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Reading and Misreading the Ancient Evidence for Democratic Peace*

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In the course of the debate over the existence and possible explanations for democratic peace (the tendency of democracies not to fight wars with one another), some scholars have looked to the world of Classical Greece to bolster their claims about the phenomenon. This article critiques the best of these efforts, looking at the way the ancient evidence has been handled and the conclusions drawn therefrom. It is argued that while the ancient world is an entirely appropriate era to investigate with regard to the issue, the analyses offered thus far have not made a strong case for the existence of a Greek democratic peace. Indeed, contrary to what investigators had hoped to show, the evidence from the period in and around the Peloponnesian war indicates that not only did ancient democracies go to war with each other, they did so with relatively high frequency. Both quantitative and more traditional literary analyses support this conclusion. These results do not so much attack the general notion of democratic peace as offer a more fruitful way of using ancient history to help explain it: by focusing on the differences between ancient and modern democracies and their historical settings, future studies may be able to identify the factors which encourage or discourage democratic peace.

Introduction

The debate about ‘democratic peace’ – the phenomenon that democracies never, or very rarely, go to war with one another – has been fully joined for over a decade now. Two questions have driven it: (1) is it really true that something about democratic government prevents or inhibits warfare with other democracies; and (2) assuming that democratic peace is real, how exactly do we account for the phenomenon? While the discussion of these issues has usually centered on modern states of the last two centuries or so, some studies have extended their inquiries

into the ancient Greek world. This is entirely logical: the classical period represents the only other era of history in which fully democratic states are known to have flourished. It also had its share of warfare, and ancient authors wrote many volumes of history devoted to conflicts between rival states. Thus there is the reasonable expectation that scrutiny of the ancient Greek world will yield additional evidence in the debate over democratic peace.

Naturally, some of the practices of ancient and modern democracies have varied, but this has not deterred scholars from looking to Greece for possible insights about democratic peace, nor should it. Divergences include the tendency of ancient *demokratiai* to be smaller and operate far more directly than most modern counterparts, with ordinary citizens

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assembling to decide the issues of the day themselves rather than leaving all governing to elected representatives. The ancients also practiced slavery and excluded women from having a share in government. While these and other factors are important to keep in mind – and will be revisited later in this article in regard to their potential impact on democratic peace – they need not dissuade anyone from observing the tendencies of the Greek examples. This is because the fundamental kinship of ancient and modern democracy is obvious when one considers the shared principles visibly at work in both. These include the notion that government is to be in the hands of the many rather than the few or the one; veneration of the ideals of freedom and equality among citizens; and inclusion within the political body of the broadest categories of residents plausible given the social realities of the era. Such characteristics unite democracies ancient and modern and distinguish them clearly from the perennial alternatives (oligarchy, autocracy, theocracy, etc.). Even the divergences noted earlier are not as drastic as might be thought: ancient democratic governments often employed councils of elected or allotted citizens, so the principle of representation was far from alien; and many modern democracies exhibit a taste for direct citizen action, as the increasing use of ballot initiatives and referenda shows. Further, slavery and the political exclusion of women were not features of *demokratia* per se, but of Greek civilization as a whole, and indeed of most civilizations until very recent times. If one refuses the name democracy to any state that tolerated slavery or limited participation on the basis of gender, one eliminates from historical consideration almost all popular governments prior to the very latest versions – and even many of these, if continuously evolving views of social justice are to be the criteria, might well be eliminated on one ground or another. In sum, when viewed strictly as a political order and considered in

the light of contemporary alternatives, *demokratia's* essential similarity to modern democracy is inescapable, justifying the willingness of scholars of democratic peace to reflect on what might be learned from Greek events.¹

The first question that must be addressed, then, is whether the pattern noted in modern history that democratic states tend not to go to war – touted by some as coming ‘as close as anything we have to an empirical law in international relations’² – is equally demonstrable in the ancient world. Some have claimed that the most absolute formulation of the pattern, that true democracies have *never* fought each other, applies to the ancient world just as it does the modern. Spencer Weart (1998) maintains as much in his book *Never At War*, which examines the phenomenon in all eras of history and devotes a crucial early chapter to ancient Greece.³ Other proponents of democratic peace have been more cautious, though they too find support for the hypothesis in ancient evidence. Bruce Russett, who has been at the center of the democratic peace debate for years, closely examined the behavior of ancient Greek states in his article, co-authored by William Antholis, ‘Do Democracies Fight Each Other? Evidence

¹ This issue, of course, will bear discussion at far greater length than the present occasion allows. For detailed treatments of the ideals and definition of ancient democracy (*demokratia*), with comparisons to modern versions, see Robinson (1997: chs 1 and 2), Hansen (1989, 1996), Ostwald (1996), and Murray (1995).

² This oft-quoted phrase comes from Levy (1988: 662). While statistical analyses do show a low incidence of warfare between modern democracies, not everyone agrees that popular government itself is the cause. See the prominent critiques of Layne (1994) and Spiro (1994), with responses and further discussion in *International Security* 19(4): 164–184. More recent reactions, explanations, and reviews include Farber & Gowa (1996), Chan (1997), Gartzke (1998), Maoz (1998), Hegre (2000), and Russett & Oneal (2001).

³ Weart (1998). Chapter 2 is devoted to ancient Greece, and classical examples crop up elsewhere in the book. Weart (1998: 13, 20, 298) admits only that there may have been some ‘doubtful’ or ‘ambiguous’ cases of ancient Greek democratic wars. Similar views are expressed more briefly in his earlier article (Weart, 1994).

from the Peloponnesian War', which was reprinted with some additions as a chapter in Russett's book *Grasping the Democratic Peace* (Russett & Antholis, 1992, 1993). Russett & Antholis argue that a pattern of democratic peace was beginning to emerge in the Greek world, though they admit that democracies did sometimes fight and that the statistical evidence is inconclusive.

