

ARISTOPHANES ACHARNIANS, TRS. SOMMERSTEIN ①

DICAEOPOLIS: Be not indignant with me, members of the audience, if, though a beggar, I speak before the Athenians about public affairs in a comedy. Even comedy is acquainted with justice; and what I have to say will be shocking, but it will be right. This time Cleon will not allege that I am slandering the city in the presence of foreigners; for we are by ourselves and it's the Lenaean

competition, and there are no foreigners here yet; neither tribute money nor troops have arrived from the allied cities. This time we are alone, ready hulled; for I reckon the immigrants as the civic bran. Now I hate the Spartans intensely, and I hope the god of Taenarum sends them another earthquake and brings all their houses down on them. I too have had vines cut down. But

look – for there are only friends here listening – who do we blame it all on the Laconians? For it was men of ours – I do not say the city; remember that, I do not say the city – but some bent, ill-struck pieces of humanity, worthless counterfeit foreign stuff, who began denouncing the Megarians' little woollen cloaks.

and if they saw anywhere a cucumber or a young hare, or a pig-let, or some garlic or lump-salt, it was declared Megarian and sold up the same day. Now that, to be sure, was trivial and purely local; but then some cottabus-playing young rakes went to Megara and stole a whore called Simaetha. After that the Megarians, garlic-stung by the smart, stole two whores of Aspasia's in retaliation. And from that broke forth the origin of the war upon all the Greeks: from three prostitutes. Then in his wrath Olympian Pericles lightened and thundered and threw Greece into turmoil, making laws worded like drinking songs, "that no Megarian should remain on land or in Agora, on sea or on shore". After that, when they were starving by inches, the Megarians asked the Spartans to procure a reversal of the decree caused by the prostitute affair; but we refused, though they asked repeatedly. And after that it was clashing of shields. "Says one, 'They ought not.'" But you tell me, what ought they to have done? Come, supposing one of the Spartans had sailed forth in his bark and denounced and sold a puppy-dog belonging to the Seriphians,

"would you within your halls have sat? Far from it!"

Why, on the very instant you'd have been launching three hundred ships, and the city would have been full of the hubbub of soldiers, noisy crowds surrounding ships' captains, pay being handed out, Pallas emblems being gilded, the Colonnade groaning, rations being measured out, leathers and oarloops and people buying jars, garlic and olives and onions in nets, crowns and anchovies and flute-girls and black eyes; and the dockyard full of the planing of oar-spars, the hammering of dowel-pins, the boring of oarports, full of flutes and boatswains, of warbling and piping. I know that is what you would have done:

"and do we think that Telephus would not?"

Then we really have no brains.

ARISTOPHANES PEACE, TRS. SOMMERSTEIN ⁽²⁾

CHORUS-LEADER [to *Hermes*]: But where can this goddess have been, to be away from us all this long time? Friendliest of gods, do explain this to us.

HERMES: "O indigent peasants, mark well my words," if you want to hear how it was that she vanished. What started it all in the first place was Pheidias getting into trouble. Then Pericles became frightened he might share Pheidias' fate — for he was afraid of your character and your hard-biting temper — and before anything terrible could happen to *him*, he set the city ablaze by dropping into it a tiny spark of a Megarian decree: and he fanned up so great a war that all the Greeks were in tears with the smoke, both those over there and those over here; and as soon as the first vine had reluctantly begun to crackle, and the first wine-jar received a knock and kicked out in vengeful anger at another jar, there was no longer anyone who could put a stop to it, and Peace was disappearing. 605

TRYGAEUS: Well, by Apollo, I'd never been told that by anyone before, nor had I heard how she was connected with Pheidias. 610

CHORUS-LEADER: No more had I, not till now. So that's why she's so fair of face — because she's a relation of his! There's a lot of things we don't realize! 615

