

CLAH4005 Defenders, Conquerors, Vanquished

Lecture 9: *The Peloponnesian War II*

Athenian ambitions in the 430s

- After the crushing of the Samian revolt, Athens once more started to extend its influence in mainland Greece and the Ionian Sea.
- By the treaty of 446 BCE, Athens was excluded from the mainland. The Aegean was agreed to be her dominion.

Actions against Corinth

- The Athenians did not try encroaching upon Spartan interests directly.
- Rather they started interfering in the sphere of Corinthian influence, which covered western Greece, the Ionian Sea and Sicily and Magna Graecia.

The Akarnanian Alliance

- About the same time towards the close of the summer, the Ambraciot forces, with a number of barbarians that they had raised, marched against the Amphilochian Argos and the rest of that country. [2] The origin of their enmity against the Argives was this. [3] This Argos and the rest of Amphilochia were colonized by Amphilochous, son of Amphiaraus. Dissatisfied with the state of affairs at home on his return thither after the Trojan war, he built this city in the Ambracian gulf, and named it Argos after his own country. [4] This was the largest town in Amphilochia, and its inhabitants the most powerful. [5] Under the pressure of misfortune many generations afterwards, they called in the Ambraciots, their neighbors on the Amphilochian border, to join their colony; and it was by this union with the Ambraciots that they learnt their present Hellenic speech, the rest of the Amphilochians being barbarians. [6] After a time the Ambraciots expelled the Argives and held the city themselves. [7] Upon this the Amphilochians gave themselves over to the Acarnanians; and the two together called the Athenians, who sent them Phormio as general and thirty ships; upon whose arrival they took Argos by storm, and made slaves of the Ambraciots; and the Amphilochians and Acarnanians inhabited the town in common. Thucydides 2.68

Athenian Alliances in the West

- In the 430s, the Athenians also concluded alliances with Leontinoi and Rhegion against Syracuse.
- Syracuse was the biggest Corinthian colony and the gateway of Corinth to the west.

Epidamnos

- Epidamnos was a Corcyraean colony but its oikistes was from Corinth.
- When Epidamnos was in war with the native populations in the 430s, they asked for help from Corcyra.
- The Corcyraeans refused. So the Epidamnians turned to Corinth.

Corinth and Corcyra

- This the Corinthians consented to do. Believing the colony to belong as much to themselves as to the Corcyraeans, they felt it to be a kind of duty to undertake their protection. Besides, they hated the Corcyraeans for their contempt of the mother country. [4] Instead of meeting with the usual honors accorded to the parent city by every other colony at public assemblies, such as precedence at sacrifices, Corinth found herself treated with contempt by a power, which in point of wealth could stand comparison with any even of the richest communities in Hellas, which possessed great military strength, and which sometimes could not repress a pride in the high naval position of an island whose nautical renown dated from the days of its old inhabitants, the Phaeacians. This was one reason of the care that they lavished on their fleet, which became very efficient; indeed they began the war with a force of a hundred and twenty galleys. XXVI. All these grievances made Corinth eager to send the promised aid to Epidamnus. Advertisement was made for volunteer settlers, and a force of Ambraciots, Leucadians, and Corinthians was despatched. Thucydides 1.25-6

The Athenian Involvement

- The Corinthians were defeated by the Corcyraeans in Action.
- In turn, they built a bigger fleet and tried to take the war a step further.
- Corcyra turned to Athens, who eagerly accepted an alliance although it would immediately mean war with Corinth.

Potidaea

- Almost immediately after this, fresh differences arose between the Athenians and Peloponnesians, and contributed their share to the war. [2] Corinth was forming schemes for retaliation, and Athens suspected her hostility. The Potidaeans, who inhabit the isthmus of Pallene, being a Corinthian colony, but tributary allies of Athens, were ordered to raze the wall looking towards Pallene, to give hostages, to dismiss the Corinthian magistrates, and in future not to receive the persons sent from Corinth annually to succeed them. It was feared that they might be persuaded by Perdiccas and the Corinthians to revolt, and might draw the rest of the allies in the direction of Thrace to revolt with them. LVII. These precautions against the Potidaeans were taken by the Athenians immediately after the battle at Corcyra. [2] Not only was Corinth at length openly hostile, but Perdiccas, son of Alexander, king of the Macedonians, had from an old friend and ally been made an enemy. [3] He had been made an enemy by the Athenians entering into alliance with his brother Philip and Derdas, who were in league against him. [4] In his alarm he had sent to Lacedaemon to try and involve the Athenians in a war with the Peloponnesians, and was endeavoring to win over Corinth in order to bring about the revolt of Potidaea. [5] He also made overtures to the Chalcidians in the direction of Thrace, and to the Bottiaeans, to persuade them to join in the revolt; for he thought that if these places on the border could be made his allies, it would be easier to carry on the war with their co-operation. [6] Alive to all this, and wishing to anticipate the revolt of the cities, the Athenians acted as follows. They were just then sending off thirty ships and a thousand heavy infantry for his country under the command of Archestratus, son of Lycomedes, with four colleagues. They instructed the captains to take hostages of the Potidaeans, to raze the wall, and to be on their guard against the revolt of the neighboring cities. Thucydides 1.56-7

