

Through Diomedes' Eyes

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General Education

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Introduction

The following journal was written as a final paper for my classical literature class. The first half of the semester the class read classic Greek texts such as *Antigone*, *The Illiad*, *Trojan Women*, *The Republic* and *The Odyssey*. The second half of the semester we applied what we had learned about Greek culture and living to a role-playing game. For the game, all of the students were Greek men living in Athens around 403 BC, after the city had been left in ruins from the war with Sparta, and the Thirty Tyrants had been overthrown. As Greek men, it was now our responsibility to attend the assembly to help rebuild our city and restore democracy.

Every class period was to be treated as if we were Greek men at the assembly or *dikasterion* once we started having trials. We would begin with a prayer to the gods and a “pig sacrifice,” and then the assembly would begin with each person addressing the crowd on the topic announced by the president. My journal follows my life during the game as Diomedes; it is written as a first-person account in the year 403 BC.

Day 1- Morning

My oldest son gave me this scroll to write in. He has been taken by the urge to write and felt it would be wise for me to keep record of the events unfolding in Athens since the Spartans left. I am Diomedes. I used to proudly manage my father’s farm after his death, but now I am struggling to survive. The war has left my farm in ruins, leaving me reliant on borrowed money to pay my land taxes. My wife has a sickness ailing her and I lost two of my sons during the war with Sparta. Now my debt has been called in and I have no money for repayment. My father would die of shame to see how I have lost the favor of the gods. My *oikos*¹ is ruined, my honor and virtue called into question. Perhaps with the Spartans gone and Critias and his gang fleeing for their lives, I may find some help to restore harmony to my land.

Day 1-Evening

Much has happened in Athens since this morning. I went to the Agora today and saw a gathering of men at the Ten Tribal Heroes monument (Carnes & Ober, 2005). As I approached, I heard the men discussing an assembly meeting to be scheduled for the next day. At the last assembly I went to, Critias established the council of thirty who subjected us to tyranny for years. Men were asked to step forth to draw lots for positions as president of the assembly, herald, and *perstarchos*². As an honorable citizen of Athens, I took part in the lot drawing. The gods must have plans for me that even I can not foresee, for I was chosen to preside over Athens’ first assembly meeting since our democracy was overthrown.

I’ve never been blessed with such honor from the gods; I pray I can please Zeus as I help to restore our democracy. It is my duty to establish a reconciliation agreement for our great city and I have announced social welfare as the first item to be discussed. I have much to ponder tonight.

¹ *Oikos*: Greek household, the primary unit of Homeric culture; one’s primary loyalty was to the *oikos*, which included relatives, servants, retainers, and companions in a tightly-bound support system.

² *Perstarchos*: Greek man chosen by lot to sacrifice a pig at the beginning of the assembly.

Assembly #1 Day 2

Today was our first assembly; I am still filled with the overwhelming feeling of shock from the events of the day. On my walk to the Pnyx³, I proudly saw my brothers and fellow Athenians crowding the roads in an effort to attend the assembly. There was an electric feeling in the air, as if Zeus himself was present in our streets.

As president, I announced the first agenda item: “It is legal to remember the wrong of the Thirty Tyrants and their sympathizers; however, no lawsuits are allowed against any faction or individual of that era.” It was important to me that we move forward with rebuilding our city by not wasting time in trial, but also allow ourselves to remember our past mistakes so we can move on to build a better Athens than before. It passed by a large margin, which brought hope to my heart that we all had Athens’ best interest in mind.

Then we discussed social welfare. Many arguments were made, but one man in particular stood out to me. I remember him as the merchant’s son, Nikodemis, but he has never been one to get involved in politics. Today, however, he made excellent rebuttals against social welfare and swayed many in the assembly. I will have to keep an eye on him; perhaps I can learn better persuasion skills by watching him speak. Social welfare was never brought to a vote but in a surprising turn of events, the gods saw fit to put into presidential power a democrat for the next assembly who is favorable towards social welfare. So the men of Athens will continue discussing social welfare at our next meeting and will also determine who is to be considered a citizen within our city walls.

Assembly #2 Day 12

Last night I had a visit from Athena, the great goddess of wisdom. She informed me, “Wisdom of the collective is greater than the wisdom of a few.” Her words rang through my ears during the speeches given today. A division is occurring between the factions of our city. How can I stop this from happening? How can we all work together?

