

FLEET DISPATCHES IN FOURTH-CENTURY BC ATHENS¹

By Vincent Gabrielsen

Summary: In his *First Philippic*, Demosthenes ranks the Athenian navy as inferior to Philip II's Macedonian navy primarily because of its unpreparedness and dilatory fleet dispatch procedures. In accord with this assessment, a recent paper makes particularly the quarrels and lawsuits between trierarchs the causes of delayed expeditions and the poor performance of the Athenian navy in the fourth century. The present paper scrutinizes both of these claims. It concludes that a larger body of evidence contradicts Demosthenes' assessment and shows the claims of the recent paper to lack empirical support.

I

Modern assessments of Athens' naval effectiveness in the fourth century often refer to a passage from Demosthenes' *First Philippic*. Deploing the unpreparedness of Athens' navy and its tardiness in sailing out to check Macedonian expansion in 351/0 BC, Demosthenes says the following:

ἐν δὲ τοῖς περὶ τοῦ πολέμου καὶ τῇ τούτου παρασκευῇ ἄτακτα, ἀδιόρθωτα, ἀόρισθ' ἅπαντα. τοιγαροῦν ἅμ' ἀκηκόαμέν τι καὶ τριηράρχους καθίσταμεν καὶ τούτοις ἀντιδόσεις ποιοῦμεθα καὶ περὶ χρημάτων πόρου σκοποῦμεν, καὶ μετὰ ταῦτ' ἐμβαίνειν τοὺς μετοίκους ἔδοξε καὶ τοὺς χωρὶς οἰκοῦντας, εἴτ' αὐτοὺς πάλιν, εἴτ' ἀντεμβιβάζειν, εἴτ' ἐν ὅσῳ ταῦτα μέλλεται, προαπόλωλεν τὸ ἐφ' ὃ ἂν ἐκπλέωμεν.

However, in what pertains to war and its preparation everything is disorderly, irremediable, ill-defined. Consequently, we wait till we

1 I would like to thank the editors for offering me the opportunity to honour Mogens' memory with a contribution to this memorial volume. Special thanks are due to Adam Schwartz for referring me to works on the military review. Finally, I thank the anonymous peer reviewer for offering me several useful suggestions.

have heard some piece of news, and then we appoint trierarchs and deal with the *antidosis*-challenges between them, and we deliberate over sources of revenue, and next we resolve to man the fleet with resident aliens and slaves living apart from their masters, then with citizens again, then to embark the former groups instead, then while we thus delay, the object of our launching a fleet is lost.²

This chaotic situation has in a previous passage been contrasted to the orderly, well-funded and meticulously organized festivals of the Panathenaea and the Dionysia, the costs and organization of which were taken care of by timely appointed *choregoi* and other liturgists (Dem. 4.35-36). But the main contrast this passage seeks to highlight is between, on the one hand, the weakness of the Athenian navy, and on the other hand, the superior effectiveness of Philip II's Macedonian navy.

Demosthenes was not unbiased. He had a clear personal interest to magnify the threat posed by Philip II and hence also the effectiveness of the Macedonian king's navy.³ Moreover, in the same speech, he was proposing a naval reform that would enable the Athenians to deal with the alleged Macedonian superiority at sea (4.16-22). He therefore had an interest to present the current naval system, which had been introduced by Periander's reform of 358/7, as highly dysfunctional. Besides, his previous naval reform proposal of 354 (Dem. 14.16-30) had been turned down by the Athenians. Nevertheless, his statements still carry weight with scholarship.

Demosthenes' assessment of Athens' navy prompted Friedrich Blass in 1877 to pronounce that 'Der Mangel an Ordnung und Zucht im athenischen Seewesen wird uns jedenfalls durch diese Rede sehr grell gezeigt'; this pronouncement has adherents.⁴ A most recent one is David Pritchard, who holds that the poor performance of the fourth-century

2 Dem. 4.36-37, revised Loeb Classical Library translation. Cf. Dem. 8.10-11. For the date: MacDowell 2009: 210-18; Worthington 2013: 116-22. In the following, all dates are BC. The *antidosis* (exchange of properties) was the procedure that a newly appointed liturgist could use for becoming exempt from the service: see Gabrielsen 1987 and p. 90 below. For a slightly different reconstruction of the procedure: Christ 1990.

3 See, e.g., Worthington 2026: 239-40.

4 Blass 1877: 527; Mossé 1962: 331; MacDowell 2009: 216-17; Nash 2024: 192-98.

navy until ca. 340 owed to the great delays in dispatching fleets.⁵ Those to blame for the delays were, according to Pritchard, the trierarchs. For, ever eager to be exempt from a financially onerous service, members of the trierarchic class, just before fleets were to depart, became embroiled in time-consuming lawcourt disputes, notably those arising from *antidosis*-challenges. With Demosthenes' reform of the trierarchy in 340, Pritchard holds, all this changed: costs became more equitably distributed among trierarchs; *antidosis*-challenges between them became less frequent; more men were willing to serve as trireme captains and thus the navy regained its fifth-century effectiveness.

