



Rediscovering Greek Institutions

New Institutional Approaches to Ancient Greek History

Edited by Matteo Barbato, Mirko Canevaro and Alberto Esu

NEW APPROACHES TO ANCIENT GREEK INSTITUTIONAL HISTORY

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New Approaches to Ancient Greek Institutional History

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Drift, Conversion and Informal Rules: The Athenian Office of *Strategos* from a New Institutional Perspective

Matteo Zaccarini

This chapter explores some key aspects in the institutional developments and interactions of high-ranking military officers (*strategoí*) in Athens, by interpreting ancient evidence through models borrowed from the New Institutionalism. The study considers the role of the *strategos* as a magistrate interacting with the soldiers, the *polis* and his own peers: the models employed explain defining features of the institutional history of the office and illustrate the mechanisms through which the *strategoí* collectively reached decisions on the field.

I. INTRODUCTION

Comprehensive treatments of Classical Greek military by modern scholarship, hindered by the elusive nature of the sources, are limited. Even a seminal study like W. K. Pritchett's *The Greek State at War* (1971–91) lacks an overarching theoretical framework and an engagement with relevant political bodies and institutional history in the longer term.¹ Therefore, we still lack a general analysis of the ancient Greek military in light of institutional, technological, economic and social factors, of the kind exemplified in recent history by Overy's work on the Second World War.²

¹ Henceforth, abbreviated as *GSW*. A few examples of thematic monographs: Fornara 1971, Hamel 1998 and Boëldieu-Trevet 2007 (officers); Konijnendijk 2018 (tactics); the approach of Pritchard 2019 (economy and institutions) is more wide-ranging.

² See e.g. Overy 1995; 2021.

The present chapter constitutes a small step in this direction by considering the institutional framework within which military organisation was conceived and operated in Athens, a perspective that can help us clarify how command and leadership were conceptualised and applied, from the institutions and the magistrates down to the rank-and-file.³ The study focuses on the institutional history, powers and interactions of the *strategoí* ('generals'), as members of a small board of peers characterised by remarkably stable, and yet evolving features over time. The analysis offers a fruitful opportunity to apply notions borrowed from New Institutionalism and other related disciplines.

My purpose is to explore two interrelated aspects of the *strategia*. The first is the institutional rationale explaining why some elements remained stable, while others were introduced or renovated from the late Archaic to the early Hellenistic period, a process that can be interpreted in terms of path dependency. The second section offers a preliminary exploration of the way a group of *strategoí* achieved decision-making on the field, as a practical example of institutional interactions driven by teamwork and informal rules.

2. INSTITUTIONAL STABILITY AND CHANGE

It is convenient to sum up the diachronic features of the *strategia*, from the late Archaic to the early Hellenistic period: the office underwent substantial restructuring across its history while maintaining its original, defining traits. This section aims to explain, in institutional terms, the reasons behind such process.

2.1. The *Strategoí* from the Archaic to the Hellenistic Period

The circumstances and date of introduction of the office of *strategos* are unclear. Likely before the end of the sixth century, ten *strategoí* were elected, one from each tribe ([Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 22.2), clearly as a consequence of the recent introduction of the Cleisthenic tribal system.⁴ Some scholars believe that Athens had *strategoí* even before then, as subordinates to the archon polemarch,⁵ but

³ For earlier similar approaches see Harris 2010 and 2015b; some materials for a historical analysis in Naiden 2007; consider also Fröhlich 2008a and 2008b. For additional, recent cross-disciplinary remarks involving the *strategia*, see Bettali 2002 on positive discipline and generalship in Greece and other ancient contexts; Ober 2008: esp. 169–79 on various mechanisms of rational-based, coordinated decisions in military operations and leadership.

⁴ For an analysis, also in relation to [Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 61.1, see Hammond 1969: 111–23.

⁵ See e.g. Accame 1935: 353; Hammond 1969: 112–18 argues that the *strategoí* (in an unknown number) were a regular archaic office; Bicknell 1970; cf. Rhodes 1981: 264, supporting the thesis that the *strategoí* were occasionally appointed to lead expeditions abroad, while the polemarch was in charge of the defence of Attica.

the few sources attesting their existence seem very susceptible to anachronism.⁶ In any case, it is clear that by the 480s the polemarch had already lost his authority in favour of the elected *strategoi*, and that eventually he became a civil magistrate in charge of presiding over judicial litigation between the Athenians and the allies (e.g. *IG I³ 10 ll. 9–11*).⁷

In an unknown moment before the mid-fourth century, the composition of the board of *strategoi* changed from one member from each tribe to ten members elected *ex hapanton*, ‘from all’ tribes – that is, irrespective of tribal representation, this being the system in use by Aristotle’s time ([Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 61.1).⁸ Some form of specialisation and specific designations of military agenda are attested in the fifth century, but they are far from standardised: from at least the 420s, a *strategos* could be assigned to the ships (Thuc. 3.115.2, 8.54.3: ἐπὶ τὰς ναῦς), and we know of two ‘commanders of the fleet’ from a fragmentary, late fifth-century casualty list (*IG I³ 1191 ll. 104–9*: ἄρχον τῷ ναυτικῷ).⁹ Certainly, in the fifth century *strategoi* regularly held not only military but also political, financial, judicial and civic powers.¹⁰ For example, they were allowed to summon the Assembly on their own initiative;¹¹ they were

⁶ Problematic evidence is provided by Hdt. 1.59.4 (on Pisistratus: see How and Wells 1928a) and [Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 4.2 (on Draco: cf. 17.2, 22.3); against the assumption that archaic Athens had *strategoi*, see Wheeler 1991: 132–4. On the polemarch see some notes in § 3.

⁷ Cf. Hammond 1969: 117–18; Canevaro 2017a: 40 n. 7, for an example concerning the polemarch and the metics. On the reform of the selection of candidate archons in 487/6 attested (only) by [Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 22.5, see Rhodes 1981: 272–4; esp. on its apparent inconsistency with Hdt. 6.109 see Buck 1965; Badian 1971; Hamel 1998: 80–3 (rejecting Herodotus’ testimony); Nenci 2007: 180–1, ll. 5–9.

