

# Thucydides 1, 97, 2 : the "arche of the Athenians" and the "Athenian Empire"

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## Thucydides 1, 97, 2: The 'arche of the Athenians' and the 'Athenian Empire'

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ἔγραψα δὲ αὐτὰ καὶ τὴν ἐκβολὴν τοῦ λόγου ἐποίησάμην διὰ τόδε, ὅτι τοῖς πρὸ ἐμοῦ ἅπασιν ἐκλιπὲς τοῦτο ἦν τὸ χωρίον καὶ ἢ τὰ πρὸ τῶν Μηδικῶν Ἑλληνικὰ ξυνετίθεσαν ἢ αὐτὰ τὰ Μηδικά· τούτων δὲ ὅσπερ καὶ ἤψατο ἐν τῇ Ἀττικῇ ξυγγραφῇ Ἑλλάνικος, βραχέως τε καὶ τοῖς χρόνοις οὐκ ἀκριβῶς ἐπεμνήσθη. ἅμα δὲ καὶ τῆς ἀρχῆς ἀπόδειξιν ἔχει τῆς τῶν Ἀθηναίων ἐν οἴῳ τρόπῳ κατέστη.

However problematic in other respects, this passage has seemed straightforward as regards translation. Its final sentence is taken to mean 'At the same time the account shows the way in which the *arche* of the Athenians came into being', the account referred to comprising Chapters 98–117. So understood, this sentence has formed the basis of the view that, for Thucydides, Athens' *arche* came into being in the course of the *Pentecontaetia*: Thucydides construes the development of Athens' relationship with her allies as a move from *hegemonia* based on allied consent to a coercive relation of *arche*<sup>1</sup>. The modern distinction between the Delian League and the Athenian Empire thus corresponds to the Thucydidean distinction between *hegemonia* and *arche*.

This understanding of the final sentence of 1, 97, 2 faces two immediate difficulties. First, at 99, 2, in his general analysis of defections from the League, Thucydides says that the Athenians ἦσαν ... οὐκέτι ὁμοίως ἐν ἡδονῇ ἄρχοντες. This comment, clearly alluding to the report at 1, 95f. of the allies' enthusiasm for Athenian leadership at the time of the League's formation<sup>2</sup>, suggests that Athens' relation to her allies had been from the first one of *arche*, a relation initially but now no longer congenial to the allies. Secondly, at the end of the *Pentecontaetia* Thucydides says (1, 118, 2) that between the Persian and Peloponnesian Wars the Athenians 'established a firmer hold on their *arche*' (τὴν ... ἀρχὴν ἐγκρατεστέραν κατεστήσαντο). This is a rather odd statement, if Thucy-

1 The earliest statement of this view I know of is Grote's (*A History of Greece ...*, London 1888, IV 380). It has of course become a common-place: see, e.g., Gomme, *Comm. on Thuc.* I 272; Jacqueline de Romilly, *Thucydides and Athenian Imperialism* (Oxford 1963) 87; G.E.M. de Ste. Croix, *The Origins of the Peloponnesian War* (London 1972) 51.

2 It is of course strictly speaking inaccurate to say that Thucydides records the formation of (what we call) the Delian League at 1, 95f.; rather, he speaks here of a change of leadership within an existing alliance. However, it will be convenient here to follow convention on this matter.

dides believed that at the beginning of the *Pentecontaetia* Athens did not possess an *arche* at all.

These two passages seem to put in question the view that Thucydides considers Athens' *arche* to have come into existence in the course of the *Pentecontaetia*. What indications on this matter are to be found elsewhere in his *History*? Seven passages require consideration<sup>3</sup>.

(i) At 1, 75, 1f. the Athenian envoys at Sparta in 432, having reminded their audience of Athens' services to Greece during the Persian Wars, continue: 'Considering the zeal and sagacity we then displayed, do we deserve to be so bitterly hated by the rest of Greece, merely on account of the *arche* which we possess? We did not acquire this by force; rather, when you were not prepared to continue the fight against what was left of the Persian threat, the allies approached us and of their own accord asked us to become their leaders (ἡγεμόνας)'. In the following chapter the Athenians again emphasize that Athens' *arche* had been given to her: ἀρχὴν ... διδομένην, 76, 2. The envoys clearly present Athens' *arche* as dating from the beginning of the Delian League.