Pritchard's view squares with logic. But is it also correct? In this contribution, the passage from Demosthenes' *First Philippic* (Dem. 4.36-37) and the latest interpretation of it are put to test. Unavoidably, my approach is going to take a critical tone, perhaps at times it will be bordering the 'politely quarrelsome'. Even so, that would almost certainly have been pleasing to Mogens, to whom I dedicate this paper in respectful memory.

II

It seems useful initially to clarify an important issue: how did the Athenians go about it when they dispatched fleets in the fourth century? A reasonably reliable reconstruction of the procedure can be given by piecing together the information provided by several sources, most of them from the fourth century. Richest in detail is a decree of 325/4 cited in the naval record IG II² 1629, lines 165-271, which can therefore serve as the centrepiece of our reconstruction.⁶ The decree orders the establishment of an Athenian colony somewhere in the Adriatic, which is to function as a naval station and as a grain trade hub. Henceforward, it is referred to as the colonizing decree.

5 Pritchard 2026: 77-81. For the opposite view: Cawkwell 1984; Gabrielsen 2026.

6 Republished as IG II³ 1 370. See also Rhodes-Osborne, *GHI* no. 100. The decree cited in the naval record is a summary of the original decree. On the inscriptions referred to here as the naval records, see Gabrielsen 2013: 63, with n. 2.

All fleet dispatches (*apostoloi*) were authorized by a decree of the Assembly.⁷ Besides stating the purpose or purposes of the expedition, such an enactment usually specified the number, classes and types of ships to be launched;⁸ the way they were to be manned;⁹ and how the expedition was to be funded.¹⁰

The next steps of the procedure required that all the administrative bodies assisting the dispatch were in readiness at the navy's Headquarters, the dockyards (*neoria*) at the three war harbours of the Piraeus: Kantharos, Zea and Mounichia.¹¹ The daily business there was taken care of by the Superintendents of the Dockyards (*epimeletai ton neorion*).¹² These officials collaborated closely with the ad hoc elected board of ten Dispatchers of Naval Expeditious (*apostoleis*),¹³ and after 358/7 also with the *epimeletai* of the twenty trierarchic symmories, also called 'the Twenty'.¹⁴

7 IG II² 1629.165-69: [Ψήφισ]μα καθ' ὃ παρέλαβε [Μιλτ]ιάδης τὰς τριή[ρεις] καὶ τετρήρεις [καὶ τ]ριακοντόρους καὶ τὰ σκεύη. See further [Dem.] 50.4 (referring to 362): 'Ἐβδόμη γάρ φθίνοντος μεταγεινιῶνος μηνὸς ἐπὶ Μόλωνος ἄρχοντος (...) ἐψηφίσασθε τὰς ναῦς καθέλκειν τοὺς τριηράρχους. [Dem.] 17.20 (referring to 338): ἐψηφίσασθε τριήρεις ἑκατὸν πληροῦν καὶ καθέλκειν εὐθύς. See also Dem. 3.4; [Dem.] 47.20; [Dem.] 51.4; IG II² 1623. 237-41; 1628.37-39. The key words are καθέλκειν (sc. ναῦς) and ἔκπλους (sc. τριήρων).

8 From the 360s, all triremes were divided into four classes according to their qualities, in ascending order: 'third', 'second', 'first' and 'select', the latter called also 'fast sailing', *tachynautousai* (Gabrielsen 2013: 65). Moreover, from 330/29 the fleet included quadriremes (*tetrereis*), and from 325/4 quinquereemes (*pentereis*) and thirty-oared ships (*triaconters*). Thus, a decree authorizing an expedition specified how many warships of a certain type and of a certain class were to be launched.

9 Through use of conscription: e.g., Dem. 3.4 (embarkation of the age-classes 20-45). Or by hiring naval labour: e.g., [Dem.] 50. 7. See Gabrielsen (forthcoming). There is not a single text to corroborate Demosthenes' statements about the Athenians' indecisiveness regarding how their warships were to be manned.

10 Through an *eisphora*-tax levy, from the Military Fund (*stratitotika*), from allied contributions (*syntaxeis*) or from a combination thereof: see Brun 1983.

11 On the harbour installations, see Lovén et al. 2011-2021.

12 See, e.g., IG II² 1611.1-4; 1629.178-183; [Dem.] 47.21.

13 [Dem.] 47.26-27, 33. The colonizing decree shows that the ten citizens serving as *apostoleis* were appointed on the occasion of the expedition: τοὺς δὲ αἰρεθέντας ἐπιμελεῖσθαι τοῦ ἀποστόλου (lines 224-226).

14 [Dem.] 47.21-22, 24: ἐπιμεληταὶ οἱ ἐν ταῖς συμμορίαις. IG II² 1623.155: οἱ εἴκοσιν (the Twenty). See also IG II² 1617.29-67.

