

Thrasybulus and the Restoration of Athenian Democracy

In 403 BCE, following a conflict with the Thirty Tyrants and their Spartan protectors, Thrasybulus of Steiria and over a thousand exiles and foreigners returned to the city of Athens. The victors facilitated the reconciliation of the opposing factions, through an amnesty agreement and, eventually, the return of democracy to Athens. Although Thrasybulus has come to be known in modern historiography as a great democratic champion (Ostwald 1986; Buck 1998), the sources do not ascribe to him the motive of restoring democracy. Instead, he is depicted as a pragmatic moderate and a reconciler, not an ardent democrat who rejected oligarchy in any form. This paper reexamines his role in the events from his exile to his return to Athens, and reveals a more nuanced depiction of the commander than is commonly assigned to him.

The first half of the paper reviews the period of Thrasybulus' exile. Diodorus (Diod. Sic. 14.32.5-6; cf. Just. *Epit.* 5.9.13-14; Oros. 2.17.11) says that while the army of Athenian exiles occupied Phyle, in northwestern Attica, the Thirty tried to co-opt Thrasybulus by offering him a seat on the Thirty. Diodorus says that Thrasybulus replied not with a demand for the restoration of democracy but for the *patrios politeia*, by which, I argue, he meant a broad oligarchy. Later, before the battle at Munichyia (Piraeus), Xenophon (Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.13-17) reports that, Thrasybulus inspired his soldiers with promises of restored citizenship, homes, and honor – but not democracy. During this period he never makes democracy a banner around which to unify the army of exiles.

The second half of the paper reviews the return of the exiles to Athens. During the reconciliation ceremony, according to Xenophon (Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.40-42), Thrasybulus delivered a public speech that urged all to observe the amnesty agreement but made no reference to democracy (Munn 2000, 249). Finally, at some point after the restoration of democracy, he advocated for

citizenship for the 1,000 foreigners in his army (*IG II² 10*; [Aristot.] *Ath. Pol.* 40.2; Plut. *Mor.* 835F-836A; cf. Osborne 1981-1983; Whitehead 1984; Krentz 1986). While this may look like a radical measure, it derived from practical concerns over reconstituting the Athenian polity rather than a commitment to the new democracy. The picture that emerges from this reexamination of the evidence is of a statesman who was committed to civic harmony and therefore supported the restoration of democracy even though it was not his personal preference.

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