

The Idealization of the Athenian Conon in Fourth-Century BCE Oratory and Historiography

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Abstract: *This article examines the battle of Cnidus in 394 BCE and the rebuilding of the Athenian Long Walls through the prism of fourth-century BCE idealization of the Athenian commander Conon. After assessing Xenophon's and Diodorus Siculus's accounts, it highlights that work on the fortifications began prior to Conon's return to Athens in spring 393 BCE. Fourth-century BCE oratorical and historiographical treatments of Cnidus and Conon are then analyzed to show a progressive, selective idealization that downplayed Persian participation and cast Conon as the savior not only of Athens, but of all of Greece. Finally, it is argued that Theopompus' views on Conon and Cnidus converges with Isocrates' portrayal of the 340s, showing the political significance of Conon's idealization in the mid-fourth century BCE.*

Keywords: *Early Hellenistic Athens, Conon, Xenophon, Isocrates, Demosthenes, Theopompus, Ephorus*

To the memory of Giovanni Parmeggiani (1973–2026)

The aim of this article is to consider the battle of Cnidus in 394 and the rebuilding of the Athenian Long Walls through the prism of the idealization of the Athenian general Conon in the fourth century.¹ Firstly, (§ 1) the main events are laid out as

¹ Translations of Greek and Latin texts are my own, unless otherwise noted. All dates are BCE, except for a few instances where CE is noted. Abbreviations of epigraphic sources follow the SEG online: <https://scholarlyeditions.brill.com/sego/abbreviations/>.

described by Xenophon in his *Hellenica* and Diodorus Siculus in the *Bibliotheca*. In § 2, it is highlighted that the rebuilding of the Athenian fortifications started at least a year before Conon reached Athens in spring 393. Isocrates' and Demosthenes' representation of Conon is discussed in § 3, showing that both authors idealized – to different degrees – the Athenian commander and consciously minimized the involvement of the Persians both in the battle of Cnidus and in the rebuilding policy. Isocrates' orations in particular show the stratigraphy of Conon's idealization from the 380s to the 340s. The historiographic tradition of the fourth century is then considered in § 4, namely Ephorus of Cyme and the obscure Athenian historian Cratippus, followed by a wider discussion of Theopompus of Chios. In § 5 it is argued that Theopompus' views on Conon and Cnidus, most likely expressed in his *Hellenica*, aligned with that of Isocrates in the 340s, stressing the political significance of Conon's idealization in the mid-fourth century.

1. The battle of Cnidus and Conon's triumphal return to Athens

The battle of Cnidus stands out as a significant event in the Corinthian War (395–387), a conflict fought by Athens, Thebes, Corinth, and Argos against Sparta and its Peloponnesian allies. The naval engagement near Cnidus occurred on August 14th, 394, coinciding with the Spartan King Agesilaus II's victory over the combined forces of Argos and Thebes at Chaeronea. This information comes from Xenophon's account, as he accompanied Agesilaus II that day and noted a partial solar eclipse, which has helped establish the precise date of the battle.²

Xenophon – who was evidently well informed on these events – reports that in the waters near Cnidus, the Spartan ships led by the navarch Pisander, brother-in-law of Agesilaus II, clashed with the Phoenician and Greek fleet, the former commanded by the satrap Pharnabazus, the latter by the Athenian Conon.³ Conon was among the Athenian generals defeated at Aegospotami by Lysand-

² Xen. *Hell.* 4.3.10. That Xenophon participated in the battle at Chaeronea alongside the Spartans is known from Plut. *Ages.* 17–18.

³ Xen. *Hell.* 4.3.10–12. For a biography of Conon: L. Asmonti, *Conon the Athenian* (Stuttgart 2015) with previous references.

er in 405. After the defeat, he escaped with eight ships to king Euagoras of Cyprus. He then entered the service of Pharnabazus, the Persian satrap.⁴ In that capacity he fought at Cnidus, where the Phoenician and Greek ships outnumbered the Spartans. This led to a retreat of the Spartans' left wing: despite this disadvantage, Pisander ordered the attack, but his ship was rammed and driven ashore. Many crew members attempted to escape to higher ground on Cnidus, while Pisander died fighting on his ship.

After defeating the Spartans, Conon and Pharnabazus drove away the Laconian governors (ἄρμοσται) from the islands and the cities on the coast and promised them not to build citadels on the acropolis and to keep them autonomous. From Ephesus, they sailed to Sestus and Abydos, where the Lacedaemonians would not yield. After spending the winter in the Hellespont, they sailed with renewed forces to Melos, used as a base for raids on the coast of the Peloponnese, set up an Athenian governor on Cythera, and set out to Corinth to continue the war effort against Sparta on behalf of the Persian King.⁵ Conon finally arrived at the Piraeus in spring 393 with eighty triremes and Persian funds to rebuild the Long Walls and the fortifications around the Piraeus.⁶

Conon's victory at Cnidus and his triumphal arrival in Athens were commemorated by a statue erected in his honor in the Athenian Agora, alongside another for Euagoras of Cyprus. These statues were placed significantly next to the statue of Zeus Soter, in front of the Stoa of Zeus Eleutherios. At the time, the only other honorary statues of individuals in the Agora were the Tyrannicides, Harmodius and Aristogeiton. Though the statues of Harmodius and Aristogeiton were situated across the Agora near the Odeion, the symbolic weight of this new dedication was unmistakable. By plac-

⁴ On Conon and the Persian fleet: D.A. March, "Konon and the Great King's Fleet, 396–394," *Historia* 46 (1997) 257–269.

⁵ Xen. *Hell.* 4.8.1–8. Cf. G. Icardi, *Affirmer sa puissance par la mer. La rivalité pour l'hégémonie en Grèce dans la première moitié du IV^e siècle avant J.-C.* (Lyon 2024) § 5 (<https://doi.org/10.4000/121gx>).