In the colonizing decree, for instance, the *epimeletai* of the dockyards are instructed to hand over to the trierarchs the ships of the expeditionary force and their equipment, while the *apostoleis* seem to have performed various tasks in connection with getting the fleet ready for dispatch. One of their tasks was to assist trierarchs about to sail in recovering public equipment from the trierarchs previously in charge of their ships.¹⁵

Heading the entire administrative apparatus was the Council of the Five Hundred (*boule*), a body with extensive powers over the navy.¹⁶ Like the Assembly, it could authorize the issuing of hulls and their equipment to trierarchs.¹⁷ According to the colonizing decree, the *boule* is to direct also the work of the *apostoleis* (lines 251-258). And the *prytaneis* are ordered to make the ‘mole’ (*choma*, on which see below) the *boule*’s seat so as “to deal continuously with matters relating to the fleet’s dispatch until its departure” (τοὺς δὲ πρυτάνεις ποεῖν βουλῆς ἔδραν ἐπὶ χώματι περὶ τοῦ ἀποστόλου συνεχῶς, ἕως ἂν ὁ ἀπόστολος γένηται: lines 247-251). The *boule* (and the *prytaneis*) had to be on duty on the spot during the preparation process. Fifth-century evidence indicates the longevity of some of these procedures.¹⁸ Moreover, the *boule* is to punish disobedient trierarchs (lines 242-247) and has the right to pass such additional enactments as there might be needed, provided these do not nullify the Assembly’s decisions. In fact, the *boule* of the colonizing expedition did make use of that right: by a separate decree it enlarged the expeditionary force with the addition of the quadrireme *Eueteria*, a ship built in 328/7 (lines 272-278).

The board of ten generals was responsible for trierarchic appointments.¹⁹ In the 320s, however, that responsibility fell on only one general, the *strategos* over the symmories (*strategos epi tas symmorias*), who, according to a contemporary account, “makes a roster of the trierarchs

15 [Dem.] 47.33. See also [Dem.] 50.10.

16 Rhodes 1972: 113-22.

17 Ships: *IG II*² 1623.200-1; 1629.272-73. Equipment: *IG II*² 1609.111; 1629.1135-36.

18 See the second decree for Methone: Meiggs-Lewis, *GHI* 65, lines 52-53 (ca. 430): ἐπειδὴν ἐσέλ[θει ἐ π]ρυ[ταν]εῖα ἐ δευτ[έρα] μετὰ τὰς ἐν τῷ νεορίῳ ἔ[δρας]. Cf. Rhodes 1972: 118.

19 *IG II*² 1623.153-56. On the appointment procedures: Gabrielsen 1994: 68-78.

about to serve, deals with *antidosis*-challenges among them and introduces to court the suits (*diadikasiai*) concerning them”.²⁰ The colonizing decree confirms this and specifies that this *strategos* is to conduct his duties in collaboration with the *thesmothetai* and indirectly with the treasurers of the Goddess (lines 205-217). Finally, the same decree makes the *euthynos* and the *paredroi* stand as guarantors for unpaid fines owed by offenders, that is, those violating the decree’s provisions (lines 238-242).

Reading now Dem. 4.36-37 against this background, it becomes hard to recognize the picture Demosthenes’ paints of everything being “disorderly, irremediable and ill-defined”. Quite the contrary, one must say, and the evidence supporting this comes from before as well as after 340, the year which according to Pritchard marks a crucial change. In sum, Athens does not seem to have been bedevilled by a dysfunctional naval organization in the fourth century. Could the supposed failure then lie in the procedures? These can be summarized, in the stages they occurred, as follows.

- (a) appointment of trierarchs and treatment of claims to exemption among their group (*skepseis* or *diadikasiai*);²¹
- (b) distribution by the *epimeletai* of the dockyards of hulls and equipment to those de facto serving as trierarchs;
- (c) provision of ships with complements (conscripts and/or hired crews); and
- (d) launching of the ships (τὰς ναῦς καθέλκειν), after which the trierarchs had to “bring them round to the mole” (παρακομίζειν

20 [Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 61.1; *IG II²* 1629.204-213.

21 *Skepseis* and *diadikasiai* are used interchangeably to refer to three kinds of suits: (a) those arising in connection with an *antidosis*-challenge (e.g., Dem. 28.16-17 with Dem. 30.15-17. Cf. Gabrielsen 1987; Christ 1990); (b) those concerning claims to exemption from service on other grounds ([Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 56.3 and 61.12. Cf. Rhodes 1981: 624-25, 679); and (c) those deciding the issue of culpability for lost or damaged naval material (*IG II²* 1629.746-749; 1631.343-347. Cf. Gabrielsen 1994: 138-39, 160). In the colonizing decree, the *thesmothetai* are instructed to provide 201 jurors for two law-court meetings (*skepseis*), one on the 2nd the other on the 5th of the month Mounichion. On these days the *strategos* over the symmories is to introduce the suits concerning the trierarchs of the expeditionary force (lines 204-17). Here, as also in a fifth-century text ([Xen.] *Ath. pol.* 3.4), *skepseis* probably refers to (a) and (b) above.

