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Some Notes on the Role of Mausolos in the Social War

The study of historical events and figures of the 4th century BC consistently encounters a fundamental difficulty: the lack of sources. We have scattered and debated sources even about important figures like Mausolos,¹ or crucial events like the Social War,² particularly when trying to determine the role Mausolos played in the Social War. Consequently, unresolved and controversial questions persist regarding his potential involvement as an instigator, namely as the figure who persuaded Rhodes and Chios to secede from the Second Athenian Naval Confederacy. This secession, together with that of Byzantium – and possibly Cos and other cities³ – precipitated the outbreak of the Social War. Beyond the issue of instigation, the extent of Mausolos' influence within the conflict remains uncertain: while it is established that he provided direct support, the precise scale of his contribution and his overall

¹ Persian satrap of Caria between 377–353, for his life see: HORNBLLOWER (1982), also: WEISKOPF (1989); RUZICKA (1992: 83–119); RUZICKA (2011: 132–170); BROSIUS (2021: 176–189); NUDELL (2023: 109–130).

² The Social War (ca. 357–355 BC) was a conflict between Athens and some members of the Second Athenian Naval Confederacy (also referred to as the Second Athenian League). For the history of the war see: SEALEY (1978: 438–441); CARGILL (1981: 161–188); BUCKLER (2003: 351–384); RHODES (2005: 226–243); HORNBLLOWER (2011: 271–274); PARKER (2014: 275–279); WIJK (2019: 81–112); NUDELL (2023: 109–130).

³ Going through the important literature, Byzantium, Chios and Rhodes are the members always mentioned as revolting states: BEAN-COOK (1957: 142); SHERWIN-WHITE (1978: 40–43); BUCKLER (2003: 377); PARKER (2014: 275); WORTHINGTON (2014: 10) – the latter does not include Byzantium as a rebel. The case of Byzantium is debated, since it seems possible that Byzantium did leave the Confederacy before the Social War, see: e.g. SEALEY (1976: 434; 439); RUZICKA (1998: 60–69); WORTHINGTON (2014: 10). Besides Byzantium, possibly Cos – BUCKLER (2003: 377); SEBŐK (2023: 67–77) – and some other states also could have been involved BUCKLER (2003: 377). Buckler provides a long list of the rebel states, but he does not give any details about the possible other revolting states.

significance are still matters of debate. Modern scholars have addressed this problem extensively, yet some interpretations, as will be demonstrated, have advanced claims that are at times overstated. The present study seeks to reassess these claims and to provide a more balanced evaluation.

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Mausolos, the one-man army

One of the more problematic claim is found in the work of J. Nudell. In discussing the causes of the Social War and the course of its events, he writes the following regarding the role of Mausolos: *„Athens attacked Chios twice in 356. Each time Mausolos came to its defence, and in the lull between attacks he raided Samos and other Athenian territories (Diod. 16, 7, 2–4) and won a battle over the Athenian fleet at Embata near Erythrae (Diod. 16, 21).”*⁴ As we can read, this claim is based on two passages from Diodoros and Nudell further supports it with works by Hornblower, Sealey and Worthington (see below).⁵ Unfortunately, Nudell offers no additional evidence beyond these citations. At first, his claim appears accurate: Diodoros indeed reports that Mausolos aided the Chians, yet Diodoros mentions only a single Athenian attack on Chios, not two (Diod. 16, 7, 3). Nudell also attributes the raiding of Samos and other territories entirely to Mausolos, whereas Diodoros does not even name him in this context. Instead, the historian explicitly states: *„The Chians, Rhodians, and Byzantines, together with their allies, manned one hundred ships and sacked Imbros and Lemnos, Athenian islands, and then descended upon Samos [...]”*,⁶

⁴ Nudell does not indicate any of the other allies of the Chians as a participant either in the defense of Chios or a member of the raiding – NUDELL (2023: 127).

⁵ NUDELL (2023: 127 n. 84).

⁶ „οἱ δὲ Χίοι καὶ Ῥόδιοι καὶ Βυζάντιοι μετὰ τῶν συμμάχων ἑκατὸν ναῦς πληρώσαντες Ἴμβρον μὲν καὶ Λήμνον οὐσας Ἀθηναίων ἐπόρθησαν, ἐπὶ δὲ Σάμον πολλῇ δυνάμει στρατεύσαντες τὴν μὲν χώραν ἐδήωσαν[...]” – Diod 16, 21, 2. – Trans. by C. H. Oldfather – here Mausolos is not mentioned directly, he can only be assumed to be mentioned as part of the „allies” (τῶν συμμάχων) by Diodoros.

– a clear indication that the operation was a collective undertaking of the anti-Athenian coalition rather than a personal initiative of Mausolos.

