King Cleomenes of Sparta may already have foreseen the likely impact of Cleisthenes’ reforms on interstate power relations in Greece when he intervened to help Isagoras in 508/7. By 506, with the Athenian experiment well under way, he can have been in no doubt at all; the creation of a fully integrated citizen state in Attica almost instantly gave the Athenians a military capability to rival that of any polis on the mainland.1 Recognizing this serious threat to his own state’s preeminence, Cleomenes acted decisively. In a coordinated mobilization of allies, the Chalcidians and Thebans were detailed to invade Attica from the north and west, respectively, while the king himself arrived from the south with a Peloponnesian force, taking up a position near Eleusis.

But the devastating three-pronged assault was not to be. With all of the allied armies safely established in Athenian territory and poised to strike, first the Corinthians at Eleusis and then Demaratus, Cleomenes’ fellow king and co-commander, abruptly deserted the cause, forcing Cleomenes to withdraw. Galvanized by this unexpected good fortune, the Athenians promptly went out to meet the Thebans and Chalcidians. Both adversaries were defeated in successive engagements, and a measure of security against future incursions was achieved by the annexation of valuable territory on Euboea and in the sensitive border area between Attica and Boeotia. Two monuments were then erected: a burial mound near the Euripus for the those who had fallen in the...
struggle with Chalcis and a bronze four-horse chariot group on the Acropolis, a thank offering to Athena for the twin victories.²

The new regime had survived its first stern test from without. With hindsight, we can also see that the triumphs over the Thebans and Chalcidians in 506 mark the beginning of an important shift in the balance of power on the Greek mainland. A more assertive, interventionist Athens would increasingly overshadow neighbors like Thebes and Megara and would even come to challenge Sparta as the dominant force in interstate affairs. Within a few years, the Athenians would be emboldened to venture further afield and lend their support to the Ionian revolt against Persia, inadvertently paving the way for their finest hour—at Marathon in 490.

The primary reason for this newfound strength and confidence was the creation of a citizen army organized according to the tribal system established by Cleisthenes.³ The new form of military organization required each tribe to furnish a regiment (taxis) of hoplites from among those phyletai who possessed sufficient means to provide their own arms. Leadership was also to be assigned along tribal lines; each year, a board of ten generals—one from each phyle—was elected to oversee all military operations and command in the field.⁴ Indeed, the key structural role played by the phylai in the mobilization and administration of the army has suggested to some observers that military considerations, rather than political ones, might have been uppermost in Cleisthenes’ mind when he first conceived the deme/trittys/tribe reform.⁵ We shall return to this issue shortly.

A more immediate concern is to consider the novelty of a citizen militia in Athens. Was the new form of military organization simply an overhaul or adaptation of an existing system, perhaps one that had fallen into disuse under the Peisistratids? Or did it in fact represent the very first attempt by the Athenian state to institute a regular mechanism for mobilizing a national citizen army?

CITIZEN SOLDIERS

It is widely believed that some regularized form of citizen militia did exist in Athens before 508/7 B.C. Many scholars would probably concur with Ostwald’s assessment (1988, 332) that “however the army may have been organised early in the sixth century, the fact that the Peisistratids had depended largely on the support of mercenary soldiers will have made a new organisation desirable.”⁶ Presumably, any earlier system would have been based on the old Ionian tribes.⁷ That said, the evidence for military campaigns waged by the Atheni-
ans before 510 is astonishingly meager and tells us little of value about how their armies were mustered in earlier times.

There may be a simple explanation for this reticence. After scrutinizing the pertinent evidence in some detail, Frost (1984) argues persuasively that the Athenians actually had no standardized procedure for raising a citizen militia before the reforms of Cleisthenes. As he notes, the reliability of our sources for external military operations during this period is questionable on several grounds. In some cases, like the Athenian involvement with Sigeion, ancient authors obviously confuse and conflate the events of more than one era. In others, such as the early wars with Aegina and Eleusis and the so-called First Sacred War, the sources include elements that can be dismissed as “wholly fabulous” (Frost 1984, 284). Still other conflicts—those with Megara over Salamis and Nisaea—were really no more than raids or skirmishes, and the participants in them, like those who went on Miltiades’ expedition to the Chersonese, were probably volunteers drawn by the prospect of booty or farmland.