⁶ Xen. *Hell.* 4.8.9–10 (καταπλεύσας δ' εἰς τὴν πατρίδα συναναστήσοι τὰ τε μακρὰ τεῖχη τοῖς Ἀθηναίοις καὶ τὸ περὶ τὸν Πειραιᾶ τεῖχος) and Diod. 14.85, discussed below in § 2. See B.S. Strauss, *Athens after the Peloponnesian War. Class, Faction and Policy 403–386 B.C.* (London 1986) 126–129.

ing Conon and Euagoras in such a prominent position, Athens was effectively elevating these individuals to a heroic status previously reserved for the founders of democratic Athens.⁷

According to the later testimony of Athenaeus of Naucratis, Conon celebrated the victory at Cnidus and the reconstruction of the Athenian fortifications by offering a true hecatomb: this sacrifice of one hundred oxen was followed by a public banquet at which he feasted the entire Athenian citizen body.⁸ It is therefore not surprising that Conon's return at Athens totally eclipsed the political credit of Thrasybulus, his political rival.⁹

Only a year later, at the height of his popularity, Conon joined an Athenian embassy to the Persian satrap Tiribazus and was treacherously detained.¹⁰ His growing prominence evidently posed a problem for the Persians. He died soon thereafter, probably at the court of Euagoras of Cyprus, where he had taken refuge after escaping Tiribazus.¹¹

⁷ Dem. 20.68–70; Isoc. 9.56–57; Paus. 1.3.2. Cf. J.L. Shear, “Cultural Change, Space, and the Politics of Commemoration in Athens,” in R. Osborne (ed.), *Debating the Athenian Cultural Revolution: Art, Literature, Philosophy, and Politics, 430–380 B.C.* (Cambridge 2007) 91–115, at 106–108; B. Steinbock, *Social Memory in Athenian Public Discourse: Uses and Meanings of the Past* (Ann Arbor 2013) 313; A. Iacoviello, “The Martial Politics of Civic Space: The Portraits of Generals in the Athenian Agora (394–c. 375 BCE),” in G. Proietti, E. Rosamilia (eds.), *Memory and Space in Ancient Athens*, forthcoming.

⁸ Athen. 1.3d: Κόνων δὲ τῇ περὶ Κνίδον ναυμαχίᾳ νικήσας Λακεδαιμονίους καὶ τειχίσας τὸν Πειραιᾶ ἑκατόμβην τῷ ὄντι θύσας καὶ οὐ ψευδονόμως πάντας Ἀθηναίους εἰστιάσεν (“Conon, after he defeated the Lacedaemonians in the naval battle off Cnidus and fortified the Piraeus, offered a real hecatomb – not something only called by that name – and invited all the Athenians to a feast”).

⁹ On the rivalry between Thrasybulus and Conon: R. Seager, “Thrasybulus, Conon and Athenian imperialism, 396–386 B.C.,” *JHS* 87 (1967) 95–115; G.L. Cawkwell, “The Imperialism of Thrasybulus,” *CQ* 26 (1976) 270–277; B.S. Strauss, “Thrasybulus and Conon. A rivalry in Athens in the 390's B.C.,” *AJP* 105 (1983) 37–48; R.J. Buck, *Thrasybulus and Athenian Democracy: The Life of an Athenian Statesman* (Stuttgart 1998) 107–108; Asmonti, *Conon the Athenian* 165–166, 175–177.

¹⁰ The Athenian embassy to the satrap Tiribazus is recored in Xen. *Hell.* 4.8.12–16; Diod. 14.85; Plut. *Ages.* 23.1. Cf. also D.J. Mosley, “Conon's Embassy to Persia,” *RhM* 116 (1973) 17–21.

¹¹ The sources on Conon's imprisonment are Xen. *Hell.* 4.8.16 and Diod.

2. Rebuilding the Athenian Long Walls

The reconstruction of the Athenian fortifications – a material representation of the Athenian empire in the aftermath of the Persian Wars¹² – carried an enormous symbolic significance.¹³ More than a decade would go by before the Second Athenian League was re-established in 377.¹⁴ But in the late 390s the Athenians, with Conon as their victorious general, were trying to reverse the outcome of the Peloponnesian war in spring 404, when

Lysander sailed into the Piraeus, the exiled were called back, and the walls were torn down to the sound of flute-girls and great en-

14.85.4, who don't mention the escape and subsequent death. Cornelius Nepos, at the very end of his biography of the Athenian general, states: *Inde nonnulli eum ad regem abductum ibique [eum] perisse scriptum reliquerunt: contra ea Dinon historicus [FGrHist 690 F 18], cui nos plurimum de Persicis rebus credimus, effugisse scripsit; illud addubitat, utrum Tiribazo sciente an imprudente sit factum* (Con. 5.4: “Then, as some writers say, he was taken to the king and there met his end; Dinon, on the contrary, an historian in whose account of Persian affairs we have the most confidence, has written that he made his escape; but he is in doubt whether it was with or without the connivance of Tiribazus”). The escape and death in Cyprus are confirmed by Lys. 19.39–41. See J. Hofstetter, *Die Griechen in Persien. Prosopographie der Griechen im persischen Reich vor Alexander* (Berlin 1978) 106–111; Buck, *Thrasybulus and Athenian Democracy* 109–110; Asmonti, *Conon the Athenian* 174–179; D. Lenfant (éd.), *Dinon de Colophon, Héraclide de Kymè: Histoire perses*, nouvelle édition revue et augmentée (Paris 2025) 110–112. Further considerations on Nepos' biography of Conon below (§ 4).

¹² On the Athenian fortifications see F.G. Maier, *Griechische Mauerbauinschriften: 1. Text und Kommentare* (Heidelberg 1959) 16–18; D.H. Conwell, *Connecting a City to the Sea. The History of the Athenian Long Walls* (Leiden 2008) 37–64; A.M. Theodoraki, *The Ancient Circuit Walls of Athens* (Berlin-Boston 2020) 25–26; L. Costaki & A.M. Theodoraki, “City Streets, Walls, and Gates,” in J. Neils & D. K. Rogers (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Athens* (Cambridge 2021) 47–62 at 54–55. A map of the fortifications is found in J. Travlos, *Pictorial Dictionary of Ancient Athens* (New York 1971) 164, fig. 213, also reproduced in C. Constantakopoulou, *The Dance of the Islands: Insularity, Networks, the Athenian Empire, and the Aegean World* (Oxford 2007) 138, fig. 7.

¹³ Strauss, *Athens after the Peloponnesian War* 127; L. Canfora, *La grande guerra del Peloponneso. 447–394 a.C.* (Bari-Rome 2024) 26–30.

