

**Aideen Carty, *Polycrates, Tyrant of Samos: New Light on Archaic Greece*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag. 2015. ISBN 978-3-515-10898-0. Pp. 260.**

Drawing confident conclusions about any Greek polis in the Archaic period, especially if that polis is not named 'Athens' or 'Sparta', is a difficult task given the state of the available evidence. Herodotus and Thucydides – whose absolute historical value has been questioned even for contemporary events<sup>1</sup> – speak at several generations' remove; surviving poetry is almost always fragmentary, usually decontextualized, and often the victim of many intermediaries. Fragmentary too, if we are lucky enough to have any at all, is local historiography. Even the archaeological record is fraught with unevenness, chronological problems, and contextual challenges. Aideen Carty undertakes a history of Samos from roughly the late 7<sup>th</sup> century to the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE. Her main focus is Polycrates, tyrant during the mid-6<sup>th</sup> century. To better understand the foreign and domestic implications of his reign, Carty extends her investigation to Samian politics before Polycrates as well as briefly discussing his immediate successors. Although not perhaps universally compelling, her conclusions will unquestionably be influential for our understanding of interstate relations in the 6<sup>th</sup>-century Eastern Mediterranean.

After her introduction, with a synopsis of Polycrates' career, review of previous scholarship, and a declaration of methodology, Carty's first chapter considers "Polycrates' Predecessors." Here she argues against the traditional view, which would see kingship on Samos until the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, followed by oligarchic rule down to the early 6<sup>th</sup> century when tyranny was introduced by Polycrates' family, with Polycrates himself being the third to hold the tyranny. In its place, Carty would see a monarchy extending to the early 6<sup>th</sup> century, when an oligarchic coup of Geomoroι<sup>2</sup> encompassed assassination of the ruling monarch, Demoteles. This theory entails placing the rule of "king" Amphicrates at the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, and the reign of Demoteles in the early 6<sup>th</sup> century, and leads to the conclusion that there was merely a counter-coup against the Geomoroι by nine generals of the Samian fleet and it only established a different oligarchic regime in power, rather than leading to a "democracy". Carty's second chapter examines Samian foreign relations to c. 550 BC and Polycrates' father. She accepts the argument that the early sixth-century inscription (IG XII.6.ii.561) mentioning one Aeakes concerns Aiakes, father of Polycrates, and specifies that he held a magistracy empowering him to oversee communal sharing of booty from naval battles and raiding. She then places Brychon, father of Aiakes, around the time of the Geomoroι's coup against Demoteles, and places Aiakes in office following the subsequent coup of the nine generals. She also

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<sup>1</sup> After touching briefly on Herodotean scholarship at 17 of the introduction, Carty offers fuller discussion at 110–113. She is influenced by Fehling (*Herodotus and his 'Sources'*, J.G. Howie (trans.), Leeds 1989), at least regarding Herodotus' deployment of "devices" to lend credibility, but not to the extent of concluding that his intent was to deceive his audience (see esp. 110 with n. 2).

<sup>2</sup> They are hypothesized to be landholders in the Samian Peraia, whose fortunes fluctuated with the size and prosperity of the Samian-controlled territory.

concludes that Samos had good relations with Lydia, Egypt, and Sparta during Aiakes' time; Lydian relations were ended by the Persian conquest of 547, and connections with the Spartans likewise broken in Polycrates time, but, for Carty, Samian ties with Egypt largely defined Polycrates' tyranny.

