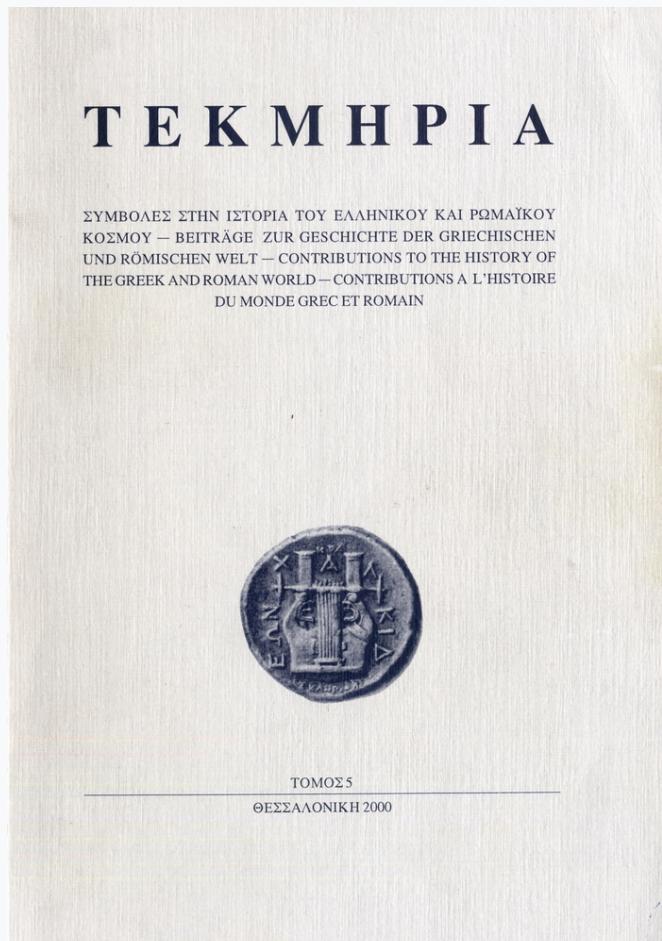


Tekmeria

Vol 5 (2000)



Έρανίσματα

J. TOULOUMAKOS

doi: [10.12681/tekmeria.210](https://doi.org/10.12681/tekmeria.210)

To cite this article:

TOULOUMAKOS, J. (2000). Έρανίσματα. *Tekmeria*, 5, 161–172. <https://doi.org/10.12681/tekmeria.210>

EPANIΣΜΑΤΑ

ZUR DISKUSSION ÜBER DEN STELLENWERT DER GRIECHISCHEN KULTUR IN DER MODERNEN ZIVILISATION

Über die Rezeption der Antike, namentlich der griechischen, im zwanzigsten Jahrhundert ist schon früher in dieser Zeitschrift die Rede gewesen [s. "Eranismata", Bd. 3 (1997) 191-214, 4 (1998) 184-196]. Wenn hier nochmals darauf zurückgekommen wird, so geschieht das eigentlich nur zu dem Zweck, durch den Hinweis auf einige Gesamturteile bzw. einzelne Interpretationen die (ohnehin naheliegende) Notwendigkeit einer eingehenden, die Vielfalt der Aspekte möglichst erfassenden Darstellung aufzuzeigen. Wie instruktiv eine solche Bemühung sein kann, lässt m.E. deutlich das unter Nr. 5 angeführte Zeugnis erkennen, das von einem Naturwissenschaftler und zwar einem Informatik-Spezialisten stammt. Dass der geistigen Provenienz, dem weltanschaulichen Standort des jeweiligen Verfassers und der geistigen wie politischen Situation der Zeit eine besondere Bedeutung zukommt, ist gut begreiflich und zeigt sich durch die Divergenz der hier angeführten (wenigen) Zeugnisse selbst. Am interessantesten scheint mir das hier wie in anderen Darstellungen deutlich ausgesprochene Unbehagen an der modernen westlichen Zivilisation, welches sogar einen Historiker wie A. Toynbee dazu führt, von einer "spiritual sickness" zu sprechen¹.

1. G. Murray, *The Value of Greece to the future of the World*, in: *The legacy of Greece*, hg. von R. Livigstone, Oxford 1921, ND 1969, 13f.

