

THE PELOPONNESIAN WAR AND THE MILITARY REVOLUTION

The Greek victory over the Persians left many unresolved problems, the principal one being the question of leadership. It was clear to many Greeks that the jealously guarded, freewheeling independence of their *poleis* had almost lost them the war. An opinion was reported by Thucydides to the effect that the only thing that had actually saved the Greeks from destruction was the fact that the Persians made more mistakes than they did. Plato had another version of the war: "If one were to tell the history of the Persian War many nasty charges would have to be brought against Greece; in fact it would be right to say that Greece made no defense of itself at all were it not for the joint actions of Athenians and Spartans in resisting the threatened enslavement."¹ There was no assurance that the next time the Greeks would be so lucky. Persia was not going to go away. It remained an active threat, always meddling, always probing. The Greek states had to make a decision about how they were going to cope with this situation. But were they flexible enough to adjust? This was a deeper problem: Was the freedom of Greece as a whole compatible with the freedom of its individual states? In the end it was the tragedy of the Greeks of the *polis* age that they were unable to preserve both sets of freedoms.

The prestige that Sparta enjoyed after the battle of Plataea suggested that it should remain the head of the Greek alliance, but neither the logic of the military situation nor Sparta's own constitution would permit this. There was the further problem that, after the battles of Marathon and Salamis, Sparta now had a potential rival in Greece: Athens. Sparta was a hothouse society, so tightly organized that its citizens could not survive long as Spartans outside its immediate environment. This fact was brought home immediately after the war by the heavy-handed behavior of the Spartan supreme commander Pausanias, which alienated the allies. More important than the inability of individual Spartans to survive outside Sparta was the inability of the Spartan army to operate for long periods away from home.

¹ Plato, *Laws*, 3.692e.

After Plataea, defense against the Persians did not call for massive land armies, but rather for both large and small fleet operations against widely scattered targets. Persian garrisons continued to maintain footholds in Europe for fifteen years or more after Plataea, and the Persians were still able to control large segments of Greek Asia through cooperative tyrants and oligarchies. Major naval offensives were a possibility, and the Greeks had to be prepared to handle massive fleet concentrations of three hundred or more ships. What was needed was a well-informed central organization that could coordinate strategy and concentrate the scattered forces of Greece to counter the enemy's great strength—in short, centralized command and control over military resources.

Other factors also made it difficult for a state such as Sparta to provide leadership to the Greeks after the repulse of the Persians. First, the theater of war was now the eastern and northern Aegean, not mainland Greece, where Sparta had traditionally operated. Then, whereas almost any city could field a hoplite phalanx, the same was not true of a fleet of triremes. Sparta was least endowed with the resources necessary to sustain a navy. Ships were extremely expensive. Large crews were needed to operate them, and large sums of money were required merely to keep the fleet in existence. The state that aspired to naval power had to have either a large population, a lot of money, or both. Naval warfare tended to favor (as it still does) the development of large fleets by the few states that possessed the necessary resources. It is not surprising that by mid-century only Athens, Lesbos, Chios, and Samos were making significant contributions in ships to the anti-Persian alliance, with Athens predominating.

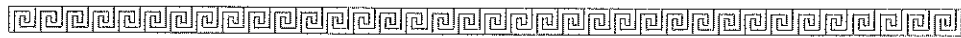
Although the Greek league headed by Sparta remained intact, Athens—with the enthusiastic support of the Greeks in the east—created another alliance, the Delian League, in the winter of 478–477 B.C. Its purpose was both offensive and defensive. It aimed to preserve Greek freedom and to conduct active reprisals against the Persian Empire to obtain plunder to offset the expenses of the league. During the next half century the Delian League grew to almost two hundred members, but as the Persian threat receded, the Delian League gradually changed from an association of free allies into an Athenian empire. Along with the growth of Athens' imperial power, there was increased tension between Athens and Sparta, its chief rival for preeminence in Greece, until war broke out in 431 B.C. and lasted until 404 B.C., with an uneasy peace in the middle from 421 to 413 B.C.

