civilization over barbarism, reason over irrationality. It was no easy victory; in some of the reliefs the heroes are losing.

The pedimental groups were equally impressive. The western group portrayed the battle between Athena and Poseidon for dominion over Athens, the eastern her birth from the head of Zeus, cloven free by the ax of Hephaestus.

A continuous frieze circumscribed the wall inside the colonnade. A band 3 feet, 5 inches in height and 524 feet in length, this frieze depicted the Panathenaic procession. The procession begins at the west or rear door, proceeds around the sides, and culminates over the east door, where priests, elders, and the family of gods—from elderly Zeus to little Eros (Cupid), sheltered under his mother Aphrodite's parasol—await the worshipers. The speed and vigor of the horses is contrasted with the Olympian calm of their riders. Each figure is interesting in its own right, yet each relates to the whole, the triumphant combination of the unique and the universal that is the essence of great art.

The Parthenon was Athena's temple for nine centuries, a Christian church for ten, a mosque for nearly four, and a tourist attraction for more than a century now. It was fairly well preserved until 1687, when it was badly damaged by Venetian artillery, which struck a gunpowder magazine the Turks had stored in the temple, in the belief that no one would dare fire on the Parthenon. In 1800, Lord Elgin, the British ambassador to Turkey, which then controlled Greece, secured permission from the Turks to remove some of the Parthenon's pedimental sculptures and reliefs to London, where they are still housed in the British Museum. This was an act of imperialism, to be sure, but one that saved the reliefs from the storms and air pollution that defaced much that remained on the Acropolis in Athens.

Opposite the Parthenon stood the Erectheum, a temple dedicated to Athena, Poseidon, and the mythical king Erectheus, constructed between 421 and 405 B.C. While Ionic porticoes fronted its eastern and northern sides, its southern side featured the famed Porch of the Maidens. The columns of this portico were six maidens (the *caryatids*) who appeared to support that side of the temple on their heads. In addition to an olive tree planted by Apollo and a salt spring created by Poseidon, the temple housed an olive-wood statue of Athena, embellished by gilt, which the Athenians had unearthed and which they believed had fallen from heaven. (It was actually a statue fashioned by other Athenians centuries earlier. Fifth-century Athenians did not know that their ancestors had sculpted wood.) Each year, during the Panathenaic Festival, the people brought the decayed statue a new robe, woven and embroidered by the girls and women of Athens, which took almost nine months to fashion. Every four years there was a Greater Panathenaia, in which a much larger

robe was woven for Athena by professional, male weavers who had won a contest.

Yet another temple located on the Acropolis was that of Athena Nike (Athena Victory), constructed in the 420s B.C. The elegant, well-proportioned little structure housed winged female figures, dressed in windblown, tight-clinging draperies, who represented victory in battle.

First accused of stealing gold, a false charge soon refuted, and then of insinuating his own image and that of Pericles among the warriors on the shield of his giant statue of Athena, Phidias left Athens and moved to Olympia. There, he fashioned a famous colossal statue of Zeus, also made of ivory and gold. The statue was so large Greeks claimed that Zeus sat by necessity, since if he stood, he would take the roof off the giant temple in which he was housed. One of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, the majestic statue presented the greatest of gods with so sublime and gentle an expression, it was said that the statue could console the deepest of sorrows. (The figure was later used as the model for a colossal statue of George Washington. The sight of an enormous Washington draped in classical robes amused many observers. One fan of Washington protested that the general had been too careful of his health to wander around half-naked in such a fashion. A prankster climbed the huge statue and shoved a large "plantation cigar" in Washington's mouth.)

The constraints placed on Greek architects and sculptors by the existence of only three types of columns and by limited space for metopes paralleled the human struggle to achieve greatness despite the limitations and shortness of life. The essential elements of Greek culture, the emphasis on restraint, dignity, and proportion, are all present in fifth-century Athenian art.

DRAMA IN THE AGE OF PERICLES

The Athenians developed drama, the source of many modern forms of entertainment, from the religious rites of the cult of Dionysus. In these rites, a chorus of men sang and danced. Although Athenian drama eventually moved beyond the few stories concerning Dionysus, even in later days a statue of Dionysus was carried in procession from a temple outside the city to the theater, so that he could watch the plays performed in his honor.

Around 534 B.C., Thespis introduced an "answerer," who conversed with the chorus—the beginning of dramatic dialogue (hence the term "thespian" for actor). By wearing different masks, the answerer could play a different character each time he took the stage. Masks were also more clearly visible than an actor's face in a large theater with only natural lighting, and they

contained megaphone-like devices that projected the actor's voice. Unfortunately, masks also hampered emotional expression, since the actor had to wear the same facial expression throughout the scene. As a result, characters often had to talk about feelings that might otherwise have been expressed facially.

Not every Athenian was a fan of drama. One statesman was reputed to have prophesied: "If we allow ourselves to praise and honor make-believe like this, the next thing will be to find it creeping into our serious business."

The fifth century B.C. witnessed the perfection of the two types of drama, tragedy and comedy, both of which were staged at the new Theater of Dionysus beneath the Acropolis. (Plays had formerly been staged around a cart in the agora.) Tragedies were performed in tetralogies, three tragedies followed by a shorter comedy known as a "satyr play," the chorus of which consisted of satyrs—the drunken, oversexed, cowardly, buffoonish, horse-tailed, and goat-eared companions of Dionysus. What made the tragedies so remarkable was their disciplined portrayal of intense emotion. While violence formed an important element of tragedy, it was always enacted offstage. Though characters alluded to past events, all of the action within the play took place within a twenty-four hour period. As on the Shakespearean stage two millennia later, male actors portrayed female characters. Unfortunately, the music and dances of the chorus (the "choreography") that originally accompanied the dialogue were not recorded for posterity.

At the height of Athenian drama as many as 30,000 people gathered to see a performance. Attendance was not restricted on the basis of age, gender, or citizenship. The state provided funds for the payment and costuming of three actors in each play. As in the days of Shakespeare, playwrights often acted in their own plays, as well as directed and produced them. Since drama was considered a craft, sons often succeeded fathers as playwrights. Competitions typically pitted three tetralogies, or five comedies, against one another.

Aeschylus

The three greatest Athenian tragedians were Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. Aeschylus introduced a second actor, who came on and off the stage, playing different parts, while the *protagonist* remained onstage. Aeschylus also introduced costumes and painted scenery to the Greek stage. Scene-painting greatly influenced the wall paintings in aristocratic homes for centuries. Aeschylus wrote ninety plays, only seven of which survive. Graced by simple but vivid dialogue that steadily built emotion, his tetralogies won thirteen competitions.