(ii) In his Funeral Speech, Pericles asserts that the Athenians' fore-fathers merit praise for having maintained Athenian liberty; the generation immediately preceding their own even more so (2, 36, 2ff.): κτησάμενοι γὰρ πρὸς οἷς ἐδέξαντο ὄσσην ἔχομεν ἀρχὴν οὐκ ἀπόνως ἡμῖν τοῖς νῦν προσκατέλιπον. τὰ δὲ πλείω αὐτῆς αὐτοὶ ἡμεῖς οἶδε οἱ νῦν ἔτι ὄντες μάλιστα ἐν τῇ καθεστηκυίᾳ ἡλικίᾳ ἐπηυξήσαμεν καὶ τὴν πόλιν τοῖς πᾶσι παρεσκευάσαμεν καὶ ἐς πόλεμον καὶ ἐς εἰρήνην αὐταρκεστάτην. ὧν ἐγὼ τὰ μὲν κατὰ πολέμους ἔργα, οἷς ἕκαστα ἐκτῆθη, ἢ εἴ τι αὐτοὶ ἢ οἱ πατέρες ἡμῶν βάρβαρον ἢ Ἑλληνα πολέμιον ἐπιόντα προθύμως ἠμυνάμεθα, μακρηγορεῖν ἐν εἰδόσιν οὐ βουλόμενος ἔασω.

It might be argued that in speaking of the acquisition of *arche* Pericles cannot be referring to the foundation of the Delian League, since he characterizes the *arche* as the fruit of military endeavour, while in 478/7 Athens merely accepted what the allies offered. But Athens' acquisition of leadership in 478/7 could plausibly be regarded as the fruit of her martial exploits in the Persian War; such a view of the matter would of course be appropriate in the context of a Funeral Speech.

(iii) In his last speech, Pericles insists that Athens dare not give up the struggle with Sparta (2, 63, 1f.): μηδὲ νομίσαι περὶ ἑνὸς μόνου, δουλείας ἀντ' ἐλευθερίας, ἀγωνίζεσθαι, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀρχῆς στέρησεως καὶ κινδύνου ὧν ἐν τῇ ἀρχῇ ἀπήχθεσθε. ἥς οὐδ' ἐκστήναι ἔτι ὑμῖν ἔστιν, εἴ τις καὶ τότε ἐν τῷ παρόντι δεδιῶς ἀπραγμοσύνην ἀνδραγαθίζεται· ὡς τυραννίδα γὰρ ἤδη ἔχετε αὐτήν, ἢν λαβεῖν μὲν ἄδικον δοκεῖ εἶναι, ἀφείναι δὲ ἐπικίνδυνον. It might be argued that Pericles here implies that Athens' *arche* had been (or might be thought to have

<sup>3</sup> I exclude 1, 93, 4 (on which see Gomme's note ad loc.): even if one believes τὴν ἀρχὴν to refer to the League, the remark does not precisely date the beginning of the *arche*.

been) acquired unjustly; and that if so, he cannot regard the *arche* as dating from the beginning of the Delian League, since in 478/7 the allies enthusiastically welcomed Athens' leadership. But Pericles is not here saying that men consider Athens' acquisition of *arche* to have been unjust; his point, rather, is that Athens' *arche* is now (ἤδη) like a tyranny, which it is thought wrong to acquire, but dangerous to relinquish (the antecedent of the relative ἣν is τυραννίδα, not αὐτήν). The implication is that Athens' *arche* has become a tyranny, which it is impracticable for her to renounce.

