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The thesis of Carol Purdey entitled
Thucydides on Athenian National Character

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Studies in the School for Summer and Continuing Education of Georgetown University has been read and approved.

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THUCYDIDES ON ATHENIAN NATIONAL CHARACTER

A Thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Studies

By

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April 21, 1993
ABSTRACT

The Peloponnesian War broke out in 431 B.C., when Sparta declared war on Athens, and ended with Athens' final defeat in 404 B.C. Thucydides said "what made war inevitable was the growth of Athenian power and the fear which this caused in Sparta." Since the Persian Wars, Sparta had been the long-standing leader of the Greeks, but now saw her position threatened by the rising power of the Athenian empire.

The theme of national character plays a central role in Thucydides' History. We see the resultant clash of two states which had opposing national characters: the rising, modern, democratic system of Athens which was challenging the stagnant, traditional, oligarchic system of Sparta.

In order to analyse Thucydides' portrayal of the two states, I have considered the development of both Athens and Sparta prior to the war in order to discover what antecedents caused these two states to be so different in outlook, action and prospects. That is, early constitutional, political and social developments, the Persian Wars and the fifty-year period following the Persian Wars. I have discussed the most pertinent sections of the History which illustrate the Thucydidean antithesis of Athenian and Spartan national
character. Examples are the Corinthians' and the Spartan King Archidamus' speeches at Sparta; Pericles' Funeral Oration; the Athenian naval victories under Phormio and at Pylos; the Melian Dialogue; and the Sicilian expedition.

Without a doubt, Athens' liberal constitution contributed to her national character, and conversely, her character was suited to democracy. Unfortunately, that which made her great also had inherent problems which proved to be the cause of her nemesis: stasis and political instability resulted largely from her being a democracy. This was the main reason that she lost the war, which she should have won because she had sufficient resources to do so. Albeit staid and repressive, it is plain that the oligarchic Spartan government was far more stable than the democratic Athenian. Sparta was thus able to weather the stresses of the war and triumph over Athens.
CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ........................................... iii

INTRODUCTION ...................................... 1

Chapter

1. ATHENS AND SPARTA ON THE EVE OF THE WAR .... 4

2. THE DEBATE AT SPARTA 432 B.C. ................. 13

3. PERICLES ON THE ATHENIANS .................... 30

4. THE ATHENIANS IN ACTION:
   PHORMIO'S VICTORIES AND PYLOS ............... 45

5. THE MELIAN DIALOGUE .......................... 64

6. THE SICILIAN EXPEDITION ....................... 77

EPILOGUE ........................................ 92

BIBLIOGRAPHY ................................... 96
To Karl
INTRODUCTION

The Peloponnesian War broke out in 431 B.C., when Sparta declared war on Athens, and ended with Athens' final defeat in 404 B.C. Thucydides says that "what made war inevitable was the growth of Athenian power and the fear which this caused in Sparta."¹ Sparta had been the long-acknowledged leader of the Greeks² but had, over the fifty years since the Persian Wars, seen her position challenged by the rising power of the Athenian empire. He wrote:

Thucydides the Athenian wrote the history of the war fought between Athens and Sparta, beginning the account at the very outbreak of the war, in the belief that it was going to be a great war and more worth writing about than any of those which had taken place in the past. My belief was based on the fact that the two sides were at the very height of their power and preparedness.³

A theme which plays a central role in Thucydides' History is that of national character. Thucydides draws a picture of the resultant conflict between two states which had quite opposing national characters: the rising, modern,


³Thucydides, I. 1.
democratic system of Athens which was challenging the stagnant, traditional, oligarchic system of Sparta.\textsuperscript{4}

Athens' liberal constitution contributed to her national character and, conversely, her character was suited to democracy. Unfortunately, that which made her great also had inherent problems which proved to be the cause of her nemesis: stasis and political instability resulted largely from her being a democracy. This was the main reason that she lost the war, which she should have won because she had sufficient power, material resources and manpower to do so. Albeit staid and repressive, it is plain that the oligarchic Spartan government was far more stable than the democratic Athenian, and thus more able to weather the stresses of the war. Finley says that the "history is as dark as it is because the humaner of the two ideals [that of liberalism and authoritarianism] fails in essential respects to fulfil itself."\textsuperscript{5}

In order to analyse Thucydides' view of the two states, the nature of the Athenian and Spartan states prior to the war will be considered, and we will look at some antecedents which caused these two states to be so different in outlook, action

\textsuperscript{4}Finley, \textit{Thucydides}, p. 301. I have centred much of my discussion about Athenian national character, and hence the differences between the Athenian and the Spartan national ethos, upon what Finley sees as the conflict between a newer and an older order. Finley considers this to be one of the major ideas of Thucydides' \textit{History}.

\textsuperscript{5}Ibid., p. 133.
and prospects. Factors which effected the divergent characters grew from differing constitutional, political and social developments, as well as events of the Persian Wars and the subsequent fifty-year period, known as the pentekontaetia.

We will examine the most pertinent sections of the History, which illustrate the Thucydidean antithesis of Athenian and Spartan national character: the speeches in Book I by the Corinthians, the Athenians and the Spartan King Archidamus; Pericles' speeches to the Athenians, especially the Funeral Oration which enunciates the brilliance of Athenian democracy; the Athenians in action, specifically Phormio's victories and Pylos; the Melian Dialogue, which reveals Athens under the stress of the war; and lastly, the debacle in Sicily.7

6Ibid., p. 300.

7The Peloponnesus, or Peloponnese, which gave its name to the war, "is the extensive and largely mountainous peninsula of southern Greece, separated from the rest of the mainland by the isthmus of Corinth." Michael Grant, Rise of the Greeks, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1988), p. 73. "Laconia, of which Sparta (Lacedaemon) was the capital, comprised the south-eastern region of the Peloponnese, bounded on the west by Messenia, . . ." Ibid., p. 90.
CHAPTER 1

ATHENS AND SPARTA ON THE EVE OF THE WAR

In 431 B.C. Athens was an enterprising and energetic order; it was a state which was venturesome and was changing the world picture. This new exemplar was challenging the older world order of which Sparta was an adherent—that of the aristocratic, conservative tradition.¹ The latter favoured invariability and did not like tempting fortune. Spartan society was constrained and authoritarian, and foreigners were viewed with suspicion, whereas Athenian society was open-minded and allowed individual liberty. Athens prided herself on being a place where initiative was encouraged, men were equal in law,² and free to mix with aliens.³

At this time Athens had a democratic form of government. The sovereign authority was the Assembly, which decided by majority; any citizen could attend the Assembly, and was guaranteed freedom of speech. This system encouraged

¹Finley, Thucydides, p. 302.

²It should be noted that Spartan citizens were guaranteed equality in law long before any other Greek state. Michael Grant, The Rise of the Greeks, p. 93.

³Finley, Thucydides, pp. 145-46.
personal advancement, which in turn was to contribute to Athens' astounding development and corresponding rise in living standards. Conversely, Sparta was an oligarchic system with, it should be added, democratic and monarchic elements. The oligarchic element of the constitution was the Gerousia, which possessed deliberative and judicial functions, and consisted of twenty-eight Spartan citizens, over the age of sixty, who were drawn from a restricted circle of aristocratic families. The Gerousia prepared the business for the democratic element of the constitution, the Assembly, which could only accept or reject proposals placed before it by the former.

Athens had in the previous fifty years developed into a sea-based power, with a navy that was superior to any other in the Aegean. In battle she was daring and used clever and unprecedented tactics. A consequence of her naval power and the Long Walls, which connected the walled city to the Piraeus, was that Athens was not reliant upon her harvests. In turn this made her unassailable during a traditional hoplite invasion because she could import all of the necessary

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5Grant, Rise of the Greeks, p. 92.
6Ibid.
7Such as the tactics used by the navy when under the command of Phormio, which will be discussed in chapter 4.
foodstuffs to withstand a siege. On the other hand, Sparta, a land-based power with a formidable army, consisting of the most disciplined and brave hoplites in Greece, conquered by taking control of the land. The army would enter the enemy's territory in order to destroy the harvests upon which practically all Greek states were dependent.

On account of her navy, Athens had an empire which was spread widely around the Aegean. She controlled the strong, centralised Delian Confederacy, which had been voluntarily founded in 477 B.C. to protect the Asiatic Greeks from the Persians after the end of the Persian Wars. Most of the allies were tribute paying, therefore Athens became enriched and empowered at their expense, which enabled her to build up her own fleet and empire during the pentekontaetia. Being a land-based power, Sparta was unable to expand her empire much further than the surrounding Peloponnese. Sparta was the long-standing leader in Greece and the head of the Peloponnesian League, most members of which were oligarchic agricultural states. Sparta, however, was more interested in maintaining a hold on her present territories and did not wish

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9 Finley, Thucydides, p. 300.

10 Ibid., p. 131.
to threaten her position by extending herself overseas.\textsuperscript{11}

The main factor in internal affairs which prevented Sparta from venturing too far from home was the continual threat of rebellion by her Helot population. The Helots were the aboriginals of Laconia, who had been reduced to the status of serfs by the Dorian invaders.\textsuperscript{12} The adjoining state of Messenia, which had fertile land, was conquered by the Spartans in c. 730-710 B.C. so that Sparta was able to provide her own citizens with the Messenian land.\textsuperscript{13} After the second Messenian War of c. 650 B.C., which was in response to an uprising by the Messenians,\textsuperscript{14} Sparta subsequently held these indigenous inhabitants in an iron grip. It was, furthermore, at this time that Sparta instituted "the agoge, the complex of austere, communal and totalitarian socio-military institutions for which Sparta became so famous."\textsuperscript{15} Prior to this, Sparta had seen a flourishing of art and culture;\textsuperscript{16} however, the cultured aspect of Spartan life could not

\textsuperscript{11}Ibid.


\textsuperscript{13}Grant, \textit{Rise of the Greeks}, p. 94.

\textsuperscript{14}Bury-Meiggs, p. 93.

\textsuperscript{15}Grant, \textit{Rise of the Greeks}, p. 96.

\textsuperscript{16}Ibid., p. 94.
continue. With a ratio of six Helots to one Spartan citizen,\textsuperscript{17} Sparta was forced to look to her internal security as ultimately overriding any wish for culture or luxuries. Indeed, so insecure were the Spartans that there was a secret police, the \textit{Krypteia}, which could respond to the threat of the Helots.\textsuperscript{18} From this state of affairs sprang the localised foreign policy of the Spartans.\textsuperscript{19}

Conversely, Athenian internal affairs and the consequent foreign policy were bound up with the navy and Athens' democratic constitution. After the Persian Wars many of the men who served in the navy did not return to the former agrarian lifestyle but remained in Athens.\textsuperscript{20} In order to support the growing metropolis, Athens was committed to imperialism in that when the populace sought higher living standards, further domestic growth depended upon further conquest.\textsuperscript{21} However, as there is no limit to men's wants, the destructiveness of this desire for more became apparent when the Athenians voted to send an expedition to Sicily whilst they were fighting the war with the Peloponnesians on another

\textsuperscript{17}Ibid., p. 97.

\textsuperscript{18}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{19}Finley, \textit{Thucydides}, p. 122.

\textsuperscript{20}Ibid., p. 22.

\textsuperscript{21}Ibid.
The strong, wealthy, mercantile economy of Athens consisted of manufactured goods, agricultural produce, imports and luxury goods—all developed as a result of her liberal constitution and with the use of her navy. As previously mentioned, she was able to import most of her foodstuffs, therefore her economy was not contingent upon agriculture. Sparta had a relatively poor economy, dependent upon agriculture, which kept her as a feudality. Sparta continued using iron bars when the rest of Greece had converted to using bullion as a common currency, thereby intentionally depriving herself of imported goods.  

All in all, Athens enjoyed a cultural and political flowering, as well as a rich standard of living unknown in Sparta. Athenian individuals were encouraged to partake of government, and Athens was a cultural and intellectual centre, where citizens could enjoy tragic and comic plays, philosophy, science, poetry, painting, sculpture, fine houses and buildings such as the Parthenon. In Athens there was an

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22 Thucydides, VI. 24.

23 Bury-Meiggs, p. 96.

24 "There is no more significant symptom of the political and social health of the Athenian state in the period of its empire, than the perfect freedom which was accorded to the comic stage, . . . to splash with ridicule every institution of the city and every movement of the day, to libel the statesmen and even jest at the gods." Ibid., p. 241.
admiration of reason and minds were trained.

Sparta, the inverse of Athens, had a suspicion of reason²⁵ and bodies were trained. Sparta was a place where individual luxuries and comforts were prohibited, where simplicity was the accepted standard, and culture and arts were discouraged. Sparta's society and laws had evolved in large part as a result of her insecure position as that of a minority amongst her resentful native people,²⁶ who could rebel at any time. The goal of all laws, as well as the society, was to produce excellent fighting men.²⁷ For instance, each Spartan citizen had a sizeable lot of entailed land, worked by Helots, which enabled the Spartan to devote his life to the martial arts. Although this system allowed the Spartans freedom from concern about their individual welfare and income,²⁸ it became a vicious circle in so far as the Spartan state always had to be in a state of military preparedness in order to respond to rebellion by the very Helots who indirectly facilitated this martial state. In such a way did the individual Spartan lose his freedom.

In spite of, or because of, its repressive system,

²⁵ Finley, Thucydides, p. 132.
²⁶ Ibid., pp. 97-98.
²⁷ Ibid., p. 97.
²⁸ Bury-Meiggs, p. 96.
Sparta had a very stable government: the Spartan constitution contained important elements of monarchy, oligarchy and democracy; such a combination of "checks and balances"\(^{29}\) allowed her to weather the vicissitudes of the Peloponnesian War better than Athens. The Spartan system of control and discipline, albeit detrimental to her development, infused her with strength. Unfortunately, the liberal system that was responsible for Athens' strength proved also to be her weakness. Athens' final ruin, moreover, was not because of the might of her opponent Sparta but because of the development of factionalism within Athens and the policies of Pericles' successors.\(^{30}\) Pericles had stated that Athens had all the resources necessary to win the war: money, men and a strong fleet; however, he warned that territorial aggrandizement was the one avenue which Athens must avoid during the war. His successors did not heed his words, and the Sicilian expedition proved to be the cause of Athens' downfall.

