

New Directions for the Athenian Empire after the Sicilian Disaster

After the Sicilian disaster in 413 and the subsequent defection of several key Aegean allies, many Athenians came to the realization that they could not conduct the war against the Peloponnesians and maintain their empire according to the status quo of the empire. They needed to devise an alternative, sustainable path to that which had led them to their nadir. This task, this paper argues, was initiated by the generals in the north, as Alcibiades, Theramenes, and Thrasybulus have come to be known. From 411 to 407, through political and economic innovations in their approach to interstate relations, the overall policies of these generals were more inclusive of the allies.

The first section of this paper examines the political implications of the events that took place on Samos in 411. When the Athenian fleet stationed on the island learned that the democracy at home had been replaced with the oligarchy of the Four Hundred, the sailors, in an *ekklēsia*, agreed to preserve democratic politics, in conjunction with likeminded Samians (Thuc. 8.73-76, 81-82). The generals, elected by the fleet, resolved to continue the war on their own terms. The fleet and the remaining allies were determined to pave a new path for the empire, even at the point of severing ties with the oligarchic government in Athens.

The second section reviews the economic arrangements that the generals put in place in the Hellespont and the northern Aegean from 410 to 407. After defeating the Peloponnesians in several naval battles, they renewed alliances with rebellious allies (Andrewes 1953; Kagan 1987, 211-246). In many of the new agreements they substituted *eikoste* (five-percent tax) and *dekate* (ten-percent tax) for the odious *phoros* (tribute), a symbol of the old empire (Xen. *Hell.* 1.1.32, 2.15-4.9; Diod. Sic. 13.64-69, 72; Plut. *Alc.* 29-31). These consequence of these activities could

even be felt at home, where the Four Hundred was replaced by the Five Thousand in September 411 and then the renewed democracy in the early summer of 410. Clearly there was change in the air and an acknowledgement that the old ways were obsolete.

Taken together, the ventures of the generals in the north suggest a new conception for the Athenian empire. Having observed the problems that their predecessors faced in running an exploitative hegemony, the generals recognized that they needed to find a way to involve their allies more in the running of the empire (Kierstead 2016). The synergy between the fleet and the Samians set a precedent for how the Athenians could collaborate with their allies (Sordi 2000; Taylor 2010, 224-278). After the naval victories in the Hellespont prompted the return of many allies, the generals, in their design of the economic aspects of the new alliances, deliberately avoided measures associated with the empire of the past (Kallet 2001, 197-226; Rubel 2001; Figueira 2005). That is, the generals adapted the earlier model of imperialism but with an increased role for the allies, who responded positively to these revisions. In short, by highlighting this effort to reconfigure the imperial structures and the role of the subject cities, this paper will generate scholarly discussion over the quality and quantity of allied agency vis-à-vis the Athenians in an alternative form of empire.

Bibliography

Andrewes, Antony. 1953. "The Generals in the Hellespont, 410-407 B.C." *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 73: 2-9.

Figueira, Thomas. 2005. "The Imperial Commercial Tax and the Finances of the Athenian Hegemony." *Incidenza dell'antico* 3: 83-133.

Kagan, Donald. 1987. *The Fall of the Athenian Empire*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

- Kallet, Lisa. 2001. *Money and the Corrosion of Power in Thucydides: The Sicilian Expedition and its Aftermath*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Kierstead, James. 2016. "The Delian and Second Athenian Leagues: The Perspective of Collective Action." In Jeremy Armstrong, ed. *Circum Mare: Themes in Ancient Warfare*. 164-181. Leiden: Brill.
- Rubel, Alexander. 2001. "Hellespontophylakes – Zöllner am Bosphoros? Überlegungen zur Fiskalpolitik des attischen Seebundes (IG I3 61)." *Klio* 83: 39-51.
- Sordi, Marta. 2000. "Trasibulo e la controrivoluzione di Sano: l'assemblea del popolo in armi come forma di opposizione." in Marta Sori, ed. *L'opposizione nel mondo antico*. 103-109. Milan: Vita e pensiero.
- Taylor, Martha. 2010. *Thucydides, Pericles, and the Idea of Athens in the Peloponnesian War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.