

ANCIENT GREECE

The Ionian revolt, 499–493

Causes

Herodotus' view

Herodotus sees the direct cause of the revolt in 499 of the Greeks of Asia Minor against Persian control as simply the ambitions and intrigues of the tyrant of Miletus, Aristagoras, and his father-in-law Histiaeus. He does not take into account that there was widespread discontent throughout the Greek cities of Asia Minor and that this had existed certainly from 545, when they became subject to Persia. Aristagoras could not have stirred up a rebellion of disunited Greek communities if they had not been unhappy with their situation.

Loss of freedom

Underlying causes

1 The Greeks had lost their autonomy or independence in deciding their own lifestyle, something which was precious to them.

Barbarian overlords

2 They were subject not only to another power, but to an oriental, 'barbarian' king to whom they paid a heavy tribute, most of which was not returned into local circulation.

3 The Persian system of local government in Asia Minor involved the use of Greek, pro-Persian tyrants who were 'puppets' of the great king. They held their position through the support of the satrap, to whom they were responsible. Tyranny had been a common form of government in Greece and Asia Minor when Cyrus conquered those areas, but in the generation which followed most states had thrown off their tyrants, and tyranny was no longer acceptable to the Greeks. In order to free themselves from it, they had to rebel against the Persian king who controlled them.

Herodotus on at least three occasions gives an indication of this underlying discontent. 'Histiaeus to Darius: "It appears that the Ionians have waited till I was out of sight to do what they have long passionately desired to do".⁵ However, what the Greeks needed was leadership and direction, as they lacked unity.

Direct cause Histiaeus, tyrant of Miletus and a successful commander under Darius, was summoned to Susa and detained there indefinitely by the king, who suspected his ambitions. In his place at Miletus Histiaeus left his son-in-law, Aristagoras. When he was approached by a delegation of aristocrats from Naxos, recently removed in a popular uprising and wanting help to recover their position, Aristagoras saw an opportunity to make himself ruler of Naxos. He hoped at the same time to crush Naxos commercially. Concealing his purpose, he made the Naxian exiles an offer.

Aristagoras' ambitions

Planned attempt to seize Naxos

Needing help with this plan, Aristagoras proposed to the satrap at Sardis, Artaphernes, that in returning the Naxian exiles Persia might gain control of Naxos and the other islands of the Cyclades and, using these as stepping stones, finally extend the great Persian king's empire as far as the rich island of Euboea. Artaphernes submitted the plan to his half-brother Darius, and gained his consent.

Failure to take Naxos

The plan, however, misfired, as the Naxians were warned of the attack and prepared for a long siege. The costly expedition failed to gain anything and Aristagoras, fearful of Artaphernes' reaction, was in a dilemma as to what step to take next.

Aristagoras' alarm

According to Herodotus, 'these various causes of alarm were already making Aristagoras contemplate rebellion' when Histiaeus sent a message to Aristagoras (the famous story of the slave with the tattooed head) 'urging him to do precisely what he was thinking of, namely, to revolt'.⁶ Histiaeus' motive was that he thought Darius would send him down to the coast to restore order.

Aristagoras' attempts to gain support

- 1 He renounced his own tyranny and urged other Greek leaders to do the same. Those who did not were removed forcibly or put under threat of attack.
- 2 He went to mainland Greece to seek support from Sparta and Athens. The Spartans were not interested when they realised the distance of Susa from the sea. Athens and Eretria agreed to send aid, Athens contributing twenty warships and Eretria five.

Seeks support from the mainland

Why did Athens and Eretria send help to Ionia?

- 1 The Athenians were already on bad terms with Persia, owing to the activities of the ex-tyrant Hippias at the court of Artaphernes where, according to Herodotus, he was moving heaven and earth 'to procure the subjection of Athens to himself and Darius'.⁷ The Athenians had urged Artaphernes not to listen to the exiled Pisistratid, but he had demanded that the Athenians take him back or accept the consequences. The Athenians were now openly hostile to Persia.
- 2 The new democracy at Athens was opposed to tyranny.

