

LYSISTRATA

A Comedy by Aristophanes, First Performed in 411 BCE

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Peloponnesian War between Athens, Sparta, and their respective allies lasted for 27 years.

It would cause the destruction of human lives and the eventual downfall of Athenian democracy.

In the second year of the war, a plague killed tens of thousands of Athenians, including their beloved leader, Pericles, and his sons. Without the cautious guidance of his moderate strategies, Athens would come under the sway of politicians like Cleon, who would encourage riskier tactics against the Spartans, leading to more death.

In the war's fifth year, the playwright Aristophanes wrote a scathing satire in which an ordinary Athenian stands up to the warmongering rulers of Athens and, through debate, organization, and the wisdom of the common people, brings peace to the land. This play was called *The Knights*. The war continued.

In the war's tenth year, Aristophanes would introduce another play, in which another common Athenian would bring about a miraculous peace. This time the play was called *Peace*, and soon after its debut, Athens was indeed blessed with a peace treaty. The Peace of Nicias, named for the Athenian aristocrat who negotiated it, was meant to last for fifty years. It wouldn't last for three.

In the war's thirteenth year, the largest land battle of the war would be fought at Mantinea. It was a major Athenian loss, even when the city was officially at peace.

In the war's sixteenth year, Athens sent a naval expedition to Sicily in the hopes of securing either alliance or subjugation from Syracuse, which had begun to lean towards Spartan support.

In the war's eighteenth year, the entire Sicilian Expedition was dead to the last man. Nicias, whose peace was formally disbanded the previous year, was taken prisoner and executed. Syracuse's alliance with Sparta was secured, and Athens was so rocked by this overwhelming defeat that democracy was overthrown in a coup by the city's oligarchs.

Lysistrata was first performed in the twentieth year of the war.

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

Lysistrata: lee-see-STRAT-a

Caloniki: ka-lo-NEE-kee

Lampito: la-bee-TO

Ismenia: eez-MEE-nee

Myrrhini: mee-REE-nee

Stratyllis: stra-tee-LEES

Nikothiki: nee-ko-THEE-kee

Krytilli: kree-TEE-lee

Kalliyki: ka-LEE-kee

Rhodippi: ro-THEE-pee

Drakis: THRA-kees

Philourgos: fee-loor-GHOS

Phadrias: fa-THREE-as

Strynidoros: stree-NEE-tho-ros

Cinesias: kee-nee-SEE-as

Polycharides: po-lee-kha-REE-dees

Manes: MA-nees

In Greek, “**d**” is spoken with a voiced “th” as in “the”

“**th**” is always a voiceless “th” as in “thing”

“**i**” is always like the long “ee” in “glee”

“**ch**” is spoken like in the Scottish “loch”

“**g**” is more open, and closer to the “w” sound in “woman”

“**o**” is pronounced like the “o” in “honest”, but never the “o” in “ocean”

“**r**” is trilled like in Spanish “perro” or Ian McKellen’s “Mordor.”

GLOSSARY

Acharnian: ah-KAR-nee-an - from Acharnae, a poor district in Athens. *The Acharnians* is also an early play by Aristophanes where a man, against all odds, secures peace with Sparta.

Acropolis: ah-KRO-po-lees - Gr. “upper city” - a citadel built on a hilltop for defense and for religious rites, the most famous acropolis being in Athens. It was a haunt for owls, which were symbols of Athena. The Athena Parthenos, the statue of Athena inside the Parthenon, depicted a gigantic snake at the bottom of her Aegis shield. The snake was the symbol of the mythological king Erichthonius (an early ruler of Athens).

Adonis: AH-do-nees - mortal lover of the goddess Aphrodite, gored to death by a boar. His death was mourned in the annual women’s festival, the Adonia.

Aeschylus: ES-ka-us - playwright often called the father of tragedy. Plays include *The Persians*, *Seven Against Thebes*, *Prometheus Bound*, and the trilogy of plays that make up *The Oresteia*.

Aesop: *EE-sop* - storyteller whose attributed fables include “The Tortoise and The Hare”, “The Ant and the Grasshopper” and, referenced in this play, “The Beetle and the Eagle.” A Hare dug into the burrow of a Beetle, seeking refuge from the hungry Eagle. The Beetle told the Eagle to leave, as the Hare had the right to asylum. The Eagle simply swatted the Beetle away, and made the Hare his lunch. The Beetle got their revenge when it climbed into the Eagle’s nest and rolled their eggs to the ground. No matter how high the Eagle built its nest, even when the Eagle built a nest on the Throne of Zeus on Olympus, the Beetle would always climb high and smash its eggs.

