

Imperial Ambitions: Athenian Statecraft in the Use of Colonies and Cleruchies

The Athenian model of state has long been recognized as an object of study, particularly in regard to its unique implementation of direct participatory democracy. As such, the interdisciplinary approach of studying Athenian democracy from the political science perspective has proved fruitful in understanding the complex agenda of the Athenian state in the fifth century B.C. Theories of statecraft, such as the problem of dispersed knowledge, have recently underscored the highly unique and successful nature of Athenian democracy (Ober 2008). Thus, it is from a similar perspective that this paper seeks to highlight the exceptional way in which fifth century Athens managed its imperial ambitions within the Aegean through the use of colonies and a distinctively Athenian institution: the cleruchy.

The method of this study will incorporate collective action theory (from the level of the state) with a focus on the agency of the individual in both the archaeological and textual record (bridging the gap between the ephemeral, often invisible nature of the 'state' as an entity) to understand why Athens was so successful at managing its empire. One of the key principles of collective action theory supposes that if individual agents (i.e. taxpayers) generate little internal revenue for the state, then they lose bargaining power, and the state (i.e. the governing body) provides less public goods and exerts more coercive dominance over its citizens. Of course, if taxpayers generate substantial revenues, then the opposite is true: collective action and cooperation increases in a directly proportionate degree (Blanton and Fargher 2009). A presupposition to this is that cooperation is beneficial and preferable, and thus contributes to the overall success of the state (Axelrod 1984). Therefore, one might hypothesize that the source of Athenian revenues were largely internal. It is evident that the Athenian *demos* was largely successful in terms of wealth and power in the fifth century at the height of its *arche*, yet

arguably Athenian wealth relied considerably on tributes from its allies in the Delian League and on grain shipments from the Black Sea (Kallet 2005, 2013). If we accept that Athenian revenues were largely external, then we must reconcile the high degree of collectivity, cooperation, and success displayed by the Athenian state.

My argument is that this reconciliation was provided in the debt, though not entirely unproblematic, use of colonial foundations abroad and the institution of cleruchies closer to home. A close reading of Thucydides' account of the colonial history of Amphipolis in the Thracian region will be brought to bear on this argument. Supplementing this reading will be an examination of the contemporaneous, inscribed foundation decree from Brea, an Athenian colony for which the historical context is largely unknown. Finally, an examination of the use of cleruchies, that is overseas settlements of Athenians who retained their citizenship at home in the *metropolis*, will follow along the argument set out by Graham (1983) with regards to geographical determinism.

Bibliography

- Axelrod, Robert M. 1984. *The Evolution of Cooperation*. New York: Basic Books.
- Blanton, Richard and Lane Fargher. 2009. "Collective Action in the Evolution of Pre-Modern States." *Social Evolution & History* 8:133-166.
- Graham, A. John. 1983. *Colony and Mother City in Ancient Greece*. 2d ed. Chicago: Ares.
- Kallet, Lisa. 2013. "The Origins of the Athenian Economic ἀρχή." *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 133: 43-60.
- . 2005. "Wealth, Power, and Prestige: Athens at Home and Abroad." In *The Parthenon: From Antiquity to the Present*, edited by Jenifer Neils, p.34-65. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ober, Josiah. 2008. *Democracy and Knowledge: Innovation and Learning in Classical Athens*.

Princeton: Princeton University Press.