

SOPHRONISMOS

THE RISE OF ALCIBIADES



Allen R. Hansen

Sophronismos
– The Rise of Alcibiades

Allen R. Hansen

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For all the Myrtos,
especially mine

Books in This Series:

Sophronismos – The Rise of Alcibiades
Sophronismos – The Seduction of Aristocles
Sophronismos – Death of the Philosopher King

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PREFACE

This book is a work of historical fiction about Socrates, and, ultimately, the evolution of his philosophy during his mid-life years. It is intended for those interested in history, philosophy, or biographies, and fans of non-fiction will also find extensive information about daily life and events in classical Greece that should satiate their need for factual knowledge. This book also tells a story that I hope will be entertaining, and at times moving, incorporating passionate moments, and timeless themes.

Socrates' life is very much a matter of conjecture, as most of what is attributed to the man is drawn from the writings of Plato, and also Xenophon, who were acquainted with him only during the last decade or so before his death at the age of seventy. In addition, their treatises, written after Socrates' death, seem biased to suit their theses, possibly reflecting their own thoughts, rather than the true character or words of their subject. Therefore, Socrates' life must be pieced together from fragments of information and brief stories that have likely been embellished throughout the centuries.

It is reasonable to speculate that in his earlier years Socrates was a much different person from the man portrayed in the dialogues of Plato and Xenophon. His training as a youth was almost certainly traditional, concentrating on mathematics, natural sciences, law, public speaking, and physical education, all in contrast with his philosophical legacy in which self-examination and

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enlightenment of the soul are fundamental. Indeed, even in the dialogue *Phaedo*, Plato's character of Socrates explains how his intellectual pursuits were different during his youth:

When I was young, Cebes, I had a prodigious desire to know that department of philosophy which is called Natural Science; this appeared to me to have lofty aims, as being the science which has to do with the causes of things, and which teaches why a thing is, and is created and destroyed; and I was always agitating myself with the consideration of such questions... (as Translated by Benjamin Jowett)

Additionally, Aristophanes, the comic playwright, was definitively critical of Socrates, representing him as an unkempt fool, practicing the worst sort of rhetoric to influence the minds of others, and categorizing him as a teacher for hire, or sophist. Aristophanes was just one source, working in a creative medium, but he had the distinction of knowing Socrates during his earlier years, nearly two decades before either Plato or Xenophon. Therefore, Aristophanes' plays, and those of several other contemporaries, add to the theory that Socrates underwent a significant metamorphosis during his life, and emphasize the reality that he was not uniformly admired.

This book covers a period of approximately twenty years, from ca. 432-412 BC. During this time, Socrates aged from his late thirties to his late-fifties, and some of the most important events of his life would have occurred in this period. This included participation in numerous battles during the Peloponnesian War, and interactions with some of the most prominent men of classical Athens. It is in this period, then, that Socrates underwent his transformation, and this book explores the environment in which he lived, and the factors that influenced this founding father of western philosophy.

Preface

Great effort has been made to accurately represent the timeline of actual events and actual people whenever possible. By necessity, though, some details had to be surmised, with hard facts regarding Socrates' private life particularly difficult to come by. Therefore, this book must be considered a work of fiction, but I consider it to be a plausible representation, with its key situations supported by one scholarly theory or another. The reader is encouraged to perform their own research to follow up on the people, lexicon, and happenings mentioned in this book.

Just as Socrates left no written documents of his own, requiring us to rely on others to tell us about the man, this book is also written from the perspective of an observer, Socrates' father. His name was Sophroniscus, which is accepted as factual, and he was the inspiration for the main themes of the book and the title, Sophronismos. I honor him in the title partly because he narrates the story, and also because he is an important character who undergoes a journey of his own, in parallel with that of his son. In addition, sophronismos, which is the origin of his name, means calling to soundness of mind and self-control, and is an essential foundation of the Socratic Method, as demonstrated time and again in Plato's dialogues.

The prominent people in Socrates' life also served to define him, both in life and for centuries since his death. Most notably, Alcibiades was intimately connected with the man, particularly during the period in which this book takes place. Alcibiades' exploits are legendary, or perhaps notorious is a better description, and there is no doubt that Socrates' association with Alcibiades had a significant influence on him and his status in classical Athenian society. This book, therefore, follows the life of Alcibiades closely, since, as you will see, the lives of these two men become substantially intertwined.

Also significant are Critias and Plato, both of whom appear in this book, but play much more important roles in the second volume of this series, Sophronismos – The

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Seduction of Aristocles, which begins where this book leaves off, and dramatizes Socrates' life up until his execution. Finally, there is also Aristotle, who was a student of Plato and highly influenced by Socrates, and whose contributions to philosophy are considered by some to be greater than those of his predecessors. The final volume of the series, Sophonismos – Death of the Philosopher King, recounts his struggles.

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PART I

CHAPTER 1

THE ELYSIAN FIELDS

Why I have been so fortunate to dwell in Elysium I do not know. In death, I find, understanding does not come any easier for me, though time and opportunity are now plentiful for my observations. In life, I was a simple stonemason, and not one hectare of land did I own. Still, I had some measure of wealth, and as a free citizen of the state enjoyed a modest amount of leisure and reflection.

My name was Sophroniscus, of the deme Alopece, in the tribe of Antiochis, citizen of Athens. My only son is Socrates, named for my father, and born of my only wife, Phaenarete. She survived me by many years, had remarried, and bore another child named Patrocles, half-brother of Socrates. Of my friends, Lysimachus was closest, and being the son of Aristides the Just, pulled me into many encounters with prominent men of the time. I experienced first-hand how policy was formulated and opinions swayed, so I often wonder if Lysimachus influenced my destination in death, as he had done so many times in life.

Of those mentioned so far, all have by now passed to the underworld, except Socrates. Occasionally, I see some of them, in a sense, but we cannot speak. Being dead, we may observe, but not interact in any significant way. We exist together amongst extraordinary beauty, but are ultimately

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alone with only our thoughts. There is a Sun in this world, and stars, but I do not know if they are the same as those gazed upon by those above.

I am also able to observe the living. Mostly, though, I have followed the life of only one person - my son. For this obsession I have been scolded by Kronos, ruler of Elysium, subordinate of Hades, and deposed Titan god. Kronos has the power to communicate his will here, somehow, and in our first encounter threatened to punish me by banishing me to the Asphodel Meadows. We are taught early on that this is a place that is equally good and evil, bland in its character. It is said to be a less perfect manifestation of life on Earth, infested with fluttering bats that perpetually bite and tear at the dead, precluding any moment of peace. A partial consolation is that the souls in Asphodel are cleansed by drinking from the river Lethe, and they are eventually reborn back on Earth, most often as animals, rather than humans.

Worse yet, there is also Tartarus, we are told. This third region of Hades is where the evil are forced to perform grueling and monotonous tasks, the severity of which is dictated by their crimes, as judged by the divine Rhadamanthus. Deities, as well as mortals, may be condemned to Tartarus, and the fates of the most notorious are recounted to each new generation as warnings that justice finds all. Tityos, a giant and son to Zeus and a mistress, Elara, attempted to rape Leto, a Titan princess. For this he was killed by Apollo and sentenced to endure for all eternity the anguish of a vulture feeding upon his liver, regrown as fast as it was consumed. Notably, there is also Sisyphus, ancient king of Ephyra, charged with the task of pushing a large boulder up a steep slope, only to have it roll down again as he reaches the summit. His crimes were numerous, having murdered travelers and guests for his own pleasure, ruled through fear, seduced his niece, and betrayed Zeus.

You can appreciate, then, why I feel grateful to be here in Elysium, which is said to be reserved for the blessed, according to Virgil. And according to Homer, this honored

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place is inhabited by those felled by wounds received in cause to their country, and by holy priests, and those whose memory is beloved for their service to mankind. The latter distinction includes the most accomplished poets, and also those whose inventions in the practical arts have contributed to the prosperity of their society.

I do not understand how any of these lofty characteristics can be applied to me. Certainly, I contributed to the grand architecture and monuments of my city, through my vocation, but the most delicate of sculptures and intricate designs were the work of others. I fought in some minor skirmishes while policing the empire, but my conscription was happily limited as our state enjoyed an extended period of relative peace during much of my adult life. I died of natural disease of the heart, instigated by a troublesome bowel movement, so there was nothing heroic in my death.

Such is my bewilderment, and it is my quest to uncover the reasons for my good fortune. Also troubling is the apparent possibility that souls may move from one realm of Hades to another. After all, Kronos himself was initially condemned to Tartarus after being overthrown by Zeus. After time, Kronos was redeemed, appointed ruler of Elysium, and given an exquisite palace by Zeus. How Kronos accomplished this feat I do not know, and it has become part of my pursuit, for I fear that I may fall in the opposite direction. My admonishment by Kronos was severe, so if I should find myself in Asphodel, or worse, I wish to be prepared to make my way back.

As for my son, Socrates, whose life I continue to follow closely, I wish only to ensure that he is well received in the underworld when the time comes. I know of no way to influence the outcome, but I am compelled to consider any possibility. There was little to concern me initially, as my son had surpassed me in every way very early in his adult life. However, when Alcibiades first befriended him I could not predict the impact this was to have.

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It was during the Battle of Potidaea, several years after my death, that Alcibiades became enamored with Socrates. Alcibiades was merely eighteen years of age and on his first major expedition, much younger than the thirty seven year old veteran Socrates. The two had known each other for quite a while as each frequented the gymnasium to take exercise, and each bathed in the common baths, but their interactions until then were more courteous than friendly. The pair was part of an Athenian fleet of forty ships under the command of General Callias II, which included two thousand hoplites sent to reinforce an initial contingent of thirty ships with one thousand hoplites. The mission of this combined force was to suppress an uprising, demolish the defensive walls, expunge foreign conspirators, and bring hostages back to Athens. As a member of the Delian League, Potidaea was obliged to pay tribute to Athens. In return, Athens granted them freedom, provided protection, and ensured access to lucrative trading markets.

Potidaea, a city on the Chalcidice peninsula, was originally founded as a colony of Corinth. Understandably, extensive familial ties still existed between the cities and, as it happens, Corinth was aligned with Sparta as part of the Peloponnesian League. The Delian and Peloponnesian Leagues controlled most of Greece at this time, and the relationship between the two had always been tenuous. Thirteen years earlier, at the end of First Peloponnesian War, the city-states of Athens and Sparta agreed to respect the sovereignty of each alliance, and to handle conflicts through arbitration.

With support and assurances from Corinth and Macedonia, though, Potidaea revolted and refused to capitulate to Athenian requests. A siege was launched by Athens, and all of Greece was aroused. The siege and naval blockade would last for several years, and a number of diplomatic conferences would be held between Athens and Sparta to try to settle the matter, but ultimately, the matter would be settled violently.

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Fortifications were built and rebuilt around Potidaea as battles erupted spontaneously throughout the seasons. By chance, Alcibiades and Socrates found themselves within the same battalion, sometimes fighting side-by-side during the struggles. Hoplite warfare breeds intimate liaisons as the combatants close ranks so that the shield of one soldier overlaps that of the next. Above the shields their eyes and spears penetrate forward, presenting a formidable deterrent to the enemy.