¹⁴ See the so-called decree of Aristotle: Rhodes-Osborne, *GHI* 92–105, no. 22.

thusiasm, since they believed that that day marked the beginning of freedom for Greece.¹⁵

Epigraphic evidence shows that the rebuilding of the fortifications began even before Conon's triremes entered the Piraeus in spring 393. An inscription discovered in the foundations of the section of the wall at Eëtioneia (now lost) attests the ongoing works in June or July 394, over a month before the battle of Cnidus when Conon was busy in the Eastern Aegean.¹⁶ Other inscriptions on stelai erected by the teichopoioi of various demes attest that between 394/3 and 392/1 the Athenians were busy working on the Long Walls.¹⁷ Rebuilding was a long and laborious work that could not be finished in a single summer.

Xenophon does not state explicitly that Conon started the reconstruction of the walls. In fact, he says that Conon "intended to assist (συναναστήσοι) the Athenians in rebuilding their Long Walls and the wall around the Piraeus."¹⁸ Diodorus Siculus is more ambiguous and asserts that Conon "arrived at the Piraeus with eighty ships and promised (ὑπέσχετο) the Athenians to rebuild the fortification of the city."¹⁹

Even if both Xenophon and Diodorus omit to mention that the work had already started before Conon's arrival, it is still possible

¹⁵ Xen. *Hell.* 2.2.23: Λύσανδρός τε κατέπλει εἰς τὸν Πειραιᾶ καὶ οἱ φυγάδες κατῆσαν καὶ τὰ τεῖχη κατέσκαπτον ὑπ' αὐλητρίδων πολλῇ προθυμίᾳ, νομίζοντες ἐκείνην τὴν ἡμέραν τῇ Ἑλλάδι ἄρχειν τῆς ἐλευθερίας.

¹⁶ *IG* II² 1656; Maier, *Griechische Mauerbauinschriften* 21–22, no. 1; Rhodes-Osborne, *GHI* 46–48, no. 9A. See P. Funke, "Konons Rückkehr nach Athen im Spiegel epigraphischer Zeugnisse," *ΖΠΕ* 53 (1983) 148–189; C. Fornis, "Conón entre Persia y Atenas (394–391 a.C.)," *DHA* 34.2 (2008) 33–64 (predates the beginning of the works to the summer of 395); Asmonti, *Conon the Athenian* 163.

¹⁷ *IG* II² 1657–1664; *SEG* 19.145, 32.165. Cf. Maier, *Griechische Mauerbauinschriften* 22–30, nos. 2–9.

¹⁸ Xen. *Hell.* 4.8.9: καταπλεύσας δ' εἰς τὴν πατρίδα συναναστήσοι τά τε μακρὰ τεῖχη τοῖς Ἀθηναίοις καὶ τὸ περὶ τὸν Πειραιᾶ τεῖχος. The verb συνανίστημι, "rise together," means in this case "assist in the reconstruction." This verb is rarely attested in Greek classical literature, but appears in other passages in Xenophon: *Symp.* 9.5, *An.* 7.3.35, *Cyr.* 5.1.5.

¹⁹ Diod. 14.85.2: ὀγδοήκοντα τριήρεσι καταπλεύσας εἰς τὸν Πειραιέα τοῖς πολίταις ὑπέσχετο τὸν περίβολον τῆς πόλεως ἀνοικοδομήσειν.

to match the epigraphic data with their historiographic narratives. However, the representation of Conon and of his deeds veered towards idealization and unabated praise in fourth-century oratory and in the later historiographic tradition.

3. *Idealization of Conon in fourth-century oratory*

In 392/391 – in the immediate aftermath of the events following the battle of Cnidus – Andocides composed the oration *On the Peace* to defend himself from the accusation of corruption. There he used a rhetorical question to point out the Athenians' own role in the fight against Sparta:

Who has made possible the Persian king's intervention against the Spartans, who has allowed Conon the naval victory with which the Spartans lost their empire on the sea?²⁰

The obvious answer was that it was the people of Athens who have made this possible. If this oration by Andocides is genuine – a point contested by some scholars²¹ – it demonstrates that, in the immediate aftermath of the battle of Cnidus, it was evident to the Athenians that Sparta's naval supremacy had ended with Conon's victory. It also shows that the Persian involvement could not be omitted nor understated. But the image of Conon as sole vanquisher of the Spartans and savior of Athens emerged already in the decade that

²⁰ Andoc. 3.22: τίνες δὲ βασιλέα πολέμιον αὐτοῖς ἐποίησαν, καὶ Κόνωνι τὴν ναυμαχίαν παρεσκεύασαν, δι' ἣν ἀπώλεσαν τὴν ἀρχὴν τῆς θαλάττης;

²¹ Edward Harris has repeatedly argued that the oration *On the Peace* ascribed to Andocides was composed in the Hellenistic age or in the early Roman imperial age: see E. M. Harris, "Andokides' *De Pace*. A Subversive Essay," in P. Flensted-Jensen, T. H. Nielsen, L. Rubinstein (eds.), *Polis & Politics* (Copenhagen 2000) 479–505 and Id., "Recent Events in Assembly Speeches and [Andocides] *On the Peace*," in A. Kapellos (ed.), *The Orators and Their Treatment of the Recent Past* (Berlin-Boston 2023) 81–99. However, his hypothesis has not been generally accepted: J. Grethlein, *The Greeks and Their Past. Poetry, Oratory and History in the Fifth Century BCE* (Cambridge-New York 2010) 128–129; A. Magnetto, "Ambasciatori plenipotenziari delle città greche in età classica ed ellenistica: terminologia e prerogative," *Studi Ellenistici* 27 (2013) 223–241; F. Pownall, "Andocides, the Spartans and the Thirty," in A. Kapellos (ed.), *The Orators and Their Treatment of the Recent Past* (Berlin-Boston 2023) 63–80.

followed Conon's death.

In the *Panegyricus*, written around 380, Isocrates mentioned the battle of Cnidus and the subsequent end of the Spartan hegemony by referring to the barbarians, but omitting Conon's involvement.²² In the same oration, Isocrates hyperbolically considered Conon "the most attentive of generals, the most trustworthy of the Hellenes, the most experience in the hazards of war,"²³ and claimed that as "commander in the service of Asia, he destroyed the Spartan empire."²⁴ The expression "commander in the service of Asia" (ὕπερ τῆς Ἀσίας στρατηγίας) was there to indicate that Conon was under the command of the satrap Pharnabazus and, indirectly, of the Great King, when he obtained his victory at Cnidus. The facts were too close in time to entirely omit the involvement of the Persians.

