

## BOOK REVIEW

*Espionage and Treason in Classical Greece. Ancient Spies and Lies.* By ANDRÉ GEROLYMATOS. Lanham, MD, Lexington Books, 2020. Pp. xv + 103. \$85.00, Hardback. ISBN 9781498583381.

Gerolymatos, a student of ancient and modern spycraft, first published this monograph as *Espionage and Treason. A Study of the Proxenia in Political and Military Intelligence Gathering in Classical Greece* (Amsterdam, 1986). Before his death in 2019, he revised and augmented this English edition (a Greek version appeared in Athens, 2001). The author asserts that the study of ancient intelligence gathering remains in its infancy.<sup>1</sup> Gerolymatos' thesis holds that *proxenoi*, those citizens or resident aliens in Polis A who represented interests of citizens of Polis B, also functioned as gatherers of information about A for the government of B. Not ambassadors or consular representatives, not attachés or spies, such men supplied the authorities of B with useful information, sometimes commercial or judicial, sometimes military and strategic about A, and sometimes facilitated Polis A's betrayal when under siege. This take on *proxenia*, itself a well-studied if poorly documented subject, is unprecedented. The concept that Greek "guest-friends" (regularly) added covert to overt assistance is not surprising if novel.<sup>2</sup>

Homer already mentions Dolon's spying expedition before his short-shrift murder/execution and Odysseus' more successful penetration of Troy's perimeter disguised as a beaten beggar (*Iliad* 10, *Odyssey* 4). Herodotus relishes narratives of disinformation (e.g., Themistokles at Salamis, deceiving both sides) and Thucydides' war abounds in accounts of misinformation (e.g., the Athenian

<sup>1</sup> Chester Starr's *Political Intelligence in Classical Greece* (Leiden 1974) summarizes a wider subject. He noted W. Riepl's *Das Nachrichtenwesen des Altertums mit besonderer Rücksicht auf die Römer* (Leipzig 1913). W.K. Pritchett's five-volume study *The Greek State at War* (Berkeley 1971-1991) oddly never addresses espionage.

<sup>2</sup> Simon Hornblower perceptively notes in his *Thucydides Commentary* at 2.29.1 on Thucydidean references to such consular arrangements: eleven examples in his text, five for Athens, six for other pol-eis. The count accumulates many fewer references than expected, if we presume the Athenians wanted some representative in each of their nearly 250 "League members."

envoys deceived at Segesta). Later, one meets the first surviving literary reference to a *proxenos*, Arthmios of Zeleia, *proxenos* of Athens, agent of Persia—bringer of bribes to the Peloponnese (Aiskhin. 3.258, Dem. 9.42). Epigraphical evidence goes back further. The oldest attested *proxenos*, Menekrates of Oiantheia, can be dated to the early 6<sup>th</sup> century (IG ix. 1.867). Gerolymatos considers forty-nine *proxenoi*. “Guest-friend,” however handy in English, is not an accurate translation (*pace* the author’s understanding of this term on page 4). We might suggest “a local big-shot privileged to assist aliens visiting from a specified polis,” but that clause is admittedly too clumsy. “Foreigner Representative” remains a mouthful, so best simply to retain the Hellenic term, *proxenos*.

Gerolymatos never claims that the Greeks created the institution of proxeny for clandestine purposes, or that it served identical purposes in strong and weak poleis. Indeed, it was an old convention in an unorganized world of jostling but frequently trading independent states (ceramics, wheat, timber, metals). Nevertheless, he believes that the Greeks’ underdeveloped bureaucracies and officialdom led them inevitably to adapt a primitive *personal* and aristocratic archaic mode of interstate cooperation in diverse directions. These included commercial interests, religious participation (especially at Delphi), political negotiations—and (Gerolymatos’ contribution) subversive operations. Covert information gathering permitted acquisition of reliable information from friendly, neutral and hostile poleis. Such agents of a foreign community also aided the spread of disinformation and misinformation in tense times.

Ancient states protected little “classified information” (number of ships, grain supply, fortified outposts) and boasted no agencies for information gathering. Secure forms of information-transfer were unknown (the Spartan *skytale* fails to qualify). Deceptions remained laughably basic (Thuc. 6.46). Nevertheless, agents collected information and fomented subversion—fifth-column activities.

