

Thucydides

***History
of the Peloponnesian War***

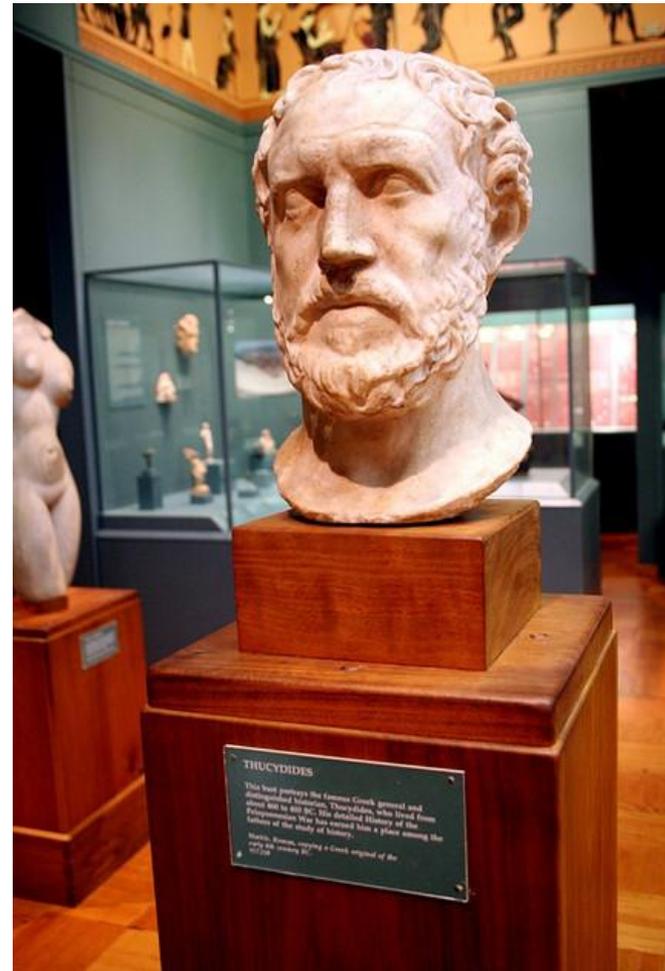
CVSP 201

5 March 2013

J. Meloy

Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*

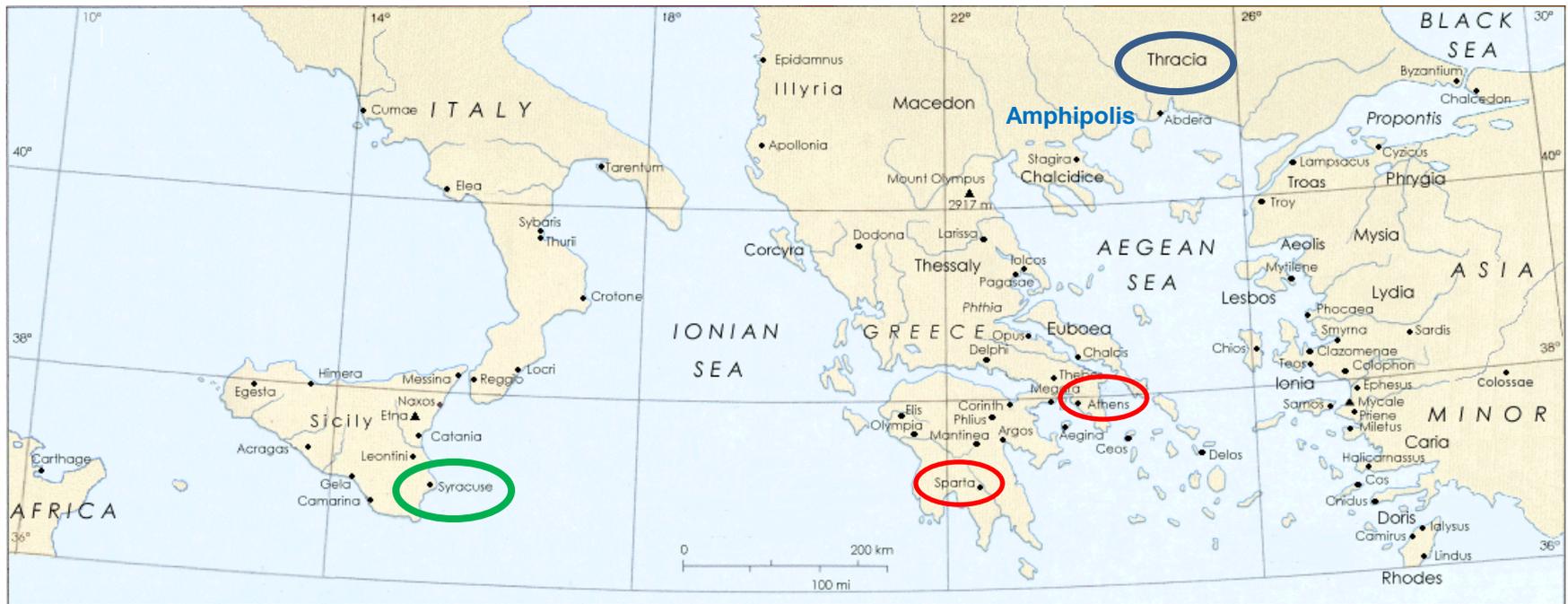
- “My work is not a piece of writing designed to meet the taste of an immediate public, but was done to last forever.”



