

DEMOCRACY AND WAR IN ANCIENT ATHENS AND TODAY*

1. Introduction

Ancient Athens developed democracy to a higher level than any other state before modern times. It was the leading cultural innovator of its age. This state is rightly revered for its political and cultural achievements. What is less well known is its extraordinary record of military success. Athens transformed ancient warfare and became one of the ancient world's superpowers. There is a strong case that democracy was a major reason for this success. The military impact of Athenian democracy was twofold. The competition of elite performers before non-elite adjudicators resulted in a pro-war culture, which encouraged Athenians in increasing numbers to join the armed forces and to vote for war. All this was offset by Athenian democracy's rigorous debating of war, which reduced the risks of Athenian cultural militarism. It also made military reforms easier and developed the initiative of the state's generals, hoplites, and sailors. Political scientists have long viewed Athenian democracy as a source of fresh ideas. At present they cannot satisfactorily explain the war-making of modern democracies. Consequently ancient history can provide political science with new lines of enquiry into how democracy affects international relations today.

2. The democratic revolution

Ancient Athens is famous for its direct democracy and for its cultural revolution that helped to lay foundations for the literatures and the arts of the ancient and modern worlds. In 508 BC the Athenian *dēmos*

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(‘people’) rose up against a leader aiming for tyranny and expelled him and the foreign troops backing his attempt.¹ They had had enough of the bloody struggles of their elite and demanded an active role in the decision-making of their state.² This popular demand was quickly realized by the reforms of Cleisthenes, which made the assembly and a new popular council the final arbiters of public actions and laws.³ By the 450s the people had consolidated their *dēmokratia* (‘democracy’) by making decisions on an increasing range of public affairs and by completely taking over the law courts and the annual review of magistrates.⁴

We now know that several other Greek *poleis* (‘city-states’) experimented with popular government in the course of the sixth century.⁵ Thus the invention of democracy can no longer be attributed to Athens. But Athenian democracy was different in that it avoided the *stasis* (‘civil strife’) that destroyed so many other Greek democracies.⁶ With the exception of two short periods of oligarchy, it enjoyed two centuries of unbroken operation. Athenian democracy also handled a significantly larger amount of public business. This state’s strong fiscal position meant that in the 420s it could afford to spend 150 talents annually on pay for those Athenians who were running the government.⁷ This state pay allowed a much wider social spectrum of citizens to be politically active.⁸ The result of these differences was that Athenian democracy was more fully developed than any other pre-modern example.

¹ [Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 20.1–21.2; Hdt. 5.65.5–74.1.

² J. Ober, *The Athenian Revolution. Essays on Ancient Greek Democracy and Political Theory* (Princeton, NJ, 1996), 32–52; D. M. Pritchard, ‘Cleisthenes and Athenian Democracy: Vision from Above or Below?’, *Polis* 22 (2005), 141–5. *Contra* K. A. Raaflaub, ‘The Breakthrough of *Dēmokratia* in Mid-Fifth-Century Athens’, in K. A. Raaflaub, J. Ober, and R. W. Wallace (eds.), *Origins of Democracy in Ancient Greece* (Berkeley, CA, 2007), 105–54.

³ [Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 20–1; Hdt. 5.63–73.

⁴ D. M. Pritchard, ‘From Hoplite Republic to Thetic Democracy: The Social Context of the Reforms of Ephialtes’, *AH* 24 (1994), 133–5.

⁵ E. W. Robinson, *The First Democracies. Early Popular Government Outside Athens* (Stuttgart, 1997), 65–122.

⁶ For this prevalence of *stasis* among Greek states see e.g. H.-J. Gehrke, *Stasis. Untersuchungen zu den inneren Kriegen in den griechischen Staaten des 5. und 4. Jahrhunderts v. Chr.* (Munich, 1985).

⁷ D. M. Pritchard, *Public Spending and Democracy in Classical Athens* (Austin, TX, 2015), 52–90.

⁸ E.g. Arist. *Pol.* 1293a1–10; see also Pritchard (n. 7), 7–8.

