

The Milesian Sub-Hegemony

Over the past eighty years scholars have tackled the complex problem of Milesian history in the mid-fifth century BC. Much of the scholarship has centered on the interpretation of the evidence from the Athenian tribute lists, several important inscriptions along with the reference to Milesian *stasis* from the “Old Oligarch” (Xen. *Ath. Pol.* 3.11). Most scholars have asserted that Miletos’ absence in the first tribute lists, the evidence from the fragmentary Athenian decree concerning Miletos usually dated to 450/49 (IG I³ 21), and the famous “Banishment Decree” from Miletos (Milet 1.6 # 187, *ML* 43) attest to political unrest in the 450s and 440s. Until recently, the general view was that Miletos was in revolt in the first tribute period followed by the backing of an oligarchy by Athens ca. 450/49. Then the oligarchy revolted a few years later from Athens with the result that an Athenians supported installed a loyal democracy (*ATL* 3.255-7; Barron 1962, 1-6; Meiggs 1972, 562-65). Based upon new evidence confirming Miletos’ appearance of the tribute lists, more recent scholars have doubted the existence of a Milesian revolt in the first tribute period but still are unsure how to interpret much of the city’s history of the period (Robertson 1987, 356-97; Gorman 2001, 216-42).

It is possible to reevaluate the evidence through an examination of Miletos’ regional hegemony in the mid-fifth century. The tribute lists reveal that the weakening of Miletos’ control over her dependent territories at the moment of civil unrest. Scholars have failed to fully consider the status of several known dependent communities such as the island of Leros and the inland community of Teichioussa and the potential role they played in the Milesian *stasis*. Some evidence suggests that Miletos lost control of the nearby cities of Priene, Myous, and Pidasia in the period of unrest, which must have been fundamental to the weakening of the polity. The late appearances of the cities in the tribute lists and Thucydides’ account of the Milesian and Samian conflict over Priene reveal the exploitative capabilities that the larger states had over their smaller neighbors in the Delian League and the potential cost of retaining or losing a traditional hegemony (Thuc.115.2). The examination of the local conditions of Miletos in this period will help elucidate the complex issues that have confounded scholars for decades, focus attention away from generalizations about Athenian imperialism and provide a clearer understanding of how allied states negotiated their own hegemonic interests in the Athenian empire. A study of Miletos’ own history reveals close parallels to other members of the Delian League such as Erythrai and Thasos that sought to retain their own traditional regional hegemonies while themselves tributaries to Athens.