Such were the contrasting natures of the Athenians and Spartans on the eve of the Peloponnesian War. As mentioned,  

\(^{29}\)"The country [Sparta] has never been ruled by tyrants. For rather more than 400 years, dating from the end of the late war, they have had the same system of government, and this has been not only a source of internal strength, but has enabled them to intervene in the affairs of other states." Thucydides, I. 18.

\(^{30}\)Finley, *Thucydides*, p. 20.
it was because of Sparta's fear of the growth of Athenian power, and her wish to contain it, that prompted her to declare war on Athens; Thucydides narrates the course of events when the land-based power confronts the naval power.
CHAPTER TWO

THE DEBATE AT SPARTA 432 B.C.

Thucydides wrote that during the *pentekontaetia*:

The Athenians made their empire more and more strong, and
greatly added to their own power at home. The Spartans,
though they saw what was happening, did little or nothing
to prevent it, and for most of the time remained inactive,
being traditionally slow to go to war, unless they were
forced into it, and also being prevented from taking
action by wars in their own territory. So finally the
point was reached when Athenian strength attained a peak
plain for all to see and the Athenians began to encroach
upon Sparta's allies. It was at this point that Sparta
felt the position to be no longer tolerable and decided
by starting this present war to employ all her energies
in attacking and, if possible, destroying the power of
Athens.¹

It was, however, the Corinthians who called a meeting of the
Peloponnesian allies at Sparta in 432 B.C. in order to
persuade the Spartans to declare war on the Athenians.
Corinth had her own reasons for wanting war: Athens was a
commercial rival and had been involved, against the
Corinthians, in the disputes over Corcyra (433 B.C.) and
Potidaea (432 B.C.). It is at this juncture that Thucydides
begins his comparison of Athens and Sparta.

It was in great part as a result of the events and
outcome of the Persian Wars (490-479 B.C.) that Athens became

¹Thucydides, I. 118.
a self-confident, experienced naval power and acquired an empire. A brief review of this period will be useful before we examine the speeches of the participants of the Allied Congress at Sparta; we can then relate their content to the actual course of events and patterns of behaviour.²

In the sixth century a major threat to the Greek world came in the form of the growing Persian empire. By 546 B.C. Persia had conquered much of Asia Minor, installed tyrants in captured cities, and was making inroads into the eastern Aegean. It was in 499 B.C. that several of the Ionian Greek cities, supported by Athens, revolted against their Persian overlords.³ This rebellion was quashed by the Persians but, as a result of it, they resolved to set about punishing Athens for the assistance she had given to the rebels.

In 490 B.C. the Persian King Darius sailed to Attica and landed at Marathon. Not wishing to meet the Persian force alone, the Athenians sent to Sparta for help, only to be told that the Spartans could not come until the sighting of the

²We will review the Corinthians' speech (68-71), the Athenians' speech (73-78), and the Spartan King Archidamus' reply (80-85). The Corinthians' speech to the Second Congress at Sparta (120-124) and Pericles' Reply (140-144) will not be discussed as they serve only to underscore points raised in the aforementioned speeches.

³Bury-Meiggs, pp. 154-155.
full moon.⁴ The Athenians were forced to proceed to Marathon, without Spartan assistance, and there they put to rout the Persians, losing only 192 of their men in the battle.⁵ The Spartans did arrive, but after the battle.⁶

The Persians again invaded Greece in 480 B.C. In order to face the Persians with some advantage on their side, the greatly-outnumbered allied Greek forces decided to meet the Persians at the pass of Thermopylae. The Spartans sent only 300 men, the pretext for this paulytry showing being the Carnean festival and the Olympic games in the Peleponnese. However, those men were valiant in the battle, and defended the pass, alone, for two days. Unfortunately, the Persians found a way around the mountain and attacked the Spartans from behind.⁷ The Spartans were slain defending the pass. The bulk of the Spartan army, meanwhile, was building a wall at the Isthmus, leaving Boeotia and Attica vulnerable. Therefore, "in the face of the invasion the Athenians decided to abandon their city; they broke up their homes, took to

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⁴Ibid., p. 158.
⁵Ibid., p. 159.
⁶Ibid., p. 160.
their ships, and became a people of sailors."\(^8\) After Athens was evacuated, Xerxes entered and took control of the city.\(^9\)

After Athens had been seized, the Greek allies decided to fight the Persians at the Isthmus. However, the Athenians, led by Themistocles, wished to fight a naval battle with the Persians in the channel of Salamis. Themistocles prevailed, and the Greeks gained a glorious victory over the Persians. However, the threat was not over as the Persians still had a large army to use against the Greeks,\(^10\) and these troops were stationed in Thessaly for the winter.\(^11\)

Notwithstanding this ominous threat, the Spartans were solely interested in protecting the Peloponnese. A division thus grew between them and the Athenians, and the Persians, knowing of this fissure, tried, but failed, to gain allies of the Athenians by offering them quite favourable terms.\(^12\) In spite of the possibility of the Athenians going over to the Persian side, the Spartans were more insular than ever: they had completed a wall on the Isthmus and felt themselves

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\(^8\) Thucydides, I. 18.

\(^9\) Bury-Meiggs, p. 175.

\(^10\) Ibid., p. 177.

\(^11\) Ibid., p. 179.

\(^12\) Ibid.
relatively safe.\textsuperscript{13} Instead of organising a force against the Persians, the Spartans again used a festival, the Hyacintha, as the reason for their inaction. Meanwhile, the Persians had entered Boeotia and were approaching Attica; for the second time, the Athenians had to abandon their city and take shelter in Salamis.\textsuperscript{14} The Persians entered Athens shortly thereafter; however, the Persians forbore destruction of the city in an final attempt to persuade the Athenians to become an arm of the Persian empire. The Athenians refused to consider any such alliance, and demanded that the Spartans immediately send an army into Attica to meet the Persians; if not, they, the Athenians, would ally themselves with the Mede.\textsuperscript{15} Once again, the Spartans dallied, waiting ten days until they replied. However, when the Spartans saw that in the event of an alliance between the Persian and Athenian navies the wall on the Isthmus would be useless, they promptly sent a large army which, together with the allied forces, defeated the Persians at Plataea in 479 B.C.\textsuperscript{16} It should be noted that Sparta carried the day because of the "discipline and prowess" of her

\textsuperscript{13}Ibid., p. 180.

\textsuperscript{14}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{15}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{16}Ibid., pp. 180-81.
hoplites.  

During the Persian Wars Sparta had been, unquestionably, mistress of the Peloponnesian League and the recognised leader of mainland Greece. However, after the wars the balance changed, and although Sparta was still supreme on land, Athens was now a challenger as the supreme sea power. If Sparta was to seize the opportune moment, now was the time to capitalise on her strength and become an imperial power. However, Sparta had neither the resources nor the ability to rule the waves of the Aegean. We saw her inability to meet commitments abroad during the Persian Wars: the ever-present threat of rebellion by her Helots diverted too much of her attention for her to send her soldiers far from home for any length of time.  

In addition to her domestic problems, Sparta found that her commanders were unfit for overseas postings; she was forced to recall Pausanias because he had made himself unpopular with the Hellenes, especially the Ionians, who in

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17 Ibid., p. 184.

18 As previously discussed, the Helots were originally Messenians who Sparta had conquered and whose land she had sequestered. The Helots were, in effect, a nation-in-waiting, ready to revolt whenever a chink appeared in Sparta's armour. Furthermore, Sparta's Helots were more akin to serfs than slaves. Athens, for example, had "chattel slaves" which were of diverse backgrounds, and thus had no common language in which to communicate their rebelliousness or "national self-consciousness" as did the Helots. Hornblower, "Greece: The History of the Classical Period", p. 129.
turn approached Athens to be their protectress against further Persian incursions. The Spartans attempted to send a replacement commander-in-chief

but by this time the allies were no longer willing to accept them as supreme commanders. Realizing this, the Spartans went back, and afterwards Sparta sent out no other commanders. They feared that when their officers went overseas they would become corrupted, as they had seen happen in the case of Pausanias, and at the same time they no longer wanted to be burdened with the war against Persia. They regarded the Athenians as being perfectly capable of exercising the command and as being also at that time friendly to themselves. So Athens took over the leadership, and the allies, because of their dislike of Pausanias, were glad to see her do so.\footnote{Thucydides, I. 95-96.}

The role of imperialist was thus to be taken up by the newly-confident Athenians because theirs was the superior navy, and they were more fit for overseas expansion.\footnote{Corinth was the only other serious challenger to the role of imperialist because she had a good navy. She, however, had been too closely associated with Sparta to attempt to contest her leadership. Furthermore, she did not have the "ideological magnetism exerted by Athens or by Sparta, whose agoge was not just an effective repressive device, but was thought of in many quarters as somehow admirable in a positive way," Hornblower, "Greece: The History of the Classical Period," p. 130.} Sparta could still be mistress of the mainland, but not of the islands and coasts.\footnote{Bury-Meiggs, p. 201.}

Athens founded the Confederacy of Delos in 477 B.C. The purpose of this confederacy was to protect the Ionian Greeks, who voluntarily placed themselves under the tutelage of Athens
to ward off further intervention by the Persians.\textsuperscript{22} In the early days, membership of the confederacy was not mandatory, yet many of the smaller islands allied themselves with Athens because of the protection she afforded them. It was this confederacy which was the foundation of the Athenian empire, and the well from which Athens drew resources in order to expand--domestically and internationally--at her allies' expense.\textsuperscript{23} There were three forms of membership: (1) non-paying allies who sent ships; (2) independent allies who sent money; and (3) allies who sent money and were subject to Athens.\textsuperscript{24} Eventually, all sent money except Lesbos, Chios and Samos, who continued to send fleets.\textsuperscript{25} Thucydides says of the Athenians that they bore more than their fair share of the actual fighting, but this made it all the easier for them to force back into the alliance any state that wanted to leave it. For this position it was the allies themselves who were to blame. Because of this reluctance of theirs to face military service, most of them, to avoid serving abroad, had assessments made by which, instead of producing ships, they were to pay a corresponding sum of money. The result was that the Athenian navy grew strong at their expense, and when they revolted they always found themselves inadequately armed and inexperienced in war.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{22}Ibid., p. 203.

\textsuperscript{23}Ibid.


\textsuperscript{25}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{26}Thucydides, I. 99.
To return then to the first meeting of the Peloponnesian allies in 432 B.C. The Corinthians reproved the Spartans for being self-satisfied with their "own constitution and way of life," and as a consequence, insular and suspicious of the world abroad. As we saw, the Spartans had been terribly slow to act during the Persian Wars. They had been concerned with building a wall across the Isthmus so that they could retreat behind it, rather than having a wider picture of the potential threat of the combined forces of Persia and Athens, in the event of an alliance between the two. Then again, during the pentekontaetia, Sparta had stood by whilst Athens rebuilt her city's walls, the Long Walls and had gained unprecedented mastery over many states in the Aegean through the Delian Confederacy. For this the Corinthians chided them:

You Spartans are the only people in Hellas who wait calmly on events, relying for your defence not on action but on making people think that you will act. You alone do nothing in the early stages to prevent an enemy's expansion; you wait until your enemy has doubled his strength.

In defence of his people, King Archidamus later explained why Sparta's reputation for slowness was mistaken:

As for being slow and cautious — . . . there is nothing

27 Thucydides, I. 69.

28 The various speeches will not be quoted chronologically, but will be incorporated into the narrative in order to illustrate their importance to the course of events.

29 Thucydides, I. 69.
to be ashamed of in that. . . "Slow" and "cautious" can equally well be "wise" and "sensible". Certainly it is because we possess these qualities that we are the only people who do not become arrogant when we are successful, and who in times of stress are less likely to give in than others.  

Furthermore, Archidamus declared that the Spartans were averse to rushing into anything and they disliked taking risks because "it is impossible to calculate accurately events that are determined by chance." 

The Corinthians sum up the two protagonists, Athens and Sparta, thus:

. . . the enormous difference between you and the Athenians. To our minds, you are quite unaware of this difference; you have never yet tried to imagine what sort of people these Athenians are against whom you will have to fight—how much, indeed how completely different from you. An Athenian is always an innovator, quick to form a resolution and quick at carrying it out. You, on the other hand, are good at keeping things as they are; you never originate an idea, and your action tends to stop short of its aim. Then again, Athenian daring will outrun its own resources; they will take risks against their better judgement, and still in the midst of danger, remain confident. But your nature is always to do less than you could have done, to mistrust your own judgement, however sound it may be, and to assume that dangers will last for ever. Think of this, too: while you are hanging back, they never hesitate; while you stay at home, they are always abroad; for they think that the farther they go the more they will get, while you think that any movement may endanger what you have already.

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30 Cf. VIII. 24.
31 Thucydides, I. 84.
32 Thucydides, I. 84.
33 Thucydides, I. 70.
Whilst there is truth in the Corinthians' description of the Spartan character, we must remember that they were overdoing it in order to incite the Spartans to declare war on Athens. Notwithstanding her slowness, Sparta was still one of the two major powers in Hellas.

The Corinthians described the Athenians as being dynamic, a people who took risks, who favoured action over inaction, and were innovative. At Marathon the Athenians had been greatly outnumbered, but still fought the Persians and won; at Salamis they had abandoned their city, boarded their "ships and chose the path of danger",\(^\text{34}\) rather than submit to the Persians. Without a doubt, the Athenians displayed "courage", "resolution" and "ability."\(^\text{35}\) The Athenians themselves explained:

At Marathon we stood out against the Persians and faced them single-handed. In the later invasion, when we were unable to meet the enemy on land, we and all our people took to our ships, and joined the battle at Salamis... We produced most of the ships, we provided the most intelligent of the generals, and we displayed the most unflinching courage. Out of the 400 ships, nearly two-thirds were ours: the commander was Themistocles, who was mainly responsible for the battle being fought in the straits, and this, obviously, was what saved us... And the courage, the daring that we showed were without parallel. With no help coming to us by land, with all the states up to our frontier already enslaved, we chose to abandon our city and sacrifice our property... Behind us,... was a city that had ceased to exist; yet we still went forward and ventured our lives for this city that

\(^{34}\)Thucydides, I. 74.