In the Royal Ontario Museum

“Thucydides the Athenian wrote the history of the war between **Athens** and **Sparta** . . .”

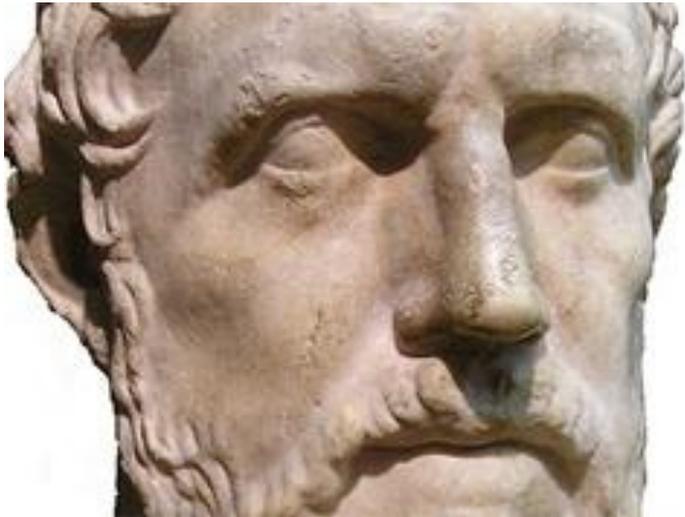
Map of the Ancient Greek World © 1998 [Bernard SUZANNE](http://plato-dialogues.org/tools/gk_wrlld.htm) http://plato-dialogues.org/tools/gk_wrlld.htm



The Peloponnesian War started in 431 and ended in 404 BCE.

- Athens and allies formed the Delian League
- Sparta and allies formed the Peloponnesian League
- Thucydides died in 400 BCE; at the time of his death, he was writing his account of the year 411 in Book VIII.





military officer

student of sophism

Antiphon

Protagoras

**“make the weaker
argument the stronger”**

Pericles and Cleon

Debate at Sparta

Pericles’ Funeral Oration

Pericles' Funeral Oration



Pericles in the British Museum

What is Thucydides' view of the Law?

Pericles: “What I would prefer is that you should fix your eyes every day on the greatness of Athens as she really is, and should fall in love with her. When you realize her greatness, then reflect that what made her great was men who were ashamed to fall below a certain standard.”

- “We are free and tolerant in our private lives; but in public affairs we keep to the law. This is because it commands our deep respect. We give our obedience to those whom we put in positions of authority, and we obey the laws themselves, especially those which are the protection of the oppressed, and those unwritten laws which it is an acknowledged shame to break.”

- “In other respects also Athens owed to the plague the beginnings of a state of unprecedented lawlessness . . . As for what is called honour, no one showed himself willing to abide by its laws, so doubtful was it whether we would survive to enjoy the name of it. It was generally agreed that what was both honourable and valuable was the pleasure of the moment and everything that might conceivably contribute to that pleasure. No fear of God or law of man had a restraining influence.”



