

Sparta

Religion

Sparta and Marathon

- While still in the city, the generals first sent to Sparta the herald Philippides, an Athenian and a long-distance runner who made that his calling. As Philippides himself said when he brought the message to the Athenians, when he was in the Parthenian mountain above Tegea he encountered Pan. [2] Pan called out Philippides' name and bade him ask the Athenians why they paid him no attention, though he was of goodwill to the Athenians, had often been of service to them, and would be in the future. [3] The Athenians believed that these things were true, and when they became prosperous they established a sacred precinct of Pan beneath the Acropolis. Ever since that message they propitiate him with annual sacrifices and a torch-race. This Philippides was in Sparta on the day after leaving the city of Athens, that time when he was sent by the generals and said that Pan had appeared to him. He came to the magistrates and said, [2] "Lacedaemonians, the Athenians ask you to come to their aid and not allow the most ancient city among the Hellenes to fall into slavery at the hands of the foreigners. Even now Eretria has been enslaved, and Hellas has become weaker by an important city." [3] **He told them what he had been ordered to say, and they resolved to send help to the Athenians, but they could not do this immediately, for they were unwilling to break the law. It was the ninth day of the rising month, and they said that on the ninth they could not go out to war until the moon's circle was full.** Herodotos 6.106-7 Transl: A. D. Godley

Why did Sparta not go to Marathon?

- The religious reasons, although maybe looking spacious to us, they were very important to the Spartans, and indeed to other Greeks as well.
- Of course, there is always the suspicion that the Spartans did not want to send a major expeditionary force in fear of helot revolt.

Religion and Politics: The Olympics

- As this proposal was not accepted, the Eleians tried a second. Instead of restoring Lepreum, if this was objected to, **the Lacedaemonians should ascend the altar of the Olympian Zeus**, as they were so anxious to have access to the temple, and **swear before the Hellenes** that they would surely pay the fine at a later day. [2] This being also refused, **the Lacedaemonians were excluded from the temple, the sacrifice, and the games, and sacrificed at home...** After this incident all were more afraid than ever, and firmly looked for a disturbance: the Lacedaemonians, however, kept quiet, and let the feast pass by, as we have seen. [5] After the Olympic games, the Argives and the allies repaired to Corinth to invite her to come over to them. There they found some Lacedaemonian envoys; and a long discussion ensued, which after all ended in nothing, as an earthquake occurred, and they dispersed to their different homes.
Thuc. 5.50

Religion, Politics and Emulation of the Past

- And when he marched forth from the country after offering all the sacrifices which were required, including that at the frontier, he dispatched messengers to the various cities and announced how many men were to be sent from each city, and where they were to report; while as for himself, **he desired to go and offer sacrifice at Aulis, the place where Agamemnon had sacrificed before he sailed to Troy.** [4] When he had reached Aulis, however, the Boeotarchs,⁵ on learning that he was sacrificing, sent horsemen and bade him discontinue his sacrificing, **and they threw from the altar the victims which they found already offered.** Then Agesilaus, calling the gods to witness, and full of anger, embarked upon his trireme and sailed away. Xen. Hell. 3.4.3

Sacrifices and Cheating

- About the same time the Lacedaemonians marched out with all their people to Leuctra upon their frontier, opposite to Mount Lycaem, under the command of Agis, son of Archidamus, **without any one knowing their destination, not even the cities that sent the contingents. [2] The sacrifices, however, for crossing the frontier not proving propitious, the Lacedaemonians returned home themselves, and sent word to the allies to be ready to march after the month ensuing, which happened to be the month of Carneus, a holy time for the Dorians. [3] Upon the retreat of the Lacedaemonians the Argives marched out on the last day but three of the month before Carneus, and keeping this as the day during the whole time that they were out, invaded and plundered Epidaurus. [4] The Epidaurians summoned their allies to their aid, some of whom pleaded the month as an excuse; others came as far as the frontier of Epidaurus and there remained inactive. Thuc. 5.54**

And again...

- While the Argives were in Epidaurus embassies from the cities assembled at Mantinea, upon the invitation of the Athenians. The conference having begun, the Corinthian Euphamidas said that their actions did not agree with their words; while they were sitting deliberating about peace, the Epidaurians and their allies and the Argives were arrayed against each other in arms; deputies from each party should first go and separate the armies, and then the talk about peace might be resumed. [2] In compliance with this suggestion they went and brought back the Argives from Epidaurus, and afterwards reassembled, but without succeeding any better in coming to a conclusion; and the Argives a second time invaded Epidaurus and plundered the country. [3] **The Lacedaemonians also marched out to Caryae; but the frontier sacrifices again proving unfavorable, they went back again,** [4] and the Argives, after ravaging about a third of the Epidaurian territory, returned home. Meanwhile a thousand Athenian heavy infantry had come to their aid under the command of Alcibiades, but finding that the Lacedaemonian expedition was at an end, and that they were no longer wanted, went back again. Thuc. 5.55

The power of Interpretation

- Now while he was at dinner in the land of the Argives, on the first evening of his stay there, and when the after-dinner libations had just been made, **the god sent an earthquake**; and all the Lacedaemonians, those in the royal tent taking the lead, struck up the paeon to Poseidon; **and the rest of the soldiers expected to retire from the country, because Agis likewise, on an occasion when an earthquake took place, had withdrawn his army from Elis.** But Agesipolis said that if the **god had sent an earthquake when he was about to invade, he should have thought that he was forbidding the invasion; but since he sent it after he had invaded, he believed that he was urging him on;** [5] accordingly, on the next day, **after offering sacrifices to Poseidon,** he again led on his forces, advancing far into the country. ...[7] After this, while Agesipolis was encamping near the enclosed space, **a thunderbolt fell into his camp;** and some men were killed by being struck, others by the shock. After this, **desiring to fortify a garrison post at the entrance to the Argive country** which leads past Mount Celusa, he offered sacrifice; **and the livers of the victims were found to be lacking a lobe. When this happened, he led his army away and disbanded it,** having inflicted very great harm upon the Argives because he had invaded their land unexpectedly.4.7.4-7

Divination

- When Agesilaus had been not yet a year in the kingly office, once while he was offering one of the appointed sacrifices in behalf of the state, the seer said that the gods revealed a conspiracy of the most terrible sort. And when he sacrificed again, the seer said that the signs appeared still more terrible. And upon his sacrificing for the third time, he said: “Agesilaus, just such a sign is given me as would be given if we were in the very midst of the enemy.” There-upon they made offerings to the gods who avert evil and to those who grant safety, and having with difficulty obtained favourable omens, ceased sacrificing. And within five days after the sacrifice was ended a man reported to the ephors a conspiracy, and Cinadon as the head of the affair. Xen. Hell. 3.3.4

Piety in War

- At this point one may unquestionably call Agesilaus courageous; at least he certainly did not choose the safest course. For while he might have let the men pass by who were trying to break through and then have followed them and overcome those in the rear, he did not do this, but crashed against the Thebans front to front; and setting shields against shields they shoved, fought, killed, and were killed. Finally, some of the Thebans broke through and reached Mount Helicon, but many were killed while making their way thither. [20] Now when the victory had fallen to Agesilaus and he himself had been carried, wounded, to the phalanx, **some of the horsemen rode up and told him that about eighty of the enemy, still armed, had taken shelter in the temple of Athena, and asked him what they should do. And he, although he had received many wounds, nevertheless did not forget the deity, but ordered them to allow these men to go away whithersoever they wished, and would permit them to commit no wrong.** Xen. Hell. 4.3.19