

# Corcyra & Corinth Debate at Athens

Corinth goes to Hellas

collected from the Peloponnese itself and good terms were offered to bring them also from the rest of Hellas

In Corcyra the news of the preparations provoked alarm. They had no allies in Hellas, since they had not enrolled themselves either in the Spartan or in the Athenian league. They decided therefore to go to Athens, to join the Athenian alliance, and see whether they could get any support from that quarter.

When the news of this move reached Corinth, the Corinthians also sent representatives to Athens, fearing that the combined strength of the navies of Athens and Corcyra would prevent them from having their own way in the war with Corcyra. An assembly was held and the arguments on both sides were put forward. The representatives of Corcyra spoke as follows:

Athenians, in a situation like this, it is right and proper that first of all certain points should be made clear. We have come to ask you for help, but cannot claim that this help is due to us because of any great services we have done to you in the past or on the basis of any existing alliance. We must therefore convince you first that by giving us this help you will be acting in your own interests, or certainly not against your own interests; and then we must show that our gratitude can be depended upon. If on all these points you find our arguments unconvincing, we must not be surprised if our mission ends in failure.

'Now Corcyra has sent us to you in the conviction that in asking for your alliance we can also satisfy you on these points. What has happened is that our policy in the past appears to have been against our own present interests, and at the same time makes it look inconsistent of us to be asking help from you. It certainly looks inconsistent to be coming here to ask for help when in the past we have deliberately avoided all alliances; and it is because of this very policy that we are now left entirely alone to face a war with Corinth. We used to think that our neutrality was a wise thing, since it prevented us being dragged into danger by other people's policies; now we see it clearly as a lack of foresight and as a source of weakness.

'It is certainly true that in the recent naval battle we defeated the Corinthians single-handed. But now they are coming against us with a much greater force drawn from the Peloponnese and from

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Corcyra

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'If you grant our request, you will find that in many ways it was a good thing that we made it at this particular time. First of all, you will not be helping aggressors, but people who are the victims of aggression. Secondly, we are now in extreme peril, and if you welcome our alliance at this moment you will win our undying gratitude. And then, we are, after you, the greatest naval power in Hellas. You would have paid a lot of money and still have been very grateful to have us on your side. Is it not, then, an extraordinary stroke of good luck for you (and one which will cause heart-burning among your enemies) to have us coming over voluntarily into your camp, giving ourselves up to you without involving you in any dangers or any expense? It is a situation where we, whom you are helping, will be grateful to you, the world in general will admire you for your generosity, and you yourselves will be stronger than you were before. There is scarcely a case in history where all these advantages have been available at the same time. nor has it often happened before that a power looking for an alliance can say to those whose help it asks that it can give as much honour and as much security as it will receive.

'In case of war we should obviously be useful to you, but some of you may think that there is no immediate danger of war. Those who think along those lines are deceiving themselves; they do not see the facts that Sparta is frightened of you and wants war, that Corinth is your enemy and is also influential at Sparta. Corinth has attacked us first in order to attack you afterwards. She has no wish to make enemies of us both at once and find us standing together against her. What she wants is to get an initial advantage over you in one of two ways - either by destroying our power or by forcing us to use it in her interests. But it is our policy to be one move ahead, which is why we want you to accept the alliance

which we offer. It is better to have the initiative in these matters - to take our own measures first, rather than be forced to counter the intrigues that are made against us by others.

34 'If the Corinthians say that you have no right to receive one of their colonies into your alliance, they should be told that every colony, if it is treated properly, honours its mother city, and only becomes estranged when it has been treated badly. Colonists are not sent abroad to be the slaves of those who remain behind, but to be their equals. And it is quite clear that Corinth was in the wrong so far as we are concerned. We asked those to settle the affair of Epidamnus by arbitration; but they chose to prosecute their claims by war instead of by a reasonable settlement. Indeed, the way in which they are treating us, their kinsmen, ought to be a warning to you and ought to prevent you from falling into their deceitful traps or listening to what may appear to be their straightforward demands. When one makes concessions to one's enemies, one regrets it afterwards, and the fewer concessions one makes the safer one is likely to be.

