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Rhodes during the Corinthian War: from strategic naval base to endemic *stasis*

The incomparable geographic location of Rhodes in the south-east of the Aegean Sea, where it formed part of the Dodecanese, meant that in its long and fertile history the island played a fundamental role as a melting pot of different cultures and a geostrategic enclave of the first order. As far as the classical period is concerned, in the framework of the struggle for hegemony among the Greek powers – principally Athens and Sparta – Rhodes not only became one of the prime naval bases, from which support could also be lent to land operations in Carian territory, but it also fulfilled an important function in controlling access to the South Aegean and as a stopping-off point on the Egyptian grain route to Attica[1]. As regards internal affairs, ever since the year 408/7, when the island had attained *synoikismos*, or political unification, around the recently founded *polis* of Rhodes – a process accompanied since 411 by the establishment of an oligarchy and the breakaway from the Athenian *arche* under the leadership of the renowned athlete Dorieus, a member of the Ialysian family of the Diagoreans[2] –the situation had been one of constant confrontation between democrats and oligarchs, leading, well into the fourth century, to outbreaks of *stasis* or civil conflict.

In the sailing season of 396, shortly before the start of the Corinthian War, in which from 395 to 386 Sparta and the Peloponnesian League would be confronted by the *synedrion* of Corinth (led by Boeotia, Athens, Argos and Corinth, and financed by Persia)[3], the citizens of Rhodes switched alliances once more when, apparently by non-violent means, they expelled the Peloponnesian fleet

[1] Thuc. VIII 35, 2; Ps. Dem. LVI *passim*.

[2] Thuc. VIII 44, 1-3; Diod. XIII 38, 5; 75, 1; Strab. XIV 2, 9-10. See especially David 1986; cfr. Bruce 1961, 167; Berthold 1980, 33; Coppola 2005, 291-293. According to Gabrielsen 2000, however, this gradual process of synoikism never finished and Rhodes would have been in fact a federal state.

[3] For a recent analysis of this Panhellenic conflict, Fornis 2008.

and welcomed in its place the Persian fleet of Pharnabazus and Conon; scarcely a year later, Conon was involved in an internal insurrection (ἐπανάστασις) that toppled the Diagorean *régime* to install a democratic order[4]. With Rhodes as his base of operations, Conon would obtain a decisive victory near Cnidus in August 394, putting an end to Lacedemonian naval hegemony and, with it, the presence of Spartan harmosts and garrisons in the Aegean islands and in most of the Greek cities on the coast of Asia Minor[5].

In the sailing season of 391 the outbreak of a new *stasis* in Rhodes – in fact a re-eruption or second phase of the civil conflict which had taken place four years previously – offered the Spartans the opportunity to recover this important *enclave* and convert it into the spear-point of its counter-offensive in the Aegean[6]. For our information on this factional struggle we are dependent on the accounts by Xenophon and Diodorus Siculus, the latter of whom, as we know, was inspired by the work of Ephorus, who in turn used as his main source for these years the anonymous author of the *Hellenica Oxyrhynchia*, of which only a few fragments are extant. The fact is, however, that these accounts not only contain discrepancies with respect to each other – each being internally consistent – but can also virtually be regarded as openly irreconcilable. When forced to choose, most modern scholars have opted for the Athenian historian, not only because he was writing at the time of the events but because he offers a great wealth of detail and explanation, unusually so in view of the slight attention he generally pays to developments in the war at sea. However, some scholars have attempted to weave both traditions together in a forced and scarcely convincing manner, without even pointing out the discrepancies between the sources, selectively picking elements of each account while leaving loose ends untied[7]. As for Diodorus, few authors appear to give him complete credit[8].

Let us consider, then, the testimony of the two ancient historians. From

[4] For all these events and their influence on the outbreak of the Corinthian War, see Fornis 2007, together with the previous bibliography.

