

Argos in VIII-VI Centuries BC – Development of Domestic Politics and its Foreign Politics

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Abstract

Importance of the raised problem is caused by significance and necessity of Argos research for understanding the phenomenon of Greek Polis. The article is aimed at indicating main tendencies of domestic and foreign politics processes during archaic period. The leading research method of the problem became historical method, which investigates historical events, phenomena and processes in their chronological development and close connection. On the basis of the results got while analyzing the sources and literature we have revealed the main aspects of political development of Argos in the time of Temenid Dynasty ruling, have studied the political status of Argos after the Temenid dynasty collapse in VI century BC and have researched the milestones of the struggle of Argos and Sparta for the hegemony in the Peloponnese in VIII-VI centuries BC. The article materials can be used in the educational process to design the summarizing works and special courses and teaching aids on socio-political history of Ancient Greece.

Keywords: polis (city-state), Argos, tyranny, dynasty, Hieromnemons, demiurges

1. Introduction

Polis (City-state in Ancient Greece) is the brightest phenomenon of Antique World. Having been founded in times of early Antique civilization it has reached significant stage of evolution, passed the phases of genesis, prosperity and crisis finishing its existence in different periods in different regions of Greece and Rome Oecumene. Polis has been attracting the attention of the researchers for a century and a half (Jeffery, 1976; Frolov, 1988; Yaylenko, 1990) that is not occasional – it is impossible to understand none of the aspects of Greek World history without understanding the essence of such socio-political organism as Polis.

Above-mentioned issue is very popular in Russia – we can name the works of two last decades that were devoted to Corinth, Megara, Delphi, Elis, Megalopolis and the city-states of Ionia (Paltseva, 1999; Kulishova, 2001; Lapteva, 2009). But first of all Sparta and Athens are the objects of interest for the researchers as they are the most significant states of Balkan Greece and their history is best provided with the sources and due to this fact they eclipse the other city-states that are not less significant. That is why the interest to Argos is understandable though world and Russia science does not pay enough attention to this city-state as we are going to show downwards.

Argos was one of the biggest Greek city-states; it was an economical center, which played independent and important role in military and political life of Antique Greece and its history is enough provided by the sources. Along with this Argos developed its own way different from Athens and Sparta that has made it interesting for theoretical research too. However, the materials on Argos history are rarely analyzed in research articles and manuals on history of Ancient Greece and due to it its place in the system of Greek city-states is not assessed in proper way and is still open for research

2. Methodological Framework

2.1 Objectives

In our research we have to solve the following objectives:

1. To identify main aspects of political development of Argos in times of the Temenid dynasty ruling in archaic period.

2. To study the political status of Argos after the Temenid dynasty collapse in archaic period.
3. To research the milestones of the struggle between Argos and Sparta for the hegemony in the Peloponnese in VIII-VI centuries BC.

2.2 Theoretical and Methodological Basis of the Research

The leading research method of the problem became historical method, which investigates historical events, phenomena and processes in their chronological development and close connection. While conducting the research we have also used the methods of the systems analysis, which is based on complex research of all kinds of history sources (narrative, epigraphical, numismatic and archeological ones). No less important is the use of historical and philological methods as well as comparative and historical ones.

2.3 The Research Sources

The narrative sources, namely the works of historians from Ancient Greece (Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, Aeneas, Pausanias, Diodorus of Sicily, Polyaeus, Socrates of Argos, and Polybius), the works of biographies authors (Plutarch) and geographers (Strabo) as well as the works of Greek philosophers (Andokides, Isocrates, Demosthenes) made the research basis.

In the study of stated problems the following archaeological data were valuable, in particular: the evidencing documents of Heraion of Argos obtained during the excavation of Argos and some cities of Argolis. Archaeological research of the sanctuary of Hera was led by a representative of the American School of Archaeology in Athens Ch. Uoldsteyn in 1892-1894. The results of these excavations were published in two volumes "Argos Heraion» (Waldstein, 1902-1905), as well as in the article of R. Richardson "Inscriptions from Argos Heraion » (Richardson, 1896). Archaeological excavations in Argos itself were originally made under the leadership of Kophiniotis in 1892, when the ruins of the theater were found. Later archaeological expeditions were organized by the French School in Athens (Vollgraff, 1920; Roes, 1953; Charitonidis, 1954; Courbin, 1956; Haiganuch, 1969; Bruneau, 1970; Marchetti, 1995).