- 3 The Greeks, generally, were becoming alarmed at Darius' movements into Europe (Thrace).
- Links between Athens and Ionia* 4 Aristagoras pointed out the close link between Athens and Ionia, that 'Miletus had been founded by Athenian settlers so it was only natural that the Athenians, powerful as they were, would help her in her need'.⁸
- Eretria repays debt* 5 The Eretrians sent help because in a previous war with their neighbour Chalcis they had been helped by Miletus, and were now repaying 'a debt of honour'.

The part played by Athens and Eretria and its significance

Degree of help 'The sailing of this fleet was the beginning of trouble not only for Greece but for other peoples.'⁹

The Athenians and Eretrians landed at Ephesus, were joined by Ionian troops, and marched inland. They took Sardis, except for the citadel, and in the attack set fire to several thatched houses. The fire spread rapidly until the whole lower town, including the temple of the goddess Cybele, was destroyed. The Ionians, Athenians and Eretrians withdrew to the coast pursued by Persian forces, but were forced into battle near Ephesus, losing many men. The mainland Greeks sailed for home, taking no more part in the revolt.

Future trouble for Athens Despite their limited participation, the Athenians and Eretrians were to suffer at the hands of the Persians in the years to come. Darius is said to have desired revenge for the burning of his temples so much that he prayed: "Grant O god, that I may punish the Athenians". Then he commanded one of his servants to repeat to him the words, "Master, remember the Athenians", three times, whenever he sat down to dinner'.¹⁰

The course of the war

- Six years of war* Herodotus' chronology is unreliable, as it often gives the impression that many battles occurred in the one year.
- 498 Burning of Sardis; Athenians defeated near Ephesus
 - 497 Cyprus joins revolt
 - Under siege by Persians
 - Cyprus subdued
 - 496 Revolt in Caria—fierce land fighting—great losses by Carians
 - Aristagoras flees to Thrace
 - Histiaeus sent down to coast—goes to Byzantium
 - 495 No decisive operations—nothing mentioned in Herodotus
 - 494 Only six cities on coast fight on
 - Great battle at Ladé (opposite Miletus)
 - Samos withdraws, followed by others
 - Greeks defeated
 - Miletus destroyed; people sold into slavery

- 493 Histiaeus killed
Miltiades escapes to Athens
- 492 Persians take all offshore islands: Chios, Lesbos, Tenedos
European coast of the Chersonese and Bosphorus retaken
Darius sends Mardonius with an army and a navy to retake Thrace
and attack Athens and Eretria
- Greeks defeated*

Reasons for the Ionian defeat

- 1 The Persian Empire had the resources to maintain a sustained war effort.
 - 2 The Ionians lacked unity and discipline. Herodotus describes their failure to work together under one leader¹¹ and suggests that the withdrawal of the Samians, who wished to save their houses and temples, encouraged others 'to become faint hearted'.¹²
- D***isunity of Greeks*

Results and their significance

Miletus was destroyed, its temples burned and plundered and its inhabitants killed or taken into captivity to Susa. Miletus ceased to be a force in history, and economic supremacy passed to the mainland of Greece. The fate of Miletus had a great impact on the Athenians, as many felt that more help should have been given to Ionia. When Phrynichus some years later presented a play called *The Fall of Miletus*, the audience was moved to tears of shame. Phrynichus was fined; his play was never to be presented in public again.

D*estruction of Miletus*

Generally, however, the Ionians were treated with great tolerance by the Persians, and Artaphernes introduced several measures which encouraged peace. He bound the Ionians by oath to settle any future conflicts among themselves by arbitration rather than by raids, and he conducted surveys to determine a fair land tax. In the following year Darius, realising the Greeks' hatred of tyranny, sent Mardonius to the coast to set up democracies.

Persians initiate reforms

However, despite these improvements the Greeks were still not free; they remained under Persian control until 479, when they were liberated by the Athenians.

The escape of Miltiades as the Phoenician fleet approached and his return to Athens at a critical time was vital for the future defence of Greece at Marathon. He had intimate knowledge of Persian ways and military tactics.

Escape of Miltiades to Athens

The help given by the Athenians to the Ionians drew upon them the vengeance of Darius, who now set in motion his first expedition against Greece.

D*arius seeks revenge*

The Ionian revolt was the first round in the struggle between Greece and Persia.