[5] Conon, who is honoured everywhere, is granted privileges and has statues erected, is celebrated in contemporary and later Greek literature as the liberator of Greece from the Spartan yoke, even though he had continued to serve the Great King, a mercenary under the orders of the satrap Pharnabazus (see, in general, Fornis 2009a, where the sources for the naval battle of Cnidus are specified and its consequences analysed). On land, however, the Spartan war machine had displayed its traditional efficiency in the pitched battles of Nemea and Coroneia, also in the summer of 394, on which the continuation of its continental hegemony was built (cfr. Fornis 2003).

[6] Hamilton 1979, 293; Funke 1980a, 95; David 1984, 276, 281. Berthold 1980, 39 puts back the outbreak of *stasis* to the winter of 391/0.

[7] Momigliano 1936, esp. 51-54; Accame 1951, 132, 136-137; Funke 1980b, esp. 65-66; David 1984, 280-284; Falkner 1992, 253-254; Tuplin 1993, 172-173; Debord 1999, 258-261.

[8] Lanzillotta 1981, 278-279; Hornblower 1982, 124; Gehrke 1985, 137-138; Gabrielsen 2000, 190 with n. 67, and, especially, Westlake 1983 (*infra*).

both it can be concluded that the subversive movement against the democratic system that was then in place – with no apparent instigation from Sparta but possibly encouraged by the renewal of the Lacedemonian offensive on the Asia Minor coast following the failure of the peace negotiations in autumn-winter 392/1[9] – stemmed from oligarchs exiled by the *régime*, who maintained control over part of the island. Beyond this point of coincidence, their accounts share little in common.

According to Xenophon, the group formed by the richest citizens (οἱ πλουσιώτεροι), banished by the *demos*, requested help from Sparta, whose authorities, aware of the strategic importance of the island, dispatched eight vessels, at the end of summer or in the autumn, under Ecdicus, the recently elected *nauarchos* for 390/89[10]. By the time he reached Cnidus, the Rhodian democrats had taken over the whole island, and Ecdicus therefore decided to wait there and request reinforcements from Sparta. At the beginning of the following year[11] the ephors decided to send Teleutias, the stepbrother of Agesilaus, from the Corinthian Gulf – technically not as ναύαρχος but as harmost, or else with special powers[12] –, at the head of twelve ships that were joined by another seven at Samos, which was now under an oligarchic *régime*; on reaching Cnidus, Teleutias replaced Ecdicus, who returned to Sparta, while Teleutias set sail for Rhodes in

[9] Westlake 1983, 240; David 1984, 276, 283 is of the opinion, not without numerous doubts, that the oligarchs might have acted after ascertaining the hostile attitude of Tiribazus towards Athens, and towards Conon in particular, before the arrival of news that the satrap had been discredited by the Great King. The unsuccessful peace negotiations held first at Sardes and then in Sparta highlighted the *Machtpolitik* of each of the warring sides, even within the Corinthian alliance itself (see Fornis 2005).

[10] Xen. *Hell*. IV 8, 20.

[11] After Agesilaus and Teleutias had once again taken over the Corinthian port of Lechaeus and the Long Walls that joined it to the city of Corinth, at the end of the summer of 391 (Xen *Hell*. IV 4, 18-19 and *Ages*. 2, 17). According to Cawkwell 1976, 273, Teleutias was still able to sail at the end of that year, but he could hardly have had time to reach Rhodes via Samos and Cnidus – capturing an Athenian squadron en route– before the winter's termination of sailing. Along with a substantial number of modern critics, we believe that Cawkwell crams an excessive number of events into the year 391.