Our principal source for the war is the great historian Thucydides. Thucydides served Athens as one of the ten generals elected in 424 B.C., but having failed against the Spartans in the north of Greece, he was exiled and returned to Athens only after the Peloponnesian War. His dominant viewpoint, not so much his reporting of the events of the war, is hard to escape. Thucydides' history is one of the finest pieces of intellectual analysis of all time, but it is not a history in the modern sense of the term. In addition to presenting the facts accurately, Thucydides sought also to penetrate the surface of individual events to discover the universal and permanent laws concealed in them and to reveal causes that lead predictably to the same results. For example, he pointed out that although Athens might be universally hated because it wielded almost total power throughout Greece, this was not because of anything peculiar to the nature of Athens or the Athenian people, but because of the nature

of power itself, which has its own laws and generates the same kind of reaction no matter who possesses it. War and justice, he concluded, cannot coexist; the powerful oppress the weak, and all states act in their own self-interest. He sought to lay bare the underlying but hidden structures of the state and the various constraints these imposed on its citizens in the conduct of interstate relations. Events for him were not right or wrong, good or evil. He did not view them in ethical or moral terms, but rather as questions of fact: What are the causes of conflict? What courses do social revolutions take once they begin? That people or states act from expedience or use whatever power they have at their disposal is not weighed for its good or evil consequences; Thucydides merely determined whether it was a fact. People and states must act according to their natures, and Thucydides' practical aim was to unravel the nature of both and leave the answer as a guide ("as an eternal possession," was his expression) to future generations.

The length and intensity of the Peloponnesian War and the wars that followed tended to push upwards the demands of warfare, especially in terms of skills and economic resources. The almost ritualistic hoplite battles of the past in which small, relatively unskilled phalanxes confronted each other gave way to more complex encounters in which, in addition to hoplites, light infantry, cavalry, slingers, archers, and other specialized arms had a role. The quality of fortifications improved, adding further complexity to the military equation. As in the past, fleets of warships were enormously expensive to maintain.

Poverty had always driven young Greeks to seek military service as mercenaries. Arcadia was well known as a place of recruitment of such mercenaries. After the Peloponnesian War there were thousands of soldiers who had known little other than warfare during their lifetimes. Persia drew on large numbers of these mercenaries for its wars, as did tyrants throughout the Greek world. Jason of Pherae was said to have had 6000 at his disposal, and in attempt to unseat his brother as king of Persia, Cyrus the Younger had little difficulty in rounding up 10,000 Greek veterans. It was next to impossible for the ordinary small state whose defense rested on its small, citizen-soldier phalanx to keep up with the new developments. Gradually the whole foundation—material and ideological—of the *polis* as a self-sustaining community was undermined. The larger states fared better, since with their greater economic resources they could hire mercenaries to complement their citizen phalanxes and fleets, but in the new arms race even such states as Athens and Syracuse found themselves unable to compete. The future was to be one in which only the largest leagues and monarchies could be successful.



A. The Rise of Athens

1. THE GOLDEN AGE: LOOKING AT THE PAST

The idea that the unexpected Greek victory over the Persians in 480–479 B.C. not only saved Greece from slavery but also ushered in a cultural "Golden Age" is not just a modern view. It was also how the Greeks interpreted the history of this period, as is illustrated by this selection from the universal

history of the first-century B.C. historian Diodorus. Whether his interpretation was accurate is another question. Clearly his remarks regarding cultural development apply mainly to Athens. Even there Diodorus intensified the picture of the fifth century B.C. as a period of extraordinary cultural achievement by anachronistically including in it such fourth-century B.C. luminaries as the philosophers Plato and Aristotle and the rhetorician Isocrates.²

