

424 BCE- Peace conference of Gela

Figure 1:
Athenian Defeat
at Syracuse.

(Image from:
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Destruction_of_the_Athenian_army_at_Syracuse.jpg)



The Gela peace conference of 424 BCE was an event where the Sicilians held a cease of arms before every city sent ambassadors to Gela for a conference to discuss the best course of action for moving forward (Thuc, 4.58). It was also the event which caused Hermocrates to first come to prominence (Meister, 2006). At this conference, Hermocrates performed a rousing speech which alerted the Siceliots to Athens and the threats that they posed as an imperial power (Caven, 2012). Thus evidencing that inter-unity was the main theme of the Gela conference, something which ended up being successful as peace was found in the summer of 424 BCE (Westlake, 1960, p.387).

During the conference, there was a call for Sicily to reunite once more (Thuc, 4.61). This was due to the fact that Syracuse attacked Leontinoi in 427 BCE, this one event then expanding to include all of Sicily with war between the Ionians and the Dorians (Berger, 1991, p.136). From 427-424, the Dorians, including Gela supported Syracuse (Woodhead and Wilson, 2005; Berger, 1991, p.136), but the Ionians drew the support of Athens thanks to the help of the persuasive powers of Gorgias, but this did not work as planned as Athens sought its own gains (Berger, 1991, p.136). Thereby evidencing why both sides welcomed talks of peace, as there was now motivation enough to stand up to Athens as a whole.

Thucydides is the main source of knowledge for the events of the time due to his great coverage of events, with book four being the main source basis for the conference itself (SHO, 2006; Thuc, 4.58). Thucydides was not at the conference itself, and as with all his recorded speeches it was not written verbatim which does lead to questions about accuracy (SHO, 2006). But after his banishment he had a wealth of resources to draw from outside of Athens for his research, meaning that his accounts of events were likely a good representation (SHO, 2006).

The Sicilians united so that they could be stronger against the force of the Athenians (Thuc, 4.64) which in turn caused the Athenians to withdraw from the island (Bloedow, 1996, p.143) and caused Leontinoi's position to weaken (Berger, 1991, p.136). Therefore, showing that the congress was a successful endeavour, the goal of unity was achieved.

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