

“Does Anyone Care about the Greeks Living in Asia?:”

Ionia and Attic Orators in the Fourth Century BCE

The King’s Peace of 386 BCE divided Ionia into two zones politically, the autonomous islands and Persian controlled mainland. The Peace allowed Athenian orators to declare that Sparta betrayed the Greeks of Asia to Persia (e.g. Isoc. 4.122), but they were more interested in disparaging Sparta than in discussing Ionia (Perlman, 1961). This pattern then recurs throughout fourth-century oratory. In the speeches, mainland Ionia is an abstraction, cities chafing under Persian rule and ready to revolt (e.g. Isoc. 5.104) and there is a persistent concern that Persian activity on the coast will lead to the occupation of the autonomous *poleis* (Isoc. 4.163; Dem. 5.25, 15.9), but references to Ionia appear infrequently and with little detail.

It is perhaps not a surprise that the orators sparingly refer to Ionia since the Peace created a political gulf between the eastern and western coasts, and historians such as Xenophon give the impression that Ionia passed beyond the bounds of Greece in 386. The orators bemoaned the Peace, but accepted it as the functional boundary between Persia and Greece. There are four broad categories that most of the references to Ionia in fourth-century Attic oratory fall into: to myth, to Chios, to the island of Samos, and to the mainland region. Only Chios is treated as an independent entity, Samos is only referred to as a geographical space, and, of the other eleven Ionian *poleis*, only Erythrae is mentioned by name. Yet, the extant speeches belie continued intercourse across the imagined boundary set up by the King’s Peace, as well as commerce between Athens and Chios and Samos (Hornblower, 1982; Dušanić 1999). So why do the orators turn their back on the cities that fifth century authors such as Herodotus and Thucydides dwelled on?

When Demosthenes gave “On the Chersonese” in 341, he challenged his audience “does anyone care about those Greek living in Asia?” (8.27). There must have been a sizable contingent of people in Athens who professed concern for the Asian Greeks, including Ionian metics, as well as one that wanted to return Ionia to Athenian orbit. The fourth-century politicians and intellectuals deflected this public discourse in order to direct limited Athenian resources toward more pressing concerns than the condition of Ionia, such as the internecine warfare in the Balkan Peninsula (Isoc. 4.187) or the rise of Philip’s Macedonian Kingdom (e.g. Dem. 8.27; 18.234). Thus, the Attic orators create the impression of a “dark age” in fourth-century Ionia because they turn away from the region, including the autonomous *poleis*, in their speeches, despite its continued importance in Athenian public discourse.

Bibliography

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