

Aideen Carty

# Polycrates, Tyrant of Samos

New Light on Archaic Greece

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Cover illustration:

Warrior from Heraion (Berlin SK 1752), c. 530–520 BC

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To Ger and Pauline,  
with love



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## PREFACE

This work presents a comprehensive re-appraisal of the controversial figure of Polycrates, tyrant of the Greek island of Samos in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, also renowned as a thalassocrat. It analyses his puzzling international relations with the powers of Egypt, the Greek cities, and Persia, as well as the ideological struggles centred on him in Samos. The time-span covered begins with the late seventh century BC, to establish the political and social background to Polycrates' tyranny, while Polycrates' death c. 522 BC marks the chronological extent of the book.

New theories are put forward regarding the basis of Polycrates' naval power and his seemingly unpredictable behaviour regarding alliances and gift-exchange. Above all, the basis of both Polycrates' tyranny and thalassocracy is posited on his supplying of Greek captives and slaves to work as soldiers in Egypt. It is here proposed that Polycrates supplied Greek manpower to Egypt: men sourced in raids and delivered as captives for ransom, to be used as elite foreign troops. This theory has far-reaching implications for our understanding of international relations between the Greeks and the Near Eastern empires in the Archaic period, whilst challenging the traditional view of autonomous Archaic Greek 'mercenaries' with a new image of bonded slaves fighting for a royal master.

In terms of Polycrates' tyranny, the complicity of most Samians in Polycrates' rule is explained by the benefits of a lucrative trade with Egypt. Domestic opposition to Polycrates is traced via archaeological evidence to a factional split c. 550 BC, and linked with questions of foreign relations. Concerning external opposition, the Spartans' attack on Polycrates c. 525 BC is interpreted as revenge for Samian sabotage of Spartan attempts to establish the type of trade relations with Egypt that had enabled Polycrates to thrive. With regard to Polycrates' death, his decision to treat with the Persian satrap, Oroites, is posited on his desire to capitalise on the Persian civil wars of 522–521 BC. It is argued that Polycrates remained opposed to the Persians until he became embroiled in the Persian coup to overthrow King Cambyses in early 522 BC.

This book has its origins in my doctoral thesis, which was undertaken in University College Dublin with funding by the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences (IRCHSS). I owe profound thanks to the IRCHSS and to those hardy and generous souls who have read and commented on the entire work: my supervisor Philip de Souza, Theresa Urbainczyk, Hans van Wees, and *Historia's* anonymous Readers. While I have incorporated many of their wise suggestions, I claim any remaining errors, omissions, or missteps as my own.

At *Historia*, my sincere thanks go to Kai Brodersen and his colleagues for this opportunity to publish. The staff at Franz Steiner Verlag have been very helpful and efficient, particularly Sarah-Vanessa Schäfer and Katharina Stüdemann. Other people who have made significant contributions along the way include Christina Haywood, Alan B. Lloyd, Graham Shipley, Alan Griffiths, Lynette Mitchell, and all of

the participants in the 7<sup>th</sup> ‘Celtic Conference in Classics’ panel on “The Interface of Greece and Egypt”.

Staff at UCD’s James Joyce Library have been very helpful, while staff at Oxford’s Duke Humfrey Library kindly made a digital copy of J.P. Barron’s 1961 D. Phil thesis for me (it is now available through their catalogue). I also thank Maeve McHugh in UCD Classics for conjuring up a map at short order. In Greece, I received patient assistance from both Joachim Heiden of the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut and Maria Biglaki of the 21<sup>st</sup> Ephorate of Antiquities. Indeed, I thank the 21<sup>st</sup> Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities, as part of the Hellenic Republic’s Ministry of Culture and Sports, General Directorate of Antiquities and Cultural Heritage, for granting permission to use the photos which I took on Samian sites and in the Archaeological Museum in Vathi. In Germany, Sabine Schumann and Astrid Winde of BPK dealt with my naive technical questions very well indeed.

Finally, I thank my friends for their empathy and caffeine-fuelled support over the past few years. Particular thanks go to Antoinette Walker for trekking with me along the Sacred Way in Samos’ blistering heat. Of course, my family has been the most important source of cheer-leading, and while Polycrates made a virtue of it with his ‘friends’, there is no way I could give back to Ger and Pauline, Ciarán and Rachel, Emer and Kingsley all that I have received from them. The best presents of all were Aoife and Eoin, both of whom burst upon the scene during my work on this project.

## INTRODUCTION

My aim is to examine and analyse the evidence for the career of Polycrates, tyrant of the Greek island of Samos in the sixth century BC. Re-evaluating the ancient sources and applying the best modern scholarship, I have sought to establish a coherent overview of one tyrant in the context of one particular *polis*. Also, by exploring his role in interstate relations of the mid-sixth century BC, I hope to offer a new interpretation of the basis for Polycrates' tyranny and thalassocracy.

The time-span covered here begins with the late seventh century BC, as I speculate on the political and social background to Polycrates' tyranny. Polycrates' death c. 522 BC marks the chronological extent of my enquiries, so the situation on Samos under the tyrannies of his successors is alluded to only briefly, where relevant to questions arising with regard to Polycrates.

### POLYCRATES IN CONTEXT, AND QUESTIONS ARISING

The story of Polycrates and Samos in the sixth century BC stretches far beyond the coast of Samos. While Polycrates was a tyrant on Samos, the expansion of his power into the Aegean meant that the Greeks needed another concept to apply to him: thalassocrat. This combination of terms suggests that Polycrates was something new in Greek eyes, and hard to define. There had been tyrants before him, but, as Herodotus suggests (3.122), apart from mythical figures, no man in living memory had ruled the sea. With Polycrates' power expressed in terms of home (tyrant) and abroad (thalassocrat), we are thus faced with the key question of how the domestic and the international aspects of his power were interrelated. How did his control of Samos allow Polycrates to become a regional magnate, particularly at a time when the expanding Persian Empire was a threat to the entire region? And how did Polycrates' friendships and enmities with foreign powers sustain or undermine his control of Samos?