“Plague in an Ancient City,”
Michael Sweerts
(Holland, circa 1652-1654)
LACMA

History as Inquiry

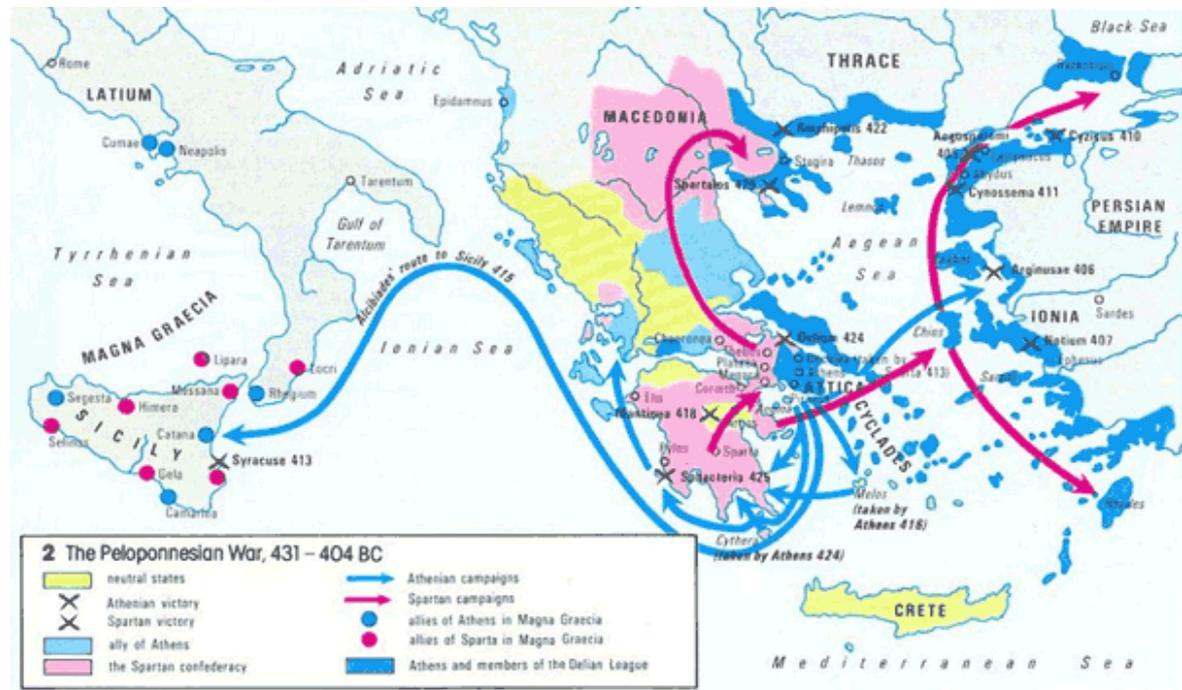


Herodotus and Thucydides
in the Naples Archaeological Museum

- **Thucydides: “The rest of the Hellenes, too, make many incorrect assumptions not only about the dimly remembered past, but also about contemporary history. . . . Most people, in fact, will not take trouble in finding out the truth, but are much more inclined to accept the first story they hear.”**

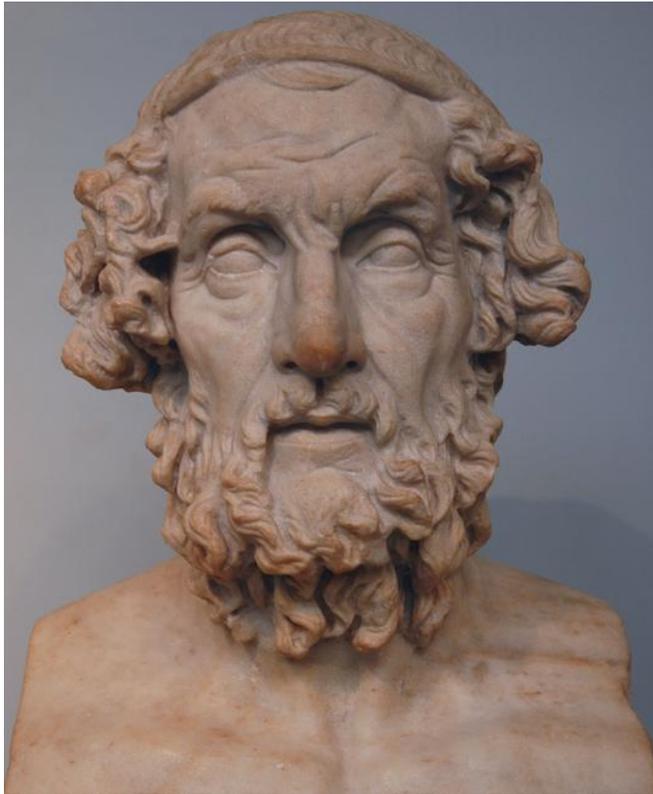
Inquiring into “deeper realities”

