

The Fate of the Captured and the Destiny of Empires: Diodorus Siculus and the Aftermath of the Sicilian Expedition

Despite being the longest Greek history, the extant portion of the *Bibliothēke* of Diodorus Siculus only has two major speeches, a pair delivered before the Syracusans debating the fate of the captured Athenians in 413 (Sacks 1990, Pausch 2018). As is often the case with Diodorus, most earlier scholarship focused on determining the original source for the speeches, with Ephorus, Timaeus, and Philistus all being put forward by different scholars (Green 1999, Pearson 1985, Vanotti 1990, Holton 2018). But examining the speeches in context shows that they form an integral part of the *Bibliothēke* and serve as a linchpin of Diodorus's narrative of the Greek city states in the fifth and fourth centuries. They are further proof of Diodorus's organizational skills and his willingness to highlight issues and themes relevant to his own times in his narrative (Rubincam 1987, Sulimani 2011, Muntz 2017). Through these speeches Diodorus is able to demonstrate both the successes and failings of the Greek polis system in building empires, and offer lessons to his late 1st century BCE readers.

In this debate Nicolaus the Syracusan argues for mercy towards the Athenians, while Gylippus the Spartan argues for harsh punishment. The ultimate model is the Mytilenean debate of Thucydides (Konstan 2001). However, Diodorus subverts his predecessor. In Thucydides, the speaker arguing for the lenient course prevails, while in Diodorus it is the opposite. And while Thucydides's Diodotus makes an argument for what is most expedient in the short term, Diodorus's Nicolaus makes his case based on a long view of what will benefit Syracuse as a potential future empire. He also explains the benefits the Athenians have given humanity before their turn towards tyranny. So this speech both looks backwards on the power for good that a city has and forwards to how a city can employ that power to rule.

Gylippus's speech similarly looks forwards and backwards, but with a focus on the crimes of Athens. He repeatedly invokes events which Diodorus has already covered. Diodorus expects his readers to be able to recall these earlier episodes and evaluate Gylippus's remarks. So when Gylippus charges the Athenians with destroying Scione, they are convicted by Diodorus's blunt description of the act. But the text is actually more complicated than a simple reference - Diodorus also tells us that the Athenians resettled the island with Plataeans. This in turn recalls the reason why the Plataeans were homeless, the Spartan seizure of their city, another event Diodorus narrates. So Gylippus, while condemning the Athenians, also indirectly draws the reader's attention to the tit-for-tat nature of the atrocities committed by all sides, atrocities which he now asks the Syracusans to continue.

And so at this critical juncture we have an argument for empire based on benefaction and mercy, and an argument for retribution above all else. The Syracusans prefer to indulge in retribution. No lasting Syracusan empire in Sicily results, any more than any of the Greek hegemonies Diodorus describes lasts, leaving the reader to ponder the moral lessons for the new empire of the 1st century, Rome.

Works Cited

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