On the domestic front, issues of elite competition and control of resources on Samos arise as we investigate the background to Polycrates' tyranny over the Samians. There was resistance to Polycrates' rule, which raises questions as to the identity of the dissenting group and the crux of their dissatisfaction. Yet popular support is indicated by the fact that he successfully held Samos against a combined attack and besiegement by Samian rebels, Spartans, and Corinthians c. 525 BC, and continued in power until he was finally killed by a renegade Persian satrap c. 522 BC. As a result, we may ask how he gained other Samians' support for his rule. The answer appears to lie in the mixture of Polycrates' notorious raiding and his international relations. For, as well as the Greek *poleis* of Ionia and the mainland, his story involves the great Near Eastern empires of Persia and Egypt, and the issue of his allegiance or enmity with their rulers is the key to understanding Polycrates'

thalassocracy and the wider history of kingdoms and *poleis* around the Mediterranean in the sixth century BC. It is vital to explore the extent to which Polycrates' friendship with the Egyptian pharaoh Amasis underpinned both his tyranny and his thalassocracy, the form of benefit Amasis may have gained from these relations, and whether Polycrates switched allegiance from Amasis to the Persian king Cambyses on the eve of the Persian invasion of Egypt in 525 BC. As Samian rebels convinced the Spartans to attack Polycrates at roughly the same time as the Persian invasion of Egypt, the Spartans' motivation for their involvement presents us with another puzzle – one which brings us back to Greek relations with Near Eastern powers and competition for their friendship.

Apart from the fundamental question of the basis of Polycrates' power, the following questions are addressed sequentially and thus outline the structure of this book by chapter:

1. What were the regimes which preceded Polycrates' tyranny on Samos, and can evidence of these regimes illuminate the political context for Polycrates' tyranny?
2. Did Polycrates' father, Aiakes, hold power over the Samians, and if so, what was the character of this power?
3. When did Polycrates come to prominence on Samos, and thus, how long was his reign?
4. With a date for Polycrates' rise to power in the early 540s, are theories of violent destruction on Samos and broken links with Sparta c. 550 BC supported by the archaeological evidence?
5. What was the nature of the stasis which preceded Polycrates' accession to the tyranny, and are there any links between evidence for this stasis and the Samian rebels who attacked Polycrates c. 525 BC?
6. How did Polycrates establish a reputation as a thalassocrat, and what form did this naval power take?
7. What was the nature of Polycrates' relations with the Egyptian pharaoh Amasis?
8. Who were the Samian rebels who attacked Polycrates c. 525 BC, and why did the Spartans and Corinthians join in the attack?
9. What were the circumstances surrounding Polycrates' death at the hands of the Persian satrap Oroites c. 522 BC?

The methodology I apply to answering these questions will be outlined below. First, I offer a précis of the main evidence for Polycrates, to be followed by a review of the scholarship concerning him.

### SYNOPSIS OF POLYCRATES' CAREER

The chronological extent of Polycrates' tyranny was traditionally given as 533–522 BC. These dates arise from the Christian chronographer Eusebius nominating the fourth year of the 61<sup>st</sup> Olympiad as the date when Polycrates took power, and Herodotus' *Histories* (3.120) pointing to a synchronism between Polycrates' death and the death of the Persian king Cambyses, which has been established independently as 522 BC. However, the evidence of Eusebius' *Chronicle* has been subjected to

serious questioning, and consensus has emerged that the date of Polycrates' accession should be higher. While it is now usually given as c. 540 BC, I argue for an earlier date, namely the early 540s BC (see below, chapter 3).

Regarding the events of his life, most of our evidence for Polycrates comes from the first two Samian *logoi* of Herodotus' *Histories* (3.39–60, 139–50), and so we begin with a summary of these *logoi*. In the *Histories*, we are told of Polycrates' pre-eminence amongst contemporary tyrants, as his magnificence was unparalleled, except for that of the later tyrants of Sicily. Concerning Polycrates' family, his father was called Aiakes, and he had two brothers, Pantagnotus and Syloson, with whom he ruled Samos after a period of civil strife. However, Polycrates went on to have Pantagnotus killed, and sent Syloson into exile, leaving him free to rule the island alone. He established bonds of friendship with the Egyptian pharaoh Amasis, and had great success thereafter. With a fleet of a hundred penteconters, and a force of one thousand bowmen, he captured numerous islands and some mainland Ionian towns. Emphasis is placed on the indiscriminate nature of his naval raiding, including against 'friends'. This is followed by reference to a victorious naval battle against the Lesbians during Polycrates' attack on the city of Miletus, and subsequent slavery for the captured Lesbians on Samos. The famous tale of Polycrates' ring then unfolds, where the pharaoh Amasis expresses superstitious fear of Polycrates' run of success, and exhorts him to sacrifice his most valuable possession to appease the jealousy of the gods. By throwing his signet-ring into the sea, Polycrates obeys Amasis, but, later, a fisherman presents a fine fish to Polycrates, in the belly of which the ring is found and is thus restored to its happy owner. On hearing of this, Amasis breaks off his relations with Polycrates, to avoid feeling sorrow when Polycrates' luck turns.

After the 'ring tale', comes the evidence which leads to theories of Polycrates' switching allegiance from the Egyptians to the Persians. Polycrates is said to have secretly encouraged the king of Persia, Cambyses, to request a detachment of Samians for the impending Persian invasion of Egypt, c. 525 BC. When Cambyses complied, Polycrates dispatched to Egypt the Samians he least trusted, sending them off in a fleet of forty triremes. These men managed to sail back to Samos where they defeated Polycrates' forces at sea, during which Polycrates spurred Samian sailors to fight by threatening to burn the ship-sheds in which he had imprisoned the sailors' families. But the rebels lost when their attack moved to a land-based battle. In need of reinforcements, the rebels sailed to Sparta, where they were given a frosty reception, but eventually secured Spartan military aid. The reason for the Spartans' involvement in an attack on Polycrates is disputed. On the one hand, the Samians to whom Herodotus spoke referred to bonds of guest friendship and reciprocation of assistance given to the Spartans against the neighbouring Messenians. Yet the Spartans denied this. They insisted that their motivation in attacking Polycrates was revenge for Samians' interception of gifts which were being exchanged between Sparta and both Egypt and Lydia in the years immediately preceding the fall of Lydia c. 547 BC. The Corinthians are also said to have lent assistance to the Samian rebels, owing to Samian disruption of an exchange between Corinth and Lydia in an earlier period: a Corinthian convoy of Corcyraean boys was being sent to Lydia to

be made into eunuchs, but the Samians took pity on the boys and helped them to escape their fate.