During most altercations one side would recognize that it was disadvantaged and fall back to defensive positions to fight another day. Bloody conflicts were inevitable, though, and decisive victories could only be achieved through hand-to-hand combat. Fighting the enemy at close quarters was arduous, requiring deft handling of a heavy shield, spear, and short broad sword. Their body armor was also substantial, consisting of a metal helmet, a cuirass around the torso, greaves, and additional guards to protect the hands and arms. The latter items were made of leather for most men, but metal could be afforded by the most wealthy as each combatant was responsible for procuring their own equipment.

Alcibiades was especially skilled in the techniques of this type of warfare and fought valiantly during each campaign. Eventually, though, his youth and desire for glory prevailed over judgment. During the most heated of battles he found himself surrounded by the enemy. He soon suffered a gashing injury to his right forearm and was thrust to the ground. It was only by the brave efforts of my son that Alcibiades was not killed that day. Socrates threw himself between his fallen comrade and the swarming foes. He barely managed to fight off the attackers in time for reinforcements to join the fray. Unrelenting, Alcibiades abandoned his shield and spear and rejoined the fight wielding his sword in his left hand. Those of the enemy who perceived him to be weakened attempted to finish him, but were quickly cut down themselves. I recall feeling immense

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pride on that day for my son and country, but now it is difficult for me to reconcile.

The war continued, but this battle was won. Recognizing its significance, a bull was offered for sacrifice by General Callias, and that evening the deep friendship between Socrates and Alcibiades was sown.

“General Callias, exalted warriors,” shouted Alcibiades. “I submit that the suit of armor be awarded to Socrates, whose valor saved the day, and my life. I will forever be indebted. We salute you.” Those who knew Alcibiades well were stunned, for they knew him to be very generous to his friends and allies, but such a gesture to a mere acquaintance of modest lineage was wholly unexpected. Socrates’ bravery had long ago been established and the men did not hesitate to cheer their acknowledgement of the proposal. Socrates, in fact, had once before received the prize of a new suit of armor, which was by tradition awarded to the soldier that had most distinguished himself during a major battle.

Socrates did not like to speak back then, and certainly was not accustomed to addressing a large audience, so distress was evident on his face as he rose to respond. “You honor me greatly, but I humbly withdraw my nomination for this prize. Today it was plain the momentum for victory was driven by Alcibiades, not by me. He credits me with saving his life, but I merely followed his charge into the melee. That my sword found its target more often than not I am beholden to Ares, but I cannot claim courage above any other among us. Heed my call and discharge the award to Alcibiades.” Socrates quickly retook his seat as the crowd pounded their shields with approval.

The genuineness of this discourse did not escape Alcibiades’ notice. Raised in privilege he was accustomed to praise and compliments, but the sincerity of the moment was unique for him. He stood silently holding his bandaged arm as his fate was decided. Both men were deserving of the honor, but Callias must have known that rewarding Alcibiades would greatly please Pericles, who was perhaps

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the most influential man in Athens at the time. Alcibiades was also the ranking officer, which was dictated by social and political standing, not experience. The decision, therefore, came quickly from their general. "Thank you, Socrates. I will indeed heed your advice. The prize goes to Alcibiades."

No one would deny the exceptional qualities possessed by Alcibiades - tall, handsome, humorous, muscular and lean. He was the son of Clinias, a wealthy and honorable man that fitted out his own galley during the First Peloponnesian War and was killed during the battle of Coronea while fighting the Boeotians. Alcibiades was only three years old at the time of his father's death, and the renowned brothers Pericles and Aripbron were made his guardians as they were nearly related to him, being cousins of his mother, Dinomache. Pericles, in particular, showed deep affection for the boy who spent much time at his home and trained with his own sons. During his studies, Alcibiades was considered to be mostly conscientious, and was afforded the best of tutors in all disciplines.

Given these amiable traits, most found Alcibiades alluring, even when he behaved badly, which he often did as he pushed the limits of social tolerance. Alcibiades also spoke with a slight lisp, which would have been a liability for most, but for him was somehow endearing. Above all other characteristics, though, it was his ambition and desire for superiority that set him apart, and was also disconcerting.

Socrates, by contrast, is short, balding, and overweight, and regarded as the converse of handsome, all bequeathed from his father. He is strong and agile, though, and has bested all but the largest men at the gymnasium. I provided him with a reasonable education, as he was a part-time student of Anaxagoras, Damon, and Archelaus. Before my death, I was also blessed to see him married. Myrto was his wife's name, and she was as pure as the sterling in the Delphi treasury. As for wealth, Socrates employed a crew of stonemasons and also owned over a hundred hectares of land that he leased to local farmers.

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As the embers dimmed on the eve of battle, most were acutely drunk. Some became very quiet and reflective, others boisterous. It was not uncommon for some of the older soldiers to seduce their younger comrades, as they would a slave girl. This was not a practice condoned by all, though everyone seemed to delight in cheering the pursuers, while simultaneously deriding those who succumbed. Only the elder participant, known as the *erastes*, would gain sexual gratification during these sordid encounters. And why the boys, known as *eromoi*, would accept the situation is unclear to me. Perhaps they gained some protection or comfort, being far from home, or maybe they perceived an ally in their future political and business ventures. For certain, contact with the free women of Athens was strictly controlled, less for moral reasons, but more to ensure that the paternity of offspring is protected and inheritances secured. As a result, meaningful female interaction for the men was rare and satisfaction for their base desires was limited, often dictated by the availability of coins in their pockets to procure *pornai*, or courtesans.

It was during this time of the evening that Alcibiades approached Socrates to engage him personally. “Socrates, it is Alcibiades. May I speak?” Socrates was in his tent reading by lamp light, as he did not enjoy socializing too much in those days. Without speaking, or even lifting his gaze from the scroll on his lap, he waved to Alcibiades to enter. “I will always be indebted to you, Socrates, for saving my life. And your praise for me I value more than any possession.”

“Nonsense,” Socrates interrupted, “All are heroes that perform what is expected of them.”

“Why do you not join the men in their celebration? There is much talk about the spoils of victory,” Alcibiades asked.

“I am content here, and no jousting by me will impact my share,” was the reply.

Alcibiades surveyed the tent. It was shared with many others, but none was present. About a dozen scrolls

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surrounded Socrates, and some he recognized to be of Homer, others seemed more recent. “That book you are reading, is it new,” came another question thrust upon the elder.

I do not believe that it was irritation at the root of Socrates’ slow responses, rather it seemed to be bewilderment. Why had this well-born youth sought him out? Socrates obliged him in any case, “It is a draft... from an acquaintance... Herodotus.”

This exchange for Alcibiades proved to be yet another fresh encounter since never before did he have to work so hard to engage a conversation. He pressed on. “Yes. I have heard of him. He is one the pensioners that lingers about the Agora. What is his interest?”

“This chapter documents the old wars with Persia,” Socrates indulged. “Others set out to describe the state of the sciences, or cultural customs.”

“There are already treatises on such subjects, are there not?” Alcibiades asked.

“True enough,” Socrates continued, “but he has made much effort to consult multiple sources for his dissertations. Recollections are unavoidably biased, and he has attempted here to report just what he has been told to him. This is of value – do you not agree?”

Alas, Alcibiades’ persistence prevailed and Socrates was now committed to the dialogue. The conversation never strayed from scientific and historical themes, which were not the sort preferred by Alcibiades. However, as I have already eluded, Alcibiades was especially adept at making people comfortable, if it suited him, and both were astonished when they realized that they had been speaking for several hours.

“Forgive me, Socrates, I did not intend to dominate the evening. I will leave you now in peace,” Alcibiades apologized as he stood.

Socrates was gracious. “I have been invigorated by your visit,” he said. “Please come again if you are so inclined.”

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With this unassuming invitation, Alcibiades was struck with an idea and posed a proposition. “When we return, would you consider advising me and directing my studies? I know many prominent men, so I think you too would find it worth your while.”

Socrates was taken aback. Although he prided himself to be well read and conversant in many disciplines, his path in life was established. “I am descended from Daedalus,” Socrates resisted, referring to the mythical founder of Greek sculpture. “You are of the elite, consorting with the influential. I associate with the stone gods on the Acropolis whose eyes and ears have not the ability to discern my flaws.”

Alcibiades laughed and was not to be deterred. He let the offer stand as he left the tent. “Contemplate my proposal, Socrates. There is opportunity for us both.”

Socrates blew out the lamp and lied back to sleep. He was restless, though, and did not immediately find slumber. It seemed natural that Alcibiades would occupy his mind that night.

The siege was not nearly over, but the final outcome was inevitable. The Athenians had managed to drive the remaining Potidaeans and Corinthians back to the fortified city center where they were fully surrounded. The port was also blockaded, so the city and peninsula had been returned to Delian control.

Callias’ men were charged with guarding land access to the city from the north, and Alcibiades was given his first command. His task was to lead a group of six men on nightly patrols over the foothills between the main roads where the bulk of the forces were concentrated. Late one night, his squad spotted a dark figure in the distance. They were able to track down the suspect in short order and found in his possession a satchel. Alcibiades took the satchel

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and withdrew alone to a nearby outcropping of rocks while his men held the hostage and stood guard. He made a small fire and began to peruse the package.

Alcibiades uncovered numerous documents in the satchel, but the papers did not divulge the assets or vulnerabilities of its authors who understood that the documents could ultimately fall into the hands of the enemy. Instead, they contained details listings of the Athenian forces, along with diagrams of their key positions and defenses.

What intrigued Alcibiades most, though, was the letter, sealed with wax, which was among the papers. It was signed by Aristeus himself, general of the Corinthian army besieged at Potidaea. In it, Aristeus ordered that ten talents be paid to the addressee by Corinth when they come to his aide in Potidaea. Also, Aristeus promised to relinquish territory, as agreed when they last met. The letter was cryptic and the name of the addressee was not provided, but the letter clearly implicated a conspirator with significant resources.

Alcibiades returned to his men, grabbed the courier, and withdrew again to the fire. Standing alone with the prisoner, he began his questioning. "Where were you taking this package," he asked. The man looked away and did not utter a sound. Alcibiades rejoined by thrusting the butt end of his spear into the man's abdomen, causing the man to double over and fall to his knees. Alcibiades reiterated, "For whom was this package intended?" There was still no response, so diplomacy was over as far as Alcibiades was concerned. He pulled the man by his right ear and sliced it off in one smooth motion with his sword. The man cried out and put his hand to the wound in a vain attempt to slow the rush of blood. Alcibiades continued, "Answer the question." This time, Alcibiades barely paused to allow the man to speak before he sliced off the left ear as well.

Terrified, the prisoner cried out, "Don't kill me... Please don't kill me... I am just a messenger... This is not done...I don't even know what I was carrying."

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“But you do know where you were going,” Alcibiades responded while simultaneously grabbing the man by his right wrist and raising his sword above his head.

Seeing that he was about to lose his hand the man spoke up. “Alright... I was heading to Macedonia for reinforcements.”

The Chalcidice peninsula is very close to Macedonia, and it was well known that the Macedonians wanted to expand their territory. In addition, a renegade Macedonian general, Perdicas, and his small army of men had already participated in the battles alongside the Corinthians and Potidaeans. Therefore, Alcibiades had no reason to doubt the man.