3. The cultural revolution

Athens was also the leading cultural centre of the classical Greek world. The disciplines of the visual arts, oratory, drama, and literature were developed to a higher level of sophistication in this state than any other. Many of the works produced there became canonical for Graeco-Roman antiquity. Admittedly these innovations were dependent on the immense wealth of classical Athens and its elite, and the ability of both to spend significant sums on festival-based contests. Between 430 and 350, for example, *chorēgoi* ('chorus-sponsors') and the state's magistrates spent a total of 29 talents on each celebration of the City Dionysia.⁹ Total spending on the full programme of state-sponsored festivals probably added up to 100 talents per year.¹⁰

But ever since Johann Winckelmann, the eighteenth-century pioneer of classical archaeology, many ancient historians have put this cultural revolution down to Athenian democracy.¹¹ The famous plays of ancient Athens are a good example. They may have been written by elite playwrights but they were performed at contests before thousands of non-elite theatregoers. Officially the judging of these contests was in the hands of ten judges.¹² But these judges were swayed by the vocal reactions of non-elite theatregoers.¹³ By going to the theatre regularly the *dēmos* gained an increasingly sophisticated appreciation of drama.¹⁴ Comedians and tragedians thus realized that their chances of winning were increased if they pushed the boundaries of their genres.¹⁵

⁹ Pritchard (n. 7), 6.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 27–51.

¹¹ E.g. J. de Romilly, 'Le rôle du jugement populaire dans le développement de la culture à Athènes', in M. Sakellariou (ed.), *Colloque internationale. Démocratie athénienne et culture* (Athens, 1996), 257–63.

¹² E. Csapo and W. J. Slater, *The Context of Ancient Drama* (Ann Arbor, NC, 1995), 301–5.

¹³ E.g. Dem. 18.265, 19.33, 21.226; Pl. *Resp.* 492a; Pl. *Leg.* 659a. See also D. M. Pritchard, 'Aristophanes and de Ste. Croix: The Value of Old Comedy as Evidence for Athenian Popular Culture', *Antichthon* (2012), 16–17.

¹⁴ M. Revermann, 'The Competence of Theatre Audiences in Fifth- and Fourth-Century Athens', *JHS* 126 (2006), 113–15.

¹⁵ For such competition-driven innovations in old comedy and tragedy see, respectively, J. M. Bremer, 'Aristophanes on His Own Poetry', in J. M. Bremer and E. W. Handley (eds.), *Aristophane* (Geneva, 1993), 160–5, and P. Burian, 'Myth into *Muthos*: The Shaping of Tragic Plot', in P. E. Easterling (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge, 1997), 206.

4. The military revolution

Athens is rightly revered for such achievements; by contrast, its contemporaneous military revolution is not widely recognized. More than any other *polis*, this state invented or perfected new forms of combat, strategy, and military organization. It was directly responsible for raising the scale of Greek warfare by an order of magnitude. In so doing, the Athenian *dēmos* overcame the traditional conception of courage that elsewhere tended to stifle military innovations. This represented a qualitative change from its military record before the democracy.¹⁶ Sixth-century Athenians went to war usually only for the sake of contested border lands.¹⁷ They apparently did so very infrequently, because we only know of twelve recorded campaigns before 514/13.¹⁸ These campaigns usually went on for days or weeks and were settled by a solitary clash of heavily armed soldiers. They were initiated not by the basic political institutions of the city but by leaders of aristocratic factions. These elite leaders raised volunteers by promising them the land to be won in battle.¹⁹ The hoplites of such campaigns were predominantly elite and numbered only in the hundreds.²⁰

This small-scale war-making of the Athenians was transformed in the first instance by the political reforms that Cleisthenes introduced immediately after 508. These reforms massively increased the readiness of non-elite Athenians to serve in the armed forces and to initiate wars. In 506 their army defeated those of Chalcis and Boeotia in back-to-back battles.²¹ In 499 they sent twenty warships to help the Anatolian Greeks to revolt from the Persian Empire,²² while, in 490,

¹⁶ D. M. Pritchard, 'The Symbiosis between Democracy and War: The Case of Ancient Athens', in D. M. Pritchard (ed.), *War, Democracy and Culture in Classical Athens* (Cambridge, 2010), 7–15.

¹⁷ E.g. [Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 14.1; Hdt. 1.59.4, 139.2.