\(^{35}\)Thucydides, I. 74.
seemed so impossible to recover.\textsuperscript{36}

In spite of the Athenians' bravery, Sparta had good reason to be proud of her own actions during the land battles at Thermopylae and Plataea. We should not forget that, on the battle field, the Spartans were the most courageous and well-trained fighters in Greece. Archidamus described their restrained way of life:

Because of our well-ordered life we are both brave in war and wise in council. Brave, because self-control is based upon a sense of honour, and honour is based on courage. And we are wise because we are not so highly educated as to look down upon our laws and customs, and are too rigorously trained in self-control to be able to disobey them.\textsuperscript{37}

This disciplined society, and the resultant political stability, gave Sparta an advantage over Athens. Archidamus declared "let us never give up this discipline which our fathers have handed down to us and which we still preserve and which has always done us good."\textsuperscript{38} Such discipline will be seen to be the one factor which enabled Sparta to win the war, whereas Athens' dynamism and liberalism led to the political instability which proved to be her downfall.\textsuperscript{39} The conflict between two opposing systems, that of liberalism and

\textsuperscript{36}Thucydides, I. 74.

\textsuperscript{37}Thucydides, I. 84.

\textsuperscript{38}Thucydides, I. 85.

\textsuperscript{39}Finley, \textit{Thucydides}, p. 131.
authoritarianism, plays an important role in the History. According to Finley

On the one side stands a system of free initiative that achieves brilliant results when it does not lead to division and self-interest; on the other, a rigorous control which, though intensely cramping to thought and even to action, produces at least a certain corporate steadiness. \(^{40}\)

Earlier we saw that Sparta's domestic problems contributed greatly to her inability to expand overseas and in so doing acquire an empire. Although she had led the allies during the Persian Wars, the Corinthians now questioned whether Sparta was fitted for continued leadership of the Peloponnesians. Sparta was, moreover, shy of sending her men abroad for fear that they would become corrupted—which they often did—being from an authoritarian state, and unused to the material wealth and freedom available in other states. The Athenians told the Spartans that "your own regulated ways of life do not mix well with the ways of others. Also it is a fact that when one of you goes abroad he follows neither his own rules nor those of the rest of Hellas." \(^{41}\)

On the contrary, the dynamic and aggressive Athenians were most qualified for the role of imperialist. As we have seen, the Spartans' reticence in taking up the role of protectress after the Persian Wars enabled the Athenians to

\(^{40}\)Ibid., p. 133.

\(^{41}\)Thucydides, I. 77.
assume this role themselves and go on and prosper:

We did not gain this empire by force. It came to us at a time when you were unwilling to fight on to the end against the Persians. At this time our allies came to us of their own accord and begged us to lead them. It was the actual course of events which first compelled us to increase our power to its present extent: fear of Persia was our chief motive, though afterwards we thought, too, of our own honour and our own interest.\textsuperscript{42}

Such was the Athenians' defence of their empire, and it was not entirely unjustified.

Of these two most powerful states at the time, the Athenians were the rising power, a process which had occurred in the previous fifty years. They were, to be sure, only filling the vacuum left vacant by the inactive Spartans. Hand in hand with this rise, however, there was a new aspect to be considered: Athens was not just a challenger in terms of power, but was a modern, progressive state which was upsetting the older, archaic world order of Sparta. The Spartans, who were averse to adapting, were told:

your whole way of life is out of date when compared with theirs [the Athenians]. And it is just as true in politics as it is in any art or craft: new methods must drive out old ones. When a city can live in peace and quiet, no doubt the old-established ways are best: but when one is constantly being faced by new problems, one has also to be capable of approaching them in an original way. Thus Athens, because of the very variety of her experience, is a far more modern state than you are.\textsuperscript{43}

Thucydides was fully aware of the paradigm shift which was

\textsuperscript{42}Thucydides, I. 75.

\textsuperscript{43}Thucydides, I. 71.
occurring in Athens, and that the "conservatism and imperturbability traditional to Sparta were no longer safe qualities in a world increasingly affected by Athenian dynamism."  

Finley describes the Peloponnesian war as not the collision of two similar and merely competitive systems. It was, rather, the inevitable clash between a rising and a declining system, the former of which represented all the revolutionizing forces of the era, democracy, imperialism, material progress, a commercial economy, while the latter stood for the oligarchic, agricultural, cantonal Greece of the past.  

As a result of drilling "their hoplites in the fifth century as they had done in the sixth" the Spartans were not really in a position to enter or win a war with Athens. Sparta was a land-based power, albeit the best in Greece; whereas Athens was a naval power--the latter was essential, according to Thucydides, for gaining and controlling an empire in Greece. Athens had several other advantages over Sparta, the major one was that she did not have Helots whom she had  

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44 Finley, Thucydides, p. 121.


46 Bury-Meiggs, p. 201.

47 Pericles, fully aware of how formidable the Spartan hoplites were, did not wish to meet them on the field: "We must not, . . join battle with the greatly superior forces of the Peloponnesians." Thucydides, I. 143.

48 Navies "brought in revenue and they were the foundation of empire. It was by naval action that those powers, . . conquered the islands. There was no warfare on land that resulted in the acquisition of an empire." Thucydides, I. 15.
to guard. King Archidamus was fully aware of the disadvantages that Sparta faced should she declare war on Athens:

With Athens it is different. Here we shall be engaged with people who live far off, people also who have the widest experience of the sea and who are extremely well equipped in all other directions, very wealthy both as individuals and as a state, with ships and cavalry and hoplites, with a population bigger than of any other place in Hellas, and then, too, with numbers of allies who pay tribute to them. How, then, can we irresponsibly start a war with such people? What have we to rely upon if we rush into it unprepared? Our navy? It is inferior to theirs, . . Or are we relying on our wealth? Here we are at an even greater disadvantage: we have no public funds, . . Perhaps there is ground for confidence in the superiority which we have in heavy infantry and in actual numbers, assets which will enable us to invade and devastate their land. Athens, however, controls plenty of land outside Attica and can import what she wants by sea. And if we try to make her allies revolt from her, we shall have to support them with a fleet, since most of them are on the islands. What sort of war, then, are we going to fight? 69

This gives the reader a clear picture of the differing states. Even if Sparta had wished to encourage Athens' allies to revolt, so that she herself could enlist them to fight against Athens, she was too poor to aid the allies, most of whom no longer had fleets. Athens, then, is seen to be in the supreme

69Thucydides, I. 80-81. The Corinthians refute each of Archidamus' concerns in their speech to the Second Congress at Sparta, lines 120-124. In his reply, Pericles develops Archidamus' concerns about the futility of a land-based power trying to subjugate a naval power, and an agricultural economy trying to outlast a mercantile economy which possessed a large empire. Pericles, however, foreshadows his concerns about Athens being able to win the war: "What I fear is not the enemy's strategy, but our own mistakes." I. 144.
position on the eve of the war: she had money, manpower and a navy. Although Archidamus was not averse to bringing down the Athenians a peg or two, he was sufficiently wise to know that the Spartans had to be prepared before they tackled such a city. His opponents, however, convinced the Spartans that they could easily defeat the Athenians,\textsuperscript{50} and the allies voted for war.

\textsuperscript{50}Thucydides, I. 121. All through the war the Spartans are surprised by the ability of the Athenians both to withstand the traditional hoplite invasions and upset the Spartans in battle, they "found that the war had gone very differently from what they had imagined when they believed that they could destroy the power of Athens in a few years simply by laying waste her land." V. 14.
CHAPTER THREE
PERICLES ON THE ATHENIANS

With war being declared, the inhabitants of Attica withdrew behind the walls of Athens, finding shelter wherever they could. The Peloponnesians proceeded to invade Attica in 431 B.C. and devastated the land; a scene which was so difficult for the Athenians to watch that they wanted to tackle the Spartans there and then. However, Pericles had recommended that the Athenians not engage the Peloponnesians on the field. Instead, by sacrificing the Attic countryside, they would let the Spartans wear themselves down, while they would remain secure behind Athens' city and Long Walls and make incursions into the Peloponnese by sea. The Athenian demos, however,

were furious with Pericles and paid no attention at all to the advice which he had given them previously; instead they abused him for being a general and not leading them out to battle, and put on him the whole responsibility for what they were suffering themselves.¹

Yet their leader was steadfast; he adhered to his previous decision, and he did not call a meeting of the assembly because he was concerned "that any general discussion would

¹Thucydides, II. 21.
result in wrong decisions, made under the influence of anger rather than of reason.\textsuperscript{2}

In this book Thucydides adumbrates the behaviour of the demos in the period after Pericles. They were easily swayed, and as a result were to make some flawed decisions. They were also apt to blame the messenger if anything went wrong, and we will see the effect that this had on Nicias when he was a general in Sicily.\textsuperscript{3} Further, it points to the vulnerability of a politician in democratic Athens, who may have been obliged to court the demos simply to maintain his position. Indeed, the Athenians temporarily threw out Pericles himself, the one man who Thucydides said could handle the mobilium turba:

Pericles, because of his position, his intelligence, and his known integrity, could respect the liberty of the people and at the same time hold them in check. It was he who led them, rather than they who led him, and since he never sought power from any wrong motive, he was under no necessity of flattering them: in fact he was so highly respected that he was able to speak angrily to them and to contradict them. Certainly when he saw that they were going too far in a mood of over-confidence, he would bring back to them a sense of their dangers; and when they were discouraged for no good reason he would restore their confidence. So, in what was nominally a democracy, power was really in the hands of the first citizen.\textsuperscript{4}

From this last sentence, we should not infer that Thucydides

\textsuperscript{2}Thucydides, II. 22.

\textsuperscript{3}See Nicias' letter to the Athenians, VI. 14.

\textsuperscript{4}Thucydides, II. 65.
meant that Athens was in the hands of a tyrant; rather, Thucydides pictures Pericles as giving the Athenians some unpleasant medicine because it was for their own good and, because he was not corrupt, the Athenians generally trusted Pericles with this task. Thucydides wrote "indeed, during the whole period of peace-time when Pericles was at the head of affairs the state was wisely led and firmly guarded, and it was under him that Athens was at her greatest."\(^5\) However, Pericles died a few years after the outbreak of war and without him Athens went right off course.

Pericles' Funeral Oration was given at the public funeral in 431/0 B.C. for those who had fallen in the first year of the war. Before presenting a eulogy for the dead, Pericles declared that he wanted to "discuss the spirit in which we faced our trials and also our constitution and the way of life which has made us great."\(^6\) Pericles begins on a practical level, by describing the workings of Athens' democratic constitution such as majority rule, freedom of speech, equality of opportunity,\(^7\) and participation in government. Pericles then proceeds to an idealistic plane in order to illustrate the effects of these mechanics on the

\(^{5}\text{Thucydides, II. 65.}\)

\(^{6}\text{Thucydides, II. 36.}\)

\(^{7}\text{Finley, Thucydides, p. 145.}\)
spirit of individual Athenians and the society as a whole: tolerance, freedom of association—even with foreigners, an open society, an admiration of reason and intellectual pursuits, a high standard of living, availability of imported goods, a love of culture and aesthetics, and an enjoyment of leisure time.

The above-mentioned qualities are in direct contrast with those found in Sparta, which viewed ability with suspicion; where leisure, and the enjoyment of beautiful or luxurious items, were unknown; where imports were banned; gold and silver prohibited; and society was secretive and repressive. The Spartans' telos was not the pursuit of reason but the attainment of excellence in the martial arts so that they could be in a state of constant military preparedness.

Pericles notes the great differences between the Athenian and Spartan educational systems: one rigid and programmed, the other humane and enquiring:

there is a difference, too, in our educational systems. The Spartans, from their earliest boyhood, are submitted to the most laborious training in courage; we pass our lives without all these restrictions, and yet are just as ready to face the same dangers as they are... There are certain advantages, I think, in our way of meeting danger voluntarily, with an easy mind, instead of with a laborious training, with natural rather than with state-induced courage. We do not have to spend our time practicing to meet sufferings which are still in the future; and when they are actually upon us we show ourselves just as brave as these others who are always in

8Ibid., p. 146.
strict training.\textsuperscript{9}

By virtue of their actions during the Persian Wars, the Athenians were no less courageous than the Spartans, despite the latter's disciplined and rigorous training. Furthermore, Pericles said, "our love of what is beautiful does not lead to extravagance; our love of things of the mind does not make us soft."\textsuperscript{10}

The Spartans, on the other hand, had a scorn of reason, and believed that an intellectual education was worthless. Only the rigours of military training made men fit for serving their state—a point which Archidamus had explicitly made during his speech during the debate at Sparta in 432 B.C.

We are wise because we are not so highly educated as to look down upon our laws and customs, and are too rigorously trained in self-control to be able to disobey them. We are trained to avoid being too clever in matters that are of no use—such as being able to produce an excellent theoretical criticism of one's enemies' dispositions, and then failing in practice to do quite so well against them. Instead we are taught that there is not a great deal of difference between the way we think and the way others think... There is no need to suppose that human beings differ very much from one another: but it is true that the ones who come out on top are the ones who have been trained in the hardest school.\textsuperscript{11}

The Spartans had a very unusual system of education and upbringing, which was governed by the requirements of military

\textsuperscript{9}Thucydides, II. 39.

\textsuperscript{10}Thucydides, II. 40.