In his encomium for King Euagoras of Cyprus – probably composed shortly after Euagoras' death in 374²⁵ – Isocrates devotes a passage to Conon, whom Euagoras had harboured during the latter's exile following the defeat at Aegospotami.²⁶ According to Isocrates' account, "the generals of the king" (τῶν στρατηγῶν τῶν βασιλέως) were persuaded by Conon and Euagoras to wage war against the Spartans: they suggested that the Persians deploy an army on land while Conon and Euagoras would man the fleet. The victory at Cnidus is accordingly presented with Conon as commander, albeit with a decisive contribution from Euagoras, who "made it possible by providing the great part of the armament."²⁷ Euagoras emerges here as a key player in the victory at Cnidus,

²² Isoc. 4.119.

²³ Isoc. 4.142: ὃς ἦν ἐπιμελέστατος μὲν τῶν στρατηγῶν, πιστότατος δὲ τοῖς Ἑλλήσιν, ἐμπειρότατος δὲ τῶν πρὸς τὸν πόλεμον κινδύνων.

²⁴ Isoc. 4.154: ὃς ὑπὲρ τῆς Ἀσίας στρατηγίας τὴν ἀρχὴν τὴν Λακεδαιμονίων κατέλυσεν.

²⁵ See T. Poulakos, "Isocrates' *Evagoras*. The Educational Ends of the 'First' Biography in Classical Greece," in K. De Temmerman (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Ancient Biography* (Oxford 2020) 101–109.

²⁶ Isoc. 9.52–57. For Conon's relation to Euagoras, see Poulakos, "Isocrates' *Evagoras*" quoted above n. 25.

²⁷ Isoc. 9.56: καὶ ταῦτ' ἐπράχθη Κόνωνος μὲν στρατηγοῦντος, Εὐαγόρου δὲ τοῦτο τε παρασχόντος καὶ τῆς δυνάμεως τὴν πλείστην παρασκευάσαντος.

something that is unattested in other sources.

Finally, in the oration *To Philip* of 346, just after the peace of Philocrates that ended the ten-year war between Athens and Philip of Macedon, Isocrates could bend the facts in favor of the Athenian commander. When recounting Conon's career from the defeat at Aegospotami down to the victory at Cnidus and the return to Athens, he claimed that the exiled Conon wanted to wage war against the Spartans and informed the generals of the Persian king of his intention to do so.²⁸ Isocrates then continued by listing Conon's success against the Spartans at Cnidus. Consequently, he "deposed them of their power, and set the Greeks free" (τοὺς δ' Ἑλληνας ἡλευθέρωσεν). Conon also rebuilt the walls and restored Athens to the high reputation from which she had fallen.²⁹

In 346, Isocrates could gloss over the fact that Conon's military successes were due to the support of the Persian king and to a Persian fleet. The "generals of the king" (τοὺς βασιλέως στρατηγούς) are only informed of Conon's will to subdue their common enemy, the Spartans. Isocrates also completely overlooked the fact that Persian money was involved in the rebuilding of the Athenian fortifications. The liberation from Spartan hegemony that Isocrates acclaimed is diametrically opposed to Xenophon's account of the end of the Peloponnesian war in 404, when Lysander and his troops entered Athens and set the Greeks free from Athenian domination.³⁰

We find a slightly different perspective in Demosthenes' *Against Leptines* of 355/4.³¹ Conon's deeds are here recalled as an example

²⁸ Isoc. 5.62–63: αἰσθόμενος δ' Ἀγησίλαον μετὰ πολλῆς δυνάμεως εἰς τὴν Ἀσίαν διαβεβηκότα καὶ πορθοῦντα τὴν χώραν οὕτω μέγ' ἐφρόνησεν, ὥστ' ἀφορμὴν οὐδεμίαν ἄλλην ἔχων πλὴν τὸ σῶμα καὶ τὴν διάνοιαν ἥλπισε Λακεδαιμονίους καταπολεμήσειν ἄρχοντας τῶν Ἑλλήνων καὶ κατὰ γῆν καὶ κατὰ θάλατταν, καὶ τὰντα πέμπων ὡς τοὺς βασιλέως στρατηγούς ὑπισχνεῖτο ποιήσειν.

²⁹ Isoc. 5.63–64: συστάντος γὰρ αὐτῷ ναυτικοῦ περὶ Ῥόδον καὶ νικήσας τῇ ναυμαχίᾳ Λακεδαιμονίους μὲν ἐξέβαλεν ἐκ τῆς ἀρχῆς, τοὺς δ' Ἑλληνας ἡλευθέρωσεν, οὐ μόνον δὲ τὰ τεῖχη τῆς πατρίδος ἀνώρθωσεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν πόλιν εἰς τὴν αὐτὴν δόξαν προήγαγεν ἐξ ἧσπερ ἐξέπεσεν.

³⁰ Xen. *Hell.* 2.2.23 quoted above (§ 2).

³¹ For the context and the dating see C. Kremmydas, *Commentary on Demosthenes Against Leptines* (Oxford 2012) 3–34 and M. Canevaro, *Demostene, Contro Leptine. Introduzione, traduzione e commento storico* (Berlin-Boston 2016) 3–11.

of virtue for the Athenian citizens in a discourse on hegemonic powers in Greece. Conon is praised because he defeated the Spartans at sea, cleared the islands of their commanders, restored the walls, and made “the hegemony of Greece once more the subject of dispute between the city of Athens and the Spartans.”³² The fact that Conon was in the pay of the Persians and commanded a Graeco-Phoenician fleet is referred to with the words στρατηγὼν βασιλεῖ: “a general at the service of the king.” It has been noted that Demosthenes attempted to portray Cnidus as Conon’s individual victory for the good of Athens, while at the same time obscuring the role of king Artaxerxes and of the satrap Pharnabazus.³³

There are strong similarities in the representation of Conon in Isocrates’ *Euagoras* and Demosthenes’ *Against Leptines*, but their treatment is fundamentally different. For Isocrates, whose narrative contains less details, Euagoras takes the credit alongside Conon for the victory at Cnidus in his general praise of the Cypriot king, while Demosthenes relies heavily on honorary decrees and is more outright in his eulogy for the Athenian commander.³⁴ It is actually in the oration *To Philip* in the 340s that Isocrates’ treatment of Conon resembles more closely the view of the Athenian general expressed by Demosthenes.

