

## THE CONSTITUTION OF CHIOS IN THE FIFTH CENTURY BC

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It has long been debated whether Chios was a democracy or an oligarchy in 412 BC. The most recent work, that of T. J. Quinn, concludes that the Chian constitution was some form of compromise between the two, but does not specify the nature of the compromise.<sup>1</sup> The nature of the Chian constitution is important both for understanding the reactions of Athens' allies to the empire and also for the history of Chios itself.

The key evidence for the question is found in Thucydides' narrative of the events leading up to Chios' revolt in 412 BC. Thucydides gives no analysis of the Chian constitution but seems to assume that his readers will understand it. The modern historian is therefore compelled to attempt to reconstruct it on the basis of Thucydides' passing remarks.

Two decisions of the Chians are of major significance: the decision to send ships when Athens demanded them as a proof of loyalty and the decision to revolt. In the first case, Thucydides says:

αἵτιον δ' ἐγένετο τῆς ἀποστολῆς τῶν νεῶν οἱ μὲν πολλοὶ τῶν Χίων οὐκ εἰδότες τὰ πρασσόμενα, οἱ δὲ ὀλίγοι καὶ ξυνειδότες τό τε πλῆθος οὐ βουλόμενοί πω πολέμιον ἔχειν, πρὶν τι καὶ ἰσχυρὸν λάβωσι.<sup>2</sup>

Thucydides' words suggest that the majority of the Chians had the final say in decision of policy and the relatively few conspirators saw no way of persuading them to revolt unless the prospects of success were better (Quinn takes the phrase οἱ δὲ ὀλίγοι καὶ ξυνειδότες to show "that all the oligarchs were in the plot",<sup>3</sup> apparently taking the phrase to mean "the oligarchs, who knew about it". But in a phrase like this with only a single use of the article the two terms should be regarded as forming a single conception<sup>4</sup> "the oligarchic Conspirators" which need not imply that all the upper class were involved.

<sup>1</sup> "Political Groups at Chios: 412 BC." *Historia* XVIII (1969) pp. 22–30.

<sup>2</sup> Th. VIII 9, 3.

<sup>3</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 25.

<sup>4</sup> cf. F. E. Thompson, *A Syntax of Attic Greek*, pp. 45 f.

The second passage states that when Chalkideus and Alkibiades arrived at Chios the majority (*οἱ μὲν πολλοὶ*) were surprised but a meeting of the council had been summoned by the arrangement of the few (*τοῖς δ' ὀλίγοις παρεσκεύαστο*).<sup>5</sup> The Peloponnesian spokesmen assured them that more ships were on their way (not mentioning these ships were under siege at Speiraeum) and so persuaded the Chians to revolt.

In this passage Thucydides mentions no other body but the council, immediately refers to Chalkideus' and Alkibiades' speeches and then says Chios (and following it Erythrai) revolted from Athens. The most natural reading of the sentence is that Chalkideus and Alkibiades spoke to the Chian council and that these speeches to the council were the key factor in producing the actual decision to revolt.

One might object to this interpretation of Thucydides that it appears to give too great a role in the decision making process to what should surely be a probouleutic council. At Athens the council was empowered to make independent decisions only on minor matters arising out of legislation passed by the assembly, when the assembly had authorised it to make such decisions.<sup>6</sup> Thucydides could easily have omitted to mention a meeting of the Chian assembly, just as he passes over the Erythraians' constitutional proceedings, merely recording their decision to revolt. But at Athens it is the meetings of the council which Thucydides frequently passes over,<sup>7</sup> in Chios it is the assembly. It seems reasonable to conclude that Thucydides believed the council at Chios played a more prominent role than its equivalent at Athens.

But if the council required persuasion, then the conspirators did not control it. For it was the common people who were reluctant to revolt.<sup>8</sup> So we can see that the council mentioned by Thucydides was a democratic body. On the evidence presented so far one would conclude that the government of Chios was a democracy suborned by oligarchic conspirators. Elsewhere Thucydides gives a different impression.

<sup>5</sup> Th. VIII 14.2.

