

428 BCE

Motivations for the Mytilenean revolt

Mytilene was a polis on the island of Lesbos (Hansen, Spencer and Williams 2004:1018). There is some debate about the number of poleis on Lesbos, but it is generally agreed that by the Classical period there were five settlements – Methymna, Antissa, Eresos, Pyrrha and Mytilene (Hornblower 1997:382) – that fit the definition of polis (Hansen, Spencer and Williams 2004:1018). ✓

Lesbos was settled during the early Bronze and late Iron age (Hansen, Spencer and Williams 2004:1018). The poleis of Lesbos participated in the Ionian revolt against the Persians but faced enslavement after their defeat (Hansen, Spencer and Williams 2004:1019). After joining the Greeks, the Lesbians were among the founding members of the Delian league and ship-contributing members (Hansen, Spencer and Williams 2004:1019; Thuc.1.117.2).

Sometime before the start of the Second Peloponnesian War, Mytilene planned a revolt against Athens, which they enacted after an invasion of Attica by the Lacedaemonians (Thuc.3.2). All the Lesbian poleis were involved, excluding Methymna.

Their motivation, according to Thucydides, was the synoikismos of Lesbos under Mytilenean rule (Thuc.3.2). Thucydides does not clearly say what the Mytileneans hoped to achieve from the synoikismos, however, in later speech when requesting aid from the Lacedaemonians, the Mytileneans claimed that the Athenians had begun enslaving their allies after the end of the Persian war (Thuc.3.10.2-6) and that the Mytileneans were revolting before the same could be done to them (Thuc.3.12).

This evidence, however, is suspect. As Quinn (1981:25-6) notes, there was no way for Thucydides to have been present during the speech. As well, the purpose of the speech was to persuade the Lacedaemonians to ally with Mytilene against Athens so the Mytileneans would have been trying to cast themselves in a more positive light (Quinn 1981:26). Further, the Athenians' reactions to learning of Mytilene's betrayal was shock rather than someone who was seizing a long-awaited opportunity (Quinn 1981:27).

Consider what a synoikismos is and how that could have affected power in the island.

Or so Thuc. tells us.

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Very good work.

To improve:

- ① Research the detail in order to understand the issues properly
- ② Use more scholarship and be more critical towards it.

432 BCE

Delphic response to Lacedaemonians

Delphi was the polis that was home to the sanctuary of Apollo (Oulhen 2004:412). It was important both politically, and religiously, as it was the site of Apollo's victory over Python and his subsequent founding of the oracle (HHAp. 285-374). After its discovery by goat-herders and the decision to let just one person act as a conduit for Apollo's visions (Diod.16.26), the oracle was visited by supplicants with important, unanswerable questions from across the Greek world (e.g. in Eur. Med. (663-688) Aegeus visited Delphi to ask how to solve his childlessness). These visitors often donated considerable wealth to the sanctuary (e.g. Hdt. 1.50).

In 432 BCE, the Lacedaemonians sent a messenger to Delphi to ask it would be advisable to enter a war with the Athenians who had broken their treaty with the Lacedaemonians (Thuc.1.118.3).

Hornblower (1997:195) highlights the religious connotations of the Greek term used by Thucydides for 'treaty', which comes from the Greek first-person singular verb 'I pour a libation', a religious act. Intrinsically, a treaty, as a kind of oath, was sacred as a feature that defines oaths is to swear by a supernatural power, usually a god, to enforce the declaration (Sommerstein and Torrance 2014:1-2). This supernatural guarantee, as well as the self-inflicted conditional curse that makes up another part of the oath, (Sommerstein and Torrance 2014:2) are a reason for the Lacedaemonians to be certain that the treaty was not broken unnecessarily (Thuc.1.118.3).

The reply the Lacedaemonians received from Delphi ^{was} reassurances that, if they put their full might into the war, they would be victorious and that the god would support their efforts, even without being invoked (Thuc.1.118.3).

Unfortunately, Thucydides is an unreliable source for these events as, at the time they were occurring, he was not exiled from Athens so would have had little information on internal Lacedaemonian affairs (Rhodes 1998:1).

↳ But would he have received
oxid information later?

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EXCELLENT work.

74.

To improve

- ① Be more critical of the scholarship and consider alternative explanations
- ② Proofread more carefully
- ③ Consider the effects of the event, such as morale, effect on Ath., the Persians etc.

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 the 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). ✓

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