

Demetrius Poliorcetes in the Peloponnese 303 B.C.

303 B.C. was a signal year for Demetrius Poliorcetes. In a few whirlwind months he campaigned with unbroken success in the Peloponnese, relocated and refounded Sicyon as Demetrias, and played a central and highly visible role in several panhellenic festivals, laying the foundations all the while for the revival of the Hellenic League of Philip and Alexander. And yet the events of this pivotal year, to say nothing of their sequence, have thus far eluded a satisfactory reconstruction. This paper establishes a plausible chronology for Demetrius' Peloponnesian campaign that is informed by epigraphic evidence missing from previous, cursory accounts (e.g. Ferguson 1948; Billows 1990; Habicht 1997) and suggests that Demetrius presided at the Nemean Games of 303 based on historical considerations and a new interpretation of a Nemean inscription. What emerges is a consistent and coherent policy by which Demetrius presented himself as the champion of Hellenic freedom and exploited opportunities presented by panhellenic festivals to garner support for a common league under his personal leadership.

The difficulty in reconstructing Demetrius' actions in 303 stems in large part from seemingly intractable problems posed by the most important literary sources, Plutarch's *Life of Demetrius* and the twentieth book of Diodorus Siculus' *Bibliotheka*. Not only are these accounts frustratingly incomplete and frequently at odds with one another, but a textual corruption in a key passage (20.103.4–5) mars Diodorus' narrative, while Plutarch pursues his ethical and didactic agenda at the expense of chronological precision. These problems were further complicated by Woodhead's (1989) demonstration that, contrary to scholarly consensus, Demetrius' initiation into the Eleusinian Mysteries belongs to 303 and not the following year on the basis of an enigmatic Athenian decree (*SEG* 36: 165). The decree confirms Plutarch's account of the manipulation of the calendar that allowed Demetrius to become a full initiate into

the Mysteries in a matter of days, but raises fundamental questions about the sequence of events in the period since current scholarly consensus holds that Demetrius revived the Hellenic League at the Isthmian Games of 302, while Plutarch explicitly places the revival *before* Demetrius' irregular initiation, and Diodorus puts the initiation in the archon year 303/02 (discrepancies first recognized by Paschidis 2008).

Athenian inscriptions (*SEG* 25:141, 25: 149), including a stele set up by volunteers serving under Demetrius that refers to him as Δημήτριος ὁ Μέγας, suggest that the primary military aims of the campaign had already been achieved by spring, 303. By expelling garrisons established in the Peloponnese by his Macedonian rivals, Demetrius burnished his credentials as the champion of Greek liberty. He then devoted much of the remainder of the year to preparations for the revival of the League, intending to harness its considerable military potential for his ongoing struggle with Cassander. To this end he presented himself as the legitimate successor to Philip and Alexander by refounding Sicyon as Demetrias and marrying the Epirote princess Deidameia, the betrothed of Alexander IV before he was murdered by Cassander. Convoing the *koinon synedrion* that formally reconstituted the League in the spring of 302 presented a considerable challenge, both logistically and for the Antigonid propaganda machine, and if preparations had begun early in 303, the chronological confusion in the literary sources is more easily understood.

After Demetrius was initiated into the Mysteries, he returned to the Peloponnese to preside over the Argive Heraia, another opportunity to present his case for the League in a panhellenic setting. So too were the Nemean games, where Cassander had presided in 315. An inscription found at Nemea that mentions Acrocorinth and contingents of Cycladic troops has been associated with an earlier Antigonid campaign (Geagan 1968), but fits more comfortably in

the context of 303 when Demetrius sought to present himself as a liberator, in the starkest possible contrast to Cassander, whom contemporary Athenian inscriptions paint as an occupier bent on enslaving Hellas.

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