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Research Article

Middle Class-Imperial Relationship in the Example of Ancient Greece

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Abstract: This article analyses in detail the relationship between the 'middle class' and 'empire' in the Ancient Greek context. The basic proposition is that empire gains strength with the weakening of the middle class. From this point of view, the article analyses the relationship between the existence of a middle class in Ancient Greece, the absence of a bureaucratic structure controlling agricultural production, and the military structures of Greek states before they became bureaucratic states. These structures enabled the middle class to maintain its economic independence by preventing the bureaucracy from exploiting the surplus value of small farmers. However, the loss of economic independence of the middle class led the state to become more centralised and to adopt an expansionist policy over time. This transformation accelerated especially with the transition from an agricultural economy to an economic model focusing on war and maritime activities. These developments further limited the economic and political influence of the declining middle class. In this context, the article examines the relationship between the class structures of ancient Greek society and the processes of political expansion from a historical perspective through economic and ideological dynamics in relation to the institutional foundations of empires.

Keywords: Ancient Greece, Empire, Middle Class, Military Structure, Small Farmer

1. Introduction

Although the Greek world was made up of independent *polis* ("city-states"), the middle class held a strong position in almost all of them. This middle class consisted of small farmers who were directly engaged in production, maintained their economic independence and were largely able to participate in military service. Although the concept of middle class is usually associated with capitalism, it is noteworthy that a similar social structure existed in Ancient Greece. In this context, an important point of reference for this article is the concept of *mesoi* ("middle class"), defined in Aristotle's *Politika* as those who are neither extremely rich nor poor and who are the stabilisers of the social order.

Ancient Greek society was characterised by an economy based on agriculture, and foreign trade was largely carried out by *metic* ("resident foreigner"). Domestic trade was carried out by some citizens. However, due to the negative social perception of trade, these activities did not support the acquisition of political power. At this point, the correlation between the middle class and the *metic* in Ancient Greece is used in direct relation to class relations in the modern period, but in fact the use of these terms carries a rather anachronistic perspective. For this reason, in this article, Aristotle's concept of *mesoi* is analysed in its original context of small farmers in the social structure of the period, rather than in its modern meaning.

The stability of the middle class, which has a very fragile structure, depends on the sustainability of economic and political conditions. In this context, the role of the middle class in agriculture and trade in ancient Greek society is of great importance for both economic development and social balance.

This article draws attention to the rise of the bureaucratic state mechanism with the weakening of the middle class. This phenomenon is particularly evident in the early modern period. In this context, the article explains the rise of Alexander the Great in the case of Ancient Greece from this perspective. The role and influence of the middle class in Alexander the Great's rise to power is analysed in detail.

This study makes an important contribution to the literature by analysing the role of the middle class in Ancient Greece and its effects on the formation of the empire. By explaining the radical changes in the

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transition from Greek city-states to empire, it is aimed to reveal the effects of the middle class on military and economic structures and to contribute to a better understanding of the social dynamics in Ancient Greece. In this context, the correlation between the middle class and the process of empire formation fills a gap in the literature and offers new perspectives both theoretically and historically.

2. Foundations of the Greek Middle Class

The Mycenaean civilisation was based on a bureaucratic economic system and agricultural production was the basis of the economy. The state strictly controlled agricultural processes, including planting and fertilisation (Donlan, 1985, p. 305). This control was critical due to the geographical difficulties of Greece, such as irregular rainfall and rocky terrain. As a matter of fact, the tablets contain detailed records from production to labour force (Hutchinson, 1977)[1]. The collapse of centralised administration, the cause of which is still hotly debated, led to the loss of agricultural information and storage systems, which completely paralysed the economic structure (Halstead, 2003, p. 116). When the centralised clearing system broke down, the rural economy became unsustainable.

In this period, called the 'Dark Age', social organisation was shaped on the basis of *oikoi* (households), followed by tribalisation. Political power was based on animal herds, land ownership and the capacity to form unions for war (Donlan, 1985, pp. 293–308). Agricultural production continued to exist, although it was not at the centre of the economy. The economic orientation of the clans in the Dark Ages enabled Greek men to settle on arable land, which was seen as worthless by the aristocracy and therefore unclaimed (Donlan, 1989, pp. 134–136). Thus, the first nuclei of small farmers began to appear in Greece. In the absence of bureaucracy, peasants developed their own production knowledge by adapting to the harsh ecological conditions of Greece. Therefore, the development that would lead to a bureaucratic structure no longer existed in Ancient Greece.

The Greek *polis*, although these structures are called 'states' today, were actually human communities and did not have the characteristics of a state. In treaties, it is seen that the parties referred to the community, not the state. Although judges received salaries, they were not yet recognised as 'civil servants' (Mossé & Stewart, 1973, p. 34). The first traces of bureaucratisation were observed in Athens in the 6th century BC, with the intense competition of the rich to obtain office and property, and the disputes that emerged with the reaction of indebted farmers (Aristotle, *The Athenian Constitution*, 5–12, trans. Rhodes, 1984). As the conflict between the classes intensified, Solon stepped in as an arbitrator and made reforms and laid the foundations of the institution of bureaucratic arbitration by making important contributions to the process of statehood. Solon did not distribute land but found a way out by cancelling all debts of the *demos* ("people") (Aristotle, *The Athenian Constitution,* trans. Rhodes, 1984).