¹⁸ F. J. Frost, 'The Athenian Military before Cleisthenes', *Historia* 33 (1984), 283–94. P. J. Rhodes reminds me that this century's campaigns were not well documented, because knowledge of them passed by word of mouth before the fifth-century historians wrote about them. Much can be lost in such oral transmission. Therefore the recorded campaigns are not the full picture. In order to restore this picture it is necessary to use surviving literary accounts of this century's wars along with the elite's military ideology as indirect evidence of the frequency of their campaigns.

¹⁹ E.g. Plut. *Vit. Sol.* 9.2–3.

²⁰ E.g. Thuc. 6.56–8; see also H. W. Singor, 'War and International Relations', in K. A. Raaflaub and H. van Wees (eds.), *A Companion to Archaic Greece* (Malden, MA, 2009), 585–603.

²¹ Hdt. 5.74–7.

²² Hdt. 5.97–103.

at the Battle of Marathon they deployed 9,000 heavily armed soldiers.²³ These reforms effectively integrated Athens and its *khōra* ('countryside') for the first time.²⁴ Each free male who lived in Attica was now registered as a citizen of Athens in his village or city suburb, and groups of these so-called demes from across the *khōra* were linked together in ten tribes.²⁵ These new tribes served as the subdivisions of the new popular council and the new publicly controlled army of hoplites. The deme-registers of citizens were used to conscript hoplites.²⁶ This was the Athenian state's first-ever mechanism for mass mobilization. Attica was around twenty times larger and more populous than the *khōra* of an average-sized *polis*,²⁷ meaning that this mobilization mechanism gave Athens a huge military advantage. Demography was therefore manifestly a major reason for the military success of democratic Athens.

The events of the late 480s and the early 470s set in train a second wave of Athenian military innovations. In order to prepare for the return of the Persians, in 483/2 the Athenian people decided to direct a windfall of public income from local silver mines towards the massive expansion of their publicly controlled navy.²⁸ The two hundred warships that they possessed at the end of this shipbuilding represented the largest fleet of state-owned warships yet seen.²⁹ Three years later, the Great King, Xerxes, launched his expedition to subjugate the Greeks of the mainland as he had recently done to those of Anatolia and the Dardanelles.³⁰ The final destruction of this huge Persian force, in 479, saw the Athenians invited to found the Delian League. Initially this league was a voluntary alliance of states contributing ships and soldiers or annual tribute to Athenian-led expeditions.³¹ For its first decades it campaigned frequently to expel Persians from their remaining bases across the Aegean. At the same time the

²³ Nep. *Milt.* 5.

²⁴ Pritchard (n. 2), 137–40.

²⁵ P. J. Rhodes, *A Short History of Ancient Greece* (London, 2014), 44–5.

²⁶ J. Crowley, *The Psychology of the Athenian Hoplite. The Culture of Combat in Classical Athens* (Cambridge, 2012), 27–35.

²⁷ M. H. Hansen and T. H. Nielsen, *An Inventory of Archaic and Classical Poleis* (Oxford, 2004), 70–3.

²⁸ [Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 22.7; Hdt. 6.87–93, 7.144; Thuc. 1.14. See also G. Davis, 'Mining Money in Late Archaic Athens', *Historia* 63 (2014), 257–77.

²⁹ P. de Souza, 'Towards Thalassocracy? Archaic Greek Naval Developments', in N. Fisher and H. van Wees (eds.), *Archaic Greece. New Approaches and Evidence* (London and Swansea, 1998), 286.

³⁰ Rhodes (n. 25), 58–62.

³¹ Thuc. 1.94–8; see also Rhodes (n. 25), 66–73.

Athenians began eroding the independence of their allies, who, by the early 440s, were obliged to pay annual tribute and had long been forcefully prevented from pulling out of what was now the Athenian *arkhē* or empire.