More revealing are ancient reports of Athenian defensive responses to hostile incursions from without, none of which suggest the existence of any institutionalized levy. The initial reaction to Cylon’s seizure of the Acropolis back in the seventh century was, in Frost’s words (1984, 287), “evidently spontaneous.” Cylon’s force met with no resistance until it had occupied the citadel, whereupon it was apparently besieged by people arriving “en masse” [pandémēi] (Thuc. 1.126.7) from the fields. And the slaughter of the conspirators at the shrine of the Erinyes that ended the coup attempt was universally regarded in later times as an action not of the state as such but of the archon Megacles and his family members, allies, and retainers (cf. sustasiōtai at Hdt. 5.70). The Athenians were no better organized some seventy years later, when Peisistratus mounted his brief coup in 561/0; his control of Athens was secured when a mere fifty men armed with clubs took the Acropolis unopposed. Fifteen years after that, when Peisistratus returned to Attica after a decade of exile, his relatively formidable force set out from Marathon for Athens and encountered no resistance whatsoever until it reached Pallene. Moreover, the Athenians who opposed him in the fateful battle that followed seem to have been drawn only from the city of Athens and were soon dispersed.

If the Athenians actually had a system for mobilizing a citizen army before 510, it is truly remarkable that there is so little evidence for it in our accounts of earlier engagements; we hear nothing of tribes, phratries, or any other groups who might have provided the organizational basis for military ventures. True, the office of polemarch seems to have been genuinely antique, and we do hear of men serving as “generals,” though there is no reason to think that these were
elected annually to the kind of board we see in later times. More likely, they were appointed as and when the need arose. Likewise, the troops under their command seem to have been mustered on an ad hoc basis, whether from volunteers, from retainers and dependents, or, in the case of defensive actions, simply from those who were around to help. And much as we would expect from the findings in chapter 1, there is no evidence that Athenian forces routinely included contingents from all parts of Attica before the last decade of the sixth century.

It seems, then, that the system devised by Cleisthenes and his associates for raising a genuinely pan-Attic citizen army had no real precedent in the earlier history of the state. Only after 508/7 did the Athenians finally find a way to exploit the manpower potential of their region to the full. Theirs was now a formidable presence in the world of Greek interstate relations, as the Thebans and Chalcidians would shortly discover.

Let us return now to the question raised earlier: is it possible that the tribal reform of Cleisthenes was motivated primarily by military considerations? There can be no doubt that the ad hoc arrangements of the past had limited the state’s ability to intervene and impose itself elsewhere, while also rendering it particularly vulnerable to incursions from without. However, as I showed in chapter 2, the need to address the chronic political instability of earlier times was no less urgent. In any case, the twin problems of vulnerability and instability were fundamentally interconnected. Engaged in ongoing political competition with their rivals, leaders had little incentive to change a system that gave them the freedom to raise what were essentially personal armies of volunteers and retainers. At the same time, the relative absence of any firm institutional structure in military life left the Athenians powerless to prevent these leaders from resorting to violence and destabilizing the state, as is so vividly illustrated by the coups of 561/0 and 546/5.

Neither problem could be decisively resolved in isolation from the other; the reform package of 508/7 was surely designed to address both. The creation of a system for mobilizing a national army was ultimately only one part of a larger experiment in collective self-rule. In a single stroke, the tribal reform made it possible for all citizens throughout Attica to share responsibility for defending the polis as well as for governing it.