2.1. Battle of the champions

The formation of the bureaucratic state could not be explained solely by the retention of agricultural knowledge as in other regions of the same period. The organisation of the army was critical to the formation of bureaucratic states. In the period from the end of the Dark Ages until the Persian invasions (7th to early 5th century BC), Greek city-states had very limited borrowing. The main reason for this was the strategy of the hoplites, small farmers (Gat, 2006, pp. 295–298), to end wars with a single battle, such as the 'War of Champions' described by Herodotus, without requiring city-states to borrow for military expenditure.

Small farmers, who did not receive a salary or other financial support from the state, preferred to participate directly in the war rather than finance it by spending their own material resources. According to Pericles, this was because small farmers trusted their own bodies more than their money

[1] For more information see (Bennet & Olivier, 1973)

against danger, especially when the war was protracted beyond expectations (Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, 1.141.17-18, trans. Hammond, 2009). It was therefore more efficient for small farmers to participate in short-term wars themselves. The distance between the front line and the armies was therefore considerably shorter; hoplites could reach the battlefield in a short march of one or two days. This reduced the city-states' defence expenditure (Hanson, 1999, p. 394).

Since the Greek city-states, as mentioned above, did not make wars permanent and protracted, there was no permanent hierarchical military structure in the states other than Sparta. Even in Sparta, generals and officers received no formal training in tactics and strategy. Many of them could learn from relatives with war experience or learn from folk tales (Lazenby, 2012, p. 34). In the Greek city-states, there was no class of officers or generals who had to be specially nurtured outside of wartime.

During this period, there was no arms production or military organisation in Greece to feed a large-scale army. In addition, the cost of infantry weapons was borne entirely by the farmers themselves (Hanson, 1999, p. 295). In the early *polis*, farmers in Argos, Corinth, Sparta, Athens, Thebes and other city-states used similar weapon equipment because the changes risked disrupting the columnar battle formation of the Greek heavy infantry (Hanson, pp. 297-8). For this reason, city-states did not allocate resources to the development of new weapon systems, while the weapons used could be repaired or reworked for centuries due to their durability (Hanson, p. 300).

This structure of warfare rendered unnecessary the imposition of taxes that would economically burden the small farmers who constituted the middle class in Ancient Greece, and a bureaucratic army that deepened inequality between classes. Indeed, in fifth- and fourth-century Greece, where there was no bureaucratic army, land ownership was not characterised by the consolidation of large plots of land; 45 and 70 acre plots were above average, though not unusual (Finley, 1982, p. 65).

3. The Transformation of Small Property into Political Power

In the mid-seventh and late sixth centuries, when tyrannies emerged, tyrants, supported by small farmers, exiled aristocrats and confiscated their land (de Ste. Croix, 1981, pp. 278–279). The support of small farmers was important because tyrants facing legitimacy problems needed the support of the military class. The small farmers supported tyranny because of the absence at that time of non-hereditary regimes that could replace the aristocrats, since oligarchy or democracy had not yet been tried, and even tyranny did not have a traditional mould. Indeed, for this reason, tyrants did not last long.

However, tyrants' confiscation of aristocrats' property and their exile paved the way for the rise of small farmers (de Ste. Croix, 1981, p. 281). This is also why small farmers supported the Titans; the population of small farmers was limited compared to the overall population size of the city-states during this period. Thus, as will be discussed in detail later, even the moderate oligarchic systems established after the fall of tyrannies resembled timocratic oligarchies (Aristotle, *Politics*, IV. 1297b.1-13, trans. Barker, 2009). Therefore, small farmers needed tyrannical regimes that would pave their way politically.

By the end of the sixth century, tyranny had ended in mainland Greece and outside the cities under Persian rule, and social and political conflicts had led to the emergence of oligarchic or, rarely, democratic regimes. Oligarchies were forms of government dominated by cavalry and hoplites, who made up about one-fifth to one-third of the population, and the class above them (de Ste. Croix, 1981, p. 283). In contrast, democracies are regimes that imply broader social participation, including these classes as well as the poor.

Although participation in oligarchic regimes in Ancient Greece was based on property relations, these regimes were not thymocratic due to the equitable distribution of property before the fourth century BC. In this context, there were important differences between the oligarchy of the fourth century and

the oligarchic regimes that emerged after tyranny. Greek city-states before the 5th century BC can be characterised as moderate oligarchies, as the participation of small farmers enabled oligarchies to spread to a wider base. Therefore, in Ancient Greek regimes, the narrow definition of the property requirement for participation in the regime transformed oligarchies into a thymocratic structure, while the broad definition led to the emergence of moderate oligarchies. These regimes, in which the middle class was active, can be defined as a kind of democracy (Aristotle *Politics*, IV.1291b38-41, trans. Barker, 2009) based on property qualifications and low property requirements, and compared to the tyrannical period, political participation was not low due to the fact that small farmers constituted a significant part of the population.