Imperial revenues allowed the Athenians to employ vast numbers of non-elite citizens as soldiers and sailors, and to perfect forms of warfare that decisively broke away from the hoplite-based conception of courage.³² Among numerous innovations, they could now afford to man large fleets and to train their naval crews for months.³³ Each trained crew could work collectively to make their warship an offensive weapon in its own right and to take part in manoeuvres at speed with other ships.³⁴ In this new form of mobile sea warfare a standard tactic was retreat,³⁵ which was a source of shame among heavily armed soldiers.³⁶ The Athenians also built tens of kilometres of walls to link their city with its port of the Piraeus and to protect them both. With these fortifications in place they developed a new way of responding to the invasion of a hoplite army.³⁷ They no longer had to send their hoplites out for a pitched battle, when their *khōra* was invaded. Instead, they could withdraw their farmers and moveable property within the Athens–Piraeus fortifications and rely on the imported grain that their sea power guaranteed.³⁸

By the 450s war had come to dominate the public affairs of Athens and the private lives of its citizens. The Athenians were now moving large forces across the entire eastern Mediterranean for campaigns that lasted months or, in the case of sieges, up to a few years. They saw it as the solemn duty of every citizen to fight for the state when he was asked.³⁹ In addition they waged war more frequently than ever before, doing so on average for two out of every three years.⁴⁰ They also directed more public money to war than to all other public business combined. In the 420s, for example, public spending on the armed forces alone averaged 1,500 talents per year.⁴¹

³² For this conception of courage see e.g. D. M. Pritchard, *Sport, Democracy and War in Classical Athens* (Cambridge, 2013), 179–84.

³³ E.g. Plut. *Vit. Cim.* 11.2–3; [Xen.] *Ath. Pol.* 1.19–20; Thuc. 1.80, 142.6–7; 2.84–6, 89.

³⁴ Pritchard (n. 16), 18–19.

³⁵ E.g. Thuc. 2.91.1–92.2.

³⁶ E.g. Aesch. *Sept.* 411; Eur. *Tro.* 401–2; Eur. *Herac.* 700–1.

³⁷ Pritchard (n. 16), 20–1.

³⁸ E.g. Thuc. 1.143.4–5; Hermippus fr. 46 Kassel and Austin; [Xen.] *Ath. Pol.* 2.16.

³⁹ E.g. Aesch. *Sept.* 10–20; Ar. *Vesp.* 1114–21; Eur. *Herac.* 824–7; Thuc. 2.43.1.

⁴⁰ Pritchard (n. 16), 6.

⁴¹ Pritchard (n. 7), 92–7.

The unprecedented supply of public income from the *arkhē* clearly was a second major reason for the military success of fifth-century Athens.

5. Challenging realism and popular beliefs

A striking feature of ancient Greek history is the timing of this military revolution. The transformation of war by the Athenians directly follows the democratic revolution of 508. It coincides with the cultural revolution that was largely brought about by Athenian democracy. The near contemporaneousness of these revolutions opens up a challenging possibility: the general bellicosity of fifth-century Athens may be another product of Athenian democracy and may constitute the dark side of the Athenian cultural revolution. Consequently, democracy may be the third major reason for the military success of fifth-century Athens. Among contemporary witnesses of Athenian warfare the perception of democracy's positive impact was more widespread than is usually assumed.⁴² For example, Herodotus put down the unexpected Athenian victories of 506 over Boeotia and Chalcis to the new democracy: the personal liberty and the *isēgoria* ('equal right of speech') that Cleisthenes had consolidated transformed the Athenians into the world's best soldiers.⁴³

This historical example of a militarily successful democracy challenges the realist school that has dominated the discipline of international relations since the Second World War.⁴⁴ The antecedents of this school go back to the famous translation of Thucydides by Thomas Hobbes.⁴⁵ Realism's advocates assume that every state rationally calculates its foreign policy on the basis of what will maximize its security and prosperity, regardless of its type of political regime. In addition, classical Athens confounds two pieces of popular wisdom about democracy.⁴⁶ The first of these popular beliefs is that democracies are bad at prosecuting wars. This assumes that democratic freedom undercuts military discipline, while the fear that its politicians have of the voters means that the tough policies that are necessary for security

⁴² E.g. Isoc. 16.27; Dem. 60.25–6.

⁴³ Hdt. 5.78–9.

⁴⁴ For the realist school see e.g. R. O. Keohane (ed.), *Neorealism and Its Critics* (New York, 1986).

⁴⁵ G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, *The Origins of the Peloponnesian War* (London, 1972), 26–9.

⁴⁶ D. Reiter and A. C. Stam, *Democracies at War* (Princeton, NJ, 2002), 2–3, 146–7, 150.

are not always introduced. This ancient example of democratic belligerence also challenges the cherished view of our post-war era that democracies are peace-seeking. According to this popular belief, democracies dislike violence in foreign affairs, prefer non-violent forms of conflict resolution, and fight wars reluctantly and only in self-defence.

