

Humanitarian values vs. imperial interests: A case study on Athenian imperial ‘Cleruchies’ and the conditions of the subject population

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Athens is identified as the earliest western empire. The Classical Athenian epigraphs indicate a widespread imposition of a special type of colonies known as ‘cleruchies’ in the subject-allies of the Athenian empire towards the middle and late 5th century BCE. ‘Cleruchies’ are special Greek colonies in which the settlers received a plot of land and retained their original citizenship. This research is intended to examine the manner in which Athens used cleruchies to cater the economic, political and military interests of its empire at the expenses of the allies by completely devaluing the humanitarian principles. The information for this qualitative research is gathered by the analytical study of the epigraphs and numismatics of the particular period and by the critical examination of the primary and secondary sources. The findings of this research suggest that cleruchies provided individual Athenians with socio-economic benefits such as subsidization of citizens and possession of landed property. Cleruchies which were commonly imposed on rebellious allies secured political expansion and stability of the Athenian empire while securing its strategic interests abroad. These special colonies boosted the economy of the Athenian empire by its large revenues and the monopoly of corn and trade routes of the Aegean. However the allies which received cleruchies were reduced into the level of subjects and their autonomy was infringed. The local population of the allied states were depopulated or mass massacred while their land was taken to address the needs of the Athenian empire. Therefore this study is significant in identifying the micro-macro concept of complete disregard and deprivation of human values and rights of one group of individuals or the peripheral states by another group of individuals or core states from the time as early as the earliest western empire. It is also observant that the similar practice of furthering imperial interests at the expenses of the allies by the powerful countries in the 20th century CE led to the origin of international organizations such as United Nations to protect human values and to uphold values of humanities.

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