnesian League wanted to immediately cut off grain supplies, in a way without taking into consideration the possibility of an Athenian action. Especially in Xenophon, the mention about the Peloponnesians' dismissive attitude towards the capability of the Athenian fleet is curious. In the quoted debate before the naval campaign of 376, there is a phrase about being able to gather a much larger fleet than the Athenians (ἐξείναι γὰρ σφίσι ναῦς πληρώσαντας πολλὴν πλείους τῶν Ἀθηναίων), which is followed by the possibility of starving the opponents into defeat, without any reference to a prospective battle.<sup>59</sup> This gives the impression that the Spartans and their

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<sup>57</sup> Both locations are present on the Decree of Aristoteles stele (IG II<sup>2</sup>, 43, ll. 101–102; Olynthus with the Chalkidikian League and l. 100 in the case of Thasos). In both cases the damaged text is reconstructed, but the reconstruction is certain. See Cargill 1981, 42–43.

<sup>58</sup> The matter of Sphodrias' trial and acquittal: Xen., *Hell.* 5.4.24–34; Diod. 15.29.6–7. The issue of the harmost's motives is problematic in this context. Xenophon (*Hell.* 5.4.20) and Plutarch (Plut., *Pelop.* 14) suggest that Sphodrias was supposedly bribed by the Thebans in order to provoke Athens into a war against Sparta. Diodorus (15.29.5), on the other hand, makes King Cleombrotus out to be the cause of the trouble. Scholars assume that Sphodrias acted on his own initiative – see Marshall (1905, 12); Munn (1993, 145–146). His goal was to "shake up" Athens and to make it pursue a more lenient policy with regard to Sparta. Cargill (1981, 59) is for the Theban bribery. Buck (1994, 93) argues for the Thebans' instigation aimed at persuading the Spartans to temporarily empty Thespieae of the garrison, which would make an assault on the exposed city possible. Cawkwell (1973, 55), Stylianou (1998, 263–264), and Buckler (2003, 221–222) subscribe to Cleombrotus' inspiration.

<sup>59</sup> Xen., *Hell.* 5.4.60.

allies counted on immediately pushing the Athenians into deep defensive. The reality threw cold water on those expectations. Even without their allies from the Second Athenian Confederation, the Athenians had 83 triremes against the opponents' approximate 60 at Naxos.<sup>60</sup> Underestimating the opponent's potential may suggest that the Spartans started their far-flung efforts without a considered plan and with poor knowledge of the opponent's capability. Everything indicates that they showed little interest in an active naval policy in the preceding period.

In the context of the above reflections, the Spartan naval policy concerning the Aegean Islands in 387–378 can be described as inconsistent. The divisions among the Spartan elites postulated by historians seem to be a good explanation of the reason for that. In the light of Xenophon's account it also seems that the Spartans considerably underestimated the Athenians' potential, assuming they would easily win control of the sea. This may be a reflection on the quality of the entire Spartan political and military leadership, whose members most likely completely failed the test, regardless of which faction they belonged to.

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<sup>60</sup> Diod. 15.34.5.

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