A person would rightly feel perplexed who considered the inconsistency of human life. For none of the agreed-on goods are found to be given to men in perfect form nor are any of the ills absolutely free of some advantage. This can be shown by considering past events, especially the greatest. For the campaign of Xerxes, the king of the Persians, caused the greatest fear among the Greeks because of the huge size of his army, since the stake for which they were about to fight was their enslavement. They all assumed that they would suffer a similar fate as the Greek cities of Asia which had been enslaved previously. But when the war, contrary to expectation, came to an unanticipated conclusion, not only did the inhabitants of Greece escape from danger, but they gained great fame, and every Greek city was filled with such abundance that all were astounded at their reversal of fortune. For the next fifty years Greece experienced a great surge of prosperity. In this period the arts flourished because of the abundance, and the greatest artists known to posterity existed then, among whom was the sculptor Pheidias. Education also advanced greatly, and philosophy and rhetoric were highly esteemed by all the Greeks, but especially by the Athenians. The philosophers included Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle; the orators, Pericles and Isocrates together with the students of Isocrates. There were also famous generals: Miltiades, Themistocles, Aristides, Cimon, Myronides, and many others. . . . The Athenians especially advanced in repute and vigor and became renowned throughout the world. For they increased their power to such a degree that without the Spartans and the Peloponnesians they defeated, on their own, great Persian forces on both land and sea and so humbled the famed Persian Empire that they compelled the Persians to sign a treaty freeing all the cities in Asia.

2. "FOR WITHOUT EQUAL MILITARY POWER IT IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR ALLIES TO HAVE EQUAL OR SIMILAR SAY IN POLICY-MAKING": THE REALITY OF ATHENIAN POWER

Diodorus could have made more explicit the connection between Athens' economic and cultural flourishing in the fifth century B.C. and its new-found military clout. Athenians in that age were energized by their unexpected success in the Persian Wars and were quite willing to use their military influence whenever self-interest seemed to indicate its need. The first instance of muscle flexing occurred immediately after the retreat of the Persians when the Athenians reoccupied their devastated city and the Spartans sought to dissuade them from rebuilding their walls. The Spartans argued speciously that walled cities would only help the Persians if they returned again, and that indeed all walled cities outside the Peloponnese should have their fortifications destroyed.

² From Diodorus 12.1-2.

The Athenian leader Themistocles outfoxed the Spartans, and the walls were rebuilt without the Spartans being able to intervene. At an assembly of the irritated Spartans, Thucydides gives the gist of how (supposedly) Themistocles justified Athenian actions. The remainder of the reading deals with the formation of the Delian League and its gradual transition from alliance to empire.³

91. Themistocles, coming before the Spartans, finally told them openly that the Athens was now provided with walls and could protect her own citizens. Henceforward, if the Spartans or their allies wished at any time to negotiate, they must deal with the Athenians as with men who knew quite well what was for their own and the common good of Greece. When they boldly resolved to leave their city and take to their ships [*during the second Persian invasion*], they did not first ask the advice of the Spartans, and when the two states met in council, their own judgment had been as good as that of any one. And now they had arrived at the opinion that it was better far, and would be more advantageous for themselves and for the whole body of allies, that their city should have a wall. For without equal military power it was impossible for allies to have equal or similar say in councils. Either all the allies should pull down their walls, or they should acknowledge that the Athenians were in the right.

3. THE STRATEGIC THINKING OF THEMISTOCLES

93. In such hurried fashion did the Athenians rebuild the walls of their city. To this day the structure shows evidence of haste. The foundations are made up of all sorts of stones, in some places unshaped, and laid just as each worker brought them; there were many columns too, taken from graves, and many old stones already cut, inserted in the work. The circuit of the city was extended in every direction, and the citizens, in their desire to complete the design, spared nothing. Themistocles also persuaded the Athenians to finish the fortifications of Piraeus, of which he had made a beginning in his year of office as Archon. The situation of the place, which had three natural harbors, was excellent and now that the Athenians had become seafarers, he thought that a good harbor would greatly contribute to the extension of their power. For he was the first to dare to say that the Athenians must make the sea their domain, and he lost no time in laying the foundations of their empire. By his advice, they built the wall of such a width that two wagons carrying the stones could meet and pass on the top; this width may still be traced at the Piraeus. Inside there was no rubble or mortar, but the whole wall was made up of large stones hewn square, which were clamped on the outer face with iron and lead. The wall, however, was completed to not more than half what he had originally intended. He had hoped that the very size of the wall would paralyze the designs of an