Having fought at Marathon, where his brother had died, Aeschylus composed the *Persians* (472 B.C.), a dramatic account of the Greek victory in the Persian Wars. Some historians believe that Aeschylus wrote the play in the hope of restoring wartime unity in Athens and in order to remind Athenians of the immense services of Themistocles, who was under severe political attack. (Pericles, a young supporter of Themistocles at the time, financed the play's production.) But, if this is so, Aeschylus failed; as we have seen, Themistocles was ostracized. An associated purpose was the glorification of Athenian democracy. When the Persian queen Atossa inquires concerning the Athenians, "Who stands over them as shepherd? Who is master of the host?", the chorus replies proudly: "Of no single master are they called the subjects or the slaves." Nevertheless, Aeschylus imbues the Persians with tragic grandeur, depicting the ghost of Darius as great and wise.

Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound* recounts the traditional story of the god Prometheus, punished by Zeus for foiling his plan to eliminate the human race. Prometheus had given humans fire, a gift that ensured their survival. In the play, Prometheus refuses to speak the word of submission that will free him. His last words are, "Behold me, I am wronged," his fortitude proving him greater than the universe that wrongs him. Aeschylus envisioned fate as a worthy adversary one must fight. His heroes are always bloodied but never bowed.

Aeschylus began the practice of forming the three tragedies of the tetralogy into a single unit. In Aeschylus's most famous trilogy, the *Oresteia* (458 B.C.), Agamemnon's wife, Clytemnestra, murders him in the bathtub, in part to seize the throne of Argos in combination with her lover, Agamemnon's cousin Aegisthus, and in part to avenge her daughter Iphigenia, whom Agamemnon had sacrificed to Artemis so that the winds would allow the Greek expedition to reach Troy. (The Greeks viewed the practice of human sacrifice with horror.) Clytemnestra then compounds her crime by abusing her daughter Electra for mourning her father and by seeking to kill her son Orestes, whose vengeance she fears. At the command of Apollo, Orestes then murders his mother to avenge his father (as well as to free Electra from her enslavement and to gain the throne). Orestes gains admission to his mother to do the dark deed by pretending to be the bearer of the news of his own death, news at which she rejoices. (Legend has it that an ancient "method actor," playing Electra in the scene in which she holds the urn that is supposed to contain the remains of her dead brother, carried the ashes of his own dead son to induce the required emotions.) Despite Clytemnestra's cruelty, it is not easy for Orestes to kill his own mother; he must steel himself, as when he first sacrificed a trembling animal on an altar. He hesitates. His mother pleads. Electra shrieks at him to strike. He does—with Aegisthus's sword, the

very one his mother had used to kill his father. When Aegisthus arrives, the disguised Orestes tells him that the covered body he sees is Orestes. A joyous Aegisthus pulls back the covers to find Clytemnestra. A sword fight ensues, ending in the death of Aegisthus by the same sword. Orestes remarks: "I am borne along by a runaway horse." An elder summarizes: "Crime begets crime and slayers are slain." The Furies, a group of vengeful goddesses, then pursue Orestes for killing his mother. Athena finally steps in, establishing the Areopagus, the Athenian law court for homicide cases, in order to promote justice through law. The Furies prosecute Orestes, while Apollo defends him. Athena breaks the tie vote of the Areopagus in Orestes' favor. Athena appeases the Furies by telling them that they will have a shrine in Athens and will be worshipped forever as the now transformed Eumenides (the Kindly Ones). The play ends with a twilight procession, as the Eumenides are led to their sacred grotto.

Aeschylus's trilogy possessed two themes. First, although sin produced misery, misery produced wisdom. Aeschylus wrote: "Wisdom comes through bitter pain. . . . Against our will comes wisdom to us by the awful grace of God." Second, while every crime must be punished, or it would destroy society, it must be punished by law. The polis was the only proper tool of justice; private vengeance had no place in society. This was a powerful message, coming in the wake of Ephialtes' assassination. The play's condemnation of civil strife and exaltation of the Areopagus's role in homicide cases, the role to which it had just been reduced by Ephialtes' reforms, was a timely effort at conciliation and pacification.

Nevertheless, the assassination of Ephialtes may have played a role in Aeschylus's decision to leave Athens for Sicily, where he died in 456 B.C. (A more critical account claims he left in distress after losing a prize in competition with Sophocles.) After Aeschylus's death, the Ecclesia voted to grant a chorus to any citizen who proposed to revive one of his plays.

Sophocles

Sophocles was perhaps the most revered of the Athenian tragedians. Twenty-four of Sophocles' forty-one tetralogies won first prize, including a prize won in competition against Aeschylus when Sophocles was only twenty-seven. Sophocles never finished lower than second place in any dramatic competition. Unlike Aeschylus, Sophocles did not form the three tragedies of his tetralogy into a single unit, but presented each as a separate play. Although each play lasted only about an hour, there was no sense of haste, since the play concentrated on the climax of a traditional tale. Sophocles introduced a third actor, thereby allowing for the presentation of more complex situations. His style was direct, lucid, and simple.

Sophocles' two greatest plays were *Antigone* (441 B.C.) and *Oedipus the King* (after 429 B.C.). *Antigone* pits duty to conscience and family against duty to law and country. The play commences after Polynices has attempted to seize the Theban throne from his brother Eteocles. Both brothers have been killed in combat and their uncle Creon has taken the throne. The stern Creon has refused to allow the rebel Polynices a proper burial, leaving his body exposed to wild animals. Creon has even declared that anyone attempting to bury Polynices will be put to death. The opening of the play reveals this edict, which creates a crisis for Polynices' sister Antigone. While it is her sisterly duty to bury her brother, since his spirit cannot rest without a proper burial, it is also her duty to obey the laws of the polis. The passionate and determined woman buries her brother, risking the wrath of the king. Antigone makes an argument for what philosophers will later term natural law: "No edict can override the unwritten laws of the gods. For they are not of today or yesterday, but live forever." Infuriated, Creon sentences Antigone to death by entombment in a cave. He explains: "He whom the city places in power must be obeyed in things both small and great, just and unjust. . . . There is no greater evil than anarchy. It is anarchy that destroys cities, ruins homes, and breaks the ranks of allies, throwing spearmen into retreat." Creon's son Haemon, fiancée to his cousin Antigone, retorts: "One man does not make a city. . . . It is the soul of vanity to consider oneself alone wise." But stubbornly unwilling to reverse his decision, Creon declares: "Even if one must fall from power, it is better to be ruined by a man and so escape the name of one worsted by a woman." Nor will Creon's pride allow him to submit to his son or to popular opinion: "Are men of my age to be schooled by children? . . . Shall the city tell *me* what I should do?" The seer Tiresias issues a final rebuke to Creon: "You have thrust a living soul into the grave and denied a grave to a corpse." Tiresias's prophecy of doom finally causes Creon to relent, but it is too late. Antigone hangs herself by her girdle in the cave, prompting the suicides of both Haemon and Eurydice, Creon's wife. Sophocles' message seems to be that although obedience to legitimate law is a citizen's most sacred duty, the citizen is not obliged to obey illegitimate and unjust laws, imposed by the fiat of a dictator, against the voice of his or her own conscience.

