

The Fall of the Four Hundred

For the rise and fall of the oligarchical regime of the Four Hundred at Athens in 411 B.C. Thucydides is by far our fullest source. Our other sources are either limited in scope (such as the Decree of Andron preserved in [Plut.], *Life of Antiphon*), blatantly tendentious (such as Lysias' analysis of Theramenes' conduct in XII. 66-68) or of uncertain authenticity (such as the documents purportedly from 411 in Aristotle's *Athenaion Politeia*). Modern scholarly debate has largely focused on the discrepancies between Thucydides and Aristotle, on the supposed desire on the part of the oligarchs for a return to the *patrios politeia*, and on trying to determine the character of the regime which followed the fall of the Four Hundred, that of the Five Thousand.

For the downfall of the Four Hundred, we are largely dependent on Thucydides, which leads to the question of whether we should accept everything he says at face value. Thucydides was in exile in 411 and did not witness the events in Athens firsthand. He may have gathered some of his information from members of the Four Hundred who fled Athens when the regime collapsed. He may have obtained additional information after the war when he was able to return to Athens. He may well have known some of the principal actors of 411 personally. Was he always impartial in judging people's motives? Did he make adequate allowances for the biases of his informants? The dissension within the Four Hundred played a significant role in the downfall of the regime. Thucydides portrays the leaders of the dissident faction as motivated by disappointed ambition (8.89.2-3). Was this a fair assessment? I will examine Thucydides' narrative of the events at Athens in 411 in an effort to gain a better understanding of what motivated the various groups inside and outside of the Four Hundred and of the dynamic which led to the end of the regime.

Bibliography

- Andrewes, A., Vol. V of A. W. Gomme, A. Andrewes and K. J. Dover, *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides* (Oxford, 1981)
- Bearzot, Cinzia, *Lisia e la tradizione su Teramene. Commento storico alle orazioni XII e XIII del corpus lysiacum* (Milan, 1997)
- Bleckmann, Bruno, *Athens Weg in die Niederlage: Die letzten Jahre des Peloponnesischen Kriegs* (Stuttgart and Leipzig, 1998)
- David, Ephraim, "Theramenes' Speech at Colonus," *AC* 64 (1995) 15-25
- Heftner, Herbert, *Der oligarchische Umsturz des Jahres 411 v. Chr. und die Herrschaft der Vierhundert in Athen* (Frankfurt am Main, 2001)
- Hignett, C. *A History of the Athenian Constitution to the End of the Fifth Century B.C.* (Oxford, 1952)
- Kagan, Donald, *The Fall of the Athenian Empire* (Ithaca, 1987)
- Munn, Mark H., *The School of History: Athens in the Age of Socrates* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2000)
- Murphy, Thomas M., "The Vilification of Eratosthenes and Theramenes in Lysias 12," *AJP* 110 (1989) 40-49
- Ostwald, Martin, *From Popular Sovereignty to the Sovereignty of Law* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1986)
- Pesely, George, "Andron and the Four Hundred," *ICS* 20 (1995) 65-76

Rhodes, P. J., *A Commentary on the Aristotelian Athenaion Politeia* (Oxford, 1981)

-----, "The Five Thousand in the Athenian Revolutions of 411 B.C.," *JHS* 92 (1972) 115-127

Sealey, Raphael, "Constitutional Changes in Athens in 410 B.C.," *CSCA* 8 (1975) 271-295

-----, "The Revolution of 411 B.C.," in *Essays in Greek Politics* (New York, 1967) 111-132

Shear, Julia L., *Polis and Revolution: Responding to Oligarchy in Classical Athens* (Cambridge, 2011)

Ste. Croix, G. E. M. de, "The Constitution of the Five Thousand," *Historia* 5 (1956) 1-23

Teegarden, David A., *Death to Tyrants! Ancient Greek Democracy and the Struggle against Tyranny* (Princeton, 2014)