Herodotus describes in some detail the subsequent combined attack on Polycrates, with an emphasis on the Spartans' role. For forty days, they laid siege to the city of Samos but were held back by Polycrates' forces and the city's defences. At one point a group of Spartans managed to enter the town, but were cut off and killed. The siege ended when the Spartans sailed away, reportedly having received a pay-off from Polycrates. As a result, the rebels were forced to give up the fight and seek their fortunes elsewhere, but eventually ended up in slavery.

Following a break in the narrative regarding Samos, Herodotus next tells us of Polycrates' death. The Persian governor of Ionia, Oroites, offered Polycrates great treasure in return for refuge and protection against his own king, Cambyses, whom Oroites suspected of having ordered his death. However, the offer was designed as a ruse with which to lure Polycrates to Persian-controlled territory. Oroites had somehow been shamed by Polycrates, either by not being able to defeat him, or by Polycrates' rebuffing of his diplomatic overtures – hence the covert scheme to kill him. Suspicion about the offer was voiced by many on Samos, including an unnamed daughter of Polycrates. Nevertheless, as he was reassured by his secretary, Maeandrius, who had conducted a reconnoitring mission, Polycrates went to collect Oroites and the treasure, thus falling into the Persian's trap. Oroites had Polycrates executed by impalement, and Maeandrius took over on Samos. Following the coup which placed Darius on the Persian throne c. 521 BC, King Darius attacked Samos and ousted Maeandrius, replacing him with Polycrates' remaining brother, Syloson, as puppet-ruler of Samos. This concludes the general outline of Herodotus' evidence concerning Polycrates (Hdt. 2.182; 3.39–60, 139–50).

Numerous other sources touch on the subject of Polycrates, adding to the array of evidence for his life and career. For instance, an inscription appears to give evidence of Polycrates' father, connecting Aiakes with a possible magistracy, plunder, and the goddess Hera (*IG XII.6.ii.561*), while the lyric poet Ibycus exalts Polycrates in a poem, seemingly written when Polycrates was a youth (fr. 281 Campbell). Much contemporary evidence appears to be lost to us, for we are told that the lyric poet Anacreon wrote poetry full of references to Polycrates (Strabo 14.638); Anacreon was hired as Polycrates' tutor when he was a youth, and seems to have remained with him during his rule (Himerius *Or.* 29; Hdt. 3.121). Unfortunately, none of the extant Anacreon fragments mentions Polycrates by name. Nevertheless, later writers provide more evidence of his career.

Writing a book of *Stratagems* in the Roman period, Polyaeus (1.23) describes the events on Samos around the time that Polycrates took power, with a stratagem involving Polycrates' brothers carrying out a massacre at the Samian Heraion and Polycrates' seizure of the city's best defensive points. Here, allusion is made to the contemporaneous tyrant, Lygdamis of Naxos, who is said to have arrived on Samos in support of Polycrates once the latter had secured the city. Polycrates' tyranny is also linked with the flight from Samos by the philosopher Pythagoras, who is said to have fled the island when Polycrates' tyranny became more severe (Aristoxenus, Wehrli fr. 16).

For events after his accession, Thucydides (1.13, 3.104) describes how Polycrates' naval power enabled him to seize many islands, including Rhenea, which Polycrates 'chained' to the neighbouring island-sanctuary of Delos. Another source tells us of his plans to initiate a festival to honour Apollo there, and records a pun linking the timing of these plans to Polycrates' death (*Suda sv. Πύθια καὶ Δῆλια*). His tyranny appears to have seen a great influx of manpower and goods to Samos, along with his initiation of large-scale prostitution in Samian pleasure-quarters which he had built. While Herodotus (3.60) listed the great Samian engineering works of the sixth century BC without ascribing them to Polycrates, Aristotle did attribute them to him (*Pol.* 1313a34). On a more military note, Polycrates also commissioned ships of a new design, dubbed the *Samaina* (Athenaeus 12.540c–541a). In terms of the social effects of Polycrates' tyranny on the Samians, we hear of Polycrates 'bestowing mothers' after an unspecified war by ordering rich families to take responsibility for certain older women (Duris *FGrHist* 76 F 63). Less laudable is his reported betrayal of Lydian suppliants, seeking refuge from the Persian satrap; at first Polycrates welcomed them warmly, but then he killed them all and took their money (Diod. 10.16.4). Finally, there is evidence of Polycrates' ordering the burning of one or more wrestling schools, in order to discourage male lovers who might incite each other to open rebellion against Polycrates' rule (Hieronymus of Rhodes *apud* Athenaeus 13.602d).

Such are the main sources which explicitly refer to Polycrates' life and times. In the following pages, it will become clear that much more evidence has a bearing on the story of his career, particularly with respect to the international context of his rule.

## REVIEW OF PREVIOUS SCHOLARSHIP

Fortunately, I have been able to draw on the work of many scholars whose interests have led them, from various approaches, to consider Polycrates. Above all, John Barron (1961a) and Graham Shipley (1987) have contributed enormously to scholarship on Samos with their general histories of the island. Barron (1961a) wrote his doctoral thesis on the history of Samos down to 439 BC, and established the first comprehensive overview of the evidence for the island and its chronology, but it was not published. Shipley's 1982 doctoral thesis took up from where Barron's left off, covering the period from 440 BC to the Peace of Apamea. However, when Shipley published his 1987 monograph on Samos, it spanned the period from 800–188 BC. For the Archaic period, he relied to a large extent on Barron's 1961 thesis. Yet he re-examined Barron's evidence thoroughly, and did not follow some of the more controversial of Barron's theories, for instance that of the existence of two Polycrates in the sixth century, i. e. father and son, both tyrants (see below, chapter 2).