To what extent is either of these, the two most important assessments to date on ancient democratic peace,⁴ accurate? Both are scrutinized here from the perspective of an ancient historian not committed to any side in the larger debate. The present analysis reveals that the attempt to discover an ancient democratic peace which matches the modern phenomenon leads to serious problems in the way the ancient evidence is handled and construed. While the testimony from Classical Greece may yet prove to be quite valuable on this issue, its proper interpretation points in a rather different direction from the path taken by the above authors.

A final preliminary note: skeptics might point out that despite the fact political relations in Greco-Roman antiquity have been studied intensively for more centuries than most other academic disciplines have even existed, no classical historian (ancient or modern) has argued for the idea that unusual peace held sway between ancient democracies.⁵ But one may fairly counter that this is

an entirely new line of inquiry, and that only in the last decade or so have numerous political scientists and historians become interested in democratic peace. Furthermore, it is undoubtedly true that by asking new kinds of questions one can make new discoveries, even in a field as venerable as ancient history. So for the present analysis, we will consider irrelevant the absence of prior scholarly notice of an ancient democratic peace.

The Weart Hypothesis

Weart (1998: 13) claims to find 'not a single unambiguous case of Greek democracies warring on one another', which finding nicely fits his general conclusion of near-complete democratic peace throughout history. In so contending, he adds a few caveats. First, for a democracy to be counted as such he insists that it have been (and been perceived by outsiders to be) so for at least three years, and thus have been 'well established'. Wars are also carefully defined: no conflict resulting in fewer than 200 deaths in combat will count, in order to eliminate trivial confrontations from consideration (Weart, 1998: 17–20, 24–34).

At first glance, these limitations seem fair enough. Regarding the three-year rule, since some theorists of democratic peace have held that democracies act pacifically toward each other because of, among other factors, the 'democratic training' their leaders receive as they maneuver themselves into power and the perception within one state that the other is in fact a democracy 'like them', it seems reasonable that one exclude from consideration those conflicts that emerge before a 'democratic culture' has had time to become fully established in both potential disputants. However, this is a significant exception to make – it would imply that we ought not count even a true democracy if its neighbors did not acknowledge it as such – and three years appears to be an arbitrary length of time

⁴ Other detailed treatments of the ancient evidence for democratic peace are rare. Bachteler (1997) adds little new analysis of the ancient evidence, seeking rather to modify Russett's approach and conclusions with more of a 'social constructivist' view. Despite its title, Raymond (1996) has nothing to do with the ancient world.

⁵ Indeed, one tends to find quite the opposite. Finley (1979: 63), for example, says the following regarding a brief period of relative peace in mid-fifth-century Sicily: 'That this was the result not of a deep-rooted pacific attitude inherent in the new democracies but rather of a temporary and unavoidable concentration on internal affairs was eventually to become apparent'. Finley goes on to describe the renewal of warfare among the mostly democratic Greek cities in Sicily in the following pages (see discussion below).

to choose for a new constitution's establishment. In the volatile world of classical Greek *poleis* (city-states), governments could go suddenly from democracy to oligarchy or to tyranny, or to democracy from any of the others. Regarding the definition of war, from a modern perspective 200 combat casualties may seem a very small number of lives for a state to lose, and thus conflicts with losses less than this might seem to fall short of a true war. But one must keep in mind that most Greek city-states were quite small, typically comprising citizen populations of a thousand men or fewer, with the very largest being measured in the tens of thousands.⁶ The loss of a hundred soldiers in battle could be grievous indeed to a Greek *polis*, comparable to the loss of tens or hundreds of thousands to a modern nation-state.⁷

But there are far more serious problems with Weart's treatment of Greek history than questionable definitions. In order to maintain his extreme view that democracies have never fought wars, he is forced to argue that Athens' famous attack on democratic Syracuse in 415–413 BC does not count. Athens was the most celebrated democracy of the ancient world, and the war involved large expeditions and terrible bloodshed on both sides, so there can be no denying a democratic war on these counts. Weart therefore

claims that Syracuse, located in eastern Sicily, was not a real democracy. He acknowledges the difficulty of such a position: quoting the contemporary historian Thucydides to the effect that the Athenians were making war on 'a democracy like themselves', he notes that this statement might easily confound anyone trying to perceive democratic peace in Greece.⁸ But Weart perseveres, and, relying mostly on one passage from Aristotle's *Politics*, he argues that Syracuse was in fact 'a mixed democratic–oligarchic regime' which was 'in some intermediate state of disunity' during the Athenian attack; the Athenians probably doubted that full democracy existed there (Weart, 1998: 31–34, 298–299).

This position is untenable and, as the Syracusan discussion is the centerpiece of his chapter, discredits Weart's entire case for ancient democratic peace.⁹ To start with the most obvious problem, Weart never refutes Thucydides' weighty and direct testimony for the kindred nature of the Athenian and Syracusan political systems. Rather, he simply dismisses it, claiming willful error by the historian and a superior vantage point for Aristotle:

[Thucydides] seems to have stretched the facts in order to make a rhetorical point – namely, a warning against wars between democracies. Only one scholar ever possessed the documents needed to study the constitution of Syracuse: Aristotle. He carefully avoided calling Syracuse as it existed in 415 a democracy. Rather, he styled it a 'polity', by which he probably meant a mixed regime – one with superficially democratic elections, but with an oligarchic elite hanging onto effective control.

