

The Revolt of Inaros Reassessed

In what follows, I reexamine the various literary and epigraphic sources for the Athenian expedition to Egypt in the middle of the 5th century BC. I argue that past modern reconstructions of the revolt underestimated the military apparatus which was at the disposal of the satrap of Egypt. When these circumstances are taken into consideration, a more complete reconstruction of the rebellion, especially its earliest stages, can be achieved. Furthermore, I demonstrate that the account of Ctesias on the discussed episode, which was rejected as unreliable by modern scholars such as Pierre Briant (2002), can and should be reconsidered.

In 463 BC, shortly after the death of Xerxes, a rebellion erupted in Egypt. The Athenians decided to send a confederate task-force to assist the Egyptian rebels. Capitalizing on the local uprising, the Athenians and their allies sought to end Achaemenid rule in Egypt. An independent and amicable Egypt would have curtailed Achaemenid influence in the eastern basin of the Mediterranean, engendered many lucrative commercial possibilities and reasserted the legitimacy of an Athenian led Delian League. In spite of an initial success, the Egyptian campaign ended with a crushing defeat.

Our knowledge concerning the phases and grim conclusion of the Athenian expedition in Egypt derives mainly from the accounts of Thucydides, Ctesias and Diodorus. All agree that the episode ended with an Athenian defeat. Yet, there are several discrepancies concerning the various stages of the revolt. One of the main disagreements concerns Ctesias' mentioning of a certain Achaemenides, the brother of Artaxerxes I and the commander of the first and unsuccessful Persian attempt to retake Egypt.

Only fragments and a Byzantine summary of Ctesias' *Persica* are extant. Yet, already in antiquity Plutarch (*Art.* 1.4, 13.4), who probably had access to Ctesias' full account, asserts

that the Greek physician inserted a confused mixture of marvelous and factitious tales, and accused Ctesias for always allowing considerable space in the narrative for himself. Such unfavorable view is accepted by a slew of modern scholars (e.g. Bigwood 1975; Momigliano 1975; Cook 1983; Sancisi-Weerdenburg 1987; Wiesehöfer 1996), who deem Ctesias as an unreliable historical source. This view is contested by many scholars who, while acknowledging the many inaccuracies and dubious element in the work of Ctesias, argue against a wholesale rejection of Ctesias' account (e.g. Picard 1980; Stronk 2010).

First, I outline the differences and discrepancies between the accounts of Thucydides, Diodorus and Ctesias. By placing an emphasis on the formidable military forces the satrap of Egypt must have employed during the first phase of the revolt, it becomes apparent that there is no considerable disagreement between the account of Ctesias and Thucydides, and even when they are mutually exclusive, e.g. the size of the deployed Greek confederate fleet, Ctesias' account seems more likely (e.g. Peek 1939; Scharf 1955; Green 2006). When contrasted with the account of Diodorus, the main issue revolves around the identity of the Persian commander in chief of the first Persian expedition sent to suppress the revolt. It is more than plausible that Diodorus simply made an error, and by accepting this possibility the accounts of Ctesias and Diodorus seems to be in concert. Therefore, in essence, there were three rounds of hostilities. The first included only the Egyptian rebels and Persian forces stationed in Egypt when the revolt erupted. These were led by Achaemenes, the Persian satrap of Egypt. The second introduced the Athenian naval task force and the first Persian royal expedition under the command Achaemenides. The third encompassed a second Persian relief force which was led by Megabyzos.

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