The traditional chronographic date for Polycrates' accession c. 533 BC has been placed in serious doubt by a series of scholars, most importantly White (1954), Cadoux (1956), and Barron (1964). Although these scholars all proposed a higher date for Polycrates' assumption of power, bringing it into the 540s, they did not

have access to the work of Mosshammer (1979) on the Christian chronographers. Mosshammer deconstructs the chronographic date for Polycrates and argues very persuasively that Apollodorus applied a scheme for ascribing absolute dates to groups of contemporaries, based on an epoch year (see below, chapter 3). With the 533 BC date for Polycrates explained as the result of such a construct, we can be more certain of the alternative dates related to Polycrates and his contemporaries.

While La Bua (1984; 1978; 1975a; 1975b;) and Wallinga (1993; 1991; 1987) both tackled various aspects of Polycrates' tyranny in numerous works, Paul Cartledge (1982) wrote a seminal paper on Spartan relations with Samos in the period before their attack on Polycrates, using such evidence from the material record as was available to him. These days, we are fortunate in having a greatly increased amount of archaeological scholarship with which to refine our view of sixth-century Samos, owing to scholars such as Stibbe on Laconian ceramics (1989; 1997), Tsakos on Samos' West Cemetery and Artemision (1980; 2001; 2003), and Pipili on Laconian ceramics, particularly her catalogue of the Artemision's Laconian black-figure pottery (1998; 2001). Most importantly, the state of the evidence has been improved enormously by the efforts of the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut (DAI) in publishing their series of Samian archaeological reports, including Freyer-Schauenburg's catalogue of Samian sculpture (1974), Kienast's examination of Samos' sixth-century BC Eupalinus Tunnel (1995), and Kyrieleis on the early-sixth century BC colossal kouros found at Samos' Heraion (1996).

Unfortunately, there are two works of scholarship which are not yet available at time of writing: Nigel Wilson's forthcoming edition of Herodotus; and Alan Griffiths' commentary on Book Three of the *Histories*. I understand that both are works in progress. While I make frequent use of the Books 1–4 commentary by Asheri, Lloyd, and Corcella (2007), and somewhat less use of How and Wells' commentary (1912), it will be clear to my readers that I have been strongly influenced by Griffiths' approach to Herodotus (2001), and thus regret that my analysis of Polycrates predates the completion and publication of Griffiths' commentary, as well as Wilson's new Herodotus.

In sum, despite Polycrates' central position in a tangle of alliances and enmities during a time of international upheaval, no work to date has focused entirely on giving a comprehensive analysis of the evidence for his rule. With one figure playing such a direct role in international affairs during the rise of the Persian empire and the fall of Lydia and Egypt, it seems likely that detailed investigation of his reign will shed some light on the wider political situation around the Mediterranean during the sixth century BC. Also, a greater understanding of Polycrates' foreign relations promises to offer an insight into the nature of his power on Samos. For, in the benefit accruing to Polycrates' foreign allies, we might find pointers to similar benefits accruing to the Samians and thus an indication of the foundations of Polycrates' tyranny. Overall, a fresh analysis of the ancient sources and a review of modern scholarship on the topic seemed long overdue. Yet any investigation into Polycrates presents substantial methodological challenges.

## METHODOLOGY

The limited state of our literary evidence for Polycrates was one such challenge, as it presents scholars with few options other than to grapple determinedly with Herodotus and to coax illumination from scattered references in contexts as late as the Byzantine period. Nevertheless, since the 1960s, scholarship on Herodotus' narrative techniques has greatly improved our understanding of the role of different *logoi* in the context of the *Histories* as a whole. This facilitates a nuanced reading of Herodotus' evidence and has allowed for a coherent approach to the Samian *logoi*. Overall, my approach can be summed up in general terms as looking for Herodotus' narrative patterns and analysing their effect on his selection and presentation of the evidence. I plot a course between extremes of opinion which view Herodotus' *Histories* as mainly fictional (Fehling 1989), or see all of his citations as representing personal inquiry and local tradition (e.g. Murray 1987; 2001). I pay due attention to oral traditions in literature (e.g. Thomas 1992), but also admit the possibility of authorial invention. Most importantly, I follow the approaches taken by Immerwahr (1966), Lateiner (1989), Griffiths (2001), and Bakker (2006), in paying close attention to the context of individual *logoi* within the *Histories*, and Herodotus' use of narrative patterning to make one *logos* illuminate another, both in adjacent material and across the work as a whole. Owing to the need for in-depth argument to support this approach, detailed discussion of how I apply their methods to Herodotus is delayed until chapter 5, for it is only in chapter 5 that Herodotus' evidence takes centre stage, along with Polycrates himself.

Another challenge – and one which requires more extensive comment at this point – is the question of whether theories regarding tyranny, from Plato and Aristotle onwards, should be applied to the evidence for Polycrates. As Lynette Mitchell argues, fifth- and fourth-century BC Athenian discourse on power was opposed to single rule and, as a result of the dominance of this discourse, its negative interpretation of tyrants has dominated and “skewed” our understanding of the early tyrants (L. Mitchell 2013, 7–8). She argues in favour of approaching the issue of rule “synchronically as a phenomenon that includes *monarchoi*, *basileis*, and *tyrannoi*...” (ibid, 48). In addition, an examination of the scholarship concerned with tyranny has convinced me that theories regarding tyranny should not be applied *a priori*, and that each tyrant should first be examined in detail – in the context of their own city's history and politics. This must be done before attempting to extrapolate any theoretical typology of a tyrant, should such a typology be considered desirable.

Traditionally, there was an image of Archaic tyrants as champions of a middle class, of hoplite farmers who resented the aristocracy and swept to power a sympathetic man from the aristocratic margins. For instance, Andrewes (1956, 42) presented as a key factor in the creation of tyrants the theory of support for the tyrant from a newly created hoplite class who chose him as a champion against the aristocrats. This theory has persisted into some recent scholarship, including that of Stein-Hölkeskamp, who links the rise of the tyrant Cypselus in Corinth with a possible adoption of hoplite tactics by the Corinthians' enemies, the Megarians, and the Corinthians' desire to emulate their rivals' tactics (Stein-Hölkeskamp 2009, 102). However, in other scholarship, serious doubts are cast on this model of tyranny's genesis, and there is an awareness of the need for a more nuanced view of the tyrant's source of power.