³² Dem. 20.68: οὗτος γάρ, ὥς ὑμῶν τινῶν ἔστιν ἀκοῦσαι τῶν κατὰ τὴν αὐτὴν ἡλικίαν ὄντων, μετὰ τὴν τοῦ δήμου κάθοδον τὴν ἐκ Πειραιῶς ἀσθενοῦς ἡμῶν τῆς πόλεως οὔσης καὶ ναῶν οὐδεμίαν κεκτημένης, στρατηγῶν βασιλεῖ, παρ’ ὑμῶν οὐδ’ ἡντιοῦν ἀφορμὴν λαβὼν, κατεναυμάχησεν Λακεδαιμονίους, καὶ πρότερον τοῖς ἄλλοις ἐπιτάττοντας εἶθις ἀκοῦειν ὑμῶν, καὶ τοὺς ἄρμοστὰς ἐξήλασεν ἐκ τῶν νήσων, καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα δεῦρ’ ἐλθὼν ἀνέστησε τὰ τεῖχη, καὶ πρῶτος πάλιν περὶ τῆς ἡγεμονίας ἐποίησε τῇ πόλει τὸν λόγον πρὸς Λακεδαιμονίους εἶναι.

³³ See Canevaro, *Demostene*, Contro Leptine 305: “che Conone comandasse una flotta fenicia da ammiraglio del Gran Re, è menzionato velocemente, in due parole [namely στρατηγὼν βασιλεῖ]. Demostene tenta di rappresentare Cnido come una vittoria individuale di Conone per il bene di Atene, e di oscurare il ruolo di Artaserse e di Farnabazo.” Cf. S. Gotteland, “L’invention d’un héros paradigmatique: la figure de Conon chez les orateurs attiques,” in S. Dubel, S. Gotteland, E. Oudot (eds.), *Éclats de littérature grecque d’Homère à Pascal Quignard. Mélanges offerts à Suzanne Saïd* (Paris, 2012) 63–87.

³⁴ M. Nouhaud, *L’utilisation de l’histoire par les orateurs attiques* (Paris 1982) 128–129 and 336–337; Kremmydas, *Commentary on Demosthenes Against Leptines* 309; Canevaro, *Demostene*, Contro Leptine 305.

Finally, Dinarchus in *Against Demosthenes* of 323 includes a reference to Conon and his victory at Cnidus alongside other great deeds of the past:

Our city was great, highly esteemed by the Greeks and worthy of our ancestors, and after those deeds from the past, when Conon, as our elders say, won the naval battle at Cnidus [394], when Iphicrates destroyed the Spartan company [390], when Chabrias defeated the Spartan triremes at sea off Naxos [376], and when Timotheus won the naval battle at Corcyra [375].³⁵

This historical reconstruction, where the Persians are progressively left on the margins, and eventually completely excluded from the picture, displays the use of historical events in fourth century oratory.³⁶ Let us now turn to the image of Conon in the historiographic tradition of the fourth century and explore possible connections with Athenian oratory.

4. *The historiographic tradition in the fourth century: Ephorus, Cratippus, and Theopompus*

The historiographic tradition in the fourth century is marred by a well-known problem: apart from Xenophon, the works of the Greek historians of that time are only known through fragments. Nevertheless, we can infer something on their opinions on Conon by considering the fragments of Ephorus of Cyme, the Athenian

³⁵ Din. 1.75: ἡ πόλις ἡμῶν ἦν μεγάλη καὶ ἔνδοξος παρὰ τοῖς Ἑλλήσι καὶ τῶν προγόνων ἀξία, μετὰ γε τὰς ἀρχαίας ἐκείνας πράξεις, ὅτε Κόνων, ὡς οἱ πρεσβύτεροι λέγουσιν, ἐνίκησε τὴν ἐν Κνίδῳ ναυμαχίαν, ὅτ' Ἰφικράτης ἀνέϊλε τὴν Λακεδαιμονίων μόραν, ὅτε Χαβρίας ἐν Νάξῳ κατεναυμάχησε τὰς Λακεδαιμονίων τριήρεις, ὅτε Τιμόθεος τὴν ἐν Κερκύρᾳ ναυμαχίαν ἐνίκησε. Cf. G. Maltagliati, "Persuasion through Proximity (and Distance) in the Attic Orators' Historical Examples," *GRBS* 60 (2020) 68–97, at 83–84 (I have relied on her translation of Dinarchus' passage).

³⁶ See Nouhaud, *L'utilisation de l'histoire par les orateurs attiques*; Gotteland, "L'invention d'un héros paradigmatique"; J. Grethlein, "The Value of the Past Challenged: Myth and Ancient History in Attic Orators," in C. Ker, C. Pieber (eds.), *Valuing the Past in the Greco-Roman World* (Leiden-Boston 2014) 326–354, esp. 326–336; G. Westwood, *The Rhetoric of the Past in Demosthenes and Aeschines. Oratory, History, and Politics in Classical Athens* (Oxford 2020) 90–95 and 107–111.

historian Cratippus, and Theopompus of Chios.

