

The Persian and Peloponnesian Wars

The Persian Wars

As the Greeks spread throughout the Mediterranean, they came into contact with the Persian Empire. The Persians had already conquered the Ionian Greeks in Asia Minor. In 499 BCE, the Ionian cities tried to revolt against the Persians and the Athenian navy assisted them but it was unsuccessful. This attack led Darius I to seek revenge, even though they were victorious. In 490 BCE, the Persians landed on the plain of Marathon, about 26 miles from Athens. On this field the Athenians attacked and defeated the Persians.

After Darius I died in 486 BCE, Xerxes became the new Persian ruler. Xerxes led an invasion of Greece in 480 BCE. The Athenians were forced to abandon their city, but the Greek navy managed to defeat the Persian fleet. A few months later, early in 479 BCE, the Greeks formed the largest Greek army up to that time. They then attacked and defeated the Persian army at Plataea, northwest of Athens.

1. Why did Darius I want to attack Greece? What happened to the Persians?
2. What did defeating the Persians prove to the rest of the world?

The Growth of the Athenian Empire

After the defeat of the Persians, Athens took over the leadership of the Greek world. In the winter of 478-477 BCE, the Athenians formed the Delian League. This was an alliance of Greek city-states united against the Persians. Its headquarters was on the island of Delos, but its chief officials were the Athenians. The Delian League continued the attack against the Persians. Eventually it liberated nearly all of the Greek states in the Aegean Sea that were under Persian control. In 454 BCE, the Athenians moved the treasury of the Delian League from Delos to Athens. By controlling the Delian League, Athens created an Empire.

Between 461 and 429 BCE, Athens expanded its new empire. This period in Greek history is known as the Age of Pericles. Pericles was a dominant figure in Athenian politics during this time. He ruled during a great period of prosperity where democracy flourished, and Athens was at its height of power and brilliance.

1. How did Athens build an empire?
2. Who is Pericles?

The Age of Pericles

In the Age of Pericles, every citizen in Athens played a role in government. The form of government was a direct democracy. A direct democracy is a democratic system in which people participate directly in government decision-making through mass meetings. In Athens, every male citizen over the age of 18 was a part of the assembly and voted on all major issues. Most residents of Athens were not citizens. Meetings of the assembly were held every ten days on a hillside east of the Acropolis. The assembly passed all laws, elected public officials, and made financial decisions on war and foreign policy. Pericles made it possible for poor citizens to take part in public affairs, by making lower class citizens eligible for public office and by paying officeholders.

On a daily basis, a large body of officials ran the government. Ten officials, known as generals, were the directors of policy. These officials were elected, so they could be reelected or removed from office. The Athenian also developed the system of ostracism. If a person was considered harmful to the city, he could be banned from the city for ten years, if at least six thousand assembly members wrote his name on pottery fragments.

Under Pericles, Athens became the center of Greek culture. The Persians had destroyed much of the city during the Persian Wars. Pericles used the Delian League treasury to rebuild the city. New statues and temples were built to Greek gods. Art, architecture, and philosophy also flourished. Athens' achievements alarmed the other Greek states, especially Sparta. This eventually led to a new war.

1. What is a direct democracy?
2. Why is this style of government unique?
3. Describe the Age of Pericles.

The Great Peloponnesian War

After the defeat of the Persians, the Greek world became divided into two main parts: the Athenian Empire and Sparta. Sparta and its allies feared the Athenian Empire. A series of disputes between Athens and Sparta led to the beginning of the Peloponnesian War in 431 BCE. Pericles knew that the Spartan army could defeat Athens in an open battle. So the Athenians decided to stay behind the walls of their city. In the second year of the war, a plague broke out in Athens and killed more than a third of its people. Pericles himself dies in 429 BCE. Despite these losses, the Athenians held out for 27 years. In 405 BCE, the Athenian navy was destroyed and within the next year Athens surrendered. The great war was over, and the Athenian Empire was destroyed.

The Great Peloponnesian War weakened all of the Greek states. It also ruined any possibility of cooperation among them. During the next 70 years, Sparta, Athens, and Thebes struggled for control. In the process they ignored the growing power of Macedonia. This would eventually cost them their freedom.