Now it is this kind of bloom which fills the world with hope and therefore makes it young. Take a man who has just made a discovery or an invention, a man happily in love, a man who is starting some great and successful social movement, a man who is writing a book or painting a picture which he knows to be good; take men who have

1. A. Toynbee, *The Greeks and their Heritages*, Oxford 1981, 270.

been fighting in some great cause which before they fought seemed to be hopeless and now is triumphant; think of England when the Armada was just defeated, France at the first dawn of the Revolution, America after Yorktown: such men and nations will be above themselves. Their powers will be stronger and keener; there will be exhilaration in the air, a sense of walking in new paths, of dawning hopes and untried possibilities, a confidence that all things can be won if only we try hard enough. In that sense the world will be young. In that sense I think it was young in the time of Themistocles and Aeschylus. And it is that youth which is half the secret of the Greek spirit.

And here I may meet an objection that has perhaps been lurking in the minds of many readers. ‘All this,’ they may say, “professes to be a simple analysis of known facts, but in reality is sheer idealization. These Greeks whom you call so “noble” have been long since exposed. Anthropology has turned its searchlights upon them. It is not only their ploughs, their weapons, their musical instruments, and their painted idols that resemble those of the savages; it is everything else about them. Many of them were sunk in the most degrading superstitions: many practised unnatural vices: in times of great fear some were apt to think that the best “medicine” was a human sacrifice. After that, it is hardly worth mentioning that their social structure was largely based on slavery; that they lived in petty little towns, like so many wasps’ nests, each at war with its next-door neighbour, and half of them at war with themselves!”

If our anti-Greek went further he would probably cease to speak the truth. We will stop him while we can still agree with him. These charges are on the whole true, and, if we are to understand what Greece means, we must realize and digest them. We must keep hold of two facts: first, that the Greeks of the fifth century produced some of the noblest poetry and art, the finest political thinking, the most vital philosophy, known to the world; second, that the people who heard and saw, nay perhaps, even the people who produced these wonders, were separated by a thin and precarious interval from the savage. Scratch a civilized Russian, they say, and you find a wild Tartar. Scratch an ancient Greek, and you hit, no doubt, on a very primitive and formidable being, somewhere between a Viking and a Polynesian.

That is just the magic and the wonder of it. The spiritual effort implied is so tremendous. We have read stories of savage chiefs converted by Christian or Buddhist missionaries, who within a year or so have turned from drunken corroborees and bloody witch-smellings to a life that is not only godly but even philanthropic and statesmanlike. We have seen the Japanese lately go through some centuries of normal

growth in the space of a generation. But in all such examples men have only been following the teaching of a superior civilization, and after all, they have not ended by producing works of extraordinary and original genius. It seems quite clear that the Greeks owed exceedingly little to foreign influence. Even in their decay they were a race, as Professor Bury observes, accustomed 'to take little and to give much'. They built up their civilization for themselves. We must listen with due attention to the critics who have pointed out all the remnants of savagery and superstition that they find in Greece: the slave-driver, the fetish-worshipper and the medicine-man, the trampler on women, the bloodthirsty hater of all outside his own town and party. But it is not those people that constitute Greece; those people can be found all over the historical world, commoner than blackberries. It is not anything fixed and stationary that constitutes Greece: what constitutes Greece is the movement which leads from all these to the Stoic or fifth-century 'sophist' who condemns and denies slavery, who has abolished all cruel superstitions and preaches some religion based on philosophy and humanity, who claims for women the same spiritual rights as for man, who looks on all human creatures as his brethren, and the world as 'one great City of gods and men'. It is that movement which you will not find elsewhere, any more than the statues of Pheidias or the dialogues of Plato or the poems of Aeschylus and Euripides.

2. S. Morenz, Der Alte Orient, in: *Propyläen-Weltgeschichte* (hg. von G. Mann-A. Heuss), *Summa Historica* XI, 1 (1965) 63.