35 'It is not a breach of your treaty with Sparta if you receive us into your alliance. We are neutrals, and it is expressly written down in your treaty that any Hellenic state which is in this condition is free to ally itself with whichever side it chooses. What is really monstrous is a situation where Corinth can find sailors for her ships both from her own allies and from the rest of Hellas, including in particular your own subjects, while we are shut off from a perfectly legitimate alliance, and indeed from getting help from anywhere: and then, on top of that, they will actually accuse you of behaving illegally if you grant our request. In fact it is we who shall have far greater reasons to complain of you if you are not willing to help us; you will be rejecting us, who are no enemies of yours, in the hour of our peril, and as for the others, who are enemies of yours and are also the aggressors, you will not only be doing nothing to stop them, but will actually be allowing them to build up their strength from the resources of your own empire. Is this right? Surely you ought either to stop them from engaging troops from your own subjects, or else to give us, too, whatever assistance you think proper. Best of all would be for you to receive us in open alliance and help us in that way.

Corcyra

'We have already suggested that such a course would be very much in your own interests. Perhaps the greatest advantage to you is that you can entirely depend on us because your enemies are the same as ours, and strong ones, too, quite capable of doing damage to those who revolt from them. And then it is quite a different matter for you if you reject alliance with a naval power than if you do the same thing with a land power. Your aim, no doubt, should be, if it were possible, to prevent anyone else having a navy at all: the next best thing is to have on your side the strongest navy that there is.

36 'Some of you may admit that we have shown that the alliance would be in your interests, and yet may still feel apprehensive about a breach of your treaty with Sparta. Those who think in this way should remember that, whether you feel apprehensive or not, you will certainly have become stronger, and that this fact will make your enemies think twice before attacking you; whereas if you reject us, however confident you may feel, you will in fact be the weaker for it, and consequently less likely to be treated with respect by a strong enemy. Remember, too, that your decision is going to affect Athens just as much as Corcyra. At the moment your thoughts are on the coming war - a war, in fact, which has almost broken out already. Certainly you will not be showing very much foresight for your own city if, at this time, you are in two minds whether to have on your side a power like Corcyra, whose friendship can be so valuable and whose hostility so dangerous to you. Apart from all other advantages, Corcyra lies in an excellent position on the coastal route to Italy and Sicily, and is thus able to prevent naval reinforcements coming to the Peloponnese from there, or going from the Peloponnese to those countries.

'The whole thing can be put very shortly, and these few words will give you the gist of the whole argument why you should not abandon us. There are three considerable naval powers in Hellas - Athens, Corcyra, and Corinth. If Corinth gets control of us first and you allow our navy to be united with hers, you will have to fight against the combined fleets of Corcyra and the Peloponnese. But if you receive us into your alliance, you will enter upon the war with our ships as well as your own.'

Corcyra

37 After this speech from the Corcyraean side, the representative of Corinth spoke as follows: "These Corcyraeans have not confined their argument to the question of whether or not you should accept their alliance. They have named us as aggressors and have stated that they are the victims of an unjust war. Before, therefore, we go on to the rest of our argument, we must deal first with these two points. Our aim will be to give you a clear idea of what exactly we are claiming from you, and to show that there are good reasons why you should reject the appeal of Corcyra.

"Wisdom" and "Moderation" are the words used by Corcyra in describing her old policy of avoiding alliances. In fact the motives were entirely evil, and there was nothing good about them at all. She wanted no allies because her actions were wrong, and she was ashamed of calling in others to witness her own misdoings. The geographical situation of Corcyra gives its inhabitants a certain independence. The ships of other states are forced to put in to their harbours much more often than Corcyraean ships visit the harbours of other states. So in cases where a Corcyraean has been guilty of injuring some other national, the Corcyraeans are themselves their own judges, and there is no question of having the case tried by independent judges appointed by treaty. So this neutrality of theirs, which sounds so innocent, was in fact a disguise adopted not to preserve them from having to share in the wrong-doings of others, but in order to give them a perfectly free hand to do wrong themselves, making away with other people's property by force, when they are strong enough, cheating them, whenever they can manage to do so, and enjoying their gains without any vestige of shame. Yet if they really were the honourable people they pretend to be, this very independence of theirs would have given them the best possible opportunity of showing their good qualities in the relations of common justice.

