

CLAH4005 Defenders, Conquerors, Vanquished

Lecture 10: *The Peloponnesian
War III*



Athens Weakened: The Mytilenian Revolt

- Immediately after the invasion of the Peloponnesians all Lesbos, except Methymna, revolted from the Athenians. The Lesbians had wished to revolt even before the war, but the Lacedaemonians would not receive them; and yet now when they did revolt, they were compelled to do so sooner than they had intended. [2] While they were waiting until the moles for their harbors and the ships and walls that they had in building should be finished, and for the arrival of archers and corn and other things that they were engaged in fetching from the Pontus, [3] the Tenedians, with whom they were at enmity, and the Methymnians, and some factious persons in Mitylene itself, who were Proxeni of Athens, informed the Athenians that the Mitylenians were forcibly uniting the island under their sovereignty, and that the preparations about which they were so active, were all concerted with the Boeotians their kindred and the Lacedaemonians with a view to a revolt, and that unless they were immediately prevented, Athens would lose Lesbos. III. However, the Athenians, distressed by the plague, and by the war that had recently broken out and was now raging, thought it a serious matter to add Lesbos with its fleet and untouched resources to the list of their enemies; and at first would not believe the charge, giving too much weight to their wish that it might not be true. But when an embassy which they sent had failed to persuade the Mitylenians to give up the union and preparations complained of, they became alarmed, and resolved to strike the first blow. Thucydides

Death for the Mytilenians

- Upon the arrival of the prisoners with Salaethus, the Athenians at once put the latter to death, although he offered, among other things, to procure the withdrawal of the Peloponnesians from Plataea, which was still under siege; [2] and after deliberating as to what they should do with the former, in the fury of the moment determined to put to death not only the prisoners at Athens, but the whole adult male population of Mitylene, and to make slaves of the women and children. It was remarked that Mitylene had revolted without being, like the rest, subjected to the empire; and what above all swelled the wrath of the Athenians was the fact of the Peloponnesian fleet having ventured over to Ionia to her support, a fact which was held to argue a long-meditated rebellion. [3] They accordingly sent a trireme to communicate the decree to Paches, commanding him to lose no time in despatching the Mitylenians. Thucydides 3.36

Kleon

- An assembly was therefore at once called, and after much expression of opinion upon both sides, Cleon, son of Cleaenetus, the same who had carried the former motion of putting the Mitylenians to death, the most violent man at Athens, and at that time by far the most powerful with the commons... Thucydides 3.36.6

Your Empire is a Tyranny

- 'I have often before now been convinced that a democracy is incapable of empire, and never more so than by your present change of mind in the matter of Mitylene. [2] Fears or plots being unknown to you in your daily relations with each other, you feel just the same with regard to your allies, and never reflect that the mistakes into which you may be led by listening to their appeals, or by giving way to your own compassion, are full of danger to yourselves, and bring you no thanks for your weakness from your allies; entirely forgetting that your empire is a despotism and your subjects disaffected conspirators, whose obedience is insured not by your suicidal concessions, but by the superiority given you by your own strength and not their loyalty. Thucydides 3.37

The Pylos Affair

- Off Laconia they heard that the Peloponnesian ships were already at Corcyra, upon which Eurymedon and Sophocles wished to hasten to the island, but Demosthenes required them first to touch at Pylos and do what was wanted there, before continuing their voyage. While they were making objections, a squall chanced to come on and carried the fleet into Pylos. [2] Demosthenes at once urged them to fortify the place, it being for this that he had come on the voyage, and made them observe there was plenty of stone and timber on the spot, and that the place was strong by nature, and together with much of the country round unoccupied; Pylos, or Coryphasium, as the Lacedaemonians call it, being about forty-five miles distant from Sparta, and situated in the old country of the Messenians. [3] The commanders told him that there was no lack of desert headlands in Peloponnese if he wished to put the city to expense by occupying them. He, however, thought that this place was distinguished from others of the kind by having a harbour close by; while the Messenians, the old natives of the country, speaking the same dialect as the Lacedaemonians, could do them the greatest mischief by their incursions from it, and would at the same time be a trusty garrison. Thucydides 4.3

