

# Greek and Other Aegean Mercenaries in the Archaic Age: Aristocrats, Common People, or Both?

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## ABSTRACT

Two issues regarding the social status of Archaic Greek (and other Aegean) mercenaries are discussed. The historiographical issue consists in exploring the reasons why the image of a limited participation restricted to the elites has until recently prevailed. The influence of social anthropology, which contributed to the development of a series of conceptual automatisms, is seen as the main cause for the emergence of the elitist thesis. The historical and anthropological issue consists in a summary re-evaluation of the most appropriate and persuasive sources that provide clues for the broader social participation in mercenary activities.

## KEYWORDS

Mercenaries; Archaic Greece; elites; social anthropology; warfare; conceptual automatism.

## INTRODUCTION

The small number of sources on Aegean mercenaries in the archaic period, and the fact that these sources are very often fragmentary and doubtful, trigger frequent scholarly attempts to demonstrate or to refute the presence of mercenaries in different spatial and temporal contexts. Discussions of more complex issues such as the social status of mercenaries, their material culture, and the negotiation of identities against a background of multicultural interactions, are either avoided or treated rather simplistically.

As the role of the researcher involves not just the reconstitution of facts, but also the development of a wider picture of archaic Greek civilization, I argue here for an attempt to tackle the more complex features of the mercenary phenomenon, even if the sources are scarce. At the same time, interpretative cautiousness, manifested not only in the thorough analysis and realistic contextualization of the sources, but also in the awareness and control of the assumptions inherent in the researchers' own conceptual paradigm, is the prerequisite of every such delicate attempt.

Bearing in mind these general remarks, I will examine in this paper a specific complex feature of the Aegean mercenary phenomenon in the archaic period: the social status of mercenaries. It is perhaps the most frequently explored social question, given the relatively high visibility of status in the sources, compared to other issues like kinship or religious beliefs and rituals in the mercenary environment, less perceivable in our meagre evidence. The goal of the paper is twofold. First, on a historical and anthropological level, it seeks to clarify some aspects of the social status of Greek and other Aegean mercenaries in the archaic period; and second, on a historiographical level, it aims to deconstruct the reasons for the persistent assumption in the modern literature that archaic mercenaries must have been of a high social status.

Undoubtedly, the first goal is more important as a contribution to the advancement of the study of archaic mercenaries. Nevertheless, in order to be able to make further progress in this study, we must begin by explaining why a *communis opinio* stating that only limited Greek

elites took part in this phenomenon has until recently prevailed. Once the historiographical issue becomes clear, then a re-evaluation of the most appropriate and persuasive sources for this topic is possible. This re-evaluation suggests that the mercenary phenomenon had larger dimensions than is usually thought, which means that a broader segment of Greek society is likely to have been involved.

## STATUS QUAESTIONIS

Scholarly interest in archaic mercenaries was generally low throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the most conclusive proof being the space allotted by Parke to this matter in his 1933 monograph dedicated to Greek mercenaries until Ipsos: only 10 pages out of 238 (PARKE 1933, 3-13). The particular issue of the social status of mercenaries received even less attention in the secondary literature.

Starting with the 1990s, however, archaic mercenaries became much more popular as an object of study, and this has led to a greater focus on their social status as well, both in works dedicated to the phenomenon and in studies with different main interests. In both situations, the opinion that has prevailed is that mercenary troops in this period were not numerous and consisted of bands of aristocrats and their followers, who either sought immortal glory in the Homeric vein or who fought for pay because they had been temporarily or permanently excluded from their own communities.

Marco Bettalli's research on archaic Greek mercenaries, one of the most extensive on this topic, is the most explicit in this direction. The following two fragments are illustrative of the position taken by the Italian historian (BETTALLI 1995, 26, 52):

Il mercenariato d'età arcaica è un fenomeno elitario, che ha per protagonisti uomini di non bassa condizione, mossi da motivazioni non dissimili da quelle che hanno alimentato la più o meno contemporanea colonizzazione: persone spinte, più che dalla fame, da insoddisfazione, da motivi 'politici' (esili, confische) e da spirito di combattere al soldo di re stranieri, in Mesopotamia, in Egitto, in Lidia, in Persia.

È comunque possibile affermare con sicurezza che il mercenariato era esercitato da gruppi ristretti: si tratta di un mercenariato aristocratico, di élite, e non di un mercenariato di massa, come troveremo in altri periodi della storia greca.<sup>1</sup>

The views expressed by two other researchers of the archaic and classical mercenaries are similar. In his article on the social status of archaic Greek mercenaries, Philip Kaplan (2002, 241) concludes:

The evidence we have reviewed certainly suggests that it was a literate elite from eastern Greece that made contact, perhaps through their Carian neighbours, with the powers of the Eastern Mediterranean.

Matthew Trundle, in a monograph on the mercenary phenomenon in the classical period (TRUNDLE 2004, 44), is not as explicit about the social status of archaic mercenaries, but

<sup>1</sup> The same opinion, though more balanced, is preserved in a recent monograph of the ancient Greek mercenary phenomenon until Alexander (BETTALLI 2013, 245-246).

nevertheless also implies that early mercenary activities were small-scale, accidental and connected with aristocratic interaction:

Before the fifth century BC, the only large number of Greek mercenaries known in service abroad was the 30,000 Carians and Ionians who took service with Psamettichus [sic] (Hdt. II, 152–154; Diod. Sic. I, 66.12, 67.1–3, 68.5). The sources make this appear to be an isolated incident of mass Greek hiring. [...] It is possible that ritualized friendships between Ionians and Carians facilitated the relationship with the Egyptians in this instance. Otherwise, mercenaries appear only in the service of Aegean and Sicilian tyrants down to the middle of the sixth century BC.

This general view, based on assumptions about limited numbers of mercenaries, the accidental character of this occupation, and its connection with typical forms of aristocratic relations, can also be seen in works that touch only in passing on mercenaries. Scholars who examine the relations between Greece and the Oriental world in the archaic period also emphasize the elitist character of the phenomenon and the small number of Aegean mercenaries fighting in the Eastern armies.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, even those who study archaic tyrannies claim that tyrants and powerful aristocrats used either guards recruited among their own fellow citizens, or troops provided by their peers from other cities, and reject for this period the association between tyrants and mercenaries promoted by late Classical and Hellenistic sources (e.g. LAVELLE 1992, esp. 87 and 94–96; LAVELLE 2005, 134). General works on early Greece or on the military aspects of Greek civilization either completely ignore the topic or provide only some brief observations.<sup>3</sup>

We can identify, therefore, a significant historiographical current that perceives the emergence of archaic mercenaries as an exclusively elite phenomenon, with small numbers of warriors embracing this occupation. A perfect contrast between the archaic and the late classical phenomena is sometimes created, in the best Greek tradition, such as *few – many*, *elites – masses*, *aristocratic reciprocity* (with all its associated forms) – *economic contractualism* (cf. BETTALLI 1995, 9). Nevertheless, several authors have recently rejected this view and claimed that participation in the phenomenon was more extensive, both socially and numerically.<sup>4</sup>