Unlike the peasants of medieval Europe, Greek peasants were not often indebted to the rich and had disposable cash; they were not subjected to high rents and taxes; they did not constitute a community engaged only in subsistence food production without regard for the market; because of their political power, they could not be conscripted without their consent; they could also own slaves (Hanson, 1999, p. 107). In moderate oligarchies, unlike narrow oligarchic systems, the sale and rental of family lands are restricted, and a check on power is provided to prevent land concentration by preventing the division of properties through a single-heirs policy (Asheri, 1963, p. 2). Ancient Greek farming consisted of farms of similar size and owned by families rather than single individuals, rather than huge farms run by a small number of individuals with great wealth. Also Aristotle points out that the laws of Solon and other states prevented an individual from acquiring as much land as he desired (Aristotle, *Politics*, II.1266b14-20, trans. Barker, 2009). Therefore, intensive slave labour was not used in agriculture.

Although Sparta, like many other city-states, was dominated by a system in which small farmers were effective in the administration, unlike other city-states, it was not the small farmers who owned property who cultivated the land, but the unfree Greeks called helots - εἵλωτες. As a result of the Second Messenian War, which started with the revolt of the Helots, the Spartans, feeling the necessity to keep thousands of people under constant surveillance, directed Spartan men who were not engaged in agriculture to continuously train for war, thus transforming their society into a militarist structure.

The importance of small property owners for our subject lies in the fact that the existence of this class prevents the formation of a sharp binary opposition between the rich and the poor in societies. From the Dark Ages until the 5th century BC, there was a strong and large agricultural middle class in Greek states where social polarisation was low. In the Greek *polis* between 600-500 BC, class conflicts did not have significant effects.

4. The Transformative Impact of the Persian Wars on the Military and Social Structure in Ancient Greece

Unlike the hoplite-dominated tactics of direct confrontation embodied in the 'war of champions', the Persians tended to avoid forms of conflict that would allow for protracted battles and the concept of chivalry. These wars dealt the first blow to the moderate oligarchy due to their high cost and unsuitability for the demography of small farmers. Prior to the Persian Wars, this type of warfare had only been seen in the war of militarised Sparta in Messenia.[2] Unlike the short-lived border disputes of the classical Greek wars, in the Persian Wars and the conflicts that followed, city-states had to recruit soldiers for months-long campaigns, and so the army included middle-class peasants, *demos*, foreigners, *metics* and slaves.

In order to adapt to the new warfare, it was concluded that the heavily armed hoplite troops should be transformed in order to employ lightly armed soldiers better suited for raids, sieges, ambushes and long campaigns. In addition, costly cavalry was deployed for raids and a special military unit called 'Psiloi'

[2] In the Second Messenian War, Sparta laid siege to the Messenian capital of Eira for eleven years. For more see (Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, IV.17.11–20.1, trans. Jones & Ormerod, 1926)

was created for siege warfare. Military service was paid in order to increase the size of the army to counter the crowded Persian army. The navies were upgraded to military status and organised in such a way that their costs were covered by the state; in this context, shipyards were built, fortifications were created, and naval crews and weapons were provided (Hanson, 1999, p. 316). Additionally, walls and fortification systems were built so that cities could be prepared for long-term sieges

In Ancient Greece in the fifth and fourth centuries BC, state subsidies covering areas such as weapon repair and training of young soldiers emerged to support conversion (Kartledge, 1977, p. 17). Mass arms production was possible when states that did not contribute to the production of military equipment in the first two centuries of the poleis period began to participate in the supply of arms, and when the Ancient Greek peasants, who were not under the control of tax collectors, unlike the peasants in Greece during the time of Alexander the Great, began to be subject to tax control.

The Persian Wars brought about not only a military but also a mental transformation. In ancient Greece before the wars, the concept of an army that did not have imperial characteristics was either a reflection of a naturally introverted and conservative worldview or a direct result of this understanding. In this context, the society's distant attitude towards the sea (Hesiod, *Theogony and Works and Days*, Lines 671–701, trans. West, 2009) can also be considered as an extension of this mentality. From Carl Schmitt's perspective, the formation of a conservative society is a phenomenon that can take root in agrarian, not maritime, social structures.[3]

On the eve of the Persian Wars, in 499 BC, when the Greek cities of Asia Minor revolted against the Persians, only Eretria and Athens supported the rebels. When the Persians attacked Eretria, Athens watched the situation without intervening. When the Persians turned towards Athens, Sparta, which had decided to act together with Athens, did not come to the region. This inaction was not surprising given the fear of Persia as well as the aims of the wars in Greece.

The impact of the Persian Wars on mental transformation should be understood by focussing on the relationship between the Greek people and the sea. Carl Schmitt argues that the history of the world is essentially the history of conflicts between maritime powers and land-locked powers, emphasising the efforts of maritime societies (Leviathan) to strangle land-locked societies (Behemoth) (Schmitt, 1997, pp. 5–6). In this context, according to Schmitt's perspective, land societies tend to protect their borders, while maritime societies tend to expand and establish hegemony.[4] From Schmitt's perspective, Athens' naval role in the Persian Wars indicated from whom the imperial claim would emerge after victory. The material as well as intellectual conditions for the conception of hegemony had been established: The vacuum left by the Persians.