Spartan weakness

- When the news of what had happened at Pylos reached Sparta, the disaster was thought so serious that the Lacedaemonians resolved that the authorities should go down to the camp, and decide on the spot what was best to be done. [2] There seeing that it was impossible to help their men, and not wishing to risk their being reduced by hunger or overpowered by numbers, they determined, with the consent of the Athenian generals, to conclude an armistice at Pylos and send envoys to Athens to obtain a convention, and to endeavor to get back their men as quickly as possible. XVI. The generals accepting their offers, an armistice was concluded upon the terms following:-- That the Lacedaemonians should bring to Pylos and deliver up to the Athenians the ships that had fought in the late engagement, and all in Laconia that were vessels of war, and should make no attack on the fortification either by land or by sea. That the Athenians should allow the Lacedaemonians on the mainland to send to the men in the island a certain fixed quantity of corn ready kneaded, that is to say, two quarts of barley meal, one pint of wine, and a piece of meat for each man, and half the same quantity for a servant. That this allowance should be sent in under the eyes of the Athenians, and that no boat should sail to the island except openly. That the Athenians should continue to guard the island the same as before, without however landing upon it, and should refrain from attacking the Peloponnesian troops either by land or by sea. [2] That if either party should infringe any of these terms in the slightest particular, the armistice should be at once void. That the armistice should hold good until the return of the Lacedaemonian envoys from Athens--the Athenians sending them thither in a galley and bringing them back again--and upon the arrival of the envoys should be at an end, and the ships be restored by the Athenians in the same state as they received them. [3] Such were the terms of the armistice, and the ships were delivered over to the number of sixty, and the envoys sent off accordingly. Thucydides 4.15-6

Spartan Defeat at Pylos

- The Lacedaemonians hearing this offer, most of them lowered their shields and waved their hands to show that they accepted it. Hostilities now ceased, and a parley was held between Cleon and Demosthenes and Styphon, son of Pharax, the other side; since Epitadas, the first of the previous commanders, had been killed, and Hippagretas, the next in command, left for dead among the slain, though still alive, and thus the command had devolved upon Styphon according to the law, in case of anything happening to his superiors. [2] Styphon and his companions said they wished to send a herald to the Lacedaemonians on the mainland, to know what they were to do. [3] The Athenians would not let any of them go, but themselves called for heralds from the mainland, and after questions had been carried backwards and forwards two or three times, the last man that passed over from the Lacedaemonians on the continent brought this message: 'The Lacedaemonians bid you to decide for yourselves so long as you do nothing dishonourable;' upon which after consulting together they surrendered themselves and their arms. [4] The Athenians, after guarding them that day and night, the next morning set up a trophy in the island, and got ready to sail, giving their prisoners in batches to be guarded by the captains of the galleys; and the Lacedaemonians sent a herald and took up their dead. [5] The number of the killed and prisoners taken in the island was as follows: four hundred and twenty heavy infantry had passed over; three hundred all but eight were taken alive to Athens; the rest were killed. About a hundred and twenty of the prisoners were Spartans. The Athenian loss was small, the battle not having been fought at close quarters. ... Nothing that happened in the war surprised the Hellenes so much as this. It was the opinion that no force or famine could make the Lacedaemonians give up their arms, but that they would fight on as they could, and die with them in their hands: [2] indeed people could scarcely believe that those who had surrendered were of the same stuff as the fallen; and an Athenian ally, who some time after insultingly asked one of the prisoners from the island if those that had fallen were men of honor, received for answer that the atraktos--that is, the arrow--would be worth a great deal if it could tell men of honor from the rest; in allusion to the fact that the killed were those whom the stones and the arrow happened to hit. Thucydides 4.38&4.40