1. What was the cause of the Peloponnesian War?
2. What happened to Greece because of the Peloponnesian War?

Pericles Funeral Oration

This famous speech was given by the Athenian leader Pericles after the first battles of the Peloponnesian war. The Athenians held an elaborate funeral for all those killed in the war. After reading the document, answer the questions that follow using quotes and evidence.

...But before I praise the dead, I should like to point out by what principles of action we rose to power and under what institutions and through what manner of life our empire became great.

...Our form of government does not enter into rivalry with the institutions of others. We do not copy our neighbors but are an example to them. It is true that we are called a democracy, for the administration is in the hands of the many and not the few. But while the law secures equal justice to all alike in their private disputes, the claim of excellence is also recognized; and when a citizen is in any way distinguished, he is preferred to the public service, not as a manner of privilege, but as a reward of merit. Neither is poverty a bar, but a man may benefit his country whatever be the obscurity of his condition. There is no exclusiveness in our public life, and in our private [life] we are not suspicious of one another, nor angry with our neighbor if he does what he likes; we do not put on sour looks at him which, through harmless, are not pleasant.

And we have not forgotten to provide for our weary spirits many relaxations from toil; we have regular games...throughout the year; at home the style of our life is refined; and the delight which we daily feel in all these things helps banish melancholy. Because of the greatness of our city, the fruits of the whole earth flow in upon us, so that we enjoy the goods of other countries as freely as our own.

We do not anticipate the pain, [but] when the hour comes, we can be as brave as those who never allow themselves to rest; and thus too our city is equally admirable in peace and in war...Then again, our military training is in many respects superior to that of our adversaries. Our city is thrown open to the world, and we never expel a foreigner or prevent him from seeing or learning anything of which the secret if revealed to an enemy might profit him... For in the hour of trial Athens alone among her contemporaries is superior to the report of her. No enemy who comes against her is indignant at the reverses which he sustains at the hands of such a city; no subject complains that his masters are unworthy of him. And we shall assuredly not be without witnesses; there are mighty monuments of our power which will make us the wonder of this and of succeeding ages; we shall not need the praises of Homer or of any other writer whose poetry may please for the moment, although his representation of the facts will not bear the light of day. Such is the city for who sake these men nobly fought and died; they could not bear the thought that she might be taken from them; and every one of us who survives should gladly toil on her behalf...

I have dwelt upon the greatness of Athens because I want to show you the...proof the merit of these men whom I am now commemorating. Their loftiest praise has been already spoken. For in magnifying the city I have magnified them, and men like them whose virtues made her glorious. And of how few Hellenes can it be said as of them, that their deeds when weighed in the balance have been found equal to their fame! I believe that a death such as theirs has been the true measure of a man's worth; it may be the first revelation of his virtues, but is at any rate their final seal.

But, deeming that the punishment of their enemies was sweeter than any of these things, and that they could fall in no nobler cause, they determined at the hazard of their lives to be honorably avenged, and to leave the rest. They resigned to hope their unknown chance of happiness; but in the face of death they resolved to rely upon themselves alone. And when the moment came they were minded to resist and suffer, rather than to fly and save their lives; they ran away from the word of dishonor, but on the battlefield their feet stood fast, and in an instant, at the height of their fortune, they passed away from the scene, not of their fear, but of their glory.

Such was the end of these men; they were worthy of Athens, and the living need not desire to have a more heroic spirit, although they may pray for a less fatal issue. The value of such a spirit is not to be expressed in

words. Anyone can discourse to you forever about the advantages of a brave defense, which you know already...and when you are impressed by the spectacle of her glory, reflect that this empire has been acquired by men who knew their duty and had the courage to do it, who in the hour of conflict had the fear of dishonor always present to them, and who, if ever they failed in an enterprise, would not allow their virtues to be lost to their country, but freely gave their lives to her as the fairest offering which they could present at her feast.

The sacrifice which they collectively made was individually repaid to them; for they received again each one for himself a praise which grows not old, and the noblest of all tombs, I speak not of that in which their remains are laid, but of that in which their glory survives, and is proclaimed always and on every fitting occasion both in word and deed.