⁸ The change is usually dated to an early period: Fornara 1971 thinks of the 460s (but see Zaccarini 2018 against the significance of the ‘reforms of Ephialtes’); however, Bicknell 1970: 440–1 (*contra* Hammond 1969), argues that the reform in *Ath. Pol.* 61.1 dates to the 330s; cf. Jameson 1955: 63, who (questionably) interprets πρότερον as ‘shortly before the time of Aristotle’. On the *ex hapanton* see also § 3. On the election procedure see Piérart 1974; Mitchell 2000, esp. on the double representation; Taylor 2007: 331–4, for possible practical reasons behind it.

⁹ Jordan 2004: 31–2 claims that these officers were ‘clearly [...] something like a modern admiral’, but fails to explain why; his parallel with Xen. *Hell.* 1.6.19 yields little to his argument. Note that Arist. *Pol.* 6, 1322b 1–2 refers to *arche* of the *navitikon*, i.e. navarchy, in clearly generic terms.

¹⁰ I use this (modern) division among spheres for conciseness, but it should not be interpreted as rigid in the case of ancient Greece. On the importance of non-military powers of the *strategoi* cf. Fröhlich 2000: 100–1; 2008b: esp. 431–8, regarding Athens largely as an exception among Greek communities: however, ultimately the evidence he discusses does not seem to set Athens so much apart from the rest of the Greek world, but suggests a somewhat narrower role of Athenian *strategoi* within the same agenda they had elsewhere.

¹¹ Cf. Thuc. 2.59.3 and 2.22; 4.118.14; in general, these should be regarded as special meetings, with no implication that the *strategoi* had any means to deal with – or even less so to prevent – regular meetings: Rhodes 1972: 43–8, and esp. 44–5; see also Hamel 1998: 7–12,

in charge of administrative procedures related to the safety of citizens and public spaces¹² as well as to religious duties.¹³ Abundant evidence shows that the *strategoí* carried out daily bureaucratic administration, such as compiling and managing *katalogoí* and other registers, as well as chairing lawcourts for draft-dodgers (Lys. 15.1) and administering financial matters related to military campaigns.¹⁴

In the fourth century, the city's fortunes varied dramatically, from the loss of the Empire to the recovery of naval power after the battle of Cnidus in 394, and through several major campaigns until the defeat in the Hellenic war in 322. Athenian resources and military needs changed accordingly. Despite often maintaining an enormous navy in the central decades of the century (e.g. IG II² 1611 ll. 3–9; IG II² 1613 l. 303), the contraction or fluctuation of public finances could result in significant reduction (in absolute, but not necessarily relative terms) in funding for the military, itself followed by a dramatic decrease in Athenian military activity abroad from the Hellenistic period.¹⁵ One would expect consistent adaptations of military magistratures, and to some extent this is attested, as chiefly shown by the financial-related reforms of the trierarchy.¹⁶ In fact, from around the mid-fourth century, at least a part of the *strategoí* were regularly assigned to specific duties that increasingly dealt with (military or civil) administration in addition to – and, eventually, more often than – campaigning.¹⁷ We do not know precisely when most of the following offices were introduced, but we know that by

who tends to heavily downplay this aspect of the powers of the *strategoí*. Asmonti 2006: 9 argues that a *strategos* could address the Assembly essentially as a citizen, but benefiting from institutional authority.

¹² See Harris 2013a: App. 2.

¹³ See e.g. (probably) the generic *archontes* performing libations before the expedition in Thuc. 6.32.1; this role was possibly expanded to include non-military occasions proper, such as the sacrifices performed by the *strategoí* to *Demokratia* on IG II² 1496 ll. 131–2 and 140–1.

¹⁴ See Christ 2001 on the *katalogoí* and the fourth-century change in the conscription system; Pritchard 2019: 46–50. On financial administration, fundraising (e.g. Isoc. 15.127) and accounting see Pritchard 2019: e.g. 177–8.

¹⁵ On fourth-century Athenian military activity, more fragmented, diversified and relying on mercenaries, see Bettalli 2013: ch. 4, esp. 71–3 and 80–3 (discussing Xen. *Hell.* 4.4.14); on finances destined to war see the overview by Pritchard 2019: 175–8. On the reduction of operations abroad from the Hellenistic period see Oliver 2007: 163–72.

¹⁶ On which see Canevaro 2016a: 3–7; see also the general outline in Pritchard 2019: 176.

¹⁷ See Rhodes 2016: 114; cf. Hamel 1998: 15–16 on changes in the appointment process connected with the ‘departmentalization of the *strategia*’. Even when campaigning, fourth-century *strategoí* often had to deal with fundraising; Pritchard 2019: 175–9. Fröhlich 2008a focuses on the ‘civilian’ sphere. See also Demosthenes’ instrumental accusation that, despite Philip’s growing threat, the Athenians used to send on campaigns abroad a single *strategos* while the rest of the many military officers were assigned to civic duties (Dem. 4.26).

the late century ([Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 61.1) the city maintained one *strategos* in charge of the hoplites (ἐπὶ τοὺς ὀπλίτας), who led campaigns abroad; one in charge of the territory – that is, home defence (ἐπὶ τὴν χώραν), an increasingly critical issue;¹⁸ two assigned to the Piraeus and one to the symmories; the five left constituted more generic, flexible officers assigned as needed to take care of tasks abroad (τοὺς δ' ἄλλους πρὸς τὰ παρόντα πράγματα ἐκπέμπουσιν).¹⁹

This internal division of the board of *strategoī* is consistent with the practice of dispersing members of small groups of magistrates around Attica to widen the reach of their action: parallels are provided by other ten-man boards, such as the roll-keepers ([Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 49.2), the inspectors of streets (50.2), markets (51.1), measures and weights (51.2), as well as the grains supervisors (51.3). Other examples of this decentralised organisation are the archon of Salamis and the demarch of the Piraeus (54.8), the hipparch of Lemnos (61.6) and generally the *archai* stationed in the cleruchies (62.2), as well as the introduction of a secretary *epi ta psephismata* in the Council during the 340s.²⁰ In the case of *strategoī*, institutional change is closely tied to a further process which is only partially visible from the *Constitution of the Athenians*. Later sources show that the board of *strategoī* underwent further compartmentalisation and gained additional administrative assignments, sometimes replacing the older ones, until eventually all ten members acquired a specific posting. Related titles seem to have never reached full standardisation: in the case of inscriptions, such variability likely depended on lack of uniform habits as well as on space constraints on the stone.²¹ It is reasonable to assume that literary sources often inherited this lack of standardisation in defining specific titles. A good illustration of both the compartmentalisation process of the *strategia* and of the flexibility of designations is visible in the honours for Phaedrus of Sphettus in the third century (*IG II*³ 1.985): after his father had served as general in charge of the fleet/the ships (cf. l. 5: ἐπὶ τὸ ναυτικόν and l. 15: ἐπὶ τῶν νεῶν), Phaedrus was repeatedly elected to the posts of general for the

¹⁸ First attested for 352/1 as (probably) 'in charge of the defence of the territory' (*IG II*³ 1.292 ll. 19–20: τὸν στρατηγὸν τὸν ἐπὶ τῇ [ν φυλ]ακῇ [ν τῆς χ]ώρας). On the defence of Attica esp. in the fourth century, see Fröhlich 2008a: 41–4; for the various episodes of loss of control over various parts of Attica due to external threats between the late fourth and the third century, see Oliver 2007: 113–37.