Plan und Freiheit sind Kennworte, die Grösse und Elend einerseits der ägyptischen, anderseits der hellenischen Kultur und ihrer Geschichte umschreiben. Wir stellten am Anfang die Frage, ob die Geschichte des Alten Orients noch zu uns Heutigen sprechen könne. Im Blick auf Grösse und Elend unseres Zeitalters beantworten wir sie am Ende mit einem uneingeschränkten Ja. In einem Tiefsten erscheinen uns Ägypten und Hellas freilich in Übereinstimmung: Sie hatten bei einem Minimum an Technik ein Maximum an Kultur. Ist es denkbar, dass wir auf die Dauer im umgekehrten und offenbar verkehrten Verhältnis leben können?

3. A. Andrews, *The Greeks*, London 1967, 265f.

If many Greeks thought that the characteristic virtue of their civilisation was its

freedom, we need not shrink from agreement, nor confine the freedom to the political sphere which the Greek would have intended. The openness of mind and readiness to discuss, which have been the main subject of this chapter, must take pride of place among the claims which the Greeks have on our attention, along with the clear vision of their artists and the vigorous beauty of their poetry and the best of their prose. Their contemporaries, the barbarians, from whom at the start they learnt so much, achieved many things, but not this freedom. The monumental rigour of Egypt stiffened thought as well as art, priestly authority weighed heavily, and the insidious influence of magic wrecked much, including the empirical advances of their medicine. Babylon is still with us in the 360 degrees of our circles; but their mathematics and astronomy, like their law, served practical ends which have merely perished. The imagination of the Scythians, and later of the Celts, made fascinating abstract patterns out of living forms, but did not nourish an organised body of knowledge. Of all the various cultures which the Romans met in their career of conquest, it was Greece that took them captive, and that was no accident. Hence the large Greek component in our inheritance, with which no other compares except the Jewish contribution to the Christian tradition.

Our grasp of this culture is a precarious one. Of all that the Greeks made, only their pottery, their engraved gems and some of their bronze present to our eye the same image that they saw; and we set these things apart in museums for study and pleasure, where they spent them in use or dedicated them to a god. If we saw the sculpture and architecture in its first gaudy colour, most of us would have to make large adjustments. Large-scale painting is virtually lost, and so is their music and dancing. We do not know with certainty how the language sounded, nor can we hope to gather all the overtones a phrase would have for contemporary ears.

Nevertheless, the literature lives, in quantity enough for devoted philologists to make out very much more than the bare meaning. The language is unusually expressive and flexible, the poetry, even at this distance, has an unusual power and grace, and current experience shows that, even when diluted in translation, it still makes its impact. In the visual arts, enough remains, not only to move us, but to stimulate current argument; and scholarship can fill in some of the gaps in the series from late copies. This is a world whose air we can breathe. It is different enough from late copies. This is a world whose air we can breathe. It is different enough from our own to force us to look at it attentively, not only at the high masterpieces, but at

ordinary things; and like enough, for us to feel that the issues which moved the Greeks are substantially of the same kind that move us. The study of it is not just antiquarian study of our origins. Homer and Herodotus, Euripides and Plato, have still the power to surprise us and to sharpen our vision of the world we live in.

4. K. v. Fritz, *The Relevance of Ancient Social and Political Philosophy of our Times. A short Introduction to the Problem*, Berlin/New York, 1974, 17f.

*All Greek thinkers from the early poets to late philosophers, however, were convinced that the world in which we live is a world in which there exists a certain order, and that man, if he does not wish to hurt himself, has to comply with it. This is the fundamental conviction on which all Greek ethical and moral theory, however different in its result, is ultimately based. It is exactly this notion with which those who pride themselves on their modernity profess violently to disagree. Nothing is more common among the most 'progressive', the most 'avantgardistic', in modern thought and art than the representation of the world as totally disorderly and absurd. Anyone who does not follow this fashion, who insists that the world in general including the modern world contains also elements of order, even of a moral order, and that true art should make visible both aspects of life, the orderly as well as the disorderly ones, is apt to be jumped upon by the adherents of the modern creed as superficial, unrealistic, lacking in depth, as outright dishonest*²¹*. Yet it appears obvious that the very notion of disorder is but the negation of the concept of order and the notion of absurdity but the negation of the concept of sense and that therefore they could not even exist without their positive counterparts. What is more: it is true that the order of the world is an order that to some extent can be violated and disturbed. It shows its practical, not only theoretical, continued existence by the fact that it avenges itself on those who disturb it: which is in fact one of the overwhelming experiences of our times.*

1. The classical case is that of Emil Staiger, who, when he insisted that good literature should give a full representation of life, not only of its evil aspects, was violently attacked from all sides, including by writers, whom he had not meant to include in this strictures, but who obviously nevertheless had to some extent a bad conscience.