- Avoid discussion of supernatural
- Skepticism
- Accuracy
- Context
- Interpretation
- Understanding “from all sides”

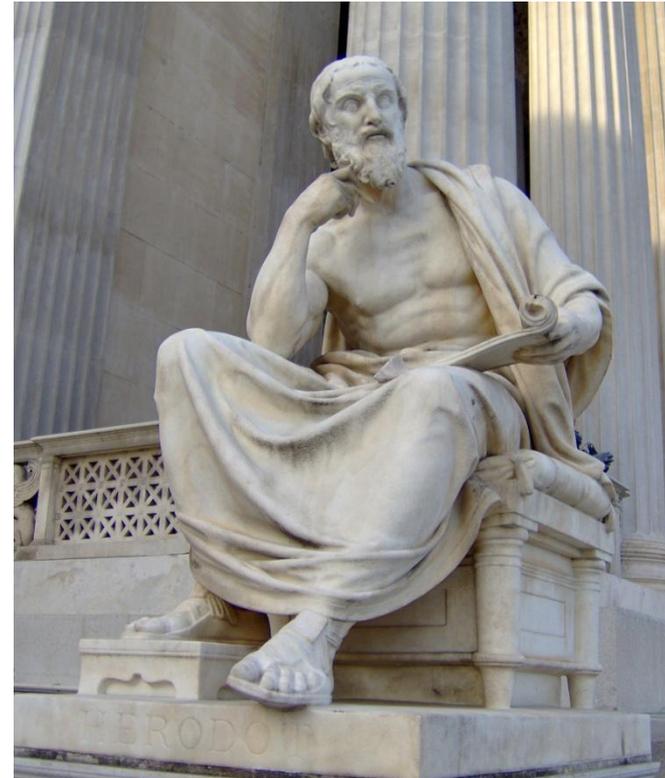


Arguments: historiographical

Thucydides: my evidence is more reliable than “that of the poets, who exaggerate the importance of their themes, or of the prose chroniclers, who are less interested in telling the truth than in catching the attention of their public, whose authorities cannot be checked. . .”



Homer
in the British Museum



Herodotus at the Austrian parliament
Wikimedia Commons

Arguments: historical

Thucydides: the war between Athens and Sparta was the greatest war of all time.

“. . . more worth writing about than any of those which had taken place in the past.”

“Never before had so many cities been captured and then devastated, whether by foreign armies or by the Hellenic powers themselves . . . Never had there been so many exiles; never such loss of life—both in the actual warfare and in internal revolutions.”

“Wide areas . . . Were affected by violent earthquakes . . . eclipses . . . drought . . . famine . . . plague . . . All these calamities fell together upon the Hellenes after the outbreak of the great war.”



Reenactment of a hoplite phalanx by the Korymbantes Historical Association. From:

[periklisdelligiannis Περικλής Δεληγιάννης](http://periklisdelligiannis.wordpress.com/tag/colonies-in-antiquity/)

Ιστορικές Αναδιφήσεις – Delving into History

<http://periklisdelligiannis.wordpress.com/tag/colonies-in-antiquity/>

Arguments: Virtue and Human Nature

- **“It will be enough for me if these words of mine are judged useful by those who want to understand clearly the events which happened in the past and which (human nature being what it is) will, at some time or other and in much the same ways, be repeated in the future.”**

What is human nature for Thucydides?

Greek cultures:

Athenians were Ionians

Spartans were Dorians



Cultural ties and Political alliances



Power and Culture



<http://undevicesimus.deviantart.com/art/The-Peloponnesian-War-431-404-BC-319368659>