Amazon: *AH-ma-zon* - mythological tribe of warrior women, said to be daughters of Harmonia, nymph of harmony, and Ares, god of war.

Amorgos: *ah-mor-WOS* - island in the Aegean, part of the Cyclades. Location of a temple to Aphrodite.

Amyclean: *ah-mee-KLEE-un* - from Amykles, village in Laconia, south of Sparta

Aphrodite: *AH-fro-DYE-tee* - goddess of love, beauty, pleasure, and sex; “Aphrodite’s shrine/mysteries” was a slang for the genitals

Apollo: *ah-PO-lo* - god of oracles, archery, music, dance and the sun. According to myth, he r*ped the Athenian princess Creusa in a cave on the northern side of the Acropolis. He concealed her pregnancy and in secret she gave birth to the hero Ion. Ion’s discovery of his divine parentage was the subject of a then recent play by Euripides.

Aristogeiton: *AH-ris-to-GYE-ton* - assassin who, with his lover Harmodius, killed the nobleman Hipparchus. He was tortured and killed in an attempt to root out the other assassins. Harmodius and Aristogeiton were later commemorated in Greek culture as “the Tyrannicides.”

Artemis: *AR-teh-mis* - goddess of the hunt, the wilderness, the moon, and chastity, associated with women

Artemisia: *ar-teh-MEE-zuh* - Queen of Halicanarsus, commanded the Persian fleet during the Battle of Salamis

Artemisium: *ar-teh-MEE-see-um* - the Temple of Artemis in Ephesus - one of the seven wonders of the ancient world

Assembly: *ah-SEM-blee* - the political body open to all male Athenian citizens, called by the Greek the ekklesia.

Athens: *AH-thens* - setting for the play, located in Attica, Greece. At war with Sparta.

Athena: *ah-THÉE-na* - goddess of wisdom, warfare, and the city patron goddess of Athens, from which she likely got her name. She has many epithets, including *Tritogeneia* (thrice-born) and *Parthenos* (virgin). The Parthenon in the Acropolis at Athens was her most sacred site. She is often depicted wearing a golden helmet, armed with a spear and shield, and accompanied by a snake at her feet and an owl by her head (both symbols of wisdom).

Bacchus: *BAK-kuss* - Roman name for Dionysus, god of wine, theater, and revelry. Bacchus’ “lovers” most likely refer to the maenads. (See “maenad”)

basket-carrying ceremonies: a reference to the Arrhephoria, a yearly ceremony held to honor the three daughters of the first king of Athens, Kekrops. Pandrosos and her sisters Aglauros and Herse were entrusted by Athena to watch over the baby Erechtheus, bastard son of Hephaestus and Gaia (it’s complicated and involves r*pe, as many Greek origin stories do), and heir to the throne of Athens. Athena instructed them never to look into the basket that held the babe within.

Aglauros and Herse disobeyed, driving them mad and causing them to hurl themselves from the Acropolis. Pandrosos, having obeyed Athena, was spared this fate. During Arrhephoria, young female initiates to Athena called Arrhephoroi performed a ritual of exchanging packages whose contents they were not allowed to know, in honor of the dutiful Pandrosos.

beds in Ancient Greece: they were much like modern beds, with wooden frames and a back board to rest pillows on. Mattresses were stuffed with wool or dry weeds and the sheets were cloth. They would be used for sleeping or eating - a combination bed and couch. The Greek word for this piece of furniture is *kline*, pl. *klinai*, from which we get the words *recline* and *clinic*.

Boeotia: *bee-O-shuh* - a region in central Greece, Thebes being its largest city. Boeotia was a source of eels for eating.

Bog Burrow: the town is named "Anagrya" in the archaic script, which does not appear to be a real town. Perhaps this is a pun? In context: "From Anagrya they come." "Yes, they generally manage to come first."

Brauronian Artemis: the cult of Artemis at Brauron in Attica, location of initiation rituals for young women from before puberty to first childbirth.