An elite power-base for the Archaic tyrant has become a more common diagnosis for the origin of his power. For instance, Sarah Morris saw this as “an accumulation of power and wealth within the governing elite” (2003, 11), and Lynette Mitchell (2013, 61) has recently asserted that “the object of elite politics was not the rest of the community but other members of the elite.” One paper has particularly invigorated the discussion. In “Before *Turanoi* were Tyrants: Rethinking a Chapter of Early Greek History” (2005) Greg Anderson argues that, in Archaic politics, the competitive element among the elite was overarching, creating “a winner-take-all political environment” (ibid, 177), while true power did not reside with magistrates, as the main focus of Archaic law was circumscription of their power (ibid, 180). Anderson suggests that ‘image-marketing’ was the most common weapon in elite struggles for dominance through “the articulation of superiority” (ibid 183–5). The traditional assumptions regarding tyrants have been summed up by Anderson (2005, 190–201) as “articles of faith”. They are as follows: that tyrants distanced themselves from the elite in their own *poleis* and created an exclusive type of tyrant-guild; that they were distinguished from the elite by their building programmes; that they fostered citizens’ identification with the city through cult; that they were revolutionaries backed by the demos; and, finally, that they ruled illegitimately (Anderson 2005, 190–201). I have avoided applying these particular assumptions while tackling the evidence regarding Polycrates. In addition, approaches which tackle the tyrant through conflation of his role with that of ‘lawgiver’ (e.g. V. Parker 2007), or ‘sage’ (e.g. Wallace 2009) face the insurmountable difficulties of both limiting their view of any individual tyrant’s powers to the point at which the evidence for both roles overlaps, and attempting to apply the type to all tyrants, despite the meagreness of the supporting evidence.

What might aid us in approaching the political context for an individual tyrant such as Polycrates is Anderson’s simple definition of the tyrant as “the first among equals” whose authority was “not so much unconstitutional as extra-constitutional” – “normal leadership in its most amplified form, conventional *de facto* authority writ large” (ibid, 202). More dramatically, he terms the tyrant: “the last man standing in an ongoing political contest waged within the *polis*, not an opportunistic insurgent who challenges the ‘state’ from without” (ibid, 208).

However, one area which Anderson does not explore in detail is the role resources played in the struggle for power. Wealth – its acquisition and redistribution – must play a large part in elite struggles and the rise of tyrants. Rose noted this in his call for a re-examination of the role wealth plays in elite competition for power (2009, 477) – a call which chimes with Ure’s view of early tyrannies as founded on “financial or commercial supremacy” (Ure 1922, 2), including the example of Polycrates (ibid, 73). In his recent monograph *Class in Archaic Greece* (2012), Rose concludes that Archaic tyranny arose from aristocratic factions warring out of envy and a desire for wealth (2012, 217).<sup>1</sup> Overall, the struggle for pre-eminence re-

1 Whilst Rose argues that we must focus on the tyrant’s extraction and distribution of wealth (Rose 2012, 220), his own analysis of archaic tyrants trends in favour of the tyrant fostering communal identity through cult, public building programmes, and colonisation (2012, 266). Also, his chapter on tyranny (2012, 201–266) relies to a large extent on evidence related to Solon, without any explicit discussion of Solon’s status.

quired considerable funds, and those who were not members of the elite stood to gain or lose depending on whom they backed in terms of access to resources.

Some scholars, such as Hall (2007), make use of Marshall Sahlins' (1963) typological models of Big Man and Chief in their discussions of Archaic tyranny, yet the basis of Sahlins' analysis is often ignored. For Sahlins' types of Big Man and Chief were founded on questions of resources in the form of gift and redistribution networks, emphasising the role of "great public giveaways", "kinship dues", "the relation of reciprocity" and so on (Sahlins 1963, 291). In Sahlins' model of the 'Big Man', the leader's power comes in large part from successes in the area of gift-giving and benefactions, but his downfall lies in the need to give more than he receives (ibid, 293). Operating on a different scale and with authority residing more clearly in the office rather than the individual, the 'Chief' has power over the mode of production through placing taboos on certain crops, withholding them for specific communal purposes, and, above all, creating a surplus from which he "capitalises the fund of power" (ibid, 296). The difference in quality and evolutionary level between Sahlins' Big Man and Chief rests on the differing flow of resources: the Big Man is limited by the extent of his household's ability to distribute its own product to the community; the Chief's success lies in his ability to extract product from the community for himself and his faction (ibid, 300).

Some scholars have indeed noted the vital role of wealth for tyrants, without using Sahlins' model. Making the link between Archaic and Classical tyrants, Trundle (2006) does emphasise the importance of resources to the tyrants of Samos and Sicily. He points to the role of resources in Herodotus' tales of Polycrates and his successor Maeandrius, and to Thucydides' assertion that states could not grow great without revenues (Thuc. 1.10; Trundle 2006, 68). Catenacci also describes Polycrates' wealth as his most distinctive trait (Catenacci 2004, 128). In my examination of the circumstances surrounding Polycrates' tyranny, it will be clear that raiding was a key factor in the rise and resilience of Polycrates, but that his holding of office means Sahlins' type of Chief is more pertinent to him than that of Big Man. As I will show in chapter 1, there is strong evidence for Samos having been ruled by monarchs in the late seventh and early sixth centuries BC, thus one cannot envisage Polycrates' tyranny as immediately evolving from a society that could be typified as one ruled by a Big Man into a Chiefdom. However, I consider Sahlins' anthropological typology to be a useful diagnostic tool, even if the overall social evolutionary aspect of his work is not supported by this particular evidence, i.e. that of Polycrates' tyranny. I speculate that Polycrates could extract produce (booty) from Samians and control deployment of the surplus for the community's benefit (public works). His ability to create both tyranny and thalassocracy from this simple dynamic is due to opportunism in the face of the extraordinary factors at play around him, namely the fall of Lydia, and Egypt's need for military manpower as the threat of Persian invasion grew. I argue that Polycrates exploited the Egyptians' needs and the Samians' capacity to meet them, by organising the Samians to supply slaves and captives to Egypt for sale or ransom, and ultimately for use in the Egyptian army.