The battle of Cnidus was certainly mentioned in Ephorus of Cyme's universal history. Unfortunately, the only reference to it is in a passage of Polybius who praises Ephorus' narrative:

In military matters I think Ephorus has some notion about naval matters to a certain extent, but in land battles he is completely inexperienced. Thus when one looks closely at his accounts of the naval battles of Cyprus [ca. 380] and Cnidus, in which the Persian king's generals fought against Euagoras of Salamis and the Lacedaemonians respectively, one can marvel at the author's descriptive force and his experience, and can take away much useful material for similar situations.³⁷

Polybius continues by contrasting the brilliant description of Cnidus with that of the battles of Leuctra and Mantinea, where Ephorus allegedly showed a lack of professional knowledge of warfare. For our purposes, it is important to stress that this passage shows that the battle of Cnidus was treated in some detail in Ephorus' work.³⁸

It is worth noting that in the Polybian passage cited above on Ephorus' treatment of the battle of Cnidus, Conon is not mentioned explicitly; he is only implied by the generic expression "the Persian king's generals" (οἱ βασιλέως στρατηγοί). This might lead one to assume, as Parmeggiani observes, that "it did not escape Ephorus that Cnidus was, first and foremost, a Persian success."³⁹

Even less can be inferred from the fragments of the obscure

³⁷ See Polyb. 12.25f (*FGrHist/BNJ* 70 T 20 and F 208a): ἐκεῖνος γὰρ ἐν τοῖς πολεμικοῖς τῶν μὲν κατὰ θάλατταν ἔργων ἐπὶ ποσὸν ὑπόνοιαν ἐσχηκέναι μοι δοκεῖ, τῶν δὲ κατὰ γῆν ἀγόνων ἄπειρος εἶναι τελέως. τοιγαροῦν ὅταν μὲν πρὸς τὰς περὶ Κύπρον ναυμαχίας καὶ τὰς περὶ Κνίδον ἀτενίσῃ τις, αἷς ἐχρήσανθ' οἱ βασιλέως στρατηγοὶ πρὸς Εὐαγόραν τὸν Σαλαμίνιον καὶ πάλιν πρὸς Λακεδαιμονίους θαυμάζειν τὸν συγγραφέα καὶ κατὰ τὴν δύναμιν καὶ κατὰ τὴν ἐμπειρίαν <εἰκός>; καὶ πολλὰ τῶν χρησίων ἀπενέγκασθαι πρὸς τὰς ὁμοίας περιστάσεις. Translation from G. Parmeggiani, *Ephorus of Cyme and Greek Historiography* (Cambridge 2023) 21–22.

³⁸ The only other fragment of Ephorus related to Conon and Cnidus is preserved in Harpocration's entry on Hieronymus, one of his lieutenants (*Harp. s.v.* Ἱερώνυμος = *FGrHist/BNJ* 70 FF 73–74), known also from *Diod.* 14.81.4 and *Hell. Oxy.* 18.345 Chambers. This fragment, however, does not add much to our understanding of Ephorus' views on Conon.

³⁹ Parmeggiani, *Ephorus of Cyme* 282.

Athenian historian Cratippus. A contemporary of Thucydides and continuator of his history according to Dionysius of Halicarnassus,⁴⁰ it seems that Cratippus ended his Greek history with the battle of Cnidus: this is the last event mentioned in a series of other battles that Plutarch enumerates and ascribes to Cratippus.⁴¹ But our evidence on Cratippus is very meagre and the hypothesis that the battle of Cnidus held a fundamental role in his history cannot be corroborated by other sources.⁴²

While we do not have much material to work with regarding Ephorus and Cratippus in relation to Conon, Theopompus of Chios allows for more interesting considerations.

A passage in an anonymous *Life of Thucydides* suggests that Theopompus considered the battle of Aegospotami and its consequences in very negative terms. After mentioning both Xenophon and Theopompus as continuators of Thucydides' history, the author of the *Life of Thucydides* lists several events in the late fifth century treated by Theopompus: the sea battles at Cynossema, Cyzicus, and Arginusae, and then the sea battle at Aegospotami, which is recalled as

the pinnacle of Athenian disasters (...) where the Athenians lost their ships and subsequently their hopes. For their walls were razed, the tyranny of the Thirty was established, and the city encountered many misfortunes, which Theopompus described accurately.⁴³

⁴⁰ Dion. Hal. *Thuc.* 16.2 (*FGrHist/BNJ* 64 T 1 and F 1). On Cratippus see Schepens, *L'apogée de l'archè spartiate*, who claimed that Cratippus and the author of the *Hellenica Oxyrhynchia* are one and the same; R. Nicolai, "Thucydides Continued," in A. Rengakos and A. Tsakmakis (eds.), *Brill's Companion to Thucydides* (Leiden-Boston 2006) 693–719 at 708.

⁴¹ Plut. *De glor. Ath.* 345D-E (*FGrHist/BNJ* 64 T 2): καὶ Κόνωνα πάλιν ἐμβιβάζοντα τὰς Ἀθήνας εἰς τὴν θάλατταν, καὶ Κράτιππος ἀνήρηται ("...and Conon's restoration of Athenian sea power, and Cratippus' history is taken away").

⁴² See the commentary on this fragment in V. Costa, "Kratippos (of Athens?) (64)," in *Jacoby Online. Brill's New Jacoby, Part II*, ed. I. Worthington (Leiden 2015): http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1873-5363_bnj_a64.

⁴³ *Vita Thuc.* 5 (*FGrHist* 115 F 5): τὸ κεφάλαιον τῶν κακῶν τῶν Ἀττικῶν, τὴν ἐν Αἰγὸς ποταμοῖς ναυμαχίαν, ὅπου καὶ τὰς ναῦς ἀπώλεσαν Ἀθηναῖοι καὶ τὰς ἐξῆς ἐλπίδας· καὶ γὰρ τὸ τεῖχος αὐτῶν καθιρέθη καὶ ἡ τῶν τριάκοντα τυραννὶς κατέστη

The strong emphasis on the misfortunes of the Athenians following Aegospotami suggests that Theopompus may have been influenced by pro-Athenian sentiments.

That Aegospotami played an important role in Theopompus' historical narrative is indirectly confirmed by Polybius and Diodorus Siculus. According to Polybius, Theopompus was the first to suggest that the Spartan hegemony over the Greek world lasted for twelve years, from Aegospotami in 405 to Cnidus in 394.⁴⁴ This periodization was later followed by Diodorus Siculus, who concluded the narrative on the battle of Cnidus (14.83–84) by stating that “from this moment the Spartans lost their supremacy on the sea.”⁴⁵ Since the last sentence of chapter 84 in Diodorus' Book XIV refers to the end of Theopompus' *Hellenica*,⁴⁶ it seems reasonable to suppose that here the Sicilian historian relied on Theopompus' narrative and periodization.⁴⁷

καὶ πολλαῖς συμφοραῖς περιέπεσεν ἡ πόλις, ὅς ἡκρίβωσε Θεόπομπος.