These popular beliefs and the wide influence of realism explain why democracy's impact on war has hardly ever been studied.⁴⁷ In this respect, ancient historians are not an exception. Most of their studies have only focused on one or other corps of the Athenian armed forces or this or that type of combatant on the Greek battlefield more generally. Victor Hanson writes: 'Often the parameters of present investigations simply reflect old controversies of the nineteenth century, while fruitful new fields of enquiry are left unexamined. For example, there are dozens of new treatments of traditionally narrow topics such as the hoplite push or the battle of Marathon, while we still have no wider enquiry into the role of ancient political organization – oligarchy, democracy and autocracy – on military efficacy.'⁴⁸

6. Democratic peace and war theories

In the last two decades *some* international-relations theorists have broken from the realist school by focusing on differences between the war-making of modern democracies and that of other regime types. From their statistical analyses, which have been rigorously debated and repeatedly tested, they have made three important findings. First, Bruce Russett, among others, has put beyond doubt that democracies do not fight each other.⁴⁹ But this does not mean that they do not fight wars, for the second finding is that democratic regimes are no less warlike than autocracies. They have frequently fought colonial wars or attacked non-democratic states in the name, for example, of democracy and human rights.⁵⁰ The third finding of these theorists is the general

⁴⁷ G. Merom, *How Democracies Lose Small Wars. State, Society, and the Failures of France in Algeria, Israel in Lebanon, and the United States in Vietnam* (Cambridge, 2003), 3–18.

⁴⁸ V. D. Hanson, 'The Modern Historiography of Ancient Warfare', in P. Sabin, H. van Wees, and M. Whitby (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Warfare. Volume I. Greece, the Hellenistic World and the Rise of Rome* (Cambridge, 2007), 19.

⁴⁹ E.g. B. Russett and J. R. Oneal, *Triangulating Peace* (New York, 2001); see also M. Brown, S. Lynn-Jones, and S. Miller, *Debating the Democratic Peace* (Cambridge, MA, 1996).

⁵⁰ E.g. J. Ferejohn and F. Rosenbluth, 'Warlike Democracies', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 50 (2008), 783–808.

superiority of modern democracies at waging wars. Drawing on the US army's database of modern wars, Dan Reiter and Allan Stam have demonstrated statistically that democracies have enjoyed greater military success than other types of regime.⁵¹ They have won over ninety per cent of the wars that they have started and around eighty per cent of the wars that they have fought.

Wolfgang Merkel writes: 'Although this research uses sophisticated statistical methods, it often relies on a rudimentary understanding of democracy and the interdependent workings of democratic institutions. While these researchers specialize in questions of war and peace, they are hardly democracy scholars. Missing is the intertwining of comparative politics and international relations expertise.'⁵² Consequently, it comes as no surprise that every attempt on the part of these international-relations theorists to explain these important findings has failed to withstand scrutiny.⁵³ In addition these theorists have not accounted for the enormous apparent variation in bellicosity among modern democracies. Some democracies are much more warlike than others. Indeed, seventy-five per cent of the wars that they have fought since the Second World War have been waged by just four democracies: the United Kingdom, India, Israel, and the United States.⁵⁴ Therefore, political science currently does not have a theory that satisfactorily explains why modern democracies do not fight each other, fight some wars and not others, have an unrivalled record of military success, and differ from each other in terms of bellicosity.

7. Theorizing ancient democratic war

In order to develop an untested theory of Athenian democracy's military impact, I invited fifteen ancient historians and political scientists to contribute papers on this problem to an edited volume that was

⁵¹ Reiter and Stam (n. 46), 11–57.

⁵² W. Merkel, 'Democracy through War?', in W. Merkel and S. Grimm (eds.), *War and Democratization. Legality, Legitimacy and Effectiveness* (London, 2009), 31.

⁵³ H. Müller and J. Wolff, 'Democratic Peace: Many Data, Little Explanation?', in A. Geis, L. Brock, and H. Müller (eds.), *Democratic Wars. Looking at the Dark Side of Democratic Peace* (New York, 2006), 41–58; E. W. Robinson, 'Greek Democracies and the Debate over Democratic Peace', in M. H. Hansen (ed.), *Démocratie athénienne – démocratie moderne. Tradition et influence* (Geneva, 2010), 288–98.