⁸ Weart (1998: 24) on Thucydides 7.55.2. See also Thucydides 6.39.

⁹ Weart's cause is not helped much by his appendix (1998: 298–300), which attempts to dispatch as 'ambiguous' other wars between Greek democracies. This section engages in special pleading and often unconvincing argumentation, such as the attempt to blur the clear participation of Megara (democratically run by 424 BC) in the Peloponnesian war against Athens; see Thucydides 4.66, with the commentaries of Gomme, Andrewes & Dover (1945–81) and Hornblower (1991–96). Further ancient democratic wars are discussed below.

⁶ Ruschenbusch (1985). Athens was probably the largest *polis* in Greece and only managed an adult male citizen population of c. 50,000 at its acme in the fifth century, declining to c. 20,000–30,000 in the fourth century. See Gomme (1933), Hansen (1982, 1994), Sekunda (1992).

⁷ As illustration one need only consider the striking Spartan reaction to the entrapment and ultimate capture of but 120 of their citizens at the battle of Sphacteria during the Peloponnesian war. Despite wielding great power and controlling vast territory, Sparta nevertheless placed such importance on the safe return of the 120 prisoners that it ceased invading of Athenian territory and made immediate overtures for peace (Thucydides 4.15–21, 38; 5.15–19). Sparta may have been unusually sensitive to the loss of their citizens because of the exclusivity and small size of its ruling citizen body relative to the state as a whole; even so, the example shows the enormous importance which could attach to the loss of relatively few men even in one of the larger Greek *poleis*.

Only after the Athenians were defeated was the constitution revised so that democratic leaders were fully in power. (Weart, 1998: 33, with footnotes)

Several inaccuracies leap out at one here. First, Thucydides never, implicitly or explicitly, makes a point of warning that democracies should not go to war against one other. One may reasonably argue that Thucydides exaggerates for rhetorical effect now and again in his history, or that in the books on Sicilian affairs he highlights the arrogance and incompetence with which the Athenian democracy pursued the war and emphasizes the foolishness of demagogues (both Athenian and Syracusan); but in no way do such authorial tendencies add up to ‘warning against wars between democracies’.¹⁰

Second, it is most dubious to claim that Aristotle was in a better position to know the political institutions of late fifth-century Syracuse than Thucydides, who was *alive* then, was active in and a keen observer of political affairs, and whose historical writings demonstrate substantial knowledge about Sicily in particular.¹¹ Did Aristotle, a philosopher from Stagira who lived in the middle of the following century, uniquely possess ‘the documents needed to study the constitution of Syracuse’? We have no evidence on which to base such a claim. All we know is that Aristotle or his students wrote about the govern-

ments of 158 or so cities of the Greek world, including Syracuse, and that these works could have been the basis for the historical details on display in the *Politics*.¹² But no one knows if Aristotle conducted *any* original research on Syracusan history, or what records might have been available to him. To simply assume he hunted up key documents revealing previously unrecognized constitutional truths is, to say the least, methodologically unsound. In the end, whatever Aristotle may have used could not approach what Thucydides was in a position to know outright or to acquire in his own rigorous, and contemporary, investigations.¹³

Finally, Weart overstates the actual content of Aristotle’s testimony. It is true that at *Politics* 1304a27–29 the philosopher implies that Syracuse during the war had been a polity, for he says that after Syracuse’s victory the government changed from ‘polity to democracy’.¹⁴ But elsewhere in the *Politics*, at 1316a32–33, Aristotle seems to contradict this statement, saying that Syracuse became a *democracy* after the overthrow of tyranny in

¹⁰ Thucydides narrates the Sicilian campaign of 415–413 BC, including ample background information, in books six and seven of his history. The bibliography on his aims and methods is immense, but I am not aware of anyone (aside from Weart) who thinks that Thucydides’ point is to counsel against democracies fighting each other. See, for starters, the commentaries by Gomme, Andrewes & Dover (1945–81) and Hornblower (1991–96); Donald Kagan’s series of books on the Peloponnesian war, especially Kagan (1981); Hornblower (1994), Cawkwell (1997), and Rod (1998).

¹¹ Thucydides was an Athenian citizen who fought during the very Peloponnesian war he wrote about, having served as a general before being exiled. The exceptional rigor with which he carried out his historical investigations is advertised in his account (1.22, 5.26). See the previous note for his lengthy treatment of the Sicilian campaign and for modern bibliography about his work.

¹² See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 10, 1181 b 15–24. The *Politics* contains a substantial number of references to Syracusan political affairs, which, though brief and sometimes conflicting, do suggest interest on his behalf. On the other hand, what few fragments remain from the separate Aristotelian treatise on Syracuse – brief anecdotes more personal, medical, or wine-related than constitutional – are more discouraging. For the fragments, Gigon (1987: 708–711, *politeia* # 133, 602–606); also Sandys (1912: 23–39), Weil (1960: 97–104, 299–303), Rhodes (1993: 1–2).

¹³ For Thucydides, see notes 10 and 11 above. On Aristotle’s (or his student’s) historical sources and reliability, not always held in the highest regard, see Rhodes (1993: 5–37, 58–61), Weil (1960: 87–95, 311–323), and von Fritz & Kapp (1950: 7–32).