³ From Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, trans. B. Jowett (Oxford, 1900) (revised).

enemy, and he thought that a handful of the least effective soldiers would be sufficient for its defense, while the rest might man the fleet. His mind was turned in this direction, I believe, from observing that the Persians had met fewer obstacles by sea than by land. The Piraeus appeared to him to be of more real consequence than the upper city. He was fond of saying the Athenians that if they were hard pressed they should go to the Piraeus and fight all their enemies at sea. Thus the Athenians built their walls and restored their city immediately after the retreat of the Persians.



B. The Delian League

1. "THEY HAD ENOUGH OF THE PERSIAN WAR": THE SPARTANS AND THE DELIAN LEAGUE

94. Pausanias the son of Cleombrotus was now sent from Peloponnese with twenty ships in command of the Hellenic forces; thirty Athenian ships and a number of the allies sailed with him. They first made an expedition against Cyprus, of which they subdued the greater part; and afterwards against Byzantium, which was in the hands of the Persians, and was taken while he was still in command. 95. He had already begun to be oppressive, and the allies were offended by him, especially the Ionians and others who had been recently freed from Persian control. So they appealed to their kinsmen the Athenians and begged them to be their leaders, and to protect them against Pausanias, if he attempted to oppress them. The Athenians took the matter up and prepared to interfere, being fully resolved to manage the confederacy in their own interests. In the meantime the Lacedaemonians summoned Pausanias to Sparta, intending to investigate certain reports which had reached them; for he was accused of numerous crimes by Greeks returning from the Hellespont, and he appeared to exercise his command more after the fashion of a tyrant than of a general. His recall occurred at the very time when the hatred which he inspired had induced the allies, with the exception Peloponnesians, to transfer themselves to the Athenians. On arriving at Lacedaemon he was punished for the wrongs which he had done to individuals, but he had been also accused of conspiring with the Persians, and of this, which was the principal charge and was generally believed to be proven, he was acquitted. The government however did not continue him in his command, but sent in his place Dorcis and certain others with a small force. To these the allies refused obedience, and Dorcis, seeing the state of affairs, returned home. Henceforth the Lacedaemonians sent out no more commanders, for they were afraid that those who they appointed would be corrupted, as they had found to be the case with Pausanias; they had had enough of the Persian War; and they thought that the Athenians were fully able to lead, and at that time believed them to be their friends.

2. "THE ALLIES BROUGHT ALL THIS ON THEMSELVES": FROM LEAGUE TO EMPIRE

96. Thus the Athenians by the good-will of the allies, who detested Pausanias, obtained the leadership. They immediately fixed which of the cities should supply money and which of them ships for the war against the Persians, the avowed object being to compensate themselves and the allies for their losses by devastating the King's country. Then was first instituted at Athens the office of Hellenic treasurers who received the tribute, for so the contribution was termed. The amount was originally fixed at 460 talents. The island of Delos was the treasury and the meetings of the allies were held in the temple. 97. At first the allies were independent and deliberated in a common assembly under the leadership of Athens. But in the interval between the Persian and the Peloponnesian Wars, by their military success and by their policy in dealing with the barbarian, with their own rebellious allies and with the Peloponnesians who came across their path from time to time, the Athenians made immense strides in power. I have gone out of the way to speak of this period because the writers who have preceded me treat either of Hellenic affairs previous to the Persian invasion or of that invasion itself. The intervening portion of history has been omitted by all of them with the exception of Hellanicus; and he, where he has touched upon it in his Attic history, is very brief, and inaccurate in his chronology. The narrative will also serve to explain how the Athenian empire grew up.

