

HPAH4005 - Cauldron of Democracy and Tragedy: Classical Greek History and Literature

Timeline Addition for 350-340 B.C – Demosthenes' First Olynthiac (Synopsis).

The First Olynthiac speech by Demosthenes was delivered in 349 B.C.¹.

Demosthenes claims a crisis is arising in the North. A marauding army lead by Phillip of Macedon, does not just move on the provinces that surround his territories but, as Demosthenes sees it, is eager to expand his empire into Greece². Demosthenes talks of recent past episodes (Pydna, Potidaea, Methone, Pagase) where he deems Athens to have been too slow in coming to the aid of others and which have been to the detriment of Athenian power³. Demosthenes believes the tardiness or inaction in response to Phillip's movements have enabled Phillip to believe he can move through the country as he wishes with little consequence⁴. Now, with the Olynthians feeling the pressure of Phillip's might, as Demosthenes sees it, is the time to retaliate.

Demosthenes' worry is that, unlike the Athenians, Phillip has nothing to debate, his all-encompassing power over his army, the territories he holds already, and his treasury are enabling him to move through provinces with great momentum⁵. This is also a nod to Phillip's 'despotism' and 'growing power'⁶.

Demosthenes stresses that the lack of forthrightness, in such cases as that of the Athenians also losing Amphipolis, is reason for the gods to be unfavourable as the gods can not possibly reward wrong decisions and in action, when it comes to war and the defence of their own⁷.

If the threat of unfavourable gods is not enough, Demosthenes claims the outcome of all this if nothing is done now to halt Phillip's movements is; 1- greater expense to Athens in the long run and, 2- eventual war in Attica⁸. Demosthenes centres on these costs as if it seems to him that all Athens really cares about is it money, pleading that the money to fund a campaign now will be far less than that of funding all-out war across Attica⁹.

Demosthenes suggests not only sending military aid to Olynthus but also men to Macedon in an effort to push Phillip back and further away from Attica¹⁰.

¹ Vince, 1930, p.2

² Dem. Olyn. 1. 1-7; Sugar, 2009, p. 1400

³ Dem. Olyn. 1. 8-10

⁴ Dem. Olyn. 1. 8-10

⁵ Dem. Olyn. 1. 4-6

⁶ Dem. Olyn. 1. 4-6

⁷ Dem. Olyn. 1. 11; Sugar, 2009, p. 1400

⁸ Dem. Olyn. 1. 15

⁹ Dem. Olyn. 1. 15

¹⁰ Dem. Olyn. 1. 17

Demosthenes closes his plea for action with the notion that the Athenians either fight Phillip in Olynthus or, their fate being sealed, fight Phillip on their own soil¹¹.

Olynthus falls to Phillip in 348 B.C.¹².

Word count 439

¹¹ Dem. Olyn. 1. 27-28

¹² Vince, 1930, p.3

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