(iv) In the summer of 428 envoys seeking aid for Mytilene's revolt from Athens address the Peloponnesians at Olympia (3, 9ff.). They justify their city's revolt as forestalling Athenian aggression against her; that the Athenians have thus far respected Mytilene's autonomy simply exemplifies their shrewdness (3, 11, 3): αὐτόνομοί τε ἐλείφθημεν οὐ δι' ἄλλο τι ἢ ὅσον αὐτοῖς ἐς τὴν ἀρχὴν εὐπρεπεία τε λόγου καὶ γνώμης μᾶλλον ἐφόδω ἢ ἰσχύος τὰ πράγματα ἐφαίνετο καταληπτὰ. The phrase ἐς τὴν ἀρχὴν is usually taken to refer to the purpose of Athens' policy: *arche* was the result of Athens' aggression against her allies<sup>4</sup>. It is, however, possible that the preposition ἐς is here used to express not purpose but relation: 'we were left autonomous only because their policy as regards their *arche* was to seize control of affairs through specious argument and by strategy rather than brute force'.

(v) At 3, 36, 2 Thucydides records how, after the suppression of the Mytilenian revolt, the Athenians voted to kill all the adult males and to enslave the women and children, angry that the Mytilenians τὴν ... ἀπόστασιν ... οὐκ ἀρχόμενοι ὥσπερ οἱ ἄλλοι ἐποίησαντο. The phrase οὐκ ἀρχόμενοι ὥσπερ οἱ ἄλλοι is generally taken to mean that before her revolt Mytilene had not been subject to Athens' *arche*, as (at least most of) the rest of the allies were<sup>5</sup>. However, both Cleon and Diodotus speak of Mytilene as having been subject to Athens' *arche* prior to her revolt: this is the implication of Cleon's comment at 3, 40, 4, εἰ γὰρ οὗτοι ὀρθῶς ἀπέστησαν, ὑμεῖς ἂν οὐ χρεῶν ἀρχοίτε, and at 46, 5 Diodotus refers to Mytilene as ἐλεύθερον καὶ βία ἀρχόμενον εἰκότως πρὸς αὐτονομίαν ἀποστάντα. Now Cleon argues that Mytilene revolted because her head had been turned by Athens' too favourable treatment of her: 'we should from the first have made no distinction between the Mytilenians and the rest of our allies, and then their insolence would never have risen to such a height' (39, 5). It thus seems likely that the phrase οὐκ ἀρχόμενοι ὥσπερ οἱ ἄλλοι at 36, 2 means rather 'not being subject to Athens' *arche* in the same way as the

4 So e.g. Jowett: 'And why were we left independent? Only because they thought that to gain an empire they must use fair words and win their way by policy and not by violence.' (B. Jowett, *Thucydides Translated into English ...*, Oxford 1881, I 174).

5 So e.g. Crawley: 'It was remarked that Mitylene (*sic*) had revolted without being, like the rest, subjected to the empire ...' (Richard Crawley, *The History of the Peloponnesian War by Thucydides*, London 1876, 194).

others'; i.e., Mytilene enjoyed a privileged position<sup>6</sup>. What this involved is made clear by Cleon (39, 2): 'Those who revolt because they find our *arche* too heavy to bear, or because they are constrained by the enemy, I can forgive; but people who inhabit an island, possess city-walls, are unassailable by our enemy except at sea and on that element are adequately protected by a fleet of their own, men who were autonomous and treated by us with the highest regard – when such as these act thus, they cannot be said to have revolted (revolt implies oppression); they conspired, they rose up against us.'

(vi) In his speech at 6, 16ff. supporting the projected Athenian expedition to Sicily, Alcibiades dismisses Nicias' argument that Athens should secure her position in Greece against the threat from the Peloponnese before involving herself in Sicily (6, 17, 7): 'Our fathers, in the face of these very adversaries whom we are told we shall now leave behind us if we sail, and with the Persians as their enemies as well, acquired the *arche*, their strength consisting solely in their naval predominance.' It might be argued that Alcibiades can here hardly be referring to the foundation of the Delian League, since at that time Sparta was well-disposed towards Athens. However, at 6, 82 Euphemus speaks of a perennial hostility existing between Dorians and Ionians, and says that Athens was able to escape from the *arche* and *hegemonia* of the Spartans as a result of her acquisition of a fleet and establishment of the Delian League; Alcibiades may be supposed to be arguing in similar terms here.