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- 2 The most telling examples are Niemeier (2001, 24): ‘They were members of the elite who had been driven out of their native country by war, exile following *staseis* (conflicts between aristocratic families), or economic problems, typical phenomena of the crises of the early Greek polis, or had pursued a search for an alternative way of aristocratic life centered on Homeric values like courage, honour, and glory’ and Kuhrt (2002, 22), who stands for a minimalist perspective on the contacts between Greece and Mesopotamia, based on the analysis of Mesopotamian written sources which mention ‘Ionians’: ‘direct contact between Greece and the Mesopotamian empires was slight in this period’. Raaflaub (2004, 207–209) is explicitly against the view expressed by Bettalli (1995) and Kaplan (2002), yet the perspective he describes in fragments such as the following – ‘aristocrats with their bands of followers and companions pursued various purposes, according to circumstances and opportunities; they went on raiding and trading expeditions or hired themselves out as mercenaries’ (RAAFLAUB 2004, 212) – preserve consistent traits of the elitist thesis.
- 3 General works on early Greece: OSBORNE 2009 [1996], 199, 242, 276–279, 302 (accidental references in the accounts of the Oriental influence on Greek sculpture and of the first issues of coins, as well as in the stories of Paktyes in Lydia and the exile of the Peisistratids); a similar line in: HALL 2013 [2007], 151, 169, 296 (tyrants and mercenaries); 268–277, 297, 299 (Eastern monarchs and mercenaries). General works of military history: PRITCHETT 1974–1991 ignores the phenomenon, while RAWLINGS 2007, 43–44 dismisses it quickly.
- 4 An explicit standing against the elitist view was adopted in ROLLINGER 2001, 256 and LURAGHI 2006, 23–26. Different degrees of divergence, without starting an actual polemic, were expressed in FIELDS 1994, 4;

The review of the arguments for the elitist thesis shows that the dominant conclusions on the social status of archaic mercenaries are not based on an entirely sound logical construction that uses the whole range of relevant sources and suggests that the debate has just opened.

The first proof in this regard is that the main argument for a limited number of purely aristocratic mercenaries is an argument *ex silentio*. The lack of a rich inventory of sources and the absence of clear testimonies for mercenaries of modest social standing are *a priori* considered good arguments for sustaining that Greek archaic mercenaries were some of the members of the competing elites in the emergent *poleis*, driven by the Homeric ideal. These arguments are reinforced by our meagre prosopographical knowledge of archaic Greek mercenaries and travellers in the East. The few Greeks who visited Mesopotamia, the Levant or Egypt, whose names are known nowadays, are members of the elites. Illustrative by reason of their well-known relatives and, consequently, usually mentioned as examples are the Mytileneans Antimenidas and Charaxos, the brothers of Alkaios and Sappho respectively.<sup>5</sup>

There are also secondary arguments, with varying degrees of consistency. Given the limited length of this paper, I will not exhaustively demonstrate their flaws: instead, I will just review them and explain in brief why they are weak or misleading.

The first secondary argument is the association between mercenaries and piracy, conceived by modern scholars as an aristocratic activity in the context of archaic Greek society. The argument consists of two components. Firstly, there is the association between mercenaries and pirates: according to several authors, at least the earliest mercenaries were pirates who were raiding the coastal settlements of Egypt and sometimes the shores of northern Syria and Cilicia (PRITCHETT 1974–1991, vol. 5, 315; RAAFLAUB 2004, 209–210; TRUNDLE 2004, 44; HALE 2013, 190). Fundamental for this assumption are Hom., *Od.* XIV, 199–359 and XVII, 417–444, where Odysseus presents himself as a former Cretan pirate, captured by an Egyptian kinglet during an unsuccessful raid, and Hdt. II, 152–154, where Herodotos explains the beginnings of Greek mercenary activity in Egypt as an opportunistic employment of marauders who were looting Psammetichos' lands. The secondary examples of Ionians attacking three settlements in the vicinity of Tyre, as a local Assyrian governor reported to Tiglath-pileser III (*NL* 69, published in SAGGS 1963, 76–78), or confronting Sargon II (FUCHS 1994, 109 – *Annals*, 117–119, 34 – *Zyl.*, 21, the main versions among several editions of the same text) and Sennacherib (Berossus: *FGrHist* 680, F7; Abydenos: *FGrHist* 685, F5) in Cilicia are more rarely mentioned.

As we can see, the dossier is weak and not conclusive. The main sources that support the association are two Homeric passages and Herodotos' historical account, which is itself based on a suspect tradition and perhaps even contaminated by the stories in the *Odyssey* (LLOYD 1975a, 15; BETTALI 1995, 58–59; VITTMANN 2003, 197–199). It might be admitted that piracy and predatory raids played a significant role in resuming the contacts between Greece and the Oriental world after the Dark Age (POPHAM – LEMOS 1995), and even that pirates and marauders represented the first source of Aegean mercenaries for the Eastern monarchs. However, the generalization of this model to the entire phenomenon is not justified by any concrete evidence.

Secondly, there is the representation of piracy as an honourable, mainly aristocratic activity, based once again on some Homeric passages and on a well-known statement of Thoukydides

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WALLINGA 1991, esp. 184–186, BROUWERS, 2010, 201–202 and VAN WEES 2013, 25–28. A wholly original view is developed in HALE 2013, who combines two apparently mutually exclusive features: the aristocratic character of the activity and the great numbers of Greek mercenaries in the East.

5 See, for example, BETTALI 1995, 51 who concludes: 'la presenza greca nel Mediterraneo fosse alimentata in buona misura dai membri di casate aristocratiche che trovarono difficoltà ad inserirsi nella vita politica ed economica della propria patria.' For Antimenidas, see Alkaios fr. 48 and 350 Lobel/Page, with QUINN 1961. For Charaxos, see Sappho fr. 5 and 15 Lobel/Page, *The Brothers' Poem*, Hdt. II, 135, with OBBINK 2014.

in his *archaiologia* (Thuc. I, 8). Generalization is dangerous: piracy is not always perceived as an honourable profession, not even in Homer (DE SOUZA 1999, 18–19). Although the image of the powerful nobleman, surrounded by his retainers on his own ship, leaving to acquire glory and wealth, is appealing and has some anthropological parallels,<sup>6</sup> the real situation is much more complex, as sea enterprises were highly diverse in this period.<sup>7</sup>

Another secondary argument is based on the idea that Greek and Karian mercenaries were employed in the Eastern Mediterranean exclusively as hoplites, given the superiority of their equipment and tactics over any other similar infantry combinations at that time.<sup>8</sup> Some researchers assume that only a few wealthy individuals could have afforded the hoplite panoply, and that therefore such practical reasons prevented the development of mercenary service into a larger-scale phenomenon (BETTALI 1995, 26–27; KAPLAN 2002, 241). This view oversimplifies topics which are still matters of lively debate. What was the minimal equipment of a hoplite and how much did it cost? Who provided the equipment for men employed as mercenaries? How appropriate for the archaic period is Aristotle's assertion in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC that a medium sized farm was a necessary qualification for service as a hoplite (RAAFLAUB 2004, 209)?