38 "In fact they have not acted honourably either towards us or towards anyone else. Though they are colonists of ours, they have never been loyal to us and are now at war with us. They were not sent out in the first place, they say, to be ill treated. And we say that we did not found colonies in order to be insulted by them, but rather to retain our leadership and to be treated with proper respect. At all events our other colonies do respect us, and indeed they treat

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us with great affection. It is obvious, then, that if the majority are pleased with us, Corcyra can have no good reason for being the only one that is dissatisfied; and that we are not making war unreasonably, but only as the result of exceptional provocation. Even if we were making a mistake, the right thing would be for them to give in to us, and then it would be a disgrace to us if we failed to respect so reasonable an attitude. As it is, their arrogance and the confidence they feel in their wealth have made them act improperly towards us on numerous occasions, and in particular with regard to Epidamnus, which belongs to us. When this place was in distress, they took no steps towards bringing it under their control; but as soon as we came to relieve it, they forcibly took possession of it, and still hold it.

39 "They actually say that they were prepared in the first place to submit the matter to arbitration. The phrase is meaningless when used by someone who has already stolen an advantage and makes the offer from a safe position; it should only be used when, before opening hostilities, one puts oneself on a real and not an artificial level with one's enemies. And in their case there was no mention of this excellent idea of arbitration before they started to besiege Epidamnus; they only brought the word forward when they began to think that we were not going to let them have their own way.

"And now, being in the wrong themselves over Epidamnus, they have come to you and are asking you not so much for alliance as for complicity in their crime. They are asking you to welcome them at a time when they are at war with us. What they should have done was to have approached you in the days when they were really secure, not at this present moment, when they have wronged us and when danger threatens them. Under present circumstances you will be giving aid to people who never gave you a share in their power, and you will force us to hold you equally responsible with them, although you took no part in their misdeeds. Surely, if they expect you to join fortunes with them now, they should have shared their power with you in the past.

40 "We have shown, I think, that we have good reasons for complaint, and that the conduct of Corcyra has been both violent and grasping. Next we should like you to understand that it would

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not be right on just for you to receive them as allies. Though there may be a clause in the treaty stating that any city not included in the original agreement is free to join whichever side it likes, this cannot refer to cases where the object of joining an alliance is to injure other powers; it cannot refer to a case where a city is only looking for security because it is in revolt, and where the result of accepting its alliance, if one looks at the matter dispassionately, will be, not peace, but war. And this is what may well happen to you, if you will not take our advice. You would not only be helping them, but making war on us, who are bound to you by treaty. If you join them in attacking us, we shall be forced to defend ourselves against you as well as against them.

<sup>41</sup> 'The right course, surely, is either for you to preserve a strict neutrality or else to join us against them. At least you have treaty obligations towards Corinth, whereas you have never even had a peace treaty with Corcyra. What you ought not to do is to establish a precedent by which a power may receive into its alliance the revolted subjects of another power. At the time when Samos revolted from you and when the Peloponnesian states were divided on the question whether to help them or not, we were not one of those who voted against you; on the contrary, we openly opposed the others and said that every power should have the right to control its own allies. Now, if you are going to welcome and assist people who have done wrong to us, you will find just as many of your own people coming over to our side, and you will be establishing a precedent that is likely to harm you even more than us. All this we have a perfect right to claim from you by Hellenic law and custom. We should like also to give you some advice and to mention that we have some title to your gratitude. We are not enemies who are going to attack you, and we are not on such friendly terms that such services are quite normal. We say, therefore, that the time has come for you to repay us for what we did for you in the past.