<sup>6</sup> P. J. Rhodes, *The Athenian Boule*, pp. 82 sqq. G.E.M. de Ste Croix (*CQ* N.S. 13 (1963) pp. 110-119) has shown that the alleged secret treaty between Athens and Philip II over Amphipolis and Pydna would have been constitutionally impossible. So one should not assume that the Athenian council could take independent decisions; cf. R.A. de Laix *Probouleusis at Athens*, p. 26 n. 73.

<sup>7</sup> de Laix, *op. cit.*, pp. 27 ff.

<sup>8</sup> Quinn *op. cit.*, p. 24; cf. Th. VIII 9.3.

When the Chian conspirators first approach Sparta Thucydides says, with no suggestion that this is not his own judgement:

*Χῖοι ... ἀποστῆναι ... ἐτοῖμοι ὄντες.*<sup>9</sup>

The Spartans send their own observer to Chios and on receiving confirmation of what they have been told,

*τούς τε Χίους ... εὐθὺς ξυμμάχους ἐποιήσαντο.*<sup>10</sup>

It is not at all likely that Thucydides would describe a faction acting without authority as "the Chians", nor an agreement with such an unauthorised minority as an alliance,<sup>11</sup> without giving any indication of the irregularities.

From this Quinn concludes that Chios had oligarchic and democratic institutions side by side. He finds support for this in two further passages. In VIII 24.4 Thucydides calls the Chians more fortunate and temperate than anyone else except the Spartans — and such praise from Thucydides seems inappropriate to either a fully developed democracy or a narrow oligarchy.<sup>12</sup>

When the Spartan harmost Pedaritus enforces a narrow oligarchy in Chios, Thucydides says:

*τῆς ἄλλης πόλεως κατ' ἀνάγκην ἐς ὀλίγους κατεχομένης.*<sup>13</sup>

This is hardly the description of a change from one form of oligarchy to another.<sup>14</sup>

But how satisfactory is the idea of two sets of co-existing oligarchic and democratic organs of government? It is difficult to see why a co-ordinate oligarchy could not have found means to block, or at least delay, the despatch of seven triremes to Athens.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, if Chios

<sup>9</sup> VIII 5.4.

<sup>10</sup> VIII 6.4.

<sup>11</sup> Quinn *op. cit.*, p. 23; cf. IG V 1.1 where a group of Chians making an unofficial donation to Alkidas in 428 are called *τῶν Χίων τοὶ φίλοι*.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.* p. 25.

<sup>13</sup> VIII 38.3.

<sup>14</sup> Quinn *op. cit.*, p. 23.

<sup>15</sup> If the oligarchs sent democratic supporters, why does Thucydides not say so?

had a clear case of parallel institutions, why did Aristotle not include it in his discussions of mixed constitutions?<sup>16</sup>

However two passages of the *Politics* may be relevant to this problem. The first refers to oligarchies where the magistracies are elected from a high census qualification by either the hoplites or the whole people.<sup>17</sup> This could be relevant if the decision of such an assembly were required for a declaration of war as well as electing magistrates. The second refers to constitutions which are democratic in law, but conducted in an oligarchic fashion:

κατὰ τοὺς νόμους εἶναι πολιτείαν δημοτικωτέραν, τῇ δ' ἀγωγῇ καὶ τοῖς ἔθεσιν ὀλιγαρχεῖσθαι.<sup>18</sup>

Aristotle says this condition was especially common in newly established democracies.<sup>19</sup> Quinn argues that the council of Th. VIII 14.2 could conceivably be the same as that found in Chios in the sixth century.<sup>20</sup> A Chian decree,<sup>21</sup> which is to be dated between 570–550 BC,<sup>22</sup> sets out several constitutional matters, including the liability of magistrates to obey the decisions of the people (δῆμῳ ῥήτρας)<sup>23</sup> and the summoning of a popular council (ἡ δημοσίῃ βῶλῃ) which is to meet once a month to conduct the people's business, especially the hearing of appeals from the magistrates' courts.<sup>24</sup>

A third institution in the inscription—the presence of *demarchoi* beside the *basileis*—is not democratic since it is from the courts of the *demarchoi* that appeal is made to the popular council.<sup>25</sup>

The constitution indicated here, with popular institutions beside (presumably) aristocratic ones and a minor role played by the assembly, would suit Quinn's hypothesis. The parallel between the role of the

<sup>16</sup> e.g. *Politics* 1266<sup>a</sup>26; 1273<sup>b</sup>35; 1293<sup>b</sup>19.

