

Timeline 421-431 BC

The Mytilenean revolt 428-7 BC

This Revolt took place on the isle of Lesbos, with all polies with the exception of Methymna took up arms against Athens¹. This rebellion was headed by the polis of Mytilene who had the goal of uniting all Lesbos into a political union led by Mytilene². Athens, at the height of its plague decided the Mytileneans must be made an example of to show that Athens was not too weakened when envoys returned with news that the Mytileneans would not back down³. The Athenians sent forty ships already mobilised for war led by Cleippides⁴, their strategy was to take the Mytileneans by surprise by arriving during the festival of Apollo Maloeis and seizing or demanding the Mytileneans' ships and to tear down the walls of the polis, if they refused then war would be made. Athens pre-emptively detained 10 Mytilenean triremes that were serving as ^yaskariies in Athens and when news of these events reached Mytilenean the people did not go to celebrate come festival day, instead they barricaded the incomplete sections of the wall's and harbour's defences and stood guard until Athens arrived⁵. Ton 8

When the Athenians arrived the Mytileneans did not surrender and began hostilities, however as they were underprepared for conflict, sent a token force of ships to meet the Athenians, when they were inevitably driven to shore they offered terms of peace that the Athenians accepted as they were not confident they could take the polis without heavy losses⁶. The Mytileneans then sent envoys to Athens to assure them they had no intentions of rebellion and to Sparta to tell them where the Athenian fleet was docked and to negotiate aid⁷. When the Athenian envoys returned unsuccessful hostilities reignited, this time all Lesbos except Methymna revolted⁸. They seized most of the island, however their unwillingness to take energetic measures allowed the Athenians and their allies to blockade the ports⁹. After the Spartans had backed down after promising aid the Island surrendered.

Battle of Pylos 425 BC

After sending a fleet under Demosthenes to aid Corcyra from Spartan invasion the fleet encountered storms and was forced to dock near the town of Pylos on the Peloponnesian coast¹⁰. Demosthenes had only five ships with ninety hoplites and six hundred sailors¹¹ and both the Spartan army and navy was coming to intercept them. However, the position was abundant in timber and stone making it a natural fortification¹². Demosthenes anticipating the Spartans, converted three of his

¹ Thuc. *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. 3,2

² Thuc. *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. 3,3

³ Thuc. *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. 3,3

⁴ Thuc. *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. 3,3

⁵ Thuc. *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. 3,3

⁶ Thuc. *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. 3,4

⁷ Thuc. *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. 3,4

⁸ Thuc. *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. 3,5

⁹ Thuc. *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. 3,6

¹⁰ Thuc. *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. 4,3

¹¹ Thuc. *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. 4,5

¹² Thuc. *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. 4,3

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ships into a makeshift fortress¹³ and sent the other two in search for reinforcements¹⁴. The Spartans who were at the time celebrating a festival¹⁵ sent a force that soon arrived and numbered approximately sixty ships and was headed by Brasidas¹⁶. The Spartans attacked the Athenian fortification by sea and land¹⁷ with Brasidas landing with his men on the beaches. Fighting was heavy and the Athenians managed to hold off the waves of Spartan attackers¹⁸, in this fighting Brasidas was badly injured and had to be taken from the front. The Spartans then began to besiege the fort and they brought in siege engines¹⁹. However while the Spartans were preparing the siege the Athenian fleet arrived, 50 Athenian ships clashed with the Spartan force and losses were heavy on both sides²⁰, however the Athenians managed to win thanks to their technique in clashes. The Spartans lost a third of their ships with many more being badly damaged. The Athenians had won and Demosthenes and his men were rescued.

Battle of Sphacteria 425 BC

Following the disaster at Pylos four hundred and forty²¹ Spartans withdrew to the island of Sphacteria where they were surrounded by the Athenian navy. After negotiations to get the Spartans to surrender had failed²² Demosthenes led the siege of the island of Sphacteria. His initial strategy was to starve the Spartans out with the blockade²³ as a direct assault was undesirable as the Spartans were feared warriors four hundred was thought to be enough to hold a small island, despite the fact the Athenians nearly had double the men²⁴. The strategy of starvation was unsuccessful however as Spartan swimmers were able to get past the blockade with supplies for the men²⁵.

