

## The Naxian Expedition and the emergence of the Trireme

Herodotus' (5. 3034) report of the Naxian expedition has raised many questions related to naval history and the emergence of trireme fleets in the ancient world. Scholars question the Persians' need of 200 triremes and wonder why the Ionians collaborated so willingly? The Ionians aimed at eliminating a rival that was capable of practicing some of Polycrates' piratical activities and the Persians saw Naxos as a stepping stone to Greece. The Persians required 200 triremes to convey 12,000 Persian soldiers. Some of the 34,000 Ionian oarsmen may have served as light armed soldiers and helped with the siege. Contrary to the scholarly consensus the European Greeks were developing trireme fleets at this date and the Persians would not have felt safe in the Aegean with a smaller force.

The expedition also raises the feasibility of surprise seaborne attacks. The Persians announced an expedition to the Hellespont and sailed from Asia Minor to Southern Chios about 100 miles from Naxos. In July and August the winds in the Aegean blow to the south. In optimum conditions a trireme could cover 129 sea miles in a long day. Thus the Persian fleet could have left Chios in the morning and arrived at Naxos in the late afternoon. Herodotus reports that a dispute between Aristagoras, who commanded the Ionian oarsmen and Megabates, the Persian commander of the Persian deck soldiers led to Megabates betraying the purpose of the expedition to the Naxians. It was not unlikely that some Greek merchant ship arrived from Chios to Naxos reporting that the Persian fleet was harbored in Southern Chios and not proceeding to the Hellespont. Forewarned the Naxians brought everything in from their fields and enforced the city wall and

endured a four month siege. The first Persian trireme incursion into the Aegean was a failure.