Of course, the shift to a muster system that routinely required large numbers of men from all parts of the peninsula to bear arms for the state will have been one of the more problematic innovations of 508/7 in the eyes of the average citizen. After all, given the Peisistratid dependence on non-Athenian manpower, few Athenians of the time had much battlefield experience, and
those that did had fought either out of naked self-interest or out of loyalty to an individual leader. Henceforth, all Athenians of sufficient health and means would be expected to serve a collective national interest, an altogether less familiar and more abstract cause. How, then, was this cause articulated and promoted? How was it related to the larger framework of values and attitudes that made up the symbolic and ideological universe of the new order? Here, it may be instructive to examine evidence for two military commemorations from the period: the mass grave and the victory monument that were set up after the twin victories over the Thebans and Chalcidians in 506.

DYING FOR THE CAUSE

Among the Greek epigrams assembled by Planudes in the early fourteenth century and later assigned to book 16 of the Palatine Anthology is the following epitaph.13

Δίρφυος ἐδομήθημεν ὑπὸ πτυχῆς, σήμα δ’ ἐφ’ ἡμῖν ἐγγύθεν Εὐρήπου δημοσίας κέχυται· οὐκ ἀδίκως, ἔρατὴν γὰρ ὀπωλέσαμεν νέοτητα ῥηχεῖαν πολέμου δεξάμενοι νεφέλην.

[Under the cleft of Dirphys, we were subdued, and upon us was piled a grave mound near the Euripus at public expense. This was not without due cause, for we lost our lovely youth when we welcomed war’s rugged cloud.]

The original provenance of this text is not entirely self-evident. But most would agree that style and content seem to identify it as an Athenian military epitaph from before the 470s, when the remains of battlefield casualties were first repatriated to Athens for burial in the state cemetery, or Demosion Sema, on a regular basis.14 The most likely context for the verses would then be a polyandron, or mass grave, for those who fell in the engagement with Chalcis in 506.15 If so, the text is very significant indeed. It is our earliest evidence for the Athenian practice of burying and commemorating casualties en masse without regard for individual rank or status. In fact, it is our earliest evidence for the exercise of any kind of institutionalized control over the disposal of the war dead by the Athenian state.16 Before this point, as Clairmont (1983, 8) suggests, responsibility for the retrieval of the fallen was presumably left to the survivors, who would have conveyed the remains to the appropriate families for burial.
It is obviously not an accident that the new funerary practices appear in the years immediately following the creation of a new citizen army and the establishment of a new, more inclusive form of citizen state. Collective rule was manifest in collective burial, and the obligation to go to war for a shared cause in turn obliged those who survived to honor the remains of those who did not. Responsibility for disposal of the war dead had passed decisively from private to public hands as “[t]he demos took over the part of the father of the family,” and “all fallen soldiers were honored in the same way.”

The language and imagery of the Euripus epitaph also sheds interesting light on how the idea of a citizen army was represented to the Athenians in the aftermath of the reforms that first made this idea a reality. One is first struck by the epitaph’s acute consciousness of its own novelty. Its entire structure is organized around a defense (“not without due cause”) of the use of public funds to bury wartime casualties, a concern that is readily understandable if no real precedent existed for the practice. And then there is the word de–mosiāi (at public expense) itself, which occurs only here in commemorative verses of this kind. As Clairmont (1983, 88) observes, this unusual lexical preference probably reflects the pride taken by leaders of the new order in giving a public burial to the war dead for the first time in Athenian history.

But for all the epigram’s self-aware novelty, its diction and content also profess a heavy debt to poetic idioms of earlier times, both epic and funerary. Several words in the epitaph gain nuance and flavor from their Homeric pedigree. For example, while the verb damao– (subdue), used in the first line, was obviously chosen to soften the brute fact of violent death with an appropriate euphemism, it may also recall Homer’s use of the verb and its cognates, thus adding a sense of the great effort required to “tame” or “overpower” the warriors of Athens. Likewise, Homeric usage could well inform the choice of kheo– (literally, “pour”) to describe the erection of the burial mound, suggesting that the tomb possessed a kind of supernatural weightlessness as well as an appropriately “heroic” scale.