In her third chapter on Polycratean chronology, Carty reexamines the traditional dates for Polycrates' reign of 533–522. After following Shipley and Mitchell in discarding the date of 533 as the result of an error in Thucydides' chronology,<sup>3</sup> Carty uses the works of, and traditions about, Pythagoras, Ibycus, and Anacreon, to determine that a date one or two years before the fall of Sardis in 547 is most likely for Polycrates' accession. Chapter Four, "Upheaval c. 550 BC?", rebuts the theory that the Heraion and West Cemetery experienced a period of violent destruction around 550. Carty finds that the Rhoecus Temple, which had been thought destroyed by fire (perhaps confirming a mention in Pausanias of the Hera temple in Samos being burned by the Persians) has rather been shown by more recent excavation and scholarship to have collapsed because of unstable foundations on marshy ground. The violent destruction of the West Cemetery has likewise been challenged by the results of recent excavation. Carty also points out that, while there is a significant decrease in Laconian pottery at the Heraion after c. 550, thereafter until its destruction in the 520s the Artemision sees a corresponding increase: she concludes that a pro-Spartan faction on Samos switched their main site of worship instead of seeing a violent disruption at the time of the changeover; thus "social schism" rather than extended violent stasis.

The fifth chapter considers in greater depth "Polycrates' Accession." The traditional view follows Herodotus 3.39, splitting the tyranny of Polycrates into two parts: a first in which he and his brothers take power together in an uprising, and the second in which he kills one brother and exiles the other. Carty, however, believes that a period of continuity existed between Aiakes and Polycrates because both held magistracies at Samos, and she fears that this continuity would leave little room for the stasis mentioned by Herodotus as the setting for Polycrates' rise to power. This fear is a bit mystifying, since I can see no reason why Polycrates' holding even a powerful magistracy would prevent a choice to seize further power with his brothers, as both Herodotus 3.39 and Polyaeus 1.23 seem to say. Unfortunately, her reaction to this perceived disconnect is a convoluted attempt to fill the blank spaces left by Herodotus' narrative by an unconvincing reinterpretation of Polyaeus 1.23, a preference for "narrative patterning and the unifying themes" of Herodotus Book 3 over Herodotus' actual account of Polycrates' accession, and a deep consideration of

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<sup>3</sup> Shipley, *A History of Samos 800-188 BC*, Oxford 1987, following Mitchell, "Herodotus and Samos," *JHS* 95: 75–91. Carty adds to this discussion an analysis of the dating system of Apollodorus, whom she considers to be responsible for applying the exact date of 533 to Thucydides' erroneous synchronism of the rise of Polycrates with the reign of Cambyses. Her discussion of Apollodorus draws on Mosshammer, *The Chronicle of Eusebius and the Greek Chronographic Tradition*, Lewisburg PA 1979.

an Anacreon fragment (PMG 353) that cannot with any confidence be assigned to either Samos or the time of Polycrates' accession.

Chapter Six, entitled "Polycrates' Thalassocracy," argues that Polycrates began his career as a magistrate with authority over Samian ship-owners, like his father, before he expanded and solidified power over the fleet through the creation of a commercial and *xenia* relationship with Egypt, his naval victory over the Lesbians and Milesians, and his acquisition of his own "Samaina" type ships.<sup>4</sup> Carty goes so far as to claim that Polycrates' entire thalassocracy was based upon "his ability to realise profits, for himself and the wider Samian community, from organised raiding and the sale to Egypt of slaves won in such raids."<sup>5</sup> Chapter Seven further explores Samian relations with Egypt. This chapter sees Carty set forth one of her more ambitious theories: that most Greeks who provided military service to Egyptian dynasts during the Archaic period were not serving freely on the basis of *xenia* relationships, but were instead captives in war reduced to servitude. Their Egyptian service amounted to self-ransoming. Such soldiers were initially provided by Lydia and Corinth, before the coup in which Amasis took power made preferable a change of supplier to Polycrates, who probably gathered his prisoners in raiding activity. Egypt would have sent wealth and ship-building knowledge and resources back to Greek poleis in return for the manpower: this would explain the connections of Corinth and Samos to triremes long before they become common in the Mediterranean. Underlying speculation from H. Wallinga has not helped Carty here.