ἐπὶ τὸ χῶμα)²² for undergoing trials (ἀναπείρωσις νεῶν)²³ and inspection (ἐξέτασις)²⁴ before the ships can be declared ready for the expedition (παρασκευασμένοι εἰς πλοῦν).²⁵

Postponing discussion of claims to exemption in (a) to section III, the remaining stages normally did not cause delays. As regards (b), although trierarchs are often seen to haggle (between them and with naval officials) over publicly owned ship's equipment, many owned and used their private sets.²⁶ And the sole known case in which the tenacious refusal of a trierarch to surrender public equipment to his successor threatened the timely dispatch of a fleet – that of the overly recalcitrant Theophemos in [Dem.] 47.20 *passim* – seems to be an aberration.²⁷ As regards (c), Athens seldom experienced problems in recruiting naval manpower, and even though conscription might sometimes fail to produce the desirable turnout, as it did in 362, there was a well-supplied and well-functioning naval labour market in the Piraeus most of the time.²⁸ Desertion during campaigns was the real problem. Still, one might insist that the procedure sketched above does look like being laborious and time-consuming. However, caution is advisable. For, there is a set of indications to the effect that the Athenians were mindful of the possible pitfalls of their dispatch procedures and thus took measures to deal with the matter accordingly.

22 [Dem.] 50.6; *IG* II² 1629.179-87. [Dem.] 51.4 has περιορμίζειν ('anchor around') instead of παρακομίζειν. Lines 10-11 of the fifth-century decree *IG* I³ 153 (440-425) are restored to provide that no less than one hundred men shall be present in the act of περι[ορμίζειν]. The *choma* was an artificial mole perhaps in the harbour of Mounichia: Morrison et al. 2000: 121.

23 [Dem.] 51.5.

24 *IG* II² 505.17-20: εἰς τε τὴν πρώτην ἐξέτ[α]σιν, that is, the first in a succession of reviews during dispatches; for the procedure, see also Thuc. 6.42.1; Isoc. 7.82; [Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 31.2. In military contexts, the word *exetasmós* is also used: *Hell. Oxy.* D 15.1. (Bartoletti); Diod. Sic. 11.3.7; Dinsmoor 1954: 287, no. 182 (271/0), line 16. See Cawkwell 1972: 262, n. 4.

25 *IG* II² 1629.188-90.

26 See the cases discussed in Gabrielsen 2026: 104-6.

27 For this case, see Gabrielsen 1994: 164-66.

28 [Dem.] 50.6-7 with Gabrielsen (forthcoming).

One indication consists of a nearly standard provision in resolutions authorizing fleet dispatches: that the force is dispatched ‘speedily’ (*diatachous*)²⁹ or ‘immediately’ (*euthys*).³⁰ For example, the colonizing decree is introduced with the following statement: “So that the matters decided by the *demos* are implemented as speedily as possible (*dia ten tachisten*)” (lines 173-175). That this was not just a noble intention is confirmed by several elements of the same resolution. Firstly, a tight schedule is applied throughout: suits concerning trierarchic exemptions (*skepseis*) are to take place on the 2nd and 5th of the month Mounichion (lines 204-213), while the trierarchs are to present their ships at ‘the mole’ for inspection before the 10th of the same month (lines 183-190), which implies that the force left shortly after. Also, the continuous presence of the *boule* and the *prytaneis* at that inspection site is indicative of the seriousness with which the specification ‘speedily’ was taken.

Secondly, rewards and punishment are systematically used to induce trierarchs and officials to get the fleet under way as speedily as possible. Anyone who does not act in accordance with the colonizing decree is to be fined 10,000 drachmas, which will be consecrated to the goddess Athena (i.e., defaulters will stand directly as debtors to the goddess); the *euthynos* and the *paredroi* are made responsible that these fines are paid, otherwise they themselves shall be fined 10,000 drachmas (lines 233-242). To underline once more that defiance is considered a major offense, the Athenians round off the colonizing decree with the statement “all of the above concern the protection of the territory” (*phylaken tes choras*: lines 270-271).³¹ As a reward for completing their supervisory tasks satisfactorily, on the other hand, the *boule* and the *prytaneis* are to be crowned with a gold wreath worth 1,000 drachmas (lines 258-263).

In the same spirit, and in pursuance of the same purpose, the Athenians seem to have turned the preparation of fleets (*paraskeue*) into a prize-winning contest (*agon*). As [Dem.] 51 (from after 361) shows, the first trierarch to bring his ships to the mole for inspection and trials, and whose ship was found to be properly prepared, was awarded an honorific

29 [Dem.] 50.6: ἐψηφίσασθε (...) καὶ διὰ τάχους τὸν ἀπόστολον ποιεῖσθαι. [Dem.] 47.20: ἔκπλους ὧν τριήρων καὶ βοήθεια ἀποστελλομένη δια τάχους, cf. 50.