Sophocles rarely presented characters plagued by inner tensions. Rather, Sophocles preferred to present moral dilemmas through the dialogue of characters with competing views (e.g., Antigone's argument for conscience versus her sister Ismene's argument for obedience). Sophocles captured both the grandeur and the tragedy of human life: "Many are the wonders of the world, and none so wonderful as man. . . . Language, wind-swift thought . . . these he taught himself, and how to find shelter from the storm's fierce darts of ice and rain. He strides into the future,

powerless against nothing. From death alone he finds no escape, though he has devised remedies for diseases once incurable. Clever, ingenious man, with skill beyond imagining, he makes his way, now to evil, now to good."

In *Oedipus the King*, a play Aristotle later called the perfect tragedy because of its controlled passion, it is prophesied to King Laius of Thebes that a son of his will one day kill his father and marry his mother, Queen Jocasta. Terrified, Laius orders a herdsman to expose Laius's infant son Oedipus in the mountains. Pitying the poor child, the herdsman entrusts him to a family in Corinth. When full grown, Oedipus leaves Corinth due to an oracle that tells him that he will one day kill his father and marry his mother. Oedipus does not know that his parents in Corinth are not his biological parents. At a crossroads Oedipus accidentally kills his real father, Laius, in self-defense. Years later he migrates to Thebes, where he marries Jocasta and becomes a beloved and revered king. Ironically, the very steps that Laius and Oedipus take to forestall their respective fates actually bring them about. The ubiquitous seer Tiresias warns Oedipus of "the awful web from which you cannot escape." Yet all might still be well if not for Oedipus's tragic flaw, his need to search relentlessly for truth, which eventually leads him to discover that he has suffered the wretched fate predicted for him. Oedipus laments not only his own fate, but that of his daughter-sisters: "Shunned at every festival, they will come home in tears. And when they are ripe for marriage, what man will have them?" Overwhelmed by horror and anguish, Oedipus blinds himself and his mother-wife Jocasta commits suicide.

Oedipus the King has two themes. First, in the most complex and seemingly accidental combination of events there is a design, though humans do not understand it. Second, humans can triumph over despair, despite the most terrible suffering. While they cannot change fate, they can ally themselves with the good and suffer and die nobly. Despite his suffering, Oedipus's relentless and heroic pursuit of truth—even as he begins to glimpse its horror—bestows on him a tragic grandeur. Oedipus has all the markings of a Greek tragic hero; in the words of H. R. Joliffe, he is "high enough to fall, good enough to win our sympathy, hurt enough to frighten us, and treated unjustly enough to stir our pity." At the beginning of the sequel, *Oedipus at Colonus*, Sophocles presents Oedipus in all his tragic greatness: "So Oedipus in the course of his years stood firm and bleak as a darkened, windswept northern cape lashed by waves from every side, a sea of troubles breaking on his shores—rejected by men, but dearer to the gods."

While writing plays, Sophocles also served as treasurer of the Delian League and strategos of Athens. When Sophocles was ninety, his eldest son sued him. Tired of waiting for Sophocles to die and leave him his estate, the sixty-year old son sued for control of the property on the grounds of his father's senility. To refute his son's claim Sophocles brought a recent sample of his poetry to the trial. Impressed by these lines from *Oedipus at Colonus*, the jury dismissed the case and fined the son for filing a frivolous suit. Yet, by then, Sophocles was himself a tragic figure, having written: "Youth lusts for life. Age longs for rest. And none but a fool would seek too long a span of winter years when joys are few and griefs are many."

Euripides

Composed in the latter part of the fifth century B.C., the plays of Euripides, the last of the three great Athenian tragedians, foreshadowed the new drama that revolutionized Greek theater in the fourth century B.C. Euripides worked in a secluded cave fitted up as a study on the island of Salamis. The author of ninety-two plays, Euripides won only five prizes because his plays purposely left people disturbed and dissatisfied, though his clever, realistic dialogue and music were highly popular. Sophocles claimed: "I portray men as they ought to be. Euripides portrays them as they are."

Euripides' plays emphasized the individual over the polis. He reduced the role of the chorus, which often represented society, and expanded the role of the individual character. Indeed, Euripides himself avoided a role in Athenian public life, in sharp contrast to Aeschylus, who had fought at the Battle of Marathon, and Sophocles, who had served as strategos. Rather than dealing with matters of society or the polis, Euripides centered his action around tragic, unique, even abnormal characters. Euripides added more suspense, action, and complicated plots, in contrast to the simplicity of most fifth-century tragedy. His passionate plays lacked the usual Greek restraint and the common emphasis on the universals of the human condition. They were about specific humans, not humankind.

Euripides has been called "the poet of the world's grief." One of his characters asks: "Since life began, has there in God's eye stood one happy man?" Unlike the other tragedians, Euripides did not grant sorrow any redemptive power.

Euripides joined the growing chorus of intellectuals who condemned the irrationality of traditional Greek religion. He wrote: "Say not there are adulterers in heaven. Long since my heart has known it false. God if he be God lacks nothing. All these are dead, unhappy tales. . . . If gods do evil, then they are not gods." Euripides virtually banished the gods from the body of his plays, saving them for the final scene, when a divinity often appeared to tie up loose ends in the plot. One of Euripides' characters, Bellerophon, even declares: "Does someone say that there are gods in the heavens? There are not, there are not—unless one chooses to follow old

tradition like a fool. Look for yourselves—do not accept my words—but hear what I say. Tyrants kill men and rob them of their goods, and break their oaths, and lay whole cities waste; and still they prosper more than the pious and gentle do. And I know little cities, honoring gods, subject to greater ones, not so devout, held down by superior force of arms."

Another aspect of Euripides that set him apart from most previous playwrights was his great sympathy for women. In *Alcestis* (438 B.C.), the earliest surviving play of Euripides, King Admetus of Thessaly learns from the Fates, goddesses responsible for determining the life span of each individual, that his time has expired. But the Fates allow the king the opportunity to find a substitute who will die in his place. Only his wife, Alcestis, who loves him more than life itself, agrees to serve as the substitute. She explains, "I could not bear to have you torn from me and see our children fatherless." Alcestis's courage contrasts sharply with her husband's shameful cowardice. Euripides even has Admetus and his father, Pheres, disrupt Alcestis's funeral with a comical argument about which of the two men is the greater coward for not offering to die, to the great embarrassment of the onlookers. (Pheres: "I know of no law in Greece that fathers must die for their sons. . . . Death is long and bitter; life is short and sweet. You love the light of day. Do you think your father does not love it, too?" Admetus: "You old men are liars when you complain of age and pray for death. For just let Death come near you, and you refuse to go. Suddenly old age is no burden at all." Pheres: "Me a coward? Look who says so! Oh, you have hit on a clever scheme to live forever. Just keep persuading your wives to die for you.") Admetus realizes too late his folly in sacrificing so noble a wife. He tells her, as she lays dying: "There shall be no pleasures when you are gone. . . . Only those without wives and children are happy. For Death can only strike them once." But *Alcestis* has a happy ending: Heracles wrestles Death for possession of Alcestis and wins her back.

