

CLAH4005 Defenders, Conquerors, Vanquished

Lecture 7: *The Pentekontaetia*



The Walls of Athens

- Perceiving what they were going to do, the Lacedaemonians sent an embassy to Athens. **They would have themselves preferred to see neither her nor any other city in possession of a wall; though here they acted principally at the instigation of their allies, who were alarmed at the strength of her newly acquired navy, and the valor which she had displayed in the war with the Medes.** [2] They begged her not only to abstain from building walls for herself, but also to join them in throwing down the walls that still held together of the ultra-Peloponnesian cities. The real meaning of their advice, the suspicion that it contained against the Athenians, was not proclaimed; it was urged that so the barbarian, in the event of a third invasion, would not have any strong place, such as he now had in Thebes, for his base of operations; and that Peloponnese would suffice for all as a base both for retreat and offence. Thucydides 1.90.1-2

Themistocles' Trick

- [3] After the Lacedaemonians had thus spoken, they were, on the advice of Themistocles, immediately dismissed by the Athenians, with the answer that ambassadors should be sent to Sparta to discuss the question. Themistocles told the Athenians to send him off with all speed to Lacedaemon, but not to despatch his colleagues as soon as they had selected them, but to wait until they had raised their wall to the height from which defence was possible. Meanwhile the whole population in the city was to labour at the wall, the Athenians, their wives and their children, sparing no edifice, private or public, which might be of any use to the work, but throwing all down. [4] After giving these instructions, and adding that he would be responsible for all other matters there, he departed. [5] Arrived at Lacedaemon he did not seek an audience with the authorities, but tried to gain time and made excuses. When any of the government asked him why he did not appear in the assembly, he would say that he was waiting for his colleagues, who had been detained in Athens by some engagement; however, that he expected their speedy arrival, and wondered that they were not yet there. Thucydides 1.90.3-5

The Spartan reaction

- The Lacedaemonians did not betray any open signs of anger against the Athenians at what they heard. The embassy, it seems, was prompted not by a desire to obstruct, but to guide the counsels of their government: besides, Spartan feeling was at that time very friendly towards Athens on account of the patriotism which she had displayed in the struggle with the Mede. Still the defeat of their wishes could not but cause them secret annoyance. Thucydides 1.92

Why is Athens important?

- Before the Persian Wars, Athens had some power but was not one of the really important cities in the Greek world.
- It had few colonies and had internal problems due to tyranny and the emergence of a democratic constitution.
- The building of the fleet however meant that Athens was now militarily one of the most powerful cities in the Greek world. In terms of naval power, no other polis could rival her.

The last acts of the Hellenic League

- Meanwhile Pausanias, son of Cleombrotus, was sent out from Lacedaemon as commander-in-chief of the Hellenes, with twenty ships from Peloponnese. With him sailed the Athenians with thirty ships, and a number of the other allies. [2] They made an expedition against Cyprus and subdued most of the island, and afterwards against Byzantium, which was in the hands of the Medes, and compelled it to surrender. This event took place while the Spartans were still supreme. Thucydides 1.94

Pausanias: A Spartan blunder

- But the violence of Pausanias had already begun to be disagreeable to the Hellenes, particularly to the Ionians and the newly liberated populations. These resorted to the Athenians and requested them as their kinsmen to become their leaders, and to stop any attempt at violence on the part of Pausanias. [2] The Athenians accepted their overtures, and determined to put down any attempt of the kind and to settle everything else as their interests might seem to demand. [3] In the meantime the Lacedaemonians recalled Pausanias for an investigation of the reports which had reached them. Manifold and grave accusations had been brought against him by Hellenes arriving in Sparta; and, to all appearance, there had been in him more of the mimicry of a despot than of the attitude of a general. [4] As it happened, his recall came just at the time when the hatred which he had inspired had induced the allies to desert him, the soldiers from Peloponnese excepted, and to range themselves by the side of the Athenians. Thucydides 1.95.1-4