⁴⁴ See also Polyb. 1.2.3: Λακεδαιμόνιοι πολλοὺς ἀμφισβητήσαντες χρόνους ὑπὲρ τῆς τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἡγεμονίας, ἐπειδὴ ποτ' ἐκράτησαν, μόλις ἔτη δώδεκα κατεῖχον αὐτὴν ἀδήριτον (“The Lacedaemonians, after having for many years disputed the hegemony of Greece, at length attained it but to hold it uncontested for scarce twelve years”). Scholars agree that Polybius relied here on Theopompus' periodization: cf. F.W. Walbank, *A Historical Commentary on Polybius* I (Oxford 1957) 41; P. Pédech, *La méthode historique de Polybe* (Paris 1964) 305 n. 12; J.-L. Ferrary, “L'empire de Rome et les hégémonies des cites grecques chez Polybe,” *BCH* 100 (1976) 283–289; G. Schepens, “L'apogée de l'archè spartiate comme époque historique dans l'historiographie grecque du début du IV^e siècle av. J.-C.,” *Ancient Society* 24 (1993) 169–204; G. Schepens, “Tucidide ‘in controluce’. La guerra del Peloponneso nella storiografia greca del quarto secolo a.C.,” in L. Santi Amantini (a cura di), *Il dopoguerra nel mondo greco. Politica, propaganda, storiografia* (Roma 2007) 57–99 at 69–70.

⁴⁵ Diod. 14.84.4: καὶ Λακεδαιμόνιοι μὲν ἀπὸ τούτου τοῦ χρόνου τὴν κατὰ θάλατταν ἀρχὴν ἀπέβαλον.

⁴⁶ See Diod. 14.84.7 (*FGrHist* 115 T 14): Θεόπομπος δ' ὁ Χίος τὴν τῶν Ἑλληνικῶν σύνταξιν κατέστροφεν εἰς τοῦτον τὸν ἐνιαυτὸν καὶ εἰς τὴν περὶ Κνίδον ναυμαχίαν, γράψας βύβλους δώδεκα. Cf. Diod. 13.42.5 (*FGrHist* 115 T 13): Θεόπομπος δὲ τὰς Ἑλληνικὰς πράξεις διελθὼν ἐπ' ἔτη ἑπτακαίδεκα καταλήγει τὴν ἱστορίαν εἰς τὴν περὶ Κνίδον ναυμαχίαν ἐν βύβλοις δώδεκα.

⁴⁷ Diodorus might have used Ephorus for the description of the battle of Cnidus (see V. Parker, “Ephoros (70),” in *Jacoby Online. Brill's New Jacoby – Second Edition, Part II*, ed. I. Worthington (Leiden 2023) commentary on T

Another author that likely relied on Theopompus was the Latin historian Cornelius Nepos, a near contemporary of Diodorus Siculus. In his encomiastic *Life of Conon*, Nepos claimed that the Persian king commissioned Conon to wage war against the Spartans and authorized him to choose someone to dispense the money for that purpose.⁴⁸ Almost reluctantly, Conon suggested the satrap Pharnabazus, who aided him in procuring the ships among the Cypriots, the Phoenicians, and other maritime nations.⁴⁹ Nepos' narrative completely reverses the relationship between Conon and Pharnabazus that we know from other sources and effectively makes Pharnabazus a subordinate of Conon.

Once the Spartans heard of these preparations, they also assembled a fleet with Pisander as leader:

They were attacked by Conon off Cnidus and put to flight in a great battle; many of their ships were taken, several were sunk. That victory secured the freedom, not only of Athens, but of all the Greek states which were under the rule of the Lacedaemonians. Conon with a part of his ships went to his native city, saw to the rebuilding of the walls both of the Piraeus and of Athens, which had been destroyed by Lysander, and gave to his fellow-citizens the sum of fifty talents, which he had received from Pharnabazus.⁵⁰

Nepos emphasizes that Conon's success at Cnidus was not only a victory for Athens, but for all of Greece, as it was finally liber-

20: https://doi.org/10.1163/1873-5363_bnj2_a70), but it seems pointless to linger on questions of *Quellenforschung*.

⁴⁸ Nep. Con. 4.1: (...) *et Lacedaemonios bello persequi iusserit et ei permiserit, quem vellet, eligere ad dispensandam pecuniam*.

⁴⁹ Nep. Con. 4.2: *Hinc, magnis muneribus donatus, ad mare est missus, ut Cyprii et Phoenicibus ceterisque maritimis civitatibus navis longas imperaret classemque, qua proxima aestate mare tueri posset, compararet, dato adiutore Pharnabazo, sicut ipse voluerat*.

⁵⁰ Nep. Con. 4.4–5: *hac mente magnum contrahunt classem: proficiscuntur Pisandro duce. hos Conon apud Cnidum adortus magno proelio fugat, multas naves capit, complures deprimit. qua victoria non solum Athenae, sed etiam cuncta Graecia, quae sub Lacedaemoniorum fuerat imperio, liberata est. Conon cum parte navium in patriam venit, muros dirutos a Lysandro utrosque, et Piraei et Athenarum, reficiendos curat pecuniaequae quinquaginta talenta, quae a Pharnabazo acceperat, civibus suis donat*. Translation from Cornelius Nepos. *On Great Generals. On Historians*. Translated by J. C. Rolfe (Cambridge MA 1929).

ated from Spartan supremacy (*imperium*). This reference to Spartan *imperium* in Nepos' biography of Conon can be connected to Theopompus' assertion that Spartan hegemony lasted twelve years and ceased at Cnidus, as reported by Polybius and Diodorus.⁵¹

At the same time, the whole statement that Graecia, *quae sub Lacedaemoniorum fuerat imperio, liberata est*, seems to be in dialogue with Isocrates' claim, expressed in *To Philip* in 346, that Conon stripped the Spartans of their power and "set the Greeks free" (τοὺς δ' Ἕλληνας ἡλευθέρωσεν).⁵² Rather than imagine that Nepos used Isocrates as an historical source, it is more practical to think of a direct dependence on Theopompus, whose views on Conon aligned with those expressed by Isocrates in the 340s.⁵³

In the Augustan age, Dionysius of Halicarnassus praised Theopompus' decision to end his *Hellenica* with the battle of Cnidus in 394.⁵⁴ It can therefore be assumed that Theopompus discussed both Cnidus and Conon in the *Hellenica*. The chronology of Theopompus' life and writings is difficult to ascertain, but it seems that by 343/2 he was at the Macedonian court and that his *Hellenica* was already circulating in Athens and elsewhere.⁵⁵ It might be suggested

⁵¹ See above p. 270.