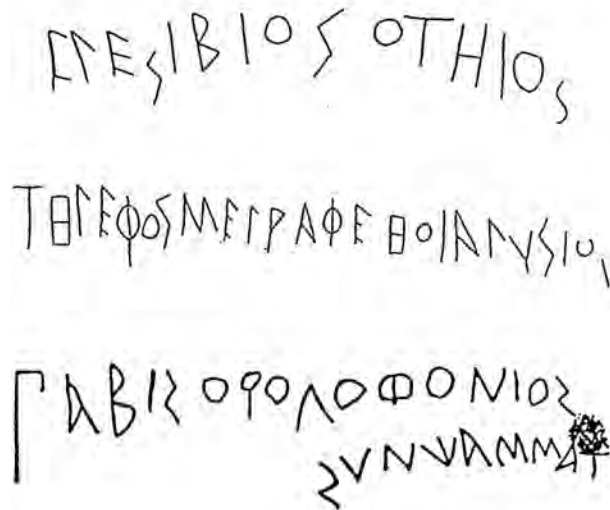
The third secondary argument is terminological. The term *epikouroi* (ἐπίκουροι), used in the archaic and early classical periods to designate mercenaries, was employed in the Homeric epics for noble allies, mostly strangers fighting for Troy (Hom., *Il.* II, 815, III, 456 etc.). Only afterwards does the word gain the additional meaning of 'fighters for pay' and for a long time it preserves both meanings. This evolution is demonstrated by the need experienced by 5<sup>th</sup> century historians to associate it with explanatory adjectives such as *misthōtoi*, in order to indicate unambiguously that it referred to 'mercenaries' (LAVELLE 1989, 36–37; LAVELLE 1997, esp. 258; TRUNDLE 1998; TRUNDLE 2004, esp. 10–20).

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- 6 Tac. *Ger.* 14.2–4 for the Germanic tribes; *Vitsndaela Saga* 2 for Norsemen. The Late Bronze Age raids of the Aegean populations in the Levant were compared both tactically and socially with the Iron Age Viking raids in WACHSMANN 1982, 297–298. The technical and tactical comparison between the *pentekontor* and the *drakkar* appears also in VAN WEES 2013, 31. HALE 2013, 186–187, 189 develops the comparison between Greeks and Norsemen for the archaic period, using it instead as an argument for stating great numbers of Greek adventurers in the East.
- 7 Cf. for example the dedication made by the whole crew after the lucky expedition under Kolaïos of Samos (Hdt. IV, 152; MÖLLER 2000, 54–55). The great diversity of archaic private enterprises is emphasized in OSBORNE 1998, esp. 267–268.
- 8 E.g. LLOYD 1975a, 16; BETTALI 1995, 71; HALE 2013, 186, 190. The idea that Aegean mercenaries were used by Eastern monarchs precisely for their superior military equipment, which made them better than any other Oriental counterparts, might have originated from the Greek accounts of the first enrolment of Karians and Ionians by Psammetichos I (Hdt. II, 148–152; Diod. Sic. I, 67; Polyainos VII, 3), from generalizations made from representations like that of the phalanx from the Amathus Bowl (BM 123053) and, lastly, from the Greek classical stereotype, whose development started during the Persian wars, that the Hellenic spear was more powerful and virtuous than the Oriental bow and arrows (Aisch., *Pers.* 147–149, 239–240). Although a Greek phalanx transplanted into the core of an Oriental army was clearly an advantage, three remarks should not be ignored: 1) The Easterners themselves trained very powerful heavy spearmen (Assyria and Urartu: SNODGRASS 1964, 66–67 and DEZSŐ – VÉR 2013, 344 on the similarities of the military equipment used by Greek hoplites and Assyrian and Urartian spearmen, FAGAN 2010, esp. 85–86 and 98–99; DEZSŐ 2012, 110–117; Egypt: Xen., *Anab.* I, 8.9 and *Cyrop.* VII, 1.33–34); 2) the Ionians and the Karians are clearly defeated at home, on open ground, by the Persians, during the Ionian Revolt (Hdt. V, 118–120); 3) there is a high probability that Greeks served not only as hoplites in the East, but also as cavalry and especially sailors (Polyainos VII, 2.2: Kolophonian cavalry in Lydia; Hdt. II, 159: Ionians as members of the Egyptian naval forces, for whom see the long controversy between Lloyd and Basch: BASCH 1969; LLOYD 1972; LLOYD 1975b; BASCH 1977; LLOYD 1980; BASCH 1980; LLOYD 1988, 159–160 with full bibliography).



These philological remarks are entirely pertinent. Half of the further interpretation given by the followers of the elitist thesis, who maintain that mercenary service derives from the aristocratic tradition of reciprocal extra-community support that noble families provided to each other, is pertinent as well. Less convincing is, however, the other half of this interpretation, i.e. that in the asymmetrical relationship with incomparably more powerful Eastern monarchs, Greek elites preserved the common name of the former practice, with the clear ideological incentive of concealing through euphemism their subordination to those monarchs (KAPLAN 2002, 241; TRUNDLE 2004, 19-20).<sup>9</sup>

In fact, the lexical process suffered by the term *epikouroi* might just as well be explained in a different manner. The word might have originally had the meaning of ‘noble ally’. Afterwards, probably quite early, influenced precisely by the ‘democratization’ and ‘contractualization’ of the activity of providing military support, the term gained also its second meaning: the common folk designated themselves as such in order to acquire the same prestige as the elites, while the elites added supplementary adjectives especially to prove that the new *epikouroi* were not authentic.<sup>10</sup>



**Fig. 1: Three East Greek graffiti from Abu Simbel (MEIGGS - LEWIS 1988, 7b, c, f), reading: ‘Ελεσίβιος ὁ Τήιος, Τήλεφός μ’ ἔγραφε ἡ Ἰαλύσιο[ς] and Πάβις ὁ ὀρολοφόνιος | σὺν Ψαμματᾶ (after HAIDER 2001, 213, Abb. 3).**

There are more secondary arguments for the elitist position, such as the claim that common people would not have been able to cultivate relationships with Oriental potentates and to integrate themselves in foreign societies, or the assumption that only members of the elite would have been literate enough to inscribe their names (**Fig. 1**) on the legs of the colossal

9 Contradicted by Pedon’s dedication in an unknown Ionian sanctuary, where he admits that he received prizes for his bravery from the king Psammetichos (ŞAHİN 1987; MASSON - YOYOTTE 1988, 174-175, 177-179). See also the case of Mandrokles of Samos, who boasted through his dedication in the Heraion with the reward given to him by Darius for building a bridge over the Bosphorus (Hdt. IV, 152).