¹⁴ καὶ ἐν Συρακούσαις ὁ δῆμος αἴτιος γενόμενος τῆς νίκης τοῦ πολέμου τοῦ πρὸς Ἀθηναίους ἐκ πολιτείας εἰς δημοκρατίαν μετέβαλεν. (‘And in Syracuse the *demos*, since they were the cause of the victory in the war against the Athenians, changed the constitution from polity to democracy’.) Diodorus of Sicily also notes new and popular postwar legislation, but does not describe the result as changing the government to democracy – according to Diodorus, it already was one (13.33–35, with 11.68.6).

the mid-460s BC,¹⁵ a popular revolution that inspired the only constitutional change recorded by any source for Syracuse until after the war with Athens. So Aristotle's testimony is rather confused. Further obscuring matters is the philosopher's varying usage of the term 'polity' (*politeia*) itself. In some purely descriptive contexts, he indeed means a government with a mixture of democratic and oligarchic elements (though he never says it had 'an oligarchic elite hanging onto effective control' as Weart prefers to conclude in the above passage). But in other, normative contexts, Aristotle employs polity to mean a responsible form of popular rule, as opposed to irresponsible ones.¹⁶ In other words, it is possible that at 1304a27–29 Aristotle simply means that Syracuse went from a 'better' to a 'worse' form of democracy after the war with Athens. We cannot be certain; Aristotle's testimony on the matter is truly snarled and ought to inspire caution in its use, not its preference over the other sources.

In fact, the case for Syracusan democracy before and during the war with Athens is exceedingly strong, even beyond the clear assertions in Thucydides (and the murky ones in Aristotle).¹⁷ Much of our narrative about Syracuse in this era comes from the first-century BC historian Diodorus of Sicily, who repeatedly calls the government a democracy (11.68.6; 11.72.2.). Moreover,

¹⁵ . . . ἀλλὰ μεταβάλλει καὶ εἰς τυραννίδα τυραννίς, ὥσπερ ἡ Σικυῶνος ἐκ τῆς Μύρωνος εἰς τὴν Κλεισθέωνος, καὶ εἰς ὀλιγαρχίαν, ὥσπερ ἡ ἐν Χαλκίδι ἢ Ἀντιλέοντος, καὶ εἰς δημοκρατίαν, ὥσπερ ἡ τῶν Γέλωνος ἐν Συρακούσαις, καὶ εἰς ἀριστοκρατίαν, ὥσπερ ἡ Χαριλάου ἐν Λακεδαιμόνι. (. . . but tyranny changes also to tyranny, like the one of Myron to the one of Cleisthenes at Sicyon, and to oligarchy, like the one of Antileon in Chalcis, and to democracy, like the one of Gelon's family in Syracuse, and to aristocracy, like the one of Charilaus in Sparta.) Cf. *Politics* 1312b10–16.

¹⁶ Responsible form of popular rule: *Politics* 1279a22–b19, esp. a37–39; *Nicomachean Ethics* 8.10–11 (1160a31–1161b11), esp. 10.3. Mixture of oligarchy and democracy: *Politics* 1293b33–4; 1294a30–b41. Government of the hoplite class (i.e. the roughly middle-class bearers of heavy arms): *Politics* 1265b27–9; 1288a6–15.

putting together all our extant accounts of Syracusan history c. 465–406 BC, one builds a compelling picture of popular domination in the city, with mass citizen assemblies passing the laws, controlling policy, electing and punishing its generals, and often heeding (for better or worse) the advice of demagogic speakers. The very art of political rhetoric is reported to have developed in Syracuse thanks to this radical environment.¹⁸ Social elites naturally continued to play a prominent role in vying with each other for public honors, just as they always have in any democracy, ancient or modern; but there is nothing in the narratives to suggest that aristocrats exerted ultimate state power. Quite the reverse: our sources emphasize at times the travails of wealthy, 'respectable' politicians at the hands of the fickle masses.¹⁹ Naturally, then, members of the elite classes in the ancient world, who generally were the ones to compose the histories and philosophical treatises, tended to despise democracy and see it as an irresponsible mess or a tyranny of the common rabble.²⁰ This typical authorial bias is worth bearing in mind. When Weart reads Thucydidean reports of rival Syracusan factions and of rhetoric about disorderly mobs running Sicily, he concludes that Syracuse was in some temporary state of civil disorder (Thucydides 6.17, 38, 103; 7.2, 48–49; Weart, 1998: 33). But this is to misunderstand the evidence. The operation of ancient democracy is frequently described

¹⁷ This argument is set forth in full detail in Robinson (2001). It should be noted that even those scholars who have questioned the evidence for Syracusan democracy usually do not so much deny the label *demokratia* as distinguish the Syracusan from the contemporary Athenian version, highlighting what they see as the ongoing influence of Syracusan elites. The most extreme attacks (e.g. Wentker [1956], who perceives a Syracusan oligarchy) have been refuted previously: see Brunt (1957).

¹⁸ Late antique rhetorical introductions called *Prolegomena* provide the main source material for this: #4, 5, 7, 13, 17 in Rabe (1931).

¹⁹ See, e.g., the account relating to petalism at Syracuse in Diodorus 11.86–87.

²⁰ For a recent survey of ancient democratic critics (including Thucydides and Aristotle), see Ober (1998).

in precisely this manner, particularly by critics or outsiders; and indeed it is a natural function of any democracy to inspire groups and factions within the community to compete fiercely against each other for political influence, both openly and behind the scenes. That our sources should indicate such activity in Syracuse around the time of the war with Athens does far more to confirm the presence of democracy than exclude it.