⁵⁴ H. Müller, 'The Antimony of Democratic Peace', *International Politics* 41 (2004), 495.

published as *War, Democracy and Culture in Classical Athens*.⁵⁵ Together our chapters suggest that democracy's impact was twofold. The competition of elite performers in front of non-elite adjudicators created a pro-war culture, which encouraged the Athenians to join the armed forces in ever-increasing numbers and to vote regularly for war. But this was offset by Athenian democracy's rigorous debating of war, which reduced this cultural militarism's risks and encouraged military reforms. It also helped to develop the initiative of the state's generals, hoplites, and sailors.

Non-elite Athenians understandably had a positive view of their own military service as heavily armed soldiers and sailors. Consequently, they showed preference for those public speakers and playwrights who employed epic poetry's depiction of soldiering to describe their own military service.⁵⁶ This depiction had been the preserve of the elite before Athenian democracy.⁵⁷ Poor Athenians continued to be ashamed of their poverty.⁵⁸ Therefore this extension of the traditional conception of *aretē* ('courage') down the social scale made soldiering attractive to them as a source of esteem.

But this recognition of courage among non-elite soldiers and sailors proved to be a double-edged sword. While making them feel proud, it put them under social pressure to participate in and to vote for wars. For the Greeks, *aretē* had to be regularly proven by actions. Those who saw themselves as courageous felt *aiskhunē* ('shame') to be accused of cowardice. Athenians could be so accused not only if they retreated from a battle before others but also if they failed to endorse a war that appeared to be necessary.⁵⁹ The result was that Athenian politicians exploited the fear of shame among assembly-goers to build support for their bellicose proposals, even if it risked pressuring them into wars that they might well lose.⁶⁰

Certainly, Athenian democracy's open debating of foreign policy did not affect the bellicosity of the *dēmos*. But it did normally reduce the

⁵⁵ D. M. Pritchard (ed.), *War, Democracy and Culture in Classical Athens* (Cambridge, 2010). A paperback edition appeared in 2014.

⁵⁶ Pritchard (n. 16), 36–9.

⁵⁷ R. K. Balot, *Courage in the Democratic Polis. Ideology and Critique in Classical Athens* (Oxford, 2014), 179–80, 198–203; Pritchard (n. 32), 198–200.

⁵⁸ E.g. Ar. *Plut.* 218–21; Lys. 24.16–17. See also Pritchard (n. 13), 29–30.

⁵⁹ For this second group of accusations see e.g. Eur. *Heracl.* 700–1; Eur. *Phoen.* 999–1005; Eur. *Supp.* 314–23.

⁶⁰ E.g. Aeschin. 2.137–8; Thuc. 6.13.1.

risk that they would endorse poorly conceived proposals for war.⁶¹ Politicians were free to be contentious and their rivalries with each other guaranteed that proposals for war met with opposing arguments.⁶² The constant adjudicating of such debates by non-elite Athenians improved the quality of their decision-making on foreign affairs.⁶³ It made them more innovative and more flexible than the combatants of oligarchies and autocracies, allowing them to see the merits of innovations that confounded the traditional hoplite-based conception of courage.

War, Democracy and Culture in Classical Athens puts beyond doubt that democracy was a major reason for Athenian military success. Some of its reviewers have noted how this volume also raises new questions for future investigation.⁶⁴ Certainly there needs to be much more evidence collected in order to prove the case for Athenian democracy's twofold impact on war. In addition, our chapters do not always spell out the ways in which specific features of Athenian democracy affected particular aspects of its foreign affairs. Significant research is still required in order to develop a fully tested explanation of Athenian democracy's military impact. This edited book is thus only the *prolegomenon* for ongoing research on the topic.

8. The usefulness of ancient history for political science

There is a real need for today's makers of foreign policy to develop a more satisfactory understanding of how democracy affects international relations. Australia is a good example. Several of Australia's neighbours are emerging or consolidated democracies; others, such as Burma, are taking their first steps towards democracy. Australians are playing a leading role in the democratization of their region: the Australian government has sent soldiers, police, and advisors to East Timor and the Solomon Islands in order to shore up new democracies suffering civil strife; and as part of its foreign aid it trains politicians and public

⁶¹ Pritchard (n. 16), 47–51.