4.1. The transformation of Athens

As mentioned, unlike a conservative society, Athens was a Greek state that was able to realise a mental revolution. In addition to the intellectual revolution, class relations in Athens also paved the way for this, because another consequence of the fact that the Greek naval power was entirely dependent on the Athenians during the Persian Wars was the emergence of the *demos* as an effective power (Aristotle, *Politics*, II.1274a13, trans. Barker, 2009). The navy was an instrument of war used by the *demos*, not by the hoplites, and the *demos'* participation in both the backbone of the army and the arms supply chain signalled the end of the traditional Greek system.

[3] Carl Schmitt's dichotomy offers a land/sea perspective, as it addresses how social structures are shaped in geopolitical contexts rather than the agricultural/seafaring distinction. However, the land-centered and sedentary characteristics of agricultural societies largely overlap with Schmitt's concept of "land sovereignty".

[4] Although Schmitt's assumption is an analysis with a dominant ideological character, the formation of Europe's hegemony concept would not have been possible without the broadening horizons that seafaring brought to European nations, which he mentioned in his work Land and Sea. See (Schmitt, 1997, pp. 33-37)

While war was a source of income for the *demos*, this source was cut off when the state stopped financing the army at the end of the Persian Wars. Some mercenaries fought on behalf of the Persians to earn a living outside the periods of war.[5] But the problem was not limited to this; for example, when they were not employed, they attacked and looted cities (Isocrates, *To Philip*, V.53-5, trans. Norlin, 1928). The problem of mercenaries was part of a wider problem in the second half of the fifth century, when the homeless and unemployed in the city outnumbered the local population (Isocrates, *To Philip*, V.96, trans. Norlin, 1928). This broad mass consisted of people who were unable to pay their debts (de Ste. Croix, 1981, p. 287) and lost their property due to increased taxes and wartime speculation, with the physically strong becoming mercenaries and the others paradoxically employed through war.

The management of this population has primarily been to direct them to farming and commercial activities outside the city (Isocrates, *Areopagiticus*, VII.44, trans. Norlin, 1929). After they were taken out of the city, they could not enter the city even for events such as festivals (Isocrates, *Areopagiticus*, VII.52, trans. Norlin, 1929). Keeping the poor population away from the city is related to the potential of the *demos* power to organise and threaten the oligarchy, which we will discuss later (Aristotle, *Rhetoric to Alexander*, II.1424b 8-10, trans. Mayhew, 2011). The second method, which is directly related to imperial expansion, is the realisation of large-scale public construction projects. These projects provided employment opportunities for all citizens, including the unemployed masses.[6] Most of these projects involved the production of weapons, involving the participation of the *demos* together with slaves and *metic*, and military preparations such as warships, various weapons, arrows, catapults and retaining walls increased the city's productivity enormously. [7]

According to Aristotle, the existence of landless *demos*, whose prestige increased with the naval victory during the Persian invasion, was not sustainable. According to Aristotle, this group does not deserve the right to citizenship. This is why Aristotle thinks that even in cases where a navy is necessary for the survival of a *polis*, there must be a mechanism to prevent the landless from being granted rights. According to him, the *trireme* (a warship with three rows of oars) can be managed by agriculturalists in the off-season (Aristotle, *Politics*, VII.1327b8-16, trans. Barker, 2009)

According to Aristotle, the fact that victories at sea brought prestige (Aristotle, *Politics*, II. 1274a13-16, trans. Barker, 2009), only to landless oarsmen brought the danger of regimes evolving from a moderate oligarchy to a democracy that favoured class interests rather than the common good. For, according to Aristotle, lightly armed troops and naval forces formed entirely by the propertyless *demos* could easily gain the upper hand against heavily armed cavalry and hoplites (Aristotle, *Politics*, 1321a13-19, trans. Barker, 2009). However, the same *demos* could also support tyrants when necessary.

However, the wars were not only profitable for the *demos*. In contrast to the aforementioned conservative attitudes of the moderate oligarchies based on per-war remuneration and small farms, Athenian small farmers embraced the new system. The conservative attitude of the farmers was based on the fact that the existing system stabilised them. However, this did not lead to the belief that small farmers should be frugal with wealth, as this was not a preaching of religious beliefs. Wealth could be seen as desirable for the small farmer despite the disaster (Herodotus, *The Persian Wars*, 7.190.1, trans. Godley, 1922).

Indeed, frequent overseas plunder and conscription allowed small farmers to accumulate cash and capital (Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, 2.26, 2.69.1, 3.51, 3.96, 5.56.3, 5.116.2, 7.17.3, 8.35.12, trans. Hammond, 2009). However, by acquiring wealth through war, small farmers contributed to the

[5] The most famous of these are the Ten Thousand.
[6] For more information see (Plutarch, *Livres, Pericles and Fabius Maximu*s, trans. Perrin, 1916)
[7] In the case of Syracuse, the Syracusans enthusiastically supported Dionysius' policy and worked in competition to produce weapons, so much so that they produced at an admirable pace. See (Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History, XIV.41-3, trans. Oldfather, 1954)*

establishment of hegemony and economic gain in Greece, which in turn led to a defensive orientation of Athenian war strategy. The prosperity gained encouraged individuals to avoid jeopardising their wealth, and for these reasons Pericles persuaded the Athenians to leave their rural homes and retreat to the city walls, avoiding confronting the enemy on land (Ober, 1985, pp. 51–52).