10 Similar ‘democratizations’ of terms that originally signified an institutionalized high prestige position may be encountered in different spatial and temporal contexts. E.g. during the Romanian Middle Ages, the word ‘jupan’, which was initially used for nobles and princes, extended its meaning to denote a large category of middle class landowners and ended as a mere polite form.

statues in Abu Simbel (KAPLAN 2002, 241),<sup>11</sup> which are rather too sketchy and speculative and, therefore, unconvincing from the very beginning.

## THE ELITIST THESIS AND SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY

As we have seen, the premises of the main tradition are weaker than expected in the light of its categorical conclusions cited above. Exploring the reasons for such an awkward logical construction seems legitimate.

I have already mentioned that the limited and fragmentary nature of our sources leads to interpretations based on exceptional occurrences of mercenary activity. To this, we should add two more characteristics of the evidence: the elitist origin of narrative sources and the greater visibility of elite items in the archaeological record.

The contemporary Greek sources, the Homeric epics and the archaic lyric poetry, are cultural products made by elites for the elites. The great battle scenes in the *Iliad*, with their detailed descriptions of single heroic combats and their hasty depiction of the collective clashes between the armies, which serve to better highlight the protagonists' heroism, should be recalled here (VAN WEES 1996). It is no surprise that without other consistent sources, the Homeric epics and the archaic lyrics influence modern scholars as heavily as they did the Classical and Hellenistic authors: modern historians and even modern archaeologists start their inquiries into the mercenary phenomenon already biased by the Homeric and aristocratic *ethos*.

Archaeologically, it is normal for the elites to leave more numerous and impressive traces, due to their economic and ideological supremacy. Even though material inventories of both elites and common people are subject to a wide range of hazards, those of commoners consist of perishable structures and objects to a greater degree, so that they are more frequently invisible to archaeologists. Besides the objective dimension of archaeological survivability, there is also the subjective dimension of the researcher's selection. Although in the last few decades both a significant shift towards examining the daily aspects of existence and opportunities provided by new technologies have directed a considerable interest to discoveries that have traditionally been considered mundane, uncommon artefacts and archaeological complexes, mostly belonging to elites, have remained in the limelight. The reasons for this range from a natural fascination with the unusual, to the irresistible temptation to use archaeology in order to reconstruct historical events, and even to academic and economic pragmatism.

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11 The last argument is based on the assumption that elites only were literate in the archaic Greek world (and in preindustrial societies in general). Although there is an impressive tradition which maintains low degrees of literacy in the ancient Mediterranean, such a conclusion might be an uncritical extension of better known examples from Medieval Europe or the Orient, where writing was ascribed only to priests and scribes. For the archaic age, there are recent claims that literacy, particularly practical and kindergarten literacy, was widespread (see discussions in DANA 2004, 13–14; WILSON 2009, 556–561; CECCARELLI 2013, 30–31). For the better known situation of the Roman Empire, sources such as the *graffiti* in Pompei or the wooden tablets of Vindolanda strongly plead against the assumption of low levels of literacy. Furthermore, the military environment is always particular in displaying higher degrees of literacy, being one of the main centres of spreading the ability to write among Roman and non-Roman non-elites. We can make such a contextualization for the Abu Simbel inscriptions (**Fig. 1**), which prove only basic writing skills and, therefore, do not support the hypothesis that their authors were exclusively aristocrats. On literacy among Roman soldiers, see BEST 1966, esp. 127, discussing the *graffiti* on the barracks walls in Ostia or PHANG 2012, 299–300. On the 'Ionicisation' suffered by the Dorian authors of the inscriptions in Abu Simbel, see CARPENTER 1935, 298–299.

The result of these objective and subjective forces is the much higher archaeological visibility of elites. In the historical discourse, the Gorgon shield from Karkemish (WOOLLEY 1921, 128, Pl. 14) or the gold leaf helmet discovered on the bottom of Haifa Bay (HALE – SHARVIT 2012) inevitably take on a more important role than the East Greek pottery from the small fortress at Mezaḏ Hashavyahu (FANTALKIN 2001, 74–97; **Fig. 2**) or the obscure bronze sheath for the base of a statuette, said to be from Memphis (JEFFERY 1961, 355, 358, Pl. 70:49).



**Fig. 2: Potsherd from an oinochoe of Milesian Middle Wild Goat II Style, found in Mezaḏ Hashavyahu (after FANTALKIN 2001, 87–88, Fig. 31:6\*).**

Besides these general considerations, there is one more remark to be made, specific to the field of mercenary studies. Archaeologists encounter extreme difficulties in proving the presence of mercenaries without the consistent support of written sources, as they have to demonstrate that artefacts meet simultaneously the following criteria: (a) they are associated with someone whose profession was war; (b) they are associated with someone who fought for other communities than his own; (c) the main purpose of the individual associated with the artefacts was to receive material benefits from persons outside or communities other than his own community.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> The difficulty arises for different reasons in different situations: 1) When trying to document the activities of Greek mercenaries in the East through artefacts discovered in the East, criterion (a) cannot usually be demonstrated because weapons and other objects typically associated to warriors are not preserved, being made of perishable or recyclable materials (metal, leather, wood, textiles), while other objects which are preserved, like pottery, are not typical for mercenaries and might be associated with merchants or local consumers. In this latter case, criterion (a) might be met only after careful historical and archaeological contextualization, whose prerequisites are not available in all situations (see FANTALKIN 2001, 128–147, for a fortunate example when contextualization for the Greek pottery in the Eastern settlement of Mezaḏ Hashavyahu is possible). In-depth contextualization is necessary even when items of weaponry or armour are preserved (e.g. the Gorgon shield from Karkemish), in order to dismiss the hypothesis of their commercial provenance. 2) When trying to document the presence of Greek mercenaries in the East through artefacts discovered in the Aegean, criterion (a) is once again difficult to meet in the absence of clear written testimonies, as even military *orientalia* might have been brought through trade or through symbolical and religious mechanisms (e.g. Hdt. II, 159 – dedications of Oriental monarchs to panhellenic sanctuaries; yet there are ingenious discussions for particular objects or skeletal remains –



To limit our inquiry to this stage is equal to admitting that only the sources are responsible for the emergence of the exaggerations of the elitist theory and that researchers have simply processed that evidence in a neutral manner. In fact, in my opinion, the explanation for the proliferation of the elitist thesis rests more on the researchers than on the sources, and the whole debate is in fact historiographical rather than historical.