98. First of all under the leadership of Cimon, the son of Miltiades, the Athenians besieged and took from the Persians Eion upon the Strymon and sold the inhabitants into slavery. The same fate befell Scyros, an island in the Aegean inhabited by Dolopes; this they colonized themselves. They also carried on a war with the Carystians of Euboea who, after a time, capitulated; the other Euboeans took no part in the war. The Naxians revolted, and the Athenians made war against them and reduced them by blockade. This was the first of the allied cities which was enslaved contrary to Hellenic law; the turn of the others came later.

99. The causes which led to the defections of the allies were of different kinds, the principal being their neglect to pay the tribute or to furnish ships, and, in some cases, the refusal to provide military service. For the Athenians were exacting and oppressive, using coercive measures towards men who were neither willing nor accustomed to bear the hardships of military service. And for other reasons they soon began to prove less agreeable leaders than at first. They no longer campaigned on terms of equality with the rest of the confederates, and they had no difficulty in reducing them when they revolted. Now the allies brought all this upon themselves; for the majority of them disliked military service and being absent from home. Accordingly, they agreed to contribute a regular sum of money instead of ships, with the result that the Athenian navy was proportionally increased, while the allies were always untrained and unprepared for war when they revolted.

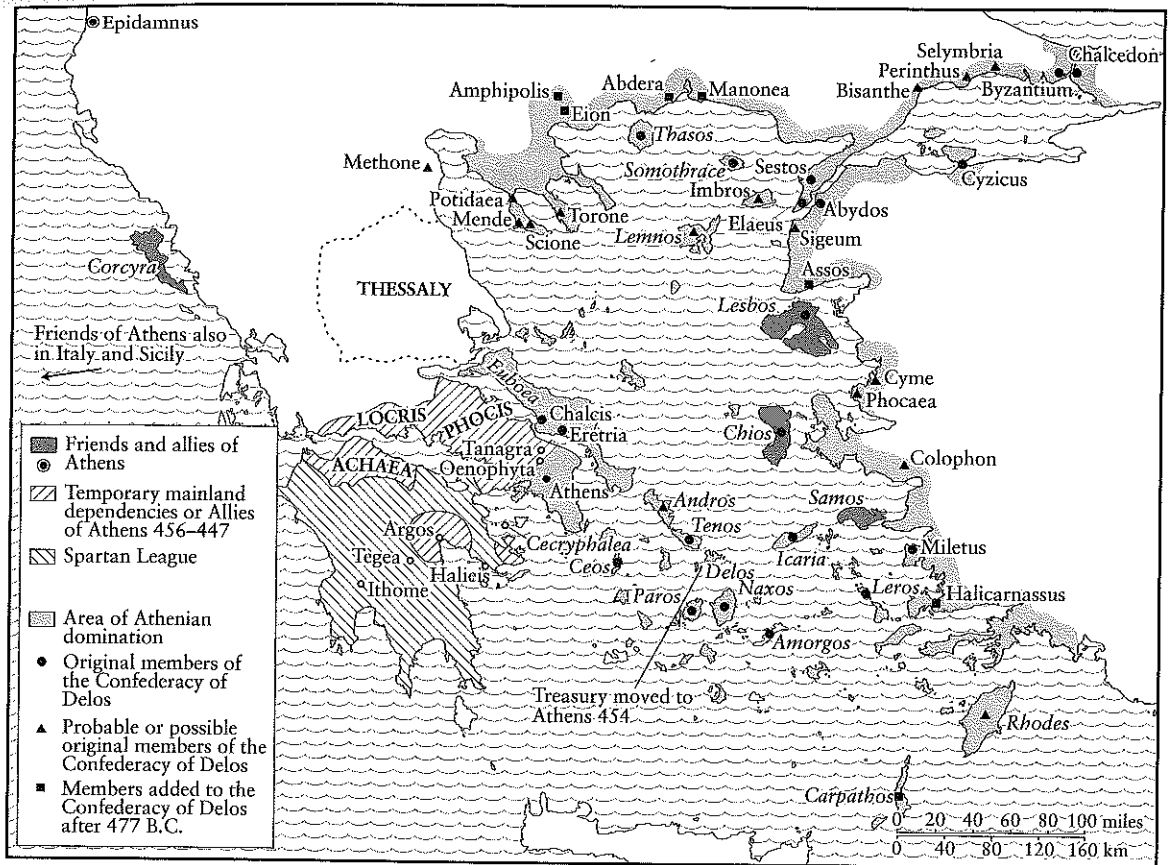


Figure 5.1 The Athenian Empire at its height.