¹⁹ However, occasional attestations of *strategoī* associated, with the same formula of ἐπὶ + accus., to specific theatres of war (e.g. Dem. 23.149; cf. earlier examples in Hdt. 5.123, Thuc. 4.104.4), seem to reflect literary emphasis on their areas of operation rather than official titles created as needed.

²⁰ *IG II*³ 1.306 (face C) ll. 34–6; see, however, Liddel 2020, II: 31–2 and n. 80.

²¹ Cf. Tracy 1982: 110–12 (on *IG II*² 2336), on substantial variations of the same officer titles as likely depending on either availability or lack of space on the stone.

equipment, the homeland, the mercenaries (ll. 21–5) and the hoplites (ll. 30–1 and 44–5).²² At this time, a *strategos* was commonly tasked with managing funds, providing supplies and building public facilities (IG II³ 4.293), duties that Ferguson noted as ‘curiously unmilitary’.²³ Some assignments could be further specialised and/or multiplied into double or triple assignments (e.g. IG II² 2336 ll. 85 and 259: στρατηγὸς ἐπὶ τὴν παρασ[κευή]ν τὴν ἐν ἄστει, and ll. 255 and 260: ἐπὶ τὸ ναυτικόν);²⁴ the *strategos* in charge of the territory was likewise doubled and decentralised (e.g. IG II³ 4.293 l. 9: στρατηγὸς ἐπὶ τὴν χώραν τὴν παραλίαν), probably from the 260s.²⁵ A similar process of bureaucratisation of the *strategia* took place in other parts of the Hellenised world down into the Roman period,²⁶ when in Athens the hoplite *strategos* continued to represent an important, coveted political office for the local elite.²⁷

2.2. Path Dependence, Drift and Conversion of the Office of *Strategos*

The evolution of the office of *strategos* over the centuries (§ 2.1) can be interpreted through a comparative-historical approach guided by Historical Institutionalism. Across its history, the *strategia* reflects an inherent paradox of bureaucracy, which floats between permanence (no state could exist without it) and change (the need to adapt, regulate and empower the offices without posing a threat to democratic rule).²⁸ The reduction of military resources and activity corresponded, on the one hand, to a preservation of the office of *strategos* as developed in the fifth century, and on the other, to a sophistication of his role as both a military officer and a bureaucrat, in close connection with the mutating needs of the *polis*.

Historical Institutionalism employs the notion of path dependence to map institutional change over time, establishing a normative framework explaining how the set of decisions an agent faces in a given circumstance is limited by the decisions made in the past, even though previous circumstances may no longer

²² See Oliver 2007: 160–1, and his § 6 for other examples. For the general in charge of the equipment cf. e.g. IG II³ 1.1154 ll. 28–9.

²³ Ferguson 1909: 319; see Matijašić 2010: 231–2 on the late third century.

²⁴ See Tracy 1982 for a detailed edition and commentary; see also Ferguson 1909: 314–23 and 327–8, with further cases and discussion.

²⁵ Oliver 2007: 164–7; see also 204–12 for ‘the defence of the territory’ or similar epigraphic expressions as likely referring mainly to urgent financial measures, rather than warfare.

²⁶ Cf. Bengston 1937–52, esp. III (Hellenistic to Roman Egypt); for some cases from north-western Greek communities see Matijašić 2010: esp. 234–43.

²⁷ See Geagan 1997; Oliver 2007: 163–4.

²⁸ On these notions in the modern world, see Kettl 2006: esp. 380–1; note that the basic mechanisms regulating modern public bureaucracies are essentially the same as those of ancient *strategia*: constraint to power, promotion of coordination and accountability of agency.

be relevant.²⁹ This form of conservatism is visible in the highest military offices of Classical Athens: one such example is the preservation of the number of ten taxiarchs and (as far as we know) ten *strategoi* even when the number of Athenian tribes was increased: a decree dated to 271/0, when Athens had twelve tribes, records the name and tribe of the ten taxiarchs in charge, tribes II and IV being left unrepresented (*IG II³* 1.907, ll. 37–56).³⁰ Similarly, just like the polemarch before, in the fourth century a part of the board of the *strategoi* had lost its military functions proper in favour of what was essentially a bureaucratic role, and this trend continued into the Hellenistic period through further departmentalisation and the acquisition of additional civil functions. Originally, this change probably depended on the fact that early fourth-century Athens had reduced its military forces and lost the need to send armies abroad frequently, but the trend continued and was further refined even as Athens reacquired naval power and undertook major military operations down to 322 BC.

The evidence shows that, as military commitment steadily decreased especially from the early Hellenistic period, rather than consistently reducing the number of *strategoi*, Athens adapted and then gradually converted some of their functions towards those of a military and civil bureaucracy. Hacker, Pierson and Thelen have analysed formal-institutional stability in a developed democracy by addressing it as a ‘status quo bias’ produced by the difficulty of introducing direct changes into formal rules that are perceived as settled. Their research analyses two widespread and partially similar processes: drift and conversion. Whereas drift occurs when institutions are not adapted to (externally determined) shifting circumstances which alter their original effects or agency, conversion happens when an existing institution or policy is actively transformed ‘through its authoritative redirection, reinterpretation, or reappropriation’.³¹

On the one hand, the preservation of the number of ten *strategoi* even after the abandonment of the rigid one-to-one tribal representation, the loss of the fifth-century Empire, the change in scope of military activity abroad and eventually the loss of naval power, reflect Athens’ drift-driven refusal to adapt its traditional institutions to substantially different contexts. However, conversion is also visible, and likely prominent, in other important institutional changes. The conscription system by age-groups introduced in the fourth century must have been part of this wider process of conversion-driven rationalisation, an attempt to improve both efficiency and fairness by speeding

²⁹ See Sanders 2006; North 1990: ch. 6, which borrows the notion from studies of economic history, still represents a fundamental analysis.

