

Athenian Invasion of Cythera

In 424 BCE an Athenian Fleet under the command of Nicias invaded the island of Cythera. Its position in relation to Sparta is strategically important as it lies just off the south eastern coast of the Peloponnese.

Cythera occupies a strategic position controlling the straits between the island and the mainland. This plays into the naval superiority Athens exercised over the Aegean and as such the Athenians would have recognised its value not only as one less port for the Peloponnesian league but also as a staging point for raids in the area and to resupply ships headed westward. The Athenian Leader Nicias captured the city by occupying the bay to the south of the city to act as a diversion whilst the rest of his forces, some two thousand hoplites, landed to the north east of the city facing Malea¹. It is likely that few ships would have been left in the bay to entice the occupants into sallying against a numerically inferior force whilst the larger force advanced from their rear. Thucydides states that the Cytherians realising that they would lose in the pitched battle fled to their walls so that negotiations could take place between the defenders and the Athenians that surrounded the city. Once the city had been secured and the terms of the treaty finalised it was decided that despite the inhabitants being Lacedaemon they would not be removed from the isle as Athens did in other cities. The reason for this are not given by Thucydides who glosses over the issue.

Instead Nicias took precautions which would most likely mean that a small garrison was left whilst the rest of the army moved onto other targets along the Spartan territories south of the mainland setting up camps to raid further inland. Another reason for occupying the island would be to supply ships heading westwards because of its position the island would allow safe passage when going through hostile waters as long as Athens could neutralise any Spartan navies early on. The island also acts as an early warning system as any fleets would be able to be seen from the encampments and word could be sent to any nearby Athenian forces.

Good effort.

To improve:

- ① Use more sources and provide references.
- ② Engage with modern scholarship
- ③ Proof read.

¹ Thuc. History of the Peloponnesian War 4.54

Athenian incursion in Sicily 427 BCE

In accordance with Thucydides dating, during the autumn of 427 BCE Athens sent twenty ships to aid the Leontines¹ and their allies against Syracuse and their Dorian allies. Ref

The Athenians claimed their presence in the conflict was to honour past alliances with the Leontines but Thucydides claims that the real reason for the interference on the behalf of the Athenians was a result of the aid that Syracuse and its allies could send to the Peloponnesian league during the war, as the city had entered the war on side of the Peloponnesians but does not appear to have participated in any major battles. The main reasons according to Thucydides is the possibility of supplying grain and other supplies to the Peloponnesian league and bypassing the stranglehold that Athens had on the other supply routes. Ref

Although Athenian presence in the Sicilian territories was maintained for several years, no major progress was gained on either side of the conflict in the west and as a result in 425 BCE when the Athenian allies in Sicily proposed a treaty in which each city but the Camarinaeans, who would take Morgantina, would return to their original territories. The treaty was put before the leaders of the Athenian fleet who would agree to the terms given by the treaty for it applied to them and thus would take their ships and leave.² Ref

This move would be disapproved of in the city of Athens and two of the three generals would be exiled for assenting to the treaty. Whilst the third would be fined. This failure in the west would result in a prolonged conflict on the mainland despite efforts by the Delian League to prevent ships from entering Peloponnesian territories. The failure of this incursion would eventually be followed up by renewed interest in the area in the form of the Sicilian expedition in which a much larger Athenian force would sail for Sicily in the hopes of capturing the island for themselves after the peace of Nicias allowed them to focus on other points of interest. Ref

Good effort.
To improve:

- ① Provide references.
- ② Given the subject you should have used Diodorus as well
- ③ You must engage with scholarship

¹ Thuc. 3.86 History of the Peloponnesian war

² Thuc. 4.65 History of the Peloponnesian war

Megarian Decree

The Megarian decree was an Athenian ¹sanction of the city of Megara's market access to Athens and was followed by a naval blockade as a result of Megarian assistance during the Corcyran conflict with Corinth, in which Athens assisted the Corcyrans¹ over the use of magistrates in its colonies and their colonies. (Potidea) in which ships from Megara were used to aid Corinth's navy.

The solution that the Athenians conceived was put in motion by Pericles, as a way of circumventing the existing truce between them and Sparta as a way to punish Megara for aiding Corinth during the Corinth-Corcyra conflict. This solution was to bar access to the trading hubs of the Delian League from the citizens of Megara². However given indeterminate evidence it isn't clear whether it would affect the Megarian economy more than simply being a political damnation of the state.³ Diodorus provides direct mention of Megara and the punishment imposed as opposed to Thucydides who mentions it in passing as a minor excuse for the Peloponnesian league to go to war with the Athenians and the Delian league. The immediate results were as would have been anticipated, aid was requested from the Lacedaemon people, although it was Pericles thought that Archidamus and the rest of the Spartans would realise they are not in a position for war⁴, he had underestimated the willingness of the pro-war elements in the Peloponnesian league⁵.