In *Medea* (431 B.C.), Euripides shows compassionate understanding of the violence to which women could be driven by social constraints. Medea has saved the life of Jason of Iolcus (in Thessaly) and has helped him capture the Golden Fleece. Her passionate love for him has even led her to leave her own father and to kill her own brother. Medea has then returned with Jason to Greece and has borne him two sons. An ungrateful snob, Jason then plans to violate his vows to Medea by abandoning her and marrying Creusa, the daughter of Creon, the king of Corinth. Learning of the plan, Medea groans: "The one who was all the world to me has proved the vilest of men." Engulfed by an ever-growing rage, she plans her revenge, though aware of her own increasing madness. She poisons Creusa and Creon and kills her own two sons with a sword, declaring, "I, who gave them their life, will take it away." Medea is then carried away on a fiery, dragon-propelled chariot dispatched by her grandfather Helios, the sun god, so that the furious Jason cannot get his hands on her. (According to myth, Jason then wandered about, forlorn, before taking up residence in his famous but now dilapidated ship, the *Argo*, until a rotting beam fell on his head and killed him.)

Transformed by a harrowing internal conflict into a bloodthirsty demon, Medea expresses the rage, frustration, hopelessness, and loneliness of a foreign woman in a Greek city:

> We women are the most unfortunate creatures. First, with an excess of wealth it is required for us to buy a husband [a reference to the dowry] and to take for our bodies a master; for not to take one is even worse. And now the question is serious whether we take a good one or bad one; for there is no easy escape for a woman, nor can she say no to her marriage. She arrives among new modes of behavior and manners, and needs prophetic power, until she has learned at home how best to manage him who shares the bed with her. And if we work out all this well and carefully, and the husband lives with us and lightly bears his yoke, then life is enviable. If not, I'd rather die. A man, when he's tired of the company in his home, goes out of the house and puts an end to his boredom and turns to a friend or mistress of his own age. But we are forced to keep our eyes on one alone. What they say of us is that we have a peaceful time, living at home while they do the fighting in war. How wrong they are! I would very much rather stand three times in the front of battle than bear one child. . . . I am alone in an alien land, scorned by my husband, a helpless captive, without a mother or brother or kinsman to turn to. . . . O Zeus, why do men not carry some outward sign of their worth like coins? Then we could recognize the villainous soul in time.

But Medea's rage transforms her from a victim into an avenger, and she at last declares: "Never think of me as a poor, weak, defenseless wife, for I am a different breed of woman—kind to my friends, but a vengeful fury to those who wrong me. Only such a woman is worthy of glory." These lines were quite subversive for their day. Though now regarded as one of the classics of Greek literature, *Medea* placed last in its competition.

Trojan Women (415 B.C.), produced just after the Athenian massacre of Melos during the Peloponnesian War, highlighted the horrors of war by portraying the Greek destruction of Troy through the eyes of the Trojan women, who were raped, enslaved, and forced to watch their children sacrificed over Achilles' grave or hurled from the walls of the city. The pressure of war had eliminated all considerations of decency. Yet Hecuba, the Trojan queen, remains a wise and heroic figure. She declares of her fallen city: "Had God not turned in his hand and cast to earth our greatness, we would have passed away giving nothing to men. They would have found no theme for song in us nor made great poems from our sorrows."

In *Iphigenia in Aulis* (410 B.C.), Iphigenia, daughter of Agamemnon, bravely offers herself as a sacrifice to Artemis so that the goddess will subdue the winds that prevent the Greeks from sailing to Troy. Iphigenia declares: "All Greece depends upon me now. I alone have the power . . . to free the daughters of Hellas forever from barbarian lust. . . . This body is mine to give to whom I will. I give it to Greece. . . . Greece must never bow down to barbarians." She marches boldly, head held high, to the altar to be sacrificed.

King Archelaus of Macedon attracted Euripides to his court shortly before Euripides' death in 406 B.C. One legend has it that Euripides was torn to pieces by dogs. At any rate, on learning of Euripides' death, Sophocles appeared in mourning at the Festival of Dionysus.

COMEDY AND THE PERICLEAN LEGACY OF FREE SPEECH

Perhaps an even more impressive tribute to the Periclean legacy of free speech than Athens's great tragedies was its continued tolerance, even after Pericles' death, of raucous, uninhibited comedy, plays that often included the merciless ridicule of political leaders. There is no record of Pericles ever taking offense at the comic playwrights of Athens, though they often poked fun at him. His tolerance of even the most personal abuse on the comic stage set a precedent of free speech that even Pericles' less tolerant successors were unable to reverse.

Aristophanes

Though Pericles did not live to see the comedies of Aristophanes, Athens's greatest comic playwright, his plays stand as a testimony to the remarkable breadth of free speech in the society that Pericles' leadership had helped to create. Aristophanes satirized everyone—other playwrights, public officials, philosophers, generals, wars, and the people themselves. His plays combined poetry, fantasy, buffoonery, indecency, puns, and parody. They traversed a remarkable range, from the most sophisticated humor to the most scatological brand of comedy. His actors wore ludicrous masks and padded clothes, the male characters often displaying exaggerated leather penises. The masks were sometimes caricatures of the famous people he lampooned. Yet his plays often included beautiful and serious verse. While *The Babylonians* (426 B.C.) depicted the cities of the Delian League as slaves grinding at Athens's mill, *Knights* (424 B.C.) portrayed the Athenian demagogue Cleon as the slave of the fickle *Demos* (the people).

The Clouds (423 B.C.), which won third prize at a festival, so ridiculed Socrates that the philosopher later complained at his trial that the play had prejudiced the people against him. (Nevertheless, according to Plato, the playwright and the philosopher remained friends years after the play was produced.) In the play, Strepsiades sends his son Pheidipides to Socrates' "thinking shop" to learn how "to win any case, however bad," so that Strepsiades can avoid paying his debts if taken to court. An eccentric Socrates sits suspended in a basket so that he can have "lofty thoughts." He declares that thunder is not caused by the gods, but by the collision of dense clouds—which he compares with the flatulence of a man who has just eaten a large meal. He scoffs at those who believe in the gods. But Strepsiades' plan backfires. Pheidipides learns at Socrates' school that it is acceptable to strike his father. Now shameless, Pheidipides tells his horrified father: "It's delightful to be acquainted with the wisdom of today, and to be able to look down on convention. . . . What is law, anyway? It must have been made at some time, and made by a man just like you and me." Furious, Strepsiades burns down Socrates' thinking shop. Aristophanes slandered Socrates in this play, attributing to him the atheism and moral relativism of the more extreme Sophists. Aristophanes chose Socrates to represent the sophistry he detested due to Socrates' fame as a philosopher—all Athenians would recognize the name—and either did not bother to learn Socrates' actual beliefs or did not care to present them accurately.

