

What benefits could a small city expect from joining a large hegemonic league?

Large Leagues were formed to protect the interests of multiple states, serving as large scale alliances, often in the face of a common enemy that required the combined power of states to overcome. The key example of this is the union of Greek states against the Persian invaders in 480 BC where the Spartan led defence meant that Greece was free from the control of an outside state. The Hellenic League was first developed from the earlier Peloponnesian League, which offered protection to members, with the power of Sparta, but also limited some of their freedom. The effect that Leagues had on smaller members is also seen in the Delian League, which offered safety and protection from invaders and pirates, but also forced members to pay tribute to Athens, and limited the members' autonomy. The Boeotian League was also created to strengthen the overall power of its members, with Thebes as the centre, first fighting off a common enemy and then forming a united coinage and assembly to form a cohesive force.

The Peloponnesian League was originally formed as a collection of states, which had treaties with Sparta, meaning that these states could war amongst themselves, but if any of them were attacked by a non-'member' then Sparta would intervene and vice-versa . This collection of Spartan allies was not formally linked together, meaning that Sparta could ask for military support from any of the allies and they would be obliged to follow,¹ this was something which did not benefit any of the allies. Therefore around 505 BC it was decided that all decisions would first be ratified by an assembly of representatives, with each member getting a single vote, no matter their size, and the decision of the assembly was final (unless

¹ Cartledge (2001), p. 225.

there was a religious reason why a state could not join).² The democratic system of decision making was key to ensuring that smaller states were treated in the same way as larger ones, meaning that they had a say in the policies of the league. However, the Allies council was counter-measured by a Spartan Assembly which had as much weight as the council, meaning that the Spartans were the leaders of the League, and often dominated discussions.³ Despite the power of Sparta in the league, their decision was not always forgone, with Herodotus telling us that around 504 BC a Spartan proposal to instil a tyrant in Athens was overruled.⁴ The formation of a group of allies into a hegemonic league with a council of representatives was important as it meant that all states could decide on a course of action, rather than Sparta forcing one onto them, it gave smaller states a say in actions and meant that Sparta could not control the members as part of an empire.

The League offered smaller states a great deal of support, as Sparta was bound to give aid if a state was attacked by a non-member. The league was also a way to shore up support for oligarchies, as the threat of a Spartan force to crush any anti-oligarchic movement could be seen as a huge benefit to joining the League. However there was also the fact that any hint of disobedience to Sparta, such as signing a treaty with a sworn Spartan enemy, or refusing to participate in league action, was crushed by the Spartans, without the need to call an assembly.⁵ In reality this meant that there were few areas in which members of the Peloponnesian League had full autonomy. This being said the decision of the League was always down to the will of the Allies rather than the Spartans, such as in the declaration of war on Athens in 432 BC which started the Peloponnesian War. This decision was taken by the Allies as a way to ensure freedom and justice against the aggressive Athenian Empire.⁶ The reasons for this decision, as given by Hammond (1967), seem to imply that smaller states

² Cartledge (2001), p. 226.

³ Hammond (1967), p. 195.

⁴ Hdt. 5.91-3.

⁵ Cartledge (2001), p. 228.

⁶ Hammond (1967), p. 322.

felt threatened by the power of Athens and were using the Peloponnesian league as a way to ensure their freedom, showing that being part of the League was a huge benefit for the smaller members.

The Hellenic League was created from the Peloponnesian League, widening it to incorporate the majority of Greece against the common enemy of Persia. Members took an oath to prevent states from submitting to the Persians in 480 BC, and promised to support any action taken against the Persians.⁷ The Spartans were the strongest power in the League so they were given the role of leading the League, as well as contributing the major generals for the war.⁸ The League's primary objective was to force the Persians out of Greek lands, and end their Greek intentions. Smaller states also joined the League, with the hopes of continuing their autonomy, and preventing the Persians from taking over, however there was a feeling that it was a lost cause and that victory seemed impossible.⁹ The League itself was not a way to protect members from attack, through the threat of League action (as with other Leagues) but was used as a way to join states against the Persians, as well as formally agreeing actions against the invaders.¹⁰

The Hellenic league was a union of states that fought against the Persian advance, with the objective of repulsing the Persian invasion, however there must also have been an argument to continue military action against the lands that the Persians already owned once the first objective had been accomplished. Brunt (1953) argues that the oath for the League also bound members to free Greeks from Persian rule, as well as joining members in an alliance that was designed to stop inter-fighting between members.¹¹ Bearing in mind that the members of the League made up the majority of Greece, this was a huge commitment, and so it is unsurprising that it disintegrated after the war, when the war weary states left the League

⁷ Hdt. 7.145.