Counting Democratic Wars: Russett & Antholis

The Athenian showdown with Syracuse cannot, therefore, be considered anything but a true war between democracies. What, then, of the broader argument for democratic peace in the ancient world – was the Atheno-Syracusan contest a rare exception in an otherwise clear pattern of conflict avoidance among democracies? The most thorough study of the issue to date is that of Russett & Antholis (1993). In an attempt to create a database for quantitative analysis, the authors compile a list of certain democracies, probable democracies, and states with other kinds of regimes which participated in that widespread conflagration of the late fifth century BC, the Peloponnesian war. They then look at who fought whom, and tabulate the results according to constitutional type. The results are striking: the government with the *highest* incidence of war against its own type is, by a hair, democracy! However, the authors call these results ‘inconclusive’ because of several factors, including a presumed undercounting of non-democracies in our sources, and note that when ‘probable’ democracies are added in with the ‘clear’ democracies, the ratios change to indicate that democracies fought with their own kind slightly less than other regimes did. In the end, the authors conclude that a trend toward friendship between democracies was beginning to take shape in the Greek world, even if the pattern is less

dramatic than that discernible in modern times and one in which the actual institutional structure of democracy played little role (as opposed to that played by the cultural norms and perceptions of democracies).

In attempting to assess the results of Russett & Antholis, one must first confront the fact that quantitative analysis of political phenomena frequently does not work as well for the ancient world as the modern, even in such relatively well-known periods as late fifth-century Greece. Of the hundreds of *poleis* which existed in the Greek world, we have clear constitutional information about a very small proportion of them – even in the fifth century – and what notices we have usually apply with certainty to only a few years of their history. Athens claims the lion’s share of our sources’ attention, and only Sparta and a handful of other states receive more than cursory attention. Centuries of careful scholarship have resulted in a remarkable understanding of a great many aspects of the Greek world, political and otherwise, especially in these famous states, but when one tries to quantify pan-Hellenic events for presentation in tabular form, the wildly uneven distribution of source material tends to undermine any findings.

Such considerations make it very difficult to quantify ancient democratic peace (or its absence) in any authoritative way. Russett & Antholis do show care in evaluating their data, choosing a good chronological framework (the era of the Peloponnesian war), breaking states down into the categories ‘Clear democracies’ (with 13 examples), ‘All other democracies’ (25 examples), ‘Unknown’ (65 examples) and ‘Not democracies’ (32 examples), and adopting reasonable criteria for distributing the states (Russett & Antholis, 1993: 43–52, 63). But one look at the totals in each category underscores the basic problem: the largest by far is ‘Unknown’, with more than twice the number of states (65) than any other category

and five times more than the number of certain democracies. Even if one assumes impeccable analysis of the evidence and categorization of states on the authors' part,²¹ the fact remains that any resulting calculations take place in a veritable sea of uncertainty.

Thus, achieving a true ratio of wars between democracies and other kinds of wars looks impossible. At best, one might answer a less ambitious but still important question: among the states about which we have a reasonable degree of knowledge, was war between democracies non-existent (the Weart hypothesis) or even very rare (a more moderate proposition)? The answer seems to be a resounding no. According to the figures of Russett & Antholis, pairs of clear democracies went to war at a substantially higher rate than pairs of non-democracies did, and their rate also exceeded warring between mixed pairs of clear democracies and non-democracies (Russett & Antholis, 1993: 53 [Table I]).

Explanations offered by the authors, who admit that they expected results more favorable to democratic peace (Russett & Antholis, 1993: 52), are not convincing. For

²¹ Russett & Antholis (1993: 63–71) list in an appendix the states, regime types, and wars used for the statistical analysis in the chapter. On the whole, the assignments seem sensible enough, though one can find some questionable decisions. For example, Camarina's constitution is categorized as unknown, but there is in fact testimony sufficient to put it in one of the 'probable democracy' categories (i.e. category 'c' for a state where there is 'an assembly called for constitutional decision', and/or category 'e' for a state 'called a democracy with less than convincing evidence'). Similarly questionable is the listing of potentially democratic Rhegion, Leontini, and Himera as unknowns. For the evidence, see my discussion of Camarina and other western Greek cities in the next section. These assignments of Russett & Antholis could have had the effect of slightly skewing their quantitative results in favor of democratic peace by artificially reducing the number of probable democracies involved in wars. But given that in the end the quantitative results already tend *against* democratic peace (see below), these possible mis-categorizations are not a matter of major concern. They underscore, however, the uncertainty involved in statistical analysis where the evidence to establish the data classification is so obscure.

example, they assert that democratic wars must have been over-reported in their sources (Russett & Antholis, 1993: 51–52), but there is no particular reason to think this. It is true that Thucydides focuses much attention on Athens and its empire, but he has plenty to say about the activities of Athens' foes as well, most of whom were considered undemocratic. That Thucydides (inevitably) leaves many peripheral states in Greece out of his account surely does skew our data – but in which direction? Without knowledge of their constitutions or wars, we cannot guess, and it will not do simply to assume most were peaceful democracies. Russett & Antholis also assert that ancient democracies tended to be naval powers with great reach and thus had more chances to get involved in conflicts, while non-democracies were usually isolated and regional in influence (Russett & Antholis, 1993: 58–59). This casual assumption, while seemingly sensible given Athens' famous naval democracy, is in fact very difficult to demonstrate empirically as a general rule. The two best-known democracies of the fifth century outside Athens, Syracuse and Argos, did not use fleets to establish overseas empires, but tended rather to fight aggressive land campaigns to dominate locally.²² Conversely, famously non-democratic Sparta and Corinth did use naval force to project power over wide areas: Corinth in northwestern Greece and elsewhere, and Sparta across the Aegean through its victory in the Peloponnesian war.²³ In the end, the unwelcome

²² Syracuse did at times deploy significant naval forces, but did so during tyrannical regimes as much as during their democracy; more importantly, the fleets played a secondary role behind the land forces in Syracuse's periodic domination of eastern Sicily. The Argive democracy was strictly a land power. On Syracusan imperialism, see Consolo Langher (1997); for Argive foreign policy, Tomlinson (1972).