For a minute, Alcibiades paced around the prisoner assessing the information and contemplating his next move. Without warning, Alcibiades again raised his sword and plunged it into the prisoner’s chest. The men of his squad rushed to the scene to aid their commander, but the courier was already dead. Alcibiades explained the situation. “He lunged for my spear, forcing me to act with my sword. Fortunately, I was able to extract the necessary information.” The men were loyal to Alcibiades, so his lie went unquestioned.

Returning to camp at sunrise, Alcibiades promptly delivered the captured satchel to Callias. The general inspected the contents and quickly found the letter from Aristeus. “Where is the courier?” Callias asked.

“He resisted and tried to attack me with my spear... I had to kill him,” was Alcibiades’ story.

Callias was not concerned. “No matter, I suspect he was destined for Macedonia for more reinforcements. The Macedonians have been interfering in this region for a long time...”

Alcibiades interrupted, “Excuse me, general, before killing my prisoner I was able to torture him.” Alcibiades paused momentarily as he produced the severed ears of his captive as evidence for the general. “He told me he was

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delivering the package to the Spartan ambassador at Corinth. I have no other proof, though”.

Why Alcibiades was so eager to implicate Sparta I do not know. Certainly, he was aware that this would be interpreted as a breach of the peace agreement, and would influence the ongoing diplomatic negotiations between Athens and Sparta. It was also well known that Pericles, his guardian and military general, was unhappy with the peace agreement, so perhaps Alcibiades saw an opportunity to force more favorable terms for Athens.

In any case, Callias was thoroughly convinced since information garnered from torture was considered to be the most reliable. “Good work, Alcibiades. I will be sure to pass this on.”

The story of Alcibiades capturing the courier, torturing him to obtain valuable information, and slaying him in a struggle raced through the ranks. Another legend of the young man had been born, adding further to his renown. When Socrates learned of the incident, his admiration for young Alcibiades swelled.

Several weeks later, sixteen hundred hoplites arrived from Athens to relieve some of the troops at Potidaea. Alcibiades and Socrates prepared for their return home.

CHAPTER 2

THE AESTHETICS OF MYRTO

My friend, Lysimachus, was still alive then, and rushed to Socrates' house to convey the news to Myrto. His knock on the door was answered by Angelikie, who was an aged woman of about fifty who lived and worked in the house. More precisely, Angelikie was a slave owned by Socrates, but she was treated more like an aunt of Myrto's than legal property. Relationships between slaves and masters in Athens were rarely genial, though, as brutality was the preferred means of discipline for slaves, who comprised a full third of the work force in Athens. Those assigned to work in the state owned silver mines of Laureion in Attica were especially unfortunate.

It was just five years prior that Angelikie was brought to his home by Socrates after he returned from a battle between Athens and a small island city that was forced to join the Delian League. Initially, Myrto protested the acquisition of a slave, but relented after learning of Angelikie's situation. Her village was taken after a short but brutal siege, and the Athenian retribution was extreme by any standard. After capitulating, all military aged men of her village were executed, including her husband, her son, and a brother. The remaining able bodied women and children were

The Aesthetics of Myrto

brought back to Athens as slaves, and the elderly of her village were left to fend for themselves.

Angelikie readily welcomed Lysimachus into the house, as he was uncle to Myrto, which I previously neglected to mention since it requires some explanation. It may seem natural that my son might marry the niece of my friend, but economic and political factors must always be considered in such unions. Despite their elite upbringing, Aristides the Just being the father of Lysimachus and grandfather to Myrto, their family fortunes were decimated by political maneuvering. In Athens, it is mandatory for each family to be categorized into one of four societal groups based on wealth, which then dictates the political and military offices that can be held. Originally, their family belonged to the upper echelons of the second highest group, the hippeis, or knights, but they quickly fell into the third group, the zeugitai, after the death of Aristides. Further misfortune followed, until their family found themselves at the bottom of the economic rankings, the thetes, and at times even faced enslavement.

Lysimachus, therefore, went from associating with the likes of Pericles, to being forced to sell a variety of wares at the Agora after Aristides' death. During the same period, my family was raised into the ranks of the hippeis, just barely, thanks to the business successes of Socrates. A marriage of Socrates to Myrto, then, normally would not have been considered, particularly since no dowry was being offered.

For women and girls of the upper classes, interaction with males other than immediate relatives was strictly forbidden, and even venturing out of the house was strongly discouraged. In most cases, marriages were arranged without the betrothed ever laying eyes upon one another. However, since Socrates and Myrto both resided in the poorer classes during much of their early years, they managed to contrive occasions to meet with one another in the public areas of town without scrutiny. Ultimately,

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Socrates insisted on marrying Myrto, and due to my close friendship with Lysimachus, I could not deny it. Ever since, Socrates has graciously been helping several members of Myrto's family financially, including Lysimachus.

Angelikie called for Myrto, who could be heard working in the back rooms. For his status, Socrates' home was considered modest, having two main rooms in the front where male guests were entertained and Socrates slept and studied. In the back there were three small rooms where meals were prepared, items stored, and the women slept and spent most of their time. Like most homes, the rooms were sparsely furnished and there was only one entrance located at the front of the house. This latter feature was both for security from intruders, and to ensure that the activities of the women could be monitored. Behind the house, there was a small barn and courtyard with chickens and other small livestock.

"Greetings, Uncle. It is always lovely to see you. May we offer you some wine and some bread?" Myrto said as she entered the main room.

"Just some wine, thank you," replied Lysimachus. His response immediately triggered curiosity from Myrto as it was highly unusual for Lysimachus to turn down food. She did not question him, though, and patiently waited for him to continue. Angelikie left them alone and went to the back to fetch him the drink.

"Some of the fleet is returning tomorrow from Potidaea, and Socrates will be among them," was the news from Lysimachus. "The siege continues, but it is said to be all but over for the conspirators. Also, word has come of Socrates' bravery, which was publicly commended by General Callias."

Myrto could hold her voice no longer, "Is he well... was he injured?"

"I have not been told one way or another, Myrto," Lysimachus replied, "so I take this as a good sign. I head to the docks directly so that I may meet them in the morning..."

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“Take me with you, Uncle. I will be discrete,” she interrupted, but knew it was not to be.

“Know your place, Myrto. You are a privileged woman now and must remain aloof. I will return with Socrates tomorrow, so be sure to prepare a proper welcome.” Angelikie returned with the wine for Lysimachus. He grabbed the cup and fully consumed its contents in one swallow. He nodded to the women and left the house to begin his journey.

The harbor was located south-west of Athens in a small town called Piraeus. The distance between the two could be walked in a couple of hours, longer if you were loaded down, and Lysimachus arrived at the docks in time to enjoy the sunset over the bay. Accustomed to many visitors, the harbor town had ample lodgings available at low prices, which usually consisted of straw filled mattresses lined up on the dirt floor of a single room building. This was not for Lysimachus, though, as these days he preferred to spend his money on wine. He spent the night stumbling from one tavern to the next, hoping to secure free drinks by telling stories about his father. He slept briefly, between rounds.

Late the following morning the ships entered the Bay of Sdea. The sails of the twenty or so triremes were stowed, with the final leg of their journey being propelled solely by the oarsmen. Each ship was imposing, consisting of three levels of rowers on each side, a large bronze battering ram at the front, a single large mast soaring upwards at mid-deck, and was substantial enough that over two hundred men could be conveyed within its structure, albeit uncomfortably. Their trek across the harbor was swift, but the process of docking and unloading required several hours more.

Lysimachus located Socrates, who was talking with their mutual friend Hippocrates at the time. Hippocrates, too, had participated in the expedition to provide medical support, as he was a physician by profession. He was only in his late twenties at this time, but was accomplished beyond his years, given his family’s long heritage in this vocation.

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“Welcome home heroes. We are blessed by Zeus that our clan have returned unscathed. Let me help you with your things.” Socrates returned Lysimachus’ greeting by clasping their right arms together and hugging each other with their left.

“I am well pleased that my eyes may again gaze upon my homeland, Uncle. I have acquired a new slave woman.” Socrates gestured to the young woman sitting on a pile of equipment behind him with her head down. “She will carry my things. How has our family fared these past months?”

“All are well, and you have been constantly in our thoughts,” Lysimachus assured. “I know of no ill happenings in your family either, Hippocrates, and I expect your father will be along shortly.”

Hippocrates smiled and began to speak, but was instantly interrupted by Alcibiades, who pushed his way through the crowd. “Socrates, our current adventure ends,” Alcibiades jauntily exclaimed as he slapped Socrates on the back. “Our time for now has been liberated, my friend. We must exploit the moment. Consider what we have discussed.”

Alcibiades had vaguely acknowledged Lysimachus during this discourse, despite having recognized him from his youth. And he completely ignored Hippocrates, who had tended to his wounds only three months prior. Considered a mere craftsman, Hippocrates was well below Alcibiades in stature, and Alcibiades felt no compulsion to acknowledge anyone for providing menial services. Lysimachus and Hippocrates, therefore, were rightly bewildered by Alcibiades’ interaction with Socrates, who, after all, had also emerged from the lower classes, as I mentioned.

Pericles himself also emerged from the crowd and headed toward Alcibiades. “Nephew! My heart swells to see you again,” Pericles beamed as he embraced his ward. “Your valor precedes you... everyone excitedly awaits your return.”

The reunion was disrupted by giggling emanating from outside their circle. Socrates quickly turned to identify the source as his slave woman, who clearly was amused by the

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odd sight of Pericles' misshaped head. He admonished her with a formidable stare. Pericles was a commanding presence, but had been predisposed to shyness at a young age due to the appearance of his cranium, which was unusually elongated at the back. Many attribute his studious and pragmatic manner to his reclusive childhood.

Unlike Alcibiades, Pericles was pleasantly pleased to encounter Lysimachus and readily acknowledged the other members of the group. "Lysimachus... what a treat. I have missed you and your father. I think about him often. Why have I not seen you?"

Lysimachus responded timidly, "Circumstances have not been kind, my general. My condition is not as I would prefer, but I am privileged to enjoy the love of my large family, which now includes Socrates." Lysimachus put his hand on Socrates' shoulder and continued, "He is the son of my departed friend Sophroniscus, whom you may remember meeting."

"Yes, I think I do remember" was Pericles' reply. As I witnessed this from the beyond, I was skeptical that Pericles had truly remembered me, but I was comforted at the time that Athens was fortunate to have such a gracious and respectful leader.

Alcibiades again stepped in, "Uncle, you may have heard that my life was saved during battle by a brave and fearless man. This is that man," he said as he embraced Socrates' other shoulder, opposite from Lysimachus.

This caused Socrates to blush and fidget. He protested, "Alcibiades, you must stop. There is nothing exceptional about my actions, and you must bring an end to these tales."

"Nonsense," Pericles interjected. "I have heard the story from several sources, Socrates. My family is deeply grateful. You must come to our celebration tonight at my home... and please bring your friends here. I look forward to reminiscing, Lysimachus... and who is this?" Pericles had turned to Alcibiades to help identify Hippocrates, but it was clear that Alcibiades could not remember.

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Socrates rejoined, “This is Hippocrates, general. He was one of our doctors.”