Looking back on the agenda of the assembly, I suppose I was guilty of hubris in declaring social welfare to be discussed so soon. My debt consumes me and I saw an opportunity to free myself from its heavy weight on my life. I am in awe of Atlas, who can hold our world on his shoulders and not grow weary. I let my interests come before Athens and our people could not come to a consensus in our last meeting on whether they should pass this law or not.

The proposed law was amended by assembly today and read, “All citizens who actively and wisely participate in the assembly will be paid to attend, as determined by Athena.” The amendment passed, but the law ultimately failed. The *Oligarkoi*⁴ were concerned over increased taxes being put on their land to provide the funds for welfare, a valid concern that could not be swayed. Another shock was the blasphemy uttered today by Menelaus and Nikodemis. Nikodemis claimed that Athena has not shown her presence in our great city, so why should she be the one to determine who merits welfare? I wonder what nonsense has filled his head on his travels for him to so openly speak critically of our gods in our time of need. He is treading on fragile ground here. We just got our city back, and it would be careless for the men of Athens to risk losing the gods’ favor.

I actually enjoy writing down what has happened in assembly. I must make an effort to thank my son. May the gods bless him and guide him to be a virtuous Greek in whom I can be proud.

Assembly #3 Day 22

Nikodemis presided over assembly today. He again blasphemed our gods. He was called out on it, but his presence in assembly is making me nervous. The immortals do not take well to being dishonored and their wrath against us will certainly mean our utter destruction. I pray to the gods, who gave their favor to Odysseus even after his lapse in piety, to give Athens their favor and overlook the loose tongue of one man among many.

The first agenda item did not pass. If it had passed, then the people would nominate and vote for a president for each assembly. I am thankful this law was not cut into stone. Our presidents are selected by lot; this allows the gods to intervene and place a person they want in power. Are we to completely shut the gods out of our city? What has this war done to my brothers that they so readily renounce the immortals that control our very fate?

³ Pnyx: a hill in central Athens, the capital of Greece. It is located less than one km west of the Acropolis and 1.6 km south-west of the center of modern Athens. City announcements were often posted here.

⁴ *Oligarkoi*: a term used by the Greek to address all oligarchs collectively.

Landownership as a criterion to vote was discussed next and the assembly voted that a citizen of Athens does not have to own land to have the right to vote. If I do not pay my debt soon, I myself could no longer own land and not having a vote in my great city would be devastating. The metic⁵ moneylender sought me out on my way home from assembly to discuss my failure to repay. I have exhausted all of my funds and cannot provide even for my wife who lies in bed getting sicker each day. How am I going to find the money to save my family?

Assembly #4 Day 32

I prayed to Apollo today. My voice rang out and the warmth in the air was affirmation of my prayer's acceptance. In fact, the beauty of the day lasted well into the night, a glorious day in Athens. My children worked together in the fields and my wife was able to venture outside, albeit for a short period of time. I can take only small comfort in this though, as the assembly has voted to increase the taxes on my land to pay for the rebuilding of our long walls.

I feel like our hero Odysseus, caught between the divine Charybdis and the lair of Scylla (Homer, 2000). I seek to free my family from the brink of despair and am caught between paying more taxes and getting paid to build long walls. I work to pay my city to pay me. At least Odysseus could see a way out of the rocks he sailed between; I can see no light steering me in the right direction. I leave it in the hands of the gods; may they guide me in the path I should walk.

Our mighty triremes⁶ were an issue of argument among the men of assembly today as well. We all fear retribution from the Spartans if they feel threatened by us. How can we stand against men whose sole profession is war? However, our warships were the pride of our city; should we now sacrifice a symbol of our greatness due to fear? I think not. The debate on constructing the triremes will continue next assembly and I will do all I can to persuade my fellow man we need our ships built.

I found myself defending an oligarch today as well. Nicanor attempted ostracism against Menelaus within the assembly for his dangerous blasphemy against the gods. I am more concerned about Nikodemis' multiple blasphemies within our assembly walls. All said, it is important for us to band together for rebuilding, rather than ostracizing each other. The ostracism was thrown out because of a component of our laws that does not allow ostracism of any member before the current year's fifth assembly meeting.