PLUTARCH, LIFE OF PERIKLES, TRS. SCOTT-KILVERT

29. A few years later, when the clouds were already gathering for the Peloponnesian war, Pericles persuaded the Athenians to send help to Corcyra in her war with Corinth² and so bring over to their side an island with a powerful navy at a time when the Peloponnesians had all but declared war on them. And yet when the people had agreed to this measure, Pericles sent a squadron of no more than ten ships under Lacedaemonius, the son of Cimon, as if his object were to humiliate him because Cimon's family was on especially good terms with the Spartans. Pericles intended to make sure that if no particular success were achieved under Lacedaemonius's command, then the latter would be discredited for his pro-Spartan sympathies, and so he allowed him only a few ships and sent him out against his will. In general he made a point of thwarting all Cimon's sons, on the pretext that they were not true Athenians, but had something alien about them even in their names, since one of them was named Lacedaemonius, another Thessalus, and a third Eleius, and their mother was believed to be a woman of Arcadia.

In consequence, Pericles was sharply criticized for the paltry size of the force he had sent. It was felt that it was too small to help the Corcyraeans in their hour of need, but that at the same time it provided those enemies of Athens who were accusing her of interference with an invaluable pretext, and he therefore reinforced it later with a larger squadron which arrived after the battle.³

This action enraged the Corinthians and they denounced the Athenians at Sparta. The Megarians also joined them to complain that they were being shut out and driven away from every market and every harbour which the Athenians controlled, contrary to the common rights of the Greeks and the articles of peace entered into upon oath. The people of Aegina also considered themselves oppressed and outraged and secretly bemoaned their grievances to the Spartans, as they did not dare to accuse the Athenians openly. At this point, too, Potidaea revolted, a city which, although a colony of

1. viii, 76.

2. 433 B.C.

3. See Thucydides, i.50.

Corinth, was subject to Athens, and the siege on which the Athenians then embarked further hastened the outbreak of the war.

In spite of all this a succession of embassies was sent to Athens, and Archidamus, the Spartan king, strove to placate his allies and bring about a peaceful settlement of most of their grievances. In fact, it seems likely that the Athenians might have avoided war on any of the other issues, if only they could have been persuaded to lift their embargo against the Megarians and come to terms with them. And since it was Pericles who opposed this solution more strongly than anyone else and urged the people to persist in their hostility towards the Megarians, it was he alone who was held responsible for the war.

30. It is said that a Spartan mission arrived in Athens to discuss this very subject and that Pericles took refuge in the pretext that there was a law which forbade the tablet on which the Megarian decree was inscribed to be taken down. 'Very well, then,' one of the envoys named Polyalces suggested, 'there is no need to take it down. Just turn its face to the wall! Surely there is no law forbidding that!' This was neatly put, but it had no effect on Pericles, who seems to have harboured some private grudge against the Megarians. However, the charge which he brought against them in public was that they had appropriated for their own profane use the territory of Eleusis, which was consecrated to Demeter and Persephone, and he proposed that a herald should be sent first to them and should then proceed to Sparta to complain of their conduct. Pericles was certainly responsible for this decree, which sets out to justify his action in humane and reasonable terms. But then the herald who was sent, Anthemocritus, met his death at the hands of the Megarians, so it was believed, and thereupon Charinus proposed a decree against them. This laid it down that henceforth Athens should be the irreconcilable and implacable enemy of Megara, that any Megarian setting foot in Attica should be put to death, and that the generals, whenever they took the traditional oath of office, should swear besides this that they would invade the Megarid twice in each year, and that Anthemocritus should be buried with honours beside the Thriasian gates, which are now known as the Dipylon.

On their side the Megarians denied that they had murdered Anthemocritus, and threw the blame for the Athenians' actions upon Pericles and Aspasia, quoting those famous and hackneyed verses from Aristophanes' *Acharnians*:

Some young Athenians in a drunken frolic
Kidnapped Simaetha, the courtesan, from Megara.
The Megarians were furious, primed themselves with garlic
Just like their fighting-cocks, then came and stole
Two of Aspasia's girls to get their own back.¹

31. The real reasons which caused the decree to be passed are extremely hard to discover, but all writers agree in blaming Pericles for the fact that it was not revoked. Some of them, however, say that his firm stand on this point was based on the highest motives combined

with a shrewd appreciation of where Athens' best interests lay, since he believed that the demand had been made to test his resistance, and that to have complied with it would have been regarded simply as an admission of weakness. But there are others who consider that he defied the Spartans out of an aggressive arrogance and a desire to demonstrate his own strength.

