

Polycrates's Delia, Egypt, and his Plans for an Ionian Expedition

This paper explores the relationship between the intention which Herodotus ascribes to Polycrates of Samos to rule all Ionian and the Islands (ἐλπίδας πολλὰς ἔχων Ἰωνίης τε καὶ νήσων ἄρξαιν, 3.122) and the possibility raised by Janko, Burkert, West, Aloni, and Nagy that Polycrates commissioned the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* for performance at the Delia of 523/22. I argue that Polycrates's Delian and Pythian festival was intended to inaugurate this plan to launch a military invasion of Asia and strip away the Ionian cities of Asia from Persia. This Ionian campaign, I argue, relied upon a strategic blueprint similar to that employed by Alexander the Great in his fourth century campaign against Darius III. Exploiting the failures of Cambyses in Egypt which preoccupy much of Book 3 of Herodotus, Polycrates would cut off Persia from using Ionian ports as naval stations, and simultaneously foment revolt in Egypt (thereby robbing Persia of a second naval base), quite likely through the agency of Petubastis IV, the full scope and exact details of whose revolt archaeologists are only beginning to bring to light (for summary of the scholarly debate on the starting date and duration of Petubastis's revolt, see Kaper 2023, 298; cf. Wijnsma 2018).

In order to implement this plan of cutting off Cambyses and his successors from the Aegean, Polycrates would use his Delia of 523/22 to promote a cultural program privileging the role of Samos as champion of the Ionians, and of Egypt as steadfast guest-friend. The effects of this emphasis on shared Ionian identity arising from Polycrates's never-realized Asiatic Ionian campaign were profound: in *The Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, these footprints range from the aggressive posture of Apollo in the Hymn's first lines which commentators have found so awkward (cf. Miller 1986, 15; Clay 2006, 38; Chappell 2013, 178; Felson 2013, 269-70); to its

self-referential nods to its own performance through the description of the Ionians gathered at festival and of the Delian Maidens (cf. Wilamowitz 1920, 450-52; Clay 2006, 55 and 66; Nagy 2013, 13-20); to the Typhaon inset, which I argue conjures a by this time well-established association between Cambyses and Seth (cf. Dillery 2005) and Apollo and Horus; to the final warning to the Cretan priests of Pytho against impious behavior, possibly a reference to the events of 523/22 rather than to the First Sacred War (cf. Wilamowitz 1916, 441; Janko 1982, 119-28; Chappell 2006, 331-34: the line likely referenced Cambyses in the original performance of 523/22, but may have come to be interpreted as a warning to Polycrates after his murder by Oroetes in subsequent years).

A number of obscure data we have for the cultural milieu at Polycrates's court, such as Anacreon's reference to a quarrel between *μυθιῆται*, seemingly at Samos, and Polycrates's lover Megistes (Anacreon PMG 353, Page 1962, 180), reveal hints of Polycrates's strategy for his attempts to extend his rule to Ionia, and of how this influenced the Delia and Hymn 3's role in it. Ibycus's situation of Polycrates's name among Trojan War themes in the fragmentary Polycrates ode (P. Oxy. 1790) may even serve, contrary to popular opinion which would date the poem much earlier, as *auxesis* of Polycrates's ambitions to conquer Asia. The inclusion of propaganda for the "liberation" of Egypt from Persian rule and for Samian rule of Ionia likely raised eyebrows during the considerable planning which Polycrates must have invested in tailoring his Delia. To these no doubt sometimes divisive planning discussions I would ascribe accounts of disputes involving the *μυθιῆται* ("mythological poets" in the employ of an Egyptian-Ionian faction at Polycrates's court, who supported "rebels" –Aristarchus's explanation of the lexeme *μυθιῆται*—not against Polycrates, but against Cambyses in Egypt).

Key Bibliography

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