[12] As is well known, the navarchy cannot be repeated. On as many as three occasions Xenophon depicts Teleutias as having responsibilities in the fleet, in only the third of which, in 387/6, does he identify him explicitly as *nauarchos* (*Hell*. V 1, 13; cfr. IV 4, 19 and 8, 11). Even taking into account that the Athenian historian is often imprecise and vague in his application of the term, we must accept, along with Pareti 1961, 98-101, that for the rest of the time he was harmost, naval commander or some type of extraordinary command (for Stylianou 1988, 468 Teleutias in fact was probably never admiral, since he regards as corrupt the passage of Xenophon in which the title is applied to him); *contra* Caroline Falkner 1992, 254, 317, who in her «tentative list of Spartan navarchs», an appendix of her doctoral thesis, includes Teleutias three times, considering him to be an individual who, in view of his relationship and close proximity to the all-powerful Agesilaus, could have represented an exception to the law.

command of a total of twenty-seven vessels[13]. During the voyage he captured ten Athenian triremes which Philocrates was leading to Cyprus to support the revolt of Evagoras of Salamis against the Great King[14]. Once the booty they had seized had been sold at Cnidus, Teleutias headed for Rhodes to "go to the aid of those with whom he shared the same ideology".

Spartan activity in the Aegean and the Hellespont, which had intensified with the threatening presence of Teleutias in Rhodes, was the cause of profound concern among the Athenian *demos*, which dispatched Thrasybulus of Steiria at the head of a float of forty triremes. Xenophon claims that Thrasybulus felt incapable of dislodging the Rhodian exiles from the fortress where they had taken refuge, supported by Teleutias's ships, and that, since he was aware that the democrats were in the majority and in control of the cities, he left Rhodes and sailed for the Hellespont and North Aegean as he "thought that he could accomplish some useful service for his state" (ἐνόμισε καταπρᾶξαι ἄν τι τῇ πόλει ἀγαθόν)[15]. After making significant political and economic gains in these areas, which point clearly to a revival of Athenian imperialism, the Steirian sailed south, to be killed near the river Eurymedon, in Aspendus (Pamphilia), as a result of which the Athenians sent Agyrrius to replace him[16]. During this time the struggle continued in Rhodes, with the exiles and their Spartan allies entrenched in a fortress, the only fresh development being that Hierax, the navarch for

[13] Westlake 1983, 242 stresses the contrast drawn by Xenophon between Ecdicus and Teleutias when he suggests that the former might have been inefficient in carrying out his duties; this forms part of Westlake's theory that the Athenian historian gave excessive and undeserved prominence to Teleutias –Diodorus does not even mention him–, with whom he was linked in a close bond of friendship through Agesilaus. We cannot share the notion that behind the dispatching of Teleutias there lay renewed plans for Asian conquest on the part of Agesilaus, as is suggested by Falkner 1992, 253.

[14] Xen. *Hell.* IV 8, 24.

[15] Westlake 1983, 244-245 rejects Xenophon's explanation outright to put forward the hypothesis that Thrasybulus's decision was based on the urgent need to obtain funds for the project of imperial reconstruction in Athens, as modern historians tend to recognize, with the substantial difference that the idea did not come from the Steirian, who was simply obeying a mandate from the Assembly; Westlake adduces as a possible additional reason that Thrasybulus was also preparing himself financially to cope with what it was assumed would be a long and hard siege on the Rhodian oligarchs (though this reason is to be found in Xenophon himself, in *Hell.* IV 8, 30). We cannot subscribe this author's thesis that Xenophon was deliberately hiding the objectives of the expedition; it is well known that the Athenian *strategoi* received broad orders from the *Ecclesia* which left them with a certain margin for manoeuvre, as long as they did not act against the interests of Athens and bore in mind that the people reserved for itself mechanisms of control over these generals (*euthynai*, the possibility of re-election, etc.). Pritchett 1974, 50-52 has correctly observed that the image of *condottiero* with which some modern historians have endowed Thrasybulus is not backed up by the sources.

[16] For an appraisal of this notable campaign by Thrasybulus and its internal consequences at Athens, see now Fornis 2009b.

389/8[17], had replaced Teleutias at the head of the fleet, to remain there until the arrival of the following navarch (388/7), Antalcidas[18].