Nudell's presentation, therefore, accords Mausolos a degree of prominence that exceeds both the testimony of the sources and the interpretation of other scholars. Indeed, an examination of the works he cites confirms this. Hornblower emphasizes the joint nature of the operations, noting that the allies together attacked Samos and other islands and fought at Embata.⁷ Sealey also refers to all of the allies, not only Mausolos.⁸ Worthington merely remarks that Mausolos assisted the allies, without ascribing to him an individual leadership role.⁹ Taken together, these works reveal no evidence that Mausolos acted independently or held preeminent responsibility for these events. Even though Nudell's phrasing elevates him to the status of a principal actor in the conflict, while minimizing or omitting the role of the other participants, whereas Mausolos, according to our sources, was an important albeit most likely supporting type ally for the revolting states.

The hundred ships of Mausolos

The next claim to be addressed is presented by Wijk regarding the Social War: „Moreover, the rebels were supported by the Persian Satrap Mausolos and a fleet of a hundred ships: *Xen. Ages. 2, 26–7.*“¹⁰ This statement raises a central controversy in modern scholarship regarding the military capacity of Mausolos, particularly the scale of his naval power and the extent to which it was employed during the Social War. The only evidence for this matter is the same passage from Xenophon that Wijk cites. There, Xenophon records that „Again, Mausolus, laying siege to both these places

⁷ HORNBLOWER (2023: 212–213).

⁸ SEALEY (1993: 104).

⁹ WORTHINGTON (2013: 65–66).

¹⁰ WIJK (2019: 108).

with a fleet of a hundred vessels was induced, not indeed by fear, but by persuasion, to sail for home.”¹¹ At first glance, the problem becomes apparent: this passage does not concern the Social War at all, but rather the Great Satrap Revolt, the events of which are dated to 366/365.¹² What can be established, therefore, is that in 366/365 – approximately nine years before the outbreak of the Social War – Mausolos commanded a fleet of at least one hundred ships. Whether this represented the entirety of his naval forces or merely a portion of them is left unspecified by Xenophon.¹³

What became of this fleet thereafter is entirely unknown. No further evidence exists concerning Mausolos’ naval capacity either for the later stages of the Satrap Revolt or for the intervening years before the Social War. In the case of the Social War, Diodoros is our only source about the *detailed* events of the conflict, and he does not provide concrete information about the naval forces supplied by Mausolos. While he does mention a fleet of one hundred ships, he attributes this total to the allies collectively and does not detail its composition.¹⁴

Related to this, there is the question of whether Mausolos was capable of maintaining such a fleet continuously from the time of the Satrap Revolt to the Social War. The possibility cannot be excluded,¹⁵ but any

¹¹ Μαύσωλός γε μὴν κατὰ θάλατταν ἑκατὸν ναυσὶ πολιορκῶν ἀμφοτέρω τὰ χωρία ταῦτα οὐκέτι δεισας ἀλλὰ πεισθεὶς ἀπέπλευσεν οἴκαδε. – Xen. *Ages.* 2, 26. – Trans. by E. C. Marchant. The two places referred to are Assos and Sestos, both located on the coastlines of Asia Minor in modern Turkey.

¹² For the sieges of Assos and Sestos see: Ruzicka (1992: 83–119); Ruzicka (2011: 132–170); Brosius (2021: 176–189); Nudell (2023: 109–130).

¹³ Ruzicka believes that because of the large number, Mausolos was ordered to deploy all of his forces.

¹⁴ „οἱ δὲ Χῖοι καὶ Ῥόδιοι καὶ Βυζάντιοι μετὰ τῶν συμμάχων ἑκατὸν ναῦς πληρώσαντες” – Diod. 16, 21, 2. „The Chians, Rhodians and Byzantians together with their allies manned one hundred ships” – Trans. by C. H. Oldfather.

¹⁵ Hornblower argues that Mausolos could have maintained his fleet, may have even expanded it after the Great Satrap Revolt. He mainly focuses on the effects of a decree made by Artaxerxes III which decree instructed the satraps to disband their mercenary forces (Schol. Dem. IV. 19), and whether this decree affected the fleet of Mausolos or not. Hornblower only says that it is likely that Mausolos kept his fleet, and unfortu-

firm conclusion would be unwarranted. It is possible to imagine that Mausolos lost ships in the Satrap Revolt, and/or during the intervening years. Also, while we know that Mausolos did offer military support to the rebels, but the scale of that contribution – whether it comprised his supposed hundred ships or just a portion – remains indeterminate. Some scholars have suggested that he retained his fleet intact and committed it fully to the war against Athens,¹⁶ however, Wijk’s categorical assertion is unsustainable, since it would imply that the other allies contributed nothing to the combined fleet of one hundred ships described by Diodoros – an interpretation both improbable and unrealistic. By contrast, Hornblower refrains from such overstatement. He mentions the possibility that Mausolos maintained his fleet and deployed it in support of the rebels, yet he explicitly presents this only as a conjecture, not as a certainty.¹⁷ Given the lack of evidence, Hornblower’s account, though still hypothetical, offers a more cautious and therefore more plausible reconstruction than Wijk’s.