The Acropolis in Athens

Copyright: © UNESCO
Author: F. Bandarin

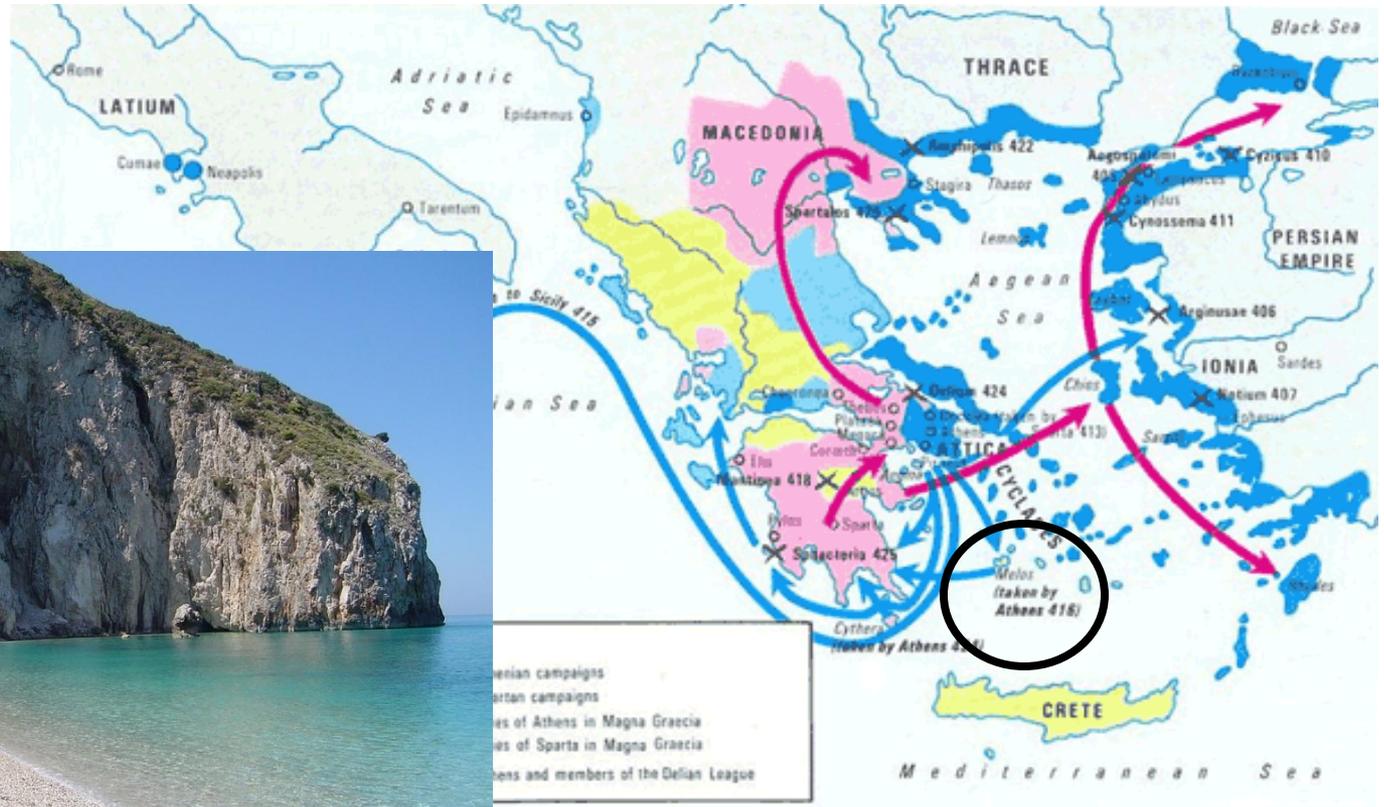
Opposing characters: Pericles vs. Cleon



- **Who would keep a statue of a demagogue?**
- **demagogue:**
“a leader who makes use of popular prejudices and false claims and promises in order to gain power.”

Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary

The Melian Dialogue



Milos/Melos
ecotourism-greece.com

- **The Peloponnesian War, 431-404 BCE**
- **Ten years of war**
- **Peace of Nicias: seven years of quasi-peace**
- **Ten years of war**
- **“the general deterioration of character throughout the Greek world”**
- **“the simple way of looking at things.”**

The Mytilenian Debate

Cleon: “punish [the Mytilenians] as they deserve, and make an example of them to your allies, plainly showing that revolt will be punished by death.”