In Diodorus's account, on the other hand, it is the Laconizers (οἱ λακωνίζοντες) who gain the upper hand in the *stasis*, killing and expelling many of the democrats who supported Athens; even so, fearing that some citizens might rebel (εὐλαβούμενοι μή τῶν πολιτῶν νεωτερίσωσιν), they requested reinforcements from Sparta, which dispatched seven triremes under Eudocimus – Xenophon's Ecdicus –, Diphilas – in Xenophon, Diphridas – and Philodocus. With this fleet the Lacedemonians won Samos and Cnidus and secured the domination of Rhodes, these being three naval bases which were strategic for the control of the Aegean and which would contribute with twenty-seven ships and crews to the Spartan naval offensive. Finally, in a passage detached from those before it and incorporated into the account of the events of 390, the Sicilian historian offers his account of the death of Thrasybulus in Aspendus – again with Xenophon as his source –, after which the Athenian trierarchs headed for Rhodes in order to support the banished philo-Athenian democrats, who, in their internal struggle against the Laconizing oligarchs who controlled the city, had made themselves strong in a φρούριον or hill-fort. Diodorus, like Xenophon, does not return to the Rhodian *stasis*, which appears not to have come to an end until the King's Peace guaranteed the *autonomia* of the cities and put an end to outside interference under the auspices of Sparta[19].

Diodorus's version suffers *a priori* from the great disadvantage of being much more succinct and presenting the chronological errors that are usual in this author, which in this case are not insignificant, as he confuses the Asian expeditions of the Spartans Thibron and Diphridas and, more seriously, brings forward Thrasybulus's departure for the Hellespont to the year 392, that is, by about two years[20]. Consequently, in the context of a disjointed narrative, there is no cause-and-effect connection between Thrasybulus's campaign and the events in Rhodes; in other words, Thrasybulus was not sent by the Athenian *demos* to help the Rhodian democrats. Secondly, in Diodorus the oligarchs are successful in their undertaking and manage to dislodge the democrats from power, expelling them from the city and causing a bloodbath in an attempted counter-

[17] Xen. *Hell.* V 1, 3.

[18] Xen. *Hell.* IV 8, 20-30; V 1, 5-6. According to Tuplin 1993, 78, Xenophon gradually loses interest in the affairs of Rhodes as Sparta gains the upper hand in the struggle for control of the island (it is the *leitmotif* of Tuplin, against the majority view among modern historians, that Xenophon does not highlight the achievements of Sparta but paints a more diffuse picture of them).

[19] Diod. XIV 97, 1-4; 99, 4-5.

[20] The years of the Corinthian War present a particular chronological disorder in the *Bibliotheca Historica*, the result of attempting to adapt the peculiar narrative structure of Ephorus, whose history of the Greek world followed geographic criteria.

revolution. The second part of his account does not differ so greatly from that of Xenophon, whom he appears to summarize in a confused manner, ignoring certain events and presenting erroneous information, such as the names of the Lacedemonian commanders or the number of ships.

Now, some scholars have sought to confirm the validity of Diodorus's account in two passages with no time reference in Aristotle's *Politics* in which he relates how the most powerful – for whom he uses the terms γνώριμοι, notables, and τριήραρχοι, trierarchs or trireme captains –, harassed by the demagogues, who aimed both to introduce a salary for armed service and, at the same time, to impede the repayment to the trierarchs of the sums owed to them, even taking out court cases against them, got together to strike a blow against democracy[21]. First of all, it is no easy matter to identify beyond any doubt the factional struggle described by Aristotle with the testimony of Diodorus, since the only point they have in common is the apparent victory of the privileged classes in their attempt to introduce an oligarchic *régime* – there is no sign at all of Spartan or Athenian intervention – and, besides, the Rhodian *polis*, both before and after the synecism, suffered similar clashes on several occasions. This is attested, for example, by Demosthenes's fourteenth oration, *On the Freedom of the Rhodians*. Nor should it be forgotten – and Tuplin has taken it upon himself to remind us of this[22] – that the interest of the philosopher is merely a social, not a historiographic one, that is, he is much more concerned with the conduct of the demagogues than with the precise facts which shape the historical event. Moreover, Aristotle does not set out the facts but has recourse to brachylogical keys that presuppose in the reader a knowledge of the events. This results in these passages being so intricate and obscure that Nino Luraghi was led to conclude that the two passages are integrated into a four-part chiastic structure made up of the four examples with which Aristotle attempts to illustrate his theorizing, in such a way that the first of them governs the others; as it so happens that the first of them shows "la sollevazione degli esclusi dalla *politeia* contro il gruppo oligarchico al potere", as a consequence of the καταπρόνεσις (contempt, disdain) on the part of the *gnorimoi*, according to the Stagirian, the other three thereby presumably do the same and therefore Aristotle must have been referring to the