Considering the transformation, it is not easy to make a clear distinction between small farmers and *demos* in Athens. This is because the use of Athenian hoplites as amphibious troops since the Persian Wars blurred the boundaries between hoplites and naval power. In this context, the hoplites did not disappear militarily but were transformed by the impact of the war and turned to different economic activities besides agriculture, thus changing their class characteristics.

Before the Persian Wars, the hoplites were not a burden on the state during non-war periods, while the standing army, especially the navy, consumed resources during non-war periods. The wealth of the Athenian Empire under Pericles was based on the triremes and, consequently, on the logistics of timber for shipbuilding. When the Athenian fleet was destroyed in Sicily in 413 BC, Thucydides emphasises that the problem became not only one of finding new crews, but also of procuring new ship timber as Athens lost influence over its suppliers (Meiggs, 1982, p. 117). Therefore, the navy's survival depended on its constant strengthening and growth.

Apart from the logistics of the navy, the logistics required to fulfil basic needs were also of vital importance. As Athens developed as an imperial state, it became home to foreigners, including slaves and *metic*, citizens of another *polis*. Therefore, unlike other Greek cities, which could produce food resources such as maize and wheat on their own soil, Athens turned to overseas territories for food supplies (de Ste. Croix, 1972, pp. 45–49). Thus, the city became dependent on the maritime empire.[8] The protection of the Bosporus and Hellespont (Dardanelles) trade line, which was the economic lifeblood of Athens, required both the defence of this line and the provision of the necessary resources for the continuity of the navy. The Attica-Delos Union, established for this purpose, provided the resources needed by the navy by paying regular tribute to Athens (Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War,* 1.96.2, trans. Hammond, 2009).

Regardless of whether they were supporters or opponents of democracy, the fifth-century Greek city-states recognised that Athens' political hegemony was a link between the social balance of its cities and its dominance over allies. This hegemony provided Athens not only with products such as wheat, of which it had insufficient quantities, but also with the resources it needed, such as slaves, raw materials for shipbuilding, and taxes that filled the treasury. These taxes also played a critical role in providing lands for the settlement of needy people and new markets for Athens.

5. The Transformative Impact of the Peloponnesian Wars on the Military and Social Structure of Ancient Greece

The Peloponnesian War broke out as a result of Sparta's reaction to Athens' filling the power vacuum in the Mediterranean after the repulsion of the Persian attack on the Greek mainland. The military and intellectual transformation was faster in Athens than in Sparta because, as mentioned above, Sparta already had a militarised state structure.

In his speech about the victory in the Peloponnesian War, Pericles made it clear that the development of Sparta was not as advanced as that of Athens. According to Pericles, the Peloponnesians (Sparta and its allies) were just a group of people who worked only in their own territory, organised short campaigns and were inexperienced in overseas wars (Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, 1.141.8-13, trans. Hammond, 2009). Therefore, according to him, the Peloponnesians could neither regularly crew ships

[8] The Peloponnesian War increased Athens' dependence on external resources, for reasons that will be discussed below. During this period, the population's food needs were provided almost entirely by imports from overseas, financed by tribute collected from the Attic-Delian League. (Ober, 1985, pp. 51-52)

nor participate in long voyages (Thucydides, 1.141.13-14). Without underestimating Sparta and its allies, Pericles argues that the alliance could withstand all of Greece in a single pitched battle, but that they would not be able to sustain the war if it were prolonged (Thucydides, 1.141.22-25).

According to Pericles, it was impossible for Peloponnesians who were farmers but not sailors to be successful (Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, 1.142.16-19, trans. Hammond, 2009). Indeed, apart from Sparta's unique military structure, the traditional military organisation of the other city-states of the Peloponnesian League was not capable of keeping up with the total warfare required by the Peloponnesian War. Sparta and its allies, which did not have a navy and were based on agrarian economies, did not encourage the presence of *metic* or slaves working in workshops, trade and mining, as in Athens.

Social and military transformation in Ancient Greece began with the Persian Wars, but the real blow to the traditional structure was dealt by the Peloponnesian War, which spread the changes in Athens. The members of the Peloponnesian League, who had been able to maintain their traditional structures despite the devastating effects of the Persian Wars, were faced with the need to build large navies in the Peloponnesian War, which would lead to radical changes in their social structure. This brought with it new financial responsibilities, such as the accumulation of capital for public armaments, the employment of large crews and the collection of taxes (Hanson, 1999, p. 341).

Most of the wars of this period - even more intensely than the Persian Wars - were fought between ships manned by the poor, mercenaries, resident foreigners and rowers made up of slaves, and almost all major battles took place either at sea or near the coast (Hanson, 1999, p. 341). The transfer of hoplites to land by ship meant that battles were fought in a manner contrary to the hoplites' traditional methods, i.e. the fighting took place in rugged, bushy or island areas. In addition, siege warfare took place with unprecedented intensity, contrary to the traditional understanding (Hanson, p. 342).