Robin Osborne has also had a strong influence on the approach to tyranny taken in this study of Polycrates. Like Anderson, Osborne (2009) discusses tyranny with

regard to elite competition and a focus on the circumscribing of office-holders' powers in Archaic laws. However, he also tackles the question of resources to some extent, arguing from Hesiod's evidence that wealth was a more important criterion than birth in attaining power in the Archaic period (ibid, 138–9). Indeed, Osborne is highly sceptical of the notion of birthright as a vital factor in winning high social status, and ridicules the concept of an ideologically coherent aristocracy in the Archaic era as “a modern fantasy” (ibid, 209). Finally, he warns about scholars seeming to “pick and mix” from anecdotes of individual tyrants (ibid, 185), while pointing to our inability even to explain the successful coup and consolidation of power of any one tyrant (ibid, 181). As a result of Osborne's concerns, I attempted from the outset to avoid distorting my view of Polycrates with assumptions as to the dynamics of his accession and maintenance of power. Also, in analysing, evaluating, and interpreting the evidence for Polycrates' tyranny in the light of the best modern scholarship, I hope to achieve a coherent overview of one single tyrant's career in the context of one particular *polis*. I do not aim at delivering a more profound understanding or definition of tyranny *per se*.

Stereotypical tyrant behaviour may be extrapolated from an array of case studies, but each tyranny should first be examined in detail, and in the context of their own city's history and politics, before comparing their regimes to theoretical frameworks of tyranny. As a result, I consciously avoid applying ancient philosophical theories of tyranny and modern political concepts to the evidence for Polycrates. Nor do I use evidence regarding other tyrants as comparanda unless they are directly involved in the events under discussion. I look instead at the question of Polycrates' power, and, in particular, how his power may have been based upon access to resources. For this, I view his raiding and thalassocracy in the context of the relations between Polycrates and Amasis, the pharaoh of Egypt, and examine how both Polycrates' piracy, his power on Samos, and his foreign relations were all connected.

Considering the range of issues and types of evidence involved in Polycrates' history, I have frequently had recourse to the material record and Near Eastern evidence, as well as models of guest-friendship (Herman 1987) and slavery (Patterson 1982; Zelnick-Abramowitz 2005). In chapter 1, I re-examine the main sources on which reconstructions of a pre-Polycratean history of Samian government were based, and offer new suggestions regarding the political and temporal contexts of key passages. This is cross-checked with the material record for the late-seventh and early-sixth centuries BC on Samos. In chapter 2, I focus on the evidence for Polycrates' father, and apply Gabriel Herman's 1987 model of guest-friendship to the evidence, seeking for any such links between Polycrates' father and the rulers of Egypt and Sparta. In an attempt to establish Polycrates' regnal dates, the chronological tradition regarding Polycrates receives in-depth analysis in chapter 3. As a result, chapter 4 requires an investigation of theories of stasis on Samos around the period in which Polycrates may have come to power. Such theories are based on archaeological evidence, thus the material record is re-examined. In chapter 5, I tackle Herodotus' evidence for Polycrates' accession, and offer a new reading of a related passage in Polyaeus' *Stratagems* (1.23). In seeking to understand the basis

and character of Polycrates' thalassocracy, I address the debate on both the invention of the trireme and the status of raiders and traders in chapter 6. Owing to the conclusions drawn, in chapter 7 I re-examine the terminology, and compare the Greek and Near Eastern evidence for foreign soldiers in Near Eastern armies in the Archaic period. Over chapters 6 and 7, I argue that Polycrates supplied Greek captives to Egypt for use as elite soldiers in the Egyptian army. In chapter 8, I investigate the evidence for the Spartans' motivation in attacking Polycrates c. 525 BC, while chapter 9 requires analysis of the Persian historical context in my discussion of Polycrates' death at the hands of the Persian satrap Oroites.

Finally, regarding translations, very occasionally I give only an English translation of those Greek references which are both particularly long and the exact wording of which I consider to be unproblematic. For instance, two of Plutarch's *Greek Questions* are quoted in full in English only, with relevant Greek expressions added in parenthesis. Here, also, I make use of Halliday's translation, for I cannot bring his English version any closer to the Greek original. However, my general practice is to quote the Greek original together with my own English translation. When I make use of other scholars' translations, they are credited – otherwise translations are my own. Similarly, apart from those credited, the photographs and charts are my own.



## CHAPTER 1 POLYCRATES' PREDECESSORS

The first question which must be raised is that of the social and political context of Polycrates' tyranny on Samos. Twentieth-century scholarship broadly accepted Barron's theory (1961a; 1964) that a landed nobility ruled Samos for most of the seventh and early sixth centuries BC, and that a 'tyrant dynasty' sprang up on Samos in the early sixth century, decades before the advent of Polycrates. As both Polycrates' father and a yet older relative are assumed to have been tyrants, tyranny is seen to have become the norm on Samos by Polycrates' time. Yet it would appear that the foundations for parts of this theory are not sufficiently strong to withstand close scrutiny, and, as a result, a different reconstruction of Archaic Samian history is not only possible but also desirable.

In this chapter, chronological connections between literary passages relevant to Archaic Samos and such events as the supposed Lelantine War can be shown to be spurious, while close reading of other passages will result in their exclusion from consideration as relevant to the Archaic period. As relations between Samians and other *poleis* such as Aegina and Megara are of prime importance in establishing a reasonable sequence of events, evidence of these cities' alliances and enmities with others such as Corinth, Epidaurus, and Miletus must also be included in my investigations. By linking the pertinent literary evidence with (arguably) more suitable historical contexts, and cross-referencing with developments visible in the archaeological record, I eventually conclude that single rule appears to have been the norm on Archaic Samos down to the early sixth century, but oligarchic factions caused serious strife on Samos in the decades preceding Polycrates' tyranny. Elite factions and a polarised society thus provide the general back-drop to Polycrates' tyranny.