5. Th. Roszak, *Der Verlust des Denkens. Über die Mythen des Computers-Zeitalters* (Dt. Übersetzung aus dem Amerikanischen von Christa Broermann). Titel des Originals: *The Cult of Information*), München 1986, 315 ff.

Das Wesen der Erziehung in den frühen Jahren liegt in der Vermittlung der grossen Ideen, wie ich sie genannt habe, der moralischen und metaphysischen Paradigmen, die den innersten Kern jeder Kultur ausmachen. Nehmen wir ein klassisches Beispiel in der Geschichte der westlichen Pädagogik: Im alten Griechenland waren die Epen Homers (gelesen oder rezitiert) die Texte, aus denen die Kinder die Werte ihrer Zivilisation lernten. Sie lernten sie von Abenteuergeschichten und Heldengestalten, die sie in unzähligen Spielen in Wald und Feld nachahmen konnten. Jede gesunde Kultur schickt ihre Kinder durch eine solche homerische Phase, auf der epische Bilder, Märchen, Heldenepen, biblische Geschichten, Fabeln und Legenden den jungen Geist zu hohen Zielen aufrufen. Die Phase legt den Grundstock für das Denken. Die "Texte" müssen nicht ausschliesslich literarisch sein. Es können auch Rituale sein -wie in vielen Stammsgesellschaften, bei denen die Mythen in festlichen Zeremonien dargestellt werden. Oder es können Kunstwerke sein, wie die bunten Glasfenster und die Statuen in mittelalterlichen Kirchen. Grosse Ideen können auf vielfältige Weise gelehrt werden. In unserer Gesellschaft gehören Film und Fernsehen zu den wirkungsvollsten Instruktionsmitteln; sie sind oft so wirkungsvoll, daß sie die glanzlosen Materialien, die in der Schule angeboten werden, in den Schatten stellen. Unglücklicherweise befinden sich diese einflussreichen Medien zum grössten Teil in den Händen kommerzieller Opportunisten, für die so etwas wie ein edler Zweck nirgendwo in Sicht ist. Bestenfalls kommen noch ein paar kitschige Klischees von Helden und Schurken als Nahrung für den jungen Geist zu Vorschein. Ansätze epischer Gestaltung sind in einem Film wie Der Krieg der Sterne zwar zu finden, aber die Bildwelt wurde auf einer mittelmässigen ästhetischen und intellektuellen Ebene angesiedelt und sorgt sich mehr um "Effekte" als um Charaktere. In solchen Händen werden Archetypen zu Stereotypen, und die grossen Taten, die vollbracht werden, sind stets mit einem Auge darauf inszeniert, den grösstmöglichen kommerziellen Erfolg zu erzielen.

In den Werken grosser Künstler wie Homer verlieren die Bilder jedoch niemals die rettende Komplexität des wirklichen Lebens. Die Helden haben genügend menschliche Schwächen, um als Geschöpfe aus Fleisch und Blut bestehen zu können.

Achilles, der grösste aller Kriegshelden, ist zugleich so eitel und verwöhnt wie ein Kind, eine Figur mit tragischen Mängeln. Odysseus kann auch ein regelrechter Schurke sein, sein "Listenreichtum" entpuppt sich gelegentlich als gewöhnliche Piraterie. Gerade die Fülle der Persönlichkeit solcher Helden hält ihre Bewunderer zwischen Bewunderung und Unsicherheit in der Schwebе. Das Ideal hat mehr als eine Seite; der Geist wird von nagenden Zweifeln befallen: "ja, aber..." Wo solche Wahrhaftigkeit gegenüber dem Leben verlorengeht, werden die Bilder flach und schal; man kann sie dann eher dazu verwenden, den Geist zu manipulieren, als ihn zu inspirieren.