Assembly #5 Day 42

Much was accomplished today! I believe I have found a way to pay off my debts; the next assembly will be instrumental to my success. Athens has spoken and our triremes are to be rebuilt. An expedition is to be launched upon completion of the triremes to exact tribute from our neighboring city states. My clansmen and I are experienced oarsmen and if I can convince the assembly to vote me to crew the expedition, then my debt will be paid from the wage I will earn. I seem to have support from my fellow Athenian brothers, but much can change in the course of a few days.

Citizenship was also brought forth by our president for discussion. It is an honor to be considered a citizen of Athens, one I do not take lightly. I would die for this city; two of my children already have. This is an honorable death. There was a proposal to grant citizenship and voting rights to slaves and metics. SLAVES! What is going on in these radical democrats' heads? I am glad I was not alone in voicing my disgust in giving slaves freedoms they do not deserve.

The most astounding speech was given by the bearded artisan, who proposed an amendment to allow women to vote. I have never heard an assembly so silent before. I knew the artisan loved his wife, but to speak on granting rights to women, unheard of. I have great respect for Aegeus, but his actions today make me wonder if he has received a blow to the head during the war, making him soft. The assembly eventually reached a compromise that allowed metics the right to vote, but not slaves or women.

After assembly, I spoke with Kerkylas, a knowledgeable metic who is admired among many, warning him that I had overheard some of the factions speaking that if they granted citizenship to *metikoi*⁷, then they can sway votes as repayment for citizenship. He does not appear to be a man who shows bias towards one party over another, so it will be intriguing to see if he can easily be bribed.

⁵ Metic: a resident alien living in a Greek city-state who does not have citizen rights.

⁶ Triremes: "state of the art" fighting ship designed to be able to cover long distances quickly under oar and sail, and in battle to ram enemy ships with devastating effect.

⁷ *Metikoi*: a term used by the Greek to address all socratics collectively.

Day 43

I saw my youngest son speaking with a few *sokratikoi*⁸ today. I am uncomfortable with the ideas they are putting into his head. He has been speaking to us at home about an ideal republic in which justice rules us all. These thoughts are dangerous and go against the teaching of our gods. I fear Socrates is molding the younger generation of Greeks into men who would readily reject the ancient teachings of Homer and Hesiod.

He expressed his disdain for my record of Athens rebuilding, saying the written word will pollute our minds by allowing fiction to be immortalized on scrolls. I love my son and do not want to hurt him, but our youth need to be protected from Socrates' teachings.

Assembly #6 Day 52

My name defined me today, for the stars aligned with me and I used cunning to get my crew hired for the expedition and freed myself from debt. The burden of financial distress has been with me for so long, it is a feeling one cannot describe with words to be free of it. I can finally look into my children's eyes and tell them our land is safe.

Before assembly today many men were seeking votes for the expedition. I was concerned my chances of being nominated were slim, until I realized most men wanted to be the leader of the expedition. In fact, all of the men sought leadership, except one; only one man stood between me and paying off my debt. I made a point to emphasize to the assembly that I was hoping to crew the expedition, not lead it, and appealed to the men for nomination. It worked!

Of course, more surprises came as Thrasybulus revealed himself to us all and announced his intention to lead the expedition. I had heard rumors he was still alive, but one cannot always believe all the idle rumors flying around in times like these. Isokrates, the retired sailor, was the only other man seeking to crew the expedition, but his age worked against him. Odysseus and Thrasybulus were also nominated along with me and after a very close vote, Odysseus was voted to lead our expedition.

There were only minutes left before we dismissed, so I stood and accused Socrates of crimes against the *polis*⁹. It was a sudden inspiration to move our assembly into the *Dikasterion*¹⁰ for trial. I was not selected as a juror though, so there will be no extra income for me from the trial. I believe I may have been hasty in my accusation, as the winds have shifted and I see a storm cloud moving in. Did I anger the gods and lose their favor for my lack of restraint?

Day 59 - Morning

I had a visit from my lender today and he was not satisfied knowing I would earn a wage on the expedition that would repay my debt. He claimed the triremes will take too long to complete and I may not survive the tribute expedition. There was a threat to sell my family into slavery if I did not repay him soon. How could my life have gotten so low? Death seems easier at times like these. Just when I thought my land was safe, I am back to fighting to survive.