In the works on mercenaries published in the first decades after the Second World War, the term 'elites' is significantly missing. We find instead a marked preoccupation with the economic and demographic side of the subject. The archaic mercenary phenomenon is nothing other than the result of the relationship between the numerous population and the limited resources of the Aegean on the one side, and the economic abundance of the Oriental world on the other. The conclusions of an approach that uses such conceptual categories are naturally demographic: 'la société grecque d'alors compte des éléments humains en surnombre, auxquels son organisation et ses ressources du moment n'assurent pas les moyens de vivre par le travail habituel' (AYMARD 1967, 490).<sup>13</sup> This statement was made by André Aymard, noted member of the *Annales* School and a good friend of Fernand Braudel.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, Aymard makes no reference to the social status of mercenaries in the archaic period, only to the dimensions of the phenomenon, vaguely considered as being of a high level (AYMARD 1967, 489: 'nombreuses').

While Aymard and other adherents of the *Annales* School were applying their economic and demographic perspective even to the narrow topic of archaic mercenaries, Louis Gernet had just started to build a new, anthropological approach to the history of Ancient Greece. Gernet was the student of Émile Durkheim and a colleague of Marcel Mauss and Marcel Granet, and his approach was influenced by their preoccupations. After his death, in France, the anthropological approach was developed in a structuralist direction by his students, Jean-Pierre Vernant and Marcel Detienne. Meanwhile, in the Anglo-Saxon environment, the way opened by Gernet was taken by Sally C. Humphreys (1978), but in the direction of a more material social anthropology. The study of Ancient Greek social institutions also gained a strong anthropological dimension which can be easily perceived in some recent works of authors like Gabriel Herman (1987), Elke Stein-Hölkeskamp (1989) or Sara Forsdyke (2004).

Unlike the main classical current of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the anthropological direction proposes an essential change of perspective: Greek civilization is seen as a primitive culture, the traditional object of study in anthropology, and not as the starting point for Western civilization (DETIENNE 2008 [2002], 5-8). It is this significant change that also explains why historians inspired by social anthropology prefer the early stages of Greek civilization and especially the archaic age. They happily seek to discover primitive relics in the institutions of later periods, like the Classical and the Hellenistic, as Frazer and Lang once used to do (HUMPHREYS 1978, 83-84), and would enthusiastically plunge into the study of the social mechanisms of the Dark Age, if it were not for the disappointing scarcity of sources. Their marked inclination toward the archaic age is therefore natural, particularly since some

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LURAGHI 2006; AGELARAKIS 2014; AGELARAKIS 2015, 966-976). 3) When trying to document the activities of Greek mercenaries in the Aegean or in Sicily, even if criterion (a) is quite easily met in funerary or dedicatory contexts, (b) and (c) are still hard nuts to crack for archaeologists, so that written sources remain essential for distinguishing between citizen, allied or mercenary soldiers.

13 DUCREY 1971, 122: 'Les conditions économiques et démographiques [...] suffissent donc à expliquer ce surplus de main d'œuvre, de bras et de bouches inutiles.' A statement made with respect to Hellenistic Crete, being extended through a rhetorical interrogation to archaic and classical Arkadia.

14 Moreover, Aymard's obituary notice in *Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations* is signed by Braudel himself, who designates their friendship as 'la plus longue amitié de sa vie' (BRAUDEL 1965, 642).

other research directions, such as Oriental studies or identity studies, have led directly or indirectly to a more extensive exploration of this period.

The conceptual inventory taken from anthropology and the primitivist view of Greek civilization, together with the aforementioned situation of the sources, explains not only a preference for the archaic age as a chronological framework, but also an orientation towards the study of elites. Starting already with Gernet,<sup>15</sup> categories specific to social anthropology, such as gift exchange, ritualized friendship, *Männerbund*-type associations, and marriage alliances, all the more visible in the record of the elites, prevail in the historical discourse concerning archaic Greek society. The available sources, combined with these new methods and concepts, led to a change of focus towards the world of aristocratic elites and their complex relationships. Phenomena typical of the archaic age are reinterpreted from this perspective: Greek colonization is triggered neither by commercial expansion, nor by *stenochōria* – it is intra-aristocratic competition that becomes the main cause;<sup>16</sup> the emergence of the institutions and the laws of the *poleis* are explained through the idea that they were in fact non-violent means and rules to govern elite competition and to hamper the permanent concentration of power in the hands of only one aristocratic family (FORSDYKE 2004, 24; OSBORNE 2009 [1996], 194, 211–212);<sup>17</sup> and older views regarding the emergence, frequency and dimensions of the archaic mercenary phenomenon in the East are supplemented precisely by hypotheses about patterns of elite interaction (compare AUSTIN 1970, 15–16 to TRUNDLE 2004, 44, especially with regard to the 30,000 mercenaries of Apries).

The elitist thesis about archaic mercenaries appears as the result of this historical current that harnesses an anthropological perspective and categories first applied on a large scale by Gernet to ancient Greece. Although no references to the main works of this current are to be found in the studies of Bettalli or Kaplan, some conceptual categories promoted by the new tendency have been adopted by the defenders of the elitist thesis.<sup>18</sup> The absence of references to the works of Gernet or Humphreys is not surprising, as the key anthropological concepts and to a certain extent even the whole view they espoused have already been incorporated into mainstream research on the archaic period,<sup>19</sup> becoming assumptions that historians no longer find it necessary to define explicitly.<sup>20</sup> The dominant paradigm at the moment when the exponents of the elitist thesis wrote their works was much different from the one that had influenced Aymard or Ducrey immediately after the Second World War. Even without having any direct contact with the works that had brought to life the new *Zeitgeist*, the historians of the archaic mercenaries wrote under its influence and within its limits. Consequently, they

15 See 'Les nobles dans la Grèce antique', published in 1938, in *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale*, and 'Mariages de Tyrans', extracted from *Hommage à Lucien Febvre* (1954), republished in GERNET 1968, 333–343 and 344–359.

16 Cf. FORSDYKE 2004, 28: 'it is increasingly recognized that these developments were not a product of over population and land hunger; rather, individual adventurism in the pursuit of gain may lie behind them. [...] It is likely that the elites were on the forefront of the push for wealth and profits, since it was they who had both the incentive (status competition) and the resources to exploit the new territories and new opportunities for market trade.'

17 The economic dimension of the idea is developed in LYTTKENS 2006; HAWKE 2011, the most recent account of the emergence of written laws in the Greek cities, explores the same idea in this particular direction.

18 On the other hand, in TRUNDLE 2004, 18–19, 38, 57, 76, 105, 114, 143, 148–149, 159, 163, 169 n. 7, 170 n. 2, 172 n.7, there are references to HUMPHREYS 1979 and HERMAN 1987.

19 Cf. the general works on early Greece: OSBORNE 2009 [1996] and HALL 2013 [2007].

20 This particular shortcoming was specifically highlighted by Humphreys (1978, 22) in regard to the common historical and philological practice of ignoring social sciences in their research.

adopted a conceptual inventory that had not necessarily been subjected to definition and critical thinking.