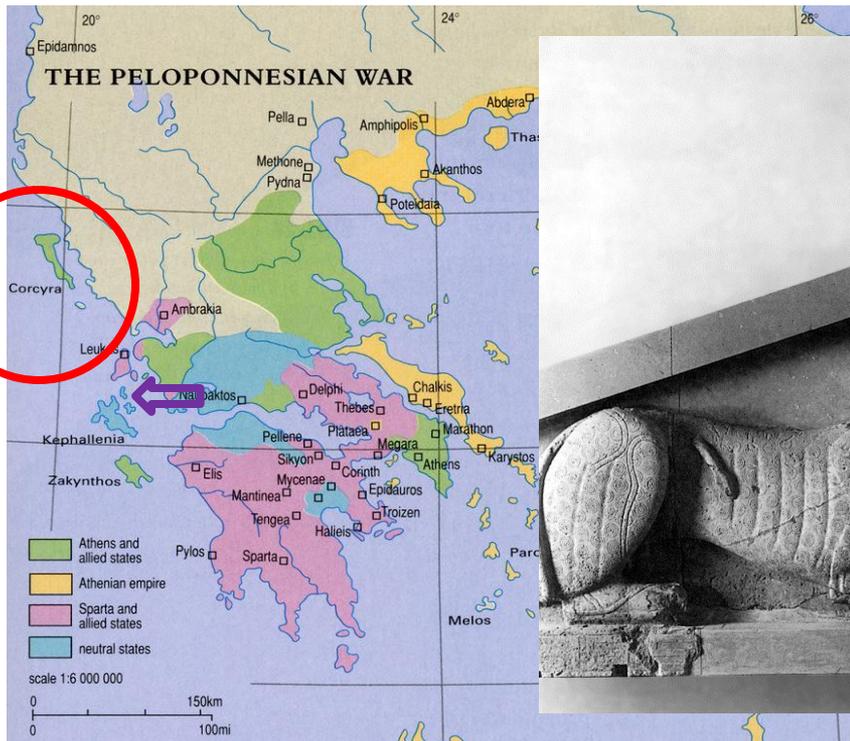
Pericles: “Your [Athenian] empire is like a tyranny: it may have been wrong to take it; it is certainly dangerous to let it go.”

Cleon: “if [the Mytilenians] were justified in revolting, [then] you [Athenians] must be wrong in holding power.”



The island of Lesbos
lesvosisland.com

Corcyra: “father . . . Killed their sons; men were dragged from the temples or butchered on the very altars; some were actually walled up in the temple of Dionysus and died there.”



From the Temple of Artemis, Corcyra
shelton.berkeley.edu

utexas.edu

Remember Odysseus? Ithaca is next to the island of Kephallonia.

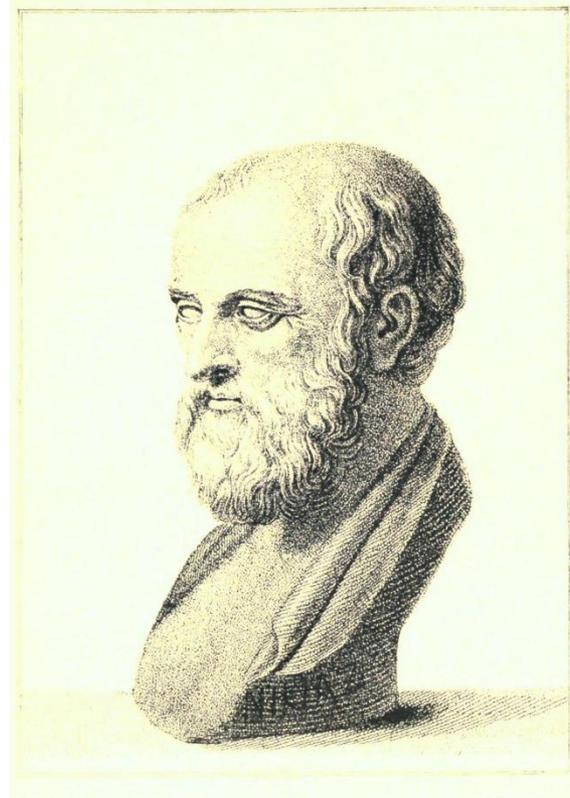
The Civil War in Corcyra

“to fit in with the change of events, words, too, had to change their usual meanings. What used to be described as a thoughtless act of aggression was now regarded as the courage one would expect to find in a party member; to think of the future and wait was merely another way of saying one was a coward; any idea of moderation was just an attempt to disguise one’s unmanly character; [the] ability to understand a question from all sides meant that one was totally unfitted for action . . .”