Bupalus: *boo-PA-lus* - sculptor from Chios, made caricatures of the poet Hipponax, who then wrote a satire of him so devastating he committed suicide

Carystian: *ka-REE-stee-an* - from Carystus, a city-state in the south of the island of Euboea. Carystian troops in Athens had got themselves a reputation for being, in the WW2 phrase, "oversexed and over here"

Castor: *KA-stor* - twin of Pollux, together called the Dioscuri and namesakes of the constellation Gemini. Castor was the son of Tyndareus, king of Sparta.

Charon: *HA-ron* - ferryman of Hades who carried the dead across the river Styx that divided the world of the living from that of the deceased.

Chloe: *HLO-ee* - an epithet of Demeter, goddess of the harvest. Gr. "blooming"

Cimon: *KEE-mon* - Athenian general, statesman, pro-aristocrat and veteran of the Persian wars who frequently engaged in pro-Spartan policies, including supporting Spartan King Pericleides against the revolt of the helots, and brokering a five-year peace treaty between Sparta and Athens in 451.

Cleisthenes: *KLYES-the-neeZ* - Athenian politician known as the founder of Athenian democracy

Cleitagora: *klye-ta-GHO-ra* - Spartan lyric poetess, namesake of a drinking song

Clepsydra: *klep-SEE-dra* - natural spring located northeast of the entrance to the Athenian Acropolis - also a name for a water clock.

Corinth: *KO-rinth* - city-state on the Isthmus of Corinth, halfway between Athens and Sparta and thus a frequent source of tension in Athenian politics. Corinth was part of the Peloponnesian League, as well as the site of a major temple to Aphrodite at the city's acropolis, the Acrocorinth. Allegedly, temple prostitution was practiced there ritually (see "prostitution in Ancient Greece").

Cyprus: *SYE-prus* - island in the eastern Mediterranean Sea that was one of the primary centers of worship to Aphrodite. According to myth, she was born near the island when the titan Uranus' genitals were severed and fell into the sea, where the goddess rose from the foam.

Cythera: *KEE-thee-ra* - island in the Aegean sea, or a town on said island, conquered by Athens from Sparta during the Peloponnesian War. Hesiod names it as the location of the birth of Aphrodite.

Demeter: *DEE-mee-ter* - goddess of the harvest and agriculture

Demostratus: *DE-mo-STRa-toos* - Athenian who supported and carried out the Sicilian Expedition - a military campaign during the Peloponnesian War that ended in disaster for the Athenian side.

Dionysus: *DEE-o-NEE-sos* - god of winemaking, fertility, festivals, and theatre.

Echinus: *eh-HEE-noos* - the name of two towns in ancient Greece - one in Acarnania, one in Thessaly

Eros: *EH-rohs* - god of love and sex

Eucrates: *eh-KRA-tees* - Athenian nobleman

Euripides: *er-ri-PEE-dees* - tragedian of classical Athens, author of *Medea*, *Hippolytus*, *Electra*, *The Trojan Women*, and *Bacchae*

Eurotas: *eh-RO-tas* - main river in Laconia.

Furies: *FYUr-reez* - deities of vengeance - three sisters who punished terrible crimes committed by mortals. Name comes from the Gr. *Erinyes* meaning, literally, "Avengers."

Gorgon: *GOR-gon* - one of three sisters with hair made of venomous snakes whose look turns men to stone. A gorgon's face was a common motif to have on Greek shields.

Graces: *GRAY-sez* - also called the Charites, goddesses of charm, beauty, creativity, and goodwill

Hekate: *he-CAH-tay* - goddess of crossroads, magic, and witchcraft; associated with women

Hektor: *HEK-tor* - mythical war hero, leader of the Trojan armies in Homer's *The Iliad*.

Helen: *HEL-en* - of Troy, the most beautiful woman in the world, whose abduction from Sparta by Paris led to the Trojan War.

Hellas: *heh-LASS* - ancient name for Greece, as well as its modern name. "Ελλάς" is what modern Greeks call their country. English speakers call it "Greece" from the Latin name for the region, "*Graecia*."

helot: *HEL-lut* - either a social class or subjugated ethnic group (or both) that made up the slave class of Spartan society and worked the land to serve Spartan citizens. The helots frequently revolted against their Spartan oppressors and were just as frequently brutally put down, sometimes with Athenian help.

Hera: *HEH-ra* - queen of the Gods, goddess of women, marriage, and family

Heracles: *HEH-ra-KLEEZ* - son of Zeus and Alcmene, divine hero and subject of the 1997 Disney animated film *Hercules*.