The evolution of the Greek army from land troops to a maritime-based structure can be seen in the incident in which Argos suggested to Sparta that protracted conflicts should be resolved by a battle of champions and that the defeated side should not be pursued (Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, 5.41.2, trans. Hammond, 2009). This proposal of Argos was considered ‘unwise’ by the Spartans (Thucydides, 5.41.3). The rapid decline of the wars of the champions increased the political influence of the *demos* and undermined the social position of the hoplites in the navy-powered *polis*. There was no longer any valid reason for the disenfranchised *demos* to be regarded as a lower class than the small farmers, a proposal that the Spartans considered ‘unwise’.

6. Class Tensions and Changes in Land Ownership in Ancient Greece

The major economic impact of the Persian and Peloponnesian wars was that the wealthy class was able to appropriate a larger proportion of the small surplus available to them than in the late fifth century (de Ste. Croix, 1981, pp. 294–295). The prolonged periods of war adversely affected those involved in agricultural production in all Greek cities; farmers were forced to employ their wives and were able to work as stewards on other people's farms. Because of the war, rich landowners were expanding their properties by indebting the peasants through speculation during the war years (Finley, 1982, p. 64).

This process led to the transformation of moderate oligarchies into thymocratic oligarchies, and the oligarchs of the period acquired a large part of the best land (Aristotle, *Politics*, V.7, 1307a27-32, trans. Barker, 2009). In the 6th century B.C., profiles such as Solon (Aristotle, *The Athenian Constitution*, 6.12-6, trans. Rhodes, 1984) who was forced by the *demos* to become a tyrant but refused to do so, Philolaos (Aristotle, *Politics*, II. 1274b1-8) who contributed to the longest-lasting oligarchic system by drafting laws to protect the land equally, were replaced by figures such as Dionysius I of Syracuse.

In the fourth century, outside Athens, conflicts between the rich and the poor had become violent. When a successful revolution took place, it was followed by large-scale executions, exile and at least the

confiscation of the property of the opposing leaders. The bloodiest example of class conflict is the incident in Argos in 370 BC, which resulted in the massacre of 1,200 to 1,500 members of the upper class by the *demos* (Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History,* XV.57.3-58.4, trans. Oldfather, 1954).

The programme of the Greek insurrectionists appears to be largely focused on two main demands: land redistribution and debt cancellation. The intensifying demands of the class struggle in Athens at the beginning of the sixth century were resolved by the Solonic reforms, but a similar mechanism could not be developed in other city-states two centuries later. The property-owning class, fearing revolution due to the burden of debt, proposed measures such as the reduction or abolition of interest and even principal for debtors (de Ste. Croix, 1972, p. 298).

The main reason for the struggle of the *demos* against the oligarchs is the fragility of the oligarchy by transforming into a thymocratic structure and the insecurity prevailing among the oligarchs, which is narrowed by the concentration of the ruling class. The first cause of insecurity is the internal conflicts caused by competition over resources. The second reason is that the *demos* recognise these conflicts in advance and takes strategic actions. The third reason is the distrust between the oligarchs caused by the uprising of the *demos*. As long as the oligarchs act in unity, they can keep the *demos* suppressed; however, if an oligarch is not sure that other oligarchs will not join the *demos*, he may be tempted to join the *demos*. Even the secession of one oligarch can trigger the collapse of the oligarchy (Simonton, 2017, p. 257). While other oligarchs were penalised, the oligarch who adapted to the *demos* had the opportunity to survive and even grow stronger under democratic rule, and in some cases to rise to the position of tyranny.

In Sparta, which had a different structure from other city-states, the effectiveness of the lower classes in the army increased, as in other Greek city-states, and this situation led to the helots playing a greater role in the Spartan army.[9] In Sparta, class inequality deepened and the tendency towards luxury consumption increased, so that many people lost the resources needed for citizenship and hoplites (Aristotle, *Politics*, II. 1269a-1271b, trans. Barker, 2009). The Helots, as Aristotle emphasises, took advantage of their lightly armed troops to raise uprisings and eventually gained their freedom after the war with Thebes.

Tyranny, which existed from the mid-seventh century until the end of the sixth century, re-emerged with the economic crisis in the fourth century, but the source of legitimacy of tyranny in this period was different. Tyrants were often brought in by oligarchs to suppress the demands of the lower classes. For example, Kleomis of Mithymn a secured the rights of property-owning citizens and compensated exiles by returning their property. However, this was not always the case. In Heraclea Pontica, the council summoned the exiled Clearchus for its own benefit, but Clearchus sided with the lower classes and pursued a radical policy against the rich. Similarly, in Sicyon, Euphron favoured the *demos* by confiscating the property of the rich (de Ste. Croix, 1972, pp. 296–297).

In many city-states where tyranny was established through demagoguery, the tyrants confiscated the property of the oligarchy, cancelled the debts of the *demos* and distributed land to the people. They also provided employment for the *demos* through public investment, but this employment was mainly confined to the military sphere. In addition, since the tyrants in power confiscated the property of the oligarchy, it was only possible for them to maintain their power through continuous war policies. In cities ruled by tyranny, war became part of the economy.