More vivid still is the cloud metaphor in the closing line of the epigram. The arresting combination of the noun nephe/-n with the epithet trekheian (rugged) conveys an image of the “cloud of war” rolling toward the waiting Athenians like some giant boulder, much like the rocks sometimes thrown by gods and heroes in the heat of epic battle. The implication of these various verbal echoes is transparent, if improbable: the novice citizen soldiers of Athens are being equated with those who took part in the titanic struggles of the legendary past.
The form and thought of the Euripus epigram also recalls earlier epitaphs composed for the tombs of wealthy individuals in Attica and elsewhere, texts that routinely draw on epic diction and imagery. Its central conceit, where the deceased address the passerby from within/beyond the grave, is a case in point. Perhaps the best-known precedent is the poignant mid-sixth-century epitaph for Phrasikleia from modern Merenda in Attica.

Σήμα Φρασικλείας· κούρη κεκλήσωμαι αἰεί ἀντὶ γάμου παρὰ θεῶν τοῦτο λαχωύς· ὄνομα.

[The grave of Phrasikleia. Ever shall I be called maiden, having drawn this lot from gods instead of a marriage.]

The novelty of the Euripus epitaph is of course that it extends the conceit from the single voice of an individual to the collective voice of the fallen Athenians. The grave admits no distinctions of wealth or status; the privilege of an impressive burial is bestowed on all alike, and in death, all speak as one.

But the primary model for the Euripus epigram was surely the verses composed to commemorate members of the archaic elite who were killed in battle, like the epitaph for Tettikhos mentioned in chapter 1.

εἴτε ἄστω τις ἄνηρ εἴτε ἕξενος ἄλλοθεν ἐλθὼν
Τέττιχος οἰκτίρας ἄνδρ' ἀγαθόν παρίτω
ἐν πολέμῳ φθίμενον, νεαράν ἔμμα όλέσαντα·
ταῦτ' ἀποδυράμενοι νεῖσθ' ἐπὶ πρῶτον ἄγαθόν.

[Whether he be townsman or an outsider from elsewhere, may he [who reads this] proceed on his way with pity felt for Tettikhos, a noble man who died in war and lost his youthful vigor. Once you have mourned these things, acknowledge the nobility of his deed.]

Much like the Euripus epigram, these lines contain a number of Homeric echoes (see, e.g., Il. 13.763; Od. 6.33, 17.382) that help to build an aura of heroic death around the deceased. A more specific resemblance occurs in the third lines of the two epitaphs, where a sense of the tragic untimeliness of death in battle is conveyed by phrases that recall epic formulae for the loss of life in war (e.g., psukhas olesantes, “losing their lives,” and the like). But in the epigram for the citizen soldiers, there is perhaps the hint of a new element. It comes in the word dexamenoi (“when we received” or “welcomed”), which implies that the Athenians gave their lives willingly for the good of the homeland. Hence,
unlike its private predecessors, which dwell only the pathos of youthful death, the Euripus epitaph does not request that the casualties be pitied or mourned by the passerby.

Perhaps we see here the first intimation of what would become a recurring feature of Athenian discourse on the war dead in the future: the praise of willful self-sacrifice for the polis as cause for celebration as much as for lament. Thus, while the epigram draws much of its force and effect from established epitaphic idioms, it also subtly reworks these conventions to produce an altogether new ideal of heroic death, one that was collective and essentially selfless.26

And the expression of this ideal was not confined merely to the realm of words. To judge from the internal evidence of the poem, the grave itself was purposely designed to recall the tombs of warriors who fought in earlier eras. Consisting of a large tumulus crowned with a stele, it clearly imitated elite private burials visible in Attica since the seventh century. Like the latter, it must ultimately have been inspired by imaginings of the landmark tombs of the Homeric world, such as that of Ilos on the plain of Troy.27 We might then see the heroizing polyandron for the victims of the battle with the Chalcidians as an immediate ancestor of the famous soros for the Marathonomakhai. Whitley’s comments (1995, 59) on the soros might just as easily be applied to the tomb near the Euripus:28

Particular burial practices are being used as metaphors for heroic courage and prowess and so as suitable means for honoring the dead. . . . The tumulus of Marathon depends for its effectiveness on previous mortuary forms and widespread ideals of heroic virtue. . . .