Hermes statues (herms): *HER-meez* - Hermes was god of messengers, merchants, travellers, and orators. He was frequently the subject of a unique style of statue which depicted a man's head, his genitals, and all else as simply a solid block. In 415 BCE, Athens was shocked by a scandal where multiple herms across the city were vandalized by having their penises knocked off. Some blamed it for the failure of the Sicilian Expedition.

Hippias: *HIH-pee-AHS* - the last tyrant of Athens, ousted in 510 BCE when Cleomenes of Sparta invaded Athens.

Homer: *HOE-mer* - semi-mythical author of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, a legendary poet even when this play was first produced.

Kleisthenes: *KLYES-the-neeZ* - a prominent Athenian *theoros*, or envoy, during the Peloponnesian War. Aristophanes frequently made fun of him for being effeminate and homosexual.

Leda: *LEE-dah* - mother to Castor and Clytemnestra by the Spartan king Tyndareus, and of Pollux and Helen of Troy, who were fathered by Zeus, who r*ped Leda in the form of a swan.

Lemnos: *LEM-noss* - island in the northern part of the Aegean Sea sacred to Hephaestus, god of the forge, due to volcanic activity on the island in ancient times.

Leonidas: *LEE-oh-NYE-dass* - king of Sparta who defended the pass at Thermopylae from Persian invaders. Played with extreme camp by Gerard Butler.

little bear: during the rites of *Arkteia* at Brauron, Athenian girls would wear bear skins and represent *arktoi* (female bears), performing a dance in honor of Artemis, to whom bears were sacred. The ritual ended with the shedding of the bear skin, symbolizing the onset of maturity.

Lycon: *LEE-kon* - an Athenian politician who would later go on to be one of the three accusers of Socrates. Presumably, he was at the center of a scandal involving an unfaithful wife.

Maenads: *MEE-nads* - female followers of Dionysus, depicted dressed in fawn skins, carrying a thyrsus (ceremonial wrapped in ivy and topped with a pine cone) and in states of intoxicated frenzy.

Megarean: *MEH-guh-REE-un* - from Megara, town in western Attica

Melia's Gulf: *meh-LEE-as GULF* - a gulf in the western Aegean Sea

Menelaus: *MEH-NEH-louse* - king of Sparta, husband to Helen of Troy, hero of the Trojan War

Messenia: *MEH-seh-NEE-a* - regional unit in the southwestern part of the Peloponnese region of Greece

Mikon: *MEE-kon* - Athenian sculptor who worked during the mid 5th century BCE

Milesian: *my-LEE-zyun* - from Miletus, city in Anatolia, modern day Turkey. The city had switched sides from the Athenian to the Spartan after Athens' defeat at Syracuse, leading to a battle that took place the previous year.

minas: *MEE-nas* - ancient unit of weight and currency

Myronithes: *mee-RON-nee-thees* - Athenian general of the 1st Peloponnesian War? No mentions outside of this play

Olympia: *o-LIM-pee-a* - town in the eastern Peloponnese that was the site of the Statue of Zeus and, most famously, the Olympic Games.

oracle: *OR-ah-kul* - high priestess who spoke prophecies, the most famous oracle being the Pythia at the Temple of Apollo at Delphi.

Orsilochus: *or-SILL-o-kus* - according to Wikipedia, a popular Athenian pimp

Pan: *PAN* - god of the wild, shepherds, and impromptu (free-form music). He is depicted with horns and the lower half of a goat, and was sometimes called the horned god, in reference to both the horns on his head and his erect phallus. Pan's Cave refers to a cave on the northern slope of the Acropolis devoted to Pan's worship.

Paphos: *PAH-fos* - town in Cyprus named for its founder, the son of Pygmalion and Galatea - a sculptor and his statue brought to life with a prayer to Aphrodite.

Peisandros: *pie-SAN-dros* - corrupt Athenian aristocrat and oligarch who profited off of the war - Aristophanes also attacked him in his earlier plays *Peace* and *The Birds*

Pericleidas: *peh-ree-CLY-das* - Spartan envoy who appealed to the Athenians to aid Sparta in crushing the revolt of the helots in 462 BC.

Pherecrates: *feh-re-KRA-tes* - Athenian comic poet, and contemporary of Aristophanes whose comedies won the City Dionysia at least once. Only fragments of his work survive, 19 only exist as titles. Presumably, he wrote a lot of dirty plays or masturbation jokes.