### BEFORE POLYCRATES – THE TRADITIONAL VIEW

In works by Shipley (1987) and Barron (1964; 1961a), the history of Archaic Samos preceding Polycrates' tyranny has been reconstructed to show kingship until c. 700 BC, giving way to the oligarchy of a faction termed the Geomoroi, or 'Landsharers', for most of the seventh century. The early sixth century BC is understood as the period when tyranny was introduced by a presumed forebear of Polycrates – Syloson, son of Calliteles – and, from then on, the sixth century is seen to be characterised by tyrant rule: that of the aforementioned Syloson; then Polycrates' father, Aiakes; and, after some stasis, Polycrates and his various successors<sup>1</sup>. According to

1 Polycrates' successors in the tyranny were as follows: his deputy, Maeandrius; his exiled brother, Syloson (often dubbed 'Syloson II' since Barron's reconstruction of 'the tyrant dynasty'); and his nephew – Aiakes (son of Syloson, and dubbed 'Aiakes II').

this reconstruction, seventh-century developments in Samian trade across the Mediterranean and Near East happened under the Geomoroi's oligarchy, and the period of greatest wealth in Samos (c. 575–550 BC) coincides with the rise of tyranny (e. g. Shipley 1987, 40–1, 69).

Before looking at the specific details of this reconstruction, it is important to note the state of the evidence. The literary evidence on which any reconstruction of pre-Polycratean history must be based is scattered and late: in one case at least, as late as the Byzantine period. The key evidence to be tackled consists of Herodotus (3.59), Plutarch (*QG* 57), Polyaeus (6.45), and Theodorus Metochites (*Miscell.* 668–9). Quite apart from questions regarding the reliability of each author, in each case there is usually little or no indication of an explicit time-period, so tentative theories are all that may be expected for any reconstruction of early Samian political history. The episodic nature of the literary evidence gives us floating chronologies which could belong to a variety of points in time, and, when linked, they cannot lead to anything more than a speculative narrative. The best one can hope for is a narrative which fits comfortably with other literary evidence, and reflects the evidence of the material record. However, I shall demonstrate that, in the traditional reconstruction of pre-Polycratean Samian history, at least two passages can be shown to be problematic.

My enquiries shall focus on four named figures and two factions, only one of which is named. In the literary evidence, apart from a *basileus* called Amphicrates (Hdt. 3.59), other Archaic-period figures are supposed to include a monarch called Demoteles (Plut. *QG* 57), and an *aisymnetes* called Phoibias, preserved by the Byzantine scholar Theodorus Metochites (*Miscell.* 668–9). Polyaeus also mentions a “Syloson, son of Calliteles” who is often posited as an ancestor of Polycrates and one of his predecessors in the tyranny (Polyaeus 6.45; cf. Shipley 1987, 69; Barron 1961a, 177–8). Thus there are references to four men who were pre-eminent on Samos and seem to have ruled the community at some point. In addition, there is the reference to an oligarchic faction called the Geomoroi, whose opponents are described but unnamed (Plut. *QG* 57). In the traditional reconstruction, the *basileus* Amphicrates is assumed to have ruled c. 700 BC (Shipley 1987, 38); Demoteles is tentatively dated to the late seventh century (Barron 1964, 211); Phoibias' name is preserved in a list along with the tyrants Periander and Pittacus, and is therefore assumed to be a contemporary, setting him in the late seventh or early sixth centuries (Shipley 1987, 49); and Syloson, son of Calliteles, is traditionally dated to around 590 BC (Shipley 1987, 53 and n. 24; Barron 1961a, 177). Below, I will examine the evidence for each in turn, following the traditional sequence for each episode or figure: the *basileus* Amphicrates, Demoteles the ‘monarch’, Phoibias the *aisymnetes*, the Geomoroi's oligarchy, and Syloson the general. Where the traditional date or context ascribed to either historical figure or episode is found to be questionable, a different context will be sought.

## AMPHICRATES AND AEGINA (HDT. 3.59)

The first passage used in the traditional reconstruction of Samos' archaic political system is Herodotus' reference to a Samian *basileus* called Amphicrates who led an attack on Aegina (Hdt. 3.59):

πρότεροι γάρ Σάμιοι ἐπ' Ἀμφικράτεος βασιλεύοντος ἐν Σάμῳ στρατευσάμενοι ἐπ' Αἴγινα  
μεγάλα κακὰ ἐποίησαν Αἰγινήτας καὶ ἔπαθον ὑπ' ἐκείνων.

For earlier, when Amphicrates was king in Samos, the Samians – coming in force to Aegina – had inflicted terrible damage on Aeginetans, and suffered [in turn] at their hands. (Hdt. 3.59)

Apart from Amphicrates' reign, the passage gives no reference to a date for the episode. Although the reason for Herodotus' mention of Amphicrates is to explain the Aeginetans' enslavement of the Samians who rebelled against Polycrates c. 525 BC, there need not be any direct connection of the rebels' fate with Amphicrates' attack on Aegina – Herodotus or his sources may simply have linked two otherwise unrelated Samian anecdotes in order to achieve an impression of cause and effect. As this does not raise doubts regarding the historicity of Amphicrates and his attack on Aegina, it remains to discuss the possible dates for his reign. Two quite different chronological settings have been argued for in relation to Amphicrates: c. 700 BC, and the middle of the sixth century BC. I shall demonstrate that there are problems with both suggestions.

Owing to the floating chronology of the episode, reference to a *basileus*, and scholarly attempts to place Archaic Greek hostilities within a framework of alliances and enmities around the so-called Lelantine War (see below), this episode too has been interpreted as an episode of the Lelantine War (Barron 1961a, 115). It has also been suggested that Amphicrates' heavy losses in his Aeginetan campaign may have led to the demise of the kingship c. 700 BC (Shipley 1987, 37–9; Barron 1961a, 115; cf. Huxley 1972, 51).