However, the most damning charge of all,² and yet the one which finds most support, runs somewhat like this. Pheidias the sculptor had been entrusted, as I have mentioned, with the contract for producing the great statue of Athena. His friendship with Pericles, with whom he had great influence, earned him a number of enemies through sheer jealousy, while others made use of him to test the mood of the people and see what their temper would be in a case in which Pericles was involved. They therefore persuaded Menon, one of the artists working under Pheidias, to seat himself in the market-place as a suppliant and ask for the protection of the state in return for laying information against Pheidias. The people granted the man's plea and a motion for Pheidias's prosecution was laid before the Assembly. The charge of

1. *Achamians*, 524ff.

2. Plutarch offers no opinion, but the facts do not support this charge. Other accounts suggest that Pheidias may have been prosecuted soon after the statue was dedicated in 438-437 and that he may have been exiled soon afterwards and died in Elis about 432. Anaxagoras is now believed to have retired to Lampsacus nearly twenty years earlier, and Dracontides' motion was not passed until 430 and therefore had no connexion with the outbreak of the war. Thucydides gives no hint that Pericles' ascendancy was being challenged in the period immediately preceding the war, but rather that the crisis strengthened it.

embezzlement was not proved, because from the very beginning, on Pericles' own advice, the gold used for the statue had been superimposed and laid around it in such a way that it could all be taken off and weighed,¹ and this was what Pericles now ordered the prosecutors to do.

However, the fame of Pheidias's works still served to arouse jealousy against him, especially because in the relief of the battle of the Amazons, which is represented on the shield of the goddess, he carved a figure representing himself as a bald old man lifting up a stone with both hands, and also because he introduced a particularly fine likeness of Pericles fighting an Amazon. The position of the hand, which holds a spear in front of Pericles' face, seems to have been ingeniously contrived to conceal the resemblance, but it can still be seen quite plainly from either side.

So Pheidias was cast into prison and there he fell sick and died. According to some accounts he was poisoned by his enemies in an attempt to blacken Pericles' name still further. As for the informer, Menon, a proposal was passed, on Glycon's motion, to make him exempt from all taxes and public burdens and the generals were ordered to provide for his safety.

Pericles had already fallen foul of the people on the occasion of Pheidias's trial and he dreaded the jury's verdict on his own case, and so now that the war was threatening and smouldering, we are told that he deliberately fanned it into flame. He hoped in this way to dispel the charges against him and make the people forget their jealousy, since he knew that as soon as any great enterprise or danger was in prospect, the city would put herself in his hands alone because of his great authority and prestige. These are the motives which are alleged for his refusal to allow the people to give way to the demands of Sparta, but the true history of these events is hidden from us.

33. The Spartans, for their part, recognized that if Pericles could be removed from power, they would find the Athenians much easier to deal with, and so they demanded that Athens should rid herself of the blood-guilt of Cylon,¹ in which Pericles' family on his mother's side had been involved, as Thucydides explains. But this manoeuvre produced exactly the opposite effect to what was intended; instead of being slandered and treated with suspicion, Pericles now found himself more trusted and honoured by the Athenians than ever before, because they saw that the enemy feared and hated him more than any other single man. For this reason, before king Archidamus led the Peloponnesians into Attica, Pericles announced in public to the Athenians that if the king should ravage other estates but spare his own, either on account of the personal friendship between them or else to give his enemies cause to slander him, he would present all his lands and the buildings on them to the state.

The Spartans and their allies then proceeded to invade Attica with an immense army commanded by Archidamus. They advanced, devastating the land as they went, as far as Acharnae, which is very close to Athens, and there they pitched camp, for they imagined that the Athenians would never tolerate this, but would march out and fight them from sheer pride and anger. Pericles, however, judged that it would be a terrible risk to engage 60,000 Peloponnesian and Boeotian hoplites, (for the first invading army was at least as strong as this)

1. Pericles belonged to the house of Alcmaeon (see *Solon*, Ch. 12).