Die Griechen, die ihren Kindern homerische Themen als Seelennahrung für ihr Wachstum anboten, brachten auch Socrates hervor, den philosophischen Störenfried, dessen Aufgabe es war, seine Stadt zur Nachdenklichkeit anzustacheln. "Erkenne dich selbst", mahnte Sokrates beharrlich seine Schüler. Aber wo kann Selbsterkenntnis beginnen, wenn nicht mit der Infragestellung ererbter Werte, vorgeschrriebener Identitäten?

Hier haben wir einen weiteren bedeutenden Nutzen von Ideen: kritische Gegensätze hervorzurufen, um den zündenden Funken im Geist auszulösen. Homer führt uns gewaltige Beispiele für Mut vor Augen. Ja, aber was ist wahrer Mut? So fragt Sokrates und bietet andere, dazu im Widerspruch stehende Bilder an, die Homer in Frage stellen. Sofort wird Idee gegen Idee ausgespielt, und die Schüler müssen selbst zu einer Entscheidung gelangen, müssen urteilen und wählen. Gesellschaften erweisen ihren sokratischen Geistern selten Ehre. Athen, bis über die Grenzen des Erträglichen hinaus von seiner hartnäckigen Kritik irritiert, verurteilte seinen grössten Philosophen zum Tode. Und doch kann keine pädagogische Theorie, der ein solcher sokratischer Kontrapunkt fehlt, darauf hoffen, die Jugend in die Freiheit einzusetzen, neue Gedanken zu denken, zu neuen Menschen zu werden und die Kultur zu erneuern.

In einer Zeit, in der sich unsere Schulen zunehmend mit fortschrittlicher pädagogischer Maschinerie füllen, mag es nahezu absurd erscheinen, erzieherische Ideale ausgerechnet bei alten und primitiven Gesellschaften suchen zu wollen, die kaum über ein anderes Lehrmittel verfügten als das mündlich überlieferte Wort. Aber es bedarf vielleicht eines starken Kontrastes, um zu einer angemessen kritischen Betrachtungsweise der Rolle des Computers in der Erziehung unserer Kinder anzuregen. Zumindest erinnert ein solcher Kontrast uns daran, dass alle

Gesellschaften, moderne ebenso wie traditionelle, zuerst entscheiden mussten, was sie ihre Kinder lehren wollten, ehe sie danach fragen konnten, wie sie sie lehren sollten. Inhalte vor Methoden, die Botschaft vor dem Medium.

6. Edith Hall: *Inventing the Barbarian. Greek Self-Definition through Tragedy*, Oxford 1989, 48.

At a non-literal level the poet of the Iliad were producing a discourse which tamed and subordinated in the Greek imagination the land mass which came to be known as Asia, by creating Troy, representing the words and deeds and defeats of the Trojans and their allies. Asia was thus familiarized and defused by assimilation into hexameter poetry, the common property of the Greek-speakers' archaic intellectual world. The celebration of Greek victory over the inhabitants of Asia Minor must legitimize the actions of the colonizers and express the spirit of the age when Greek cities were beginning to expand self-confidently all over the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. A similar dynamic informs the literature of the age which discovered America; all the danger of penetrating unknown territory, of conflict with indigenous tribes, is manifested in the colonialist discourse of Elizabethan and early Stuart England, especially in Shakespeare's vile Caliban of the Tempest. But the Iliad's relation to Greek colonization is much less transparent and easy to define.

7. Paul Cartledge, *The Greeks. A portrait of Self and Others*, Oxford 1993, 5f.

The Greeks and 'Us'

My lecture course began and ended with reflections on the Greek heritage or legacy, the Greeks and 'Us'. These were prompted by such remarks as the following, included in an essay on "The Freedom of Oedipus", by a leading expert on ancient Hellenic culture: 'Both of these extremes [suppression of freedom and anarchy] are of course repugnant to the human spirit and especially to that of the West, which is that of the Greeks' (Knox 1990a: 55)¹. Similar views have been expressed in two recent general books on the same subject of freedom by Jacqueline de Romilly (1989)² and Orlando Patterson (1991)³. In all three writings there are to be found the

