

Thucydides 1.100: Example Gobbet

The 460s was an important period in the history of Athenian imperialism. Thucydides 1.100, which is part of the narrative of the *Pentekontaetia*¹, covers three events: the battle of Eurymedon, the Thasian revolt and the attempt to colonise Hennea Hodoi. This essay will primarily discuss the reasons for the Thasian revolt as a significant turning point in the history of Athenian imperialism.

While Thucydides is considered to be a careful historian, providing detail and following a considered methodology², his coverage of the *Pentekontaetia* is very brief. He is interested only in summarising the events that brought about the pinnacle of Athenian power.³ Hence the description of important events, such as the battle of Eurymedon and the Thasian revolt, covers only a few lines.

Conversely, Diodoros wrote a universal history covering events from before the fall of Troy to the time of Caesar in forty books.⁴ Diodoros' account is both compressed and of a summary nature.⁵ This is certainly true if one compares the coverage of the Peloponnesian War by Thucydides (in eight books covering 431-411BCE) and Xenophon (in two books covering 411-404 BCE) to that of Diodoros (in one and a half books covering 431-404 BCE).

Yet the situation is reversed in the *Pentekontaetia*, as Diodoros' account is more detailed than that of Thucydides; for example the battle of Eurymedon and its aftermath are covered in two chapters in Diodoros.⁶ Interestingly, the Thasian revolt is covered only in a few lines⁷, and partnered with a longer coverage of the revolt of Aegina⁸. They are presented as evidence for the changing nature of Athenian imperialism.⁹

Thucydides' coverage of the Thasian revolt is particularly brief, yet he mentions the reason for the revolt: the Athenian demand that Thasos surrenders control of the mines and marts on

Comment [EB1]: Soft introduction

Comment [EB2]: Putting it into context.

Comment [EB3]: Main themes – necessary!!

Comment [EB4]: Narrowing down to achieve depth.

Comment [EB5]: Connecting with soft intro so that it does not come as a surprise to the reader.

Comment [EB6]: Basic comment on the author.

Comment [EB7]: And making it specific to the author.

Comment [EB8]: Ancient source and modern scholarship together.

Comment [EB9]: And making the issue specific to the gobbet.

Comment [EB10]: Connection with above (remember the issue of having good credit with the reader).

Comment [EB11]: Intro to parallel source.

Comment [EB12]: Beginning of argument (in connection with the bit above). I.e. all is about the question of the summary account.

Comment [EB13]: Conclusion and evidence of argument.

Comment [EB14]: And reconnecting to the stated aim of the essay.

¹ Thuc. 1.89-118.

² Foster and Lateiner 2012:4.

³ Thuc. 1.89; Hornblower 1991:133.

⁴ Rubincam 1998:229.

⁵ Meister 2012.

⁶ D.S. 11.61-2.

⁷ D.S. 11.70.1.

⁸ D.S. 11.70.2-3.

⁹ D.S. 11.70.4.

the *peraia*. This demands further explanation and is connected with the growth of Athenian imperialism.

Thasos was a local power in Thrace, having a large *peraia* with several settlements, as well as mines that brought it immense wealth.¹⁰ It is also generally accepted that at the time of its revolt it had, or could support, a medium-sized fleet of about thirty ships.¹¹ Its geographical position, and that of the *peraia* settlements, meant that Thasos controlled access both to the mining region of the Pangaion and to the timber trade from the Rhodope Mountains down the Strymon River (hence why the marts in the passage are as important as the mine).¹²

Comment [EB15]: Setting the stage: it is wealthy

Comment [EB16]: Setting the stage part 2: it has a fleet (ie a military threat).

Comment [EB17]: Leading the horse.

The wealth of Thasos, and its access to timber resources, made it a target for Athens, despite its membership of the Delian League.¹³ Until the mid-460s, Athens had not been overtly imperialistic towards its allies. Even the putting down of the revolt of Naxos could be explained (at least for the benefit of the allies) as an effort to avoid the island becoming a staging point for an invasion, as it had been in the Persian campaign of 490 BCE.¹⁴ Athens' demand that Thasos surrender its *peraia* was a direct attack against an ally's autonomy and heralded a significant change in the way Athens treated its allies.¹⁵ This is the reason why it is included in the summary narrative given by Thucydides.

Comment [EB18]: Connecting with previous and introducing new issue.

Comment [EB19]: Proving the difference between overt and covert.