In conclusion, if we employ the metaphor of the system and we conceive of the elitist thesis as the output of the system, the sources as the inputs and the researcher as the system itself, we see that the inputs do not generate specific outputs by themselves, but rather those outputs are conditioned by the system, which has been set to work in a certain manner. The metaphorical setting is represented in reality by the intellectual background of the researcher and his mindset: the whole series of assumptions from where he starts in the processes of selection, interpretation and reconstitution, of which he is often unaware and which he considers as granted *a priori*, so that they might be called ‘conceptual automatisms’. While these are not necessarily errors, but inherent human limitations, scholars should permanently try to avoid being entirely conditioned by them.

### SOME SOURCES WITHOUT THE CONCEPTUAL AUTOMATISMS

This section focuses not on obtaining a totally new output, but on re-evaluating some of the available inputs, without the influence of what I called before the system setting: the undefined and unverified assumptions of the elites as the only dynamic and competent factor in Greek society, or of military raids as being organized exclusively by nobles in their quest for glory.

The first remark I make is that there are more written sources that should be seriously considered in order to produce a more accurate account of the number and social condition of the Aegean mercenaries fighting in the East in the archaic age.

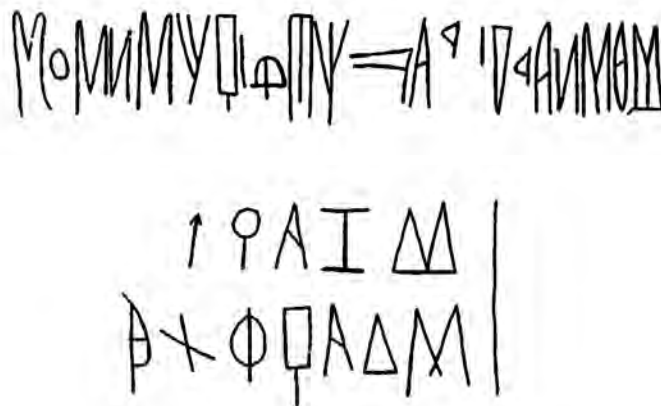
Thus, the well-known approximation of 30,000 Ionian and Karian mercenaries who helped Apries against Amasis (Hdt. II, 163; cf. Diod. Sic. I, 68.2–5), though questionable with regard to the exact numbers (BETTALI 1995, 71–72; AGELARAKIS 2015, 975), is nevertheless reinforced as a whole by the Elephantine Stela of Amasis. This document – of the highest importance, but not adequately considered by all classicists – mentions that all of Lower Egypt was ‘infested’ during the war by *ḥ3w-nbw* in their *kbnt* ships (cols. 3–4), and that they were defeated with difficulty by the new pharaoh (DARESSY 1900, 2–3; LLOYD 1988, 178–180; LEAHY 1988, 190; LADYNIN 2006). The equation between *ḥ3w-nbw* and the Aegeans was established a long time ago, without any consistent challenges (VERCOUTTER 1949, 174–181; LEAHY 1988, 190, n. 29). Moreover, the Egyptian document confirms another detail provided by Herodotos’ *Histories*, very significant for the scale of Aegean mercenary activity in Egypt: the enrolment of Greeks in the Saite navy (Hdt. II, 159.1; cf. indirectly Diod. Sic. I, 68.1).<sup>21</sup>

To these explicit sources, circumstantial pieces of evidence requiring minimal interpretation should be added. For instance, Hdt. II, 30 and Diod. Sic. I, 67.3–7, referring to the revolt of the autochthonous *machimoi*, disgruntled by the privileges granted by Psammetichos to the mercenaries, should be seen in the light of the theophoric statue of Neshor from Elephantine. Its inscription recalls how this commander of the garrison stationed at the southern gates of Egypt overcame the mutiny of his foreign warriors, Asiatics and *ḥ3w-nbw*, in the reign of Apries (Louvre A90, with MASPERO 1884, 88–90; SCHÄFER 1904, 155–162; BASSIR 2016). In my

21 Greek participation in Egyptian naval enterprises would be an additional argument for a great number of Greeks serving the pharaohs, no matter the type of ships used in the Saite fleet. Cf. VAN WEES 2013, 31. See also *supra*, n. 8.

opinion, two different events are recorded,<sup>22</sup> so that they demonstrate the important role played by mercenaries in Egypt's defence system: there are recurrent tensions between the strangers and the autochthonous population, of high intensity, which would not have occurred if the number of Ionians and Karians (as well as Asiatics) had not been significant.

A similar interpretation should also be applied to the inscriptions of Abu Simbel (MEIGGS – LEWIS 1988, 12–13, no. 7, with BERNARD – MASSON 1957, 3–20), which attest, on the one hand, to the ethnic segregation in the Egyptian army between the locals and 'those of another tongue' (cf. HAIDER 2001, 202–205, 215; BETTALLI 2013, 214–216, 218) and, on the other hand, the heterogeneous character of the Greek mercenary contingents. The warriors who inscribed their names on the legs of the colossal statues in Abu Simbel came from at least three different East Greek cities (Teos, Ialysos, Kolophon; **Fig. 1**), but there were also mercenaries from Karia (MASSON 1979; ADIEGO 2007, 115–119, 293–294; **Fig. 3**) and Phoenicia (SCHMITZ 2010), as well as Greeks who might have been born in Egypt (JEFFERY 1961, 355; VITTMANN 2003, 202). This points to the existence of much more complex recruiting mechanisms, more similar to those that contributed to the gathering of the Ten Thousand than to the typical image of chieftains who abandon their raids to enrol in the army of an oriental monarch.



**Fig. 3:** Karian graffiti E.As 3 and E.As 6 from Abu Simbel, reading pismašk | šarnwś | ýnsmsos and ρλαττ slayś ki (after ADIEGO 2007, 116, 118).

Finally, a passage in Jeremiah's prophecy of the destruction of Egypt reminds us that at the beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, the country was notorious in the Middle East for its mercenaries, compared by the prophet to 'fatted calves' (Jer. 46:21).

22 The details regarding the acting pharaohs, the places where the revolts started and the ethnicity of the mutineers are totally different. The only coincidence appears in the matter of the destination of those participating in the revolt. There is a tendency among modern scholars to doubt the authenticity of classical accounts regarding the revolt during Psammetichos' reign, starting from the comparison with the sequence described on Louvre A90. Cf. ASHERI *et al.* 2007, 260–261.



This short analysis on the Egyptian case is useful, although the Saite kingdom is acknowledged even by the supporters of the elitist thesis as an exception with respect to its great numbers of Greek mercenaries (BETTALLI 1995, 26; 2013, 219; cf. RAAFLAUB 2004, 207). It shows that by leaving aside undefined and unexplained internal assumptions, the range of sources and interpretations that can enrich our knowledge is considerably extended, even in those situations where the basic facts are a matter of consensus.

The same broadening of scrutiny should be applied to those cases where the elitist thesis states almost by default that archaic mercenaries were exclusively aristocrats and engaged only accidentally in mercenary activity. I propose for examination Babylonia and Persia.