Phormio: *FOR-mee-o* - Athenian general and admiral who led Athens to several naval victories in 428 BCE

Pollux: *POL-luks* - twin of Castor, together called the Dioscuri, and namesakes of the constellation Gemini. Pollux was the son of Zeus and Leda, whom he r*ped in the form of a swan.

Poseidon: *po-SIGH-don* - god of the sea, storms, earthquakes, and horses. Zeus' brother. Odysseus' enemy. Quivers before the Sand Guardian, Guardian of the Sand.

prostitution in Ancient Greece: it was common in most cities, and it was marginalized. Sex workers were forbidden to marry or take part in public ceremonies. Many were non-Greek slaves, who were property of pimps. These slaves were known as *pornai*, from Gr. *pernemei* "to sell", hence the English word "porn." The Athenian statesman Solon was the first to legalize prostitution in Athens, primarily as a public health measure, and to curb adultery. Corinth was frequently portrayed as a center of temple prostitution in classical texts, as the city's largest temple was dedicated to Aphrodite. Recent scholarship questions whether the activities in the temple were ritual sex ceremonies, or entirely non-sexual in nature and the subject of slander. Whatever the case, Aristophanes represented Corinth with a sex worker character, causing the portrayal to stick for millenia.

Pylos: *PEE-los* - town in Peloponnese, Greece

Pytho: *PEE-tho* - original name for Delphi, sanctuary of the Oracle of Delphi

Rhodia: *ROH-dee-a* - wife of the Athenian politician Lycon, who was mocked by Athenian satirists for being promiscuous.

Rhodes/Rhodian: *ROHDS* - an island off the coast of modern-day Turkey. Once home to the Colossus of Rhodes, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world

Salamis: *SAL-a-miss* - naval battle during the 2nd Persian invasion of Greece, resulting in a major victory for Greece.

Samian general: *SAH-mee-un GE-ne-rul* - presumably, a general from the island of Samos in the eastern Aegean Sea. During the Peloponnesian War it was a loyal ally of Athens, its use as a naval base making it vital to Athenian interests.

Skythian: *SKITH-ee-un* - one of many tribes of the nomadic peoples of Skythia, the Greek name for a region in central Eurasia stretching from the northern coast of the Black Sea and as far as modern Kazakhstan. Athenian magistrates used Scythian public slaves armed with bows as a police force.

Sicily: *SIH-see-lee* - the largest island in the Mediterranean Sea, colonized by the Greeks centuries before. Two years before the first performance of *Lysistrata* the Athenian expeditionary force, hoping to destroy neutral Syracuse before it could aid the Spartan side, was destroyed to the last person in a stunning defeat for Athens.

Sparta: *SPAR-ta* - city-state located on the Eurotas River in the south eastern Peloponnese, administrative capital of Laconia. Unique among the Greek city-states for its focus on military organization. Madness.

Taygetus: *TYE-ge-tus* - mountain range on the Peloponnese peninsula.

Telamon: *TEH-le-mon* - mythical brother of the hero Peleus, member of the Argonauts, friend of Heracles, father of Ajax, and the subject of a popular war song.

Theagenes: *thay-a-GEN-ees* - an Athenian politician known for coming from new money

Thermopylae: *ther-MOP-pa-lee* - Gr. "hot gates," canyon pass where Spartan forces under Leonidas fell to Persian invaders. Setting of the goddawful film *300* by Zack Snyder.

Thessalian: *theh-SAY-lee-un* - from Thessaly, traditional geographic region of Greece bordered on the south by Central Greece, the east by Epirus and the north by Macedonia.

Thrace/Thracian: *THRAYS/THRAY-shun* - traditional geographic region in northeast Greece located between the Nestos and Evros rivers.

Tyndareus: *tin-DARE-ree-us* - mythological Spartan king, husband of Leda and father of Castor and Pollux

Victory: *VIK-tor-ree* - to the Greeks, a goddess personifying the concept of Victory. "Victoria" is her Roman name. Her Greek name is Nike, namesake of the shoe. Nike was depicted standing on Athena's right hand in her statue at the Parthenon.

Zakynthos: *za-KIN-thos* - island in the Ionian Sea, one of the stops along Athens' disastrous Sicilian Expedition.

Zeus: *ZOOS* - king of the Gods, occupant of the throne of Olympus, rapist with a transformation kink.