The Wasps (422 B.C.) satirized the epidemic of litigation in Athenian society. The chorus consisted of old, idiotic jurors who carried skewers as their stingers. One character, a son, has to shut his father up in the house, guarded by slaves, to keep him out of the law courts.

Women were as often the butt of Aristophanes' jokes as men, though Aristophanes displayed an uncommon belief in the intelligence of at least some women. In *Lysistrata* (411 B.C.), the women of Greece take an oath to withhold sex from their husbands until the men agree to end the Peloponnesian War. After the male leader of the chorus coins a famous phrase, "We can't live with you, and we can't live without you," Lysistrata, the leader of the striking women, asks the men, "Is it right that we shall not be allowed to make the least little suggestion to you, no matter how much you mismanage the City's affairs? . . . I am a woman, but I am not brainless." The wise Lysistrata soon has the Athenian and Spartan ambassadors compromising—marking out the geographical territory they want, using a nude female as their map, and singing songs about the Persian Wars, when Athenians and Spartans had fought together to save Greece. *Thesmophoriazusae* (411 B.C.) concerns women who hatch a plot against Euripides because of his alleged misogyny, a vehicle that allows Aristophanes to ridicule the tragedian.

Indeed, even death could not shield Euripides from Aristophanes' barbs. In *The Frogs* (405 B.C.), the god Dionysus, patron of drama, descends

into Hades determined to set Athenian theater back on track by returning with whomever he determines to be the greatest tragedian. Sophocles is too peaceable to participate in a contest, so Aeschylus and Euripides are left to vie with each other for the honor by ridiculing each other's lines. Aeschylus wins the contest.

In the whimsical *Assemblywomen* (393 B.C.), the Athenians decide to turn the government over to women, who institute socialism. In *Wealth* (388 B.C.), Wealth is blind and gives his benefits to the wrong people. As a result, Chremylus consults the oracle at Delphi to learn how he can turn his son into "a scoundrel, wicked, rotten through and through," so that the poor youth can be a success in Athens. Apollo then shows Wealth that Asclepius can cure blindness. When Wealth regains his eyesight, a rich woman loses her gigolo, who now has his own wealth. Wealth is then enthroned in his home of the good old days, the Athenian treasury.

Combining a love of solid, old-fashioned country people with a remarkable energy and exuberance, Aristophanes displayed a rare humanity and an irresistible charm. At a party Plato discussed in his *Symposium*, Aristophanes explained the origin of romantic love with the following fable. There once were creatures of a single gender that had two heads, four arms, and four legs. The gods feared them but wanted their sacrifices, so Zeus cleaved them in two with bolts of lightning. Aristophanes explained: "When the original body was cut through, each half wanted the other and hugged it; they threw their arms around each other, desiring to grow together in the embrace. . . . So you see how ancient is the mutual love implanted in mankind, bringing together the parts of the original body, and trying to make one out of two, and to heal the natural structure of man. . . . Each one seeks his other half. . . . The way to make our race happy is to make love perfect, and each to get his very own beloved and go back to our original nature."

Fortunately for Aristophanes, there were no libel laws in Athens. Enraged when *The Babylonians* was performed before an audience containing foreign dignitaries, Cleon prosecuted the young playwright for slandering the city in the presence of foreigners. But no one could touch the clown prince of Athens. The next year he returned with an even harsher attack on Cleon (in *The Acharnians*), calling him "a coward" and "a cheat," whose lips "spewed out a torrent of sewage." Though Aristophanes wisely penned the play under a pseudonym, the identity of the author must have been obvious. Referring to the absence of foreigners in the audience on that occasion, a character in the play slyly remarks, "Now we are by ourselves."

Fearless, Aristophanes lampooned everyone from the gods to the audience itself. Even in the midst of the Peloponnesian War, a struggle to the death against Athens's hated enemy, Sparta, Aristophanes repeatedly produced plays attacking both the war itself and the Athenian people's general penchant for war. He even made a character who clearly represented the playwright himself declare that the Spartans "have a good many legitimate grievances against us."

The leader of the chorus in Aristophanes' *The Acharnians*, though speaking tongue-in-cheek, spoke truly when he instructed the audience regarding the playwright: "Hold on to him. He'll carry on impeaching every abuse he sees, and give you much valuable teaching, making you wiser, happier men. . . . Nor will you drown in fulsome praises, such as all the rest bestow on you. He thinks his job is to teach you what is best."

HISTORICAL WRITING IN THE AGE OF PERICLES

Herodotus

Although he was not an Athenian, Herodotus of Halicarnassus (in Caria), spent four, life-transforming years in Athens (447–443 B.C.), where the city's great minds influenced him deeply. Justly called the "Father of History," it was Herodotus who first used the term *historia* (meaning research or inquiry) to refer to study of the past.

Herodotus differed from the mythologists of previous eras in several ways. First, although Herodotus did not banish the supernatural completely from his *Histories*, an account of the Persian Wars, he attributed most past events to natural causes. He portrayed human action as the prime determinant of history. Herodotus's belief that the wisdom of Themistocles and the courage of free men had won the Persian Wars contrasted sharply with the constant meddling of the gods in Homer's *Iliad* and in the other Greek poems. Herodotus even discussed those occasions when prophecies of the oracle of Delphi had proved inaccurate or when the oracle had been bribed to favor a side in a dispute.

Second, unlike the mythologists, Herodotus based his history on real research. Herodotus did a remarkable job of gathering evidence throughout the eastern Mediterranean world and weaving it together into a plausible narrative. His accuracy was astonishing, considering that some of the events he related had occurred centuries before his time and that he had to rely mostly on oral sources even for more recent events. While he did exaggerate the size of the Persian army, that error was due partly to the unreliability of his Persian sources.

Third, unlike the mythologists, Herodotus always identified his sources, even when he doubted their veracity. He wrote: "For myself, my duty is to report all that is said; but I am not obliged to believe it all alike—a remark which may be understood to apply to my whole history."

Indeed, after Herodotus related the popular story of a diver who swam eleven miles underwater without ascending for air, he deadpanned: "My own opinion is that on this occasion he took a boat."

Fourth, the difference between history and mythology was further expressed in the decision of Herodotus and his successors to write prose, not poetry—significantly, the same decision previously made by many of the Ionian scientists. Though his work was highly amusing, Herodotus's principal purpose was to inform, only secondarily to entertain.