⁶² E.g. Thuc. 1.139, 3.36–50.

⁶³ For the knowledge that the *dēmos* gained from running the democracy see e.g. J. Ober, *Democracy and Knowledge. Innovation and Learning in Classical Athens* (Princeton, NJ, 2008), 166–7.

⁶⁴ E.g. G. Mara, 'Dangerous City: Review Article', *Polis* 29 (2012), 150–64; P. J. Rhodes, review of Pritchard (n. 55), *JHS* 132 (2012), 215–16.

servants from Southeast Asia in parliamentary procedures, electioneering, and human rights. Democracy is on the rise in two other regions of strategic importance. In South Asia there is India, which is the world's largest democracy. Meanwhile, we are witnessing a historic weakening of autocracies in the Middle East. Four years ago, popular uprisings overthrew military dictators in Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia. In order to embed democratic practices these states must avoid the dangers of majoritarianism and *coup d'état*.⁶⁵ Turkey's reasonable success in doing so gives a glimmer of hope that they may one day succeed. In these three regions, Australia – often as an ally of the UK – has deployed its armed forces ostensibly for the sake of supporting democracy and human rights.⁶⁶

These three regions may have increasing numbers of democracies but they remain far from peaceful and have been plagued by both regional wars and civil wars. Today many of their states continue to have territorial disputes with neighbours or are in battles for influence with regional rivals. Consequently, wars and threats of war will continue to be a major part of their international relations. Increasingly these conflicts will involve states that are democracies or are on the path to becoming democracies. Therefore, if makers of foreign policy want to act to prevent such conflicts or, at least, to predict how they will proceed, they will need a much sounder understanding of why democracies choose the wars that they fight and why some democracies start wars much more frequently than others. Presently political scientists are unable to account for this war-making of today's democracies. Here there is great potential for history to advance our understanding of this important issue.⁶⁷ The records of past democracies can expose, for example, questionable assumptions about democracy and war today.⁶⁸ What is more important is that an explanation of a historical democracy's military impact can furnish new ideas for thinking about today's ones. In this respect ancient Athens would appear to be of some real value.

⁶⁵ C. W. Freeman, 'Coping with Kaleidoscopic Change in the Middle East', *Middle East Policy* 22 (2013), 29–38.

⁶⁶ N. Schörnig, "'O Ally, Stand by Me": Australia's Ongoing Balancing Act between Geography and History', in A. Geis, H. Müller, and N. Schörnig (eds.), *The Militant Face of Democracy. Liberal Forces for Good* (Cambridge, 2013), 124–59.

⁶⁷ P. J. Rhodes, *Ancient Democracy and Modern Ideology* (London, 2003), 88–9; see also J. Guldi and D. Armitage, *The History Manifesto* (Cambridge, 2014).

⁶⁸ For ancient history's usefulness in testing modern assumptions see e.g. N. Morley, *Theories, Models and Concepts in Ancient History* (London, 2004), 133–61.

Admittedly there are differences between ancient Athenian *dēmokratia* and modern democracies.⁶⁹ The first major difference is that Athenian democracy was direct. Final decisions about all public business were made by a sovereign assembly, which met forty times per year.⁷⁰ In it ten to twenty per cent of Athenians always participated.⁷¹ In this direct democracy ordinary citizens voted directly on individual policies, a state of affairs that is not possible in modern democracies. Athens may have been one of the ancient Greek world's largest states but it was tiny by modern standards: today's nation-states are larger by an order of magnitude or more. The result is that modern democracies cannot organize nationwide assemblies for their citizens. Instead they ask them to elect politicians to represent them in parliaments. In modern elections, participation may be much higher than twenty per cent; in addition, politicians often implement the policy platforms on which they were elected. But elections are still only held every two or three years. On the issue of voting frequency, therefore, modern democracies are less democratic than the Athenian one.

