

BOOK REVIEW

Polycrates, Tyrant of Samos: New Light on Archaic Greece. By AIDEEN CARTY. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2015. Pp. 260. Hardcover, €56.00. ISBN 978-3-515-10898-0.

This book deals with the importance of Samos in the main diplomatic, military and economic currents of the Archaic Age. In chapter 1 “Polycrates’ Predecessors” Carty aims to establish a chronology for 7th and early 6th century BC. Samos. Although she acknowledges an influential landed aristocracy, a monarchy prevailed into the first decade of the 6th century. In chapter 2 “Polycrates’ Father and Foreign Relations to c. 550 BC” Carty dates Polycrates’ accession to c. 548 BC, a year or two before the fall of Sardis. His father Aiaakes was a powerful magistrate responsible for taxing and distributing booty. This view challenges the assumption that there was a Polycrates I or another family member that preceded Polycrates to the tyranny. According to Polyaeus (6.45) Syloson, a relative, was a naval officer. During a festival of Hera he treacherously deployed men from his ships to seize the city and become tyrant. Carty discounts an early 7th BC date for this coup.

In chapter 3 “Polycrates’ Chronology” Carty argues that Polycrates was in power when the Samians robbed the Spartans of a bronze crater they were sending to Croesus and stole a piece of Egyptian armor being dispatched to Sparta. Carty maintains that by these acts of piracy Samos broke the prevailing good relations with Sparta and triggered factional unrest on the island.

In chapters 4 “Upheaval c. 550 BC” Carty analyzes the archaeological data which indicates the destruction of cemeteries and temples. She argues that this evidence suggests a victory of Samians worshipping Hera over a pro-Spartan faction venerating Artemis. There ensued an estrangement with Sparta indicated by a decline in Laconian ware in Samos. But it is doubtful that the Samian break with Sparta can also be seen, as Carty maintains, in the Ionian decision c. 547 to dispatch a Phocaeen envoy to Sparta to request aid against Cyrus’ incursion into Ionia. The Phocaeans were the leading sea-power at that time and according to Herodotus (1.163.1) were the first to convert their ships entirely to pentecontors. The Phocaeans more than any other Ionian polis had the means to convey a Spartan expedition to the Eastern Aegean.

In chapter 5 Carty further explores Polycrates' ascension. Herodotus (3.120; 3.39) reports that Polycrates carried out the coup with 15 hoplites and that he took the city with his two brothers, Pantagnotus and Syloson, but eventually executed the former and exiled the latter. Polyaeus (3.39) reports that while the brothers were marshals for a celebration in honor of Hera they killed their enemies and then rushed to aid Polycrates who had captured the city. Carty's suggestion that the brothers were really cooperating with Polycrates' enemies and were rushing to the city to slay Polycrates distorts the meaning of Polyaeus beyond reason. Carty's conclusion, however, that the conflict between Polycrates and his brothers was triggered by their pro-Spartan position is persuasive.

In chapter 6, Carty deals with "Polycrates' Thalassocracy." Carty makes a convincing case that Polycrates commenced his thalassocracy c. 546 with a victory over a Persian subsidized Mytilenean fleet allied with Miletus. According to Herodotus (3.39.3; 3.44) Polycrates commanded a fleet of 100 pentecontors and added 40 triremes. Later writers refer to Polycrates' vessels as *samaina*. Carty describes it as a speedy transport vessel with an expansive deck. The *samaina* was most likely a pentecontor with two banks of oars characterized with a turned up-beak. On the origin of the trireme Carty seems to lean to a 7th century BC date assuming that Herodotus (2.159) was right that the Pharaoh Necho's (610-595 BC) navy consisted of triremes but confesses it is "difficult to understand the continued prevalence of pentecontors" in the tyrant's fleet. The trireme was certainly available in the 7th century but it was costly to build and expensive to man. There is little evidence whether Polycrates' fleet was a polis navy or one substantially owned by individuals as Carty claims. During a crisis c. 524 BC Polycrates threatened to burn women and children in ship sheds if the Samians rebelled. Carty argues implausibly that Polycrates would not have burned his own naval facilities and if he did not own the ship sheds he probably did not possess all of the Samian galleys.

In chapter 7, "Relations with Egypt," Carty accepts Wallinga's conjecture that the Pharaoh Amasis had financed Polycrates' 40 triremes though she absolves Polycrates from censure about breaking his agreement to deliver the galleys to Amasis because that Pharaoh died before the invasion. But Amasis expired only after Cambyses had mobilized his forces. (Herodotus 3.4) Polycrates clearly made his commitment to the Persians before Cambyses had assembled his forces. Carty also maintains that Polycrates supplied the Pharaoh with Greek slaves and that some became soldiers and purchased their freedom with service.

In Chapter 8, “The Spartan Attack,” Carty suggests that the Spartans attempted to depose Polycrates because he interfered with their Egyptian trade but concludes that the Spartans left the Samian enemies of Polycrates “in the lurch” sailing off from Samos. The Spartans besieged Polycrates 40 days, about the maximum stay for a Greek seaborne campaign. (Herodotus 6.135)

In chapter 9, “Final Years: Delos, Finances and the Persians,” Carty discusses the changing standards of Samian coinage. Apparently, around 525 BC Polycrates adopted the Lydio-Milesian standard. Carty connects the change to an increased fund to pay slaves their stipend. Another possibility is that the money went to compensate the rowers of the fleet who most likely were not slaves. Oroites, the Persian satrap of Lydia, in 522 BC lured Polycrates to Magnesia where he had him crucified. Carty conjectures that Oroites’ aim was to obtain Polycrates’ ships but after 525 BC Polycrates did not have a fleet. In 525 BC the crew of his 40 triremes mutinied and ultimately defeated Polycrates’ pentecontor fleet. Without a fleet Polycrates made no attempt to check the Spartan seaborne invasion c. 524 BC. Polycrates’ sea power was shattered in the last three years of his reign; his control of Delos and Rhenea lost. Oroites probably lured him to Ionia with the promise of money to rebuild a fleet.

One may quibble with the author’s interpretation of some of the evidence but this is a work of solid scholarship. Carty has exploited archaeological material, the chief classical historians, fragments of minor historians and poets, and late Roman and Byzantine writers to shed light on the political alignments, economy and the importance of sea power in the Archaic Age.

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