(vii) At 8, 68, 4 Thucydides comments on the achievements of the Athenian oligarchs in overthrowing the democracy in 411: χαλεπὸν γὰρ ἦν τὸν Ἀθηναίων δῆμον ἐπ' ἔτει ἑκατοστῷ μάλιστα ἐπειδὴ οἱ τύραννοι κατελύθησαν ἐλευθερίας παῦσαι, καὶ οὐ μόνον μὴ ὑπήκοον ὄντα, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὑπὲρ ἡμισυ τοῦ χρόνου τούτου αὐτὸν ἄλλων ἄρχειν εἰωθότα. This comment need not date the beginning of *arche* earlier than, say, c. 465; but, clearly, it may well refer to 478/7<sup>7</sup>.

The first of these seven passages presents Athens' *arche* as having begun with the Delian League; the other passages can all, I have argued, be understood in a way which makes them compatible with this view. What then of the

6 So Herbert F. Fox, *Thucydides ... Book III* (Oxford 1901) ad loc.: 'though governed more easily than the rest, they had revolted ...'

7 In their notes ad loc., Goodhart and Classen-Steup assume that Thucydides is referring to the foundation of the Delian League; Tucker comments: 'The leadership of Athens gradually tightened into command from B.C. 479' (H. C. Goodhart, *The Eighth Book of Thucydides' History*, London 1893; J. Classen and J. Steup, *Thucydides VIII*<sup>2</sup>, Dublin/Zurich 1967; T. G. Tucker, *The Eighth Book of Thucydides*, London 1892). Andrewes' note ad loc. seems to leave the question open: 'from 478/7 would be a good deal more than half, but at i.97.2 (*ad fin.*) Thucydides appears to date Athens' ἀρχή later than this, perhaps from the 'enslavement' of Naxos, the point where he inserted his excursus on the loss of the allies' freedom (i.99). But his language is not rigorously consistent: cf. i.99.2, where the Athenians are ἄρχοντες before the time of Naxos.'

final sentence of 1, 97, 2, the one passage in Thucydides that, as usually understood, unquestionably presents Athens' *arche* as having come into existence later than 478/7?<sup>8</sup> An alternative translation seems possible: the sentence means, I suggest, not 'At the same time the account shows the way in which the *arche* of the Athenians came into existence', but 'At the same time the account shows the character that the *arche* of the Athenians took on'. For the unusual construction with ἐν (which may be seen as emphasizing the result of the change), one may compare Antiphon, 1, 1 (ἐν διαφορᾷ καταστήναι)<sup>9</sup>; for the phrase ἐν οἴῳ τρόπῳ, cp. 1, 8, 4 (ἐν τούτῳ τῷ τρόπῳ ... ὄντες)<sup>10</sup>. On this translation, the difficulties noted earlier at 1, 99, 2 and 118, 2 dissolve<sup>11</sup>.

If one adopts this translation, the question arises as to the relation between 'the *arche* of the Athenians' Thucydides speaks of at the end of 1, 97, 2 and the *hegemonia* whose acquisition by Athens he has described in chapters 94ff.<sup>12</sup>

The terms *arche* and *hegemonia*, and their cognate verbs, are regularly used interchangeably<sup>13</sup>. Herodotus provides a number of instances; consider, for example, his account of the abortive negotiations in 481 between envoys of the Hellenic League and first, the Argives, and, secondly, Gelon. In each case, Herodotus refers to command of the forces of the Hellenic League in terms of both *hegemonie* and *arche*: at 7, 148, 4 the Argives offer alliance on condition of obtaining a half-share in the *hegemonie*, at 150, 3 Herodotus reports that according to one account the Argives made this condition in order to have an excuse for taking no part in the war, knowing that the Spartans would refuse to relinquish the *arche*; and at 7, 161, 2, Gelon having proposed that, in return for participation in the defence of Greece, he receive command of the allied fleet, the Athenian envoy insists that even were Sparta prepared to yield him the naval command (τῆς ναυτικῆς ἄρχειν), Athens would demur: οὐδ' ἦν ὁ Λάκων ἐπίη τοι ἄρχειν αὐτῆς, ἡμεῖς ἐπήσομεν. ἡμετέρη γάρ ἐστι αὐτῆ γε μὴ αὐτῶν