²³ Corinth was a naval power early on and remained one in the era of the Peloponnesian war (Thucydides 1.13, 1.36.2, 1.44.2), enabling it to establish and maintain a colonial empire. See Graham (1983: ch. 7). On Sparta's postwar hegemony, see Parke (1930); Claus (1983: 59–69, 138–142); Hamilton (1991).

quantitative results turned up by Russett & Antholis cannot be so easily explained away: while the slippery and incomplete nature of the data prevents certainty, what we have does substantial damage to the case for an ancient democratic peace.

Not surprisingly, then, the cautiously advanced conclusion of Russett & Antholis – that one *can* detect a nascent trend toward interdemocratic friendship – does not come from their quantitative results, but from more traditional analysis of texts. Here they are on firmer ground and note some intriguing passages. Isocrates' fourth-century speech *Panathenaicus* is quoted for its contention that subject states in the Athenian empire used to pay tribute willingly to preserve their democratic constitutions (12.68). Thucydides' history, we are reminded, contains a number of specific cases where democratic factions looked to democratic Athens for support, and oligarchic ones to oligarchic Sparta, suggesting the importance of ideological and constitutional ties. Thucydides also reports a speech from the Athenian Diodotus which asserts that the *demos* (the non-elite majority of citizens) everywhere support Athens and are their natural allies even when powerful individuals attempt rebellion (3.47). Evidence from Pseudo-Xenophon's *Constitution of the Athenians* is also briefly referred to: the author of this mid-to late-fifth-century political treatise states that the Athenian democracy typically backs the *demos* rather than the elites in subject cities and in cities undergoing civil discord because doing so conduces to Athenian control.²⁴

²⁴ Pseudo-Xenophon 1.14–15; 3.10–11; Russett & Antholis (1993: 59–60). Russett & Antholis might also have singled out Thucydides 5.31.6 and 5.44.1, two passages in which states are depicted as taking constitutional form (democracy or oligarchy) into account when deciding which allies would be the most compatible: evidence for, if not democratic peace, then at least the notion that states did at times pay attention to similarity of government types in making decisions about coalitions.

This testimony, all of which is valuable in some degree, nevertheless does not have quite the force Russett & Antholis imply. For one thing, in moving quickly through this material the two scholars fail to point out to their readers the prejudicial context or controversial nature of much of it. The Isocrates passage, for example, is part of a highly charged patriotic oration written over half a century after the demise of the Athenian empire and has as one of its primary purposes to praise to the sky past Athenian services to Greece. Therefore one simply cannot take at face value its inherently dubious claims about how pleased Athens' subject states used to be to surrender their tribute money or that they did so to protect their democracies against the fearsome cruelties of Athens' opponents (Isocrates 12.66–68; Zucker, 1954: esp. 11–12). As for Diodotus, his speech comes to us in Thucydides' history as part of a famous debate about what to do with the Mytileneans after the defeat of their revolt from the Athenian empire in 427 BC. Diodotus' claim that the *demos* (a term misleadingly rendered as 'democracy' in the translation used by Russett & Antholis) in every city favors Athens is an integral part of an argument for mercy for the Mytileneans: their *demos*, he asserts, never really backed the revolt. This assertion is questionable, as Thucydides' own narrative of the course of the rebellion does not demonstrate it (Thucydides 3.2–50, esp. 28–29, 47; Westlake, 1976). Even more questionable is the larger rhetorical claim: by expressing as a general proposition the (ultimately unprovable) notion that the *demos* everywhere favors Athens, Diodotus seeks to lend believability to his contention that the Mytilenean people acted similarly and thus deserve mercy. In fact, the 'popularity' of the Athenian empire is highly controversial and the subject of much scholarly skepticism and debate, for there is strong evidence of

Athens' general *unpopularity*.²⁵ As rhetorical exaggeration is an obvious danger here, one cannot simply accept Diodotus' words unreservedly.

This leaves us with the more restrained testimony of Thucydides' narrative accounts and Pseudo-Xenophon's pamphlet, which together suggest that Athens often could be found supporting the *demos* against elite factions and did so because it seemed more to their interests as a democracy. Fair enough: no one need doubt that by the second half of the fifth century Athens tended to act in this manner. Athens liked to install or support democracies in Greek states in its control, as it did, for example, in Erythrai in c. 452, Samos in 440 and 411, and (probably) Chalcis in 446.²⁶ Correspondingly, Sparta relied on oligarchic government to help control its own allies (Thucydides 1.19). Once the Peloponnesian war had broken out, factions in open civil conflicts tended to reach out to Athens or Sparta according to popular or oligarchic leanings (Thucydides 3.82). More established states might also take constitutional factors into account when making alliances (Thucydides 5.31.6, 5.44.1). Thus, in the polarized world of fifth-century Greece, which saw a decades-long confrontation between the Spartan and Athenian alliances, attention to democracy and friendly democratic factions was indeed a factor in Athens' imperial calculations and as a result could affect the behavior of states in civil discord or those considering new alliances.