30 [Dem.] 17.20: ἐψηφίσασθε (...) καὶ κατέλκειν εὐθύς. Cf. Thuc. 6.50.2.

31 For *chora* in the sense ‘territory’, see Hansen 2006: 57-58.

wreath (4-5, 7, 17). In contrast, those failing to do so on the date set by the authorities, were to be set in fetters for being surrendered to a court of law (4-7, 17). Similarly, the colonizing decree ordains that “the trierarch who is the first to bring his ship to the mole is to be crowned by the *demos* with a gold wreath worth 500 drachmas, the one coming second with a wreath worth 300 drachmas and the one coming third with one worth [200] drachmas”. The awards of wreaths are – as an extra honour – to be proclaimed by the herald of the *boule* at the contests during the Thargelia festival. These wreaths are said to make visible the ‘love of honour’ (*philotimia*) which the recipients show towards the *demos* (lines 190-204). Thus were the winners in that contest commended. As for the losers (those failing to keep the dispatch schedule), the punishment was, as we saw, a fine of 10,000 drachmas, an amount twice as much as the cost of an expensive trierarchy (see below p. 89-90). Apparently, to sum up, these measures purported to instil into the trierarchs strong motives to have their ships ready for dispatch at, or indeed even before, the appointed date. Yet, these measures had a no less important effect: properly prepared ships meant ships which, besides having already been rated according to their capabilities, were fully manned,³² fully equipped and in good performing condition.

How does Philip’s navy in 351/0 then fare in a comparison with a navy prepared for dispatch in this way and by such an administrative apparatus? Poorly, indeed. In a recent paper reassessing the strength of Macedonian naval power and warfare in the period 353-340, Joseph Roisman compellingly revises earlier optimistic assessments. Roisman’s critical appraisal of the evidence concludes that, though the Macedonian king did command naval resources, “there was little in Philip’s naval force that would have made him proud”.³³ The Macedonian navy of that period performed well against single ships, non-military vessels and at times against pirates, but when it came to regular naval battle against a capable opponent, Philip’s favourite tactic was evasion. It was only after 338 that

32 [Dem.] 51.17 indicates that to pass the inspection and win the prize, a ship had not only to be fully manned, but also to be manned with its own oarsmen: τοὺς ναῦτας (...) οἰκεῖους εἶναι τῆς τριήρους τῆς ληψομένης τὸν στέφανον.

33 Roisman 2004, quote from p. 88. Earlier assessments: Hauben 1975: 59; Hammond 1992: 35.

Philip could claim maritime hegemony, though he may not actually have had it.³⁴

Still, one may ask: could it be that, as Demosthenes implies at Dem. 4.36-37, the Macedonian navy of 351 outcompeted the Athenian navy in being faster to prepare and dispatch? It is very doubtful. In this area, Athens had the clear – but seldom appreciated – advantage of conducting its naval mobilization all at once at *one* naval facility compound where its sizeable fleet was based in its entirety:³⁵ the Piraeus Headquarters. That mobilization, moreover, was routinely carried out by one administrative apparatus and according to a single set of rules. Philip's navy lacked that advantage. Macedonian fleets were mobilized by assembling such modest naval contingents as had been prepared locally by several port towns under Philip's control in Macedonia and Thessaly, particularly Amphipolis, Pagasae, Pydna and Methone.³⁶ We can of course not exclude that these and further places used preparation procedures and protocols similar to those of Athens.³⁷ Yet, even if they did, their geographical disparity would still have put them in an inferior position to a navy that was kept unified and under one administrative roof. Demosthenes' implication, we must conclude, is distorting.

III

What about Pritchard's view that until 340 naval expeditions were often delayed because relatively many wealthy Athenians tried to avoid trierarchic service? Do our sources show that time-consuming *antidosia*-challenges and lawcourt disputes between trierarchs habitually delayed Athenian fleets? I answer these questions by way of treating briefly three issues.

34 Roisman 2024: 98.

35 In 353/2, Athens possessed 349 triremes: IG II² 1613.284-92.

36 De Souza 2007: 361.

37 Grzybek 2008: 72, no. 2 (116-81 BC), line 9: ἀποδείξει τὰν ναῶν attests to the use of the naval review/inspection procedure in Hellenistic Rhodes.

1. Manpower shortages and their effects

That some wealthy Athenians tried to avoid trierarchic service is, as Matthew Christ's seminal study demonstrates, a well-documented phenomenon (Christ 2006: 143-204). Though equally well-documented is the presence of citizens who, whether out of patriotism or self-interest, undertook trierarchies voluntarily;³⁸ who waved aside their right to temporary exemption from the obligation;³⁹ and who spent on a service more wealth and personal labour than they were obliged to do by law.⁴⁰ To promote voluntarism, the Athenians adopted several measures over time. Nearly every single known reform of the institution of the trierarchy – from the introduction of the syntrierarchy in ca. 407 through to Periander's law of 358/7 and Demosthenes' law of 340 – contained its own package of generous concessions to the trierarchic class.⁴¹ A most conspicuous concession consisted of Athens' willingness to tolerate massive naval debts that remained overdue for a long time, thus showing an astonishing degree of leniency towards these public debtors.⁴² At a minimum, all this suggests that Pritchard's equation 'heavy expense = evasion of the obligation' is overly simplistic.

