

The Peloponnesian War

War between Athens and Sparta



History as a new discipline

- History as a rational discipline is “founded” in this era.
- Herodotus of Halicarnassus (484-428) traveled widely conducting interviews and lecturing.
- He is known for his book *History* that covered up through the Persian Wars.
- His history depended on two criteria: eyewitness accounts and hearsay.
- His purpose was to tell the stories of the struggle between East and West.
- History had an explainable pattern combined with smaller lessons.



Thucydides

- Herodotus has been called “the father of historical practice” (Juan Luis Vive preferred, “father of lies”).
- His younger contemporary was Thucydides (460-400?).
- An Athenian general, he was exiled and finally assassinated.
- His work is a history of the first twenty years of the Peloponnesian War.
- He marginalizes myth, poetry, and the Trojan War; distrusts hearsay.
- History is explained by human ideas, deliberation, and decision rather than accident, fate, or the gods.



Thucydides is our main
documentary source and “definer”
for the Peloponnesian War.

He was much closer to modern
historians than to the history of
Herodotus.



Three distinct wars over 55 years

- One: This is *not* the war we call “Peloponnesian,” and this first war was suspended by the Thirty Years Peace of 445 (460-445).
- Two: The Archidamian War lasts for ten years and concludes with the Peace of Nicias in 421 (431-421).
- Three: The warfare passes to island of Sicily in 420 and ends with Battle of Aegospotami in 404 (420-404).
- Phases Two and Three are what we call The Peloponnesian War.
- We know a great deal about this war. It has always been held to be important; May be trumped up out of all proportion. But...makes for *very* interesting culture...as we will see...



Prelude to war

- Corinth goes to war with her colony, Corcyra, who appeals to Athens.
- Athenians send ten ships to help Corcyran navy.
433 Battle of Sybota, Athenians help Corcyra win (violation of TYP?).
- Corinth ticked off; Urge Potidaea to revolt against Athens.
- Corinthians pressure Spartans to go to war.
- Cause of war is fear of Athenian empire.



The Archidamian War

- Named for the Spartan king so prominent in the war.
- The Spartans and their allies had the usual strong infantry and weak navy.
- Pericles, still the strategos in Athens, sought to offset Spartan strength and capitalize on their weakness, and save money.
- He allowed the Spartans to invade Attica while the population stayed behind the elaborate wall system that included Piraeus.
- But Pericles plan was spoiled by outbreak of a plague of typhus, perhaps from a season of tick and flea infestation in Italy and northern Greece along the trade routes.



Fall of Pericles

- Plague may have killed over 30,000 Athenians and affected even Pericles.
- Disobeying Pericles, some Athenians sought a separate peace with Sparta that was rejected.
- Pericles returned from a botched naval battle at Epidaurus. He was suspended as strategos and audited.
- In 430, 1501 judges convicted him of misappropriating five talents (about \$5000). He was fined fifty talents.
- Later reinstated, Pericles dies in 429, leaving a huge void in Athenian leadership.



Siege of Plataea

- Spartans laid siege to Plataea, ally of Athens and near enemy of Thebes in 429.
- Plataeans promised aid from Athens that never came and food ran low after almost two years.
- About half the Plataean men escape to Athens in a daring winter maneuver. Spartans put the rest to death and razed the city in 427.
- Spartans now controlled the road from Megara to Thebes.



Revolt of Mytilene

- Island of Lesbos was a “free ally” of Athens and big naval partner.
- Largest city was Mytilene, and it led a revolt against Athens when oligarchy took over—disliked restraints on their navy.
- United other cities on the island against Athens, pleaded their case at the 428 Olympic games.
- Spartans promise aid, but never come. Instead they invade Attica again. Athenians invade Lesbos and put down revolt.
- Athenians execute main leaders then under Cleon the tanner’s influence, in 427, vote to execute ALL the men.
- Diodotus calls for a second reflection; Execution order is rescinded.



End of this phase

- Athenians maroon 420 Spartan hoplites on Sphacteria Island, just off Pylos which they captured—425 B.C.
- Sparta sues for peace, but Cleon refuses. Surviving Spartans carried off to Athens as hostages, effectively ending invasions of Attica.
- Athenians lose Amphipolis to Brasidas in 423. A year-long truce is made.
- In 422, another battle fought at Amphipolis. Both Cleon and Amphipolis are killed.
- In 421, war-weary Athens and Sparta sign a peace treaty negotiated by the strategos (and Cleon's rival) Nicias.
- Thebes, Megara, and Corinth refuse to ratify peace.



