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Source: *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 38, No. 5 (Sep., 2001), pp. 615-617

Published by: [Sage Publications, Ltd.](#)

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Accessed: 10/03/2011 14:41

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## Response to Spencer Weart

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Three points are discussed in response to Spencer Weart's remarks. First, Thucydides 6.32–41, which Weart considers damaging to the case for democracy in Syracuse, instead strongly supports it. Second, Weart's contention that Athenians did not *perceive* the Syracusans as democratic lacks any supporting ancient testimony; indeed, the fact that Thucydides was an Athenian and was fully aware of the Syracusan democracy implies the reverse. Finally, Weart's claim that ancient oligarchic republics also maintained peaceful relations with each other requires far more demonstration than has been offered, and in any case would seem to be contradicted by a number of historical examples.

I am glad to have the response from Spencer Weart (2001) to my views (Robinson, 2001a) and elaboration of his own (Weart, 1998). I offer here a brief rejoinder.

Weart notes my failure to discuss Thucydides 6.32–41 with regard to government in Syracuse, and considers that the text here gives a mixed message: while the open debate suggests democracy, the actions of the generals at the end signal elite dominance. I submit that the text is much less equivocal. First of all, during the debate one of the participants explicitly labels the constitution a democracy! Athenagoras, after accusing disgruntled young aristocrats of plotting against the mass of Syracusan citizens (*to plethos*, 38.2), defends the government as follows:

Some will say that democracy is neither wise nor fair, and that the ones with the money are also better suited to rule the best. But I say first that the people [*demos*] is a name for everyone together, and oligarchy only for a part; and next that while perhaps the wealthy are the best guardians of money and the wise take the best counsel, the many [*tous pollous*] when in audience judge the best, and in democracy these groups both separately and all together have an equally fair share. (39.1)

It would be difficult to interpret this passage and Athenagoras' speech as a whole as anything but confirmation of democracy at Syracuse. As for the actions of the general at the close of the meeting – he abruptly ends the discussion with the promise that he and his colleagues will take appropriate measures and report back to the assembly when more news becomes available – they hardly demonstrate 'control by an elite'. As commentators have remarked, the Greek here describing the cutoff of debate (*allon men oudena eti eiase parelthein*, 6.41.1) need not imply constitutional or presiding authority for the generals (Gomme, Andrewes & Dover, 1945–81: 4.307). Generals in Syracuse did not represent a ruling aristocracy, but were regularly elected officials, part of the democratic government itself and fully subject to its constraints. Indeed, more than once we hear of unsuccessful generals being recalled from office or more harshly punished by the Syracusan people (Diodorus 11.88, 11.91; Thucydides 6.103). Furthermore, it must be remembered that the assembly meeting here described was occasioned by rumors of an impending massive attack from Athens. In

military crises, generals are often given great leeway in democracies. Compare, for example, the seemingly extraordinary prerogative of summoning and preventing assembly meetings attributed to the Athenian general Pericles during the early days of the Peloponnesian war (Thucydides 2.22, 2.59). The Syracusan democracy may have been similarly flexible when it came to dealing with military emergencies.

But the actual state of the Syracusan constitution may be irrelevant, Weart asserts. He emphasizes that in his understanding of democratic peace the *perception* of one state about another trumps reality. Thus, if the Athenians did not perceive the Syracusans to be democratic, then the political culture at Athens would not have been engaged to bring about peace. This is an interesting theoretical position to stake out. But even if we accept it (at the expense of competing explanations for how democratic peace might work), the difficulty posed by Athens' war with Syracuse is not eliminated. The most decisive witness for Syracusan democracy is, as we have seen, Thucydides – an *Athenian* who lived through these events. Was Thucydides the only Athenian to be aware that Syracuse was democratic? It hardly seems likely, and there is no evidence to that effect.<sup>1</sup> Weart adduces reports in Thucydides about the Syracusan actions against Leontini, but none of the passages suggests Athenian ignorance of the Syracusan constitution. In fact, they show that Athens' motives for trying to help the Leontines involved a pre-existing alliance, ethnic kinship, and hunger for further conquest; democracy (or its supposed absence) never enters into it (5.4, 6.6, 6.19, 6.50).

Finally, since my article had as its subject

<sup>1</sup> Thucydides, it is true, does remark upon Athenian underestimation of the size of Sicily (6.1), but geography is not the same as politics. Indeed, we know the Athenians kept close track of political events in Sicily in the 410s, 420s, and earlier via ambassadors, alliances, and occasional direct interventions.

democratic peace in ancient Greece, I did not attempt to analyze Weart's further claim for a comparably broad peace between Greek oligarchies, nor is there space to do so adequately here. The claim is made exceedingly briefly at the bottom of one page, with another devoted to possible exceptions (Weart, 1998, 35 with n. 33; 297–298). For the hypothesis to be convincing, much more will have to be done in terms of marshalling ancient evidence and detailing the argument. In the meantime, I will note a few wars between oligarchies in Greece that any fully worked out 'oligarchic peace' theory will need to address: Sparta vs. Argos c. 546; Sparta vs. Argos c. 494; Samos, Lesbos, and/or Chios vs. Aegina c. 459; Chios and Lesbos vs. Samos 441; Boeotia vs. Sparta and Sicyon, 394.<sup>2</sup> And if Weart doubts my contention that the warring Sicilian states of the mid-fifth century were probably democratic, he now has another problem: the only alternative touted by scholars is that they were non-democratic republics – i.e. moderate oligarchies (see Asheri, 1990, 1992; Robinson, 2001b with bibliography). Constitutional perception was surely not a problem for these neighboring communities. Logic dictates that one or the other of Weart's peace theories fails here.

In sum, the ancient evidence shows little sign of the operation of democratic (or oligarchic) peace in the Greek world. I remain convinced that more progress might be achieved by concentrating on the differences between ancient and modern democracies in an effort to explain why a pattern of peace seems to hold in one era and not in the other.

<sup>2</sup> The Argive constitution after the fall of the kings and before the democracy: Robinson (1997: 82–84, with bibliography). Samos, Lesbos, and Chios during the Athenian empire: Quinn (1981); Shipley (1987: 109–120). Aegina: Figueira (1981: 299–343). Sicyon: (Griffin, 1982: 60–69). Boeotia: Hamilton (1979: 137–139).

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