That said, however, there is no denying that in certain periods Athens did experience difficulties in recruiting enough warship captains for its fleets. Especially so after the introduction of the syntrierarchy in ca. 407, as this reform created the need for at least twice as many individuals as there were active ships.⁴³ Elsewhere, I have adduced epigraphic evidence to show that in some years a considerable number of Athenian triremes remained 'unallotted' (*anepiklerotos*) to a trierarch throughout the year, most probably because of manpower shortages.⁴⁴ This, however, was confined to certain periods of time, broadly the 370s and 360s.⁴⁵ With the introduction of the twenty trierarchic symmories by Periander's law of

38 Gabrielsen 1994: 48, 59-60, 199-200.

39 E.g., [Dem.] 50.8-9.

40 E.g., Lys. 21.5.

41 On these reforms, see Gabrielsen 1994: 173-217.

42 The documentation is laid out in Gabrielsen 1994: 146-69.

43 Gabrielsen 1994: 178-80.

44 Gabrielsen 1994: 80-82, 180.

45 Documented by the naval records *IG II*² 1604-1610.

358/7, the ships were no longer allotted to individuals but to the symmories, which, according to the same law, were manned by twelve hundred trierarchs. Nevertheless, the occasional occurrence of manpower shortages in the 370s and 360s is not in doubt.

The crucial question is, though, whether these shortages, as Pritchard holds,⁴⁶ had a negative impact on Athens' sea power. It does not seem so. In the naval record of 378/7 over half of the fleet had to remain unallotted "because of unavailability of single trierarchs or syntrierarchs to take charge of them".⁴⁷ And yet in precisely that year Athens enhanced again its power considerably by becoming the leader of a new League, the Second Athenian League;⁴⁸ and in 376, Chabrias carried out a successful naval campaign which included the defeat of the Spartan fleet at Naxos.⁴⁹ Again, the naval record of 373 lists twenty unallotted triremes, which is a little less than one-fourth of the effective force.⁵⁰ But obviously this was not an obstacle at all to Athens' launching, in the same year, a force of sixty ships captained by sixty trierarchs, which under Timotheos' command was sent to a grand expedition around the Peloponnese and thence to the Ionian Sea.⁵¹ One is thus prompted to infer that, in these cases at least, manpower recruitment problems, even though real enough, did not have a negative effect on what Athens could do as a sea power. Paradoxical? Perhaps. But a fact, nonetheless.

2. *The heaviness of financial burdens*

Next, we must deal with the intricate question of costs: how burdensome was the trierarchy in the fourth century? In Pritchard's view, the financial burdens would have put a real strain on many an elite Athenian.⁵² For, compared to the fifth century, it is held, there were simply fewer citizens/properties to finance a still substantial amount of naval activity.

46 Pritchard 2026: 78-79.

47 IG II² 1604, quote from Gabrielsen 1994: 180.

48 Rhodes-Osborne, *GHI* no. 22 (charter of the new league); Cargill 1981.

49 Xen. *Hell.* 5.4.60-61; Diod. Sic. 15.34.35.

50 IG II² 1607-08. Cf. Gabrielsen 1994: 180.

51 Xen. *Hell.* 6.2.11-14; Diod. Sic. 15.47.2-7; Dem. 49.11-12.

52 Pritchard 2026: 80 with notes 143, 144.

Indeed, the trierarchy was indisputably the costliest liturgy. However, once again caution is warranted.

A persistent feature is that the operational costs – which sometimes are mistakenly perceived as the total trierarchic costs – varied markedly. Whereas one individual, for example, spent a yearly average of 2,666 dr. for three years' continuous service as sole trierarch (Lys. 19. 29, 42), another sole trierarch paid the yearly average of 5,142 dr. for seven years' continuous service (Lys. 21.2); both individuals, we should note, had disregarded their right to respite of one (or two) years. Syntrierarchies were of course meant to be and sometimes were cheaper than sole trierarchies, but variation existed with these as well: compared to the 2,000 dr. paid for one syntrierarchy (Dem. 21.80), the 2,400 dr. paid for another (Lys. 32. 24, 27) may have been considered as belonging to the high end of the spectrum. And as the case of Apollodoros in [Dem.] 50 (*Against Polycles*) demonstrates, personal ambition, or excessive voluntarism, could easily push the limit of lavishness to still higher levels; Apollodoros' costly service, too, was a syntrierarchy (ibid. 40, 58). Not infrequently, on top of the operational expenses came the expenses accruing from a trierarch's responsibility to compensate for damaged or lost hulls and/or their equipment. When it occurred, such expenditure could range from moderate to (very) sizeable, depending on the circumstances. The basic compensatory rates were in themselves substantial: 5,000 dr. per hull, 2,169 dr. per set of equipment.⁵³ To exemplify 'sizeable', I cite here the amount which an individual was asked to pay in compensatory fines incurred over a period of fifteen years: 34,923 dr.⁵⁴