⁵² Isoc. 5.63–64 quoted above n. 29.

⁵³ The encomiastic portrayal of Conon in Nepos' biography has already been traced back to Theopompus, but without considering Isocrates' role: L. Prandi, "Storie dei Greci in Cornelio Nepote," in G. Bernardi Perini, A. Cavarzere (eds.), *Orizzonti culturali di Cornelio Nepote dal Po a Roma*, Atti del Convegno: Ostiglia 27 aprile 2012 – Mantova 28 aprile 2012 (Florence 2013) 63–74, esp. at 69; cf. F. Ginelli, "La problematica apertura della biografia nepotiana di Conone," *Lexis* 38 (2020) 447–460.

⁵⁴ Dion. Hal. *Pomp.* 6.2 (*FGrHist* 115 T 20a). For Theopompus as the ideal historian for Dionysius: Wiater, *Ideology of Classicism* 149–154; I. Matijašić, *Shaping the Canons of Ancient Greek Historiography: Imitation, Classicism, and Literary Criticism* (Berlin-Boston 2018) 82–84.

⁵⁵ This can be inferred from Speusippus' *Letter to Philip* which is usually dated to 343/2 and includes a reference to Theopompus' presence at the court of the Macedonian king: *FGrHist* 115 T 7 (*apud* Speusipp. 2.11.11). On the *Letter* and its authenticity, see A.F. Natoli, *The Letter of Speusippus to Philip II. Introduction, Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Stuttgart 2004) 24–31. For a commentary on Theopompus' T 7: W.S. Morison, "Theopompos of Chios (115)," in *Jacoby Online. Brill's New Jacoby*, Part II, ed. I. Worthington (Leiden 2014): https://doi.org/10.1163/1873-5363_bnj_al15.

that both Isocrates and Theopompus expressed very positive opinions of Conon's deeds roughly at the same time in the 340s.

5. *Theopompus, Isocrates, and the idealization of Conon*

It is worth recalling the ancient tradition according to which Theopompus was, alongside Ephorus, a disciple of Isocrates.⁵⁶ The historicity of this relationship has been questioned by scholars since Eduard Schwartz's influential *Realencyclopädie*-entry on Ephorus, and rightly so: the biographical tradition that linked Isocrates, Ephorus, and Theopompus was most likely the result of a later appraisal by Hellenistic scholars and literary historians based on analogies of style rather than historiographical methodologies.⁵⁷

The appreciation of Conon by both Isocrates and Theopompus argued so far does not presuppose a teacher-pupil relationships. They lived and operated in the same intellectual environment, fourth-century Athens, where the political and cultural debate was not simply an intellectual game or a playful pastime.⁵⁸

To idealize the figure of Conon in the mid-fourth century meant elevating Athens' importance in relation to other powers that threatened Athens itself: Sparta, Persia, Macedonia. It was a fundamental step in repositioning Athens on the world stage not only ideologically, but also politically and militarily.

In Pausanias' time in the second century CE, the name of Conon still resounded at the Piraeus and on the road that led to Athens. In the first book of his *Periegesis* or *Description of Greece*, Pausanias annotated:

Near the sea, Conon built a sanctuary of Aphrodite, after having destroyed the triremes of the Spartans off Cnidus in the Carian

⁵⁶ The main sources on the relationship between Isocrates and the historians Ephorus and Theopompus are collected in: Ephor. *FGrHist* 70 TT 1-5, 8, 24a, 27, 28a-b; Theop. *FGrHist* 115 TT 1, 5a, 6a-b, 20a, 24.

⁵⁷ See E. Schwartz, "Ephoros (1)," *RE* 6 (1907) 1-16; M.A. Flower, *Theopompus of Chios. History and Rhetoric in the Fourth Century BC* (Oxford 1994) 42-62; Parmeggiani, *Ephorus of Cyme* 10-11.

⁵⁸ See N. Luraghi, "Stairway to Heaven. The Politics of Memory in Early Hellenistic Athens," in M. Canevaro, B. Gray (eds), *The Hellenistic Reception of Classical Athenian Democracy and Political Thought* (Oxford 2018) 21-43.

peninsula.⁵⁹

This might be the same temple mentioned in one of the inscriptions of 394/393 from the Piraeus.⁶⁰ Pausanias also records that

advancing inland from the Piraeus there are the remains of the walls which Conon restored after the naval battle off Cnidus. Since those built by Themistocles after the Persian retreat were destroyed during the rule of those that went by the name of Thirties.⁶¹

Pausanias ascribes to Conon a grand architectural program: the construction of the temple of Aphrodite at the Piraeus and the rebuilding of the Long Walls. He was less interested in the political implications of his actions. And yet he presented an idealized image of Conon that effectively mirrors the portrayal projected by fourth-century oratory and historiography.⁶²

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⁵⁹ Paus. 1.1.3: πρὸς δὲ τῇ θαλάσῃ Κόνων ὠκοδόμησεν Ἀφροδίτης ἱερόν, τριήρεις Λακεδαιμονίων κατεργασάμενος περὶ Κνίδον τὴν ἐν τῇ Καρικῇ χειρρονήσῳ.

⁶⁰ *IG* II² 1657; Rhodes-Osborne, *GHI* no. 9B. Cf. above p. 262.

⁶¹ Paus. 1.2.2: ἀνιόντων δὲ ἐκ Πειραιῶς ἐρείπια τῶν τειχῶν ἐστίν, ἃ Κόνων ὕστερον τῆς πρὸς Κνίδω ναυμαχίας ἀνέστησε. τὰ γὰρ Θεμιστοκλέους μετὰ τὴν ἀναχώρησιν οἰκοδομηθέντα τὴν Μήδων ἐπὶ τῆς ἀρχῆς καθηρέθη τῶν τριάκοντα ὀνομαζομένων.

⁶² See also Athen. 1.3d (quoted above at n. 8) where the victory at Cnidus is exclusively due to Conon and there is no mention of the Persians in the rebuilding of the Athenian fortifications.

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