³⁰ Ferguson 1909: 316–17. Lower-ranking military offices did not necessarily follow the same pattern: it seems that a decade earlier the cavalry phylarchs (ten at the time of [Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 61.4–5) had already become twelve in number (*SEG* 21.525, ll. 11–14): see Keim 2018: 517.

³¹ Hacker, Pierson and Thelen 2015: 182–7 (quotation from p. 185).

up the bureaucratic work of the *strategoi* and, at the same time, promoting a more egalitarian mustering in line with democratic principles.³² Above all, the *strategoi* actively evolved from a board of peers with mainly military functions to an aggregation of various offices that retained some military roles, but essentially contributed to different aspects of the increasing bureaucratisation of the *polis*, responding to the mutated environment and becoming even more embedded in democratic ideology and institutions. At the same time, the Athenians developed a more technical and precise normative framework for their *strategoi*: while originally the board consisted of ten generic commanders, later changes led to multiple named postings which formally (re)defined specific functions and individual specialisations, eventually establishing a sort of civic-oriented hierarchy within the office.³³ This evolution added complexity to the board while maintaining its original structure, a process which can be explained in terms of path dependency.

3. DECISION-MAKING

The full board of *strategoi* possibly acted as such in Athens, but in most cases only a few of its members were assigned to a campaign. Thus, in a year the board operated through a number of independent sub-boards on the field, which posed several practical issues. It is easy to posit a concrete, inevitable tension between the formal, centralised decision-making power over all military matters held by the *polis*, and the actual handling of several aspects of this process by the generals on the field. The practicalities and limits of ancient communications determined that, just as units received instructions by their officers before a battle, generals had to be given (often vague enough) objectives by the *polis*, but then they were entrusted with discretionary freedom of action on the field.³⁴ However, normally *strategoi* had to account for, and often face the consequences of, their decisions once they returned to the *polis*, for their formal agency was rather limited. For example, the three Athenian *strategoi* besieged at Potidaea were blamed at home because they had negotiated a treaty with the Peloponnesians without first consulting the *demos*

³² See Christ 2001: esp. 416–20; it is debated whether the transition from the list-based to the age-group-based selection improved or deteriorated efficiency: see Hamel 1998: 26–8, arguing that such bureaucratisation reduced the generals' authority; see also Konijnendijk 2018: 152–3.

³³ For such hierarchy, esp. in the early Hellenistic period, see Oliver 2007: 160–72.

³⁴ On the topic of the freedom of action of Athenian generals, see now Morassi 2022; on practical limits of communications on the battlefield, see Konijnendijk 2018: 139–53, esp. 146–7.

(Thuc. 2.70.4);³⁵ similarly, the Argives attempted to stone to death one of their own generals who had negotiated with the Spartans without first reporting to the *demos* (5.60).³⁶ The process of decision-making on the field was, therefore, a delicate matter and a central issue in the agency of *strategoí*. Generally, it is acknowledged that as a sub-board the *strategoí* acted according to a principle of collegiality.³⁷ However, it is unclear which decision rules were adopted to ensure unity of command. There seem to be only three possible alternatives, each with its advocates among scholars: superior command, majority rule and consensus/unanimity.³⁸

Superior command, in the form of *de iure* one-man rule, was obviously present in the military rationale from an early period. According to the Aristotelian *Constitution of the Athenians*, supreme military command over the army used to pertain to the king (cf. schol. *ad Ar. Av.* 1527 Holwerda) until, before Draco's laws, the archon polemarch was introduced to make up for the weakness of some kings in war: this *malakia* was the reason why the Athenians of the past had recurred to Ion ([Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 3.2).³⁹ Again according to the Aristotelian treatise, at the end of the sixth century the polemarch still held supreme command as leader of the entire army ([Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 22.2: τῆς δὲ ἀπάσης στρατιᾶς ἡγεμών). However, actual evidence about the military powers of the polemarch is notoriously meagre, except for the famous case of Marathon in which Callimachus' vote decided the course of action (see below § 3.1.). This has been regarded either as a regular prerogative of

³⁵ A few notes in *GSW*, II: 47. The rather vague ἐπαυτίομαι here seems to imply no formal charge, but mainly resentment, as when the Athenians, through their *strategos* Aristocrates, blamed the Chians for dealing with the Lacedaemonians (Thuc. 8.9.2: πέμψαντες ἓνα τῶν στρατηγῶν Ἀριστοκράτη ἐπητιῶντο αὐτούς) but failed to present compelling evidence (10.1–2).

³⁶ A relatively frequent risk, even in non-military contexts: for this form of 'bottom-up' violence vis-à-vis the notion of discipline in Greek armies, see Zaccarini 2022: 157 and n. 26, 161–4.

³⁷ See passages collected by Fornara 1971: 36 n. 28; Hamel 1998: 94–9; *contra* Jordan 2004; on collegiality, but mostly in other contexts, see Fröhlich 2016b.

³⁸ Due to the very small size of a board of *strategoí*, the differences found in larger groups between consensus and unanimity, and between majority and supermajority, are less pronounced but still relevant. On their differences and for the definition of decision rule, see Hartnett 2011: 29–33; on deliberation within small (i.e. characterised by face-to-face interactions) groups, see Karpowitz and Mendelberg 2007.

