

Archaic Rome in Soldier

The Urth list — 7 messages, 4 voices, 16 Jun 2003

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Andrew Bollen — 16 Jun 2003, 01:30

How anachronistic are the glimpses we get? Eg: at the very start of Mist, Latro says that he would have thought the commander of a warship would be a "horseman". Presumably by this he means somebody of equestrian rank, rather than a low-status money-grubbing merchant. This seems like an accurate portrayal of Roman attitudes during later times, but what do we know of such distinctions from the archaic period? I guess I need to go back to Livy or something.

Also, I have doubts about the picture of Athens presented in the same little passage. Did merchants really have high status in classical Athens? I have a mental picture of a society where the honorable path to wealth was through land, and booty taken in wars, and where on the nitty-gritty side of things the silver mines were a far more important part of the "GDP" and the war economy, than anything to do with trade & merchandise. Maybe I'm wrong, but the Hypereides character doesn't feel right.

Josh Geller — 16 Jun 2003, 03:14 · follows Andrew Bollen

On Sun, 2003-06-15 at 18:30, Andrew Bollen wrote:

... I have doubts about the picture of Athens presented in the same little passage. Did merchants really have high status in classical Athens?

It would depend who you were talking to.

I have a mental picture of a society where the honorable path to wealth was through land, and booty taken in wars,

There was an country party and a city party. Peasants and aristocrats on the one hand, businessmen and urban laborers on the other. You are describing the attitude of the country party.

and where on the nitty-gritty side of things the silver mines were a far more important part of the "GDP" and the war economy, than anything to do with trade & merchandise.

Trade was very important. All of those Greek vases that we find, all over the Mediterranean, those were largely packaging for olive oil or wine or whatever.

Maybe I'm wrong, but the Hypereides character doesn't feel right.

Seems fine to me.

J.

Andrew Bollen — 16 Jun 2003, 03:23 · follows Josh Geller

Josh wrote:

Trade was very important. All of those Greek vases that we find, all over the Mediterranean, those were largely packaging for olive oil or

wine or whatever.

I guess I'm influenced by Finley, esp. passages like Chap 5 of "The Ancient Economy". His position, of course, is that large-scale trade in the ancient world was very rare. He can find only two significant sources of "trade" related income for Athens from the 4th Century on - silver and tourism. Fine pottery is the only significant manufactured export he can find evidence for (which apparently died out in the 4th cent). With few exceptions, he believes that manufacture in the local world was for local consumption, and quotes Hume: he "could not remember a passage in any ancient author where the growth of a city is to be ascribed to the establishment of a manufacture." Almost all available evidence for the manufacturers themselves present them as being very small operators, "not even little Wedgewoods". The largest operation he can find in 5th century Athens is Cephalus' shield factory, employing 100+ slaves - note that it is *slaves*, not craftspeople, who do the work, and that Cephalus was a metic, not a citizen.

Is there any historical evidence of a merchant like Hypereides fitting out and commanding warships in classical Athens?

The Wynns — 16 Jun 2003, 07:42 · follows Andrew Bollen

Josh wrote:

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Then Andrew replied:

[Finley in "The Ancient Economy"] can find only two significant sources of "trade" related income for Athens from the 4th Century on - silver and tourism. Fine pottery is the only significant manufactured export he can find evidence for (which apparently died out in the 4th cent)...

Is there any historical evidence of a merchant like Hypereides fitting out and commanding warships in classical Athens?

I'll take on Finley first. I haven't read Finley and I don't know what he means by "evidence" or "rare". The impression I get from Herodotus is that sea-trade was not rare among Ionic Greeks and Phoenicians (although sometimes one gets the idea that it was considered a seemingly profession for no one else). Greek traders seemed inclined to buy anything -- including things for which there was no local value (Herodotus 2:39).

And what about all the trade routes in the Near and Middle East some dating back into prehistory? Cyrus may have not thought much of the Ionians markets (according to Herodotus 1:153) but he did build the Royal Road from Sardis (capitol of Ionic Greece) to Susa (sixth century) which immediately became an important trade route.

However, Herodotus' history is rife with references to Ionic Greek and Phoenician merchant ships. Does Finley explain this discrepancy?

It is true that I know of no reference from Herodotus or Thucydides that Athens created its navy on the backs of the merchant class, but it would be a reasonable inference on Wolfe's part. Athens' extensive standing navy was built only after the Persian War, from tribute of client states. Where would Athens' "wooden wall" have come from? Where would their competent sailors have come from? Reasonably, since the Ionians were sea-traders -- they had to defend themselves from (and fight as) pirates and privateers.