Day 59 - Evening

After working the fields this evening, I had a crazy inspiration that could only have been planted there by the gods. I sought out Odysseus, an extraordinary athlete named after one of Greece's greatest heroes, to congratulate him on his victory in leading the expedition. He knows I align more with a democratic view on agenda issues, but I thought I may be able to make a deal with him. I offered him my full support in exchange for the money I needed to pay off my debt. He agreed. I owe my life to Odysseus, even if he attempts to become tyrant of all of Athens; he has my shield at his side whenever he calls upon it.

Day 61 - Evening before Trial

I am sick at heart; my youngest son refuses to speak to me for accusing Socrates and bringing him to trial. He feels I am doing this to spite him and his willingness to listen to the rambling old gadfly. How do I tell him I did it to earn money as a juror so he has a future *oikos* to manage of his own, but failed when I was not selected by lot for jury duty? Now that Odysseus has agreed to pay my debt in

⁹ *Polis*: Greek city-state of residence.

¹⁰ *Dikasterion*: people's court consisting of 6,000 volunteers who were of age 30 or older. Lots were drawn for judge and jury positions among the volunteers. The people of the court argued guilt or innocence; lawyers did not exist. Voting for the verdict took place after the people who wanted to speak had a chance to do so.

full, how can I reverse what has already been done? I have already lost two sons to war and two daughters to our financial distress. I do not want division between my living children as well.

Dikasterion #1 Day 62

Oh, Zeus upon your mighty throne, how could I have been so foolish? I put my needs before Athens and have now paid the price. Shame and ridicule will surely follow me this day. Our city is in anarchy, men and brothers are fighting among themselves, all because of me. I knew I felt a changing in the winds after accusing Socrates and I have brought the wrath of the gods down upon our once great city. Is Athens never to be restored to her previous glory? Perhaps we are to stay in ruins and that is the wish of the gods.

Socrates' trial was going well until Hektor announced a technicality in the laws that prevented the trial from continuing. Fueled by the wise mind of Nikodemis, it was determined that the wording of the reconciliation agreement allowed for no law in our great city. Chaos was instantaneous. I sat there feeling like Creon, who upon condemning Antigone to death started a chain of events that spiraled out of his control (Sophocles, 2008). I could not stop the disorder for it was MY words that caused it. Now I know the gods have turned their back on me. I shall spend the night with sacrifice and prayer, though I am not worthy of any guidance now.

Day 65

Athena has not forsaken us in our miserable state. Word has traveled throughout the city that she has restored our democracy and reestablished law. The will of the gods is often confusing to mere mortals, but I am thankful for the divine intervention. I do not relish the coming trial; I know many are against me for what happened in the Dikasterion. I suspect an uprising against me is in the works.

Dikasterion #2 Day 72

Silence, nothing but silence. I have been convicted of *graphe paranomon*¹¹ and was silenced through this trial and next assembly. I am beginning to suspect what is best for Athens is no longer the driving force behind some of the men of the assembly but rather political moves to get their faction into power. The anger coursing through me is a struggle to control. Socrates was acquitted by a half vote. If I was not silenced, I would have turned his acquittal into a conviction. A man's voice is easily taken for granted, but he realizes how much it meant to him only after it is taken away. My anger and humiliation know no bounds. I deserved my conviction, but I expected mercy from the very men I forgave and defended against being silenced for blasphemy. They may have silenced my tongue, but they cannot silence my words. I shall speak with the men who defended me and give them words for the next assembly, when they discuss setting up a five-man council to rule our city.

Day 75

I have succeeded in my mission; my voice shall ring out in assembly despite my silencing. The *Metrioi Demokratoi*¹² and *Memetrioi Demokratoi*¹³ have both eagerly accepted my words and have incorporated them into their arguments.

I spoke with the bearded artisan as well. I do not have armor for the expedition and spoke with him about a trade. I have to say the bearded artisan is a mystery to me. As Herald, he prayed to a goddess. Men of Athens pray to gods, not goddesses. He acts as though he has not attended many assemblies, yet men in our city rarely miss an assembly meeting. I wonder if the long war has changed him; at least his armor is still just as remarkable. I offered him a deal to help him with his speeches to the assembly in exchange for a suit of armor and he accepted. For all of his mystery, I still pray the gods will look over Aegeus and his family.