³⁹ The tradition goes back at least to Herodotus, according to whom Ion had been *stratarches* of the Athenians (8.44.2): the different terminology might be significant, but too little is known of the *stratarchia* to argue that this was the original title of the office later known as archon polemarch. The extremely rare στρατάρχης seems a generic term to define a military commander; it is mostly attested by late sources (but note Pind. *Pyth.* 6.31); Tully 1998; also Wheeler 1991: 134.

the polemarch⁴⁰ or, on the contrary, as an exceptional measure prompted by the stalemate.⁴¹

In the case of multiple officers all nominally equal in rank, as in a sub-board of *strategoi*, supreme command would have taken a different form. It has often been argued that one *strategos* could enjoy formal, *de iure* prominence over his peers; however, it is now clear that the formula *strategos ex hapanton*⁴² and the practice of numbering one *strategos* among others (for instance, in the form *dekatos autos*) only reflect literary emphasis.⁴³ Many other boards in – especially late – Classical Athens were composed of ten members with no internal hierarchy.⁴⁴ Even the one certain attestation of a general bestowed with larger-than-normal powers, that of *strategos autokrator*, cannot really be considered part of a hierarchy proper as there are no clear attestations of one such general issuing orders to a ‘standard’ *strategos*: rather, the *autokratores* we know of from the late fifth century operated exclusively as a board of peers (that is, all *autokratores*).⁴⁵ We must therefore conclude that, at least formally, all *strategoi* held the same powers and status: in such a case, superior command could still be achieved through the custom of rotating command daily among them, apparently attested as early as Marathon (Hdt. 6.110.1).⁴⁶

Alternatives to supreme command are based on voting, discussion and negotiation – certainly more consistent with both the democratic rationale and the Greek mindset in general. This, however, could easily result in practical problems and delays on the field.⁴⁷ One option – majority rule among

⁴⁰ Hammond 1969: 121–2; cf. Nenci 2007: 281, ll. 5–9.

⁴¹ Cf. Badian 1971: 25–6. Fornara 1971: 72–3 argues against the widespread assumption that Callimachus held only a titular, vestigial position at Marathon, and believes that the polemarch was the commander-in-chief but, at the same time, needed at least half of the *strategoi*’s votes.

⁴² See e.g. Jameson 1955, despite assuming that the *strategos ex hapanton* acted as chairman of the board, discusses the lack of evidence for any actual special power, esp. in Pericles’ time. *Contra* assumptions of formal superiority, see Fornara 1971: 12–18 and 38; cf. Bearzot 1988: 46. See also § 2.1.

⁴³ Considered superior to the other *strategoi* by e.g. Ehrenberg 1945: 115–17 (arguing for Pericles’ title of commander-in-chief); Jameson 1955: 78–9 (*de facto* prominence). Dover 1960 (followed by Hammond 1969: 129–30; Hamel 1998: 87–91, and 91–3 for other, less clear formulas of literary emphasis; *contra* Jordan 2004: esp. 25–31) has demonstrated that the ‘*autos* formula’ bears no implication of superiority whatsoever.

⁴⁴ [Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 50–60; see e.g. Ober 2008: 156–7.

⁴⁵ Xenophon’s record of Alcibiades as *strategos* (*Hell.* 1.4.10, 12), and then as ἀπάντων ἡγεμὼν αὐτοκράτωρ in 408/7 (4.20), remains unclear: see Bearzot 1988: 54–7, also generally (esp. 45 n. 31) on the rigid collegiality of the three *autokratores* in their earliest certain attestation in Sicily in 415–13 (Thuc. 6.8.2–3, 26.1). On the *strategos autokrator* see also Hamel 1998: 201–3.

⁴⁶ See Fornara 1971: 12–18. On these mechanisms as a way to avoid division of opinion, see Harris 2010: 410 (raising doubts on Herodotus’ awareness of the practice in use in 490).

⁴⁷ See Harris 2010: esp. 407–15; Harris 2015b.

peers – could still address matters reasonably rapidly and would easily explain the often-attested odd number of *strategoi* assigned to a campaign.⁴⁸ However, majority rule presents the double issue of excluding the opinion of a part of the voters and of potentially entrusting the decision to one man in the case of a stalemate. Thus, in terms of democratic theorisation, a mediated (or, possibly, polarised) outcome resulting from discussion-generated consensus is more desirable, as it takes into proper consideration group-level processes, claims and interactions.⁴⁹

Analysis of episodes from a few cases will suggest that discussion among the commanders was a recurring element, often involving other figures ranging from soldiers to lower-ranking officers. The following section will provide a quick overview of the decision-making process, as described by our main sources, from famous fifth-century military engagements: at Marathon in 490, Pylos in 425, Sicily in 415 and 413 (twice), and Miletus in 412, with some additional *comparanda*. Although this list is far from comprehensive, it suggests a pattern and some recurring features.

3.1. Some Case Studies of Decision-Making among the *Strategoi*

The case of Marathon is exceptional insofar as it involved the full board of *strategoi* plus the polemarch, in a battle fought in Attica. It is also the most famous case of majority vote which turned into a *de facto* one-man rule. According to Herodotus, the *strategoi* were divided between those urging to attack the Persians and those advising against it (Hdt. 6.109.1): this is generally taken to mean that five voted for and five against, but the matter is unclear.⁵⁰ Herodotus states that ‘as opinions were divided and the worst one was about to win’ (109.2: ὥς δὲ δίχα τε ἐγίνοντο καὶ ἐνίκᾳ ἢ χείρων τῶν γνωμέων), an eleventh vote was cast, that of the polemarch Callimachus. Herodotus does not specify how the worst, that is, the no-attack plan, was about to prevail: it may be that the discussion among the *strategoi* was already prompting at least one of them to change sides.

In any case, Miltiades succeeded in persuading Callimachus to vote in favour of the attack (Hdt. 6.109.2–110.1). The words reported by Herodotus

⁴⁸ Hamel 1998: 95–9 (based on the Sicilian expedition) argues that normally the *strategoi* made decisions on the field according to a (simple) majority rule. On the odd numbers of *strategoi*, esp. from the Archidamian war, see Hammond 1969: 127–8; Asmonti 2006: 7.

⁴⁹ See Harris 2010 and 2015, highlighting the importance of discussion and consensus in the decision-making process among the *strategoi*; for this rationale in Athenian democracy, see Canevaro 2019c; for group dynamics as a defining feature of deliberation, see Karpowitz and Mendelberg 2007.