Exiled from Halicarnassus in 457 B.C. for his alleged opposition to Persian rule, Herodotus traveled through much of the known world—Egypt, Cyrene, Tyre, Mesopotamia, Arabia, the Black Sea, and the north Aegean—gathering material for a geographical work. He then landed at Athens, where Pericles and Sophocles befriended him. The city itself, as well as Athenian stories of the Persian Wars, so impressed Herodotus that he decided to change his topic of study. The first part of Herodotus's *Histories* concerned the rise of the Persian Empire, the second part the resulting wars with Greece.

Herodotus was not only the first historian, but also one of the most entertaining historians who has ever written. His hilarious digressions on Near Eastern cultures, the products of a passionate curiosity and love of life, represent a gold mine of anthropological research. Indeed, Herodotus has also been called the first anthropologist, sociologist, and archaeologist. No subject was too small or inconsequential to evoke Herodotus's interest, none too dull for his fertile imagination to enliven. A typical example was Herodotus's discussion of the theory that Egyptian skulls were harder than Persian skulls. A true empiricist, Herodotus felt compelled to test the hypothesis. So he journeyed to a battlefield where the Egyptians and Persians had recently fought and began smashing corpses over the head with rocks. He found that while Egyptian skulls could barely be cracked with huge stones, Persian skulls could be crushed using small rocks. Having validated the hypothesis, Herodotus then developed a typically imaginative theory to explain the phenomenon. Because Egyptians shaved their heads and walked about without any head covering, while the Persians wore their hair long and wrapped in a turban, the Egyptians required thicker skulls to withstand the heat of the sun. This was almost a theory of natural selection.

Another tale typical of Herodotus is that of Darius I's accession to the Persian throne. When Cambyses, the previous emperor, died without an heir, the seven leading noblemen of Persia met to determine who should replace him. The seven decided to allow the gods to decide. (Ancient peoples often employed what we would call "games of chance" to allow the gods to participate in important decisions.) The seven Persian aristocrats decided to ride their favorite horses to a certain spot before dawn the next day. The owner of the first horse to neigh after sunrise would become the new emperor. Darius's lowly groomsman found a way to fix the contest. Before dawn, he rubbed the genitalia of the favorite mare of his master's horse, then stuffed his hands in his cloak to preserve the smell. Then, as the sun rose at the designated location, the groomsman pretended to fasten the horse's bit. The horse smelled his hands and neighed. That is how Darius became emperor of Persia, the most powerful man in the world. This story is typical of Herodotus, because it demystifies an important event, attributing its outcome to a clever human, rather than to the gods. (In reality, it was not quite as easy as all that; Darius had to win a brief but bloody civil war to secure his throne.) Herodotus is like a favorite uncle—brilliant, endearingly eccentric, and, above all, always fun.

Unfortunately, Herodotus died at the Athenian colony of Thuria in 425 B.C. before he had completed the *Histories*. Ironically, the very man who immortalized Athens at the height of its glory was barred from becoming an Athenian citizen by his friend Pericles' recent restrictions on naturalization.

Thucydides

Thucydides, an Athenian of aristocratic lineage whose family owned rich mines, has been called the "first scientific historian." By this it is meant that he was the first to remove supernatural causation from history altogether. He also began the association of "history" with political and military affairs, an equation that dominated Western historiography until the 1960s, when Herodotean "social history" was resurrected—though even Herodotus had felt compelled to justify his lengthy, anthropological digressions on the dubious grounds of establishing the background for his central concern, the Persian Wars. For millennia the association of "history" with political and military affairs made it the exclusive study of adult male aristocrats, leaving little place for a discussion of the lives of lower-class males, women, children, and slaves.

Thucydides began his *History of the Peloponnesian War* by remarking that although his work would not be as entertaining as that of some unnamed but obvious predecessor, he hoped it would be "a possession for all time." Thucydides succeeded. A masterpiece of concision and precision, Thucydides' history is filled with insights that are so universal in application it continues to be read and cited by the best historians, political scientists, and military strategists. Thucydides' distinction between the underlying and immediate causes of war still dominates that field of inquiry. His grave and intense language effectively conveys the drama of history.

Thucydides believed that history was cyclical. If one selected an important set of events that included many variables and closely investigated

that historical sequence, one would find a pattern that could be used to predict future events. Although Thucydides believed that human development proceeded in cycles, his belief in the utility of history implied that knowledge of the past might allow humans to break these cycles.

The Peloponnesian War began when Thucydides was thirty years old. He believed that historians should write only about recent events, since he doubted the accuracy of oral accounts of the distant past. Because of this, some have called Thucydides a journalist rather than a historian, though in several instances he did recount the events of past centuries—largely to show that past wars had been inferior to the Peloponnesian War in size and significance.

Like Herodotus and most subsequent Greek and Roman historians, Thucydides had a habit of creating fictitious speeches for historical figures as a means of conveying their personalities and ideas. But Thucydides assured the reader that in such cases he did his best to faithfully reflect the content, if not always the wording, of what had actually been said.

In 424 B.C., while strategos, Thucydides was ostracized for arriving too late to defend the Athenian colony of Amphipolis against a Spartan attack. Located in Thrace, Amphipolis, the "city surrounded" by the looping Strymon River, was a vital source of metals and timber and an essential base for protecting grain shipments from the Black Sea region.

Thucydides' period of exile, much of it spent in the Peloponnesus, left him with plenty of time to write a history. His banishment probably increased his bitterness toward Athenian democracy, which he portrayed, at least in the later stages of the war, as the severest form of mob rule. Indeed, Thucydides' writings bolstered an antidemocratic tradition that dominated Western literature until the rise of representative democracy in the nineteenth century. Even Thucydides' reverential treatment of Pericles was perhaps a way of contrasting him with the demagogues who succeeded him, one of whom (Cleon) had played a leading role in Thucydides' ostracism.

Yet, Thucydides retained an obvious love for his former polis and displayed great pity at its suffering. Furthermore, however colored by his own experience, much of what Thucydides wrote was probably true. Some modern critics have been so infuriated that any historian would dare to highlight the negative aspects of democracy that they have missed the opportunity to use Thucydides to learn more about the weaknesses of democracy—knowledge that is essential to its survival and improvement. Fortunately, most historians still acknowledge and seek to emulate the rare degree of balance in Thucydides' narrative. Although he fell short of his impossible goal of complete objectivity, Thucydides was perhaps the greatest of all the ancient historians.

Thucydides returned to Athens after the war ended in 404 B.C., but died about four years later, before he could complete his *History of the Peloponnesian War.* It ends in midsentence in the year 411 B.C.

CAUSES OF THE PELOPONNESIAN WAR

The three underlying causes of the Peloponnesian War were fear, pride, and fatalism. The Spartans had been suspicious and fearful of Athens's Delian League from the time of its establishment and now felt threatened by the polis's newfound power and by its democratic system.