⁸ Ibid. 1.18.2.

⁹ Brunt (1953), p. 137.

¹⁰ Hdt. 7.145.

¹¹ Brunt (1953), p. 151.

after the immediate threat had been dealt with. However, the original aim of the League seemed to promise an end to the petty disputes between the Greeks and join them together, meaning that it would have seemed very beneficial to smaller states to join the League. An example of this policy in practice can be seen with Aegina, as Athens and the island are said to clearly have stopped their hostilities when they joined the League, going as far as fighting together at Salamis.¹² This end to hostilities seems to hint towards a more peaceful Greece under the League, along with the obvious benefits, such as a stronger military that could deal with foreign threats (as demonstrated by the Greeks victory against Persia) there was also the idea of liberating fellow Greeks from the tyranny of Persian rule in Asia Minor. However, the benefits of joining the Hellenic League did not materialise, with the Union effectively ending when Sparta and the Peloponnesians left the leadership of the continued war against Persia (which was primarily naval) in the hands of the Athenians, virtually ending their involvement as well as much of the benefit that the league had for small states.

The Delian league was formed to continue the naval war against the Persians;¹³ however it soon became clear that this collection of states was under the thumb of Athens, dominating the states, and eventually forcing them to pay tribute to Athens for the liberty to be part of the league. Diodorus tells us that Athens dominated the league, and ruled with violence and terror,¹⁴ which would imply that many member states stayed in the league because of fear of what Athens would do to them if they left. This was not an unfounded fear, as Athens crushed several states that had wanted to leave the League, Thucydides particularly mentions Mytilene which revolted against the League in 428 BC.¹⁵ Athens reacted to Mytilene's 'revolt' by crushing them, and then debating whether to slaughter the entire

¹² MacDowell (1960), p. 119.

¹³ Larsen (1940), p. 175.

¹⁴ D.S. 70.3-4.

¹⁵ Th. 3.2.

population or not, eventually deciding to spare them.¹⁶ The Mytilenaeon dialogue proves that Athens was violent towards any members that preferred to rule itself autonomously, and used its power to bring the members of the league into line with Athenian wishes.

French (1979) tells us that Thucydides shows only a few examples of Athenian and Delian action to represent the stages that Athens went through towards dominating the League with fear. Firstly, there are the purely league actions that were taken against Persia to free Greek settlements, such as Eion, undertaken around 476 BC,¹⁷ then there are the more aggressive acts that are taken toward several states, with the ‘enslavement’ of Naxos as the key case shown by Thucydides.¹⁸ There is also the case of Thasos, which revolted against the league, and was brutally crushed by Athens, forcing it to demolish its walls, surrender its ships and pay tribute.¹⁹ The action taken to stop Thasos from revolting meant that Athens’ own fleet grew, and that Thasos had no defences. The destruction of Thasos’ walls could signify that the Delian League would guarantee the safety of the city; however it would seem more likely that it was simply a punishment for rebelling, and would make it easier to destroy the city if they rebelled again. Therefore, the benefits for Thasos being part of the Delian League were almost non-existent, along with their lack of defence (both in the form of a fleet or city walls) they were also forced to pay tribute, and it seems clear that any attempt made to distance themselves from the league would end in destruction.

One of the benefits that the Delian league could offer was the fact that Athens would not attack members; this was a major part of the League’s structure. It was also a key way in which members were forced to join the league. Such as the island of Aegina, which Athens invaded and which became part of the Delian League, paying tribute to Athens, around 457

¹⁶ Th. 3.36-49.

¹⁷ French (1979), p. 136.

¹⁸ Th. 1.98.

¹⁹ Rhodes (2010), p. 22.

BC.²⁰ However, even the promise of a member's safety from Athens was not always true, as Aegina was invaded and all the inhabitants expelled in favour of Athenian colonists during the Peloponnesian War, despite no immediate Aeginitan action being taken to warrant such cruel treatment.²¹ The action taken against Aegina would seem to prove that there was no benefit for a small state to join the Delian League. However, this is not necessarily correct with several states choosing to join the Delian League as a way to oust their harsh systems of government in favour of a democratic government that Athens could support. This served as a way to both revolutionise the state into a more inclusive government as well as joining a league that would help to prevent any invasion of the state. States that underwent this change often did so with the support of Athens, such as in Corcyra where the pro-democratic faction was supported by Athens.²²