In chapter Eight Carty concludes that "the Spartan attack" on Samos c. 525, although initiated at the request of Samian rebels, was actually motivated by Spartan desire for revenge and compensation for perceived Samian interference with Spartan attempts to initiate relations with Lydia and Egypt early in Polycrates' reign. In this Carty is following the motivations ascribed to the Spartans by Herodotus 3.47, which, as her quotation from Cartledge reveals, flies in the face of the scholarly *communis opinio*.<sup>6</sup> In her ninth and final chapter of exposition, Carty explores the final years of Polycrates, touching on Delos, finances, and the Persians. This chapter is mainly a review of the important issues from 525 down to Polycrates' death c. 522; the only new ground broken lies in her speculation about the relationships between the various players in Polycrates' death: Polycrates, Maeandrius, Oroites, Cambyses, Bardiya, Darius, and the failed Samian rebels of 525 all potentially might be involved, whether directly or tangentially, but the fine details of this tangled web are difficult to parse.

Carty's volume is a well-organized reappraisal of the evidence for Archaic Samos, especially useful because she frequently introduces more recent archaeological

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<sup>4</sup> The evidence for the Samaina suggests a ship useful for both raiding (and warfare) and trade, being decked over, very broad and capacious, and capable of sailing swiftly on the open sea.

<sup>5</sup> Carty 131.

<sup>6</sup> "Almost without exception modern scholars have been unable to accept that revenge provides a sufficient explanation for the joint action of Sparta and Corinth against Polykrates," (248). Cartledge, "Sparta and Samos: A Special Relationship?" *CQ* 32 ii: 243–65.

findings and cites scholarship focused on specific issues, compared with the more comprehensive, but now dated, works of Shipley and Barron.<sup>7</sup> The volume is clearly targeted at an audience within the fields of Classics, History, and Archaeology, but as most of the Greek is translated and her methodology is explained well, it should be accessible to ambitious undergraduates and non-majors. Carty is clearly aware of the difficulties in achieving certainty that are imposed by the scarcity of evidence: most of the more hypothetical discussions are signposted by use of subjunctive or the verb "appears". Such care is as praiseworthy as it is understandable, but it can grate wherever it is used to excess.

The rearrangement of early Samian regimes, the higher date for Polycrates' accession, and the application of archaeological evidence to undermine the notion of a Persian attack on Samos c. 550 are all quite forcefully argued. A problem does arise in this last section: Carty notes that Laconian black figure ware found on Samos as a percentage of all Laconian black figure increases significantly with the addition of finds since 1989, but admits that "finds of Laconian elsewhere from 1989 onwards will dilute the Samian proportion of the corpus" (94). Increasing the amount of Laconian black figure on Samos to account for finds after 1989 without increasing the total Laconian black figure and then comparing the two proportions is at best sloppy and at worst deliberately misleading; either more "legwork" needs to be done to calculate a proper current total of Laconian black figure, or the percentage argument should be left out.

Carty's theories about the specifics of Polycrates' accession, the motivation for the involvement of Sparta and Corinth in the attack of 525, and the relationships and motivations surrounding Polycrates' death are less convincing. The arguments on these topics are internally coherent, but do not rise so clearly above competing theories. For example, Carty concludes that Maeandrius, Polycrates' administrator and eventual successor, was involved in Oroites' plot to kill Polycrates mostly on the basis of Darius' subsequent attack on Samos and Maeandrius' flight to Sparta (in place of remaining on Samos to lead Samian resistance to the Persians). However, the Persians had long wanted control over Samos, and Maeandrius is far from the only Ionian to seek aid from Sparta against the Persians. In this case, then, Carty is not contradicted by the evidence, but neither does her version stand out as most plausible.

In all, however, Carty's book is a worthy addition to scholarship on Samos and Archaic interstate relations alike, and will be of great use to scholars working in these fields.

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<sup>7</sup> For Shipley see n. 4 above. Barron, *The History of Samos to 439 BC*, D. Phil. Thesis, Oxford 1961, and *The Silver Coins of Samos*, London 1966.