The Lelantine War is so called from various references to war or animosity between the rival Euboean *poleis* of Eretria and Chalcis, separated by the Lelantine plain. Key evidence is seen to be Herodotus (5.99; cf. How and Wells 1912, 58) regarding Samos' alliance with Chalcis, and Eretria's support from Miletus, and Thucydides (1.15; cf. Gomme 1945, 126) concerning the extent of the conflict between the two Euboean *poleis*:

... οἱ γὰρ δὴ Μιλήσιοι πρότερον τοῖσι Ἐρετριεῦσι τὸν πρὸς Χαλκιδέας πόλεμον συνδιήνικαν,  
ὅτε περ καὶ Χαλκιδεῦσι ἀντία Ἐρετριέων καὶ Μιλησίων Σάμιοι ἐβοήθηον ...

... For, previously [i. e. at some point before the Ionian Revolt], the Milesians allied with the Eretrians in the war against the Chalcidians, while the Samians went to the assistance of the Chalcidians against the Eretrians and Milesians. (Hdt. 5.99)

μάλιστα δὲ ἐς τὸν πάλαι ποτὲ γενόμενον πόλεμον Χαλκιδέων καὶ Ἐρετριῶν καὶ τὸ ἄλλο Ἑλληνικὸν ἐς ξυμμαχίαν ἑκατέρων διέστη.

In particular, long ago in the war between Chalcis and Eretria, the rest of the Greeks joined in alliance with either side. (Thuc. 1.15)

Thucydides' reference to the Corinthian shipbuilder, Ameinocles, building four ships for the Samians, is also given a date c. 700 BC (Thuc. 1.13) and thus read as another episode of the Lelantine War:

φαίνεται δὲ καὶ Σαμίοις Ἀμεινοκλῆς Κορίνθιος ναυπηγὸς ναῦς ποιήσας τέσσαρας· ἔτη δ' ἔστι μάλιστα τριακόσια ἕς τὴν τελευταίην τοῦδε τοῦ πολέμου ὅτε Ἀμεινοκλῆς Σαμίοις ἦλθεν.

It seems that Ameinocles, the Corinthian shipbuilder, made four ships for the Samians; it was around three hundred years before the end of this [the Peloponnesian] war that Ameinocles went to Samos. (Thuc. 1.13)

Other evidence, ranging from Archilochus to Strabo, has been gathered to propose a war involving many Greek *poleis* sometime in the early Archaic period<sup>2</sup>. The traditional date for the war was the late eighth or early seventh centuries (e. g. Burn 1929, 34; Donlan 1970, 135), with dates in the late seventh or early sixth centuries also proposed (cf. Hall 2007, 3). It is from the earlier of these dates that the Samian *basileus*, Amphicrates, has received his traditional chronological fix.

However, recent scholarship on the Lelantine War has led from a point where scholars once declared that the main outline of events could be traced with confidence, and details occasionally added (Burn 1929, 31), to concluding that "... we do not know when – or even whether – the Lelantine war occurred" (Hall 2007, 8). Departing from the stance taken by early Thucydides commentators, Hornblower (1991, 49) warns against exaggerating the international importance of the hostilities Thucydides describes. According to Lambert (1982, 219), Herodotus' and Thucydides' views of the hostilities are "by no means the same as modern reconstructions of alliances based on their texts", and Lambert argues that the Thucydides passage should be interpreted as meaning that other Greeks "stood aloof" from the warring Euboeans (1982, 218)<sup>3</sup>. With such doubts as to the Lelantine War, there is no obvious link between Samos' alliance with Chalcis and any attack on Aegina by a Samian king.

If Herodotus' report of an alliance between Samos and Chalcis (Hdt 5.99) has any basis in fact, it may be related to an account in the Theognidean corpus of a Corinthian campaign of aggression on Euboea during the reign of the Cypselid dynasty in Corinth in the late seventh century. Among the work ascribed to Theognis (891–4), there is reference to the Cypselids' destruction of Cerinthus in Euboea, their ravaging of the Lelantine plain and causing stasis in an unspecified Euboean *polis*. Added to Theognis' report of Cypselid aggression against Euboea, it is also possible that Samos was in conflict with both Corinth and Aegina during the tyranny of Periander in the late seventh and early sixth century BC, at which point the *basileus* Amphicrates may find a chronological context. Here, I turn to Figueira's theory that Aegina gained independence following Periander's ousting of the tyrant of Epidaurus, Procles (Hdt. 3.52; Figueira 1983, 17).

- 2 In reviewing the evidence for supposed Lelantine War alliances, Hall (2007, 2–3) cites the following in addition to the sources and passages already mentioned: Archilochus (fr. 3); Herodotus (1.18; 3.47, 59; 5.80, 95); Thucydides (6.4); Aristotle (*Pol.* 4.3.2); Plutarch (*Mor.* 293b, 760e–761b); and Strabo (10.1.12).
- 3 Lambert (1982, 217) argues that a scholium on Thucydides (1.15) means that διέστη should be interpreted as 'divided' rather than 'joined'. His translation of the passage (Thuc. 1.15) thus reads: "Particularly in that long-ago war between Chalcis and Eretria, the rest of the Greek world stood aloof as far as alliance with either side was concerned." (ibid, 218)

POLYCRATES, tyrant of Samos (c. 535-515 B.C.). Having won popularity by donations to poorer citizens, he took advantage of a festival of Hera, which was being celebrated outside the walls, to make himself master of the city (about 535 B.C.). After getting rid of his brothers Pantagnotus and Syloson, who had at first shared his power, he established a despotism which is of great importance in the history of the island. Realizing clearly the value of sea-power for a Greek state, he equipped a fleet of Polycrates. (Πολύκρατες), d. c.522 B.C., tyrant of Samos. He established Samian naval supremacy in the Aegean Sea and tried to control the archipelago and mainland towns of Ionia. He dominated the E Aegean, capturing the island of Rhenea (now Rinãa) and defeating the Lesbians, who had gone to the aid of Miletus. His tyranny drove the philosopher Pythagoras from Samos. He sent (c.525) 40 ships manned by his main political opponents from Samos to aid the Persian king Cambyses against the Egyptians, but the crews revolted and, with Spartan aid, unsuccessfully warred against Polycrates. Oroe