\textsuperscript{11}Thucydides, I. 84.
training: a seven-year-old boy was entrusted to an officer of the state, who programmed the child's education and training so that it would instil in him the virtue of courage, enable him to tolerate the strict discipline required of the Spartan military, and make him unquestioningly patriotic, to boot.\textsuperscript{12} At the age of eighteen, and until he was twenty, the Spartan youth attended a military-style school; when he was twenty, he entered the *syssitia* or mess group,\textsuperscript{13} where he lived until he was thirty, whether or not he was married. Even after the age of thirty, Spartan men were still obliged to eat at the mess to which they had to contribute from the land allotted to them and farmed by state-owned slaves [Helots], who were . . . constantly rebelling and requiring suppression. The theoretical elegance of this solution (soldiers make slaves, slaves make soldiers, slaves need soldiers to suppress them) and the way it built on traditional Greek social customs, . . . offered a counter-ideal to the Athenian democracy. The two examples show how differently similar institutions could develop in different states, and produce societies with utterly opposed characteristics.\textsuperscript{14}

Conversely, in Athens military training had been relegated "from first to second place in the scholastic

\textsuperscript{12}Bury-Meiggs, p. 97.


\textsuperscript{14}In Athens the communal group to which a man belonged was the *phratria*, or phratry. The phratry governed the celebrations for coming of age, marriages, and religion, whereas the Spartan *syssitia* was "transformed to create a military elite." Ibid., p. 208.
system"\(^{15}\) in the late 590s, and during the time of the Peloponnesian War higher education was an aspect of Athenian life which was of great importance. With the growth of democracy there was a need for a man to be well-versed in the art of oratory because the political and legal arenas in which an Athenian took part required him to be persuasive.\(^ {16}\) This movement then prompted further inquiry into science and nature, philosophy and ethics, history and geography, and "it was in this atmosphere of critical inquiry and scepticism that Greece had to provide for the higher education of her youth, which the practical conditions of the democracy demanded."\(^ {17}\)

It should be added that higher education was generally the pursuit of the rich aristocrats simply because they had the time and money needed to pursue higher education and acquire *paideia*. In view of this, the upper classes tended to prevail and be in the majority in the Council and Assembly. In these institutions a man would be ridiculed if he could not speak well; therefore, with a costly education, the upper, rather than the lower classes, were more able to afford to remedy any lack of ability. Notwithstanding, a lower-class man could be a master in the Assembly because he was a great

\(^{15}\) Grant, *Rise of the Greeks*, p. 50.

\(^{16}\) Bury-Meiggs, p. 241.

\(^{17}\) Ibid., p. 242.
orator, not because he was of a certain family. As Pericles declared

Our constitution is called a democracy because power is in the hands not of a minority but of the whole people. . . when it is a question of putting one person before another in positions of public responsibility, what counts is not membership of a particular class, but the actual ability which the man possesses. No one, so long as he has it in him to be of service to the state, is kept in political obscurity because of poverty.

In the Funeral Oration Pericles relates the trust with which the constitution accorded the individual Athenian, a trust absent in the oligarchic Sparta.

We are free and tolerant in our private lives; but in public affairs we keep to the law. This is because it commands our deep respect. We give our obedience to those whom we put in positions of authority, and we obey the laws themselves, especially those unwritten laws which it is an acknowledged shame to break.

Finley feels that "this trust in human nature which Pericles expresses forms the ultimate difference between Athens and Sparta and thus between democracy and oligarchy." The Athenians were encouraged to debate and partake of the governing of their city. Pericles stated

Here each individual is interested not only in his own affairs but the affairs of the state as well: even those

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19 Thucydides, II. 37.
20 Finley, *Thucydides*, p. 146.
21 Thucydides, II. 37.
22 Finley, *Thucydides*, p. 146.
who are mostly occupied with their own business are extremely well-informed on general politics - this is a peculiarity of ours: we do not say that a man who takes no interest in politics is a man who minds his own business; we say that he has no business here at all. We Athenians, in our own persons, take our decisions on policy or submit them to proper discussions: for we do not think that there is an incompatibility between words and deeds; the worst thing is to rush into action before the consequences have been properly debated.\footnote{Thucydides, II. 40.}

In spite of what Pericles (or Thucydides) implied, Sparta's citizens, albeit militarily programmed, were not without rights even if theirs was an authoritarian system. For instance, they had had equality in law long before citizens of other Greek states. A brief review of their constitution may be useful.

The Spartan constitution was unique in that there were two hereditary kings, one from each of two prominent Spartan houses. The major function of these monarchs was to lead the military; furthermore, having two monarchs provided an internal balance on the other monarch, as well as other players in the Spartan body.\footnote{Grant, \textit{Rise of the Greeks}, p. 92.} These players were the Gerusia, or Council of Elders, which was the oligarchical section of the Spartan constitution, restricted to twenty-eight nobles over the age of sixty. The Gerusia was responsible for placing motions before the Assembly. The Assembly consisted
of general free-born citizens, over the age of thirty;\textsuperscript{25} they did not propose bills, but they voted, by acclamation, on schemes set before them. The Assembly elected the Gerusia and ephors and decided matters concerning foreign affairs and war. Of the relationship between the Gerusia and the Assembly Grant says that

on the one hand the authority of the Council's venerable members made it a safeguard against rash enterprises, and its preparation of the Assembly's business gave it a chance to influence the way things went. Yet the decisions of the Assembly, in the last resort, were binding, and it was its members, the Equals, who provided the infantry that made Sparta the dominant power for many miles around. So there was at most times, between these bodies, a delicately balanced equilibrium, which contributed to Sparta's strength.\textsuperscript{26}

The ephorate consisted of five annually-elected ephors, an office to which any Spartan citizen, between the ages of thirty and sixty, could aspire. The ephors were "king watchers," they could indict the king\textsuperscript{27} and they bridled the power of the Gerusia. The good order and discipline of Sparta were also their responsibility.\textsuperscript{28}

We cannot say, therefore, that the Spartans did not participate in the governing of their state, but they did not

\textsuperscript{25}Ibid., p. 92.

\textsuperscript{26}Ibid., p. 93. Equals were the 9,000 free-born Spartan citizens, or Spartiates.

\textsuperscript{27}Bury-Meiggs, p. 93.

\textsuperscript{28}Ibid., p. 92.
have as free a hand as the Athenians; for example, the Spartan Assembly did not debate or initiate motions\(^{29}\)--something which Pericles believed to be of tantamount importance to the Athenian constitutional process. Furthermore, we must remember that Sparta's authoritarian educational and social system would have produced a mentality in her men which was conservative, and which would inhere in the men who made up the Assembly and Ephorate; in turn, these bodies would perpetuate a rigid system. Therefore, Spartan citizens were not clamouring for the political freedom accorded the Athenians because the security of the state, and their own well-being, depended upon being militarily prepared, rather than politically permissive, in order to respond to any Helot restiveness.

Set after Thucydides' narration of the lawlessness that resulted from the plague, Pericles' third speech is juxtaposed with the Funeral Oration in that it shows us "a change in the spirit of the Athenians" after a second, more unsparing invasion by the Peloponnesians and the debilitating effects of the plague. The Athenians were so disheartened that they made overtures of peace to Sparta and "began to blame Pericles for having persuaded them to go to war and to hold him responsible for all the misfortunes which had overtaken

\(^{29}\)Ibid.
them. After the idealised Athens of the Funeral Oration we are now seeing wartime Athens, and it was in response to the unpleasant state of affairs that Pericles gave a speech, both to defend himself and to countenance the Athenians in continuing the war.

Pericles warns the Athenians that they must pull together "since a state can support individuals in their suffering, but no one person by himself can bear the load that rests upon the state." Pericles does concede, however, that the Athenians were asked to implement a "policy which entails suffering," which was especially difficult when "its ultimate benefits are still far away and not yet clear for you to see." To bolster up the Athenians Pericles informs them that, with their most powerful navy, Athens was the mistress of the seas—a sea power which could be neither matched, nor prevented from expanding. It makes the Athenians seem invincible and we will see that this valuable piece of information was put to use by Pericles' successors. Furthermore, although we are reading much of Thucydides' thoughts in the History this, coming from Pericles, tells the reader that, with his estimation of Athens' power, the

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30 Thucydides, II. 59.
31 Thucydides, II. 60.
32 Thucydides, II. 61.
Sicilian expedition was not totally without grounds.\textsuperscript{33} Yet, there was a caveat: Athens had to beware lest she lose her hold on the empire you cannot continue to enjoy the privileges unless you also shoulder the burdens of empire. And do not imagine that what we are fighting for is simply the question of freedom or slavery: there is also involved the loss of our empire and the dangers arising from the hatred which we have incurred in administering it. Nor is it any longer possible for you to give up this empire. . . . Your empire is now like a tyranny: it may have been wrong to take it; it is certainly dangerous to let it go.\textsuperscript{34}

Pericles was an avowed imperialist and had guided and encouraged Athenian imperial policy since 461 B.C.\textsuperscript{35} It was, moreover, upon the spoils of empire that the flourishing Athens and her democracy relied.\textsuperscript{36} In the Funeral Oration Pericles had portrayed Athens' particular form of imperialism as mild and benevolent. It is important to bear this, and the above quote, in mind when reading the Melian Dialogue. By then, under the continued stresses of the war and political instability, the Athenians have become hardened and quite unlike the Periclean ideal which made "friends by doing good

\textsuperscript{33}See II. 65.

\textsuperscript{34}Thucydides, II. 63.

\textsuperscript{35}That is, after the banishment of Cimon, who had encouraged the alliance with the Spartans. Finley, Thucydides, p. 22.

\textsuperscript{36}Ibid., p. 27.
to others, not by receiving good from them."³⁷

Pericles concludes his speech by calling upon the Athenians to resume their energetic conduct, to live up to their reputation as the greatest and most powerful city in Hellas, and become once again the Athenians who favoured action over inaction and innovation over status quo.³⁸

Thucydides closes the Periclean chapters with a statement about the failure of Athenian democracy after Pericles death

But his [Pericles'] successors, who were more on a level with each other and each of whom aimed at occupying the first place, adopted methods of demagogy which resulted in their losing control over the actual conduct of affairs. Such a policy, in a great city with an empire to govern, naturally led to a number of mistakes, amongst which was the Sicilian expedition, . . . And in the end it was only because they had destroyed themselves by their own internal strife that finally they were forced to surrender. So overwhelmingly great were the resources which Pericles had in mind at the time when he prophesied an easy victory for Athens over the Peloponnesians alone.³⁹

In such a fashion did the Athenians lose the war and their empire. Pericles himself had declared "what I fear is not the enemy's strategy, but our own mistakes,"⁴⁰ and we see how essential it was for Athens to have a leader who was able to control the demos for the democratic system to endure the

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³⁷ Thucydides, II. 40.
³⁸ See I. 70.
³⁹ Thucydides, II. 65.
⁴⁰ Thucydides, I. 144.
stresses of the war.

These speeches of Pericles show us the two faces of the Athenian character: the ideal of this remarkable democratic state, to which at times it did rise; and a second persona, which did not fully live up to this ideal because of the events of the plague, the war, and political stasis. It is very often the latter mode that we will subsequently see Athens.
CHAPTER 4

THE ATHENIANS IN ACTION:
PHORMIO'S VICTORIES & PYLOS

The Athenians were experienced, skilful, innovative and daring; such were the characteristics which they exhibited during the victories of Phormio in 429/8 B.C., and again at Pylos in 425/4 B.C. On these occasions, we will see how, because of these traits, the Athenians outmanoeuvred the Peloponnesians. We will also witness the surprise of the Spartans at the resilience and ability of the Athenians—the Spartans had believed that they would defeat the Athenians in a relatively short time. The elements of surprise, experience and skill are important in this chapter, and to the entire History, because it was based upon these assets, amongst others, that Pericles had predicted that the Athenians would be victorious over the allied forces of the Peloponnesians.

In 429 B.C. Sparta sent a force of 1,000 hoplites to Acarnania in an attempt to "conquer the whole of the country and to detach it from the Athenian alliance."¹ A fleet of forty-seven allied ships was sent in support of this contingent; the Peloponnesians had to sail past Phormio, the

¹Thucydides, II. 80.
Athenian admiral who was guarding Naupactus with twenty ships. The Peloponnesians "were by no means contemplating a sea battle, . . nor did they imagine that the twenty Athenian ships would venture on a battle with their own force of forty-seven ships." Phormio, nevertheless, planned to seize such a timely moment; he let the fleet pass into the open sea because this was the sphere in which the Athenian navy fought best. When the Peloponnesians realised that an attack was imminent they formed a circle with their ships, believing that it would prevent the Athenians from breaking through their line of defence; however,

The Athenian ships, formed in line, sailed round and round them, forcing the circle inwards as they kept sailing in close to the enemy ships and appearing to be on the point of ramming them. Actually they had previously been ordered by Phormio to make no attack until he himself gave the signal. He expected that, so far from keeping their formation, like a force on land, the warships would fall foul of each other, and the smaller craft would add to the confusion."

Furthermore, when the dawn wind blew from the gulf, Phormio knew that the Peloponnesians would be thrown into a muddle. The enemy, "lacking experience, as they did, they could not clear their oars in the rough sea, and so made the ships more

\(^2\)Naupactus was situated at entrance of the Corinthian gulf.

\(^3\)Thucydides, II. 83.

\(^4\)Thucydides, II. 84.
difficult for the steersmen to handle."\textsuperscript{5} It was at this opportune moment that Phormio ordered his men to attack; they captured twelve vessels, and those Peloponnesian vessels which were not destroyed, fled.

This defeat stunned the Spartans, who attributed their loss not to lack of experience but to a deficiency in courage—the mainstay of the Spartan army. They planned a counter-attack and were ordered to do better in it and not to be driven off the sea by a few ships. For the Spartans, especially since this was their first taste of naval engagements, found it very difficult to understand what had happened, and so far from thinking that there was anything wrong with their own navy, concluded that the defeat was the result of cowardice, not taking into consideration the contrast between the long experience of the Athenians and the short training which their own crews had received.\textsuperscript{6}

The Peloponnesians had been confident that the Athenians would not attack ships which were twice their number; to their astonishment such odds were not to deter the plucky Phormio, who was as good a reader of his inexperienced enemy as of his own men. Moreover, not only did the risk-taking Phormio attack the larger fleet, he actually routed them.