Ancient Athens was also innovative in its extension of political rights to all non-elite free males. Many other Greek states only gave political rights to those who met a high property qualification. But the Athenians never enfranchised their female relatives,⁷² and they owned slaves who did not have any political and legal rights. This is the second major difference between their democracy and ours: modern democracies outlawed slavery in the nineteenth century, and by the 1970s all had extended the right to vote to females, indigenous peoples, and other subaltern groups. On the issue of voting rights, then, the situation is reversed: modern democracies are more democratic than Athenian democracy.

These differences complicate the comparison of ancient and modern democracies. Certainly they make it impossible to project conclusions about ancient Athens directly onto the modern world. In spite of

⁶⁹ Robinson (n. 5), 13–16, 25–33.

⁷⁰ Pritchard (n. 7), 62–3.

⁷¹ The quorum for an Athenian assembly-meeting was 6,000 (Pritchard [n. 7], 62). In the fourth century there were probably 30,000 Athenians living in Attica (M. H. Hansen, *The Athenian Democracy in the Age of Demosthenes. Structure, Principles, and Ideology*, trans. J. A. Crook [Cambridge, MA, and Oxford, 1991], 90–4). In the late 430s there had been twice as many Athenians (*ibid.*, 55).

⁷² D. M. Pritchard, 'The Position of Attic Women in Democratic Athens', *G&R* 61 (2014), 184, 188.

this, direct and representative democracies still have a lot in common.⁷³ Each gives political rights to as many people as social norms allow. Both give voters equal opportunities to elect or to be politicians, and both promote freedom of speech and the rule of law. In addition both democratic regime types encourage politicians to develop competing policy proposals. In both the votes of the people play a vital role in deciding which proposals will be enacted. Consequently, there is more than enough common ground to allow meaningful comparison of ancient and modern democracies. Findings about Athenian democracy can thus be used to enrich our understanding of modern democracies.

The well-documented history of Athenian democracy allows us to analyse its operation thoroughly.⁷⁴ Therefore historians of classical Athens can undertake what Clifford Geertz famously described as ‘thick description’: we can give rich descriptions of politics and war over two hundred years, test a complex theory about democracy’s military impact, and detail the causal mechanisms of proven hypotheses. Comparative politics shows how such a case study has great practical value for researchers.⁷⁵ A proven explanation of Athenian democracy’s impact on war can furnish suggestive hypotheses for researching modern examples.

Ancient historians do not fully recognize this potential, because they do not normally pay close attention to ‘hot topics in international relations’.⁷⁶ This stands in contrast to the ever-increasing numbers of political scientists who draw on ancient Athens to build new theories. Thus theorists of comparative politics use ancient Athens as a point of comparison for identifying unique features of modern democracies.⁷⁷ Economists are turning to it to test their theories.⁷⁸ Many of those in international relations who have abandoned realism recognize the ancient Greek world as ‘the only other well documented state system with a larger number of democratic regimes’.⁷⁹ Consequently, they

⁷³ M. H. Hansen, *Was Athens a Democracy? Popular Rule, Liberty and Equality in Ancient and Modern Political Thought* (Copenhagen, 1989).

⁷⁴ Rhodes (n. 67), 25–6.

⁷⁵ T. Landman, *Issues and Methods in Comparative Politics. An Introduction* (London and New York, 2000), 32–3.

⁷⁶ Robinson (n. 53), 278.

⁷⁷ E.g. L. Carson and B. Martin, *Random Selection in Politics* (London and Westport, CT, 1999).

⁷⁸ G. C. Bitros and A. D. Karayiannis, ‘Values and Institutions as Determinants of Entrepreneurship in Ancient Athens’, *Journal of Institutional Economics* 4 (2008), 205–30.

⁷⁹ B. Russett and W. Antholis, ‘Do Democracies Fight Each Other?’, *Journal of Peace Research* 29 (1992), 415.

draw on Athenian war-making in support of their own theories about why modern democracies do not fight each other or do better militarily than autocracies.⁸⁰ This use of ancient history by political scientists shows how they will be receptive to ongoing research into democracy's impact on war in classical Athens. Thus Athenian democracy can help political scientists to build a new empirical theory on the wars of today's democracies.

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⁸⁰ E.g. Ferejohn and Rosenbluth (n. 50); B. M. Russett, 'Democracy, War and Expansion through Historical Lenses', *European Journal of International Relations* 15 (2009), 9–36.