⁵⁰ Against this widespread assumption (e.g. Rhodes 1981: 264–5) see discussion in Hamel 1998: 80–1 and n. 4; esp. Nenci 2007: 280, ll. 1–2 and 4–5.

effectively convey the weight of the decision: by underlining that Callimachus had ultimate authority on the matter (109.4: τὸ κῦρος), Miltiades was aiming at putting the polemarch under pressure. He presented the situation effectively offering only one viable option, as Callimachus could either support Miltiades' plan and make Athens free or reject it and enslave the city (109.3–6). Miltiades' urging 'it is up to you now' (109.3: ἐν σοὶ νῦν Καλλίμαχε ἐστὶ), as the very opening of his speech, and then his repetition of similar second-person appeals (cf. 109.4 and 6), are never meant as an acknowledgement of Callimachus' institutional superiority, but rather as a persuasive device that stresses the critical importance, responsibility and risks related to an individual vote that would break the tie: parallels are found in suchlike situations described by Herodotus, such as Themistocles' identical words to Eurybiades before the battle of Salamis (8.60a.1: ἐν σοὶ νῦν ἐστὶ σῶσαι τὴν Ἑλλάδα).⁵¹ A similar pattern, taken to the extreme, can be seen in the stalemate among the boeotarchs at Leuctra in 371 according to Pausanias' account. In this case, it appears that the situation led directly to unanimity – almost mechanically, as no discussion is reported: initially, divided by deep divergences, six boeotarchs were split into two even groups of three, one led by Epameinondas and determined to fight, the other recommending a retreat (Paus. 9.13.6). Once the seventh boeotarch declared his support for Epameinondas' plan, the whole board agreed to engage the Spartans (9.13.7: τότε καὶ πᾶσιν ἐδέδοκτο ἀγωνι διακρίνεσθαι), evidently because the three who had opposed it now preferred to embrace the prevailing decision rather than find themselves excluded by (and from) the majority. As we shall see, the kinds of concerns and attitudes described in these episodes were the norm when a decision had to depend on a single individual.

Another peculiar example of collegiality is provided in the early stages of the Pylos campaign. The Athenian *strategoí* Eurymedon and Sophocles were sailing around the Peloponnese when Demosthenes was authorised by the *demos* to take command of the expedition. It is often believed that Demosthenes, whose status at the time is unclear (he is called an ἰδιώτης in Thuc. 4.2.4), might have acted as 'general-elect'.⁵² Upon his arrival, Demosthenes urged (Thuc. 4.3.1: ἐκέλευε) a landing on Pylos, but his two colleagues opposed him (ἀντιλεγόντων). Eventually, the army was forced to land by a storm. Demosthenes went on arguing (3.2: ἡξίου) in favour of fortifying the position, and again the two *strategoí* had a different opinion (3.3), which resulted in an unresolved debate: Demosthenes failed to persuade both the *strategoí* and the soldiers (4.1: ὥς δὲ οὐκ ἔπειθεν οὔτε τοὺς στρατηγούς οὔτε τοὺς

⁵¹ On Herodotus' formulas see Nenci 2007: 282 l. 9.

⁵² On the expression see Hornblower 1991: 516 and 1996: 152.

στρατιώτας).⁵³ As a result, Demosthenes apparently waived his plan, ‘until an impulse to act fell upon the idle soldiers, stationing around, to fortify the place’ (Thuc. 4.4.1: μέχρι αὐτοῖς τοῖς στρατιώταις σχολάζουσιν ὁρμὴ ἐνέπεσε περιστᾶσιν ἐκτειχίσαι τὸ χωρίον). The situation is puzzling: regardless of his status, Demosthenes attempted and failed to persuade two *strategoî*. These, in turn, made no decision despite holding either superior formal power or, in any case, two votes against one. It was finally the soldiers themselves – initially unconvinced by Demosthenes – who autonomously made a decision as their commanders went on debating to no avail. It seems that no individual, regardless of his formal authority, was ready to take responsibility for a difficult decision, and that the inconclusive discussion was aiming at achieving consensus among (at least) the commanders.

Alcibiades, Nicias and Lamachus were appointed *strategoî autokratores* in 415 for the Sicilian campaign. While formally their powers were equal, there was an informal degree of recognition of different expertise among them, which might have allowed one to enjoy a *de facto* superior authority.⁵⁴ Hermocrates states that the most experienced, Nicias, was reportedly leading unwillingly (Thuc. 6.34.6: καὶ τοῦ ἐμπειροτάτου τῶν στρατηγῶν, ὡς ἐγὼ ἀκούω, ἄκοντος ἡγουμένου). Plutarch has a colourful story on Nicias’ status: during an earlier meeting, Nicias had urged Sophocles to speak his opinion first as he was the most senior (Nic. 15.2: πρεσβύτατος); Sophocles replied that, while he was the eldest, Nicias was the πρεσβύτατος, in the meaning, apparently, of the most experienced senior officer (‘ἐγὼ’, φάναι, ‘παλαιότατος εἰμί, σὺ δὲ πρεσβύτατος’). While we cannot take this episode at face value,⁵⁵ it may represent quite faithfully the informal authority of an experienced member of the board.

So far, it seems that Nicias, through a form of unofficially recognised authority, was able to exercise significant influence. This is absolutely reasonable and, taking another account on Leuctra as a parallel, can be compared to the decision by the boeotarchs to entrust full command to Pelopidas and Epameinondas in recognition of their resolution and courage (Diod. Sic. 15.62.4).⁵⁶ However, it seems that Nicias had in fact limited authority when it came to making real decisions. At the beginning of the Sicilian campaign, the *gnomai* of the three *autokratores* were divided: Nicias would carry on the attack on Selinous

⁵³ These passages have textual issues, but the proposed emendations are probably unnecessary: Hornblower 1996: 155–6.

⁵⁴ Some remarks in Hammond 1969: 122–6; see also the general discussion above, § 3.

⁵⁵ The story belongs to the tradition on Sophocles’ astuteness as a *strategos*, which likely went back to Ion of Chios (see *FGrHist* 392 FF 6 and 8; Zaccarini 2017: 50); Jameson 1955: 70–2, regarding the episode as genuine, argues that Nicias was the *ex hapanton* acting as a chairman, with no formal authority over the others (but see § 3). Hammond 1969: 132–3 n. 1 provides good remarks but credits the anecdote with excessive reliability.

⁵⁶ On this episode see the observations in Fröhlich 2008b: 427–8.

and avoid other risks (Thuc. 6.47.1); Alcibiades would negotiate with other cities and then move against Selinous and Syracuse (48.1); Lamachus eventually agreed with Alcibiades (50.1). Since Alcibiades later began negotiations with various *poleis* and then the *strategoi* led raids against Syracuse (50.1–52.2), it seems that his proposal prevailed, thanks to Lamachus' endorsement having moved the balance to two against one and having prompted a majority vote or, possibly, having persuaded Nicias and achieved unanimity;⁵⁷ regardless, in this case the seniority and experience of a single general did not prevail over a course of action advocated by even a relative majority.