A Spartan Counter-Attack

- About the same time in the summer, Brasidas set out on his march for the Thracian places with seventeen hundred heavy infantry, and arriving at Heraclea in Trachis, from thence sent on a messenger to his friends at Pharsalus, to ask them to conduct himself and his army through the country. Accordingly there came to Melitia in Achaia Panaerus, Dorus, Hippolochidas, Torylaus, and Strophacus, the Chalcidian Proxenus, under whose escort he resumed his march, [2] being accompanied also by other Thessalians, among whom was Niconidas from Larissa, a friend of Perdiccas. It was never very easy to traverse Thessaly without an escort; and throughout all Hellas for an armed force to pass without leave through a neighbour's country, was a delicate step to take. Besides this the Thessalian people had always sympathized with the Athenians.. ... In this way Brasidas hurried through Thessaly before any one could be got ready to stop him, and reached Perdiccas and Chalcidice. [2] The departure of the army from Peloponnese had been procured by the Thracian towns in revolt against Athens and by Perdiccus, alarmed at the successes of the Athenians. The Chalcidians thought that they would be the first objects of an Athenian expedition, not that the neighbouring towns which had not yet revolted did not also secretly join in the invitation; and Perdiccas also had his apprehensions on account of his old quarrels with the Athenians, although not openly at war with them, and above all wished to reduce Arrhabaeus king of the Lyncestians. Thucydides 4.78-9

Brasidas: An Exemplary Spartan

- Brasidas himself was sent out by the Lacedaemonians mainly at his own desire, although the Chalcidians also were eager to have a man so thorough as he had shown himself whenever there was anything to be done at Sparta, and whose after service abroad proved of the utmost use to his country. [2] At the present moment his just and moderate conduct towards the towns generally succeeded in procuring their revolt, besides the places which he managed to take by treachery; and thus when the Lacedaemonians desired to treat, as they ultimately did, they had places to offer in exchange, and the burden of war meanwhile shifted from Peloponnese. Later on in the war, after the events in Sicily, the present valour and conduct of Brasidas, known by experience to some, by hearsay to others, was what mainly created in the allies of Athens a feeling for the Lacedaemonians. [3] He was the first who went out and showed himself so good a man at all points as to leave behind him the conviction that the rest were like him. Thucydides 4.81

An End to Hostilities

- Indeed it so happened that directly after the battle of Amphipolis and the retreat of Ramphias from Thessaly, both sides ceased to prosecute the war and turned their attention to peace. Athens had suffered severely at Delium, and again shortly afterwards at Amphipolis, and had no longer that confidence in her strength which had made her before refuse to treat, in the belief of ultimate victory which her success at the moment had inspired; [2] besides, she was afraid of her allies being tempted by her reverses to rebel more generally, and repented having let go the splendid opportunity for peace which the affair of Pylos had offered. [3] Lacedaemon, on the other hand, found the event of the war falsify her notion that a few years would suffice for the overthrow of the power of the Athenians by the devastation of their land. She had suffered on the island a disaster hitherto unknown at Sparta; she saw her country plundered from Pylos and Cythera; the Helots were deserting, and she was in constant apprehension that those who remained in Peloponnese would rely upon those outside and take advantage of the situation to renew their old attempts at revolution. [4] Besides this, as chance would have it, her thirty years' truce with the Argives was upon the point of expiring; and they refused to renew it unless Cynuria were restored to them; so that it seemed impossible to fight Argos and Athens at once. She also suspected some of the cities in Peloponnese of intending to go over to the enemy, as was indeed the case. Thucydides 5.14