<sup>17</sup> 1305<sup>a</sup>30 sqq.

<sup>18</sup> 1292<sup>b</sup>15.

<sup>19</sup> Which would not be the case at Chios in 412 BC.

<sup>20</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 25.

<sup>21</sup> Meiggs-Lewis, *GHI*, no. 8.

<sup>22</sup> Jeffery "The Courts of Justice in Archaic Chios" *BSA* 51 (1956) pp. 157–167.

<sup>23</sup> A 1–2.

<sup>24</sup> C 1–15.

<sup>25</sup> B 2–3; cf. Jeffery *op. cit.*, p. 165. And, as Ehrenberg shows in "Origins of Democracy" *Historia* I (1950) p. 523 n. 24, "demarch" means "ruler of the demos", not "popular ruler".

council making final decisions in the sixth century<sup>26</sup> and at the time of the revolt is noteworthy, although in the "Constitution" we have mention of decrees of the people — suggesting that an assembly may have played a role in the sixth century not found in Thucydides' narrative.

Although Chios was a very stable society, some changes would not be surprising. The presence of the tyrant Strattis in Chios in 479 BC<sup>27</sup> means we cannot assume that the Chian constitution was unchanged.

Even so, such fifth century evidence as survives suggests that such changes were minor. One inscription deals with violations of sacred land, where the council's decision (*βόλης γνώμη*) is that such violations must be reported to the *basileis*.<sup>28</sup> Another inscription deals with violations of boundary stones which "the fifteen" are to report to the council under penalty of a fine for failure to do so.<sup>29</sup>

We can see basic similarities in the evidence for the constitution of Chios over the two centuries: *basileis* beside the council and most notable the prominent role of the council in all the surviving evidence. The role played by the council seems more important in the fifth century than the sixth and may indicate that the council had become (or been recognised as) the effective government of Chios.<sup>30</sup>

The preservation of the original tribal system of Chios down into the fourth century also shows the conservatism of the Chians. W. G. Forrest has shown that a tribal system of clans, phratries and tribes was replaced by one based on families residing in a given locality at the time.<sup>31</sup> This tribal reform was probably associated with Alexander's restoration of democracy in Chios.<sup>32</sup>

In fact the (old) Chian tribe of Clytidae does not seem to have established a common shrine for the tribe (*τὰ ἱερὰ τὰ κοινά*) until about 335 BC<sup>33</sup> — and even then felt it necessary to forbid any individual or phratry to monopolise the sanctuary. These fourth century developments at Chios seem to parallel Peisistratus' breakdown of the old cults and

<sup>26</sup> See Meiggs-Lewis, *GHI* pp. 16 f.

<sup>27</sup> Hdt VIII 132.2.

<sup>28</sup> Syll.<sup>3</sup> 986.

<sup>29</sup> DGE 688.

<sup>30</sup> Larsen, *Representative Government* p. 19.

<sup>31</sup> "The Tribal Organisation of Chios" *BSA* 55 (1960) p. 177.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*, p. 181.

<sup>33</sup> Syll.<sup>3</sup> 987. For the date cf. Forrest *op. cit.*, 179.

Cleisthenes' new tribes — which were introduced in the sixth century at Athens.

We also find Chios identified as a conventional democracy in the 384/3 treaty with Athens.<sup>34</sup> We also find a definite oligarchic party at Chios, which overthrew the democracy with the help of Maussolos of Caria.<sup>35</sup> This is a marked contrast with the fifth century, when as Quinn has shown democratic and oligarchic parties are not to be seen.<sup>36</sup> Again fourth century Chios shows developments like those of sixth century Athens.