6.1. Impact of transformation on Athens

The restoration of democracy in 403 BC brought an end to regime disputes in Athens, but class differences continued to influence policymaking. Small farmers and the wealthy argued that Athens

[9] During the Battle of Plataea in 479 BC, the number of helots was seven times that of the Spartans. See (Lupi, 2017, p. 280)

should focus on keeping the trade routes open, while the *demos* sought revenge against Sparta and capitalised on the tensions between Thebes and Sparta. For small farmers and the rich, imperialist policy became increasingly costly, and in the period of Sparta's weakening, maintaining the status quo took precedence over seeking hegemony. Moreover, for small farmers, the war risked dispossession and loss of land (Mossé & Stewart, 1973, p. 39). As a matter of fact, while the number of hoplites was 25,000 before the Peloponnesian War, this number decreased to 9,000 in 411 BC due to plague, war losses and economic collapse (Kagan, 1987, p. 2).

Demos was not willing to give up its imperialist policy because war provided employment, reliable income, booty and regular supplies as well as ideological reasons (Mossé & Stewart, 1973, p. 39). We have already seen a similar approach in tyrannies. As mentioned above, while the employment of the *demos* was provided both by their involvement in war production and their direct participation in the war, the burden of the war fell mostly on the shoulders of large and small property owners. During this period, Athens pursued various policies in order to strengthen its navy, which, as mentioned earlier, relied to a large extent on the tribute provided by the union. However, Athens, which lost the Peloponnesian War, lost the opportunity to collect tribute from the same union. As a matter of fact, in 357 BC, Athens' demand for high tribute from the newly established union led to the outbreak of the "Social Wars" (Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History,* 15.78.4-79.1, trans. Oldfather, 1954).

Although the difficulties experienced by the peasants mentioned above were also experienced in Athens, they were not felt as harshly and the size of their estates slowly increased. Indeed, unlike in previous periods, Alkibiades, who was among the supporters of the oligarchic revolution, acquired three hundred *plethrons* (about seventy acres) of land (Plato, *Alcibiades I*, 123c7-8, trans. Lamb, 1927) and Aristophanes purchased land of about the same size (Lysias, *Lysias*, 20.29, trans. Lamb, 1930). However, despite the economic difficulties of the war years, the tendency of property monopolisation remained low, and small and medium-sized peasants retained land ownership (only 5,000 out of a total of 30,000 Athenians did not own land at the beginning of the fourth century), preventing Athens from moving away from agricultural activities (Mossé & Stewart, 1973, p. 25). The monopolisation of land ownership in Athens will be seen in the Hellenistic era.

7. Imperialist Tendencies of Greece: Class Conflicts and the Search for Solutions

Imperialist theories were based on the idea that the main problems of Greece could be solved by these policies, and these ideas were shaped by the collapse of the Athenian hegemony and the failure of the Spartan and Theban hegemonies to meet expectations. Isocrates systematically developed the imperialist theory in his Panegyricus, arguing that the Greeks should exploit Asia and extract wealth from foreign lands. Thus, civil wars and poverty would end (Isocrates, *To Philip*, V.173-4, trans. Norlin, 1928). Because the enemies had great resources (Isocrates, V.182). Persian territory was even to become a home for homeless nomads of mercenary origin who plundered (Isocrates, *To Philip*, V.122-3). Moreover, according to him, all barbarians should serve the Greeks in a position similar to that of the helots in Sparta (Isocrates, *Panegyricus,* IV. 131-2, trans. Norlin, 1928).

The wars between the Greek city-states and the chaotic environment created by the class struggles within the city-states prepared the ground for the development of the expectation of hegemony in Greece and accordingly the development of imperialist theories. The first candidate of this expectation was Agesilaus II of Sparta. Xenophon speaks of Agesilaus' desire to conquer Asia (Xenophon, *Hellenica,* 4.1.41, trans. Brownson, 1918) and draws a parallel between Agesilaus and Agamemnon, whom Isocrates characterises as the first leader of a crusade against the 'barbarian east'.[10] However, Agesilaus' Asian campaign was short-lived, as attacks by Thebai and Corinthos, who were disturbed by Sparta's

[10] According to Xenophon, Agesilaus stopped at Aulis to offer a sacrifice, just as Agamemnon did before going to Troy See (Xenophon, *Hellenica*, 3.4.3–4, trans. Brownson, 1918).

expansion, forced him to return to Greece (Hamilton, 1991, pp. 100–103).The significance of the Agesilaus narrative lies in the frustration caused by the idea that the Asian expedition was hampered by internal strife among the Greeks. [11]

This disappointment raised the prospect of unity on the Greek mainland. According to Isocrates, before a hegemony could be established against the Persians, a reconciliation between the Greek city-states was necessary (Isocrates, *Panegyricus*, IV.15-16, trans. Norlin, 1928) However, it was unclear how this expectation would be fulfilled, as the hegemonies of Athens, Sparta and Thebes had failed to establish full hegemony on the Greek mainland. Prior to the Battle of Mantinea, it was thought that the battle would decide hegemony, but despite the participation of all the major Greek cities, the battle's ambiguous outcome was disappointing (Xenophon, *Hellenica*, 7.5.26, trans. Brownson, 1921).