The Athenian leader Cleon wagered he could take the island and set sail to Sphacteria with reinforcements²⁶. Demosthenes and Cleon made a joint attack on the island with Cleon bringing a mainly light infantry force consisting of archers and peltasts²⁷, giving them the advantage of manoeuvrability and ranged attacks against the Spartan heavy infantry. The two armies met in battle, the Spartans were hesitant to attack first, fearing they would be flanked by the lighter infantry²⁸. So they held position but faced heavy projectile fire, the peltasts then assaulted, throwing their javelins at close range, when the Spartans gave battle the peltasts retreated and returned to throw more javelins²⁹. This resulted in the death of the Spartan commander and his second in

¹³ Thuc. *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. 4,4

¹⁴ Thuc. *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. 4,8

¹⁵ Thuc. *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. 4,5

¹⁶ Thuc. *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. 4,8

¹⁷ Thuc. *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. 4,8

¹⁸ Thuc. *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. 4,9

¹⁹ Thuc. *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. 4,9

²⁰ Thuc. *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. 4,9

²¹ Thuc. *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. 4,30

²² Thuc. *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. 4,30

²³ Thuc. *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. 4,26

²⁴ Thuc. *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. 4,31

²⁵ Thuc. *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. 4,26

²⁶ Thuc. *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. 4,29

²⁷ Thuc. *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. 4,30

²⁸ Thuc. *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. 4,32

²⁹ Thuc. *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. 4,33

command was also gravely injured. This caused the Spartans to retreat³⁰ to an ancient ruin on the island which they fortified, they resisted the Athenians until they were surrounded, seeing inevitable defeat the Spartans surrendered³¹.

The news of a Spartan surrender and defeat on land was a massive shock to the Greek world³². Spartans, especially the elite warriors of noble birth like those at Sphacteria were expected to fight and die to the last man and provide the greatest challenge on land an army could face. Of the four hundred forty Spartans on Sphacteria two hundred ninety-two were made prisoner, one hundred and twenty of which were of noble birth. After this humiliation the Spartans proposed peace and prisoner exchange, Cleon refused and threatened to execute all Spartan prisoners if Sparta ever attempted to invade Attica, now Athens could return to farming the fields surrounding the Polis.

Peace of Nicias 421 BC

After a long war that resulted in gains and defeats for both Sparta and Athens neither side wished to continue the war³³ as many men had died. After the death of Cleon and Brasidas at Amphipolis³⁴, the leaders of the war factions in Athens and Sparta³⁵, the Athenian General Nicias met with the Spartan interim King Pleistoanax and Agis II to work out a peace treaty³⁶, with some of the terms being the return of all conquered territory to its pre-war state except for Nisaea, which would remain under Athenian control, and Plataea, which remained under the control of Thebes³⁷; the return of Spartan prisoners taken at Sphacteria³⁸ and the free movement of pilgrims to Pan-Hellenic sanctuaries, including the oracle at Delphi regaining its independence³⁹.

Another part of the treaty was that Athens was allowed to keep control of the Delian league and collect tribute from member states, however they could not force members to remain within the alliance. Athens also promised to aid Sparta in the event of a Helot revolt

This treaty was meant to last fifty years and was known as the Peace of Nicias. However, Thebes, Megara, Elis and Corinth refused to take part in the treaty⁴⁰, and so tensions between the Greek polities would remain. To add to these tensions, despite heavy losses during the war Athens still had a powerful navy by war's end and remained the most dominant force in the Aegean sea.

Bibliography

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³⁰ Thuc. *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. 4,35

³¹ Thuc. *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. 4,38

³² Thuc. *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. 4,39

³³ Thuc. *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. 5,14

³⁴ Thuc. *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. 5,16

³⁵ Thuc. *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. 5,14

³⁶ Thuc. *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. 5,16

³⁷ Thuc. *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. 5,18

³⁸ Thuc. *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. 5,18

³⁹ Thuc. *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. 5,18

⁴⁰ Thuc. *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. 5,17

Good work. You have worked well with Thucydides.

To improve:

- ① You must use scholarship
- ② BE LESS descriptive and more analytical, Why are the events important?
- ③ You must proofread more carefully