The following are some quickly drawn references from Herodotus suggesting that traders were

not rare world-wide and could be competent warriors....

Herodotus 2:141

Tale of an Egyptian king that neglected the "warrior class" and went to war and conquered drawing his army entirely from the "traders, artisans, and market-people".

Herodotus 5:9

"Sigynnae is the name which the Ligurians who dwell above Massilia [modern Marseilles] give to traders, while among the Cyprians the word means spears."

--- Crush

Andrew Bollen — 16 Jun 2003, 07:54 · follows The Wynns

Crush writes:

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However, Herodotus' history is rife with references to Ionic Greek and Phoenician merchant ships. Does Finley explain this discrepancy?

I don't think Finley's argument against widespread trade, rather it's against widespread *economically important* trade of anything except rarities. In the chapter I referred to, after a discussion of Athens, he says this:

"To sum up: essentially the ability of ancient cities to pay for their food, metals, slaves, and other necessities rested on four variables: the amount of *local* agricultural production [...]; the presence or absence of special resources, silver above all [...]; the invisible exports of trade and tourism; and fourth, the income from [empire, tribute, gifts etc.] The contribution of manufactures was negligible ..."

On his model, manufacture is almost entirely for a local market; communities usually didn't balance their accounts with a manufacture-for-export approach; and "when Greek and Roman moralists allow [grudgingly] that foreign traders have some virtue, unlike local petty shopkeepers, they invariably credit them with public service as importers."

Your example from Herodotus wouldn't contradict this; the head of a sacrificed beast presumably isn't something which is going to figure large in any city's balance of payments :)

I would be extremely surprised if the Royal Road was built for any explicit purpose other than the movement of troops, like every other state-sponsored road in antiquity. But maybe I'm wrong. You have to remember that moving goods by road, even fine Roman roads, was a hellishly uneconomic proposition. The example I've seen cited in different places is the way it was cheaper to move a load of cargo from one end of the Mediterranean to the other, than it was to move it twenty miles by bullock cart.

There are lots of people who disagree with Finley, I know, but he's certainly worth reading.

It is true that I know of no reference from Herodotus or Thucydides that Athens created its navy on the backs of the merchant class, but it would be a reasonable inference on Wolfe's part. Athens' extensive standing navy was built only after the Persian War, from tribute of client states. Where would Athens' "wooden wall" have come from? Where would their competent sailors have come from? Reasonably, since the Ionians were sea-traders -- they had to defend themselves from (and fight as) pirates and privateers.

Well, specifically, the silver mines funded much of the ship-building, if not most of it. (Her. 7.144). Themistocles championed using surplus funds from the new find at Laurium to build 200 ships for a prospective war against Aegina which "proved to be the salvation of Greece, because it forced the Athenians to turn towards the sea". When the conflict with Persia approached, "they felt obliged to undertake further ship-building". Just from that passage, it appears that ship building was a state thing, funded by the silver which was really what made Athens much of anything compared to say Thebes, and not some kind of public liturgy on wealthy citizens. But maybe there's other evidence somewhere.

The following are some quickly drawn references from Herodotus suggesting that traders were not rare world-wide and could be competent warriors....

Herodotus 2:141

Tale of an Egyptian king that neglected the "warrior class" and went to war and conquered drawing his army entirely from the "traders, artisans, and market-people".

But surely one of the elements of this little tale is the unlikely image of marketplace "rabble" forming an army, coupled with the folk-tale thing about mice chewing through the enemies' bowstrings etc.

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--- Crush

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Chris — 16 Jun 2003, 14:55 · follows Andrew Bollen

I don't have the book on hand to reference as someone else did, but I remember a passage in Herodotus that explicitly says that traders were looked down on in Greece, more in some cities and less in others. He cites one city in particular - Corinth, I think, but I'm not sure - where they are hardly looked down on at all. But we can infer that there would be some prejudice in the other cities. Probably not quite as much in Athens as in Sparta, but still there.

re: Latro as an Immortal, I didn't actually know that foreigners were allowed in that unit - Herodotus didn't say an awful lot about it, and I haven't read other sources. But certainly that would help to explain things. Though, I'm not so sure his entire unit would have been used that

way. If they were, it seems more likely that they would have been caught in the later fighting around Thebes than to have gotten so far away.