8 Of course, the problem would dissolve if one believed the final sentence of 97, 2 to refer to the preceding as well as the subsequent passage: Thucydides could then be taken to be referring to his account of the formation of the Delian League at 1, 94ff. It seems clear however that in 97, 2 Thucydides is referring to developments subsequent to the formation of the League; so e.g. H. D. Westlake, *Essays on the Greek Historians and Greek History* (Manchester 1969) 41.

9 For other similar examples, see Kühner-Gerth, I 541.

10 It is to be noted that if one accepts the usual translation of 97, 2, the presence of the preposition ἐν is odd; one would expect the dative alone.

11 It is perhaps worth noting here that later writers regularly envisage Athens' *arche* as having begun with the Delian League: see Lys. 2, 55, Isoc. 12, 56, Plato, *Ep.* 7, 332b–c, Dem. 3, 24, and the discussion of these and other relevant passages in Clinton, *Fasti Hellenici* II<sup>3</sup>, App. 6.

12 95, 1: the allies ask the Athenians to become their leaders (ἡγεμόνας); 95, 7, they decline to grant Dorcis τὴν ἡγεμονίαν; *ibid.*, the Spartans consider the Athenians ἱκανοὺς ἐξηγεῖσθαι; 96, 1, the Athenians thus acquire τὴν ἡγεμονίαν.

13 Cp. Hans Schaefer, *Probleme der Alten Geschichte* (Göttingen 1963) 122.

βουλομένων Λακεδαιμονίων. τούτοισι μὲν ὧν ἡγέεσθαι βουλομένοισι οὐκ ἀντιτείνομεν, ἄλλω δὲ παρήσομεν οὐδενὶ ναυαρχεῖν<sup>14</sup>.

So too Xenophon in his account of the negotiations concerning the alliance between Athens and Sparta in 369: the Athenian Cephisodotus rejects as inequitable the Spartan proposal that command should be divided, Athens commanding at sea, Sparta on land (Hell. 7, 1, 14): Ἔστιν οὖν, ἔφη ὁ Κηφισόδοτος, ἰσαίτερον ἢ ἐν μέρει μὲν ἑκατέρους ἡγεῖσθαι τοῦ ναυτικοῦ, ἐν μέρει δὲ τοῦ πεζοῦ, καὶ ὑμᾶς τε, εἴ τι ἀγαθόν ἐστίν ἐν τῇ κατὰ θάλατταν ἀρχῇ, τούτων μετέχειν, καὶ ἡμᾶς ἐν τῇ κατὰ γῆν; ἀκούσαντες ταῦτα οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι μετεπίσθησαν, καὶ ἐψηφίσαντο κατὰ πενθήμερον ἑκατέρους ἡγεῖσθαι.

Similarly Aristotle in his critique of the imperialistic tendency of Spartan education: men should study war not with a view to subjecting those who do not deserve this, but in order to prevent their own subjugation by others, ἔπειτα ὅπως ζητῶσι τὴν ἡγεμονίαν τῆς ὠφελείας ἕνεκα τῶν ἀρχομένων (Pol. 1333b 40f.).

Now it is of course clear that the two sets of terms are not synonymous in all contexts, and it may be that further consideration of how they do differ in meaning, in Thucydides and elsewhere, will suggest that the two terms are not in fact used as synonyms in Thucydides' account of the origins and early development of the Delian League at 1, 94ff.; but I think that quite possibly they are.

14 For other Herodotean examples, see 3, 65, 6f.; 9, 26, 5f.; 122, 2ff.