Session II. Post-Periclean Age: Pylos, Amphipolis, and Sicily

Dimitris J. Kyrtatas (University of Thessaly): “The Eclipse of the Moon in Sicily”

During the last stage of the Sicilian expedition, and while the Athenian troops were preparing to retreat secretly, an eclipse of the moon occurred – one of the most famous eclipses in ancient Greek history. The Athenians, according to Thucydides, took the event seriously, while general Nicias, who was rather over-inclined to divination, would not even discuss the issue further until the next full moon, as was recommended by the soothsayers. This delay proved to be fatal and catastrophic. Despite the learned and sensible treatment of the topic by several modern scholars, the passage is still read with uneasiness. What did oracles and portents have to do with war and strategic decisions? In my paper, I shall reexamine the relations between generals and soothsayers by stressing aspects that have not been taken too seriously by most modern readers.