For the Chaldean kingdom, there is already the well-known reference to Antimenidas, brother of Alkaios.<sup>23</sup> New pieces of information might be extracted from the tablets discovered in the palace of Nebuchadnezzar II in 1903. They registered the oil ratios distributed to 216 Karians who were certainly acting as guards. Oil ratios for another 2,000 Karians who most probably were exercising the same profession are also recorded (PEDERSEN 2005, 270). Further precious information might be expected from the huge numbers of clay tablets from Babylon which have not been published or excavated yet (PEDERSEN 2011, 50–66). Given the apparently strong association between Greeks and Karians in mercenary activities, this significant Karian presence might imply a broader Greek presence as well.

The set of evidence regarding the situation of Greek mercenaries in Persia should also be enlarged. For the whole context of the relations between the Greeks and the Persians, the notice of significant groups of Ionian and Karian workers contributing to the building of the palaces in Susa and Persepolis is very important (Dsf 30–34; *Persian Fortification Tablets*: PFT 0123; PFT 1123; PFT 1807; *Persian Treasury Tablets*: PTT 15; PTT 37; PTT 1962–1963; Unpublished: NN 1822; NN 2108; NN2261; NN2486. See HENKELMANN–STOPLER 2007, esp. 274–275, 302–304 – great numbers of mainly common workers – *kurtas* –; PERROT 2013, 429; FITZPATRICK–MCKINLEY 2015, 90–92), as well as the fact that the Persian generals are interested in recruiting soldiers among the recently conquered East Greeks (Hdt. I, 171.1). The high appreciation for Aegean soldiers is also demonstrated by the enrolment of some Karians who had previously served the Saite pharaohs, as some fiscal documents in Borsippa have shown (WAERZEGGERS 2006). All these sources that prove Persian openness towards the employment of Aegean soldiers, as well as the favourable disposition of Greeks towards serving the great power in the East, indirectly explain the enthusiasm shown by many Ionians and Aeolians for voluntarily taking part in Kambyses's campaign against Egypt.<sup>24</sup>

A similar approach is appropriate for the archaeological sources, as well. I start once again with Egypt, where the excavations of Petrie from Tell Defenneh have been counted for a long time as illustrative in the matter of mercenaries (PETRIE 1888, 47–96; cf. MALLETT 1893, 54–70; BETTALLI 1995, 63–64). Although strongly contested in the last decade,<sup>25</sup> the identification of

23 See n. 5 above. Although FANTALKIN – LITTLE 2016 rightly challenged most of the popular modern reconstructions of Antimenidas' deeds in the East, e.g. his participation in the sack of Ashkelon (95–97), the rejection (97–102) of the association between Antimenidas and the Babylonians operated in Strab. XIII, 2.3 = Alkaios Fr. 350 Lobel/Page is not particularly convincing: there are no solid grounds to think that Strabo's paraphrase or inference about Antimenidas fighting alongside the Babylonians is wrong.

24 Hdt. III, 25.7; III, 139.1. The fascination for Egypt, the target of the campaign, contributed a lot to the Microasiatic Greeks enthusiasm. The fragments are very useful for contextualizing the better known afflux of Greek mercenaries towards the Saite Egypt also, offering a glimpse of the attitude developed by employees toward the country where they were employed.

25 LECLÈRE 2007; LECLÈRE – SPENCER 2014. The latest researches gave serious arguments for the hypothesis that, more likely, the site at Tel Defenneh was an Egyptian frontier town, developed near an autochtho-



these complexes with the fortified encampment of Daphnae, followed by the estimate of its capacity at 20,000 soldiers, is still a key element of our intellectual construction of the Aegean mercenary phenomenon in the Saite kingdom.

But even if we admit the identification was wrong, we still have a solid proof for the high amplitude of the phenomenon: the remnants of the Karian necropolis near Memphis, one of the best pieces of evidence for the truth of the classical accounts regarding the *Karomemphitai* (Polyainos VII, 3; Aristagoras of Miletos *FGrHist* 608, F9 mentions the Karian – *Karikon* – and the Greek – *Hellēnikon* – quarters in Memphis). Even though only a few dozen funerary stelai of Karians buried in Memphis have been discovered until now, in my opinion it is highly probable that the necropolis consisted of a far larger number of tombs, either marked or not marked by funerary stelai.<sup>26</sup> Alongside the *graffiti* found across the entire territory of Egypt and even in Nubia, from Abydos to Buhen, and the offerings from several Egyptian sanctuaries which bear inscriptions in Karian, the funerary stelai of Saqqara are fundamental for the hypothesis that a large community of Karian mercenaries lived in Egypt, of such dimensions that an exclusively aristocratic participation should be rejected.<sup>27</sup> Although the evidence for Greek mercenaries is not as impressive, similar discoveries of stelai, *graffiti* and dedications allow a prudent generalization of the Ionians (VITTMANN 2003, 227–229, with regard to the Hellenomemphite necropolis).

The evidence from Egypt can be connected with other scraps of information from the Levant and Ionia. In the Levant, a number of settlements, some of them probably acting as fortifications and garrisons, provided East Greek potsherds and other signs of a consistent Greek presence (HAIDER 1996, 59–70; NIEMEIER 2001, 22–24; WENNING 2001; FANTALKIN 2015, 235–237, with discussion whether the employers were Levantines or Egyptians). In Ionia, archaeologists have already started to pay attention to the matter of identifying returning mercenaries in their excavations, with questionable, yet promising results at the moment (AGELARAKIS 2014, 362; AGELARAKIS 2015, 966–976, discussing a situation described in HÜR MÜZLÜ 2010, 92–96, 97–98, 100–108; 109–112; see also LURAGHI 2006 and GREAVES 2010, 87–89 for re-evaluations of temples' inventories).

It is imperative that we complement the inventory of archaeological sources that should be carefully examined, without any academic preconceptions, with those pieces of evidence which attest complex interactions between Greeks and Asiatics, even when there are no clear

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nous sanctuary. The Greek artefacts discovered at the site might be explained through the several times that Greek mercenaries passed by the sanctuary and the settlement.