Relations between the two poleis were worsened by a long-standing commercial rivalry between Athens and Corinth, Sparta's principal ally in the Peloponnesian League. In 434–433 B.C., Corinth waged war against Corcyra (Corfu), a neutral Greek island in the Adriatic Sea, due to a dispute over Epidamnus in what is now Albania, a colony that the two poleis had founded jointly. In 433 B.C., alarmed by a Corinthian naval construction program, Corcyra abandoned its traditional policy of neutrality and asked Athens for aid.

Athens decided to aid Corcyra in its conflict with Corinth for three reasons. First, the Athenians feared the results of a Corcyraean defeat. At the time, the three greatest naval powers in Greece were Athens (300 ships), Corcyra (120 ships), and Corinth (100 ships). If the Corcyraean navy fell into Corinthian hands, the Peloponnesian League, already superior to the Delian League in land power, would approach it in naval power. Second, the Athenians were dazzled by the Corcyraeans' offer to join the Delian League if the Athenians aided them in their war against Corinth. Such an alliance between Athens and Corcyra would give the Delian League complete naval supremacy. Third, fatalism contributed to Athens's decision. Many Athenians considered war with Sparta inevitable and sought to increase Athenian power in preparation for that conflict. According to Thucydides, the Corcyraeans encouraged Athenian fatalism, saying: "If any of you imagine that war is far off, he is grievously mistaken, and is blind to the fact that Lacedaemon [Sparta] regards you with jealousy and desires war." Pericles shared this perspective since he doubted that Greece could remain half democratic and half oligarchic. Territorial disputes might be settled by negotiation, but ideological differences could not be compromised.

Although Athens dispatched only thirty ships to defend Corcyra, Corinth was forced to retreat in humiliation, rather than risk war with Athens. Nevertheless, fearful of Corinthian machinations in Potidaea, which was both a Corinthian colony and a member of the Delian League, Athens ordered the Potidaeans to expel their Corinthian ambassadors

and to raze their walls on the seaward side. The Athenians also increased Potidaea's assessment to the League from six to fifteen talents. When Potidaea revolted, the Athenians surrounded the city, trapping Corinthian envoys inside.

Corinth, now infuriated enough to desire war, called a meeting of the Peloponnesian League at Sparta (432 B.C.). There, again according to Thucydides, the Corinthians played on Spartan pride and fear: "The world used to say that you were to be depended upon. . . . If our present enemy, Athens, has not again and again annihilated us, we owe more to her blunders than to your protection. Indeed, expectations from you have before now been the ruin of some whose faith induced them to omit preparation. . . . Do not sacrifice friends and kindred to the bitterest enemies, and drive the rest of us in despair to some other alliance." The Corinthians' threat was unmistakable.

Megara, another Spartan ally, complained about Pericles' harsh decree prohibiting Athenian allies from trading with the Megarians. The Athenians were still angry with the Megarians for breaking away from Athens, and massacring an Athenian garrison in the process, in 446 B.C. More recently, the Athenians believed the Megarians had killed an Athenian herald.

The able Spartan king Archidamos warned against the devastation war would bring to Greece, noting that young men often romanticized war because they had no experience of it. But Archidamos's rivals portrayed his wisdom as cowardice, and Sparta declared war on Athens.

THE PELOPONNESIAN WAR

The Spartan Invasion of Attica

Nine months later, the Spartan army invaded Athenian territory (431 B.C.), forcing the country people to retreat behind the walls of the city. But though the Spartans destroyed the Athenians' crops, the Athenians could still supply themselves with food and other essential supplies as long as they controlled the seas. Athens and its allies possessed 600 ships to the 150 ships of Sparta and its allies. Better yet, while the Athenians possessed 6,000 talents, the Spartan treasury was virtually empty.

The Speech

It was the Athenian custom to honor all of the city's fallen soldiers with a public funeral each year. Each of the polis's ten tribes carried a giant cypress coffin containing the remains of its casualties in a procession leading to the public cemetery outside the city. The coffins were carried on biers, with an empty eleventh bier representing those missing in action. The public funeral featured an oration, delivered by the most distinguished and respected citizen of Athens. In 430 B.C. that man was Pericles, and he delivered one of the greatest speeches in Western history.

Pericles began his speech (recounted by Thucydides) by denying his ability to honor Athens's fallen heroes. Rather, through their supreme sacrifice, the soldiers had bestowed honor on him and on all other Athenians. Pericles then glorified the individualistic, democratic way of life the heroes had died defending, contrasting it with the totalitarian, oligarchic system of Sparta:

> Our constitution does not copy the laws of neighboring states; we are a pattern to others rather than imitators ourselves. Its administration favors the many rather than 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 . . . class conditions 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. . . . We do not feel called upon to be angry with our neighbor for doing what he likes. . . . 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. . . . We throw open our city to the world and never exclude foreigners from any opportunity of learning or observing. Although the eyes of an enemy may occasionally profit by our openness, we trust less in system and policy than in the native spirit of our citizens; while in education, where our rivals from their very cradles by a painful discipline seek after manliness, we live exactly as we please, and yet are just as ready to encounter every legitimate danger. . . . We cultivate refinement without stinting and knowledge without effeminacy; wealth we employ more for use than for show, and place the real disgrace of poverty not in owning to the fact, but in declining to struggle against it. . . . Again, in our enterprises we present the singular spectacle of daring and deliberation, each carried to its highest point. . . . In short, I say that as a city we are the school of Hellas; and I doubt if the world can produce a man who . . . is equal to so many emergencies, and graced by so happy a versatility, as the Athenian.

In this speech, Pericles transformed the traditional heroic ethic, the quest for immortality through fame and glory, by applying it to a city rather than to an individual hero. The new heroes of his day, he proclaimed, fought not for their own individual glory, like Achilles, but for the immortal fame of their city. Pericles' funeral oration is similar in argument, if not in style, to Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. But, in stark contrast to Lincoln, Pericles never mentioned the gods, though the occasion was perfectly suited to such a reference. It is unclear whether this glaring omission was due to Pericles' irreligiosity or to Thucydides'.

The Plague

Unfortunately, the overcrowding caused by the migration of the country people into Athens created the perfect breeding ground for a plague that devastated Athens in 430–429 B.C. and again in 427–426 B.C. The plague (perhaps bubonic), carried from Egypt to Athens by a trading vessel, ravaged parts of the Persian Empire as well. Thucydides, who contracted and survived the plague and nursed many sick friends, described the plague's symptoms:

> It [the internal body] burned so that the patient could not bear to have on him clothing or linen even of the very lightest description. . . . What they would have liked best would have been to throw themselves into cold water; as indeed was done by some of the neglected sick, who plunged into the rain tanks in their agonies of unquenchable thirst . . . though it made no difference whether they drank little or much. Besides this, the miserable feeling of not being able to rest or sleep never ceased to torment them.

