

On Being Heard: Protest, Imperialism, and the *Adoniazousai*

Here I explore the issue of the Adonia of 415BCE. Through the extant evidence, nearly all of which treats this particular Adonia, I conclude that though it is impossible to interpret the regularly occurring Adonia (i.e. the Adonia of every year except 415), this particular performance, held out of season in the spring, during the immensely important meeting of the *ekklesia* at which the Sicilian expedition was discussed, was in fact a protest in which the *Adoniazousai* made convenient use of an unofficial ritual to make their voices heard against the expedition.

I begin by examining what is known of the ritual itself. From the few vase paintings we possess and the brief comments of Plato (*Phaedr.* 276b) and Menander (*Sam.* 38–46), a rough sketch is given. Next I offer an overview of the interpretations made by several contemporary scholars from Detienne to present (e.g. Detienne 1994; Winkler 1990; Simms 1998; Burnett 2012). Each interpretation, I argue, is as untenable as those preceding it, for we simply do not know enough about the typical Adonia to make even a semi-educated guess.

Following this, I compare the evidence from Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* (387–398) and Plutarch's *Nicias* (13.7) and *Alcibiades* (18.7), the three most important sources we possess, in order to discuss the timing of the Adonia of 415BCE. Aristophanes places this performance in the spring, concurrent with the debate in the *ekklesia* regarding the Sicilian expedition, while Plutarch places it in the summer, coinciding with the departure of the fleet for Sicily. I argue that Aristophanes' testimony is to be preferred over Plutarch's, though from the line in Plato's *Phaedrus* it stands to reason that the Adonia was regularly performed in the middle of the summer (with Furley 1988, 1996.140–144; contra Dillon 2003; see also Simms 1997).

Having established the chronological position of this particular Adonia, I then explore its

significance. Aristophanes clearly intends the reference in his *Lysistrata* to parallel Lysistrata's occupation of the Acropolis, and thus it follows that the Adonia of 415 was an event comparable to Lysistrata's anti-war protest (cf. Reitzammer 2008). In order to understand this event, I turn to other protests that occurred both within ancient Hellenic communities and those temporally and spatially removed from them (See esp. Forsdyke 2012). I consider why the *Adoniazousai* regarded the Adonia as a suitable vehicle for expressing their disapproval of renewed imperialism. The importance of women within the Athenian religious system, the fact that the ritual occurred on their rooftops, giving them a platform from which they were sure to be heard, and the Adonia itself, a ritual lament for and burial of a young man in his prime, could easily be regarded as determinant factors. Finally, I conclude with a few brief remarks on how our perceptions of 'Athenian women' are altered by recognizing that this was indeed an act of protest at a critical moment during the Second Peloponnesian War, emphasizing that at least some women were obviously not the silent and secluded figures that haunt (and hinder) the work of many modern scholars.

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