The events that led up to the Megarian Decree would be a major source of tension within what would make up the pro-war elements of the Peloponnesian League such as the Athenian interference in Corinth and her colonies affairs, knowing full well that responding to the Corcyran appeal would put the Athenian people in direct conflict with a member of the Peloponnesian league it was provided as a defence pact rather than an outright alliance so that the Athenians could claim that they have not transgressed the treaty in any way.

As a result of the Megarian decree which was imposed due to Megarian aid to Corinth, Sparta and her allies decided that the Athenians had gone too far in this instance and that they would be the ones to break the thirty years truce.

The Athenian people's diplomacy with colonies and its allies in the Delian League would receive similar treatment during the Great Peloponnesian War and result in many revolts against Athenian supremacy in the Aegean.

Bibliography

Thucydides. *History of the Peloponnesian War, Volume I: Books 1-2*. Translated by C. F. Smith. Loeb Classical Library 108. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1919.

Diodorus Siculus. *Library of History, Volume IV: Books 9-12.40*. Translated by C. H. Oldfather. Loeb Classical Library 375. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1946

MacDonald, Brian R. "The Megarian Decree." *Historia: Zeitschrift Für Alte Geschichte*, vol. 32, no. 4, 1983, pp. 385-410. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/4435862. Accessed 16 Jan. 2020

¹ Thuc. 1.45 *History of the Peloponnesian war*

² Diod. 12.39 4-5 *Library of History*

³ Brian R, 1983, pg 386

⁴ Diod. 12.40 4-6 *Library of History*

⁵ Thuc. 1.86 *History of the Peloponnesian war*

Good effort.

To improve:

- ① Use and reference scholarship
- ② Proofread.
- ③ Be more critical of the ancient sources.

⑤

Gender in the Medea

The Medea exists as a comfortable showcase of the expected behaviours of men and women in Corinth as shown in the chorus reaction to the main characters, Medea, Jason, Creon, and Aegeus as well as to an extent the tutor and nurse. Written by playwright Euripides who enjoyed the use of controversial topics, the Medea explores the results of crossing a barbarian woman with divine heritage and the results of being un-heroic as in the case of Jason. *Really? How does this relate to historical Corinth rather than my the world?*

Medea's character in the play is shown to be a shrewd, calculated and driven character, this is emphasised in her 'madness' that comes from the Eros, Eros was considered to be a terrible affliction in either male or female as it means that the individual becomes unhinged in situations that include the subject of their affection, this is shown negatively. What this does show is that despite the fact Medea is a woman she is capable of action that would have been believed were beyond a man's capabilities. *audience?*

Jason's portrayal is in direct comparison to Medea whereas she enters with the preconception that she has Eros for Jason and is a Barbarian, he is supposedly to be one the heroes of the Argos and procurer of the Golden fleece, however this is in stark contrast to his actual actions within the play, where he seemingly abandons the heroic code to pursue his own interests, choosing to dishonour his first wife in Medea for the princess of Corinth, with the tutor even going so far as to state "Old marriage ties give way to new: he is no friend to this house."¹ Jason's character is offset by what Euripides considers to be a heroic man, Aegeus, who condemns Jason's actions and reluctantly agrees to Medea's plea for help but only for safety. "If you come to my country, I shall in justice try to act as your protector. This much, however, I tell you in advance: I will not consent to take you from this land."²

The Chorus acts as a secondary female presence from the perspective of the average Athenian citizen providing their opinions on Jason while also attempting to guide Medea onto an appropriate path, this continues until she begins to go beyond what is deemed appropriate. Whilst they agree with her sentiments of Jason they do not condone her actions, this however is neglected by Medea as she is a not a Greek woman, this fully projected with the depiction of Medea riding a chariot, this in combination with her demeanour and thoughts throughout the play distinguish her from the Greek woman whilst simultaneously showing that as a barbarian woman she is defending her honour. *Red*

Bibliography

Euripides. *Medea*. Edited and translated by David Kovacs. Loeb Classical Library 12. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994.

Gabriel, Ayala H. "Living with Medea and Thinking after Freud: Greek Drama, Gender, and Concealments." *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 7, no. 3, 1992, pp. 346-373. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/656203. Accessed 16 Jan. 2020.

*More reading needed?
Use commentaries.*

¹ Eur. *The Medea* 74-5

² Eur. *The Medea* 723-5

³ Eur. *The Medea* 1316a

Good work.

To improve:

- ① Provide more references
- ② You must engage with scholarship more. Read more and consider how scholarly views affect/change your own reading of the play
- ③ Proofread. ?