Comment [EB20]: Conclusion of point.

Comment [EB21]: Connection with gobbet and 1st argument.

The Athenian choice of Thasos as the first target of a more imperialistic stance was logical.

Comment [EB22]: connective

Meiggs argued that there was a connection between the mining areas and the Athenian attack¹⁶ but the evidence does not quite support the idea that metal resources were the main Athenian motivation. Athens' control over the sea lanes, its defence against a renewed Persian offensive, and its control over its allies, depended upon its navy. Athens, however, did not have the necessary materials to build large numbers of triremes locally.¹⁷

Comment [EB23]: modern scholarship

Comment [EB24]: attack.

Comment [EB25]: Set the stage.

Comment [EB26]: Ace.

Additionally, the best timber for triremes, silver-fir, could only be found in specific areas around the Mediterranean: Macedonia, Thrace, Mysia, Latium.¹⁸ Of all the areas, Thrace was the easiest for Athens to access, and possibly control, since Macedon was a strong kingdom

Comment [EB27]: Parallel argument.

¹⁰ Hdt. 6.46; Hansen and Nielsen 2004:779.

¹¹ Meiggs 1972:266.

¹² Bissa 2009:35; Meiggs 1972:365.

¹³ Hansen and Nielsen 2004:779.

¹⁴ Hdt. 5.30; Meiggs 1972:71.

¹⁵ Meiggs 1972:90.

¹⁶ Meiggs 1972:83.

¹⁷ Bissa 2009:117.

¹⁸ Theo. HP. 4.5.5.

(particularly under Alexander I)¹⁹, Mysia was too easily controlled by the Persians, and Latium was far away and more easily controlled by a powerful Syracuse (such as the one under Gelon)²⁰. Hence, Athenian control of the timber supplies of Thrace could only be accomplished if Thasos surrendered its *peraia*, which is exactly the demand recorded by Thucydides. Certainly controlling another mine would not be rejected by Athens, as Meiggs argued²¹, but timber was surely a more important commodity under the circumstances, given that Athens already had control of the mining area of Laurion, the most important in the Greek world at the time.²²

Comment [EB28]: Closing the argument hole.

Comment [EB29]: Final punch

The effort by Athens to colonise Hennea Hodoi clearly points to a timber-related explanation of the demands against Thasos²³; something that is emphasised in Thucydides as the two events are mentioned one after the other, unlike the Diodoran account that injects a discussion of the Aeginetan revolt.²⁴ Although the colonising effort in the 460s was unsuccessful, a later effort in the 430s succeeded in colonising Amphipolis.²⁵ The conquest of Amphipolis by the Spartan Brasidas in 424 BCE brought about great fear and consternation in Athens, specifically because of its effect upon the Athenian timber supply, as Thucydides mentioned in 4.108.

Comment [EB30]: Connection with argument in p.1

Comment [EB31]: Stomp!

Unlike other Athenian actions in the 470s and 460s, including the conquest of settlements, such as Eion,²⁶ the attack on Thasos could not be explained away to the allies as part of an effort to safeguard against a renewed Persian offensive.²⁷ The timing of the demand after a major Persian defeat by the Athenian fleet also precluded an Athenian explanation to the allies relating to a Persian threat.²⁸ Hence the inclusion of the Thasian revolt in the Thucidean narrative, as well as Diodoros' comment about Athenian imperialism²⁹, since it is the turning-point into overt imperialistic action against the allies and, one can assume, the beginning of an allied conception of Athens as an imperialistic overlord. Certainly, the

Comment [EB32]: Connection with before

Comment [EB33]: Eurymedon....

Comment [EB34]: Bringing it in all together.

¹⁹ Hammond 1989:178-80.

²⁰ D.S. 11.22.

²¹ Meiggs 1972:83.

²² Lohman 2012.

²³ Bissa 2009:122.

²⁴ D.S. 11.70.2-3.

²⁵ Bissa 2009:123.

²⁶ Thuc. 1.98.

²⁷ Meiggs 1972:90.

²⁸ Meiggs 1972:90.

²⁹ D.S. 11.70.4.

Thasians' reaction in asking Sparta for help³⁰ foreshadows the usual actions of members of the Delian League that wanted to get out of Athenian domination, such as Aegina, Samos and Mytilene later.

Comment [EB35]: Parting shot.

Word count: 1,090.

³⁰ Thuc. 1.101.

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