

Help from the West?

By these means Gelon had grown to greatness as a tyrant, and now, when the Greek envoys had come to Syracuse, they had audience with him and spoke as follows:

“The Lacedaemonians and their allies have sent us to win your aid against the foreigner, for it cannot be, we think, that you have no knowledge of the Persian invader of Hellas, how he proposes to bridge the Hellespont and lead all the hosts of the east from Asia against us, making an open show of marching against Athens, but actually with intent to subdue all Hellas to his will. [2] Now you are rich in power, and as lord of Sicily you rule what is not the least part of Hellas; therefore, we beg of you, send help to those who are going to free Hellas, and aid them in so doing. The uniting of all those of Greek stock entails the mustering of a mighty host able to meet our invaders in the field. If, however, some of us play false and others will not come to our aid, while the sound part of Hellas is but small, then it is to be feared that all Greek lands alike will be destroyed. [3] Do not for a moment think that if the Persian defeats us in battle and subdues us, he will leave you unassailed, but rather look well to yourself before that day comes. Aid us, and you champion your own cause; in general a well-laid plan leads to a happy issue.” This is what they said, and Gelon, speaking very vehemently, said in response to this: “Men of Hellas, it is with a self-seeking plea that you have dared to come here and invite me to be your ally against the foreigners; yet what of yourselves? [2] When I was at odds with the Carchedonians,¹ and asked you to be my comrades against a foreign army, and when I desired that you should avenge the slaying of Dorieus son of Anaxandrides on the men of Eggesta, and when I promised to free those trading ports from which great advantage and profit have accrued to you,—then neither for my sake would you come to aid nor to avenge the slaying of Dorieus. Because of your position in these matters, all these lands lie beneath the foreigners' feet. [3] Let that be; for all ended well, and our state was improved. But now that the war has come round to you in your turn, it is time for remembering Gelon! [4] Despite the fact that you slighted me, I will not make an example of you; I am ready to send to your aid two hundred triremes, twenty thousand men-at-arms, two thousand horsemen, two thousand archers, two thousand slingers, and two thousand light-armed men to run with horsemen. I also pledge to furnish provisions for the whole Greek army until we have made an end of the war. [5] All this, however, I promise on one condition, that I shall be general and leader of the Greeks against the foreigner. On no other condition will I come myself or send others.” When Syagrus heard that, he could not contain himself; “In truth,” he cried, “loudly would Agamemnon son of Pelops lament, when hearing that the Spartans had been bereft of their command by Gelon and his

Syracusans! No, rather, put the thought out of your minds that we will give up the command to you. If it is your will to aid Hellas, know that you must obey the Lacedaemonians; but if, as I think, you are too proud to obey, then send no aid.” Thereupon Gelon, seeing how unfriendly Syagrus' words were, for the last time declared his opinion to them: “My Spartan friend, the hard words that a man hears are likely to arouse his anger; but for all the arrogant tenor of your speech you will not move me to make an unseemly answer. [2] When you set such store by the command, it is but reasonable that it should be still more important to me since I am the leader of an army many times greater than yours and more ships by far. But seeing that your response to me is so haughty, we will make some concession in our original condition. It might be that you should command the army, and I the fleet; or if it is your pleasure to lead by sea, then I am ready to take charge of the army. With that you will surely be content, unless you want depart from here without such allies as we are.” Such was Gelon's offer, and the Athenian envoy answered him before the Lacedaemonian could speak. “King of the Syracusans,” he said, “Hellas sends us to you to ask not for a leader but for an army. You however, say no word of sending an army without the condition of your being the leader of Hellas; it is the command alone that you desire. [2] Now as long as you sought the leadership of the whole force, we Athenians were content to hold our peace, knowing that the Laconian was well able to answer for both of us; but since, failing to win the whole, you would gladly command the fleet, we want to let you know how the matter stands. Even if the Laconian should permit you to command it, we would not do so, for the command of the fleet, which the Lacedaemonians do not desire for themselves, is ours. If they should desire to lead it, we will not withstand them, but we will not allow anyone else to be admiral. [3] It would be for nothing, then, that we possess the greatest number of seafaring men in Hellas, if we Athenians yield our command to Syracusans,—we who can demonstrate the longest lineage of all and who alone among the Greeks have never changed our place of habitation; of our stock too was the man of whom the poet Homer says that of all who came to Ilion, he was the best man in ordering and marshalling armies. We accordingly cannot be reproached for what we now say. ” “My Athenian friend,” Gelon answered, “it would seem that you have many who lead, but none who will follow. Since, then, you will waive no claim but must have the whole, it is high time that you hasten home and tell your Hellas that her year has lost its spring.” [2] The significance of this statement was that Gelon's army was the most notable part of the Greek army, just as the spring is the best part of the year. He accordingly compared Hellas deprived of alliance with him to a year bereft of its spring. Hdt. 7.157-162