“Yes, of course,” Pericles said with recognition clearly apparent in his expression. “Your father is Heraclides. He has attended to me many times. You and your father must attend tonight as well.” It disheartens me that Alcibiades was not more like his guardian, Pericles. So much pain could have been avoided.

The opportunity was finally open now for Hippocrates to speak, but he was slow to respond. “I am honored, general, but I live a good distance away and must relieve my father and help him attend to many patients. Another time, perhaps? You must excuse me, friends. I must be on my way.” Hippocrates bowed his head as he backed away.

Pericles also took this opportunity to move on. “Gentlemen, I will see you tonight.” He and Alcibiades nodded and retreated to a stand of horses being held nearby. They deftly mounted the great animals and galloped off. Owning horses was yet another manifest sign of their prosperity since only the wealthiest families could afford to feed such beasts. Their journey home would take less than half an hour and their possessions would follow later, carried on the backs of their slaves.

“Pick up my things, woman, and lets be on,” Socrates ordered his new slave. Though she was in her prime, she struggled to carry even a small amount since arduous work was new to her as she was from a privileged family in her homeland. Socrates feigned disgust and burdened himself with most of the gear. Lysimachus snickered at the sight of Socrates’ harshness, as he knew that any attempts to establish dominance would be quickly undermined by Myrto. Lysimachus also grabbed a few items and they were on their way.

Socrates and Lysimachus chatted only occasionally as they made their way back to Alopelce, which is a suburb immediately south-east of Athens. They followed the main road, which is perfectly straight and contained within the

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long walls. The Wall of Themistocles, named for the late politician and general that argued for its creation, was constructed in some parts from stone mined locally, and large logs imported from the north in other parts. The wall completely enclosed Athens, the port town of Piraeus, and the connecting road on which they traveled. Socrates' slave woman, named Eudoxia, rarely looked up during the journey. Perhaps this was because of her sadness, or perhaps it was because there was little to see, as the tall fortifications eclipsed all views on the sides.

When the city of Athens finally came into view, Socrates briefly became melancholy as he reflected on those who had sacrificed so much to ensure its survival and contribute to its prosperity. Eudoxia's reaction, by contrast, I recognized to be of stunned disbelief. The city that was renowned as a bastion of the arts and culture, seat of an empire, and conqueror of her homeland seemed nothing more than a cluster of nondescript, unorganized buildings. The roads were mostly unpaved and meandered about in random directions. The exception, of course, was the acropolis, which raised high above the city and could be easily seen during the entire walk from Piraeus. Atop the acropolis was the recently completed Parthenon, which is a magnificent temple constructed as a monument to Athena, patron goddess of the city. A golden statue of Athena resides in the center of the building and is so tall that it nearly touches the ceiling. Other smaller monuments and statues could also be seen on the acropolis, but were difficult to discern from their locale.

Pericles was mostly responsible for the building and beautification programs of the city of the preceding two decades. This ingratiated him significantly with the citizens of Athens, but caused much antagonism amongst the members of the Delian League. It was obvious that the escalating tribute money from the subservient city-states had paid for Pericles' excesses, and there was much speculation that this contributed significantly to the unrest of the times.

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The trio made their way to the edge of the city and soon arrived at Socrates' house. Socrates entered first and was quickly accosted by Myrto who ran toward him and kissed him and hugged him with all of her strength. Lysimachus and Eudoxia squeezed past the couple and dropped their loads in the middle of the main room.

"Welcome home, husband," Myrto spoke as she released her grasp. "This is a joyous day. We have prepared a special meal for you, including meat from one of our chickens that I sacrificed to give thanks to Poseidon for your safe return." Daily meals normally consisted of only vegetables, bread, eggs, and goat milk products. Meat was rare, and generally was consumed as part of a sacrifice ritual, so this was an extraordinary reception indeed. "Of course, you must stay and dine with Socrates, Uncle," Myrto offered to Lysimachus.

At that moment Myrto noticed Eudoxia standing behind the men with her head down and her hands clasped behind her back. Myrto's mood became serious in an instant. "Who is this visitor you have brought into our home, Socrates?" Lysimachus was wide eyed as his head spun away from Myrto and looked sympathetically toward Socrates, wondering how he was going to explain the new slave, and that they had other plans for dinner.

"I have acquired a new slave, Myrto," Socrates blurted out with an almost defiant tone. "Her name is Eudoxia and she will help you and Angelikie with the household chores and handle any errands that you require."

"You know that I do not approve of this, Socrates," Myrto interjected. "Take her elsewhere."

Socrates delicately pushed forward. "Her husband and father were killed in the conflict, so she was destitute," he explained, but quickly realized that this sounded almost compassionate, so he clarified. "I intended to send her to work in the stone quarries, but they wanted nothing of her, due to her scrawny arms. So, I brought her here until we find something else that she may be good for." Angelikie

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had also entered the room by this time, and she and Myrto glanced at each other and vainly attempted to hold back their smiles. The introduction reminded the women of Angelikie's arrival several years before, and they understood that Socrates had almost certainly saved this woman from certain death, or worse, but would never admit to such sentimentality.

Myrto motioned for Angelikie to take Eudoxia into the back, and Lysimachus seized the opportunity to make his escape. "I'll be on my way now. It's good to have you back, Socrates," Lysimachus said as he hurried through the door.

"What about dinner, Uncle?" Myrto called after him, but he was already gone. Her curiosity was peaked, so she pursued Socrates as he dragged some of his belongings into his sleeping quarters. "Why do you think my uncle was in such a hurry, Socrates? Is there something I should know?"

Socrates was a very quiet man, at least back then, but never avoided responding to a direct question, even if he knew the conversation was going to be uncomfortable. "He is preparing for a reception at Pericles' home tonight," he answered.

Myrto's arms dropped to her sides and her mouth opened slightly when she heard this news. "That's... wonderful. It has been a very long time since he has been invited to such an event. How did this come about?" she pried further.

Socrates continued to indulge his loving bride. "Pericles stumbled upon us at the docks. He recognized Lysimachus from the old days."

Myrto was accustomed to Socrates' terse responses, and knew she would ultimately emerge victorious if she persevered. "And how did Pericles happen to stumble upon you two?" she asked.

"We were talking to Alcibiades, his ward, and Pericles came over to welcome him home." Certainly this should have satisfied Myrto, Socrates thought, but she was not yet done with him.

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“But why were you talking to Alcibiades?” Socrates closed his eyes and silently chided himself for his missteps.

The conversation continued until Myrto uncovered nearly the entire story, including Socrates’ contributions to saving Alcibiades’ life, and his invitation to Pericles’ party. “So you will not be spending your first night home with me? Surely Pericles’ family is not more important to you than your own. Do not go. They will not miss you.”

Socrates wanted to agree with her, and also felt that he would not enjoy the experience since at that time he was uncomfortable at gatherings of this sort. He had not yet told Myrto everything, so he concluded that he should discuss his plans.

“Alcibiades offered me an opportunity to advise him and share my studies with him. There is also opportunity for me, of course, as this could provide connections for my other ventures.”

Myrto’s response surprised them both, “But he’s an ass.” Socrates did not immediately disagree, so Myrto continued to protest. “Such associations are bound to sour, Socrates. My grandfather, none other than Aristides the Just, was caught up in that political world and was eventually ostracized by his opponents, despite all that he had done for our city. He was exiled and could not return until his opponents met the same fate. He regained the public’s trust only after he gave away most of the family fortune. He secured his legacy, but at the expense of my heritage. Your businesses are doing well, Socrates. Why put them at risk?”

Socrates knew that Myrto’s concerns were justified, but he did not share her optimism that their livelihood was secure. “Many of the public construction projects have been completed, so work for my stonemasons has dwindled. Alcibiades confided in me while we were in Potidaea that we are on the brink of another war with Sparta and the Peloponnesian League, and he uncovered evidence that Sparta conspired with Corinth to stoke the revolt. We are well for the moment, but we must be open-minded about

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our future. I am also supporting much of your family now, and I must provide for my future son.”

Socrates regretted this last statement as soon as it had left his lips, but it could not be retrieved. Myrto’s eyes immediately glistened from the tears that she struggled to contain. They had been trying to conceive since the day they married. Several times they succeeded, only to lose the baby within the first month or two. Of all topics, this seemed to be the only one on which Myrto would not expound tirelessly. Socrates had finally put an end to the inquiry, but at a high price, so he relented. “I must attend the reception tonight, but I will not commit to any arrangement at this time. Go tend to the other women and enjoy your feast. I must prepare.”

Alcibiades had already been drinking and cavorting with the courtesans for an hour before any other guests arrived, including the host, Pericles. When Pericles entered the courtyard of his home, where the reception was held, he immediately went to Alcibiades to engage him in conversation. “Alcibiades, our home has been dreary in your absence. Your spirit has done much already to restore my soul. Regrettably, though, I must share with you the machinations that have transpired recently.”

Alcibiades put down his wine and reassured his uncle, “I am your loyal servant, general. What is troubling you?”

Pericles outlined the plot that was brewing, which was the most serious political confrontation he had faced in over a decade. “Several of my opponents have schemed to request additional audits of the state expenditures that I have been overseeing in our building projects.”

“This is an outrage, Uncle. You have been reelected strategos not even two months ago. Surely there is nothing of concern here. The people adore you more than ever,” Alcibiades reassured.

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“I am confident in my performance, of course,” Pericles continued. “But many materials were imported by necessity from numerous states, thereby engaging many foreign officials. Some payments could be misconstrued...”

“There are far more important matters for the Boule to consider,” Alcibiades interrupted, referring to the council of five hundred that sets the agenda for the Ecclesia, the legislative body of all citizens where policy was debated and voted on. “Do they not know that war with Sparta is looming?”

Pericles agreed with Alcibiades, but sighed as he contemplated how to explain the prevailing mood of the mob. “I have been warning the citizens that Sparta is jealous of our successes and has openly opposed the rebuilding of the Long Walls. Few have listened, until now. Thanks to you, Alcibiades, we have some evidence that Sparta has been conspiring with Corinth to destabilize our alliance. The letter you intercepted in Potidaea, destined for Spartan emissaries, has advanced my cause, but there are still many claiming the evidence is weak. All in the Boule have seen the letter, but they are quick to point out that the recipient is unnamed.”

There was a pause in their discourse as the pair contemplated the situation. It was brief, though, as it did not take long for Alcibiades to pose a resolution. “You must lobby the Boule to force Sparta’s intentions, Uncle. Is it not true that Megarian farmers have cultivated some of the consecrated lands of Demeter? And have the priests not protested this affront to our divine goddess of agriculture and fertility?”

“Yes. This is true,” Pericles confirmed, “but Athens relinquished that land as part of our peace agreement with Sparta. It is of little consequence, except perhaps to the most devout members of the Cult of Demeter.”

Alcibiades pressed on with his argument, “But it is also rumored that the Megarians have been providing sanctuary to runaway slaves. If we simply sanctioned Megara for this

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transgression, would they not seek advice from Sparta, with whom they are aligned, thereby forcing Sparta to intercede on their behalf?”

Pericles was intrigued by the plan, as he understood that this would refocus the attention of the Boule onto foreign affairs, stifling his opponents and illuminating Sparta's stance.