Gerolymatos examines all the few known examples of data-gathering and subversive activity by *proxenoi* from Alexander I of Macedon to Lapyris of Kolonai (ca. 323). The evidence is organized by region (why?) and secondarily by chronology. Gerolymatos unfortunately mixes 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>-century facts, a method that diminishes his usefulness, as, for example, his discussion of Arthmios of Zeleia (29). It is unlikely that the Athenians could or would declare a non-citizen Persian agent *atimoi*, as later sources insist.

The epigraphical evidence demonstrates that useful *proxenoi* may be given significant benefits such as the right to own land and a house in Athens, taxation privileges, protection and compensation for his family in case of death on duty

(21). The *doxa* (prestige) of *proxenia* would be another incentive. In the Peloponnesian War, the Lakedaimonians as well as the Athenians invested in *proxenoi*, and later the Boeotians did as well. Herodotus, Thucydides and Xenophon refer to important individuals. Somewhat hastily, Gerolymatos declares that two Selymbrians granted *proxenia* in 407 on a broken inscription (IG<sup>i</sup>. 116) “may well have been [honored] as a result of [their] betrayal” (31). Polydamas of Pharsalos had access to detailed information about Thessaly and Jason of Pherai in particular and he shared it in detail with his Spartan patrons, ca. 375 (*Hell.* 6.1.2-14). The Athenians elevated Philiskos of Sestos from informer to a trusted friend, in spite of (actually because of) his help, when his Propontic city rebelled from Athens. Epigraphical and literary sources attest his activities during the second Athenian League. Banishment from home or assassination might well have been the fate of this Athenian “agent.” In the eras of both Leagues, *proxenoi* linked their cities to the hegemon, sometimes betraying their countrymen’s interests. Demosthenes (20.59-62) refers to Athenian *proxenoi*’s rewards and their suffering exile from Thasos.

The example of Mytilene in the Peloponnesian War provides insight into covert proxenic machinations (Thuc. 3.2-4). It may have been *proxenoi* who provided their Athenian patrons with information for catching the Lesbian army and fleet off-guard. The Lesbians contributed ships, not tribute, and had thoughts not only of rebelling but of uniting the towns into one powerful, anti-Athenian military force. Thucydides does not name any *proxenoi* or even specify that *proxenoi* were the source of the treasonous information that sunk the Mytileneans’ hopes for rebellion (41).<sup>3</sup> Gerolymatos correctly reasons that intelligence enabled the Athenian victory, but he has not proven that a *proxenos* supplied it. Others too might find motives, financial or especially ideological, to betray the oligarchical government (3.27.2) for the demos. Subversion was cheaper than siege, and had greater chances of success.

Gerolymatos offers an enlightening discussion of the role of *proxenoi* in Corcyra—both pro-Athenian and pro-Corinthian (47-56), although out of proper chronological order. They played a role in both the alliance formations and in the stasis. Thucydides describes Peithias as an *etheloproxenos* (3.70.3), a *hapax* term. His energetic pro-Athenian efforts determined the oligarchs to assassinate him

<sup>3</sup> Aristotle (*Pol.* 1304a) names Dexandros and supplies a personal motive concerning his son’s failed suit for an heiress.

and sixty followers (53). Gerolymatos highlights this clear example of a *proxenos*' overt regime subversion.

Gerolymatos' analysis of "*proxenoi* functioning as intelligence agents" (65) finds some such instruments of diplomacy collecting information covertly and overtly, as it came to them (passive intelligence), but others, as in Corcyra, more actively pursued their patron cities' interests. Gerolymatos' achronic citation of sources (Thucydides, Demosthenes, *IG* ii<sup>2</sup>. 111, ca. 364 BCE together) confuses certain issues concerning the development or devolution of proxenic benefits and services. Eventually, Athenian *proxenoi* became suspicious, especially for services to the Athenian empire and its traveling overseers. Aristophanes' (*Birds* 1021) officious *episkopos* on arrival in Cloudcuckooland asks: πῶς πρόξενοι;). What began as a position of honor and prestige sunk to a reward for informers and lobbyists (75), and indeed traitors. *Proxenoi* came under closer scrutiny for subterfuge in times of polis instability. Demosthenes, *proxenos* of Thebes, was himself accused of selling Athenian privileges to various foreigners (Dein. I.44-45).

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