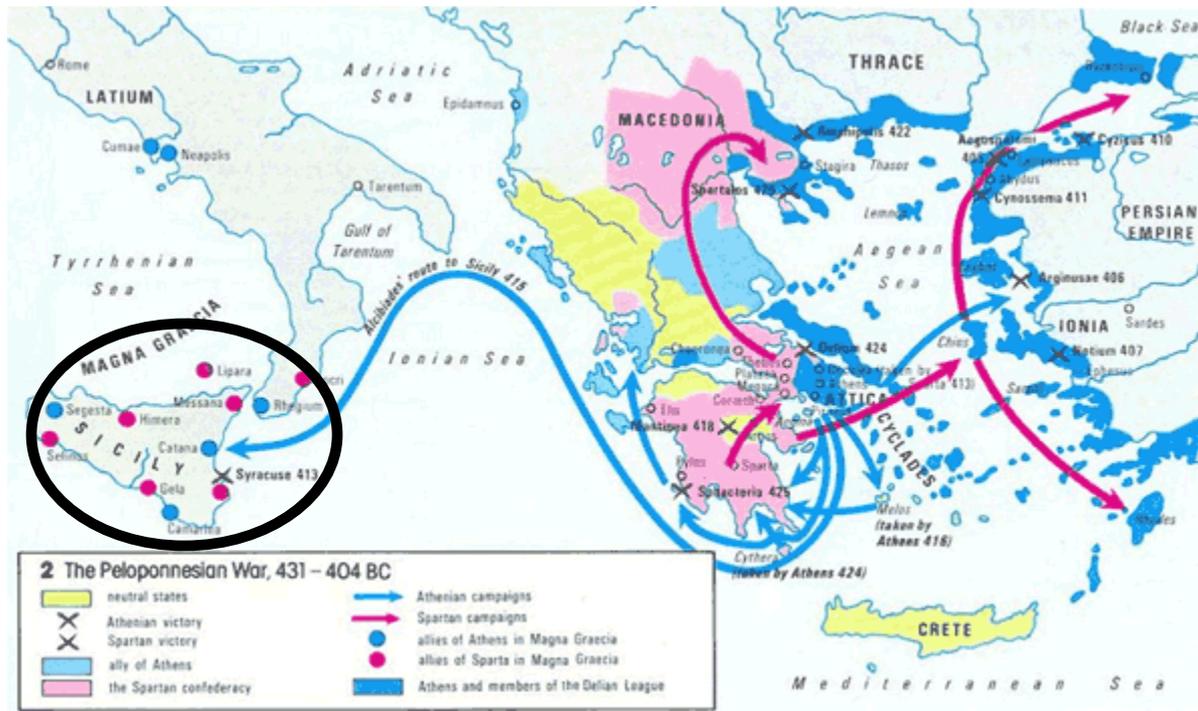


The Peace of Nicias

- **Nicias:**
“of all the Hellenes of my time, [he] least deserved to come to so miserable an end, since the whole of his life had been devoted to the study and the practice of virtue.”



Alcibiades' campaign to Syracuse in Sicily



The End of the War

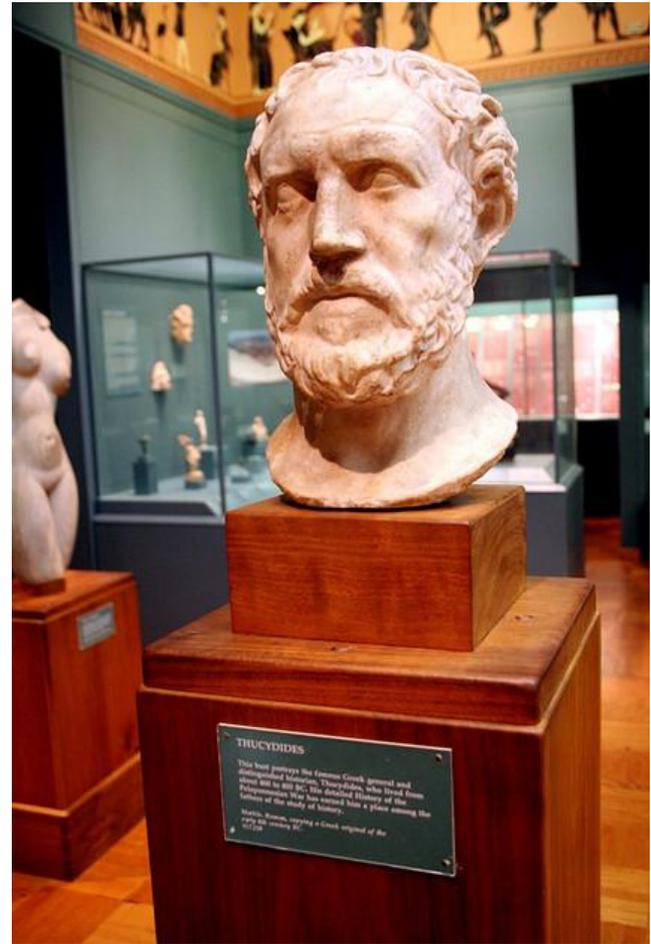
- “No Hellenic army had ever suffered such a reverse. [The Athenians] had come to enslave others, and now they were going away frightened of being enslaved themselves.”