How anachronistic are the glimpses we get? Eg: at the very start of Mist, Latro says that he would have thought the commander of a warship would be a "horseman". Presumably by this he means somebody of equestrian rank, rather than a low-status money-grubbing merchant. This seems like an accurate portrayal of Roman attitudes during later times, but what do we know of such distinctions from the archaic period? I guess I need to go back to Livy or something.

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The Wynns — 17 Jun 2003, 01:48 · follows Chris

Andrew responds to Crush:

Well, specifically, the silver mines funded much of the ship-building, if not most of it. (Her. 7.144). Themistocles championed using surplus funds from the new find at Laurium to build 200 ships for a prospective war against Aegina...

Crush responds:

Okay, good point. Rawlinson says that this build-up increased the size of the Athenian navy "up to" 200 ships, which was the number of ships Athens used at the battles of Artemisium and Salamis. So Athens did have a standing navy of 200 ships and this was the number of ships it employed in the war. So there is probably no compelling evidence from Herodotus of Athens forcing merchants to outfit ships for the fleet.

Andrew originally said:

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negligible ..."

On his model, manufacture is almost entirely for a local market; communities usually didn't balance their accounts with a manufacture-for-export approach; and "when Greek and Roman moralists allow [grudgingly] that foreign traders have some virtue, unlike local petty shopkeepers, they invariably credit them with public service as importers."

Crush responds:

Okay, I think I understand your point now: That a manufacturer being involved in distributing and shipping leather rather than a maker of leather tools or cattleman is anachronistic (but growing olives for export would be a different matter). But is that really the case for Hypereides? Now that I look back, he does not seem to have been involved directly with ships in his business before he was called on to build and command his three ships. He only says that "a man does learn a bit about ships in the leather trade" (SotM, chap. 7). Hmm. looking back, it seems we really know very little about Hypereides' business. He doesn't say he's a tanner. He could be a large cattleman who recently became a war profiteer. He might have slaves rather than employees. Athenians would need leather for armor and shields and triremes. There is money to be made there. Athens voted money to go into ships, but someone has to make those ships, maintain the ships, hire the rowers, pick the soldiers. Is Hypereides existence really contrary to what Herodotus or Finley say?

Also, trade would not be as important to municipalities because it would be much more obvious how agriculture and mining could be taxed rather than traders and sellers. But that does not mean they were not vital to the economy and represented an unrecognized but significant chunk of the GNP of any advance culture that did not deliberately base its economy on tribute or plunder (such as Sparta or Susa). But even then, when one thinks about what would be required to field and maintain scores of thousands of soldiers, cavalymen, and sailors just for ****two days**** it is difficult to imagine how the Persian war could be conducted without a significant craftsman/trader class.

You know, Hypereides makes me think of Marrow. They are both mildly prominent merchants whose physical description makes me think of Gene Wolfe.

Regarding Herodotus 2:141, Andrew says:

But surely one of the elements of this little tale is the unlikely image of marketplace "rabble" forming an army, coupled with the folk-tale thing about mice chewing through the enemies' bowstrings etc.

Crush responds:

I don't think so. For the tale to have the ring of credibility to Herodotus, it suggests that the artisans, traders, and merchants had a significant degree of self-organization rather than being merely milling rabble. And there had to be a lot of them.

Chris said:

...I remember a passage in Herodotus that explicitly says that traders were looked down on in Greece, more in some cities and less in others.

Crush responds:

This is in Her. 2:166. It says:

"Like the Hermotybians, [the Kalasirians] are forbidden to pursue any trade, and devote themselves entirely to warlike exercises, the son following the father's calling. Whether the Greeks borrowed from the Egyptians their notions about trade, like so many others, I cannot say

for certain. I have remarked that the Thracians, the Scyths, the Persians, the Lydians, and almost all other barbarians, hold the citizens who practice trades, and their children, in less repute than the rest, while they esteem as noble those who keep aloof from handicrafts, and especially honor such as are given wholly to war. These ideas prevail throughout the whole of Greece, particularly among the Lacedaemonians. Corinth is the place where craftsmen are least despised. "

I think Herodotus' characterization represents the hostility always felt toward the middle class in highly class-conscience societies. They are a threat to privileged classes who in turn mock them as absurd pretenders, and the poorer classes view them with envy. But as Herodotus admits, Ionic Greeks were very deeply employed in the shipping trade (and, yes, piracy too).

-- Crush