In response to the threat of a Peloponnesian attack, Phormio asked Athens to send immediately a fleet to assist him. The Athenians responded by sending twenty ships which,

\textsuperscript{5}Thucydides, II. 84.

\textsuperscript{6}Thucydides, II. 85.
unfortunately for Phormio, had been ordered to call at Crete before proceeding to Naupactus. Meanwhile, the gathered fleets of the Peloponnesians and Athenians faced each other on opposite sides of the Rhian channel.\(^7\) The Peloponnesians, with seventy-seven vessels, waited alongside the coast of Achaea to the south, and the Athenians, who had a meagre twenty vessels were on the opposite coast. Each side had a different plan: the Spartans did not wish to leave the Rhian channel and set sail into the open sea because they had lost the previous battle due to their exposed position. Alternatively, the Athenians did not want to sail into the straights and engage the Peloponnesians because being in such a compressed space would be disadvantageous to their manoeuvres.

In such a way did the two fleets remain for six days. The Peloponnesians broke the impasse by pretending to sail towards Naupactus; Phormio, of course, had to follow in order to protect the undefended Naupactus, and in such a way were the Athenians drawn into the narrow passage of the gulf. As the line of Athenian vessels sailed along the coast, the Peloponnesians turned and attacked them. The Athenians lost several ships, and the remaining eleven fled to Naupactus.

\(^7\)The Rhian channel was the channel leading to the Corinthian Gulf. Achaea was the northern province of the Peloponnesian peninsula.
However, one of the Athenian ships which was being chased, turned, rammed, and sank its Peloponnesian pursuer. This had the effect of unsettling the Peloponnesians, who were not expecting such a response from the Athenians, whom they had supposedly vanquished. Furthermore, the Peloponnesians were not in formation at the time—they were in fact singing a paean of victory.\(^8\) Phormio, who was at Naupactus by this time, saw the vulnerable position of the enemy, did an about turn, and attacked the scattered Peloponnesian fleet, gaining a brilliant victory.\(^9\)

These two sea battles illustrate the proficiency and boldness of the Athenian fleet and their leader. The Athenians had acquired their experience from the naval engagements of the Persian Wars, as well as during the pentekontaetia when they secured their empire on the coasts and islands of the Aegean. From this experience came their skill,\(^10\) and thence their daring. In 432 B.C., on the eve of the war, Pericles had told the Athenians

As for seamanship, they [the Spartans] will find it a difficult lesson to learn. You yourselves have been studying it ever since the end of the Persian wars, and

\(^8\)Bury-Meiggs, p. 263.

\(^9\)Ibid.

have still not entirely mastered the subject. . . . if they are faced with a large fleet they will not venture out, and so lack of practice will make them even less skilful than they were, and lack of skill will make them even less venturesome. Seamanship, just like anything else, is an art. It is not something that can be picked up and studied in one's part time; indeed, it allows one no spare time for anything else.  

The Spartan commanders were convinced that their courage would stand them in good stead against the Athenian navy:

lack of experience played its part in our failure in our first battle at sea. . . . real courage never alters, and those who have it never use inexperience as an excuse for being anything else but courageous. So far as you are concerned you may lack the enemy's experience, but that is more than made up for by your superior daring. This skill of theirs, which is the thing which you fear most, has to be combined with courage. . . . So, when you think of their greater experience you must also think of your own greater courage.  

The Spartans were sure that their excellence on the field could easily be translated into excellence on the sea, and Phormio realised this when he told his men

the thing which gives them most confidence in facing us is that they imagine themselves to have a kind of monopoly in being brave, yet this comforting belief is based simply on their experience in land fighting, owing to which they have won many victories. They think that this experience of theirs will be equally valuable on the sea; but here, if there is anything in their argument, the advantage will be on our side. They are certainly no braver than we are, and as for feeling confident, both they and we have that

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11Thucydides, I. 142.

12Thucydides, II. 87.

13That the Spartans were not terribly daring, as the commanders had stated in II. 87, is illustrated when they planned, but failed to implement, an attack on Athens' port, the Piraeus.
feeling with regard to the element where we have the greater experience.\textsuperscript{14}

In addition to the experience which they had acquired, Finley considers that the Athenians' skill and their consequent empire resulted from specific inherent traits: "high spirit, courage, capacity for innovation, and willingness to undergo toils."\textsuperscript{15} These characteristics were enumerated in the speeches at Sparta\textsuperscript{16} and, other than courage, were features which the Spartans did not possess; such attributes can be said to be the basis for Athens' ascendancy as well as the democratic "doctrine that those who deserve power should have it."\textsuperscript{17}

From such a aggressive and dauntless milieu sprang Phormio and he was to seize any opportune moment to achieve victory. It was up against the Athenians' unconventional behaviour that Sparta and her allies found themselves. The Spartans measured themselves and their world in terms of traditional virtues such as courage, honour, and standard procedures in battle; these were now worthless sentiments in

\textsuperscript{14}Thucydides, II. 89.

\textsuperscript{15}Finley, Three Essays, pp. 142-143.

\textsuperscript{16}See chapter two, supra.

\textsuperscript{17}Finley, Three Essays, p. 143. Cf. the Syracusans, who, like the Athenians, were daring and democratic; they acquired their excellent naval skills when fighting the Athenians, and they subsequently defeated them.
the newer world picture—where unorthodox and expedient tactics were being used by the skilful and mobile Athenians to secure victory.

An uncharacteristic episode occurred in the following winter which perhaps best illustrates the Spartan trait of caution. Sparta had planned to make an attack on Athens' port, the Piraeus. This port was not guarded by the Athenian fleet "indeed, no one could possibly have expected that the enemy would ever make a surprise attack of this kind." The Spartans sailed from Nisaea but did not follow their plan, which had been to go immediately to the Piraeus, because "they were frightened of the danger involved." The Spartans claimed that the winds were not favourable, and sailed instead to Salamis; there they set off the alarms when they ravaged the island. Of the proposed attack Thucydides wrote "indeed they could easily have done so if they had managed to overcome their apprehensions; certainly the wind would not have stopped them." This incident is an excellent example of how the Spartans, albeit courageous, lacked the daring required to undertake a dangerous venture, even when a favourable juncture arose. We should note that one of the commanders of the

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18 Thucydides, II. 93.
19 Thucydides, II. 93.
20 Thucydides, II. 94.
abortive mission to capture the Piraeus was one Brasidas, whom Thucydides described as daring, skilful,\textsuperscript{21} and quite un-Spartan.

The events and outcome of Pylos in 425/4 B.C., which were a disaster for Sparta, show us once again the wily Athenians set against the cautious Spartans. It illustrates well the archaism of the Spartan hoplite and the novelty of the Athenian navy; it also foreshadows the Athenians' own defeat at Syracuse in 413 B.C.

Pylos was a promontory of uninhabited land, surrounded on three sides by the sea, and "about forty-five miles from Sparta, in what used to be the country of the Messenians."\textsuperscript{22} The Athenian general, Demosthenes, thought that it would be an excellent place to fortify because "it had a harbour close by, and the Messenians, whose country this used to be . . . were capable, he thought, of doing a lot of damage if they had this place as a base."\textsuperscript{23} Due to unfavourable weather an Athenian fleet was forced to put into Pylos and, having nothing better to do, fortified the place, after which the fleet left Demosthenes at the base in charge of five ships.

Upon hearing of the capture of Pylos, Sparta sent a

\textsuperscript{21}Thucydides, V. 7.

\textsuperscript{22}Thucydides, IV. 3.

\textsuperscript{23}Thucydides, IV. 3.
contingent to attack the Athenians from the land as well as a fleet; Demosthenes, for his part, sent to the Athenian fleet which had recently departed, requesting them to send reinforcements. The Spartans were "expecting to capture it [Pylos] easily, since it had been built in a hurry and had only a few men to defend it."\textsuperscript{24} Anticipating that Demosthenes would receive a reinforcement of ships from the Athenian fleet, the Spartans planned "to block the entrances to the harbour so that the Athenians would not be able to enter it and take up their positions there."\textsuperscript{25} Furthermore, the island of Sphacteria, which was at the entrance of the harbour, and around which the two entrances passed, had 420 Spartan hoplites stationed there to prevent the Athenians from using it as a base.

The Spartans then proceeded to attack Pylos; however, reefs close to the shore made it very difficult for them to land their vessels.\textsuperscript{26} Thucydides tells us that "it was Brasidas who distinguished himself more than anyone else,"\textsuperscript{27} ordering the Spartans, if need be, to sacrifice their vessels and run them aground in order to force a landing. It proved

\textsuperscript{24}Thucydides, IV. 8.

\textsuperscript{25}Thucydides, IV. 8.

\textsuperscript{26}Bury-Meiggs, p. 271.

\textsuperscript{27}Thucydides, IV. 11.
too difficult for the Spartans, especially since "the Athenians stood firm and did not yield an inch."\textsuperscript{28} The brave Brasidas was himself wounded whilst trying to make a landing, and after two further days of attempting to land, the Spartans retreated. This incident is notable because of the reversal of roles of the Athenians and Spartans, as Thucydides wrote.

It was indeed a strange alteration in the ordinary run of things for Athenians to be fighting a battle on land — and Spartan land too — against Spartans attacking from the sea, and for Spartans to be trying to make a naval landing on their own shores, now hostile to them, against Athenian opposition. For at this time Sparta chiefly prided herself on being a land power with an unrivalled army and Athens on being a sea power with the greatest navy in existence.\textsuperscript{29}

The Athenian reinforcements which Demosthenes had requested came in and, because the island of Sphacteria was occupied by the Spartans, the ships went to another island which was close by. The fleet returned the next morning to find that the Spartans had "not put out to sea, nor had they blocked the entrances to the harbour, as they had meant to do. They stayed quietly on shore an occupied themselves in manning their ships."\textsuperscript{30} Such a scenario could not have been more apt for the quick-witted Athenians: they "sailed in to attack by

\textsuperscript{28}Thucydides, IV. 12.
\textsuperscript{29}Thucydides, IV. 12.
\textsuperscript{30}Thucydides, IV. 13.
both entrances,"\textsuperscript{31} put to flight the bulk of the Peloponnesian fleet, and disabled those close to the shore. The effect of this was that the Spartan hoplites, who had been put ashore on Sphacteria, were stranded on the island.

The Spartans and Athenians agreed upon an armistice so that Sparta could send ambassadors to Athens with a view to concluding a peace. This mission failed, due in great part to growing Athenian hubris; Thucydides wrote that the Athenians "aimed at winning still more, and, as for making peace, they considered that while they had the men on the island they could do so whenever they liked."\textsuperscript{32} The hostilities therefore resumed, and the siege of Sphacteria continued.

Now although the Athenians were holding the Spartan hoplites as hostages on Sphacteria, they found that they themselves could not actually land on the island and capture the hoplites. Moreover, the Spartans were receiving provisions, secreted in by those willing to make the dangerous landing. As the blockade was protracted and proved difficult for the Athenians, Demosthenes originated a plan to land light-armed troops on the island and get them to engage, and wear down, the heavily-armed Spartan hoplites. This plan was

\textsuperscript{31}Thucydides, IV. 14.

\textsuperscript{32}Thucydides, IV. 21.
now more feasible since the accidental burning of the wood on the island had made the Spartans visible.\textsuperscript{33}

The Athenian troops landed on Sphacteria and proceeded to attack the Spartan hoplites. The latter "were unable, however, to engage with the [Athenian] hoplites or to reap the advantages of their own specialized training"\textsuperscript{34} because the light-armed Athenians were able to shoot arrows, pelt them with stones, and escape quickly, while the heavily-armed Spartans "could not press their pursuit."\textsuperscript{35} In such a manner did the Athenians avoid a traditional engagement with the fearsome Spartan hoplites. Indeed, so outmoded and out of their depth were the Spartans that the Athenians began to wonder why they had ever feared them.

they had now become accustomed to the idea that these Spartans were not quite so terrible as they had thought, . . they had been obsessed with the idea that they were actually going to attack Spartans, but now they began to despise their enemy, shouting as they charged down upon him in a mass and letting fly with stones and arrows and javelins.\textsuperscript{36}

The Spartans, now blinded by the dust from the recently burnt

\textsuperscript{33} Bury-Meiggs, p. 273.

\textsuperscript{34} Thucydides, IV. 33.

\textsuperscript{35} Thucydides, IV. 33.

\textsuperscript{36} Thucydides, IV. 34. This passages reminds us how formidable the Spartan hoplites must have been to the rest of the Greeks.
wood,\textsuperscript{37} were in a dreadful state. They "were not used to this kind of fighting, and they were thrown into consternation by the shouting which accompanied the attacks."\textsuperscript{38} Thucydides describes their plight

their felt helmets could not keep out the arrows; when they were hit with spears the broken shafts stuck in their armour, and they themselves, unable to see what was in front of them, had no means of fighting back; words of command were inaudible, being drowned by the shouting of the enemy; danger was on every side, and they could see no possible way either of defending themselves or of escaping.\textsuperscript{39}

After a gruelling retreat to higher ground, the Spartans were trapped in a position similar to that at the battle of Thermopylae, when the Persians had gained access to their rear. At this point the Athenians ceased fighting and the Spartans agreed to surrender. Of the 420 originally on the island there were 292 Spartan hoplites remaining, and these were taken to Athens.\textsuperscript{40}

Pylos, meanwhile, was settled with a garrison, which included Messenians

These troops carried out raids into Laconia and, helped by the fact that they spoke the same dialect as the inhabitants, did a lot of damage. The Spartans had had no previous experience of this type of guerilla warfare and, as the helots began to desert, they feared the spread

\textsuperscript{37}Bury-Meiggs, p. 273.

\textsuperscript{38}Thucydides, IV. 34.

\textsuperscript{39}Cf. the Athenians when they were trapped at Syracuse.

\textsuperscript{40}Thucydides, IV. 38.
of revolution in their country and became exceedingly uneasy about it.\textsuperscript{41}

This hit directly at the heart of Sparta’s weakness—their fear of Helot revolt.

