

Athens and the Hellespont in the Later Archaic Period

The Athenians aimed for permanent settlement in the Hellespont from the end of the 7th century BCE. Sigeion, a foothold gained in the Troad, was subsequently complemented by settlements in the Thracian Chersonesos at Elaious and Agora (or Polis Agoraios) at two ends of the major land route into and out of the peninsula. Athenian permanency and resolve to hold the Chersonesos are not only indicated by the wall erected across the peninsula's narrowest part and the situation of the tyrants' headquarters there, but also by the facts that the Chersonesos was considered "Athenian" and that Chersonesian settlers remained Athenian citizens (*contra* Berve, 1937, 7 ff.). The settlement of the Chersonesos was not adventurism, but part of a coherent Athenian strategy concocted cooperatively by the Philaids and Peisistratids to benefit them both (*contra* Sears, 2006). Athenian aims in the Hellespont in the Archaic period anticipate Athens' expansionist enterprises in the 5th century BCE, particularly, it seems, the plantation of citizen-garrisons, *i.e.*, *klerouchies*.

The Athenians' keen interest in the Hellespontine region is first indicated by their war with the Mytilenaians over possession of Sigeion at the end of the 7th century BCE. At the Hellespont's southwestern entrance, Sigeion was positioned to interfere profitably in sea-borne trade through it. With it permanently secured in the 540s BCE, the Athenians turned toward the Chersonesos.

The tradition that Megakles I the *oikistes* was invited to be tyrant of the Chersonesos by the native Dolonkoi traveling to Greece to find a leader (Herodotos 6.35.3) is to be distrusted for several reasons apart from the obvious one. Rather Miltiades and the Peisistratids seized upon a moment of opportunity to expand their interests. The tradition that Miltiades fled Peisistratid Athens is also to be discounted, since, among other reasons, a lack of continuing support from

Athens – and Peisistratid-held Sigeion – would have made the Chersonesian enterprise impossible. Accompanied by “every Athenian who wanted to share in the expedition” (Herodotos 6.36.1), Miltiades’ first act upon arrival was to wall off the peninsula from Kardia to Paktye and take up station at the barrier’s midpoint, Agora (modern Bolayir). When prolonged and bitter war ensued with Lampsakos, a heated rival for control of the Hellespont, the conflict took on a national character for the Athenians who seem to have been just as inimical to the Lampsakenes as the Chersonesians (Thucydides 6.59.3; Gomme, Andrewes and Dover, 1970, 336).

What was at stake is clear enough. In addition to its dominance of sea-traffic moving through the Hellespont, the Chersonese was also the bridgehead for land-traffic ferried between Europe and Asia (Casson, 1926) Abydos and Sestos, “best of (the Chersonesian) cities,” owed their existence to their positions as northern and southern ferry-termini, but Sigeion and Elaios were also ferry-ports. (A short transshipment route which avoided the difficult Hellespont counter-currents nearly altogether ran behind the trans-isthmian wall.) The wealth of the Chersonesos derived from “... direct and indirect taxation of traffic, harbor dues, piloting, trans-isthmian transport and the revenue from road traffic along the Sestos-[Bolayir] road” (Casson, 1926, 226). But the Chersonesos was also extremely fertile (Tzvetkova, 2008, 267) and capable of sustaining on its own a substantial population of settlers who must also be its warrior-defenders. In fact, its resources not only supported the permanent settlement of the Chersonesos and the enrichment of the Athenians there, but also sustained a steady and considerable flow of grain and wealth to Athens.

Athenian “ownership” of the Chersonesos is proven not only by the nationalistic nature of the war with the Lampsakenes. When asked to surrender Lemnos by the Athenians, the

Lemnians responded that they would surrender it “when with a north wind (your) ship crosses from your land to ours in one day.” When Miltiades II, the latest tyrant, arrived from Elaious in the Chersonesos, he pronounced the task accomplished and most Lemnians apparently conceded (Hdt. 6.139-140). When Miltiades II returned at length to Athens, he was tried for tyranny in the Chersonesos – a legal impossibility if it was considered foreign or he an alien (Hdt. 6.104.2). Finally, Themistokles, born in the Chersonesos to a Thracian mother (Plut. *Them.* 1.1-2), enjoyed full Athenian citizenship, as did Kimon son of Miltiades – at least for a time. Clearly, the Chersonesos was “Athenian.”

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