As Pericles and Alcibiades spoke, the courtyard filled with dozens of the most prominent men of the city, plus Socrates and Lysimachus. Aspasia, who was from Miletus and the mistress of Pericles that lived with him as if they were married, tapped Pericles on the shoulder and reprimanded him. “You are remiss, dearest. Your guests are waiting.”

“Of course, Aspasia,” Pericles conceded. He concluded his conversation with Alcibiades. “Tomorrow, you and I will draft a decree on behalf of the poor priests and slave owners who have been severely put upon by the actions of the Megarians.”

Pericles and Aspasia walked to the front of the courtyard. Aspasia caressed the back of Pericles peculiar skull as they made their way, and the whispers and looks of disapproval could not have been missed by the couple. Respectable women were not expected to associate with men outside of their family, so the only females generally allowed at events of this sort were courtesans and servants. Having divorced his wife many years earlier, around the end of the First Peloponnesian War, Pericles soon took up with Aspasia, who was proprietor of a brothel at the time. She has been by his side since.

Aspasia was generally mistrusted, as many feared that she swayed undue influence over Pericles. None in the crowd, however, would dare express their objections, either out of fear or respect, but Pericles' eldest sons from his ex-wife, Paralus and Xanthippus, would not interact with their father when Aspasia was present. They were the most critical of their father's relationship, perhaps because Aspasia had a

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young illegitimate son from Pericles, who could someday threaten their inheritances.

In addition to the public's disdain, Aspasia had also recently endured the threat of imprisonment by the Athenian courts. She was accused of impiety and corrupting Athenian society by disregarding the accepted norms of womanhood, which was not difficult to argue. Pericles expended the full weight of his influence to save his love, including a tearful oration to the jury. Aspasia was acquitted, but the event further eroded Pericle's feeling of self-assurance.

Pericles stepped forward and, being a great statesman, knew to keep his greeting short. "Eat, drink, and enjoy the company, my friends."

Lysimachus escorted Socrates among the elite, as he had done with me decades before, introducing him to old acquaintances of his father. Socrates spoke little during the evening, but was pleased to find the conversations to be more interesting than he had expected. He would walk away, though, when the topics ultimately degenerated into common gossip. Socrates also nearly laughed on several occasions, which was unusual for him back then, as he listened to Alcibiades entertain the revelers with one colorful story after another. He was also surprised when he realized that he and Lysimachus were among the last dozen remaining at the end of the evening.

Alcibiades caught up with Socrates as he was preparing to leave. "Thank you for coming, my friend. Did you enjoy yourself?" Alcibiades asked.

"Yes. The conversation was to my liking," was all Socrates could muster.

"I have told everyone that you will be joining me as my advisor, Socrates. When can we start?"

He knew this was coming, but was prepared with a response. "Currently, my family obligations fully occupy my time, and I have many in-laws that are relying on me."

It was unintentional, I am certain, but Lysimachus was nearby and Alcibiades noticed that he was deeply

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embarrassed by Socrates' comment. Lysimachus was relieved, then, when Alcibiades graciously ended his pursuit. "All things work themselves out, my friends. Good evening gentlemen."

CHAPTER 3

CULTIVATING A TORRENT

The weather had finally cleared after three days straight of rain. As a result, the Agora was unusually crowded that morning, which the women hoped would help obscure their activities. Socrates had originally refused to allow Myrto to accompany Angelikie and Eudoxia to the market as he felt her social status now precluded her from such common tasks. Myrto had long ago recognized that her privileges were inversely linked to her husband's prosperity, and she had been voicing dissatisfaction with her deteriorating condition for many years by then. Socrates knew, therefore, that his objections would lead to a heated argument between the two, but he was taken aback on this occasion as her emotional distress was uncharacteristic.

Her argument was that the Greater Eleusinian Mysteries, which occurred only every five years, were planned for the following month. The women of the city, slaves and citizens alike, played prominent roles in all of the religious festivals throughout the year, and Myrto was charged with a critical task for this most sacred of occasions. It was her responsibility to prepare the ingredients for the consecrated drink that was consumed during the climactic final days of the festival. The beverage is called kykeon, and is said to possess enlightening qualities that allow the initiates to

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experience the highest state of mystical awareness. Such a task could not be trusted to their servants, she insisted, so Socrates was forced to yield.

It was true enough that Myrto was required to accumulate the components for the kykeon, but this sacrosanct assignment was not the source of her anxiety. She had lied to her husband and was helping to plot the escape of Eudoxia, his property. In only a few days Myrto had befriended Eudoxia and learned that she had two brothers. It was possible that one or both of them was still alive since some of the Potidaean forces fled north to Macedonia after being cut off from the main defenses of the city. It was resolved, then, that the women would arrange for Eudoxia to travel to Megara, and then on to Macedonia where she would search for her siblings. Even if she failed to track down her brothers, Myrto felt, Eudoxia was still very young and deserved every chance to have a family of her own. Slave ownership was yet another aspect of her growing affluence that caused Myrto more despair than bliss.

The Agora was located at the south-west base of the Acropolis and consisted of a large, unpaved center square surrounded by several government buildings and stoas. The stoas were promenades lined with stone pillars and capped with roofs where the more substantial vendors hawked their wares, protected from the elements. The majority of craftsmen and farmers, however, setup shop along the paths of the square wherever they could find space. A number of vendors were from Megara, as their city offered a particularly favorable trade environment with little government oversight. Myrto was unsure whom they should approach, and felt slightly betrayed when Angelikie took the lead and guided them to the proper contact.

Angelikie motioned with her hand for Myrto to engage an elderly woman with gray, wiry hair standing behind several barrels of grains. "I wish to secure passage for my friend here to Megara," Myrto said as she nodded her head toward Eudoxia.

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“Clearly, this is a very special package, my dear, so it will cost... one hundred drachmas,” the old woman offered.

“That’s outrageous...,” Myrto protested. After all, another slave woman could be purchased for the same amount.

The old woman continued to state her case. “There are many who would accept less, my dear, only to recoup their risk by reselling your treasure into slavery elsewhere. Does that not concern you?” Myrto had not considered this and instinctively looked to Angelikie for approval. Angelikie hesitated for a moment, but eventually nodded in agreement.

Myrto sighed as she contemplated her response. One hundred drachmas was more than her household allowance for an entire month. Fortunately, she had already hoarded more than half that amount, but was unsure if she could keep the deficit from Socrates. She knew that Eudoxia’s absence could easily be concealed for several weeks since Socrates never ventured into the back rooms of his house, and, if necessary, she could claim that Eudoxia had been sent temporarily to assist a relative. Socrates would grumble, but would not protest.

“How can we be sure that you will not be stopped at the gates? This woman does not at all resemble a Megarian,” Myrto pressed.

“My dear,” the old woman smiled as she responded. “How do you think we can afford to sell this grain at such low prices? With our barrels emptied, we have plenty of space for our valuable return cargo.”

Myrto felt somewhat embarrassed by her naivety. She had no idea such dealings were occurring, let alone in the most public of places. “It’s agreed, then,” Myrto relented. “How do we proceed?”

“We leave in three days. The girl should meet us here at sunset, but you must pay in advance to hold her spot.” Reluctantly, Myrto looked around and pulled a sack from under her robe and handed it to the old woman. “Three days, my dear,” the old woman repeated

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That evening, Nicias sought out Cleon at his home and found him in the street talking to Menon of Pharsalus. It was already dark, and Nicias did not want to chance being seen conversing with this pair. "May we speak in private," Nicias asked curtly before Cleon could even recognize the man that had darted out of the shadows. Cleon quickly escorted the men to his door and invited them into his small house without a word, for astonishment and curiosity had silenced his tongue. The purpose of the visit was a mystery to Cleon, but he knew precisely what had triggered such agitation from his unexpected guest.

Nicias and Cleon shared few characteristics in common. Most notably, though, both aspired to be elected strategos and to wield the political influence that the office afforded. Each year, the ten tribes of Athens, loosely based on geography, elected a strategos from among their male citizens in good standing that had reached the age of thirty, which Nicias and Cleon had not long before attained. The ten strategoi were the supreme generals of the forces, charged with executing the military goals set forth by the Ecclesia.

The Ecclesia had final word on all public policy. Any adult male citizen could choose to participate in the debates in the Ecclesia, and vote on all proposals put forward. Each citizen was counted equally, regardless of stature, and it was not unusual for more than five thousand citizens to participate in the most important votes. A quorum of six thousand was required to impose ostracism on any citizen.

In turn, the agenda of the Ecclesia was set by the Boule, which consists of five hundred men selected each year randomly by lot, fifty from each tribe, and individuals could only serve twice in their life. In this manner, then, no one tribe, or family, could expect to obtain disproportionate control over the destiny of the city. Indeed, the vote of even a strategos did not count for any more than that of a lowly

farm hand. However, being the sole elected representative of an entire tribe, the opinions of the strategoi could not be ignored, and were certain to be heard and weighted heavily as the Boule and Ecclesia debated laws and decrees. The strategoi, therefore, held the most powerful offices in the extreme democracy governing Athens.

The similarities between Nicias and Cleon ended there, as otherwise the two men could not have been more different. Nicias came from an extremely wealthy family and had gained some notoriety for his passable oratory skills exhibited in the Ecclesia. He advocated war only as a last resort, and was deeply troubled by the antagonistic rumblings sweeping the city.

Cleon, by contrast, was renowned as a war hero. He had some wealth, but lived modestly and mingled amongst the less privileged. Predictably, then, he supported the efforts of Pericles and others to force a stand-off with Sparta. This was despite being Pericles' most staunch opponent at the time, being responsible for the serious accusations of impropriety with public finances recently levied against Pericles and his associates. Cleon's friend, Menon of Pharsalus, commanded a small faction from Thessaly in the north, which was aligned with Athens. He too supported war, but was in Athens at the time to testify that associates of Pericles, Phidias in particular, had embezzled funds and bribed officials to divert building materials destined for the defense of Thessaly to the beautification projects in Athens. Ultimately, the pair would successfully convict Phidias, who would later die in prison.

When it came to policy, therefore, it was generally assured that Nicias and Cleon would ultimately be aligned at opposite ends of any debate. In this instance, however, both were outraged by the latest proposal submitted by Pericles. In just a few days Pericles had managed to defer all outstanding initiatives of the Boule in deference to his Megarian Decree. In it, Pericles called for trade sanctions

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against Megara that barred its populace from the harbors and markets throughout the Athenian empire.

Both men understood that this subterfuge would provoke Sparta, and that Pericles had successfully managed to divert attention away from the charges pending against him, at least for the moment. Nicias was unsure, however, where Cleon would stand on the decree, given his conflicting desires to wage war, yet gain political advantage over Pericles. By coming to Cleon's home, then, Nicias was gambling that Cleon was more committed to his political future than Pericles' short sighted ruse. Nicias' conjecture proved correct and the men began to formulate their strategy to defeat the decree, which was scheduled for debate the following morning.

Back then, no single event of the time struck me as being extraordinary, so reflecting back I am compelled to question if my soul has evolved at all. Surely, my perception should be more advanced. Perhaps this is for the best, though, as my objectivity may be impacted if I were afflicted with insight. My observation of Hippocrates that same night, therefore, appeared likewise insignificant to me.