Wherefore I do not now pity the parents of the dead who stand here; I would rather comfort them. You know that your dead have passed away amid manifold vicissitudes; and that they may be deemed fortunate who have gained their utmost honor, whether an honorable death like theirs, or an honorable sorrow like yours, and whose share of happiness has been so ordered that the term of their happiness is likewise the term of their life. I know how hard it is to make you feel this, when the good fortune of others will too often remind you of the gladness which once lightened your hearts. And sorrow is felt at the want of those blessings, not which a man never knew, but which were a part of his life before they were taken from him. Some of you are of an age at which they may hope to have other children, and they ought to bear their sorrow better; not only will the children who may hereafter be born make them forget their own lost ones, but the city will be doubly a gainer. She will not be left desolate, and she will be safer. For a man's counsel cannot have equal weight or worth, when he alone has no children to risk in the general danger. To those of you who have passed their prime, I say: "Congratulate yourselves that you have been happy during the greater part of your days; remember that your life of sorrow will not last long, and be comforted by the glory of those who are gone.

To you who are the sons and brothers of the departed, I see that the struggle to emulate them will be an arduous one. For all men praise the dead, and, however preeminent your virtue may be, I do not say even to approach them, and avoid living their rivals and detractors, but when a man is out of the way, the honor and goodwill which he receives is unalloyed. And, if I am to speak of womanly virtues to those of you who will henceforth be widows, let me sum them up in one short admonition: To a woman not to show more weakness than is natural to her sex is a great glory, and not to be talked about for good or for evil among men. I have paid the required tribute, in obedience to the law, making use of such fitting words as I had. The tribute of deeds has been paid in part; for the dead have them in deeds, and it remains only that their children should be maintained at the public charge until they are grown up: this is the solid prize with which, as with a garland, Athens crowns her sons living and dead, after a struggle like theirs. For where the rewards of virtue are greatest, there the noblest citizens are enlisted in the service of the state. And now, when you have duly lamented, everyone his own dead, you may depart.

1. According to Pericles, what makes Athens great? Use direct quotes in your answer.
2. How does he describe those who fight and die in battle? Use direct quotes in your answer.
3. Is there evidence of bias in the document? Use direct quotes in your answer.

Comparing Primary Sources:

Directions: Read the following excerpts. Compare the viewpoints of Pericles' *Funeral Oration* and Xenophon's *The Constitution of the Athenians*. Locate evidence of bias and point of view using direct quotes.

Excerpts from Pericles's Funeral Oration, as recorded by Thucydides in *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 2:34–2:46

Our constitution does not copy the laws of neighboring states; we are rather a pattern to others than imitators ourselves. Its administration favors the many instead of the few; this is why it is called a democracy. If we look to the laws, they afford equal justice to all in their private differences; if to social standing, advancement in public life falls to reputation for capacity, class considerations not being allowed to interfere with merit; nor again does poverty bar the way, if a man is able to serve the state, he is not hindered by the obscurity of his condition. The freedom which we enjoy in our government extends also to our ordinary life. There, far from exercising a jealous surveillance over each other, we do not feel called upon to be angry with our neighbor for doing what he likes, or even to indulge in those injurious looks which cannot fail to be offensive, although they inflict no positive penalty. But all this ease in our private relations does not make us lawless as citizens. Against this fear is our chief safeguard, teaching us to obey the magistrates and the laws, particularly such as regard the protection of the injured, whether they are actually on the statute book, or belong to that code which, although unwritten, yet cannot be broken without acknowledged disgrace.

**Excerpts from *The Constitution of the Athenians*
by the "Old Oligarch" (Pseudo-Xenophobe)**

And as for the fact that the Athenians have chosen the kind of constitution that they have, I do not think well of their doing that inasmuch as in making their choice they have chosen to let the worst people be better off than the good. Therefore, on this account, I do not think well of their constitution....

There is a point which some find extraordinary, that they everywhere assign more to the worst persons, to the poor, and to the popular types than to the good men: in this very point they will be found manifestly preserving their democracy.... And everywhere on earth the best element is opposed to democracy. For among the best people there is minimal wantonness and injustice but a maximum of ignorance, disorder, and wickedness; for poverty draws them rather to disgraceful actions, and because of a lack of money some men are uneducated and ignorant....

Compare: