

# **The Cosmic Significance of Wealth Acquisition in Ancient Greece: the Athenian General Nicias as a Case Study**

Presented by the Workshop in Ancient Mediterranean Studies



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**Thursday, April 5, 2018  
3:30pm in Curtin Hall 866**

Since Moses Finley, scholars studying the ancient economy have largely abandoned the search for cultural particularism in ancient economic mentality and behavior, and have moved instead to a New Institutional Economics approach, which is heavily grounded in modern social science theory and economic models. But while the search for what was unique about ancient mentalité has been largely left behind, a growing chorus of increasingly vocal critics is stressing the need for culturally specific models of behavior, as has been convincingly demonstrated by anthropologists. In this workshop Dr. Leese will explore the economic, political, and religious behavior of Nicias, the famous Athenian general of the Sicilian Expedition and argue that Nicias' behavior shows how difficult it is to identify what was culturally specific about ancient Greek economic mentalité. While the cosmic significance of wealth acquisition in ancient Greece certainly differs from that of the modern world, it is still not possible to determine that religious devotion, even for someone so notoriously superstitious and pious, was the ultimate goal of his economic behavior rather than the maximization of wealth and profit that are central to modern economic models of individual behavior.

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