The Megarian Decree

- When the Athenians voted to exclude the Megarians from both their market and harbors, the Megarians turned to the Spartans for aid. And the Spartans [...] dispatched ambassadors [...], ordering the Athenians to rescind the action against the Megarians and threatening, if they did not accede, to wage war upon them together with the forces of their allies. When the [Athenian] Assembly convened to consider the matter, Pericles, who far excelled all his fellow citizens in skill of oratory, persuaded the Athenians not to rescind the action, saying that for them to accede to the demands of the Spartans, contrary to their own interests, would be the first step toward slavery. Diodoros 12.39.4-5

The Beginning of the War

- The allies of Sparta were insistent on Sparta putting a check on Athenian interference in their interests.
- Sparta sent embassies to Athens but her demands for Athens to back off were refused.

Sparta Convinced

- After this, though not many years later, we at length come to what has been already related, the affairs of Corcyra and Potidaea, and the events that served as a pretext for the present war. [2] All these actions of the Hellenes against each other and the barbarian occurred in the fifty years' interval between the retreat of Xerxes and the beginning of the present war. During this interval the Athenians succeeded in placing their empire on a firmer basis, and advanced their own home power to a very great height. The Lacedaemonians, though fully aware of it, opposed it only for a little while, but remained inactive during most of the period, being of old slow to go to war except under the pressure of necessity, and in the present instance being hampered by wars at home; until the growth of the Athenian power could be no longer ignored, and their own confederacy became the object of its encroachments. They then felt that they could endure it no longer, but that the time had come for them to throw themselves heart and soul upon the hostile power, and break it, if they could, by commencing the present war. [3] And though the Lacedaemonians had made up their own minds on the fact of the breach of the treaty and the guilt of the Athenians, yet they sent to Delphi and inquired of the god whether it would be well with them if they went to war; and, as it is reported, received from him the answer that if they put their whole strength into the war, victory would be theirs, and the promise that he himself would be with them, whether invoked or uninvoked. Thucydides 1.118

The Two Sides

- The allies of the two belligerents were the following. [2] These were the allies of Lacedaemon: all the Peloponnesians within the Isthmus except the Argives and Achaeans, who were neutral; Pellene being the only Achaean city that first joined in the war, though her example was afterwards followed by the rest. Outside Peloponnese the Megarians, Locrians, Boeotians, Phocians, Ambraciots, Leucadians, and Anactorians. [3] Of these, ships were furnished by the Corinthians, Megarians, Sicyonians, Pellenians, Eleans, Ambraciots, and Leucadians; and cavalry by the Boeotians, Phocians, and Locrians. The other states sent infantry. This was the Lacedaemonian confederacy. [4] That of Athens comprised the Chians, Lesbians, Plateans, the Messenians in Naupactus, most of the Acarnanians, the Corcyraeans, Zacynthians, and some tributary cities in the following countries, viz., Caria upon the sea with her Dorian neighbors, Ionia, the Hellespont, the Thracian towns, the islands lying between Peloponnese and Crete towards the east, and all the Cyclades except Melos and Thera. [5] Of these, ships were furnished by Chios, Lesbos, and Corcyra, infantry and money by the rest. [6] Such were the allies of either party and their resources for the war. Thucydides 2.9

The Periklean Strategy

- While the Peloponnesians were still mustering at the Isthmus, or on the march before they invaded Attica, Pericles, son of Xanthippus, one of the ten generals of the Athenians, finding that the invasion was to take place, conceived the idea that Archidamus, who happened to be his friend, might possibly pass by his estate without ravaging it. This he might do, either from a personal wish to oblige him, or acting under instructions from Lacedaemon for the purpose of creating a prejudice against him, as had been before attempted in the demand for the expulsion of the accursed family. He accordingly took the precaution of announcing to the Athenians in the assembly that, although Archidamus was his friend, yet this friendship should not extend to the detriment of the state, and that in case the enemy should make his houses and lands an exception to the rest and not pillage them, he at once gave them up to be public property, so that they should not bring him into suspicion. [2] He also gave the citizens some advice on their present affairs in the same strain as before. They were to prepare for the war, and to carry in their property from the country. They were not to go out to battle, but to come into the city and guard it, and get ready their fleet, in which their real strength lay. They were also to keep a tight rein on their allies--the strength of Athens being derived from the money brought in by their payments, and success in war depending principally upon conduct and capital. Thucydides 2.13