‘The phantom menace’

The final thing to be examined is the theory that Mausolos was the true instigator of the Social War – manipulating the rebels and orchestrating the conflict from behind the scenes. Although this cannot be regarded as a *communis opinio* among scholars,¹⁸ a number of interpretations present

nately he does not provide any reason for why it is likely. Contrary to this, Cawkwell does not think that Mausolos could have kept his fleet after the decree, but neither does he elaborate on why it would not be likely. – HORNBLLOWER (1982: 212) contra CAWKWELL (1981: 41).

¹⁶ See the previous note.

¹⁷ The composition of the rebel navy is not stated in the ancient sources, but Mausolos’ navy of 100 ships is not likely to have been affected by the orders given by Artaxerxes III to disband mercenary armies. – HORNBLLOWER (1982: 212).

¹⁸ There are a number of scholars who either take a more neutral stance about the role of Mausolos in the Social War, with simply stating that Mausolos helped the rebels

the idea as a strong, almost certain, possibility. The starting point of this discussion is Hornblower's comprehensive and detailed monograph on Mausolos, published in 1982. After examining the available evidence – both ancient sources and modern scholarship accessible at the time – he concluded that Mausolos was most likely the principal instigator of the Social War, persuading the participating states to break openly with Athens.¹⁹ Following Hornblower, several scholars have adopted similar positions. Ruzicka argues that the original impetus for the secession of the rebel states lay in the actions of Epameinondas in 364, though Athens did not respond until 357. In his view, however, the actual alliance formed between the seceded members was the result of Mausolos' machinations.²⁰ Badian likewise depicts Mausolos as one "*who had done much to instigate the Social War.*"²¹ Rhodes describes him as operating in the background of the events, pulling the strings behind the rebelling League members.²² Nudell, largely following Ruzicka's interpretation, portrays Mausolos as one who „manipulated the concerns over Athenian actions in the Aegean islands in order to start the war and shatter Athenian influence in the region."²³ Taken together, these accounts consistently assign a decisive role to Mausolos, though the degree of agency attributed to him varies across interpretations.

How well can this theory be sustained in light of the available sources? Two primary sources are generally invoked, with heavy emphasis on one of them, as direct evidence by those scholars who por-

but not elaborating on the question further: CAWKWELL (1981: 41); PARKER (2014: 275); WIJK (2019: 108). BUCKLER (2003: 379) thinks that while Mausolos had a significant part in the conflict, he himself was not the sole reason but someone who benefited greatly from the opportunity. WORTHINGTON (2012: 66) states that Demosthenes (Dem 15, 3) falsely accused Mausolos of being the prime instigator of the Social War.

¹⁹ HORNBLOWER (1982: 208–211).

²⁰ RUZICKA (1992: 92–93).

²¹ BADIAN (2001: 22).

²² RHODES (2005: 323).

²³ NUDELL (2023: 127).

tray Mausolos as the master manipulator of the Social War. The especially prominent source is Demosthenes' speech *On the Freedom of the Rhodians*.²⁴ In this oration, delivered on behalf of exiled Rhodians who appealed to Athens for support in reclaiming their city, Demosthenes assigns the responsibility of the entire conflict to Mausolos, presenting him as the driving force behind the war. In order to strengthen his argument, Demosthenes provides certain details, among them the information that following the Social War both Cos and Rhodes came under Mausolos' control.²⁵

The crucial question is whether Demosthenes' claims can be trusted, or whether this speech represents a propagandistic strategy, shifting blame for the war away from the Rhodians and onto Mausolos. Scholars who have examined the speech closely tend to favor the latter interpretation. Hornblower acknowledges that Demosthenes deliberately sought to absolve the Rhodians of their past misdeeds, for which Mausolos served as a convenient scapegoat.²⁶ Radicke similarly emphasizes that Demosthenes consciously attempts to redirect responsibility toward Mausolos, thereby presenting the events in a distorted light.²⁷ Trevett says that some of Demosthenes' statements may contain elements of truth, but stresses that the overarching aim was to displace responsibility for the Social War from the rebels onto Mausolos, in order to persuade the Athenians to intervene on behalf of Rhodes.²⁸ The intents of Demosthenes are evident in the always cited passage of the speech: „*The Chians, Byzantines, and Rhodians accused us of plotting against them, and as a result combined against us in this most recent war, but it will emerge that the man who engineered this and persuaded them was Mausolos, who claimed*

²⁴ I used the translation of TREVETT (2007).

²⁵ Dem. 15, 27.

