

424 BCE

Capture of Amphipolis

Amphipolis was a colony in Thrace, founded after several failed expeditions by various poleis (Flensted-Jensen 2004:819). The founder was Hagnon, an Athenian, making Amphipolis an Athenian colony (Flensted-Jensen 2004:819; Thuc.4.102.3-4) however it was inhabited by people from other poleis (Thuc.4.103.3).

The primary importance of Amphipolis to the Athenians was its timber export, which was used for shipbuilding (Thuc.4.108.1). Part of the Periclean strategy meant maintaining the Athenian fleet to preserve their position as a naval power was a necessity (Rhodes 1998:23). Therefore, losing access to Thracian fir (Rhodes 1998:291) was a major blow when Amphipolis was captured by Lacedaemonians.

Brasidas, the man who captured Amphipolis, was a Lacedaemonian leader, who is presented by Thucydides as a military genius and is one of the few individuals Thucydides attributed with great, if flawed, virtue (Burns 2011:508).

Traitors from within the polis helped Brasidas' army to gain access to city by staging a revolt while Brasidas took advantage of the poor weather to cross the guarded bridge (Thuc.4.103). Brasidas managed to surprise the inhabitants of the city and captured the people who were still outside the walls (Thuc.4.104), whom Rhodes (1998:287) suggests were farmers who remained on their land overnight. The Athenians prevented Brasidas' allies from immediately lowering the gate for Brasidas and the Athenian general already present sent a request for reinforcements (Thuc.4.104).

Knowing that the approaching general was Thucydides, who held the rights to work Thracian gold-mines and would be able to collect quickly an allied force to relieve Amphipolis, Brasidas offered a deal to the Amphipolians: to remain and keep their possessions and equality or to leave with their property within five days (Thuc.4.105). Deciding the terms were fair, the city capitulated, and the resident Athenians fled (Thuc.4.106).

The account by Thucydides is very brief, only taking four chapters (Thuc.4.102-6) so it does not contain as much information as other accounts Thucydides was or heard eye-witness accounts for, such as the Mytilene revolt (Thuc.3.2-19).

Bibliography

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