What they [the Spartans] feared was that there might be a revolution against the government after the great and unexpected disaster at Sphacteria, . . . and committed as they were on every side to a form of warfare where mobility was what counted and where attacks were difficult to guard against. Thus they raised a force of 400 cavalry and a force of archers—something quite at variance with their normal way of doing things—and in fact they now became more than ever irresolute in their military conduct; they were faced with something outside the scope of their existing organization, namely a war fought on the seas and fought against Athenians—people who thought that every moment when they were not attacking was so much sacrificed from their expectation of achievement.\textsuperscript{42}

This shows the bewilderment of the old-fashioned Spartans and their attempts to adapt.

After the incidents of Pylos and Sphacteria in 425/4 B.C., the Athenians kept the Spartans in Athens as hostages. During 424 B.C. the Athenians were to gain more successes in the war and “such was the effect on the Athenians of their present good fortune that they thought that nothing could go wrong with them.”\textsuperscript{43} It followed, however, that Athens was to suffer several setbacks: she was defeated at Delium in 424/3 B.C., and at this time the brilliant and un-Spartan Brasidas

\textsuperscript{41}Thucydides, IV. 41.

\textsuperscript{42}Thucydides, IV. 55.

\textsuperscript{43}Thucydides, IV. 65.
came to the forefront on the Peloponnesian side. Brasidas entered Thrace and in 424/3 B.C. captured one of Athens' most important outposts: Amphipolis. The loss of Amphipolis ran counter to one of the tenets of Pericles' plan for the war, which was that under no circumstances should the Athenians lose control of any of their empire because any such loss could gravely affect Athens' power. Thucydides himself was the general in charge of Amphipolis when it was captured—he was not, however, in the city at the time of the attack. For this dereliction of duty he was exiled for twenty years; yet, this exile gave him the facility to write the History.

Meanwhile, the energetic but moderate Brasidas was winning over many of Athens' subject cities who

when they heard of the capture of Amphipolis, of the terms being offered, and of the considerate behaviour of Brasidas himself, eagerly embraced the idea of a change, made overtures to him, begging him to march on into their territory, and vied with each other in being the first to revolt. Indeed, they fancied that this was a perfectly safe thing to do, though, as was proved later on, the power of Athens was as great as had been their mistake in underestimating it.\(^{45}\)

Thucydides adds that the subject cities were willing to chance revolting against Athens because "it looked for the first time as though they were going to find the Spartans acting with

\(^{44}\)Finley, *Thucydides*, p. 199.

\(^{45}\)Thucydides, IV. 108. For confirmation of this, we need only read the Melian Dialogue; see chapter 5, infra.
real energy."\textsuperscript{46} It was, of course, the energetic Brasidas who was the ring leader. The uniqueness of Brasidas did not go unnoticed in Sparta. When he sent to Sparta for reinforcements, "the Spartans, however, did nothing for him, partly because their leading men were jealous of him, partly because what they really wanted was to recover the prisoners made on the island and to end the war."\textsuperscript{47}

It was after the battle of Amphipolis in 422 B.C. that the Athenians, who were the losers, "no longer possessed the same confidence in their strength which had induced them to reject previous offers of peace;"\textsuperscript{48} the "Spartans on their side had found that the war had gone very differently from what they had imagined when they believed that they could destroy the power of Athens in a few years simply by laying waste her land."\textsuperscript{49} The Spartans' reputation for being the most fearsome and disciplined land forces in Greece was well-deserved. However, their enemy was a naval power, and far

\textsuperscript{46}Thucydides, IV. 108.

\textsuperscript{47}Thucydides, IV. 108.

\textsuperscript{48}Thucydides, V. 14.

\textsuperscript{49}Thucydides, V. 14. In 432 B.C. the Corinthians had told the Spartans that "there are many reasons why victory should be ours. First, we are superior in numbers and in military experience; secondly, one and all and all together we obey the orders that we receive." 1. 121. Archidamus was the only Spartan who had not believed that the Peloponnesians would easily and quickly defeat the Athenians. Cf. VII. 28.
more powerful, experienced and determined than the Spartans had imagined. The Spartans had been surprised by their adversary on many occasions: at Phormio's bold attack and their unexpected loss; at the surprising events at Pylos and the Athenians' victory. Sparta found that she was ill-prepared for a war with Athens: her daring antagonist had used unusual military tactics, which the disciplined Spartans, albeit splendid in pitched battles, did not anticipate. Their rigorous training was very specialised, hence they fought at sea as if they were on land. We saw their unwillingness to undertake hazardous ventures by their inability to take the Piraeus. Sparta was, moreover, distracted with fear of a Helot revolt, and the course of events showed that her concern was justified, more so since the Athenians had chosen Pylos to attack, which was in Messenia. The unequalled Brasidas did win some important victories for Sparta; however, he was viewed with suspicion at home, and was killed at Amphipolis.

A truce was called and peace was agreed upon in 421 B.C., and this, as Finley states

represents a victory for Athens in that she had weathered the Peloponnesian attempt to destroy the empire. Nevertheless, not only had the course of events since

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50 In this respect, the Athenians were following Pericles' advice not to meet the Spartan hoplites in a pitched battle. Rather, they were waging a war of attrition by landing in Spartan territory, stirring up the Helots, and drawing the Spartans into situations in which the latter were inexperienced.
Pylos revealed a potential weakness in the empire, but at home the bright vision of wider conquests had been raised.\footnote{Finley, Thucydides, p. 201.}

Athens proved herself capable of taking on the Peloponnesians and winning some important victories. However, the Athenians became hubristic as a result of their success, and this mood would continue and precipitate in the Sicilian expedition. But not before the effects of the strain, from the continued war, the reversals of fortune, and the revolt of her subject cities, would change the benevolent aspect of Athenian imperialism as it was described in the Funeral Oration; we will see this new facet of Athens in the Melian Dialogue.
CHAPTER FIVE

THE MELIAN DIALOGUE

The peace of 421 B.C. and the subsequent alliance between Athens and Sparta did not last for long; it was, in fact, a hollow peace because the terms were never completely implemented.\(^1\) Furthermore, it is during this period that we find Alcibiades coming to the forefront in Athens as the bellicose counter-agent to the peace-maker, Nicias.

Alcibiades' plan was to embark upon a policy of territorial aggrandizement of the upper Peloponnese, a campaign of which Pericles would have disapproved, taking into consideration that Athens should have been protecting her existing possessions rather than adding to her empire. The Spartans, of course, were forced to respond to an incursion into their territory.\(^2\) It was in 418 B.C., at Mantinea, that Sparta took on the challenge, displayed the famed discipline of her men, and defeated an allied force of Argives, Mantineans and Athenians. She regained her old reputation as leader of the Peloponnese, and acquired sufficient confidence

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\(^1\)Finley, *Thucydides*, p. 204.

\(^2\)Ibid., p. 207.
to aid her in the continuation of the war with Athens.\textsuperscript{3}

With the ill success of Alcibiades' plan to conquer the Peloponnesian, the Athenians turned their sights towards the Aegean, and it was at this juncture that they proceeded to Melos in order to bring the Melians into the Athenian empire. The island of Melos, one of the last remaining independent city states, had been independent for 700 years, staunchly refusing to join the Confederacy of Delos, the league by which Athens held her empire.\textsuperscript{4} The Athenians had attacked Melos in 426 B.C., and laid waste her land so that the Melians then "became open enemies of Athens,"\textsuperscript{5} but they still remained elusive.\textsuperscript{6} As mistress of the Aegean, Athens now decided that the Melians should be brought into line because "the Athenians, for reasons both of prestige and of political philosophy, cannot tolerate an independent island in the middle of their embattled empire."\textsuperscript{7} In 416 B.C., therefore, she sent an expeditionary force to the island.

The Athenians, of course, hoped that the Melians would

\footnotesize{\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{3}Ibid., p. 208.
  \item \textsuperscript{4}Bury-Meiggs, p. 291.
  \item \textsuperscript{5}Thucydides, V. 84.
  \item \textsuperscript{6}Bury-Meiggs, p. 291.
\end{itemize}}
be acquiescent and agree to come into the fold without the need for force. Representatives were sent to Melos to negotiate, and although there probably was no dialogue as we have it, Thucydides uses this device in order to examine the clash between these two radically different states: the modern, aggressive, strong, Ionian imperial power with the traditional, pacific, independent, weak, Dorian city state. The Melian Dialogue is important because it shows us the changed disposition of the Athenians, which had become cynical and hubristic during the progression of the war. Thucydides again ponders the Spartan character—and we are forced to conclude that, although their characters were varied, the Spartans followed many of the same precepts as the Athenians when it came to matters of self-interest. Furthermore, after first having shown us Sparta, a powerful Dorian adversary, Thucydides' portrayal of Melos, a weak Dorian opponent, shows how disparate was the national ethos of the Ionian Athenians when contrasted with the aforementioned Dorian states.\(^8\)

The Athenians began the dialogue by prohibiting the Melians from using "fine phrases;"\(^9\) specifically, moral grounds for their defence such as justice and honour; instead,\[\footnote{Ibid., p. 32.} \footnote{Thucydides, V. 89.} \]
the dialogue should be governed by expediency.\footnote{Wassermann, "The Melian Dialogue," p. 20.} \footnote{Thucydides, V. 89} The Athenians declared that they themselves would not waste time by claiming that "we have a right to our empire because we defeated the Persians, or that we come against you now because of the injuries you have done us;"\footnote{Thucydides, V. 89.} they are sufficiently realistic, if not sardonic, to admit that such a speech would be a "great mass of words that nobody would believe."\footnote{Thucydides, V. 89.} However, as they were not going to use any moral pretext for being at Melos, neither should the Melians expound their justification for remaining independent in moral terms. The Athenians recommended that the Melians get to the point and "get what it is possible for you to get"\footnote{Thucydides, V. 89.} because

when these matters are discussed by practical people, the standard of justice depends on the equality of power to compel and that in fact the strong do what they have the power to do and the weak accept what they have to accept.\footnote{Thucydides, V. 89.}

The Athenians, because they were the greater power, were able to turn aside the moral abstractions and base their arguments on expediency, whereas the weaker Melians had no such resource with which to compel the Athenians; their only choice, other than resignation, was to resort to persuasion.
based on "fair play and just dealing." If the Melians had had their way and the dialogue had been governed by moral criteria, the Melians' arguments would have been invulnerable to defeat by the Athenians because "the lack of power does not count" in the realm of justice. By basing the dialogue upon expediency, the Athenians could overrule the Melians.

The Athenians cynically, but pragmatically, tell the Melians:

So far as the favour of the gods is concerned, we think we have as much right to that as you have. Our aims and our actions are perfectly consistent with the beliefs men hold about the gods and with the principles which govern their own conduct. Our opinion of the gods and our knowledge of men lead us to conclude that it is a general and necessary law of nature to rule whatever one can. This is not a law that we made ourselves, nor were we the first to act upon it when it was made. We found it already in existence, and we shall leave it to exist for ever among those who come after us.

Although blunt, the Athenians were merely expressing the natural law which governed the way in which unequals correlate. This law was eternal and universal, applying to man and the gods. Resignation by the Melians was the only

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15 Thucydides V. 90.


17 Thucydides, V. 105.

18 "This was a doctrine which it was Hellenic to follow, but unusual to enunciate in all its nakedness." Bury-Meiggs, p. 291.
solution under such rules.\textsuperscript{19}

We should recall that in Periclean Athens, when Athenian imperialism was considered temperate, the very same argument was used by the Athenians during the speech at Sparta in 432 B.C., when they declared

we have done nothing extraordinary, nothing contrary to human nature in accepting an empire when it was offered to us and then in refusing to give it up. Three very powerful motives prevent us from doing so - security, honour, and self-interest. And we were not the first to act in this way. Far from it. It has always been a rule that the weak should be subject to the strong; and besides, we consider that we are worthy of our power. Up till the present moment, you [Spartans], too, used to think that we were; but now, after calculating your own interest, you are beginning to talk in terms of right and wrong. Considerations of this kind have never yet turned people aside from the opportunities of aggrandizement offered by superior strength.\textsuperscript{20}

This was precisely what the Athenians were now affirming at Melos— they were following the "general and necessary law of nature to rule whatever one can," as did any strong power, in any age; furthermore, moral considerations and expediency did not mix well in the arena of political power. Although the mood of the Athenians had changed, the mechanics of their imperialism had not. The Athenians knew that they themselves could be subject to this law, and in a position similar to

\textsuperscript{19} Cf. V. 105.

\textsuperscript{20} Thucydides, I. 76-77.
that in which the Melians were at present.\textsuperscript{21}

We could say that "if no more than a clash of interests were involved, a compromise would be possible. But every word spoken by either party underlines the fact that the real issue is the struggle of two political ideals"\textsuperscript{22} and two world pictures. Indeed, the arguments of both of the protagonists are valid with respect to their particular stance.\textsuperscript{23} As we have seen, Thucydides was fully aware of the changing social and political patterns in Greece, and the Melian Dialogue, as much as the History itself, shows us the conflict between followers of the older and the newer world pictures—both of which had a place in Greece. Furthermore,

there is much in Thucydides which agrees with the Athenian concept of enlightened imperialism and practical expediency. But his own aristocratic background helps him to recognize in the Melians the power of their tradition and character if not of their arguments. Against the scepticism of his contemporaries they offer an impressive example that men fight and die not only for their interests, but for their beliefs, ideals, hopes, and even illusions.\textsuperscript{24}

Of the Melians we can say that "the old aristocratic and Doric ideas of [aidos] and [dike] are the core of their existence. They stand against the Athenians as

\textsuperscript{21}Cf. V. 91.
\textsuperscript{22}Wassermann, "The Melian Dialogue," p. 25.
\textsuperscript{23}Ibid., p. 21.
\textsuperscript{24}Ibid.
representatives not only of a different political ideal, but of a different age."\textsuperscript{25} The dialogue form illustrates well the oblique way in which the two parties confer. It is as if the Melians and Athenians were speaking different languages—the former an archaic and noble dialect, shaped by a belief in a system which was ordered by the gods and moral ordinances, while the latter spoke a modern, sceptical tongue, formed as much by the sophistic thought of the age as the experiences of the war. The Athenians are patently impatient with the Melians;\textsuperscript{26} they cannot comprehend the Melians' inability to follow the "safe rule – to stand up to one's equals, to behave with deference towards one's superiors, and to treat one's inferiors with moderation."\textsuperscript{27} Physically repressing the stubborn Melians was easier for the Athenians than understanding the Melians' willingness, when faced with the inevitability of engulfment by a stronger power, to venture their lives on an archaic concept such as honour.