Hippocrates was summoned by his father, Heraclides, to Piraeus to assist with a patient. The immobilized man was a deckhand on a merchant ship from Egypt and was exhibiting a disturbing combination of symptoms. According to his companions, it started with redness and inflammation of the eyes, along with heat about the head. He then developed a violent cough, which was soon followed by retching and convulsions. The disease started at his head and progressed down to his feet over a period of four or five days. By this point, the poor man's skin was reddish all over and broken out in small pustules.

Heraclides pulled Hippocrates aside to confer. "What do you make of this, Hippocrates?" he asked, but Hippocrates

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only shook his head in bewilderment. Heraclides hesitated, and then shared his fears. “I have seen something similar... at least twenty years ago. There was an isolated epidemic on the island of Naxos that affected nearly one out of ten, most of whom died. I confess that I felt incompetent since all of my efforts proved futile. Eventually, winter came and the disease disappeared for some time, only to reemerge the following spring. Fortunately, the population could recognize the symptoms much earlier and were able to quickly isolate the infected, thereby controlling the malady.”

“Perhaps we should notify the government, father,” Hippocrates suggested.

“It is too soon, my son,” Heraclides replied, having already considered it. “This is the lone case that I have encountered... we must avoid panic. As for the task at hand, I have administered the standard herbs. What course might you prescribe?”

When unsure, Hippocrates generally put forward a minimal approach. “I recommend the patient be stripped and thoroughly bathed. There is a chill in here, so a fire should be lit. Also, the patient should only be fed or be given drink if he requests it. This approach should do no harm as we monitor his progress.”

Over the following weeks the physicians were pleased that their patient recovered, albeit with some memory loss and lingering infections in his extremities. But sadly, another of his shipmates contracted the same disease and died within only a few days. They knew of no other cases of the illness, so, with winter coming, Heraclides felt confident that disaster had been circumvented. Unable to be everywhere, though, they were unaware that the disease had briefly appeared sporadically in other regions of Attica, just south of Athens.

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On the morning of the Megarian debate, a new foreman, or epistates, of the prytaneion council was selected by lot, which they did each day. The members of the Boule were required to serve one tenth of their annual term on this executive council, so there were 50 men total in the prytaneion, and each would serve as epistates only one day. During their terms, the prytaneis lived and ate in the Tholos building on the southwest edge of the Agora, and were on-call twenty four hours a day to manage the day-to-day business of the state, discuss the merit of new proposals, receive ambassadors from foreign states, and call to meeting the full Boule and the Ecclesia as needed. The epistates was further responsible for presiding over the meetings, and on this day a man named Gryllus was selected, who was an aristocrat well known by both Pericles and Nicias.

Gryllus soon ordered the Scythians to the Agora to herd the eligible citizens toward the Pnyx where the Ecclesia normally met, which is about ten minutes walk southwest from the Agora. The Scythians, a contingent of 300 slaves entrusted to help maintain order in the city, rounded up the mob by swinging ropes dipped in red dye. If a citizen did not cooperate, they would be struck, thereby branding them for shirking their civic duty. Dodging the Scythians made for popular sport, as it was known that the meetings never started promptly.

The Pnyx was located atop a squat hill with a stone platform at its apex on which the speakers stood, along with the epistates. The citizen participants of the Ecclesia were forced to stand on the bare stone ground in front of this platform, which was likely uncomfortable by design so as to incite the crowd to exercise brevity. There was room for well over ten thousand men, and a spectacular view of the Acropolis and Parthenon could be enjoyed by all in attendance. The five hundred members of the Boule, by contrast, were provided with raised wooden benches on which to sit, allowing them to observe both the speakers and the clambering horde.

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It took nearly two hours for the arena to fill, delayed in part by the Scythians who had to check the credentials of all attendees. Pericles, his two sons, and Alcibiades arrived early to ensure a good position up front, and to monitor the populace as they filed in. It was common for those seeking to oppose the decree to also be punctual, providing an opportunity for Pericles to assess the competition prior to the debates. Pericles was not surprised, then, when Cleon and his associates were among the first to arrive and setup their circle near the speaker's platform. Wishing to remain aloof, though, Nicias arrived late and stood near the back to wait for the right moment.

The Pnyx was close to capacity as Gryllus started the proceedings. By tradition, all meetings began with purification offerings and a curse on all traitors of the state. With this out of the way, Gryllus could begin the business at hand. "This being a special meeting of the Ecclesia, there is only one item on your agenda today, which is to consider the decree put forward by Pericles to sanction the Megarians for transgressions against Demeter and providing sanctuary to run-away slaves. Vote now, citizens, if you agree to consider this proposal." Those in favor of debating the decree raised their hands, and it was clear that the vast majority wished to proceed. In fact, it was difficult to detect any that had abstained. Pericles noticed that Cleon voted to continue, so he briefly hoped that Cleon would be agreeable, but suspected otherwise.

Gryllus then summoned a herald onto the platform to read the decree in its entirety, which outlined the offenses and proposed a suitable punishment. In Pericles' plan, the Megarians would be barred from all ports and markets of the Delian league until they abandoned the lands of Demeter and allowed Athenian delegates to scrutinize any and all traffic entering or leaving the city of Megara.

"Who wishes to speak?" Gryllus asked after the decree had been read. Pericles was shrewd and was slow to step forward to speak, hoping that his enemies would misstep

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and try to jump up prematurely. Despite being anxious, though, Cleon kept quiet, as Nicias had advised him.

Pericles eventually broke the silence as he walked to the steps leading to the platform. “I wish to speak, Gryllus,” Pericles said, addressing the epistates by name rather than title. Gryllus acknowledged the request and relinquished the stage to the general.

“Fellow citizens,” Pericles began. “That I must put forward this decree is a failure of our society to protect what we hold most sacred – our relationship with the gods and accommodation of their desires. Our priests have decried the indiscretions of the Megarians for nearly one year now, without movement from a single archon, strategos, or prytaneis. I include myself in this grave oversight, and wish to make amends. Can any one of you deny that the Megarians have desecrated the hallowed land of Demeter, goddess of fertility and nourishment?” The crowd grumbled restrained approval, and the ubiquitous hecklers took this opportunity to begin their assault of sporadic barbs. To maintain control, though, audible comments from the audience were discouraged and actively subdued by the Scythians that roamed through the arena. When the speaker was given the platform they were entitled to have their say, but the epistates had the right to cut them off at any time.

“Now, on the verge of sowing our winter crop, on which we most heavily rely for our grains, we must satisfy our moral obligations. Megara has also provided refuge for our run-away slaves, further denigrating our prosperity and undermining our way of life. The Megarians must abandon Demeter’s consecrated ground and consent to oversight. This will not be resolved without some sort of confrontation, but as Megara is aligned with Sparta we must tread carefully and respect our peace agreement. Therefore, the use of force is not recommended, for now, but surely we must have some recourse. Also, to avoid further escalation, our response must be severe enough to evoke a swift conclusion. The proposal, then, is to bar the Megarians

from the Delian ports, which is an appropriate punishment, and well within our rights.” The crowd cheered their approval as Pericles descended from the platform.

“Are there any others that would like to speak?” Gryllus continued as the noise subsided.

This time, Cleon was not to be held back and he scurried up the steps and shouted, “I am Cleon, and I wish to be heard.”

“Proceed,” Gryllus allowed.

“Do not be fooled by this ruse, my friends. Pericles cares not of the concerns of priests or missing slaves. This decree is merely an attempt by Pericles to divert focus from the law suits pending against him.”

At this point, Gryllus stood and protested, “How are your arguments relevant to this debate? Concentrate on the merits of the decree only, or relinquish the platform.”

“You aristocrats continue to behave as demagogues,” Cleon rejoined angrily. “You no longer control our destiny...”

“You have had your say, Cleon. Step down,” Gryllus interceded. Cleon continued his objections as the Scythians attempted to pull him off the stage, but he could not be heard over the jeers of the crowd. All were silenced, though, when Pericles retook the platform.

“May I address these accusations, Gryllus?” Pericles requested, and the epistates nodded in agreement. “Citizens,” Pericles proceeded, “be assured that these spurious accusations will be addressed in due time. But I pledge now, friends, that if I am responsible for any inappropriate expenditure of public funds that I will pay for those disbursements out of my own pocket. I know of nothing more I can proclaim. As strategos, I must continue the business of my office, of which this decree is paramount.” Pericles bowed to the audience and again left the platform. The crowd cheered their approval for Pericles, so Cleon shook off the Scythians holding him by his arms and stormed off the stage in frustration.

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Gryllus moved to the center of the platform and waved his arms for the crowd to quiet down. For the third time he asked, “Who would like to speak on this decree?”

Nicias had slowly made his way forward, but now was hesitant to act. He waited for a moment to see if anyone else would step forward, but none was forthcoming. At the last moment, Nicias spoke up, “I wish to speak, Gryllus.” Nicias was sure to address the epistates by name, as Pericles had, and he reminded himself to not antagonize the mob. “I do not wish to forgive the offenses of the Megarians, but I am compelled to ensure that we have properly considered how this decree may play out, and that the outcome will be successful. Pericles claims that we are well within our rights to block the Megarians from the Delian ports, but in fact our agreement at the end of the Peloponnesian war, affording us over a decade of relative peace, explicitly provides for access to trade on both sides. Furthermore, the lands that the Megarians have occupied in defiance of Demeter were also unambiguously awarded to them. I only wish to inform you of these facts, as Sparta is assured to do the same.”

Nicias paused to allow the crowd to react. There was no applause, but the rumblings were loud enough to embolden him. “Now, as at the end of the previous war, Athens is the undisputed ruler of the seas, while Sparta is perceived to be unparalleled on land. This balance has ensured a stalemate, with no winners, and no losers. Persia and Macedonia continue to be a threat, and are constantly eyeing all of Greece, seeking any weakness. As our emissaries are already in Sparta working to resolve our disputes with Corinth and Potidaea, certainly should not our first step be to add the Megarian transgressions to our list of grievances? I propose that a diplomatic solution has not yet been properly pursued, so the decree should be voted down at this time.” Nicias stopped there as he did not want to overstay his welcome on stage.

Pericles, disturbed that the mob was swaying away from his cause, gestured to Gryllus that he wished to speak one

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more time. “Thank you, Nicias, for your caution,” Pericles began slowly. “But our floundering negotiations regarding Corinth and Potidaea that you mention are precisely why we must take a different tack. Blocking Megara from our ports will emphasize our resolve, and show the strength of our alliance. We also may have evidence that Sparta has already been conspiring against us...” Pericles was forced to stop momentarily, despite carefully wording his statement, due to hissing emanating from the Boule, as well as the Ecclesian assembly. When the noise died down he continued, “Evidence that might implicate Sparta with the Corinthian conspirators. Therefore, this situation warrants a new, bolder response.” Pericles was finished and surrendered control back to Gryllus.