3. Results

3.1 Argos in the Period of the Temenid Dynasty Ruling

In the period of prosperity of the states in Achaean Greece Argos considered being one of the most important political centers of the Agamemnon power, as it is presented in "Iliad" of Homer (Allen, 1909; Fletcher, 1941; Drews, 1979). Dorian invasion in the Peloponnese at the threshold of XII–XI centuries BC led to the collapse of Achaean kingdoms but Argos, probably, preserved its influence in Greece during the period of so-called "dark ages" (Andreyev, 2003; Frolov, 1988). The fact is proved by the participation of Argos citizens in the process of colonialization of the Eastern Mediterranean and migration movement of Greeks of XI–IX centuries BC. Dorian invasion - it had the 'motto' to give back Heracles heritage to his descendants – and the seizure of Argos strengthened the supremacy of Heraclides and Timenides dynasty (Andrews, 1951; Jeffery, 1976; Tomlinson, 1972; Koiv, 2003; Molchanov, 2004; Makarov, 2007). The information about the kings of Argos was received from the works of some Antique authors. Being much fragmentary it still helps to state that the first king of Argos was Temen, then the power got his elder son Keis and later Keis's son Meudon. However, soon the rights for power were so much limited that Meudon and his descendants got nominal title of the kings. Obviously, the royal power after Meudon could already be an elective one, though likely lifetime, but without the possibility of succession to the throne. This observation follows from the fact that the ancient tradition has not retained any information about the kings of the dynasty Temenids from Meudon to Fidon.

After the advent of the dynasty of Fidons the Temenids again started ruling in VII century BC, though not for a long time. Only after the Argives finally deposed grandson of Fidons, Melt, this dynasty ended in Argos. But it should be noted that the royal power in Argos, obviously, has not been entirely eliminated, and transformed again in elective magistracy - at this time it appeared to be a one-year.

3.2 After Temenids – from the Kingdom to Polis Magistrates

Antique tradition considers the first tyrant Fidon who being aristocrat was elected the Basileus. But later he expanded the king power prerogatives and became the tyrant. In the case of Archinus and Perilay we can see the other situation: Archinus being epimelet and supported by demos, foreigners and meteks seized the power in Argos and later he got the title of the king. Perilay became famous in the battle, got trustworthy among demos and having support of demos also seized the power. As for Laphay his attempt to seize the power was connected with the support of Sparta.

Special attention was paid to early polis magistrates, demiurges and hieromnemons, that appeared due to power

limit by Argos citizens (during the ruling of Meudon, the grandson of Temen who was the founder of Argos dynasty, or after the collapse of the Temenid dynasty). The representatives of both sides participated in the court sessions and demiurges worked at secular issue whereas hieromnemons worked at religious ones.

3.3 The Origin and Development of the Conflict between Argos and Sparta

The historians researching Antiquity agree that Argos and Sparta were worst enemies (though some modern researchers such as T. Kelly express some irony regarding the origin of the conflict) (Kelly, 1970). Initially the war conflicts between Sparta and Argos were caused by territory identification but later they turned to the rivalry for the hegemony in the Peloponnese. Argos in VI century BC became the source of aggression for its neighbors especially in times when Fidon got the power and who preferred expansionist policy. The earliest conflicts between Sparta and Argos were Messana wars – the first Messana war (743–724 BC) and later the second Messana war (669 – the end of VII century BC) when Argos citizens battle at the side of Messana citizens against Lacedaemonians. The important stage in Argos and Sparta conflict development was the battle near Gissy (about 671/669 BC) after which Argos became the most powerful state in the Peloponnese. However, the situation quickly changed and during the next battle for Firiatida in 546 BC Argos citizens failed. This battle did not finish the struggle between Sparta and Argos for the hegemony in the Peloponnese and Argosers did not lose the hope to return their lands while Lacedaemonians had to prove once more their military superiority during a few centuries.