Now what led to this stability of the Chian state for two centuries and why did it end? Another unusual feature of Chios may be connected: Thucydides says Chios had the largest number of unfree men (*οἰκέται*) outside Sparta.<sup>37</sup> Athenaeus adds to this that the Spartans and Thessalians enslaved the existing inhabitants of their countries, while the slaves of the Chians were bought (*ἀγορῶνῃσι*)<sup>38</sup>. Other evidence indicates these unfree men worked the land on Chios: after many of them had deserted to the Athenians in 412,<sup>39</sup> we find the sailors of the Peloponnesian navy lacking pay and working on Chian farms.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore Chios had a *demos* of merchant seamen (*ἐμπορικὸς*)<sup>41</sup> which would be consistent with the agricultural work force being largely unfree.<sup>42</sup>

If the farm labourers were mainly unfree and the free poor were often absent, the rich would control a larger share of the wealth of Chios—and so have greater political influence—while the free poor could not participate in any form of democracy which required their frequent involvement. Both factors would militate against Chian politics advancing be-

<sup>34</sup> Tod *GHI* 118.16. For the date of origin cf. Bruce *Phoenix* 19 (1965) p. 282.

<sup>35</sup> Dem. XV. 19.

<sup>36</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 30.

<sup>37</sup> VIII 40.2.

<sup>38</sup> Ath. VI 265 BC.

<sup>39</sup> Th. VIII. 40.2.

<sup>40</sup> X. *Hell.*, II, I. 1.

<sup>41</sup> Ar. *Pol.* 1291<sup>b</sup>24. Aristotle says this of both Chios and Aigina, which he says elsewhere (Fr. 472R) had a large slave population—just as Chios did.

<sup>42</sup> Though note: M. I. Finley *The Ancient Economy*, p. 131 and n. 17 concludes that Chios was "a clearing house of the slave trade" and W. L. Westermann *Slave Systems*, p. 4 suggests that Chian slaves were employed in handicrafts such as metal-working and wine-growing.

yond the protection of the weak from arbitrary actions of magistrates — as provided in the sixth century constitution.<sup>43</sup>

This stability would also be enhanced if the constitution were established by aristocratic action. Aristotle gives Chios as example of a despotic oligarchy overthrown by wronged members of the politically privileged group.<sup>44</sup> Aristotle does not give a date but the sixth century constitution is more likely to be the result of such a change than the fully-developed democracy of the fourth century.

So long as the majority of the Chians approved of this constitution Chios was stable. But once Pedaritus established a narrow oligarchy,<sup>45</sup> conflict between rich and poor was introduced to Chios. Similarly Athenian encouragement of Chian slaves to desert led to servile unrest.<sup>46</sup> Before 412 Chians could even employ their unfree labourers as rowers in the navy,<sup>47</sup> but during the Corinthian War the mere threat of help to a servile revolt was enough to induce the Chians to abandon the Spartan cause.<sup>48</sup>

The reform of the Chian constitution in the sixth century may be described as "an early start on the road to democracy",<sup>49</sup> but it was apparently produced by a lesser degree of social unrest than the earlier reforms of Solon at Athens and so did not go so far.

Rather than strengthening the claims to ownership of land by the peasants the Chians left the ownership of land in the hands of the aristocrats. The disappearance of the traditional forms of dependent labour led to the importation of chattel slaves to replace them.<sup>50</sup> Chian society thus rapidly came to differ from that of Athens and their political developments, though starting from similar bases, also diverged markedly.

In the fifth century the Chian system of government fell between oligarchy and democracy. The people and the popular council had the

<sup>43</sup> cf. Jeffery, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

<sup>44</sup> 1306<sup>b</sup> 2-5.

<sup>45</sup> cf. Quinn *op. cit.*, p. 30.

<sup>46</sup> A. Fuks "Slave War and Slave Troubles in Chios", *Athenaeum* 46 (1968) p. 109.

<sup>47</sup> Th. VIII 15.2.

<sup>48</sup> Polyaeus III 9.23.

<sup>49</sup> Forrest *op. cit.*, p. 180.

<sup>50</sup> On this process see Finley *op. cit.*, p. 70 f.

final say but aristocrats dominated politics to an extent which prevents us classifying Chios as a democracy as that was understood in fifth century Athens. Chios was protected by its social structure and constitution from class-conflict down to 412 BC, but this good fortune makes Chios a poor example for drawing conclusions about other states where such class-conflict was common.

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