Results of the Archidamian War

- Peace of Nicias (421) negotiated by Nicias and Pleistoanax.
- Athens returns Pylos and other captured posts, Spartan hostages released.
- Spartans return Amphipolis and other cities that defected from Athens, which pay tribute to Athens. Athenian empire survives—for now.
- Peace was to last 50 years. Did it?



An uneasy peace

- Sparta's unilateral peace with Athens leads to dissolution of the Peloponnesian League...for a time.
- Argos, an old rival of Sparta, joins with disaffected poleis Mantinea and Elis to forge a separate alliance.
- Then, at both Athens and Sparta there was a triumph of war "hawks." In Athens, the wisdom and restraint of Pericles was sorely missed.
- In 420, a young man of high birth named Alcibiades is elected strategos.



Alcibiades

- Athenians still maintained an undeserved respect for people of high birth with no other demonstrated merit.
- Alcibiades was a stylish and vain man with tremendous ambition, but little political experience, and *no* sense of community.
- He fought bravely in 424 at the battle of Delium, which the Athenians lost to the Boeotians.
- His life was saved in that battle by none other than Socrates, the philosopher, who became a lifelong friend.
- Thought to favor democracy, he demonstrated that he did not have a sincere belief in democratic institutions.
- He wanted to be the new Pericles.



Athenian high-handedness


- Genocide and cruelty were becoming the reputation of the Athenians. It was increasing their enemies' determination to defeat them.
- At Scione in 421 and Melos in 416, the Athenians killed all the male inhabitants of the subdued cities.
- Melos especially held no strategic importance to Athens. Life was cheap under the democracy.
- Greed led Alcibiades and the war hawks to assist Sicilian Egesta in their war with Selinus, ally of Syracuse, which was a colony of Corinth.
- An embassy of Egesta asked for 60 ships with men from Athens, but after a speech by Alcibiades, Athenians voted for over 100!




THE PELOPONNESIAN WAR



Review: The Archidamian Phase

- This phase opened with a three year standoff between Athens and Sparta, 431-429.
 - Sparta ravaged Attica, “besieged” Athens.
 - Athens raided Peloponnesian ports, hunkered down behind its walls.
 - A turning point was the plague of typhus in Athens followed by the disgrace and death of Pericles.
 - Four great events marked the middle of this phase after Pericles’ death:
 - Spartan siege of Plataea, 429-427.
 - The revolt of Lesbos, 427.
 - Civil war in Corcyra and execution of the oligarchists, 427.
 - Athenian victory at Pylos and Sphacteria, 426-425.
 - The end of this phase came with the Spartan victory in Chalcidice, the Battle of Amphipolis, and deaths of Cleon and Brasidas.
 - The peace of Nicias (421) after a year’s truce concluded the phase.
- 

Review: Transition to a new phase

- Allies of Sparta and Athens were discouraged by provisions of the fifty-year truce.
 - Hawkish factions also took over in both Sparta and Athens.
 - Alcibiades became strategos in Athens.
 - He proposed a plan that would open the way for a western Athenian empire with attendant wealth and fame for him.
 - Alcibiades and the war hawks to assist Sicilian Egesta in their war with Selinus, ally of Syracuse, which was a colony of Corinth.
- 

Segesta and Selinus

- War broke out in 416 B.C. between Segesta and Selinus, two cities in the west of Sicily. When Selinus was joined by Syracuse, a colony of Corinth and implied ally of Sparta, the Segestans turned to Athens.
- An embassy of Egesta asked for 60 ships with men from Athens.
- Alcibiades had wanted to find a way to carve out western expansion and saw this as his opportunity.
- After a speech by Alcibiades to the ekklesia, Athenians voted for over 100!
- By this time Alcibiades was becoming too powerful for jealous political opponents to endure.



A strange event

- The fleet sailed under the command of three strategoi: Alcibiades, Nicias, and Lamachus (415).
- But before the fleet sailed, there was an awful night of sacrilege in Athens!
- All over Athens, at street corners, before public buildings, and outside residences stood busts of the god Hermes mounted on pedestals. These busts were talismans meant to appease the god and protect the city.
- During the night before the fleet sailed the busts were systematically defaced all over the city, the blasphemy was compounded as this came during the celebration of the Eleusinian Mysteries.
- Alcibiades was suspected immediately and called for an inquiry, but his enemies arranged for him to sail with a cloud hanging over him.