Samos, a relatively large state, was part of the Delian league from its beginning, meaning that it had originally promised some of its fleet to Athens to be used in League actions. This policy was continued beyond the point when other states were told to pay tribute, which was unusual for a member of the League but it served to bolster Athens' fleet, which was the key power base behind Athens' influence.²³ However the majority of states were made to pay tribute, the exact amount of which varied between members, with Athens demanding only as much as the state could afford. This system of tribute was a way to make sure that the members could pay for their membership; it was also a way of limiting their individual military power, as they wouldn't have enough spare money to pay for a build-up in military. Tribute also meant that Athens wouldn't have to rely on other states' military to fight battles, as well as having more money to build up their own military. Tribute was also beneficial for smaller states as it meant that they didn't have to contribute citizens to wars

²⁰ Th. 1.108.

²¹ Ibid. 2.27.

²² Ibid. 3.75.

²³ Legon (1972), p. 145.

that Athens wanted, therefore having Athens as the protector for all members of the Delian league meant that states could prosper in the peace that Athens guaranteed. Athens also promised to protect members from the terror of Persia and from pirates, which helped members of the Delian League trade, which was a major benefit for any state, and became a huge part of the Delian League's attraction.²⁴ Athens was also seen as the cultural centre of Greece and they saw themselves as benefitting the Delian League by passing on their culture to the other members.²⁵ These benefits were wide ranging and helped to stabilise many states in the League, however Hammond (1967) argues that political freedom was held in greater esteem than these benefits, and so Athens was seen as a tyrant state that sought to rule others by force rather than through respect.²⁶

The formation of the Boeotian League is argued by Buck (1972) as being around 520 BC, serving originally as a military alliance it soon fought off the aggressive state of Thessaly which invaded them at this time.²⁷ Similar to the Hellenic League, the Boeotians banded together to fight off a common enemy, forming a group that then continued under the strong leadership of one state, much like the Delian League. The benefit to a smaller member is clear, with the League able to fight off a common enemy, whereas one state would not have been powerful enough, meaning that the members could feel safe as part of the League, whereas before they would have been vulnerable. The League also stressed a form of unity between the members, with a shared coinage becoming part of this. The coins changed from a unified coinage, to ones showing the individual name of the town that they were minted in, with it being suggested that this showed that members of the league held a certain amount of autonomy.²⁸

²⁴ Hammond (1967), p. 327.

²⁵ Th. 2.40-41.

²⁶ Hammond (1967), p. 327.

²⁷ Buck (1972), p. 97.

²⁸ Ibid. pp. 97-98.

The League was built around shared values, religiously, militarily and politically, therefore members were all originally governed by a moderate oligarchic government,²⁹ with league action having to be approved by a council first before any action could be taken. The council allowed all members to have a vote in league policies; however it seems clear that Thebes was the most powerful state, and often dominated these councils. Members of the Boeotian league did however have some say on all actions of the League, and could vote against anything they didn't agree with, which was a benefit to any state that was part of the League, and despite Theban dominance it could still be outvoted. The Boeotian states also incorporated a form of exclusivity in the league, with a property qualification to be part of the individual city councils,³⁰ which could be seen as a benefit to small members as the people who presumably had the most free time could be part of the council, both in the city and possibly as part of the League council.³¹

Overall, there were several benefits that large leagues could bring to small states, often guaranteeing their safety against invasion from larger states. The Hellenistic amalgamation of states against Persia guaranteed the freedom of all Greece; however the later Delian League sought to destroy this freedom, in favour of Athenian dominance over smaller states that were forced to pay tribute. The Delian League did also bring stability to its members, and guaranteed safe trading with the destruction of pirates in the Aegean. The league also brought about the freedom of Greek cities in Asia Minor that had previously been under Persian control. The Peloponnesian League also helped its members in times of struggle, with small states' oligarchic governments being propped up by the power of Sparta, while the states' safety was also guaranteed by the League. The Boeotian League did a lot for smaller states as well, by bringing about stable trading in the area with a shared currency, as well as the shared protection of members in the League. The Boeotians were also led by a

²⁹ Hammond (1967), p. 485.

³⁰ *Hellenica Oxyrhynchia*, 19.2.

³¹ Mitchell (2006), p. 372.

council, as was the Hellenic and Peloponnesian Leagues which meant that all members had a say in League action, giving smaller states at least some degree of sway in the Leagues. All of these benefits meant that small states were often safer and better off being part of a larger league as their benefits often outweighed the more negative aspects.

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