There was only one way to resolve the class conflict in accordance with the demands of all classes and to end the wars between the Greek city-states: a sovereign king who would restore order in all Greek city-states by military intervention when necessary and who would occupy Persian territory in order to gain land for the poorer classes. The Battle of Mantinea weakened the Greek city-states, but Macedonia came to the fore as a result. Situated on the periphery of the Greek world and often seen as semi-barbaric, Macedonia was unaffected by the wars between the city-states, controlling a large geographical area and having a stronger central government than most Greek states (Bury, 1967, p. 684). Therefore, Macedonia had the potential to realise imperialist policies.

Indeed, Philip and Alexander fixed the city constitutions in order to preserve social order and prohibited land distribution, debt cancellation, property confiscation and the emancipation of slaves (Demosthenes, *Speeches*, XVII.15, trans. Trevett, 2001). In this period, the trend from the Persian Wars continued, and armies became professional, with an organisational structure dominated by cavalry units and specialised military units (Connolly, 1998, pp. 68–69). This process left small farmers vulnerable due to the lack of political representation, and taxes depleted their earnings, making the cultivation of agricultural land unprofitable. [12]

As small farmers left the countryside, these lands gradually became the property of the wealthy class. Increasing migrations caused agricultural knowledge to become dependent on a bureaucratic structure, as in the Mycenaean civilisation. Agriculture was carried out by serfs and slaves under the supervision of overseers, and details such as which seeds to plant where, the taxes to be paid by tenants, and interventions were recorded through extensive bureaucratic planning (Green, 1990, p. 368).

However, the rural decline did not lead to class tensions. Philip II and Alexander intervened in this process with a solution that had the potential to end class warfare, in which the wealthy classes would continue to expand their property, while new areas of opportunity would be created for the lower classes. Indeed, after the conquest of Persia, the entire territory of the Persian Empire was claimed, claiming that all conquered lands belonged to the 'Great King', and large-scale land donations were made in this direction (de Ste. Croix, 1972, p. 97).

8. Conclusion

With the collapse of the Mycenaean civilisation, Greece entered the Dark Ages and experienced radical transformations in agricultural production systems and social structures. After the collapse of the central bureaucracy, small farmers developed their own production knowledge and adapted to the

[11] For example, Isocrates relates that Agesilaus captured the region up to the Halys River (today's Kızılırmak) facing Greece (Isocrates, *Panegyricus*, IV. 144, trans. Norlin, 1928). However, in reality, the Spartans were unable to advance to this point, and the Persians managed to cut off the supply to Rhodes. See (Funke, 2023, pp. 425–435).

[12] Although the reasons for the abandonment of the lands are a complex issue due to the lack of evidence, it can be said that this factor played a decisive role, considering that a similar situation occurred in Rome (Tainter, 1988, p. 146), accepting the validity of the tax-based explanation and many other explanations.

harsh ecological conditions. At the same time, small farmers played an active role as a military class. Both of these conditions protected small farmers from heavy tax burdens and secured their economic and social existence. During this period, tyranny emerged as a result of class struggles between the aristocracy and small farmers. As a result of the class struggle, small farmers formed a large part of the population, which transformed political structures, and a social structure based on small property ownership laid the foundation for a more balanced social order by preventing sharp class distinctions.

The Persian Wars led to significant changes in both the military and social structure of Ancient Greek society. Prolonged military campaigns changed the strategic needs of the city-states, enabling wider masses of people, especially the *demos*, to join the army. This transformation affected not only military classifications but also economic and social structures. Athens was at the centre of this transformation. In this period when naval power gained importance, the navy was the area where the *demos* was most effective, which led to the strengthening of *demos*-centred policies. The Persian Wars marked the end of middle class-oriented systems in Athens and initiated the transition to democracy with the increasing power of the *demos*.

The Peloponnesian War enabled the social and military transformation in Athens to spread to other Greek city-states. The long duration of the war and its high manpower requirement led the states to place their military structures on a bureaucratic basis. In order to create the supply chain of bureaucratic armies, states provided their financial resources through taxes, which caused severe economic pressures on small farmers who were already facing the danger of dispossession due to the prolongation of wars. The increase in debt burden led to the threat of dispossession of small farmers and the widening of the gap between the rich and the poor. The sharpening of class inequalities led to the emergence of revolutionary movements and accelerated the transition to tyranny or democracy in city-states. For the landless *demos*, war was seen as a means of economic gain. For this reason, city-states that adopted war policies intensified their military campaigns with the increasing influence of the *demos*, and this accelerated the war cycle in Greece. After the Peloponnesian War, the struggle for hegemony continued between Athens, Sparta and Thebes, but no city-state succeeded in establishing a complete hegemony.

The ongoing class and political tensions between the Greek city-states revealed the need for a centralised authority. This need was met with the rise of Macedonia. Philip II and his son Alexander the Great built a centralised power, promising to end class conflicts in Greece. Assuming the role of 'arbiter' ascribed to Napoleon by Karl Marx in his work The Civil War in France, Macedonia sought hegemony against Persia in order to end the conflicts between the Greek city-states. Macedonia's imperialist policies enabled the dispossessed to acquire property and the rich to expand their holdings. Thus, unlike the thymocratic oligarchy, Macedonia built its popular support on an anti-Persian ideology rather than Greek class struggles. Macedonian hegemony had the potential to put an end to the class tensions that had previously existed in Greece and laid the foundations for a new political order.

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