1. B. M. V. Knox, *Essays Ancient and Modern*, Baltimore 1990.

2. J. de Romilly, *La Grèce antique à la découverte de la liberté*, Paris 1989.

3. O. Patterson, *Freedom in the Making of Western Culture*, London 1991.

implicit assumption and even the explicit assertion that freedom, one of the West's most cherished ideal values, was invented or discovered by the Greeks in pretty much the same form or forms in which it is cherished by 'us' today. Knox and Patterson, to be fair, do not suppress or palliate the fact of slavery in ancient Greece. But neither do they doubt that there is a continuum, or at any rate an evolutionary progression, from the Greeks to us in 'our' shared positive evaluation of freedom. My own reading of the Greeks historians, and of other privileged cultural texts from Classical Greece such as the surviving Athenian tragic and comic dramas, has persuaded me otherwise, indeed almost diametrically so (Chapter 6). For me, as a modern commentator on Greek tragedy once put it, the ancient Greeks are in crucial cultural respects, ideological no less than institutional, 'desperately foreign' (Jones 1962;⁴ see further our Epilogue).

The Savage Greeks

Let us stay briefly with ideas of freedom. Benjamin Constant, reacting violently in 1819 against some French Revolutionaries' attempted appropriation of ancient Greece, distinguished sharply -perhaps too sharply, but still in my view rightly- between "the liberty of the Ancients" and "the liberty of the Moderns" (Constant 1988: 308-38);⁵ the distinction he drew depended on their incommensurably different constructions and evaluations of the individual's status and function in relation to the community or State. From Constant through Fustel de Coulanges, Emile Durkheim, and Louis Gernet and thence on to J.P. Vernant and his 'Paris School' there is traceable in French scholarship on the Greeks an unbroken line of thought that stresses the Greeks' essential difference, even 'otherness' from 'us' in crucial areas of awareness and representation of Self.

That line of thought has intersected, fruitfully in my view, with the 'anthropologization' approach inaugurated a century earlier than Constant by Jesuit missionary J.-F. Lafitau in 1724. Briefly stated, the anthropologizers suggested that, if the Greeks were not merely earlier version of themselves, with (most obviously) an immeasurably less sophisticated technological toolkit, then perhaps they were more

4. J. W. Jones, *On Aristotle and Greek Tragedy*, London 1962.

5. B. Constant, *Political Writings*, ed. B. Fontana, Cambridge 1988.

usefully to be compared to and interpreted in the light of the so-called primitive peoples targeted by European colonial expansion. The fact that the Classical Greeks were polytheists and practised animal sacrifice as a central ritual of their religion was a great encouragement towards such relativistic anthropologization. So too, more recently, has been Claude Lévi-Strauss's 'structural' anthropology. The binary oppositions he detects in, and uses as a key to explaining, the myths of contemporary Amazonian or North-west Pacific Coast Indians bear an uncanny resemblance to the 'polarity' that informed Classical Greek social and political thought (see Chapter 1).

On the other hand, there are or should be limits to the 'othering' of the Greeks. The case of Athenian tragic and comic theatre marks them out rather nicely (Epilogue). No doubt, the DWEMs ('Dead White European Males') like Aeschylus & Co. who have provided us with the bulk of our extant evidence for Classical Greek culture ought not to have a monopoly claim on our attention; but it is hard simply to ignore or even consciously to marginalize them. One alternative strategy is to stress the racially or ethnically distinct inputs that went into the making of Classical Greek culture, especially those from the Semitic East and the Negroid South. But though superficially attractive, politically speaking, this runs up against insuperable obstacles on empirical grounds (Chapter 3 and 7). My aim therefore will be, in Edward Gibbon's phrase, to "hold the balance with a steady and equal hand".

8. Hans von Wess, Politics and the Battlefield Ideology in Greek Warfare, In: *The Greek World*, hg. von A. Powell, London/New York 1995, S. 153, 170f.

In 1943, Soviet forces beat off a German attempt to land on the Black Sea coast at Malaya Zemlya. Among the non-combatant party officials involved was Leonid Brezhnev. The incident passed without much notice, until some twenty years later. Then score of Soviet writers began to describe the battle as a turning-point in the Second World War, comparable to the battle of Stalingrad and the defence of Lenigrad. ..The decisive significance of Brezhnev's action at Malaya Zemlya...was touched up to the utmost extent in booklets and solid, multi-volume works.