The Euripus war grave thus fits very comfortably into the general scheme of politico-cultural change in Athens in the late sixth century. Much as the new tribes offered all Athenians a share in the kind of glorious past that was once the preserve only of the great families, so each citizen soldier was now assured a burial fit for an Attic lord or an epic warrior. And through the adaptation and reuse of time-honored elite mortuary practices, a direct continuity of aretē was intimated, one that extended back from the new national army of the present to the legendary figures of Homer’s distant past. Whatever the unglamorous realities of late archaic warfare, the humble Athenian hoplite and his fellows could at least share in a glamorous death.

Athenian sepulchral arrangements for the war dead would evolve considerably in the decades ahead, and it seems that the heroizing battlefield tumulus had effectively been abandoned by the end of the 470s.29 Thereafter, the
remains of all casualties were repatriated and interred with due pomp in the soil of the Demosion Sema, which served in effect as a vast *polyandrion*. Evidently, as the frequency of Athenian military interventions increased with the rise of the Delian League and as the demands on manpower rose accordingly, political leaders saw potential symbolic capital in creating a compelling public spectacle around the burial of those who gave their lives for the polis. The result was the institution of a lavish annual state funeral, featuring a two-day *prothesis* (a formal display of the war dead), a horse-drawn cortege for the tribal coffins, and a program of athletic contests, as well as the familiar graveside oration. In other words, the occasion was essentially a full-scale, fifth-century reproduction of the heroic funeral ceremonies so memorably described in epic poetry and vividly rendered on Late Geometric amphorae, which had marked the graves of aristocrats in this very same location centuries earlier.30

We might note that some have seen the pageantry of the state funerals as a sign of the troubling persistence of a dominant aristocratic ethos in democratic Athens; others see it as evidence of the power of “the democracy” to appropriate and adapt aristocratic values to its own purposes.31 There is some truth in both views. But both may also miss the larger point.

When we consider the state funerals against the background of earlier arrangements for fallen citizen soldiers, it becomes clear that any apparent opposition or tension here between aristocratic practice and democratic context is of less significance than the more general interplay between past and present. Elements like the horse-drawn cortege and the funeral games were included in the spectacle not for their “aristocratic” associations per se but for their manifestly traditional and, above all, heroic resonance. The point was to suggest continuities of military prowess with the age of heroes; the mortuary practices of the archaic aristocracy simply provided the most readily available means to that end.32 And though this heroizing mode of funerary commemoration would not reach its fullest expression until the Cimonian era, the cultural logic behind it is already visible years earlier in the relatively simple tumulus and epitaph set up near the Euripus in 506, when the new citizen army met and overcame its first serious challenge in the field.

A TRADITION OF VICTORY

A very similar cultural logic informs the other monument erected by the Athenians in connection with the battles of 506, a thank offering for the twin victories, dedicated to Athena on the Acropolis. It probably stood somewhere near the entrance to the citadel, and was clearly regarded as a landmark of some his-
torical significance; after suffering damage at the hands of the Persians, it was replaced by a replica at some point in the mid–fifth century. The monument took the form of a bronze four-horse chariot, with the following epigram inscribed on its base.33

\[\text{Δεσσωμι ἐν ἄχυνωντι σιδηρέων ἔσβεσαν ὠβριν παίδες Ἀθηναίων, ἐργυμασίν ἐν πολέμῳ ἔθνεα Βοιωτῶν καὶ Χαλκίδέων δαμάσαντες.}
\[\text{τῶν ἵππους δεκάτην Παλλάδι τάσδ ἔθεσαν.}

With grievous chains of iron, sons of the Athenians quenched excessive aggression, after overcoming the hosts of the Boeotians and Chalcidians through deeds of war. They dedicated these steeds to Athena from a tithe of the ransom.]