By law, Gryllus had to continue asking until all were satisfied. “Does anyone else wish to speak?” Nobody came forward this time, so Gryllus could call for a vote. “With no more input, we must put this decree to a vote. Those in favor of the decree vote now by show of hands.” The crowd voted and there appeared to be a majority approval, but the victory was clearly a close one. Gryllus proclaimed his interpretation, “We appear to have a majority vote of approval for the decree. Does anyone wish to contest the outcome?” If the show of hands was unclear, then a full count could be requested, which Nicias contemplated. However, he felt the will of the people was clear enough, and that his speech was well received despite the finally tally. Therefore, neither he nor anyone else wished to prolong the inevitable with a tedious counting of ballots.

With no objections, Gryllus began to wrap up the proceedings, “The decree is approved. There being no other business, I hereby...”

Suddenly, Alcibiades rushed to the foot of the platform and interrupted, “I request an emergency proposal that the Ecclesia address the damages perpetrated against Aristides the Just and his family.”

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Gryllus and most others in attendance were taken aback, as circumventing the Boule in this manner was highly unusual. However, the Ecclesia was empowered to alter its agenda if it so wished. Therefore, Gryllus put it to another vote. "Vote now if you agree that this Ecclesian assembly should consider new business proposed by Alcibiades regarding damages suffered by Aristides and his family." The crowd did not respond quickly, but eventually a large majority of the audience raised their hands to hear to proposal, perhaps out of curiosity more than compassion. Socrates and Lysimachus were in the crowd of the Ecclesia and looked at one another in confusion, hoping the other may know what was happening.

"State your proposal, Alcibiades," Gryllus said.

Alcibiades hurried up the steps and to the center of the platform. "Fellow citizens, we are all aware of the mistreatment of Aristides the Just, being ostracized unfairly and ultimately absolved of any treachery. At his funeral, I am told, most of the city was in attendance to show their love of this man and acknowledge his contributions to the people, mostly provided from his own estate. As a result of the disservices he endured from the city, his surviving family members have been unduly penalized. You know this to be true, my friends, so I propose that our city compensate each child of Aristides the Just by forgiving all their debts, providing 100 hectares of cultivatable land, and paying 4 drachmas per day in support. In addition, all other descendants of Aristides the Just should receive 2 drachmas per day in support." That was all Alcibiades had to say, but no response was forthcoming from the audience.

Gryllus stepped forward and asked, as required, "Are there any who wish to speak on this proposal." Again, only silence was the response, so Alcibiades feared that he would be embarrassed. Gryllus called for a vote, "Vote now, then, if you agree that the children and other descendants of Aristides the Just are to be compensated as proposed." Surprisingly, the show of hands seemed instantaneous and

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was nearly unanimous. Socrates and Lysimachus sat motionless and abstained from the vote. “The proposal has passed,” Gryllus pronounced. “There being no other business...,” he paused, “this assembly of the Ecclesia is adjourned.”

CHAPTER 4

MISGIVINGS INCARNATED

During the time of the Greater Eleusinian Mysteries, which occurred during the last days of summer every fifth year, a general truce of fifty five days was declared throughout Greece so that anyone wishing to attend the ceremonies could travel safely to and from the events. The women had hoped that this truce would embolden the Megarian smugglers to reenter the city and shepherd Eudoxia to freedom, but their contact was nowhere to be found.

Within hours of Pericles' decree, all Megarians had been purged from the city by the Scythians. Eudoxia had rushed to the Agora as soon as she heard the news, but was too late to join her liberators. One month later, while preparing for the Mysteries, Myrto, Angelikie, and Eudoxia searched for another opportunity. If the Megarians did not return, then perhaps there would be a chance to escape from Eleusis, the site of the final rituals.

Myrto had been initiated into the Mysteries long before while she was a teenager, and Angelikie was initiated soon after her introduction into Socrates' home. Therefore, it was not unexpected for Myrto to recommend Eudoxia for initiation. Entry into the Mysteries was unrestricted, open to men and women, citizens and non-citizens, and slaves and

free persons alike. The only requirements were that initiates must be able to speak Greek, and must be free of blood guilt, meaning never having committed murder.

The Eleusinian Mysteries was the most sacred of all religious events, and its reverence was mandated by state law. They emphasized personal revelation and salvation, and centered around the myth of Demeter's recovery of her daughter, Persephone, from the underworld. The tradition is that Zeus allowed Hades to seize Persephone, who was his niece, and take her to the underworld with him. Being distraught, Demeter, the goddess of agriculture and fertility, brought a plight onto the lands and exacted great suffering from the people. The gods responded to this misery by persuading Zeus to return Persephone to Demeter. Hades was not to be deprived, though, and tricked Persephone into eating four pomegranate seeds. This deception forced Persephone to abide by the rules of the Fates, requiring her to return to the underworld for four months out of every year. This is the reason, it is taught, that the Greeks enjoy eight months of fertility, and four months of no productivity during the excessive heat of summer.

Neither Socrates nor I ever participated in these rituals, perhaps due to our unrelenting vocational obligations, or perhaps due to our cynicism, which was congealed on the battle fields with the blood of our brethren. As with all religious festivals, women were far more likely to participate than men, but everyone was deeply respectful of these proceedings. In any case, my lack of devotion did not seem to influence my status here in the underworld, so I did not value such customs, at least until what I had witnessed that year.

The ceremonies lasted for ten days. The hierophants, or priests, began the rites when the sacred objects arrived from the city of Eleusis, a full day walk northwest of Athens. The objects consisted of a box and an open basket, and, since my death, I have managed to discover the contents of these sacred containers. I dare not divulge their contents,

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however, for in life revealing any of the secrets of the Mysteries carried a penalty of death, and such veneration for these sacraments has remained with me in the afterlife.

Eudoxia and the other initiates were purified by bathing in the sea, each with a suckling pig that they later sacrificed to Demeter. Several lesser ceremonies occurred over the next few days, culminating in the procession to Eleusis on the fifth and sixth days. The hierophants and sacred objects were at the forefront of the long march, which was broken into two days as the faithful walked slowly and swung branches of myrtle, called bacchoi, that were tied together with wool. Upon reaching Eleusis, a day of fasting was observed to commemorate Demeter's search for her missing Persephone.

The eighth day was the most sanctified, as this was when the secrets of the Mysteries were revealed to the initiates. Very little was eaten on this day, despite having fasted the day before, so that the full potency of the kykeon drink could be experienced. Myrto was responsible for concocting the kykeon that year, which was a brew of barley, mint, and the leaves and seeds of a short, flowering shrub called harmal. In the evening, the faithful entered a great hall called the Telesterion, capable of holding up to eight thousand participants.

The ceremony that night consisted of three stages: a dramatic reenactment of the myth of Demeter; the disclosure of the sacred objects, their contents, and their meaning; and then ending with revelations. A large fire was set in the middle of the Telesterion during the late hours of the event as the final sips of kykeon were consumed. The hierophants led the crowd in the divine chants as the revelations proceeded. During this time, the participants were encouraged to stand and describe any visions that came to them, which were always brief and usually consisted of predictions of the future, or encounters with loved ones that had passed to the underworld.

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For hours, men and women sporadically jumped up and shouted out what they were experiencing. After a short time, though, these outbursts became part of the background noises and were difficult to discern as the assembly continued their chants. It was during the early morning hours of the ninth day that I sensed a connection with Myrto. It was a feeling I had not known since I was alive, and I have only felt this single time since death. Could she hear me... or see me? Realizing that the moment was fleeting I concentrated with all of my being.

Myrto sprung up suddenly and exclaimed, "Its Sophroniscus. He says... Alcibiades lies." The episode passed quickly and Myrto looked around as if suddenly awakened from a dream. Several people nearby were staring up at her with their mouths agape, for the mere mention of the name Alcibiades was sure to evoke interest. She knew what she had said, and seen, but did not understand it. For her, the chanting was over and she sat down quietly to ponder what had happened.

Near the end of the ceremony, Myrto regained her composure and began to relax, only to be startled again when Eudoxia, who was sitting next to her, bound to her feet. "They're dead...", she screamed, "they're all dead." Eudoxia immediately began crying uncontrollably, despite Myrto's best efforts to console her.

With the main event behind them, the remainder of the ninth day was spent resting, celebrating, and feasting. The time was right to make their move. "Eudoxia," Myrto said, as she found Angelikie and Eudoxia standing together and pulled them aside. "The sun is setting. Follow the coast northwest until you reach Megara. It should take no more than two days, and from there you should be able to find passage to Macedonia and..."

Eudoxia grabbed Myrto's hand and stopped her. "It is of no use, dearest Myrto. I saw my brothers during the revelations. They are dead. I have no more family," Eudoxia explained.

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Myrto tried to reassure her, “You cannot trust those visions, Eudoxia. You must try.” Eudoxia resisted and seemed content with her fate. Angelikie shed a tear and said, “We are your family now, Eudoxia.” The three women embraced and kept to themselves for the rest of the evening. After a short ceremony the following morning they began their journey home.

In Sparta, members of the Peloponnesian League gathered to debate their response to the Megarian Decree, thus being summoned at the insistence of the Corinthians. A contingent from Athens was also in the city at the time to vent general grievances to their nemesis state, and so did not hesitate to force their interjection, albeit uninvited.

The discussions were organized and moderated by 30 elders, called the Gerousia, that were responsible for debating state policies. This council included the two kings of Sparta, and was responsible for establishing a limited number of options from which the Spartan citizenry would select by vote to pursue. For centuries, Sparta has traditionally had dual kings, one each from the Agiad and Eurypontids families, both supposedly being descendants of the ancient hero Heracles. The kings had the right to veto any proposal, and the balance of power between them helped to ensure the interests of all Spartan citizens were considered. In addition to their participation in the Gerousia, the kings were responsible for administration of all religious, judicial, and militaristic activities.

Immediately, the Corinthians had set the tone of the meeting. “The Athenians continue to be emboldened, my illustrious hosts, by the lack of response from our League,” argued Sostratus, an acclaimed orator and head of the delegation from Corinth. “Potidaea, with whom my people enjoy a much cherished kinship, has endured a brutal and unlawful siege for nearly two years, and now the Megarians

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are a target. It is true that the former is not a member of our league, but surely we must express sympathy to our brethren in a more expedient and tangible manner. As for the latter, who among us can deny that the League is obliged to intercede on behalf of our fellow member? To that end, I further contend that the provision for arbitration outlined in our peace agreement is insufficient to address these aggressions and to ensure that no further trespasses are perpetrated. Indeed, the Athenians have clearly chosen to shun arbitration and have implemented the decree without warning. I am personally ashamed at our inaction and propose that only a military solution is viable at this juncture. My excellencies, cowardice must not be allowed to prevail.” Sostratus recognized that the Spartans’ restraint and tolerance for loquaciousness had been exceeded, so he paused, bowed to the council, and retook his seat hoping that he had swayed the passions of his audience.

It was important that the orators exercise brevity during their discourses, as the Spartans were well known for their impatience and quick tempers. The members knew well that they were not equals, and insubordination would incur harsh retribution from their masters. Male Spartan citizens were allowed only one occupation in life, that of a warrior. Starting at age seven, boys were removed from their households to live within the Agoge system where they received military training and a general education. The treatment of the boys was arduous and often cruel, including the practice of purposely under feeding the boys so they were obliged to resort to violence and theft to accommodate their needs. At age eighteen, the initiates were sent naked out to the countryside, armed only with a knife, where they were forced to provide for themselves.