'You were short of warships when you were fighting Aegina, just before the Persian invasion. Corinth then gave you twenty ships. As a result of this act of kindness you were able to conquer Aegina, and as a result of our other good turn to you, when we prevented the Peloponnesian states from helping Samos, you were

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able to punish that island. And these acts of ours were done at critical periods, periods when people are very apt to turn upon their enemies and disregard every other consideration except victory. At such times people regard even former enemies as their friends, so long as they are on their side, and even genuine friends as their enemies, if they stand in their way; in fact their overmastering desire for victory makes them neglect their own best interests.

<sup>42</sup> 'We should like you to think carefully over these points; we should like your young men to ask their elders about them, and for you to decide that you ought to behave towards us as we have behaved towards you. Do not think: "the Corinthians are quite right in what they say, but in the event of war all this is not in our interest." It is generally the best policy to make the fewest errors of judgement, and you must remember that, though Corcyra is trying to frighten you into doing wrong by this idea of a coming war, there is no certainty that a war will come. You may think that Corinth will be your enemy in the future, but it is not worth your while to be carried away by this idea and to make open enemies of us now. A much wiser course would be to remove the suspicions which we already feel towards you in connection with Megara. And you will find that an act of kindness done at the right moment has a power to dispel old grievances quite out of proportion to the act itself.

<sup>43</sup> 'Do not be influenced by the fact that they are offering you a great naval alliance. The power that deals fairly with its equals finds a truer security than the one which is hurried into snatching some apparent but dangerous advantage. We ourselves are now in the position that you were in at the time when, during the discussions at Sparta, we laid down the principle that every power should have the right to punish its own allies. We claim that you should uphold this principle, and, since our vote helped you then, you should not injure us now by voting against us. No, you should deal with us as we have dealt with you, and you should be conscious that we are in one of those critical situations where real friendship is to be gained from helping us and real hostility from opposing us. Do not go against us by receiving these Corcyraeans into your alliance. Do not aid and abet them in their crimes. Thus

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you will be acting as you ought to act and at the same time you will be making the wisest decision in your own interests.

44 This was the speech of the Corinthian delegation. The Athenians, after listening to both sides, discussed the matter at two assemblies. At the first of these, opinion seemed to incline in favour of the Corinthian arguments, but at the second there was a change, and they decided on entering into some kind of alliance with Corcyra. This was not to be a total alliance involving the two parties in any war which either of them might have on hand; for the Athenians realized that if Corcyra required them to join in an attack on Corinth, that would constitute a breach of their treaty with the Peloponnese. Instead the alliance was to be of a defensive character and would only operate if Athens or Corcyra or any of their allies were attacked from outside.

The general belief was that, whatever happened, war with the Peloponnese was bound to come. Athens had no wish to see the strong navy of Corcyra pass into the hands of Corinth. At the same time she was not averse from letting the two Powers weaken each other by fighting together; since in this way, if war did come, Athens herself would be stronger in relation to Corinth and to the other naval Powers. Then, too, it was a fact that Corcyra lay very conveniently on the coastal route to Italy and Sicily.

45 So, with these considerations in mind, Athens made her alliance with Corcyra. The Corinthian representatives returned to Corinth, and soon afterwards Athens sent ten ships as a reinforcement to Corcyra. These ships were under the command of Lacedaimonius, the son of Cimon, Diotimus, the son of Strombichus, and Proteas, the son of Epicles. Their instructions were to avoid battle with the Corinthians except under the following circumstances. If the Corinthians sailed against Corcyra with the intention of landing on the island itself or at any point in Corcyraean territory, then they were to do whatever they could to prevent it. These instructions were given in order to avoid breaking the existing treaty.

46 The ten ships reached Corcyra, and now the Corinthians had completed their preparations and sailed for the island with a fleet of 150 ships. Ten of these came from Elis, twelve from Megara, ten from Leucas, twenty-seven from Ambracia, one from Anactorium, and ninety from Corinth herself. Each contingent had its

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