The initial invasion

- After the fleet arrived in Sicily a trierarch ship followed, summoning Alcibiades to return to Athens to face charges brought by the ekklesia.
- Alcibiades defects to Sparta, leaving Nicias and Lamachus in charge of the operation.
- Syracuse was built on an island and peninsula defended by an old wall. The key to victory was to cut off all escape by land by spanning the peninsula and reducing the city.
- The Athenians won early victories but then withdrew to establish winter quarters in Catana, north of Syracuse.
- The Syracusans used this extra time to throw up an entirely new and stronger wall, and to beg the Spartans for help.





Euryalus

Marshes

Syracuse

Epipolae plateau

A Great disaster for Athens

- In the spring hostilities resumed, but Nicias was not able to completely cut Syracuse off by land and Lamachus is killed in battle.
- Alcibiades also draws in the Spartans on the side of Syracuse by “exposing” an Athenian design to invade the Peloponnesus.
- During the siege Spartans arrive under Gylippus.
- Gylippus is able to break the siege and trap the Athenian navy in the harbor of Syracuse.
- In desperation, Demosthenes arrives to rescue Nicias and orders retreat through the Spartan lines.
- The Athenian fleet suffers tremendous losses in breaking through the blockade and most retreating soldiers were captured.



Aftermath of a disaster

- Most of the original 25k man force died due to incompetent leadership, especially that of Nicias.
- Demosthenes and Nicias were condemned to death by the Spartans.
- The last battle is humiliating for Athenians back home as they hear horrible stories of fellow citizens cut off from their ships, dying of thirst.
- Surviving Athenian prisoners are forced to work in stone quarries on a diet of bread and water for six months.
- Spartans intervene to make sure they are not put to death by Syracusans.



End of War and the End of Empire

The Peloponnesian War changes
the face and the fortunes of Greek
cities.



Oligarchy in Athens

- Alcibiades was playing both sides in an effort to return to Athens—he was now in the confidence of the Persian satrap Tissaphernes.
- Alcibiades sent word that he was empowered to convince the Persians to support Athens—if he was returned to Athens at the head of an oligarchy.
- Possibility of oligarchy being introduced was higher due to the absence of the Athenian fleet.
- In 411 a majority of the Athenian ekklesia changed government to a provisional Council of 400.
- Plan was to transition to a Council of 5000, an oligarchic compromise with democracy.



...and back to democracy.

- A series of military setbacks forced the hand of the 400 to more quickly implement the government of the 5000.
- The 5000 were the domination of the hoplite class and the disenfranchisement of the thētes class, who manned the triremes.
- After Athenian naval victories at Kynossema and Kyzikus democracy was restored in the summer of 410.



Persia and Sparta

- Sparta took 8 years after the Sicily debacle to defeat Athens, and they needed financial help from the Persians.
- The Persian heir apparent, Cyrus (*not* the Great), is sent by his father Darius (a different one) to become the satrap of Sardis, and allies with the Spartans.
- Other Greeks were appalled by this alignment, and the 408 Olympics saw other cities protest the Persian-Spartan alliance.
- The Spartan admiral (Nauarch) Lysander defeated an Athenian fleet under Alcibiades at Notion, off the Asia Minor coast near Ephesus.
- The Athenians exiled Alcibiades once and for all. He had prepared for this possibility by provisioning a citadel overlooking the Hellespont.

Spartans press Athens

- Spartans capture part of Lesbos and blockade the navy in Mytilene harbor.
- Athenians sent a relief fleet of 170 triremes and defeat the Spartan navy at a chain of islets south of Lesbos called the Arginusae.
- In a separate engagement, Lysander besieged Lampsacus on the Hellespont in 405 and by a brilliant surprise captures almost 90% of the Athenian navy without a fight at Aegospotami.
- 4000 Athenian soldiers and sailors were put to death.
- Spartans blockade Athens by sea and invade Attica.
- Athenians hold out for six months, then surrender.



Terms of Peace—404

- The War was over.
- Spartans overruled desire of Corinth, Thebes, and Megara to raze Athens. Mercy based on Athenian legacy against the Persians.
- Long walls were to be destroyed.
- The fleet, with exception of 12 triremes was forfeit.
- Athenians give up all foreign holding except Salamis.
- All exiles permitted to return; Athens becomes Spartan ally.
- Oligarchy established again at Athens, but civil war racks Attica for 18 months until both oligarchists and Spartans are thrown out. The year is 403.
- Socrates begins to live under suspicion.