But such tendencies in no way equate to democratic peace, the proposition that

democracies avoid going to war with each other. They need not even indicate a general pattern of ideological bonding between democratic groups, for there were notable exceptions even as concerns Athens: Pseudo-Xenophon himself mentions two or three instances in which Athens backed aristocratic groups over popular ones.²⁷ As for the rest of Greece, we have *no* general statements that democratic groups tended to help each other, and there are prominent examples to the contrary, such as when democratic Syracuse intervened in Leontini c. 423 on behalf of the upper classes (*hoi dunatoi*) to drive out the *demos* (Thucydides 5.4.1–3). Nor did the *demos* always turn to democracies for help, or get help when they did. Consider Thucydides' narration of the disputes in Epidamnus, Corcyra, and Corinth which set Greece in motion toward the Peloponnesian war. The troubles began when the *demos* of Epidamnus, which was being hard-pressed by recently exiled elites (*hoi dunatoi*), made an appeal for help to its mother-city, democratic Corcyra. The colony/mother-city relationship explains the targeting of this appeal, not shared political ideals, for when the Corcyran democracy refused to help, preferring to side with the elites – an act worth noting in itself – the desperate Epidamnians next turned not to some other democracy, but to oligarchic Corinth, which was a secondary mother-city to Epidamnus. As it happens, Corinth agreed to help the *demos*, which was followed by democratic Corcyra going to war against the *demos* of Epidamnus. Any tendency toward democratic peace or even democratic support for populist groups is hard to discover here. Indeed, such constitutional considerations are entirely absent from Thucydides' discussion,

²⁵ Thucydides 2.8.4–5, with Hornblower (1991: 247). Prominent contributions to the debate include: de Ste Croix (1954), Bradeen (1960), Pleket (1963), Quinn (1964), and Fornara (1977).

²⁶ See Meiggs (1972: 205–219) for methods of control in the Athenian empire, including support for the *demos* abroad. On Erythrai: Meiggs (1972: 112–115, 421–422); Gehrke (1985: 66–68). On Samos: Thucydides 1.115–7; Diodorus 12.28; Gehrke (1985: 140–144). On Chalcis: Thucydides 8.21; Gehrke (1985: 39–40).

²⁷ 3.11, in Boeotia some time between 457 and 446, and Miletus in the 450s or 440s. Meiggs (1972: 99–100, 115–118, 209–210); Lapini (1997: 278–287); Gorman (forthcoming: ch. 6). Pseudo-Xenophon also mentions here Athenian support of Sparta during the earthquake and helot revolt of the 460s, though we may consider this event hardly comparable.

not only of *this* episode, but of the whole run-up to the Peloponnesian war in Book 1 with its policy speeches from participants and authorial analyses of causation. Instead, states are said to have been divided or connected by ethnicity (Dorian vs. Ionian Greeks), alliance systems (Peloponnesian vs. Athenian), colonial relationships (colony to mother city), and perceptions of past friendship or injury.²⁸

At best, the supposed bonds of constitution and ideology between democratic entities promoted by Russett & Antholis are only faintly and inconsistently evident in our sources, and what little we have is mostly tied to the imperial confrontation of Athens and Sparta. To say that the evidence signals a growing dynamic of democratic peace in the Greek world is decidedly optimistic. Combined with the negative quantitative data, it seems very hard to justify the authors' confidence in even a moderate ancient trend toward democratic nonviolence.

Further Considerations: Greek Sicily After 445 BC

Complicating matters for proponents of a Greek democratic peace are other potential interdemocratic wars not considered by either Weart or Russett & Antholis. The most telling of these, perhaps, were those fought by Syracuse and other cities for control of Greek Sicily in the mid-fifth century and afterwards.²⁹ The historian Diodorus of Sicily reports a major conflict in c. 445 BC between Acragas and Syracuse (12.8; 12.26.3). A

disagreement between the two cities over the return of a dangerous political leader to Sicily impelled Acragas to declare war on Syracuse, though lying behind the specific pretext was jealousy over Syracuse's power. The Greek cities of the island ranged themselves on one side or another, resulting in a large conflict with numerous forces. Syracuse was victorious in a battle at the Himera river, and the Acragantines sued for peace. According to Diodorus, Acragas had been a democracy since the overthrow of their tyrant Thrasydaeus in 472; its citizens had also helped liberate Syracuse from tyranny in 466 (11.53.5, 11.68.1). Syracuse had been strongly democratic ever since this revolution (*contra* Weart; see earlier discussion), and most other cities of Sicily at this time are collectively labeled democracies by Diodorus (11.68, 11.72, 11.76). Therefore, this war likely pitted several democratic states against one another.

Moreover, the struggle for dominance in Sicily continued over the next few decades, with Syracuse playing a leading role, even spilling into the Peloponnesian war. Various coalitions formed and competed, including at one time or another Rhegion in southern Italy, Leontini, Acragas, Messana, Camarina, Naxos, and Gela. Before long, Athens became entangled in these affairs, making alliances and generally opposing Syracusan ambitions. Details about these wars are hard to come by, for Thucydides (our main source) limits his focus to campaigns in the 420s involving Athenian forces, but it seems clear enough that fighting in this period between the free governments of Greek Sicily was frequent and unhindered by any pacifying effect of shared democratic governance.³⁰

Now it is necessary to point out that some scholars have voiced uncertainty about the true nature of the post-tyrannical

²⁸ Pope (1988: 282) remarks upon the complete absence of the term *demokratia* in the speeches (and the near-absence in the narrative) of Thucydides' first book.

²⁹ There are other possibilities, but no comprehensive study of wars between Greek democracies is feasible without a clearer understanding of where exactly democracies existed in the fifth- and fourth-century Greek world. As it happens, I am currently engaged in a book project to identify the locations and examine the nature of Greek democratic states in this period, and so I hope in future to be in a position to offer further empirical evidence for or against the existence of ancient democratic peace.