Mostly because of pride, honour and faith in divine intervention, as well as the possibility of Spartan assistance, the Melians refused to bend to the Athenians. The Melians said that they

\textsuperscript{25}Ibid., p. 28.

\textsuperscript{26}Cf. V. 111.

\textsuperscript{27}Thucydides, V. 111.
trust that the gods will give us fortune as good as yours, because we are standing for what is right against what is wrong; and as for what we lack in power, we trust that it will be made up for by our alliance with the Spartans, who are bound, if for no other reason, then for honour's sake, and because we are their kinsmen, to come to our help.  

The Melians' belief that the gods would intervene and save them from the overbearing and unjustly wielded power of the Athenians, albeit naive, was a corollary of their heritage, from which came their hope in divine justice; theirs was "a concept of the gods which obtained in Aeschylus' Athens."  

On the other hand, the Athenians "reveal a new idea concerning the relation of the gods to human affairs as befitting the moral disintegration of the age under the cumulative impact of war and 'sophistic' scepticism."  We should not say that the Athenians were atheists, rather, they believed that the gods "do not interfere with the laws of nature as expressed in the political sphere by the rule of the strong," especially as the gods themselves followed the same rule.

In the Melians we see, perhaps, the ideal of the older Greece. Although Sparta was a member of this older exemplar, she was also a major power like Athens, therefore, when it came to exercising that power, she was required to abide by

28 Thucydides, V. 104.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
the same political codes as Athens. Sparta did retain many of the older standards, but the war was also taking its toll on her, and forcing her to have a foot in two different worlds. We could say that the Spartans did not always live up to the traditional tenets, whereas the Melians lived and died for their ideals—choosing destruction rather than loss of honour.

As Sparta was as driven by self-interest as Athens, the Athenians informed the Melians that theirs was an idealised picture of the Spartan character. The Melians were convinced that the Spartans would save them from the clutches of the Athenians: they did not, because irrespective of the moral implications, Melos was not worth the effort and danger involved. We need only look to the actions of the Spartans at Plataea to conclude that they followed the most expedient, rather than the most honourable, course.

Plataea was an Athenian ally, and the Spartans wanted them to change to a neutral position. However, after the Plataeans refused, the Spartan King Archidamus, claiming that he was morally justified, invoked the gods for their support and set siege to the city of Plataea. His noble speech was precisely the sort of exhibition that the Athenians rejected at the beginning of the Melian Dialogue. Notwithstanding Archidamus' piety, the Plataeans were to suffer the same fate as the Melians, and inevitably were put to death.
We must ask whether the character of the Athens in the Melian Dialogue was very different from the Athens of Pericles? If we recall Pericles' ideal of Athens in the Funeral Oration, we will remember that when he described the glories of Athens, he declared that Athenian imperialism was humane and benevolent, and that Athens showed goodwill towards her subjects and allies.\textsuperscript{32} The Athens which was described in such fine phrases in Pericles' Funeral Oration had altered. Being benevolent to her subjects was now a luxury which Athens could not afford. Furthermore, under the continued exertion of war, for political reasons, she would not accept resistance. In the Melian Dialogue we now have the undisguised imperialism of Athens, in which she undertakes the conquest of a relatively insignificant island. When national pride and honour prevented the Melians from submitting, the Athenians set siege to the city. After treachery from within the city, the Melians capitulated, and the Athenians put to death all the men, made slaves of the women and children, and razed the city.

To understand why the Athenians seem so arrogant and sceptical in the Melian Dialogue, we must remember that they had undergone fifteen years of war and a devastating plague, the effects of which began to show in the political \textit{stasis} in

\textsuperscript{32}Cf. II. 40.
Athens, as well as their conduct towards the empire. Thucydides makes it very clear that for men to behave in accordance with standards such as moderation, justice and honour, the state has to be secure. Periclean Athens was as magnificent as it was, in part, because the thirty-year period of Pericles' ascendancy\(^{33}\) was generally a peaceful and stable period. Being stable, Athens was able to expand and flourish. Thucydides wrote: "in times of peace and prosperity cities and individuals alike follow higher standards, because they are not forced into a situation where they have to do what they do not want to do. But war is a stern teacher; . . ."\(^{34}\) The plague, moreover, must have tainted the spirit of many Athenians when they realised the pointlessness of many of the things in which the Melians placed their faith: "equally useless were prayers made in the temples, consultation of oracles, and so forth; indeed, in the end people were so overcome by their sufferings that they paid no further attention to such things."\(^{35}\) Thucydides said that in addition to causing the Athenians to be indifferent "to every rule of religion or law"\(^{36}\) the plague touched the Athenians in other

\(^{33}\)460-429 B.C.

\(^{34}\)Thucydides, III. 82.

\(^{35}\)Thucydides, II. 47.

\(^{36}\)Thucydides, II. 52.
ways:

As for what is called honour, no one showed himself willing to abide by its laws, so doubtful was it whether one would survive to enjoy the name for it . . . . No fear of god or law of man had a restraining influence. As for the gods, it seemed to be the same thing whether one worshipped them or not. 37

Although thirteen years had passed since the plague, the long-term ramifications were to dull the sensibility of the Athenians.

The Melian Dialogue took place when Athens was at the peak of her power, full of hubris, with Victory on her side. It serves as our prologue to the venture which was to be the cause of her nemesis, 38 and in such a spirit was Athens when

In the same winter the Athenians resolved to sail again against Sicily with larger forces than those which Laches and Eurymedon had commanded, and, if possible, to conquer it. They were for the most part ignorant of the size of the island and of the numbers of its inhabitants, both Hellenic and native, and they did not realize that they were taking on a war of almost the same magnitude as their war against the Peloponnesians. 39

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37 Thucydides, II. 53.


39 Thucydides, VI. 1.
CHAPTER SIX
THE SICILIAN EXPEDITION

It was not for nothing that the Athenians looked to the west. One outward reason for the Athenians to seek a presence in Sicily, a reason which dated back to the Periclean period, was to aid Ionian outposts which were in the minority amongst Dorian settlements.\(^1\) The major Dorian city in Sicily was Syracuse, a colony of Corinth,\(^2\) Athens' commercial rival. Another reason was that grain and men could be supplied to the Peloponnese; Athens of course wished to prevent the passage of anything which could assist the Spartans in defeating her.\(^3\) The Athenians had sent out previous expeditions to Sicily, once in 427 B.C., and again in 425 B.C.; however, neither amounted to much. In fact, the leaders of the latter expedition were roundly punished by the Athenian demos when they returned, without success. Such censure was to have repercussions upon the later expedition to Sicily, when the wretched Nicias remained in Sicily, facing certain death,

\(^{1}\) Bury-Meiggs, p. 292.

\(^{2}\) Ibid.

\(^{3}\) Ibid., p. 203.
rather than return to the Athenian demos empty-handed.

The expedition to which we will address our enquiry left in 415 B.C. The superficial reason for the present bid for Sicily was that Segesta, an Ionian city, sent to Athens for the latter's assistance in Segesta's conflict with Selinus. The wily inhabitants of Segesta had tricked the Athenian ambassadors by showing them much gold and silver, so that the Athenians returned to Athens with tales of the great wealth to be had in Segesta. The Athenians, guided by the avaricious Alcibiades, and triumphant over the outcome of Melos, were eager to support the issue. ⁴ The citizens of Athens were keen to send the armada because of the rewards that an addition to their empire would afford: "the general masses and the average soldier himself saw the prospect of getting pay for the time being and of adding to the empire so as to secure permanent paid employment in future." ⁵ Furthermore, the post-Periclean leaders of Athens were eager to promote a policy of territorial aggrandizement because of the personal profits to be gained. ⁶ This mutually-rewarding association was a double-

⁴ Ibid., p. 294.

⁵ Thucydides, VI. 24.

⁶ On Alcibiades and his support of the Sicilian venture: "Stronger motives still were his desire to hold the command and his hopes that it would be through him that Sicily and Carthage would be conquered - successes which would at the same time bring him personally both wealth and honour." VI. 15. Thucydides considered that the bizarre lifestyle of
edged sword which was to be a major factor in Athens' demise.

The moderate Nicias, however, opposed the expedition,⁷ "his view was that the city was making a mistake and, on a slight pretext which looked reasonable, was in fact aiming at conquering the whole of Sicily - a very considerable undertaking indeed."⁸ Nicias was, however, unable to convince the Athenians otherwise: they voted to send a larger force than was required, and then sent him as a general of the expedition. In failing to heed Nicias' advice, the demos were being unwise; however, in appointing him as one of the generals, they were nothing but foolish.⁹ He was an honourable and trustworthy man, but was to be entirely misplaced in the forthcoming adventure, which required a man more akin to the unreliable but capable Alcibiades, of whom Thucydides wrote "although in a public capacity his conduct of the war was excellent, his way of life made him objectionable to everyone as a person; thus they entrusted their affairs to other hands, and before long ruined the

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⁷Reading Nicias' speech to the Athenian assembly reminds one of the moderate Archidamus' speech at Sparta in 432 B.C.

⁸Thucydides, VI. 8.

⁹Bury-Meiggs, p. 294.
city."\(^\text{10}\) In fact, in sending Alcibiades, Nicias and Lamachus, the Athenians had found all the essential ingredients for the right man for the job: brilliant tactician, honourable statesman, and career soldier, but each man was not complete enough to carry off the enterprise, and all of the characteristics necessary for success were to be thrown asunder during the course of events.

From the launching of the armada, which Thucydides described as looking "more like a demonstration of the power and greatness of Athens than an expeditionary force setting out against the enemy,"\(^\text{11}\) we are taken back to the Athens of earlier books: a powerful, vigorous, glorious city. Unfortunately, shortly after the Athenian fleet arrived in Sicily, Alcibiades was recalled to face charges on the desecration of the Hermae;\(^\text{12}\) Nicias was left in charge and he recommended a plan which involved no risk whatsoever. Nicias went on to engage in a somewhat minor skirmish with the Syracusans, which the Athenians won; however, he failed to take immediate advantage of this victory when he removed the

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\(^{10}\)Thucydides, VI. 15.

\(^{11}\)Thucydides, VI. 31.

\(^{12}\)The Hermae were stone figures which were situated at the doors of various temples and individual's houses. The mutilation of the genitals of these figures caused an outrage in Athens because it was an extremely irreligious act.
entire army to Catane for the winter.\textsuperscript{13} Nicias' inaction thus caused the dissipation of the Athenian fleet's major asset: its fearsome appearance and the unsettling effect that this had on the Syracusans when the Athenians first arrived in Sicily. Thucydides wrote "for after the Athenians had failed to make an immediate attack, as they had at first feared and expected they would do, the Syracusans gained confidence with every day that went by."\textsuperscript{14}

Not content with his recall, Alcibiades proceeded to defect to Sparta, and in one fell swoop Sparta found the agent of her renewed vigour in the war on mainland Greece, as well as her support of the Syracusans in Sicily. Alcibiades recommended that the Spartans fortify Decelea and resume their annual invasions of Attica. They should also send a first-rate man out to Sicily to lead the Syracusans. These two factors were to bring Athens to her knees: Decelea was in Attica and having a permanent outpost there meant the Spartans could ravage the Attic countryside without abatement. Of this Thucydides wrote

\begin{quote}
the occupation of Decelea, resulting, as it did, in so much devastation of property and loss of manpower, was one of the chief reasons for the decline of Athenian power. The previous invasions had not lasted for long and had not prevented the Athenians from enjoying the use of their land for the rest of the time; now, however, the
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{13}Bury-Meiggs, p. 297.

\textsuperscript{14}Thucydides, VI. 63.
enemy were on top of them throughout the year.\textsuperscript{15} The Spartans who "even before this had intended to march against Athens, but were still hesitating and examining the risks involved"\textsuperscript{16} were now convinced of the course recommended by Alcibiades. Moreover, the Spartans realised "that Athens, with two wars on her hands - one against them and one against the Sicilians - would now be easier to crush."\textsuperscript{17} The double blow to the Athenian cause, this time in Sicily, was the Spartans' appointment of the general Gy lippus, a man who was as good a commander as the late Brasidas.

In the spring the Athenians took Epipolae, a strategic plateau above Syracuse. The plan was to build a wall down to the harbour in order to prevent access, by land, to the centre of the city of Syracuse. Then if the Athenians sent in their fleet to the Great Harbour, the Syracusans would effectively be isolated.\textsuperscript{18} The Syracusans began to build a cross wall in an attempt to intercept the Athenians' wall which was to extend to the harbour;\textsuperscript{19} this was destroyed, so they built another. It was at this stage that Lamachus was killed,

\textsuperscript{15}Thucydides, VII. 27.
\textsuperscript{16}Thucydides, VI. 93.
\textsuperscript{17}Thucydides, VII. 18.
\textsuperscript{18}Bury-Meiggs, p. 299.
\textsuperscript{19}Ibid.
leaving the command solely in the hands of the now-unwell Nicias, who was suffering from a kidney disease. The Syracusans at this moment believed that they were worsted and were about to make terms with the Athenians, which in turn gave Nicias confidence, so that he put off completing the north wall. This omission was one of Nicias' graver errors, especially as he knew that the Peloponnesians were coming to aid the Syracusans.\(^{20}\) The Syracusans' pessimism faded when they heard that Gylippus was on his way.