The Peace of Nikias

- The smart of this accusation, and the reflection that in peace no disaster could occur, and that when Lacedaemon had recovered her men there would be nothing for his enemies to take hold of (whereas, while war lasted the highest station must always bear the scandal of everything that went wrong), made him ardently desire a settlement. [2] Accordingly this winter was employed in conferences; and as spring rapidly approached, the Lacedaemonians sent round orders to the cities to prepare for a fortified occupation of Attica, and held this as a sword over the heads of the Athenians to induce them to listen to their overtures; and at last, after many claims had been urged on either side at the conferences, a peace was agreed on upon the following basis. Each party was to restore its conquests, but Athens was to keep Nisaea; her demand for Plataea being met by the Thebans asserting that they had acquired the place not by force or treachery, but by the voluntary adhesion upon agreement of its citizens; and the same, according to the Athenian account, being the history of her acquisition of Nisaea. This arranged, the Lacedaemonians summoned their allies, and all voting for peace except the Boeotians, Corinthians, Eleans, and Megarians, who did not approve of these proceedings, they concluded the treaty and made peace. Thucydides 5.17

Consequences of Peace

- The Peace of Nikias was an Athenian victory to a large extent.
 - The Athenian empire was once again recognised by Sparta.
 - Sparta's allies however did not recognise the Peace.
 - Both Boiotia and Corinth did not sign the peace.
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The Argive Problem

- Sparta and Argos had been enemies since the 7th century.
- 421 BCE was a crucial year for Sparta, since the 30 Years Peace with Argos ended that year.
- Argos shared a border with Sparta and had the power in the Peloponnese to create division in the Peloponnesian League.

Athens and Argos

- As soon as Argos was free from the conditions of its 451 treaty with Sparta, Athens took advantage.
- Under the influence of Alkibiades, Athens and Argos concluded an alliance.

The Battle of Mantinea, 418 BCE

- Such was the battle, as nearly as possible as I have described it; the greatest that had occurred for a very long while among the Hellenes, and joined by the most considerable states. [2] The Lacedaemonians took up a position in front of the enemy's dead, and immediately set up a trophy and stripped the slain; they took up their own dead and carried them back to Tegea, where they buried them, and restored those of the enemy under truce. [3] The Argives, Orneans, and Cleonaeans had seven hundred killed; the Mantineans two hundred, and the Athenians and Aeginetans also two hundred, with both their generals. On the side of the Lacedaemonians, the allies did not suffer any loss worth speaking of: as to the Lacedaemonians themselves it was difficult to learn the truth; it is said, however, that there were slain about three hundred of them. Thucydides 5.74