³⁰ Thucydides 3.86, 3.88, 3.90, 4.1, 4.24–5, 4.65, 5.4, 6.75; Diodorus 12.29–30.1, 12.53–4; Meiggs & Lewis (1988: documents 37, 38, 63, 64); Finley (1979: 58–73); Asheri (1992).

governments in Sicily, despite Diodorus' assertions of democracy. It has been proposed that when Diodorus – who wrote centuries later in a less democratic era – uses the word *demokratia*, all he really means is autonomous, constitutional (i.e. non-tyrannical) government, which may or may not have involved the broad and sovereign participation by the mass of citizens characteristic of democracy. Unlike Syracuse, for which Diodoran passages about the democracy can be supplemented with notices in Thucydides, Aristotle, and others, the rest of the Greek cities in Sicily generally lack testimony about their constitutional status. Thus, if one can cast suspicion on Diodorus' labeling, one might well imagine that Aristotelian 'polities' or even moderate oligarchies held sway in them (Asheri, 1990: 490; 1992: 154–170).

Without attempting here detailed examinations of all the cities involved, one can offer a few reasons for thinking that many or all of them were democracies just as Diodorus claims. First of all, there is the fact that Syracuse, the one state we know the most about, was indeed democratic – Diodorus' terminology and understanding seem fine here and bode well for his use of sources for the period. For while few modern scholars will champion Diodorus as a model historian (errors or confusions in his history are not uncommon), he does tend to follow his sources closely. For this part of the history, these sources probably were Timaeus, who lived early in the Hellenistic period, and secondarily Ephorus, a late Classical-era historian. All things considered, anachronistic misunderstanding about what constituted democracy seems not very likely here.³¹

Moreover, additional bits of evidence about some of the cities involved do imply

democratic government. For example, Thucydides describes an assembly meeting at Camarina in 415 where the citizens gather to hear speeches, deliberate, and then come to a decision, much like the sovereign popular gatherings he describes at contemporary Athens. There are also the fifth-century lead tablets, inscribed with the names of citizens, recently discovered during excavations at Camarina: scholars have hypothesized that they were used for the allotment of public officials or for public payment of those attending assembly meetings, both notoriously democratic practices (Thucydides 6.75–88; Cordano, 1992; Manganaro, 1995). Regarding Acragas, Diodorus mentions in passing *psephismata* (decrees from a popular vote) as well as one tumultuous wartime assembly meeting; in this connection, one might mention the archaeological discovery of an apparent *ekklesiasterion*, or meeting place for the ruling assembly of the city. This structure is, however, dated to the third century BC (Diodorus 13.84.5, 13.87–88; de Miro, 1967: 164–168). We also have stories about the philosopher Empedocles of Acragas. Active in the mid-fifth century, Empedocles seems to have behaved at times like the archetypal demagogue, thundering persuasively in the law courts and other forums about the dangers of would-be tyrants and about the necessity of political equality, all of which imply the existence of a potent *demos*.³²

In sum, while the source material is too thin to confirm with certainty Diodorus' democratic labeling beyond the case of Syracuse, available evidence does lend support to the contention. We are left, then, with several more military conflicts between probable democracies in Sicily during the second half of the fifth century.

³¹ Meister (1967: 41–54, 68–69); cf. Sacks (1990: 20, 167, and generally on Diodorus as being less slavish to his sources than usually believed).

³² Diogenes Laertius 8.51–77; *contra* Asheri (1990), who doubts that Empedocles' activities imply democracy.

Conclusion

This investigation has found much to question about the viability in the ancient world of the modern conception of democratic peace. Weart's attempt to argue that wars between Greek democracies never occurred is simply wrong, miscarrying most glaringly in the case of Athens' campaign against Syracuse from 415–413 BC. Russett & Antholis approach the subject more realistically and end up concluding merely that the ancient evidence suggests nascent and insufficiently effective norms of interdemocratic non-violence. And yet even this conclusion seems too optimistic: the authors' own quantitative data of Peloponnesian war-era conflicts shows, if anything, that ancient democracies were *more* likely to war with each other than other governments; and the non-quantitative testimony does little more than illustrate occasional cooperation between democracies and/or struggling democratic groups in the context of Athenian imperial ambitions. Wars among probable democracies in fifth-century Sicily further weaken the proposition.

Nevertheless, theorists of democratic peace may still find the ancient evidence useful for their investigations. The lack of a discernible propensity for democratic peace in ancient Greece does not mean that the phenomenon is unreal in the modern world.³³ Perhaps future work might focus precisely on the differences of setting and institutions between ancient and modern democracies in an attempt to explain why the pattern occurs in one era and not the other. Russett & Antholis make a start of it when they speculate about the role of institutions versus perceptions in trying to explain their unexpected results, but they are handicapped by their insistence that one can find clear

signs of democratic peace in the ancient evidence (Russett & Antholis, 1993: 59–62; similarly, Bachteler, 1997). It may be that the differences in ancient and modern practice referred to at the beginning of this article play a significant role here. Could something about the small size of Greek *poleis*, with their citizens' fierce parochial loyalty to city-state rather than to larger political ideals, prevent the operation of democratic peace? Differing social and economic realities within and among cities – e.g. slavery, ancient trade – also provide potential avenues of explanation. Or perhaps the real key lies in the institutions of ancient democracy itself: as noted above, *demokratia* meant that citizens generally governed themselves directly, through meetings of the popular assemblies to which all were invited and by election or random allotment of ordinary people to carry out government functions. Terms of office were short (typically one year), and authority was strictly limited. Perhaps modern representative democracy with its entrusting of power to an elective, careerist elite enhances the prospect of peace between such states.

Scholars have variously championed such factors as institutional restraints, cultural norms, shared competitive experiences, perceptions of outsiders, and trading connections as providing the main impetus towards democratic peace. Future study of the contrasting way the Greeks dealt with these categories of group behavior may go a long way to resolving what it is that generally prompts – or retards – peace between democracies.

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³³ On the other hand, those who doubt the existence of democratic peace will no doubt take this study as further grounds for skepticism.

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