²⁶ HORNBLOWER (1982: 208–211).

²⁷ RADICKE (1995: 75).

²⁸ TREVETT (2007: 262 n. 13).

to be the Rhodians' friend, but instead deprived them of their freedom" (Dem. 15, 3). The rhetorical purpose of this statement is clear: to deflect responsibility for the Social War – particularly from the Rhodians themselves – by placing the blame squarely on Mausolos. Thus we cannot blindly trust the words of Demosthenes therefore we cannot accept the claims depicting Mausolos as the mastermind behind the Social War.

The other principal source often invoked to reinforce the claims of Demosthenes is a passage from Diodoros (Diod. 16, 7, 3), the first of two sections in which he discusses the Social War (the second being Diod. 16, 21–22). In this initial passage, Diodoros records that when the Athenians arrived at Chios, they found that the Chians had received support from their allies—Byzantium, Rhodes, Cos, and Mausolos as well.²⁹ From this part we may safely conclude that Mausolos helped the rebels; Mausolos sent direct military support for the rebels; and the forces of Mausolos helped in the battle of Chios at the start of the conflict. Beyond this, however, Diodoros is silent: Mausolos disappears entirely from his narrative and is not mentioned in either Diod. 16, 21 or 16, 22. Thus, while it is certain that Mausolos contributed forces, the scale of this assistance – whether in terms of ships or soldiers – remains unknown.

A further piece of evidence occasionally cited in support of Mausolos' supposed central role is a fragmentary inscription about the Greek city of Erythrae, which honors Mausolos as *proxenos* of the city. This is often interpreted as evidence of Mausolos' growing ambition and influence over Greek cities and islands of the Aegean following the Great Satrap Revolt. Yet such an interpretation faces two problems. First, Erythrae had been under Persian control since 386,³⁰ which means that its inhabitants had long been subject to Persian influence; in this con-

²⁹ „οὔτοι δὲ πλεῦσαντες ἐπὶ τὴν Χίον κατέλαβον παραγεγονότας συμμάχους τοῖς Χίοις παρὰ Βυζαντίων καὶ Ῥοδίων καὶ Κώων, ἔτι δὲ Μανσώλου τοῦ Καρῶν δυνάστου.” – Diod. 16, 7, 3. – Trans. by C. H. Oldfather.

³⁰ R&O 56 commentary 266–267.

text, the honoring of a Persian satrap is hardly surprising and cannot be taken as conclusive proof of Mausolos' manipulation of Greek cities. Second, the dating of the inscription is highly uncertain: it may belong to the period of the Social War,³¹ but it could possibly date to the time of the Satrap Revolt.³² Even if the dating were secure, however, the significance of the inscription would remain limited, as it merely reflects the normal dynamics of a city long accustomed to acknowledging Persian authority by honoring a high-ranking official.

Overall, the theory of Mausolos as the master manipulator of the Social War rests primarily on Demosthenes, whose rhetorical agenda was to cast blame upon Mausolos; it is only weakly reinforced by Diodoros, who mentions him a single time regarding the conflict and only in the capacity of an ally; and it is further bolstered by tenuous interpretations of an inscription that, in reality, offers little direct evidence. In contrast there is an interpretation by Buckler,³³ which appears more convincing: Mausolos was not a hidden architect of the war, but rather a pragmatic opportunist who recognized and exploited the circumstances created by the conflict to advance his own power.

Conclusion

In sum, the examination of the evidence reveals that several claims concerning the role of Mausolos in the Social War exaggerate his significance. The danger of such exaggerations lies in the fact that they are sometimes presented as near certainties, despite the absence of adequate support in either the ancient sources or the modern literature.

As we saw it can be asserted with considerable confidence that

³¹ R&O 56 commentary 266–267.

³² HORNBLOWER (1982: 107–110).

³³ BUCKLER (2003: 379).

Nudell significantly overstates Mausolos' involvement in the Social War by attributing to him all raiding activities that were most likely carried out collectively by the allied forces. This attribution can't be sustained by either the sources or the literatures cited by Nudell. Moreover, given the many uncertainties surrounding the period and the limited concrete information available, Van Wijk's claim that Mausolos commanded a fleet of 100 ships during the Social War, as inferred from Xenophon, necessitates a series of assumptions and unverified conditions in order to be considered plausible – none of which can be definitively demonstrated. Additionally, while the hypothesis that Mausolos acted as a master manipulator who single-handedly orchestrated the Social War is internally coherent and logically conceivable, it cannot be corroborated by the extant evidence. It appears more plausible that this interpretation represents a comprehensive theoretical framework constructed from a series of smaller, source-limited hypotheses, rather than from solid, indisputable evidence.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the overarching theory asserting Mausolos as the principal architect of the entire Social War is fundamentally unreliable and, based on current evidence, appears unsubstantiated.

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