A different situation is found towards the end of the Sicilian campaign, in 413. One of the newly appointed *strategoi*, Demosthenes, did not attack the Epipolae before 'having persuaded Nicias and his other colleagues in charge, as he had in mind' (Thuc. 7.43.1: *πείσας τόν τε Νικίαν καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους ξυνάρχοντας, ὥς ἐπενόει, τὴν ἐπιχείρησιν τῶν Ἐπιπολῶν ἐποιεῖτο*), which implies that the board had reached unanimity. The use of the vague *archontes* may mean that other officers were involved besides the *strategoi*.⁵⁸

The same rationale of consensus is found in a later meeting of the *strategoi* (Thuc. 7.47.1) just before the imminent disaster. Demosthenes voted to abort the campaign and leave at once (47.3); Nicias, although in doubt, declared that the army had to stay, as he envisaged that the *demos* would indict the *strategoi* in case of a retreat (48.3–4), to which Demosthenes firmly opposed and restated his earlier point (49.2). Now Eurymedon openly supported Demosthenes (49.3), thus apparently producing another two-against-one situation. Yet, contrary to what had happened in 415 and despite the urgency, since Nicias still objected, the result was 'a sort of hesitation and a delay' as the Athenians remained on the field (49.4: *ἀντιλέγοντος δὲ τοῦ Νικίου ὄκνος τις καὶ μέλλησις ἐνεγένετο [...]. καὶ οἱ μὲν Ἀθηναῖοι τούτῳ τῷ τρόπῳ διεμέλλησαν τε καὶ κατὰ χώραν ἔμενον*).⁵⁹ It was only when Nicias ceased to oppose (50.3) that the army finally made preparations to depart. Nothing allows us to suspect that Nicias had any official power to veto a resolution by the majority of his colleagues, therefore again we must conclude that his opposition amounted to discursive remonstrations rather than a formal procedure. It may be significant that in a critical moment the three *strategoi* were unwilling to make

⁵⁷ On this example of majority rule see Jameson 1955: 83, correctly against the assumption that Nicias was unquestionably the commander-in-chief (*pace* Jordan 2004: 40–3). On the episode in general see Harris 2010: 410; the diverging plans advanced by the three generals suggest that, as in many other cases, the 'mandate' issued by the Assembly was rather vague (see § 3; see Morassi 2022: 5–7).

⁵⁸ E.g. occasionally we find taxiarchs involved in a discussion (Thuc. 7.60.2). See notes in Asmonti 2006: 6, regarding this as an occasional practice; also Hamel 1998: 73–5.

⁵⁹ See Harris 2010: 411. On the threat of punishment for the *strategoi*, their mutual suspicions and their perception of colleagues and subordinates as a potential threat, see Hamel 1998: 118–21.

such an important decision unless they had reached unanimity first. This episode, which recalls the aforementioned uncertainty at Pylos in 425, has been compared to Phrynichus' strong opposition to his *synarchontes* near Miletus in 412/11. As a *strategos*, he refused to fight at sea and declared his intention to prevent anyone else from doing so (Thuc. 8.27.1: οὐκ ἔφη οὐτ' αὐτὸς ποιήσειν τοῦτο οὐτ' ἐκείνοις οὐδ' ἄλλῳ οὐδενὶ ἐξ δύναμιν ἐπιτρέψειν). Again, there is no formal procedure involved here: Phrynichus eventually managed to persuade his colleagues (27.5), but since their exact number and nature remain unclear, the episode is less informative than the Sicilian debates of 413. Hamel briefly discusses the episodes together,⁶⁰ but fails to explain how strong opposition might undermine majority vote: the Sicilian episode and, possibly, the Miletus debate rather seem to illustrate how generals discussing potentially critical decisions might have resorted to unanimity/consensus as a precautionary measure, probably as a way to feel safer on the field by unity of purpose and to make their point stronger in front of the Athenians upon their return.

3.2. Decision-Making: Unanimity and Teamwork as Informal Rules

The selection of examples here presented (§ 3.1) shows that majority vote among the *strategoí* could be employed as a decision-making procedure, but not light-heartedly. At Marathon it was a desperate measure, and Miltiades' speech in Herodotus clearly stresses the risks connected with a *de facto* one-man decision; majority vote was perhaps employed in 415 in Sicily. Otherwise, unanimity/consensus was preferred even when timing and speed were critical, as shown at Pylos in 425 (where the soldiers took the initiative after the officers had failed to agree and apparently refused to call a majority vote), in Sicily twice in 413, and possibly at Miletus in 412.

One implication of these discussion-based, consensus-building mechanisms is that a group of *strategoí* tended not just to operate, but also to present itself and to be perceived as a single agent in decision-making. Indeed, even at the Arginusae trial, the *strategoí* had reported collectively to the Council and the Assembly (Xen. *Hell.* 1.7.3–4), but each one spoke individually in his own defence (7.5); Euryptolemus proposed to judge them for both individual and collective liabilities (7.19–23), but ultimately they were illegally accused, prosecuted and sentenced as a group (7.4–7 and 34).⁶¹ Yet, as we have seen – and as the notion of consensus itself implies – the generals had decided to reach and present their decisions as a result of the mediated will of all the involved officers, as they likely regarded collective agency as a source of both legitimacy and

⁶⁰ See Hamel 1998: 97; see also the reasonable observations by Hornblower 2008: 825–8 on the Miletus debate.

⁶¹ On the trial see Asmonti 2006; Harris 2013a: 339–43.

safeguard against individual culpability. These episodes suggest that (near) unanimity was the ideal, although not exclusive, mechanism behind the decisions of a board of Greek military commanders. In terms of democratic rationale, this is consistent with the deliberation process as reconstructed by Canevaro,⁶² as well as with the conception of the *demos* as a singular entity, as opposed to both individuals and groups of leaders, analysed by Budelmann.⁶³ Whether these mechanisms actually worked well for the military is an entirely different matter – at times, they certainly created critical delays and anarchy, and one can at least note that, despite all of its complexity, the system eventually brought Athens to defeat at the end of the fifth century.⁶⁴

Several models can be applied to interpret the normative framework within which the processes of decision-making took place among the *strategoï*. The dynamics through which they sought cooperative synergy and unanimity on the field can be seen as an example of consensus-oriented decision-making (CODM);⁶⁵ if one-man decision and even majority vote were perceived as alarming and inappropriate, this means that the internal dynamics of the board tended to achieve conflict-resolution through mechanisms that today are classified as functional and productive, such as confrontation and compromise, rather than those regarded as dysfunctional and disruptive, such as forced resolution by an individual or withdrawal of the disagreeing party.⁶⁶ The tendency of a group of *strategoï* to favour collective action recalls the notion of real team, that is, a group that operates through an outcome-based approach and provides ongoing institutional learning to its members.⁶⁷ By borrowing a classification employed by teamwork studies we can see the board of *strategoï* as a relatively simple form of aggregation of sub-groups. To further connect this section to the institutional evolution of the office (§ 2.2), as long as the ten *strategoï* had no (or limited) specific posting, each sub-repartition of the board into different campaigns can be seen as an example of identity-based subgroups, that is, divisions of a team whose identity is fragmented for operative purposes. The offices assigned to specialised postings that composed the board from the late Classical period, on the other hand, appear as a kind of knowledge-based

⁶² Canevaro 2018d.

