THE ATHENIAN NAUKRAROI AND ARCHAIC NAVAL WARFARE

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Resumo

O objectivo deste artigo é analisar as evidências dos naukraroi atenienes-
es e do seu contexto social, bem como as naukrariai e seus dirigentes, os πρυτάνιες τῶν ναυκράρων. Procuraremos ilustrar esta instituição através
do que recolhemos sobre os primórdios da guerra naval. Essa investigação
dozjrz-nos-á inevitavelmente e uma polémica problemática: a asserção de
Heródoto de que estes prutanies ou prutaneis (no dialecto ático) «adminis-
travam Atenas» e tinham desempenhado um papel relevante na morte dos
conspiradores cilónios no século VII a. C.

Palavras-chave: Naukraroi; Prutaneis; Atenas; naval; guerra.

Abstract

I propose to examine the evidence for the Athenian naukraroi and their
social context, and the naukrariai and their leading officers, the πρυτάνιες
tῶν ναυκράρων.1 I shall attempt to illuminate this institution through our evi-
dence about early naval warfare.2 This inquiry shall inevitably lead to a no-
torious crux: Herodotus' asserted that these prutanies or prutaneis (in the Attic
dialect) «administered Athens» and played a role in the deaths of the Kylonian
conspirators in the late 7th century.

Key-words: Naukraroi, Prutaneis: Athens; naval; warfare.
Our first inquiry concerns the basic nature of this institution. The term ναύκραρος is an archaic form of ναύκληρος «ship master», which was created through dissimilation of the r sound (a common phenomenon) and through a false etymology to κλήρος «allotment». Some late intermediaries do indeed tend to conflate naukraroi and nauklēroi. Both naukraros and nauklēros mean commander of a ship, since the first element of the word is derived from ναύς, and the Greek stem*kraros<*kaira<*kra-s- is derived from the Indo-European ker1 «horn». The same root is seen in κάρα «head». Associations with κραίνω «command» and with κραίρα «top» or «head» have also been noted. The term ναυκράρια is a feminine abstract built on ναύκραρος. Two points follow from this etymology. In the first place, the original naukraroi were simply ship-owners/captains. Weak social differentiation stood between merchant captain and warship captain because no sharp distinction yet existed between merchant galley and warship, and commerce as a vocation had not yet differentiated from other elite activities. Naukraroi became nauklēroi as social roles evolved. Having a ship as one’s klēros «allotment» meant that one subsisted by seafaring, just as a farmer or colonist supported himself by cultivating his agricultural klēros. Time does not permit me to explore the ramifications of this semantic evolution. Yet, averring that one’s livelihood was a ship constituted a significant ideological claim. It defied the prevailing early archaic normative system that restricted seafaring chronologically, subordinating it to the calendar of agricultural labor and connected religious rite. That had been the Hesiodic and Theognidean vision of subsistence. This willingness to claim naus asklēros is associated with emergence of new social groups like aeinautai «ever-sailors» at Miletos. However, the older term naukraroi was retained at Athens as the term for men officially providing warships for communal defense.

Secondly, while the naukraroi can be seen as officers of naukariai and thus state officials, constituting an arkhē, their quasi-private or vocational character should be recognized. They began as Athenians able to offer ships for military purposes. This opens the possibility that the naukraroi in the various naukariai may have varied in number depending on local economic conditions. Collected into units called naukrariai, they eventually had prutaneis as a «presiding» committee, who were presumably responsible for activating or coordinating naukraric activities. They were more obviously state officials, although we resist below the temptation to equate them with other archaic governmental organs. The naukraroi