Cost variation, finally, became even more ordinary as the habit of leasing a trierarchy out to naval contractors (*misthosis trierarchias*) became widespread (further on this below). Newly appointed trierarchs, we are told, were wont to seek out those contractors who were willing to take over their active part of service for the smallest price possible ([Dem.] 51.7). A pair of syntrierarchs paid their contractor(s) 4,000 dr. (Dem. 21.80). In contrast, as a sole trierarch Meidias paid his contractor 6,000 dr. (Dem. 21.155).

53 Gabrielsen 1994: 139, 152-53.

54 These expenses were incurred by Konon Timotheou Anaphlystios: Gabrielsen 1994: 222.

Given such a diversification in expenditure, one must inevitably ask: what exactly was it that put a strain on many an elite Athenian? Was it the 2,000 dr. for a syntrierarchy, or the 5,142 dr. for a sole trierarchy, or again the far higher sums that included compensations of naval material? Additionally, how do we decide whether those supposedly being strained were ‘many’? Lastly – and irrespective of the answers one gives to these questions – one ought to consider seriously the rival and very plausible view that fourth-century liturgical expenditure actually boosted the private economy of liturgists and the economy of Athens: to obtain the surplus with which to cover their liturgical expenses, the Athenian propertied class tended to increase considerably their production of marketable agricultural goods thereby making themselves and Athens richer.⁵⁵ This is of course not to say that there were not wealthy citizens who abhorred trierarchic service and its cost. But it is to say that contemporary generalizations about the tendency of liturgical spending to ruin the Athenian upper-class citizens,⁵⁶ which previous scholarship accepted as credible,⁵⁷ likely represent exaggerated, partisan views. In sum, the picture is more variegated than Pritchard envisages it to be.

3. Legal disputes

As mentioned above (p. 78 and note 2), a newly appointed trierarch who pleaded financial inability to discharge the service had the option of seeking exemption through resort to an *antidosis*. Thereby, he challenged another citizen, whom he deemed wealthier than himself, either to take over the service or to exchange properties with him. In some cases, the parties settled the matter in private and relatively quickly.⁵⁸ But if no private settlement could be reached, the case was brought before a court of law (as a *diadikasia* or a *skepsis*), where the jurors decided who of the

55 Osborne 1991.

56 See, e.g., [Xen.] *Ath. pol.* 1.13; Isoc. 8.128; Theophr. *Char.* 26.6; Antiphanes fr. 204, apud Ath. 3.103F.

57 Böckh 1886.I.1: 670; Andreades 1933: 358–63.

58 This was, for example, the case with the trierarchy undertaken through an *antidosis*-challenge by Demosthenes in his youth: Dem. 21.78 with 28.17.

two opponents was to perform the service.⁵⁹ It was these suits which, according to Pritchard, delayed the dispatch of fleets in the period before 340, but ceased to do so after that year because their frequency dwindled.⁶⁰ The *antidosis* is attested from ca. mid-fifth century to 325/4.⁶¹ But what do we know about its frequency? What is the evidence for the alleged decisive shift in that frequency?

The answer is, there is no such evidence. Nor are there any means to clarify the core issue, which remains unaddressed: the ratio of cases settled in private to cases settled by a court. Matthew Christ maintains that resort to *antidosis* was frequent, but the arguments supporting his view are at best speculative.⁶² Pritchard, on his part, uses the main effect of Demosthenes' trierarchic reform of 340 – relocation of the heaviest financial burdens from the less affluent to the most affluent trierarchs – to infer a (very?) low frequency from that year on. However, one can use that same effect of the reform to draw the opposite and perhaps more plausible inference: an upsurge in the use of the *antidosis* after 340, as a substantial minority of super-rich and powerful citizens now had reason to express their discontent by seeking exemption from the trierarchy.

Almost certainly, Demosthenes' reform of 340 did spread the financial burdens more equitably among the trierarchs. The naval records confirm that the ships of active fleets were henceforward distributed among sole trierarch and syntrierarchs in such a way that there was a graduation of the relative burdens, with the heavier burdens likely falling on the wealthiest members of their group. Liabilities and risks, too, were spread among more ships and persons, according to this fairness principle.⁶³ The naval records confirm also that Demosthenes' reform of 340 did not, as is often asserted, reduce the number of those liable to the trierarchy from twelve hundred to three hundred persons. It only compelled the

59 See the works cited in note 2 above.

60 Pace Pritchard (2026: 78-79), Apollodoros' conflict with his successor Polycles (in [Dem.] 50) is inadmissible evidence: their dispute was not about who of the two would serve but about money, and Apollodoros sued Polycles *after* his term of service,

61 Earliest attestations: *IG I³ 254* (440-415?); [Xen.] *Ath. pol.* 3.4. Latest: [Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 61.1; *IG II² 1629.204-13*.