Gylippus arrived to Syracuse "full of confidence"\(^{21}\) and immediately he took advantage of Nicias' recent failure to construct the north wall by entering the city via this very route. Then when Gylippus "saw that the Syracusans were in a disorganized state and could not easily be brought into line, . . . he withdrew his army"\(^{22}\) However, to add to his reputation as a man of inaction, "Nicias, instead of leading the Athenians forward against him, remained in a defensive position by the wall."\(^{23}\) Thus, once again he failed the Athenian cause by neglecting to seize the opportune moment by exploiting the enemy's obvious disarray. The wall building

\(^{20}\)Ibid.

\(^{21}\)Thucydides, VII. 1.

\(^{22}\)Thucydides, VII. 3.

\(^{23}\)Thucydides, VII. 3.
continued on both sides and Gyliippus built walls which cut off the Athenians and gave security to Syracuse. Hence Gyliippus seized every available opportunity to prevent the Athenians in their attack. His success is as much a measure of his brilliance as of Nicia's fecklessness.

In view of the changed state of affairs, Nicia wrote a letter to the Athenians advising them that "we, who thought we were the besiegers, have become in fact the besieged." He advised the demos that either they must recall the mission or they would have to send out reinforcements to match those previously sent. He asked that he himself be recalled due to ill health. The Athenian demos responded by voting to send another expedition under the command of Eurymedon and Demosthenes, but they refused to relieve Nicia of his command. The Athenians, not satisfied with having voted for the original expedition, sending an inept general, and refusing to recall him after hearing of the dismal position of the Athenians, blundered further: they sent out another fleet.

Briefly, the events which ensued were that Gyliippus made an offensive, on land and sea, against the Athenian force at Plemmyrion. He succeeded in taking the Athenian forts which

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24 Thucydides, VII. 11.

meant that the Athenian fleet, presently in the Great Harbour, had to return to the base by the double wall to the north, which was guarded by Syracusan ships.\textsuperscript{26} The Athenians were now trapped.\textsuperscript{27} When Demosthenes arrived at Syracuse, he witnessed the Syracusans trouncing the Athenians at sea; the reason for the Syracusans' victory was that they had designed innovative vessels with which they could outflank the Athenian ships in the constricted space of the harbour.\textsuperscript{28} Demosthenes attempted an attack on the Syracusans' cross-wall, but failed; he then proposed that the Athenians leave Syracuse immediately, whilst they were still able, but Nicias demurred. The latter feared that the Athenians would blame him for the failure of the expedition: "knowing the Athenian character as he did, rather than be put to death on a disgraceful charge and by an unjust verdict of the Athenians, he preferred to take his chance and, if it must be, to meet his own death himself at the hands of the enemy."\textsuperscript{29} When, however, he saw that Gylippus had increased his manpower, he concurred to leave. The famous eclipse of the moon occurred on the night they were to depart and the superstitious Nicias heeded the

\textsuperscript{26}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{27}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{28}Ibid. The Athenians' battle tactics relied upon having plenty of room in which to manoeuvre. Cf. II. 89.

\textsuperscript{29}Thucydides, VII. 48.
advice of the soothsayers to remain for one lunar month until their departure.  

30 Nicias was thus to condemn the Athenian army to death. The Athenians were ingloriously defeated in the Great Harbour and they were driven onto the land.

They were now in much the same state as that into which they had forced their enemies at Pylos; then, when the Spartans lost their ships they lost at the same time the men who had crossed over to the island, and now the Athenians had no hope of getting away safely by land, unless some miracle happened.  

31 With no miracle forthcoming, they attempted to escape via the hinterland but were not successful and eventually surrendered. Nicias and Demosthenes, along with most of the men, perished.

It has been said of the Sicilian expedition that "all the chances were in its favour"  

32 and as with many a failure, hindsight reveals many instances of "if...then": if the Athenians had not recalled Alcibiades to Athens to face charges concerning the desecration of the Hermæ, as a brilliant and talented leader, then he would likely have led the Athenians to victory; if Nicias had seized the day, attacked the Syracusans upon arrival in Syracuse whilst the fleet appeared formidable, then he could have defeated them without much ado; if Nicias had completed the wall to

30 Bury-Meiggs, p. 302.
31 Thucydides, VII. 71.
32 Bury-Meiggs, p. 305.
Epipolae, then Syracuse could have been captured; if there had not been an eclipse of the moon, and if Nicias had not been so superstitious, then the Athenians may have been able to escape. Had one of these "ifs" been absent, the endeavour could quite well have succeeded.

Notwithstanding, the reason for the expedition's failure is to be laid at the feet of the Athenian demos. Albeit foolishly embarking upon an enormous undertaking whilst fighting a war with Sparta, a westward expansion was not entirely out of line with Athens' former imperialistic policies. The misdirection of the demos lay more in their assignment of Nicias, rather than Demosthenes, to a position of such responsibility, and then in their recall of Alcibiades. Had Athens chosen wisely the generals to whom she entrusted the expedition, it could have succeeded. Unfortunately, the three generals in whom she did invest the mission were ill-chosen: the brilliant but unstable Alcibiades, who could have probably brought the enterprise to fruition, was recalled upon his arrival in Sicily; the only soldier among the three, Lamachus, saw an untimely death;

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33 Ibid.

34 Ibid. It was, as has been noted on several occasions, out of line with Pericles' advice to the Athenians that they should on no account attempt to add to their empire during the war with Sparta.

35 Ibid.
lastly, the stable but cautious Nicias was incapable of carrying out the emprise for which he was enlisted. The wretched Nicias, in whom the Athenian demos had such trust, was responsible for the failure of the campaign which was to result in Athens' demise.\textsuperscript{36} Such mistakes imply "that an expedition of that kind was liable to be mismanaged when any of the arrangements connected with its execution depended on a popular assembly, or might be interfered with for party purposes. To Thucydides it was clear that the mistakes were political, not military."\textsuperscript{37}

The events and outcome of the Sicilian debacle show us the ethos of an Athens which had undergone almost twenty years of war in addition to outbreaks of plague, misguidance by opportunistic leaders and the resultant political \textit{stasis}.\textsuperscript{38} The changed character of Athenian imperialism, which we saw in the Melian Dialogue, is again seen during the debate at Camarina in 415/4. On this occasion there was no place for honour, rather the Athenians justified their empire in a manner that was harsher than in the Melian Dialogue. On the other hand, the hesitant Spartans were still cautious at the

\textsuperscript{36}Ibid., p. 304.

\textsuperscript{37}Ibid., p. 305.

\textsuperscript{38}Cf. "War is a stern teacher; in depriving them of the power of easily satisfying their daily wants, it brings most people's minds down to the level of their actual circumstances." III. 82.
time of the Sicilian venture; however, with Alcibiades egging them on to engage Athens on two fronts, and Gylippus executing their policy with great skill, they were more determined to defeat Athens.

In Syracuse the Athenians were faced with opponents quite unlike the Spartans. Gylippus, one of the most un-Spartan of Spartans,\(^{39}\) was easily able to countercheck the un-Athenian Nicias. In fact, as observers of this segment of Thucydides' *History*, we are constantly reminded of the reversal of characteristics and fortunes. Gylippus' style was to be compared with an Athenian's—in fact, like Phormio, he exploited any opportune moment,\(^{40}\) he took risks,\(^{41}\) was daring and vigorous. Conversely, Nicias was much like a Spartan—he was honourable, superstitious, cautious, and did not take risks. Therefore, the daring Athenians that we saw in the earlier books were placed in situations similar to those of their previous opponent, Sparta—such as when the Athenians found themselves fighting a land battle from their ships, as the Spartans had done at Pylos.\(^{42}\) The element of surprise, felt by the Spartans at Pylos and Sphacteria, was to be

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\(^{39}\)The other uncharacteristic Spartan was Brasidas.

\(^{40}\)"When he thought the right time had come, he once more led his men into action." Thucydides, VII. 6.

\(^{41}\)See VI. 21.

\(^{42}\)Thucydides, VII. 62. Cf. IV. 12.
experienced several times by the Athenians at Syracuse. For example, during the lull in hostilities in the Great Harbour, Gylippus unexpectedly attacked the Athenians—just as they had done to the Spartans on Sphacteria.\textsuperscript{43}

To add to the Athenians' disadvantage, they were faced with an opponent who possessed a national character which differed radically from the staid and predictable oligarchic Spartans. Indeed, Syracuse had characteristics similar to Athens:\textsuperscript{44} they were vigourous, innovative, and daring.\textsuperscript{45} Under the leadership of Gylippus, the Syracusans became skilful both on sea and land, which made it all the more difficult for Athens to defeat them. Indeed, in challenging Syracuse, Athens was faced with a mirror image of herself and had met her match. The factors which made Athens successful: her democratic constitution, which in turn encouraged vigour and an adventurous spirit, were also the factors which helped the Syracusans beat her.

The mission failed for the reasons previously set forth. Notwithstanding her ill success, Athens was to continue for almost a decade. Quite amazingly, or not as we may decide,

\textsuperscript{43}VI. 40. Cf. IV. 13-14.

\textsuperscript{44}Cf. VII. 55, the Athenians had never before been up against "democracies like themselves".

\textsuperscript{45}Indeed, neither in this battle nor in the others did the Syracusans show any lack of enthusiasm or daring." VI. 69.
the Spartans did not muster up sufficient strength or will to defeat the Athenians until 404 B.C., and then it was with the assistance of the Persians.

We will not venture too far into the subsequent events, especially as Thucydides's History stops in 411 B.C., only to say that for all her slowness and caution, Sparta was an honourable opponent upon Athens' final submission in 404 B.C. At a meeting of the Peloponnesian allies it was recommended that Athens be annihilated.

But Sparta never felt the same bitterness towards Athens as that which animated Corinth and Thebes; she was neither a neighbour nor a commercial rival. The destruction of Athens might have been politically profitable, but Sparta, with all her faults, could on occasion rise to noble views. She resolutely rejected the barbarous proposal of the Confederacy; she would not blot out a Greek city which had done such noble services to Greece against the Persian invader. That was more than two generations ago, but it was not to be forgotten; Athens was saved by her past.\footnote{Bury-Meiggs, p. 317.}
EPILOGUE

It would not be excessive to say that the Peloponnesian War was caused, albeit indirectly, by the divergent natures of the Athenian and Spartan characters. Athens was a rising and aggressive democracy as well as the emerging, new order in Hellas. Sparta, the leading member of the older, conservative order, was receding in power and prestige. It was because of the growing power of the upstart Athenian empire, and the threat which this posed to the status quo, that Sparta was prompted to declare war on Athens.

We have seen how characteristically reticent Sparta had been whilst the Athenian empire grew at a great pace during the fifty years following the Persian Wars. However, Sparta was not as ineffective as she was made to sound in the Corinthians' speech. She was, to be sure, cautious about embarking upon any mission, whether uncommon or routine, because of the need constantly to guard the Helots in her own territory. But, given time and encouragement from outsiders, she did respond. In spite of her nature, therefore, she was willing to take on the great naval power of Athens when it appeared that the Athenians were a menace to the long-standing authority of Sparta. Yet Sparta underestimated the power of
Athens, as well as her own capabilities in the rapidly changing Greek world. The Athenians were fortunate in having the Spartans as their enemy—the national character of Sparta was no match for the Athenian—the Spartans' inability to take the Piraeus is a good example of their lack of daring, a quality in which the Athenians were not deficient. The performance of the experienced Athenians during the naval battles of Phormio and at Pylos was sufficient evidence that they were the superior power and should have thoroughly worsted Sparta.

Athens' remarkable rise was in great part due to her democratic constitution, which freed her men and institutions to fulfil their chosen missions, without hindrance from an overarching control. Athens was full of promise on the eve of the war, and she had the means necessary to withstand the Spartan invasion. From Pericles' speeches we envision a glorious city. However, we also saw the unpleasant aspect of the democracy, and how essential it was for Athens to have a wise leader such as Pericles for the demos to function well. It was not Athens' fortune to have Pericles for more than a few years after the outbreak of the war, and in the Melian Dialogue and the Sicilian expedition we see the degeneration of the brilliant and promising city.

Athens' democracy, albeit the main reason for her ascendancy, contained the seeds of her destruction. The
liberalism intrinsic to democracy led to a tendency on the part of the demos to make unwise decisions--very often when they were swayed by the rhetoric of self-seeking demagogues. The factionalism which ensued from these unpatriotic politicians led to political stasis, which resulted in Athens losing the war to Sparta after the demos voted to send an expedition to Sicily while Athens was fighting a war with Sparta on another front.\textsuperscript{47}

The instability which resulted from Athens' national character was not to be found in the Spartan national ethos. The stability of the Spartan individual and state was the element which enabled the conservative, oligarchic Spartans to survive the war. They were more able to endure the strain of the war. Moreover, unlike the freedom accorded the Athenians, the Spartans' authoritarian state did not give them the opportunity to make rash decisions.

In conclusion, it is worth noting that Thucydides, who had been a great admirer of Periclean Athens, looked with favour upon the restricted democracy of the Constitution of the Five Thousand which was instituted in 411 B.C. This was after seeing the splendid city of Athens fall into ruin and

\textsuperscript{47}This, of course, was exactly what Pericles had warned the Athenians against doing: "I could give you many other reasons why you should feel confident in ultimate victory, if only you will make up your minds not to add to the empire while the war is in progress, and not to go out of your way to involve yourselves in new perils." Thucydides, I. 144.
lose the Peloponnesian War because of political stasis

It was voted that power should be handed over to the Five Thousand, who were to include all who could provide themselves with a hoplite's equipment, and that no one, on pain of being put under a curse, was to receive any remuneration for the holding of any office. . . . Indeed, during the first period of this new regime the Athenians appear to have had a better government than ever before, at least in my time. There was a reasonable and moderate blending of the few [that is, oligarchic or upper classes] and the many [democratic or lower classes], and it was this, in the first place, that made it possible for the city to recover from the bad state into which her affairs had fallen.¹

¹Thucydides, VIII. 97.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