⁶³ Budelmann 2018: 198–200.

⁶⁴ See Harris 2013a: ch. 9, esp. 339–44, on the negative impact of the abuse of trials from the 420s on military performance. On the Athenian military see Pritchard 2019, with the remarks of Zaccarini in *CR* 69.1 (2019). The possible inefficiency of institutional outcomes produced by path dependence is aptly discussed by North 1990: ch. 11.

⁶⁵ On CODM see Hartnett 2011: 1–2.

⁶⁶ For this model applied to more complex teams, see Sarin and Colarelli O'Connor 2009: esp. 190–2.

⁶⁷ Cf. Ober 2008: 157–9, applying this model to small Athenian boards of magistrates. See also Budelmann 2018 on the internal dynamics within dramatic choruses.

subgroups called task-related subgroups – repartitions formed according to specialised knowledge and purposes.⁶⁸

The resolution of conflicting opinions through discussion draws attention to forms of interaction among the *strategoi* down to the rank-and-file. The possibility to seriously question a peer's or even a superior's (in the case of soldiers) decision implies a peculiar perception of the chain of command, a rationale which is certainly closely connected with the typically mild discipline and weak hierarchy (for modern standards) of the *polis* military.⁶⁹ Formal institutional rules, such as official powers, legal frameworks and rigid hierarchies were important up to some level, but they clearly operated alongside much less formalised mechanisms such as the in-group dynamics here analysed. New Institutionalism distinguishes between formal and informal forms of constraint in social relations.⁷⁰ Socially transmitted informal rules, such as norms of behaviour and conventions, are recognised as a prominent factor in shaping policies and political life: Helmke and Levitsky define informal institutions as 'socially shared rules, usually unwritten, that are created, communicated, and enforced outside of officially sanctioned channels'.⁷¹ Such informal institutions create normative expectations through which individuals tend to act: such dynamics played a major role in establishing the decisions of a group of *strategoi*, the relative weight of individual opinions, and generally the interactions both within the board and between the board and the citizen-soldiers.

In lack of a recognised supreme authority among the *strategoi* (all formally equals) on the field, the rigid hierarchy derived from institutional powers as assigned by the *polis* coexisted with informally defined, shifting and socially negotiated personal authority and claims, raised on the spot to address practical necessities during a campaign or engagement. This is entirely consistent with the awareness that non-institutionalised normative factors, such as peer pressure and reputation, played a strong role in affecting leadership and behaviour (also) within Greek military contexts, as they were socially construed, maintained and sanctioned.⁷² Again, this does not mean that the system always

⁶⁸ On this theory of subgroups see Carton and Cummings 2012.

⁶⁹ Some notes in Wheeler 1991: 139–40; on 'soft' military discipline in Classical Greece see Bettalli 2002; cf. e.g. *GSW*, II, 232–3 (paucity of sources), 243–5 (lax discipline, even in mercenary armies); cf. Zaccarini 2022: esp. 161–4.

⁷⁰ North 1990: resp. chs. 5 and 6.

⁷¹ Helmke and Levitsky 2004: 727; the authors regard their analysis as focused on modern contexts, but their definition of informal institutions seems to map rather precisely onto the dynamics at play among ancient Greek officers as well: see Azari and Smith 2012: e.g. 42 and 50, who (despite a heavy focus on US contemporary politics) consider densely institutionalised democracies and suggest the promising potential of applying the model to other fields.

⁷² On this topic I refer to the case study of shame I have analysed in Zaccarini 2022; consider also Zaccarini 2023 on fear.

worked smoothly: the above-analysed cases feature examples in which informal institutions can be defined as functional, that is, enhancing the efficiency of formalised hierarchy by allowing to break a stalemate and reach a decision (working as ‘complementary’ informal rule, as in the cases of Marathon and Sicily in 415), but also as dysfunctional, when the *strategoi* prove unable to reach an agreement, failing to make a decision and producing either an exasperated reaction by the soldiers or a dangerous stalemate, as at Pylos or in Sicily in 413 (an ‘accommodating’ type of informal rule).⁷³

4. CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has provided an overview of some defining features of the office of *strategos* in the long term, an analysis of the mechanisms driving the decision-making process among groups of *strategoi* and an interpretation of ancient sources based on models provided by the social sciences and the New Institutionalism. The permanency and change of the *strategos* in Athens show that this office was progressively compartmentalised according to the reduction in military needs and the increase in the bureaucratisation of the *polis*. From the naval Empire to the Hellenistic period, while the board was unchanged in its numerical composition, its duties shifted from military command proper to wider civic functions, turning the *strategoi* into a bureaucratic resource whose institutional history can be analysed through the notion of path dependence. The theoretical models here adopted can help us understand why, and how, the Athenians preserved and even reinforced their democratic institutions through their history despite facing dramatically different contexts over the centuries. In spite of the loss of the Empire and the inability to recover its military glories, the historical development of *strategia* reflects the remarkable degree of flexibility and adaptation of ancient democratic institutions.

The evidence analysed so far suggests that consensus/unanimity was the favoured means of achieving unity of command and a cohesive, mutual safeguard in a context as delicate and unpredictable as warfare. One-man and majority rule were theoretically possible, but in practice discouraged, in order to avoid bestowing excessive power or responsibility on a single individual. These notions stand at the basis of the peculiar Greek conceptualisation of leadership, discipline and decision-making, which were driven by informal rules at least as much as by formal, institutional prerogatives.

⁷³ I refer to two of the four types of informal institutions as defined by Helmke and Levitsky 2004: 728–30; a close alternative to their ‘complementary’ is provided by ‘parallel’ informal institutions as defined by Azari and Smith 2012: 41.