[21] Arist. *Pol.* V 1302 b 21-24; 1304 b 27-31. The connection was established by Newman 1902, 299 and developed by Momigliano 1936, 51-54, who eliminated other possible *staseis* as being due to external interference; it has also been accepted by Funke 1980b, 65-66; Lanzillotta 1981, 278; Westlake 1983, 246-247; David 1984, 273-275, 281-282; Gehrke 1985, 138; Gabrielsen 2000, 203 n. 67. *Contra* Berthold 1980, 39, 43, Hornblower 1982, 127 and Radicke 1995, 192-195, who place the Aristotelian episode around 355, while Luraghi 1998, 121-123 and Coppola 2005, 294, 297-300 suggest the year 395.

[22] Tuplin 1993, 173.

toppling of an oligarchy in Rhodes[23]. And finally, of no small importance is the fact that, if the arguments that tilt the scales in favour of the testimony of Diodorus are accepted, this would imply that Xenophon was deliberately intending to falsify the facts – in particular to hide the reasons underlying Thrasybulus's expedition to the Hellespont, even at the cost of not stating publicly that the Lacedemonians controlled the extremely important island of Rhodes –, and not only to silence or colour them, an imputation we consider to be exaggerated and unfair to the Athenian historian, with all his prejudices and limitations.

As for the war in Asia, Ecdicus had been accompanied in his travels by Diphridas, who had been entrusted with the mission of reuniting what was left of Thibron's army and recruiting fresh troops with whom to continue fighting the satrap Strutas. A stroke of luck placed in Diphridas's hands the daughter of Strutas and her husband, Tigranes, who were travelling towards Sardes; the substantial ransom paid was used by the Spartan to pay his mercenaries' wages and to consolidate the Spartan presence in Ionia[24]. For this reason the Lacedemonian counter-offensive in 391 and 390 may be considered a success, given that it had enabled Sparta to recover a good number of the towns lost after the battle of Cnidus. Even in the case of Rhodes, which we consider had not been recovered, the internal dissent which was the scourge of the island prevented it from playing a strategic role in the final years of the conflict. In fact, it was in the area of the Straits linking the Aegean and the Black Sea that the Corinthian War would finally be resolved[25].

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[23] Luraghi 1998, who curiously does not apply his hypothesis to the corroboration of the testimony of Xenophon – in fact, he believes that both, Xenophon and Diodorus, are referring to two successive phases of a single *stasis* in 391 –, but to support the idea that the upheaval to which Aristotle refers is the democratic one instigated by Conon in 395; Luraghi is followed in this point by Coppola 2005, 294, 297-300.

[24] Xen. *Hell*. IV 8, 21.

[25] Fornis 2008, 291-294 and 2009b, 21-23.

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Abstract

The island of Rhodes was a naval base of great strategic interest for the Greek states fighting for hegemony, especially Athens and Sparta in the Classical period. This situation influenced the Rhodian civic community, where there were several episodes of *stasis* between democrats and oligarchs, supported respectively by Athenians and Spartans. In this paper we focus on one of these episodes, in the framework of the so-called Corinthian War (395-386 B.C.), on the development and implications of which our two main sources (Xenophon and Diodorus of Sicily) disagree.