Military victory and glory was the only achievement for which a Spartan male could be publicly praised. Pride in all other activities and accomplishments was proscribed, and the accumulation of personal wealth was deemed counter to the collective good. Even their diet, consisting mostly of a

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tasteless but nourishing type of gruel, was prescribed by the state to discourage the pursuit of pleasures of the flesh. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Spartan army was extremely adept at its vocation, and was uniformly recognized to be the most formidable force, at least on land.

Despite this proclivity for violence, the Spartans were unpredictable when it came to declaring war. Unlike their Athenian counterparts, the potential for profit was not generally a consideration to the Spartan leadership when considering a course of action. Instead, the protection of their state and the ability to provide the basic necessities for their populace and their war machine were paramount. When this has been threatened in the past, most notably by the Persians and Athenians, Sparta has been quick to march.

In many cases, Sparta has refused to attack, being confident that no adversary would dare to invade their borders, and the mere presence of Spartan troops was often sufficient to relieve tensions. Further, the Spartans were ever mindful of the resentment harbored toward them by the helots that comprised more than eighty percent of the population in Sparta and its surrounding regions. The helots were essentially slaves forced to perform all of the chores of Spartan society, but were fortunate at least to be granted the right to marry and own a small amount of property, which was unheard of for slaves elsewhere in Greece. These leniencies were of little consequence, though, since the helots were otherwise treated cruelly, as dictated by law. If the treatment of a helot was not considered demeaning enough, the Spartan supervisor would be subjected to whipping as punishment for his negligence.

After time, the Gerousia succumbed to the demands of the Athenian ambassador to address the delegates, but only after all members of the Peloponnesian League had been given a chance to voice their position. It was clear that the ambassador intended to justify Athens' handling of the Megarians, but no one expected the ambassador to directly provoke the council as he did. His name was Isaios, from a

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wealthy family, but I do not otherwise know where his allegiances lied. It was logical, though, to presume that Pericles had the most influence on the deputation of Isaios to represent Athens.

Isaios dispassionately listed the grievances against Megara that had precipitated the decree, and the delegates were respectful as they received the information. Isaios continued, though, speaking more authoritatively, and louder. “May I also remind the council that the military might of Athens must not be disregarded. Indisputably, our navy is the strongest in the world, and all of Greece remains indebted to Athens for her role in defeating the Persian emperors that have relentlessly sought to invade our shores for generations. It was only natural that Athens reacted quickly to the Megarian offenses against us, Megara being within one day’s sail, with constant traffic between our cities for trade. We have every right to enforce piety within our region, and we do not accept that Athens should be judged on this matter. It is clear that Corinth is behind these accusations, so Sparta would be wise to better discipline its children, lest the parent be construed as responsible for such disrespect.”

True to form, the Spartan response was brief. “You are dismissed,” ordered the chairman the council. The debate continued, but only for a short time longer as the outcome seemed inevitable.

War was not immediately declared. Instead, the ambassador was sent back to Athens with a demand that the Megarian Decree be rescinded, and that the entire Alcmaeonidae family be expelled, which included Pericles himself. Predictably, Pericles was still powerful enough at the time to repel the insult and successfully argued that any concession by Athens would surely encourage additional demands from her enemy. Soon, the march to war was underway.

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“I surrender,” Alcibiades exclaimed. “Not one minute more of this can I endure.”

“Does not cosmology and metaphysics address the very nature of all that is? And so, must we not discuss these topics at length to better uncover the fundamental bases of all other subjects? We must press on,” Socrates retorted, having finally agreed to counsel the young Alcibiades. His submission, despite objections from Myrto, was due in part to Alcibiades’ persistence, but was also due to the improving fortunes of his in-laws. The state subsidies allotted to the family of Aristides the Just, at the urging of Alcibiades, had lessened the burden on Socrates, providing a higher level of comfort for himself, and opening his mind to new experiences.

“Fair enough, my master, but on another day. Please, let us change the subject for now – to politics, perhaps?” Alcibiades pleaded sardonically. “What are your thoughts on this new war with Sparta and the Peloponnesian League? What outcome do you foresee?”

“On that subject, Alcibiades, I have no particular insight. You are far better connected than I, so my opinion should be of no value to you. Perhaps we should return to our lessons on rhetoric, which is ninety percent of politics anyway. Let me find my legal treatises and we will engage in a mock debate.”

“No, no, no... Dearest Socrates, you are always so serious. Not once have I heard you laugh aloud, and even a smile is rare for you. I am your friend. Let loose your tongue and allow every thought to emerge so that I may bathe in your wisdom. Come now, tell me, is this war just?”

Socrates was clearly uncomfortable, but offered an assessment to pacify his apprentice. “Any society is compelled to war when its way of life is threatened. But to consider such aggression to be moral or just, however, is tantamount to judging the validity of the virtues that the society holds dear and wishes to protect. To go to war to fulfill the will of the gods is just only if our interpretation of

Sophronismos – The Rise of Alcibiades

their will is correct, if the gods exist at all. It is just to go to war to ensure the wellbeing of our citizens, but what components are necessary for one to live well? Is ownership of slaves and gold jewelry an essential human right, for which waging war is warranted? I do not know if this war is just, my friend. I can ensure you, though, the just will prevail, for each combatant claims title to the moral high ground.”

Alcibiades found that he was becoming more and more adept at enticing his counselor to expound on nearly any subject, despite Socrates’ reluctance to stray from factual knowledge or first-hand observation. This did not escape Socrates’ notice, and often made him ill at ease, sometimes losing an entire night of sleep agonizing over the legitimacy of a statement made in haste. He often reminded himself why he was hesitant to act as docent, to Alcibiades or anyone else, and to avoid the consequences of those who fall victim to their ambitions. Still, he was immensely grateful to Alcibiades for helping his family, Lysimachus in particular, and Alcibiades had shown him that he may be overlooking the many pleasures of life.

It was true, back then. Socrates rarely laughed and did not engage in leisurely pursuits. While exercise at the gymnasium was substantially a social activity for most men, for Socrates it was only a means to maintain his skills for battle. When a witty comment was uttered during a discourse, most would smile in recognition of its cleverness, while Socrates would find it glib and frivolous. Instead of appreciating that humor was a manifestation of the best qualities of human nature and intelligence, he viewed joviality as a distraction from productivity.

Unsatisfied, Alcibiades began to push Socrates to respond further, for the war effort was of paramount importance to him and his family and he valued Socrates’ objectivity. At that moment, though, the pair was interrupted by Critias, a friend of Alcibiades who was ten years his elder, slightly younger than Socrates. “This is a

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pleasant happenstance. How goes it, Alcibiades? What is your business here?"

"Greetings, Critias. This is Socrates, my friend and counselor. We have been conferring on all things of great importance. If there is any problem you are having, tell us the issue and we will be sure to solve it straight away."

Critias laughed at the proposal, while Socrates let out a gasp of irritation. "Of this I am positive," Critias replied, "but my time is limited. I am aware of you, Socrates, but I am surprised that we have not before been properly introduced, for I thought I was acquainted with all of the sophists in the city."

"I am not a sophist," Socrates managed to protest politely. "I am only assisting Alcibiades to elucidate fact from conjecture, and to formulate hypotheses based in logic."

"Are you compensated for this form of education?" Critias asked. Socrates shook his head in disagreement. "Then in this respect at least you are not a sophist, but you can forgive me for my misconception. Perhaps I would benefit from your free services as well, then. May I contact you?" Again, Socrates did not speak, but subtly nodded in agreement. "That is excellent. I am off, my friends."

Alcibiades smiled as Critias left and slapped Socrates on the back. "You see, Socrates. There is benefit for both of us in this relationship. Critias is from a very wealthy and powerful family, so this is an opportunity not to be missed." Socrates could not disagree with this assessment and tried desperately to conceal his delight, but failed.

Under Pericles' guidance, the first year of the war with Sparta progressed reasonably, but not without controversy. His strategy was to avoid direct conflict with Spartan forces on land, which required much of the population of Attica to be brought within the Long Walls of Athens whenever a

siege was imminent. This tactic proved very effective since Sparta was unwilling to commit to an extended engagement due to logistical issues, and also concerns that a helot revolt could occur in Sparta if the bulk of their forces were far from home for an extended period of time. Therefore, the Spartan invasions were generally brief, though one siege lasted for over one month.

In this manner, the impact that the war had on the city was initially minimized, but Pericles still endured much criticism since the Athenian response seemed cowardly to some and may have been construed as weakness by their Delian allies. Further, the residents of Attica resented being forced into the confines of the city walls where conditions for them were harsh, even if only for short periods of time. Being mostly farmers, their crops also suffered at the hands of the invaders, and the reduction in food supplies impacted all citizens. Despite these hardships, the Athenian naval forces proceeded nearly unimpeded to raid and loot isolated city-states aligned with the Peloponnesian League, partially compensating the Athenian citizens for their misery.

As fate is often cruel, further devastation befell Athens the following spring when an adversary far more powerful than Sparta let loose its fury. Hippocrates and his father, Heraclides, worked frantically to tend to victims of the disease that they had first encountered the previous year. A plague had descended upon them, and in only a few short months nearly three percent of the population had been killed by the affliction, with no end in sight.

In Socrates' household, Angelikie was struck by the disease, but somehow managed to survive. Both Myrto and Eudoxia worked tirelessly to care for the ailing woman, and even Socrates helped out by quietly procuring scarce herbal remedies, and garnering visits from his physician friend, Hippocrates. Angelikie's recovery was agonizingly slow, but she was back to full health within a couple of months.

A new reality had descended on the city, where death and grief became the norm, supplanting the fertile atmosphere

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that had for decades nurtured the arts and culture. War and disease had decimated the public morale, and the mood was ripe for vengeance. Pericles, perceiving that he was vulnerable, did not hesitate to respond to his critics at every opportunity. Most notably, though, his tenuous position was temporarily secured when he successfully maneuvered to give the annual Funeral Oration, traditionally delivered by a high ranking government official.

The symbolic funeral procession consisted of ten cypress coffins containing remains of fallen warriors from each of the ten Athenian tribes. The procession ended at a public grave site, where they were buried. Pericles' speech concluded the ceremonies, and was well received by thousands of men and women in attendance.

Rather than dwelling on the heroic accomplishments of those that had passed, as was standard for this homily, Pericles instead emphasized the greatness of their city and society. For it was such a unique state in the world that any sacrifice necessary to protect it was well justified, and those that remained should give thanks to those who had given so much to ensure its posterity. Indeed, I was especially moved by these words, "...We throw open our city to the world, and never by law exclude foreigners from any opportunity to live, study, and observe, though enemy eyes may on occasion benefit from our openness, trusting less in procedures and policies than to the innate character of our citizens. In education, where our rivals from their infancy pursue military accomplishments by oppressive discipline, at Athens we live as we wish, and yet are prepared to confront every threat..."

The mob was truly moved by the words of Pericles, and the love of their state swelled, renewing in them a pride that had been absent for so many months. Most importantly for Pericles, it was not lost on the crowd that his contributions to the laws, buildings, and cultural status of Athens were substantial. Pericles, therefore, had secured his position of leadership, if only for the moment.