62 Christ 1990: 163, *pace* Gabrielsen 1987: 29. Ober 1986: 221, to which Christ refers, does not provide any support.

63 Dem. 18.102-8, with the epigraphic evidence cited in Gabrielsen 1994: 207-13.

three hundred richest members of the Twelve Hundred to shoulder a greater financial load than their fellows.⁶⁴ It was consequently individuals from these three hundred who, according to our sources, reacted against Demosthenes' reform law, trying to quash it both before and after its enactment. Their line of action included offers of bribes to Demosthenes to make him withdraw his proposal as well as an unsuccessful indictment of the proposal by a *graphe paranomon* while it was preliminarily treated in the Assembly.⁶⁵ And Deinarchos (1.42) raises the accusation that Demosthenes did in fact receive bribes to alter and redraft his proposal in every meeting of the Assembly. Thus, this evidence cannot be adduced to show that the frequency of *antidosis*-challenges decreased. For, if anything, it suggests that another segment of the trierarchic class – the three hundred – now had a clear motive for using the *antidosis* more often. Whether they actually did so, however, remains unknown.

The focus on the *antidosis* and legal disputes among trierarchs has detracted attention from another way in which an individual could obtain partial exemption from service; a way that in addition may have shielded one from charges of liturgy avoidance. A newly appointed trierarch could resort to a *misthosis trierarchias*, that is, he could pay a contractor to take over the active part of his duty, all the while he himself continued to be formally responsible for the ship and to carry the title of trierarch; the contractor, in contrast, remained formally anonymous (see also p. 89 above). I curtail detailed discussion here by referring to my treatment of this practice elsewhere.⁶⁶ Three points, however, must be highlighted briefly.

The first consists of the growing scholarly consensus that the practice was quite widespread, perhaps already from the early fourth century.⁶⁷ The second is that, although it likely emerged as an informal 'reform' instigated by the trierarchic class itself, the *misthosis trierarchias* seems to have had institutional offshoots both in Hellenistic Athens (the grant to

64 Gabrielsen 1989.

65 Dem. 18.102-108; Aesch. 3.222; Hyp. fr. 134 (Jensen/Kenyon). On the indictment by a *graphe paranomon*: Hansen 1974: 36, 44-45.

66 Gabrielsen 1994: 95-102; Gabrielsen 2026: 106-8.

67 Cawkwell 1984: 340; Christ 2006: 175, 199.

a trierarch of ἀτέλεια τοῦ πλοῦ, ‘exemption from sailing’) and in Hellenistic Rhodes (the officer titled *epiplous* as a substitute for the formally appointed trierarch on board the ship).⁶⁸ The third point emerges when we combine what we know about the practice with inscriptional evidence documenting trierarchies performed by persons beyond the military age (over sixty years old). The point itself is that the hiring out of trierarchies tended to alleviate any manpower shortages Athens might experience by mobilizing the properties of those who, while physically unable to serve in person, in economic terms qualified for the liturgy: Isocrates undertook a trierarchy when he was over eighty years old.⁶⁹ Just like the *antidosis*, moreover, the *misthosis trierarchias* made all these naval financiers responsible for finding their own replacements. For a person seeking to be relieved from the trierarchy (whether below or above the military age), the *misthosis trierarchias*, though it only gave partial exemption, stood as a cheaper and – in terms of legal entanglements – safer alternative to an *antidosis*.

IV

In conclusion, contrary to Demosthenes’ claims at Dem. 4.36-37, in 351/0 the Athenian navy was markedly superior to the navy of Philip II; not merely with regard to size and operational effectiveness, but also with regard to quick preparation for dispatch. Epigraphic and literary sources combine to show that the Athenians possessed a naval infrastructure and employed procedures that were unavailable to Philip at that time. Demosthenes’ statement on the tardiness and weakness of the Athenian navy (Dem. 4.36-37) is rhetorical and tendentious. Furthermore, Pritchard’s suggestion that for most of the fourth century quarrels and lawsuits between trierarchs delayed Athenian fleet dispatches lacks empirical support and is in fact contradicted by our sources. Normally, Athenian squadrons and fleets were timely and properly prepared for expe-

68 Athens: *I.Rhamnous* 31 (225/4), cf. Thomsen 2024: 88. Rhodes: Segre 1936: 228, line 3, cf. Gabrielsen 1997: 101 with n. 96.

69 Isoc. 15, 5, 9. For the remaining evidence, see Gabrielsen 1994: 247 n. 29.

ditions, not in spite of, but largely thanks to the seemingly laborious procedures and protocols in use. Failures in Athens' foreign policy in the fourth century, if any, cannot, therefore, be credibly explained with reference to the inefficiency of its navy. In 1984, George Cawkwell stated that "the charge that it was the naval system that in large measure led to Athens' ruin is false" (Cawkwell 1984: 334). His thesis is fully backed by our evidence.

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