Physicians were among the first to die, since they contracted the disease from its earliest victims. Some men managed to escape death by severing infected extremities. Even predatory birds avoided the unburied bodies, or died after eating them. Thucydides continued: "No remedy was found that could be used as a specific; for what did good in one case did harm in another. Strong and weak constitutions proved equally incapable of resistance, all alike being swept away, although nursed with utmost precaution." Those who became ill were filled with despair. Athenians avoided each other but perished anyway. Thucydides concluded:

> The bodies of dying men lay one upon another, and half-dead creatures reeled about the streets and gathered round all the fountains in their longing for water. The sacred places also in which they [the country people] had quartered themselves were full of corpses . . . for as the disaster passed all bounds, men, not knowing what was to become of them, became utterly careless of everything. . . . All burial rites before in use were entirely upset, and they buried the bodies as best they could. . . . [Wood, used for pyres, became scarce.] Sometimes getting the start of those who raised a pile, they threw their own dead body upon the stranger's pyre and ignited it. . . . Present enjoyment, and all that contributed to it, was considered both honorable and useful. Fear of gods or law there was none to restrain them. . . . No one expected to be brought to trial for his offenses, but each felt that a far severer sentence had been already passed upon them all.

One-quarter of the Athenian population died at this time, including Pericles himself. Pericles had been elected strategos almost thirty times, holding the office thirteen straight years before the people had ousted him and fined him in 430 B.C. In their rage, the people had blamed the plague on Pericles' strategy of retreating within the city. But, of course, Pericles had had no alternative to that strategy, since it would have been suicidal to engage the larger and better-trained Spartan infantry. Overcome with remorse, the people had reinstated Pericles in 429 B.C. By then, Pericles' two sons by his first wife, his sisters, some of his other relatives, some of his friends, and his assistants had all died of the plague, and he himself had contracted it. Although Pericles survived the disease itself, he died of a resultant exhaustion, at the age of about sixty, later that year. Shortly before Pericles' death, the assembly exempted his son by Aspasia from Pericles' own naturalization restrictions, so that his family line might continue among the citizenry of Athens. But Pericles' political successors, lesser men who lacked the courage to oppose the people when they were wrong, would lead Athens to ruin.

Defeat

Alcibiades, one of those successors, persuaded Athens to launch a massive invasion of Sicily in 415 B.C. The Athenians lost 4,500 of their own men, 40,000 allies, and 200 ships—one-third of their army and most of their navy—in Sicily. The Sicilian disaster produced revolts among Athens's allies and even inspired a coup that produced a brief period of oligarchic rule in Athens itself (411 B.C.). More importantly, sensing a golden opportunity to gain the vengeance against Athens that had so long eluded them, the Persians began financing the construction of a large Spartan fleet and the payment of its crews. The destruction of the Athenian fleet in the Sicilian campaign, when combined with the construction of a new Spartan fleet, proved the turning point in the war, threatening Athenian control of the seas.

Nevertheless, the Athenian leader Cleophon refused to accept a generous Spartan peace offer that would have preserved the status quo. Although the Athenians won a naval victory at Arginusae in 406 B.C., victory soon turned to defeat, when the short-tempered Athenian assembly executed the six victorious generals for failing to rescue drowning rowers in stormy seas. Five thousand men had drowned in the great confusion of that stormy evening. The Greeks believed that the souls of such men, denied a proper burial, could not enter Hades, but must wander the earth as shades. The generals, one of whom was the son of Pericles and Aspasia, were denied a proper trial. The generals insisted that they instructed a captain to rescue men clinging to the wreckage; for obvious reasons, the captain denied that the order had been issued.

Ever optimistic (or stubborn), the Athenians again rejected a Spartan peace overture that would have left them part of their former empire. In

405 B.C., largely through the incompetence of Athenian generals (their best generals had just been executed), the brilliant Spartan general Lysander caught the remaining Athenian navy by surprise on the beach at Aegospotami at the Hellespont. Not only had the Athenian generals chosen a poor location on an exposed beach, but they had allowed the rowers to roam about at will, and had even failed to post a watch. When Alcibiades, who had been banished from Athens, left his nearby retirement villa to warn the Athenian generals against these mistakes, one of them snapped: "It is we who are in command here, not you." The Spartans destroyed or captured all but 9 of the 170 remaining ships in the Athenian fleet. They also captured 3,000 rowers, all of whom they put to death. By then, neither side had the slightest claim to the moral high ground. The Spartans had massacred the prodemocratic leaders of Miletus, and Athens had decreed that the right thumbs of all prisoners be severed, so that they could not hold a spear again.

The Spartans controlled both land and sea for the first time. They used it to prevent Athens from importing food and collecting money from allies. Meanwhile, the Spartan troops stationed on Athenian soil prevented the Athenians from cultivating a crop of their own and from using the silver mines at Laurium. As a result, the Athenians had to melt down sacred statues for gold and to replace their famous silver coins with silver-coated copper coins. Athenian slaves used the opportunity to flee (only to be enslaved by others). To worsen the city's food shortages, Lysander returned all prisoners to Athens and decreed that any Athenian caught outside the city would be killed.

By 404 B.C., Athens had been starved into submission. Legend has it that in Lysander's excitement at the end of this twenty-seven year war, he wrote home to the ephors, "Athens is taken," to which the ephors, irritated by Lysander's un-Spartan verbosity, replied, "'Taken' would have been enough."

One of Sparta's allies (by one account Thebes, by another Corinth) proposed that Athens be razed and that the entire Athenian population be sold into slavery—just as the sleepless Athenians expected. But after a man from Phocis sang a few lines from Euripides' *Electra*, the allies decided that it would be an outrage to destroy a city that had produced such a poet. Instead, the Spartans dismantled Athens's walls, as well as the "long walls" connecting the city with Piraeus, and demolished all but a few of Athens's ships. They also replaced Athenian democracy with the rule of the "Thirty Tyrants," a group of ruthless Athenian aristocrats, and maintained a garrison on the Acropolis.

Ironically, through Greek disunity the Persians had managed to secure the revenge against Athens that they had failed to gain by their own efforts in the Persian Wars. The lesson would not be lost on Macedon and Rome.

THE LEGACY OF PERICLES

Periclean Athens not only exerted an enormous influence over much of the art, architecture, and literature subsequently produced by the Western world, but also inspired democratic experiments throughout history. Although most political theorists before, during, and after the Periclean Age considered the Athenian political system too democratic and unstable, that judgment began to change in the nineteenth century. Hellenism, and in particular a love for Athens, began to sweep the Western world, as democracy became increasingly popular and property qualifications for voting were reduced or eliminated. Though still subordinate to Latin in Western pedagogy, the Greek language, in the form of the Attic dialect, began to assume a more prominent position within the educational system. Histories of the ancient world began to depict the Periclean Age as a golden age in human history. Although this new adulation of Athens's political system, like the excoriation of previous centuries, sometimes went too far, Athens's importance as the first major democracy in history cannot be doubted.