The next stage of the struggle between Argos and Sparta in archaic period was the battle near Sepey which took place in about 500 BC and which became one of the most important battles of that time. Crushing defeat of Argos citizens in this battle caused the start of important socio-political changes in the state.

4. Discussions

The research of American T. Kelly studied the history of Argos in archaic period and his research considered being the most systematic. His views regarding the early Argos history are presents in his work “A History of Argos to 500 BC (Kelly, 1976). He wanted to debunk some “Myths” that were the feature of Argos history. As he said, he tried to trace historical development of this city-state basing first mostly the data of archeologic excavations and later he studied the sources. While conducting the research he tried to find the mismatch of Argos image in the data got from the analysis of archeologic excavations and narrative sources. Thus, he is rejecting the views of antique authors that Argos had great power in VIII-VII BC. The early history of Argos was also studied by Koiv (Koiv, 2003). In his work the author studied ancient information about Argos in details and in particular, he tried to define the time of Fidon ruling but many of his statements are still open for discussion. M. Wörrle also contributed much in the study of Argos history (“Untersuchungen zur Verfassungs geschichte von Argos im 5 Jahrhundert”) (Wörrle, 1964). In his work he raised the problems of the society structure in Argos of archaic and classical periods and the research he based on the data of epigraphy material. The author analyzed the state structure of Argos, the phils, the phratries and other elements of its socio-political arrangement but in our opinion he did not pay much attention to the process of evolution in the polis institution. Most valuable are the articles devoted to various aspects of Argos history. We want to highlight the article written by Huxley “Argos et les derniers Temenidis” (Huxley, 1958) where the author tried to present the history of the last Temenids in Argos. No less important are the works of French researcher M. Piérart “The position of Argos relatively the other cities of Argolid”. In the article the author showed home policy and political institutions in Argos in the times of classical period (Piérart, 1997; 2004). Very interesting is the article written by Russian historian V. Strogetsky “On the date of the battle near Sepee” in which the researcher presented the facts in favor of the battle date 520 BC (Strogetsky, 1979). We also want to present the articles written by S. Zhestokanov where he showed the relationships between Argos and Korinf and presented the research of the activity of Fidon from Argos (Zhestokanov, 2005, 2009).

5. Conclusion

The research having been conducted in accordance of the goal and objectives allows drawing the following conclusions:

After the invasion of Dorians in the Peloponnese the dynasty of Temenids started ruling in Argos and the power, as we think, was given from the father to the son though we do not have the information regarding the order of succession of the throne. The power of ruling dynasty in Argos was interrupted at some stage of Argos society development but the power institution continued to exist and transformed into eponym magistracy. When Fidon came to power the Temenids strengthened their power position in VII century BC and their ruling ended after Melt, the grandson of Fidon was driven away. We also have to note that Argos had magistrates with important rights (demiurges and hieromnemons) and they limited the king power.

In VII-VI centuries BC the boom of social struggle took place in Argos during which a few tyrants ruled in the city after the collapse of the Temenids. During the archaic period the struggle between Sparta and Argos continued for the hegemony in the Peloponnese. The earliest rivalry of Argos with Sparta was the participation in the first Messana war at the side of Messens against Lacedaemonians. Mostly this fact does not allow to agree with the opinion of T. Kelly that Argos-Sparta rivalry started only after Sparta seized Tegey and their first war conflict was the battle for Fireatida in 546 BC. The rivalry between Argos which struggled without any support from other cities and Sparta which struggled for the hegemony in the Peloponnese lasted with success and failure for both parts. Thus, the battle near Gissey (671/669 BC) was won by Argos but it failed in the battle for Fireatida and in the battle for Sepey when the winners were Lacedaemonians. The last failure influenced the development of Argos. So, the transition from traditional "Dorian" aristocrat society to democratic one was caused by the failure of Argos near Sepey.

6. Recommendations

Practical significance of the research is the following: the article materials can be used in the educational process to design the summarizing works and special courses and teaching aids on socio-political history of Ancient Greece. The research is much contributing in study of Ancient Greece history promoting the identification of regional peculiarity of political processes and the role of Argos in political history of Ancient Greece and filling in the gaps of the problems research raised by historiography.

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