In a country as poor as Greece, war became a principal way for individuals and states to increase their revenue. Homeric heroes acquired property and wealth through conquest. Greeks saw spoils of war as the victor’s property (Andoc. 3.11, Xen. Cyr. 7.1.44). Herodotus (e.g. 5.77, 8.123, 9.81), Thucydides (e.g. 1.11–13, 2.13, 7.52), Plato (Phd. 66c, Resp. 372e–374a), and Aristotle (Pol. 1.8, 1255b37, 1256b1, 1256b23–27, 1333) each knew the material benefits of a successful campaign. Ancient literary evidence attests, therefore, that plunder produced wealth on a far greater scale than other economic activities. Modern scholarship has agreed.\(^1\) The poverty of many Greek states, and the dearth of food resources especially, made wars of acquisition more common in the fifth and fourth centuries BC.\(^2\) In this period, states, like Athens, became more cohesive and more able to coordinate their resources to steal those of others. This chapter explores the acquisition, redistribution, and circulation of resources, primarily in the form of coinage, which accompanied the rise and dominance of the Athenian Empire in the fifth century BC. It seeks to follow the trail of money and show that Athens was as much an economic as a political imperial society and empire and the important role played by economic and therefore monetary ‘flow’ in understanding the rise and fall of the Athenian archê.

Fifth century Athens reflected the economic necessities of antiquity. The archê that the Athenians created in this period sought to control grain resources within the eastern Mediterranean. What follows demonstrates the economic significance of Athenian efforts and, most importantly, the role that

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\(^3\) All dates are BC unless otherwise stated.
coinage played in framing the Athenian Empire. The efforts of the Peisistratids in the late sixth century to secure the Hellespont, Chersonesus, and other areas of the northern Aegean further developed Solon’s earlier policies to control food supplies within Attica at the start of the sixth century. Economic interests underpinned Athenian imperialism well before the imperial period of the fifth century. During the fifth century, Athenian imperialism feels ever more economic, with all manner of techniques to control resources within Attica and to control food production centers like the Black Sea, Egypt, and later Sicily.\(^4\) Silver, in the form of Athenian coinage, became the mechanism by which such resources might be controlled. Silver coins flowed out of Attica from Laureion, around the empire, the Aegean Basin, and back again, but, as many hoards illustrate, it also flowed out of the empire.\(^5\) Understanding this money ‘go-round’ is not as simple as it theoretically might appear. The flow of coinage, the fiscal focus of many inscriptions, and Thucydides’ clear emphasis on the importance of money illustrates much about the Athenian Empire’s economic basis.

Two sets of premises are important in this discussion. The first set connects naval warfare, money, and empire just as Thucydides (1.11) did at the start of his history. Here he links naval power with money and with longer and more aggressive wars. It is no surprise that wealthy regions and states produced the first large navies: Phoenicia, Egypt, Miletos, Samos, Corcyra and Corinth, and then, finally, Aegina and Athens.\(^6\) Thucydides clearly recognized the significance of navies on the one hand and money on the other.\(^7\) Thus, the Athenian naval archê rested on the production and redistribution of coined silver. This silver paid for the ships, the oarsmen, and specialist crews that defended the empire. Tribute in coin, after the initial investment from a windfall find at Laureion, became a significant part of a redistributive cycle of resources flowing from the allies, as phoros and other mechanisms of financial exploitation, to

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4 See for example the Phaselis decree, Meiggs and Lewis (1989) 31.6–14, regarding grain supplies and other traded goods to Athens. For further evidence see Thuc. 3.86.4, 115.3–5 and Arist. [Ath. Pol. ] 51.3. For discussion and a contrary view see Garnsey (1988) 127–128 who observes the absence of official controls of grain supplies.

5 See for discussion Howgego (1995); Kallet-Marx (1993); Kallet (2001); Samons (2000); Samons, (1993) 129–138; Mattingly (1996); Meiggs (1972); Meritt et al. (1939–1953). Most recently, the important contribution of Kallet (2013) 43–60 which argues, I think rightly, for an economic basis from the start of (and even before) the Athenian control of the Delian League.


7 Thucydides’ obsession with money has been well noted, see for example Kallet-Marx (1993); Kallet (2001).