Day 81 - Evening

I am numb. One minute my life is as it should be, the next my wife breathes her last. I have never felt emotion like this, not even on the battlefield facing bloody men who died an honorable death for our city's freedom from Sparta. I once thought Achilles weak for weeping over his beloved Briseis

¹¹ *Graphe paranomon*: When a written law is found to be unconstitutional because of how it is written, the author is accused of *graphe paranomon*. If the author is found guilty, he is punished, such as being silenced in assembly for a set time or fined.

¹² *Metrioi Demokratoi*: a term used by the Greeks to address all moderate democrats collectively.

¹³ *Memetrioi Demokratoi*: a term used by the Greeks to address all radical democrats collectively.

(Homer, 2000), and Haemon lacking as a man for taking his own life when his beloved Antigone was buried alive (Sophocles, 2006). I now know the pain and suffering that drove them, for I too would gladly accept a dagger to the heart at this moment. They were no less Greek than our mightiest heroes; they lived their lives with passion and loved with a full heart.

My wife joins Hades and Persephone in the underworld and I am now alone; so very alone. I cannot compare with Sappho, the tenth muse, in her flowing depictions of love and beauty but my soul demands release of the emotions plaguing me.

From the depths I call to thee, oh Zeus
The shaper of all our fate
How is it I have earned your disfavor
That half my soul you take?

Can you feel the ache in my heart
Sitting high on Mount Olympus?
Do you feel my inner torment;
My pain, my suffering, my loss?

I'm on my knees for you, my gods,
Reaching into my heart
To have the courage, the strength, the love
To accept what you impart.

Oh Persephone, Goddess divine
Take my wife into your fold,
Give her peace I could not give
No more worries about her home.

Gods divine, I seek your aid,
My passions attempt to control me
Steady my mind and guide my tongue
To continue the fight for democracy.

Goodbye, my dear.
You will never be forgotten.

Assembly #7 Day 82

My sorrow over my loss last night made me grateful for my enforced silence today. I could not stop the weeping but was able to hide it well from my Athenian brothers. Perhaps Cephalus was right in saying, "For certainly old age has a great sense of calm and freedom; when the passions relax their hold, then, as Sophocles says, we are freed from the grasp not of one mad master only, but of many" (Plato, 2007). While Cephalus was speaking mostly of sex, the passion of love could certainly be included here.

My mind was so occupied by my wife and the happier times we shared, that I could barely focus on the events occurring around me. I have much to be grateful for but I feel nothing. I am empty. A law proposed by Nikodemis was passed today. The stone reads, "The assembly will vote to appoint a five-person council to set all policies. All in our assembly may self-nominate or be nominated by others. Voting style will be the same as when we chose our expedition members. However, we will elect the five highest vote carriers to council, and each ballot may contain five names or less. A ballot may be cast per stone in possession (half stones will be rounded up to a full stone for this vote only). The council will last for the remaining sessions with its original members." Democracy has fallen, and of all the surprises that could be thrown my way, I was elected to the council of five. I am the only man on the council in favor of democracy. It is an honor to have been voted to this position, even though I was silenced by the very men who voted me in. I see all political motives; Athens is not on the men's hearts anymore. I cannot think on this anymore; my soul cries out in exhaustion from mourning my loss. Hypnos, I pray for release from my suffering; soothe me with your branch dripping water from the river Lethe. Help me sleep and forget.

Assembly #8 Day 92

Time heals all wounds, physical as well as mental. My mind has cleared since the last assembly meeting and I have been emboldened by the goddess of wisdom, Athena. The gods have restored their faith in me, and Athena herself put up her shield on my behalf as I enacted my plan to restore Athens' democracy.

I was not going to let my mistakes lead to a council rule in a city that was the envy of other nations for her democracy. On the road to the Pnyx, I gathered men to my cause to overtake the council through military force. As a councilman myself, I had nothing to gain from overthrowing the council. But as I have learned, I cannot think of my needs when Athens is in need. Athens is more important than I am and her democracy will enable her to be the great force she was before the war. I felt immense pride in the men who stood by my side as we stormed the assembly and overtook the men who favored a council. We could feel Athena's power in our muscles as we readied ourselves for a fight.

We did not have to spill any blood this day, a great feat indeed. We won by our sheer numbers and our brothers backed down without opposition. Democracy is once again the center of Athenian government. Athens now has a bright future ahead of herself. I pray we continue to work together as Greek men and please the gods through sacrifice and tribute, so our great city can be rebuilt to her majestic glory.

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