A Change for the Athenians

- The Athenians listened to his advice, and began to carry in their wives and children from the country, and all their household furniture, even to the woodwork of their houses which they took down. Their sheep and cattle they sent over to Euboea and the adjacent islands. [2] But they found it hard to move, as most of them had been always used to live in the country. ... XVI. The Athenians thus long lived scattered over Attica in independent townships. Even after the centralization of Theseus, old habit still prevailed; and from the early times down to the present war most Athenians still lived in the country with their families and households, and were consequently not at all inclined to move now, especially as they had only just restored their establishments after the Median invasion. [2] Deep was their trouble and discontent at abandoning their houses and the hereditary temples of the ancient constitution, and at having to change their habits of life and to bid farewell to what each regarded as his native city. Thucydides 2.14&2.16

The Consequence of the Periklean Strategy: The Plague

- Such was the funeral that took place during this winter, with which the first year of the war came to an end. [2] In the first days of summer the Lacedaemonians and their allies, with two-thirds of their forces as before, invaded Attica, under the command of Archidamus, son of Zeuxidamus, king of Lacedaemon, and sat down and laid waste the country. [3] Not many days after their arrival in Attica the plague first began to show itself among the Athenians. It was said that it had broken out in many places previously in the neighborhood of Lemnos and elsewhere; but a pestilence of such extent and mortality was nowhere remembered. [4] Neither were the physicians at first of any service, ignorant as they were of the proper way to treat it, but they died themselves the most thickly, as they visited the sick most often; nor did any human art succeed any better. Supplications in the temples, divinations, and so forth were found equally futile, till the overwhelming nature of the disaster at last put a stop to them altogether. Thucydides 2.47

The Death of Perikles

- Such were the arguments by which Pericles tried to cure the Athenians of their anger against him and to divert their thoughts from their immediate afflictions. [2] As a community he succeeded in convincing them; they not only gave up all idea of sending to Lacedaemon, but applied themselves with increased energy to the war; still as private individuals they could not help smarting under their sufferings, the common people having been deprived of the little that they ever possessed, while the higher orders had lost fine properties with costly establishments and buildings in the country, and, worst of all, had war instead of peace. [3] In fact, the public feeling against him did not subside until he had been fined. [4] Not long afterwards, however, according to the way of the multitude, they again elected him general and committed all their affairs to his hands, having now become less sensitive to their private and domestic afflictions, and understanding that he was the best man of all for the public necessities. [5] For as long as he was at the head of the state during the peace, he pursued a moderate and conservative policy; and in his time its greatness was at its height. When the war broke out, here also he seems to have rightly gauged the power of his country. [6] He outlived its commencement two years and six months, and the correctness of his previsions respecting it became better known by his death. [7] He told them to wait quietly, to pay attention to their marine, to attempt no new conquests, and to expose the city to no hazards during the war, and doing this, promised them a favorable result. What they did was the very contrary, allowing private ambitions and private interests, in matters apparently quite foreign to the war, to lead them into projects unjust both to themselves and to their allies--projects whose success would only conduce to the honor and advantage of private persons, and whose failure entailed certain disaster on the country in the war. [8] The causes of this are not far to seek. Pericles indeed, by his rank, ability, and known integrity, was enabled to exercise an independent control over the multitude--in short, to lead them instead of being led by them; for as he never sought power by improper means, he was never compelled to flatter them, but, on the contrary, enjoyed so high an estimation that he could afford to anger them by contradiction. [9] Whenever he saw them unseasonably and insolently elated, he would with a word reduce them to alarm; on the other hand, if they fell victims to a panic, he could at once restore them to confidence. In short, what was nominally a democracy became in his hands government by the first citizen. Thucydides 2.65.1-9

The Demagogues

- With his successors it was different. More on a level with one another, and each grasping at supremacy, they ended by committing even the conduct of state affairs to the whims of the multitude. [11] This, as might have been expected in a great and sovereign state, produced a host of blunders, and amongst them the Sicilian expedition; though this failed not so much through a miscalculation of the power of those against whom it was sent, as through a fault in the senders in not taking the best measures afterwards to assist those who had gone out, but choosing rather to occupy themselves with private cabals for the leadership of the commons, by which they not only paralyzed operations in the field, but also first introduced civil discord at home. [12] Yet after losing most of their fleet besides other forces in Sicily, and with faction already dominant in the city, they could still for three years make head against their original adversaries, joined not only by the Sicilians, but also by their own allies nearly all in revolt, and at last by the king's son, Cyrus, who furnished the funds for the Peloponnesian navy. Nor did they finally succumb till they fell the victims of their own intestine disorders. [13] So superfluously abundant were the resources from which the genius of Pericles foresaw an easy triumph in the war over the unaided forces of the Peloponnesians. Thucydides 2.65.10-3

Questions?

Follow-up Reading

- Thucydides Book 2:

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0105%3Abook%3D2%3Achapter%3D1>