A political win for Sparta

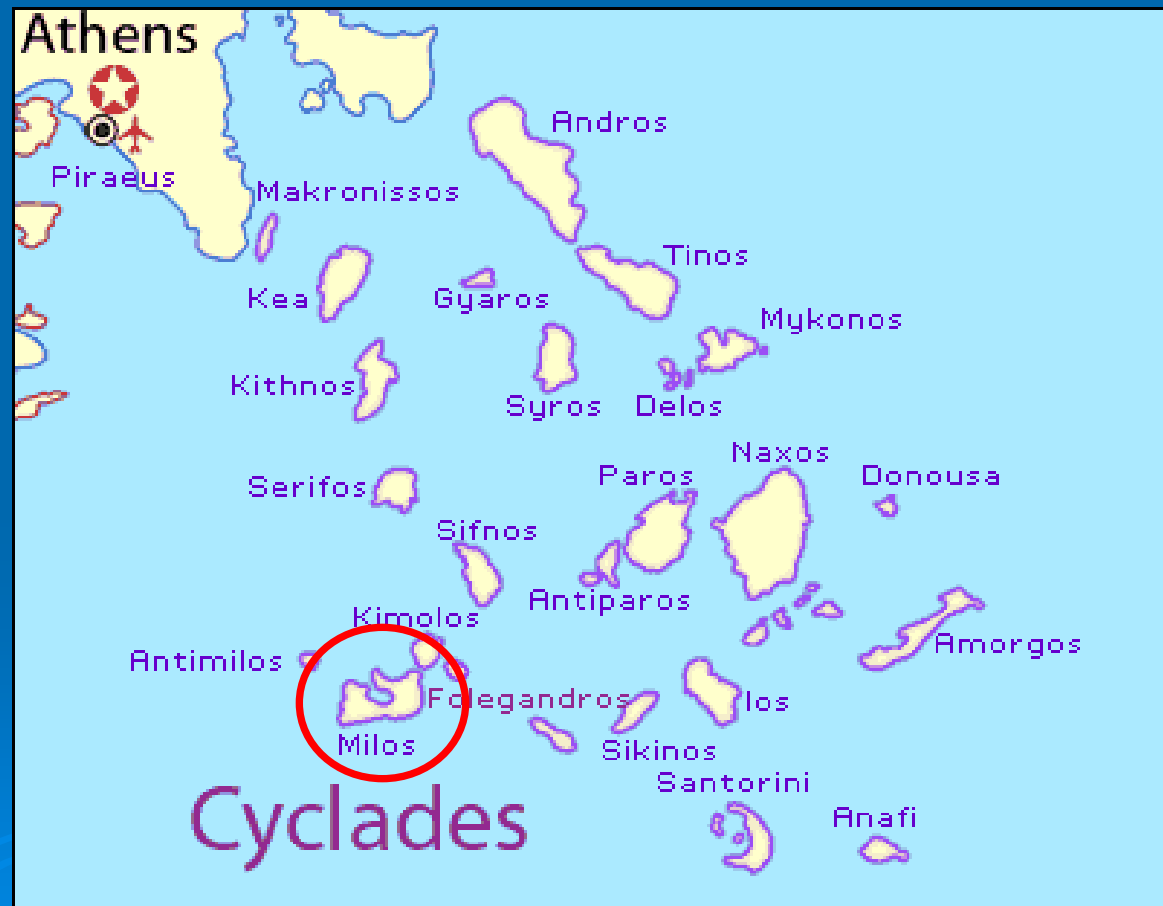
- While the battle was impending, Pleistoanax, the other king, set out with a reinforcement composed of the oldest and youngest men, and got as far as Tegea, where he heard of the victory and went back again. [2] The Lacedaemonians also sent and turned back the allies from Corinth and from beyond the Isthmus, and returning themselves dismissed their allies, and kept the Carnean holidays, which happened to be at that time. [3] **The imputations cast upon them by the Hellenes at the time, whether of cowardice on account of the disaster in the island, or of mismanagement and slowness generally, were all wiped out by this single action: fortune, it was thought, might have humbled them, but the men themselves were the same as ever.** Thucydides 5.75

Athens' eastern front

- While Athens was engaging in the equivalent of a cold war with Sparta in Greece, it also opened a front in Asia Minor.
- It supported the rebel satrap Amorges against the King.
- Amorges did not succeed but the Athenian intervention there brought Persia once more into Greek politics.

The Melos Episode, 416 BCE

- In 416 BCE, Athens decided to put an end to the neutrality of the island of Melos in the Aegean
- Melos was traditionally a Spartan colony



The Melian Dialogue

- The Melian Dialogue is a dialogue between the Athenian generals and the commanders of the Melians discussing a surrender.
- It is a unique piece of oratory in Thucydides.



The dark Face of imperialism

- 'For ourselves, we shall not trouble you with specious pretences--either of how we have a right to our empire because we overthrew the Mede, or are now attacking you because of wrong that you have done us--and make a long speech which would not be believed; and in return we hope that you, instead of thinking to influence us by saying that you did not join the Lacedaemonians, although their colonists, or that you have done us no wrong, will aim at what is feasible, holding in view the real sentiments of us both; since you know as well as we do that right, as the world goes, is only in question between equals in power, while the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must.' Thucydides 5.89

QUESTIONS?



Follow-up Reading

- Thucydides Book 5
- Available from Perseus.