The Greek theatre in Syracuse
“Oedipus the King” now playing!
http://www.algila.it/en/season_greek_theatre_siracusa.htm

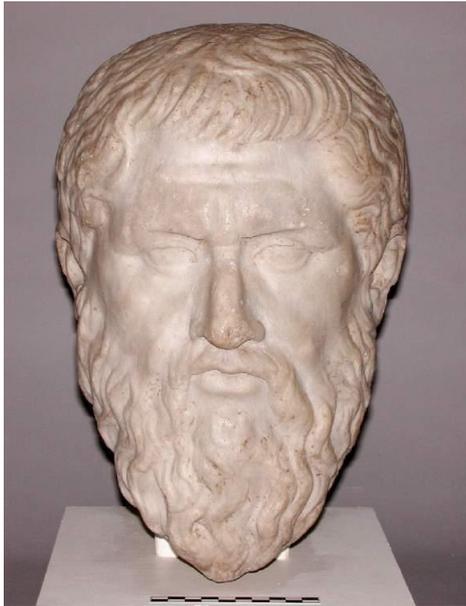
Athens and Thucydides

insight, character, virtue



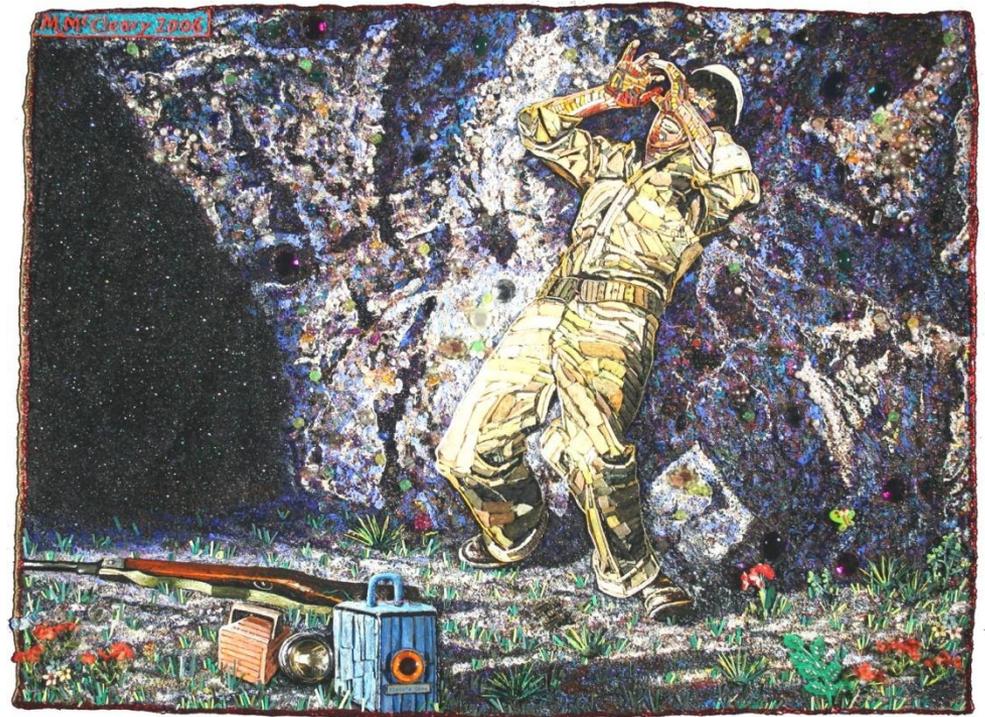
Coming soon to a cave near you!

The Republic
by Plato



Plato

in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge University
fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk



"Plato's Cave"

Mary McCleary, 2006