- 26 EMERY 1970; EMERY 1971; MASSON 1978, vi–vii and RAY 1982, 154 show that the funerary stelai discovered at Saqqara in 1968–1970 had been reused as mere building materials for several later works from the Hellenistic period. The archaeological observations on the ground led H.S. Smith to state in the preface to Masson's book, where the stelai were thoroughly published, that the cemetery of the 'Karomemphite' colony 'must have been *systematically* looted of stelai' (MASSON 1978, vi – my emphasis). Besides these stelai, there are several more which made their way into Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, published in MASSON – YOYOTTE 1956, 1–10, 17–35, said to be from Memphis, Saqqara or the Serapeum of Memphis, as well as a stele found in 1910 during archaeological excavations in the nearby village of Abusir (MASSON 1978, 64, 91). The range and number of the findspots for these stelai support the image of a great cemetery, extensively looted in antiquity of its funerary markers. Furthermore, I agree with Kammerzell (1993, 178–179), who pleads both for a greater number of stelai, which were not preserved or not discovered by archaeologists, and for the idea that, besides the owners of the stelai – probably members of the elite, there were also many Karomemphitai who could not afford such social status markers.
- 27 Cf. VITTMANN 2001, 40–41. The corpus of Karian inscriptions from Egypt, gathered by ADIEGO 2007, has approximately 170 entries. Almost 50 more inscriptions identified by Ševeroškin, but unpublished, should be added to this corpus (ADIEGO 2007, 30–32).

signs of a mercenary presence. The case study of Cilicia and northern Syria is particularly useful. In this area, the Greek presence takes different forms, from the evidence for *apoikiai* at Kelenderis, Nagidos and Soloi, to objects that represent incidental encounters or mere imports, as in the case of Tyre (GATES 2010, 43–44). Charles Gates, one of the archaeologists whose career is tightly bound to the area, concludes (GATES 2010, 45):

The resulting picture, filled with many different situations, does not provide an easily understood context for the cultural exchanges that led to the Orientalizing Revolution and beyond. It reflects, however, the rich complexities of Greek interactions with peoples of established states.

Taking into consideration the written sources which attest frequent clashes in this area between the Assyrians and the Ionians (LANFRANCHI 2000, 13–31; ROLLINGER 2001, 237–243; KUHRT 2002, 18–20; DEZSŐ – VÉR 2013, 334–341), as well as certain representations such as that of a well integrated phalanx into an Oriental army, on the Amathus bowl (BM 123053, with MYRES 1933; BARNETT 1977; MARKOE 1985, 172–174; LURAGHI 2006, 36–38; HALE 2013, 183–184; BETTALLI 2013, 236–237), it might be possible as well to consider the mercenary phenomenon as one of the main forms of interaction between Greeks and Easterners on these shores of the Mediterranean.

As the testimonies discussed briefly above demonstrate, before we can render a verdict on the issue of the archaic Greek mercenary phenomenon and its characteristics in the Oriental world, in the Aegean or in Sicily, a more in-depth and comprehensive analysis of all the sources that can provide new clues on the matter is fundamental.

## FINAL OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Historical research conducted from a single point of view, determined by conceptual automatisms, leads to the exclusion or the swift dismissal of relevant sources and equally possible alternate interpretations. The final result is a sketchy image of a complex phenomenon, where some of the most important features are distorted and significant details are lost.

The elitist thesis regarding the archaic Greek mercenaries may be counted as an example of this unfortunate handling of evidence. Nevertheless, we should be aware that the opposite distortion may occur anytime: exploiting the fragmentary character of the sources and associating them without using the most reliable criteria, we risk constructing the false image of a swarm of Greek adventurers, pirates and mercenaries, mainly in the East (HALE 2013, esp. 185–187, an exaggeration of the perspective described in LURAGHI 2006 regarding the number of mercenaries and their impact on the Greek civilization), but possibly also in the West.

It is interesting and regrettable at the same time that the study of archaic Greek mercenaries, a relatively recent academic activity, encounters the same problems as the researches focused on similar and even overlapping phenomena, like colonization and trade expansion, did before. In these two cases, after similar wanderings, the ultimate result was the understanding of the necessity to clearly define, from the beginning, the concepts and the theoretical models which govern over the sources' selection and interpretation.

The following statement, expressed in 1984 by Benedetto Bravo (1984, 140, my emphasis; cf. DUPLOUY 2007, 57–58) in his polemic with Alfonso Mele regarding archaic trade, is particularly telling for our own situation:

Mais on ne devrait pas [...], comme on le fait d'habitude, parler des «nobles», des «aristocrates» de la Grèce archaïque sans indiquer ce qu'on entend par là, car la notion courante de noblesse, pour ce qui concerne la Grèce archaïque, ne repose que sur un consensus superficiel, qui est le produit, non pas d'une longue tradition de recherches critiques, mais d'*habitudes de pensée non réfléchies*.

Only by adopting premises like this one, which encourages a permanent awareness and critique of our own mindset, the historical reconstructions will better resemble the past phenomena they try to describe and explain. As such, the historical discourse would be more accurate, more detailed and would benefit from a larger series of nuances. We should take as a good example Dominguez's observations on the role elites played in the Greek colonization of the Mediterranean – that of pioneers and mobilizing factors, but certainly not that of unique participants. The most consistent gains, both symbolic and material, emerged when enterprising elites mobilized in their projects the masses, usually of heterogeneous origin and united only by circumstance (DOMINGUEZ 2011, 198–201).

An aspiration towards conceptual clarity and transparency should guide research on the archaic mercenary phenomenon. The historian, the archaeologist and the anthropologist should always ask themselves who the elites they are writing about were in fact and how those elites were embedded in their societies. We should be sensible to the warnings provided by studies of Greek colonization: after all, colonization and mercenaries are two sides of the same coin.<sup>28</sup> A better nuanced and more balanced reconstruction, like that proposed by Dominguez for colonization, might be also the most suitable in the case of archaic mercenaries. Aristocratic adventurers and pirates might have been only at the origin of the phenomenon: later, in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, if not even in the middle of the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC, the flow of mercenaries turned into a massive enterprise that even needed specialized recruiters, like Eurybatos of Ephesos, who was acting on behalf of Kroisos.<sup>29</sup>

In the end, I propose that a fundamental observation with regard to the visibility of mercenaries in archaeology and history, as well as the best argument for a cautious approach to the topic, emerges through a simple thought experiment: How much would we have known about the Ten Thousand if Xenophon's account had not been written?

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28 See the expeditions of Dorieus and his followers (Hdt. V, 42–48), as well as the attempt of the Ten Thousand to found a colony (Xen., *Anab.* V, 6.15–19). The resemblance between the two phenomena is highlighted by several modern researchers: AYMARD 1967, 490; AUSTIN 1970, 18–19; LLOYD 1975a, 13; BRESSON 1980, 317–318; DUCREY 1985, 126; RAAFLAUB 2004, 207 etc.  
29 Diod. Sic. IX, 31.3. Cf. Hdt. I, 77, 81–82.1. It seems that using Greek recruiters was a well enrooted tradition in Lydia: the emergence of Greek contingents in Egypt for the use of the Saites might be more related to the action of Gyges of Lydia (BM 91026 – the Rassam Cylinder) than to the accidental recruiting of marauders by Psammetichos I, as Hdt. II, 152 is suggesting (cf. LLOYD 1975a, 14–16; BETTALLI 1995, 71). I owe thanks to J. Bouzek for his inspiring suggestions on recruiters. On the spectacular transformations of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, which also affects the employment of foreign warriors, see VAN WEES 2013, 25–28.

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