3. ARISTOTLE ON THE ORGANIZATION OF THE ATHENIAN EMPIRE

The Aristotelian Constitution of Athens is the only surviving politeia out of the 159 Greek and non-Greek constitutions Aristotle and his students assembled for the purpose of political analysis. It provides useful information on the actual numbers of Athenians dependent on tribute from the empire. Since the vast majority of Greek poleis were very small—in the range of 700–1000 households—Athens' preponderance among Greek states can easily be appreciated.⁴

23. The leaders of the people during this period [i.e., after the Persian wars] were Aristides, son of Lysimachus, and Themistocles, son of Neocles, of whom the latter appeared to devote himself to the conduct of war, while the former had the reputation of being a clever statesman and the most upright man of his time. Accordingly the one was usually employed as general, the other as political adviser. The rebuilding of the fortifications they conducted

⁴ Aristotle, *The Constitution of Athens* 23–24, trans. Frederick G. Kenyon (Oxford, 1892).

in combination, although they were political opponents; but it was Aristides who, seizing the opportunity afforded by the discredit brought upon the Lacedaemonians by Pausanias, guided the public policy in the matter of the defection of the Ionian states from the alliance with Sparta. It follows that it was he who made the first assessment of tribute from the various allied states, two years after the battle of Salamis, in the archonship of Timosthenes; and it was he who took the oath of offensive and defensive alliance with the Ionians. . . . 24. After this, seeing the state growing in confidence and much wealth accumulated, Aristides advised the people to lay hold of the leadership of the league, and to quit the country districts and settle in the city. He pointed out to them that all would be able to gain a living there, some by service in the army, others in the garrisons, others by taking a part in public affairs; and in this way they would secure the leadership. This advice was taken; and when the people had assumed the supreme control they proceeded to treat their allies in a more imperious fashion, with the exception of the Chians, Lesbians, and Samians. These they maintained to protect their empire, leaving their constitutions untouched, and allowing them to retain whatever dominion they then possessed. They also secured an ample maintenance for the mass of the population in the way which Aristides had pointed out to them. Out of the proceeds of the tributes and the taxes and the contributions of the allies more than 20,000 persons were maintained. There were 6,000 jurymen, 1,600 bowmen, 1,200 Knights, 500 members of the Council, 500 guards of the dockyards, besides fifty guards in the Acropolis. There were some 700 magistrates at home, and some 700 abroad. Further, when they subsequently went to war, there were in addition 2,500 heavy-armed troops, twenty guard-ships, and other ships which collected the tributes, with crews amounting to 2,000 men, selected by lot; and besides these there were the persons maintained at the Prytaneum, and orphans, and jailers, since all these were supported by the state.



C. The Athenian Empire

1. THE LOGIC OF POSSESSING AN EMPIRE

"The Old Oligarch" is the name given by scholars to an anonymous author who, in the 430s or 420s B.C., wrote a short essay attempting to explain, possibly as a rhetorical exercise, the reasons for the paradoxical success of the Athenian democracy. Using the principle of "enlightened self-interest," he demonstrated that the Athenian poor, the backbone of the Athenian navy, knowingly supported the "bad" democracy because a "good" government would deprive them of a share in government and the benefits it provided. Besides demonstrating how the "People" benefited from the possession of an empire, "The Old Oligarch" provides a vivid picture of the prosperous, cosmopolitan society of mid-fifth-century B.C. Athens.⁵

⁵ From *The Constitution of Athens* by "The Old Oligarch," trans. H. G. Dakyns (London and New York, 1890-1897).



IRE

9 Greek and
al analysis.
tribute from
f 700-1000

n wars]
cles, of
hile the
upright
ral, the
ducted

1, 1892).