Like the Euripus tumulus, the victory memorial was singularly unprecedented. As I noted in chapter 4, it seems to have been the very first commemoration in Athens of a collective military achievement. Along with the Salamis decree, it was probably one of the first public installations of any description to be set up on the Acropolis. Again, it is surely no coincidence that this particular style of commemorative practice—the celebration of victory won by the group—emerged only a year or two after the introduction of the reforms that defined the group and provided the organizational basis for the group’s military ventures.

Much like the epitaph for the fallen Athenians, the memorial epigram from the Acropolis uses a distinctly Homeric style of diction to lend heroic stature to the citizen soldiers and their accomplishments. Whatever the actual scale of the battles, their opponents are not simply “Boeotians” or “Chalcidians” but whole “nations” or “hosts” [ethnea], suggesting conflicts of truly epic magnitude.34 More interesting still is the characterization of the home forces as “sons of the Athenians” [paides Athenaiōn]. This phrase recalls Homer’s familiar practice of designating “national” armies as “sons of the Achaeans” [huies Akhaio–n] and the like and must consciously echo the description of the modest Athenian contingent in the Iliad’s Catalog of Ships as “youths” or “sons of the Athenians” [kouroi Athēnaio–n] (Il. 2.551). The continuity of aretē intimated in the Euripus epitaph is here made more explicit: the citizen soldiers of the late sixth century are the linear descendants of those Athenian warriors who graced the battlefields of yore, specifically those who fought at Troy.

But it will have been the monument’s sculpture that made the most immediate impression on viewers. Like the thought and language of the epigram,
the image of a four-horse chariot stirred visions of a world that was very far removed from the realities of contemporary battle. Chariots were certainly not a feature of Greek hoplite warfare in the late archaic era. Nor is it likely that they played anything more than a ceremonial role in eighth-century society, when they became a fixture of battle scenes in art and epic poetry. Fascination with these vehicles seems to have been prompted by the sustained encounter of the Late Geometric Greek elite with the material remains of the Bronze Age past, an engagement that also led to, inter alia, the widespread reuse of Mycenean tombs as cult sites for ancestor-heroes, the imitation of Cyclopean masonry, and the deposition of arms and armor of Bronze Age style in contemporary graves.

Whether or not chariots were regularly used in warfare in Mycenean times, knowledge of their military function seems not to have survived into the Iron Age. But representations and perhaps remains of chariots in Bronze Age tombs will have given them a prominent place in the grander, more “heroic” world that was evoked in the eighth-century mind by the visible residue of a civilization long since defunct. This of course was the world imagined in the Homeric epics, and perhaps more than any other medium, these poems fixed the image of the chariot in Greek culture as the conveyance par excellence of gods and heroes, both in war and in peace, and thus as one of the definitive markers or signifiers of the divine and the heroic.

In other words, the four-horse chariot that adorned the Acropolis victory memorial was an unambiguous iconographic restatement of the idea found in the monument’s epigram. Word and image combined to represent the novice citizen soldiers of the new national army as worthy successors of the storied Athenians who fought at Troy and elsewhere.

With its emphasis on shared continuities, the victory monument was very much a product of its age. It sat easily amid the cavalcade of equestrian imagery that had in recent decades come to engulf the Acropolis, while for the first time using that same imagery to celebrate a group accomplishment. And just as the fabric of the citadel and the Agora now proclaimed the restoration of an older, “ancestral” style of political community, so the victory memorial announced that an ancient tradition of collective martial prowess had been successfully revived. The new shared cause was thus glamorized: the obligation to take one’s place in the Athenian phalanx became an opportunity to tread in the footsteps of heroes. At the same time, the Acropolis dedication, along with its sister grave monument near the Euripus, established a verbal and a visual language on which the Athenians would increasingly draw for all forms of military commemoration in the decades to come.