Brezhnev won a literary prize for a autobiographical account of his exploits, and a popular song about the battle was given much air-time on Moscow radio. What had brought about this revision of history, of course, was Brezhnev's rise from lowly party commissar to leader of the Soviet Union. Another twenty years later history was

revised again. In 1982, Brezhnev died, then fell from grace, and soon a historian stepped forward to announce that in fact neither the battle of Malaya Zemlya nor the ex-leader's role in it had been of decisive importance at all.

One is inclined to associate such propagandistic manipulation of history with totalitarian regimes, and it comes as a surprise to find something similar happening in ancient Greece, not least in famously democratic Athens. Yet we shall see that, from Homer to Aristotle, poets and writers slanted their accounts of warfare past and present so as to attribute a decisive military role to those in power- or those aspiring to power. Their bias was all the more effective for being less blatant; so much so that some of it found its way into modern histories of ancient Greece, unchallenged until recently.

CONCLUSION: ANCIENT BIAS AND NEW THEORIES

When the ancient Greeks wrote their history, they tailored it to fit one of their most persistent political ideals, so that in present and past power seemed earned by prowess, and prowess rewarded with power. This ideal shaped the poets' image of battle in the heroic age, as well as historians' and philosophers' representations and interpretations of archaic and classical warfare. It might be added that the ideal took other forms, too. In the fifth century, the Athenian state felt it necessary to justify its imperial power over nominal 'allies' by appealing to its decisive role in the defence of Greece against the Persian invaders, although according to Thucydides no one genuinely accepted this justification. From the late fourth century onwards, historians helped legitimate the monarchical power of Alexander the Great and his successors by seizing every opportunity to portray these kings as great warriors able to turn the tide of battle by feats of personal heroism and even by their mere presence on the field. Political bias thus pervades ancient accounts, not only of constitutional and political history, but also of warfare, and the modern historian should treat these with caution.

The concept of a 'decisive factor' in battle has turned out to be highly problematic. It is to much a matter of subjective judgement and an issue of polemic in our sources that it is hard to arrive at an objective assessment such as has been cautiously attempted a couple of times in the above. The example from Soviet historiography which introduced our discussion poses the same difficulty: the newspapers may believe that we now know 'the full truth' about Brezhnev's role at Malaya Zemlya, but it is entirely possible that the revised account, too, is less than objective. The new regime denouncing Brezhnev, after all, stands to gain by playing

down his alleged achievements as much as possible. One is forced to wonder whether objective judgement in pin-pointing a single factor of paramount importance is feasible at all, where a complex of events as intricate and contentious as a battle or war is concerned. Whereas the views of contemporaries on who or what was most responsible for the outcome of a war, or indeed any course of events, are, of course, of great interest to us, the issue of the ‘decisive factor’ as a subject of scientific historical analysis is perhaps best avoided.

The main conclusion to be drawn from our argument is that changes in Greek warfare were far less dramatic, and had far fewer political ramifications, than our sources suggest and historians have long believed. From Homer to Aristotle and beyond, we find horsemen, hoplites, light infantry and ships all playing a part in war at all times. Of course, they did not always play exactly the same role, but both the elite and the bulk of the population in various ways actively participated in battle throughout Greek history, and, as we have seen, there is little ground for objectively crediting one rather than another social group or branch of the armed forces with a clearly decisive role at any time. Hence historical developments in tactics, equipment and patterns of warfare cannot be said to have amounted to clear-cut transfers of military dominance; if ancient perceptions of military dominance altered a great deal, this was primarily the result of changes in the balance of power within communities.

The development of the phalanx and the expansion of the Athenian fleet, although of military significance, did not have the revolutionary political impact generally attributed to them. Neither of these processes might have had any political impact at all, if the hoplite and lower classes involved had previously been resigned to their lot. Only because military developments affected social classes cherishing prior political ambitions did they play some small part in political change, by inspiring an extra degree of ‘confidence’ and perhaps also by making ideological justification seem that much more plausible.

It is unfortunate that we end up with a result which is negative insofar as it undermines established explanations of the rise of tyranny, hoplite democracy and radical democracy without offering anything to replace them. Yet the result is positive in that it exposes a pervasive political bias in our sources and an unwitting bias in modern accounts of the military and political history of Greece. In doing so it may perhaps clear the way for the new and better historical theories that it is unable to offer.