A Spartan Retreat

- On his arrival at Lacedaemon, he was censured for his private acts of oppression, but was acquitted on the heaviest counts and pronounced not guilty; it must be known that the charge of Medism formed one of the principal, and to all appearance one of the best-founded articles against him. [6] The Lacedaemonians did not, however, restore him to his command, but sent out Dorkis and certain others with a small force; who found the allies no longer inclined to concede to them the supremacy. [7] Perceiving this they departed, and the Lacedaemonians did not send out any to succeed them. They feared for those who went out a deterioration similar to that observable in Pausanias; besides, they desired to be rid of the Median war, and were satisfied of the competency of the Athenians for the position, and of their friendship at the time towards themselves. Thucydides 1.95.5-7

The Delian League

- The Athenians having thus succeeded to the supremacy by the voluntary act of the allies through their hatred of Persians, fixed which cities were to contribute money against the barbarian, which ships; their professed object being to retaliate for their sufferings by ravaging the king's country. [2] Now was the time that the office of 'Treasurers for Hellas' was first instituted by the Athenians. These officers received the tribute, as the money contributed was called. The tribute was first fixed at four hundred and sixty talents. The common treasury was at Delos, and the congresses were held in the temple. Thucydides 1.96

Why is the Delian League important?

- The Delian League is the first true sign of Greek imperialism as it would become prevalent in the classical period.
- Without the Delian League, Athens would never have achieved the power it had in the fifth century.
- Without the precedent of the Delian League, imperialism in the Greek world in the classical period would be less severe and probably less achievable.

The Tribute

- The Hellenes used to pay a sort of contribution for the war even while the Lacedaemonians had the leadership, but now they wished to be assessed equably city by city. So they asked the Athenians for Aristides, and commissioned him to inspect their several territories and revenues, and then to fix the assessments according to each member's worth and ability to pay. [2] And yet, though he became master of such power, and though after a fashion Hellas put all her property in his sole hands, poor as he was when he went forth on this mission, he came back from it poorer still, and he made his assessments of money not only with purity and justice, but also to the grateful satisfaction and convenience of all concerned. Indeed, as men of old hymned the praises of the age of Cronus--the golden age, so did the allies of the Athenians praise the tariff of Aristides, calling it a kind of blessed happening for Hellas, especially as, after a short time, it was doubled and then again trebled. [3] For the tax which Aristides laid amounted to four hundred and sixty talents only; but Pericles must have added almost a third to this, since Thucydides² says that when the war began the Athenians had a revenue of six hundred talents from their allies. And after the death of Pericles the demagogues enlarged it little by little, and at last brought the sum total up to thirteen hundred talents, not so much because the war, by reason of its length and vicissitudes, became extravagantly expensive, as because they themselves led the people off into the distribution of public moneys for spectacular entertainments, and for the erection of images and sanctuaries. Plutarch *Aristeides* 24.

Tribute and Ships

- The majority of poleis contributed money to the League.
- A few, the most powerful, contributed ships and personnel. These were Thasos, Chios, Samos and Mytilene.

The League against Persia and the medisers

- First the Athenians besieged and captured Eion on the Strymon from the Medes, and made slaves of the inhabitants, being under the command of Cimon, son of Miltiades. [2] Next they enslaved Scyros the island in the Aegean, containing a Dolopian population, and colonized it themselves. [3] This was followed by a war against Carystus, in which the rest of Euboea remained neutral, and which was ended by surrender on conditions. Thucydides 1.98.1-3

The First Signs of Athens' Iron Fist

- After this Naxos left the confederacy, and a war ensued, and she had to return after a siege; this was the first instance of the engagement being broken by the subjugation of an allied city, a precedent which was followed by that of the rest in the order which circumstances prescribed. Thucydides 1.98.4

Questions?



Follow-up Reading

- Meiggs, R. *The Athenian Empire* Oxford 1972, Chapter 11 “The Instruments of Empire”.
- Link available on Moodle