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GUIDE TO THE PELOPONNESIAN WAR

Pericles ushered Athens into the great war with Sparta that was to last 27 years and end in defeat for Athens (431 to 404). His strategy was to rely on sea power while ceding the land war to Sparta. The result was a long military dance in which neither side could take the advantage, until Athens blundered and lost its main force in Sicily (415 to 413). Sparta acquired a navy soon after, and the end for Athens was terrible.

The war began when Sparta and its allies were frightened by Athenian expansionism into launching war rather than going into arbitration, as the latest treaty between Athens and Sparta required. The war is divided into two phases. The Archidamian War (431 to 421) was named for the Spartan king Archidamus, who initially led the Spartan army, although he had opposed the war. The Spartans started invading Attica every spring, farmers sought refuge inside the walls, and a deadly plague broke out in the crowded city (430). Corcyra (modern Corfu) set a bloody example in civil war, as the democrats there eventually destroyed the oligarchs (427 to 425). Sparta and its allies besieged Plataea, which surrendered to the Spartans after a heroic defense. The Spartans executed the surviving defenders of Plataea (427). Also, in that year, the rebellious Athenian ally Mytilene (modern Lesbos) surrendered to the Athenians; the Athenians voted at first to massacre the citizens of Mytilene, but a last-minute reprieve prevented this atrocity. Leading hawks on both sides died, making possible the Peace of Nicias between Athens and Sparta (421), which was supposed to last 50 years.

The second phase of the war was started by the Athenians, who seized the tiny island of Melos (which was loosely tied to Spartan interests) in 416 and killed or enslaved its people. This is the best-known case, but there were at least two other Athenian massacres, to say nothing of the Spartan ones. Melos represents the clearest evidence for the brutality of the empire.

In 415 the Athenians launched the Sicilian Expedition in hopes of taking the large city of Syracuse. It was the largest force ever assembled by Athens, with 30,000 combatants. Three generals were appointed: Nicias (who had opposed this war), Lamachus, and Alcibiades (who had advocated the expedi-

tion). Alcibiades was charged with impiety before sailing, but the trial was to be postponed till his return. In his absence, however, new information (probably false) persuaded the Athenians to call Alcibiades back to the city for trial. Alcibiades, however, fled from the fleet to Sparta on hearing the news. In 414, the Athenians besieged Syracuse but were unable to run their walls completely around the city. Nicias was afraid to give up and go home, for fear of being brought to court in Athens, as failed generals often were. In the end, the entire force was defeated. Most of the men were killed, and the survivors were put to hard labor in stone quarries (413).

Meanwhile, the Spartans began to maintain a permanent presence in Attica, at Alcibiades' suggestion. The defeat in Sicily was followed by a rebellion by many of the subject states (412), which was put down with difficulty.

The Spartans now acquired a navy, with financial help from Persia. The Athenians won a naval victory at Arginusae in 406, but they took an unacceptable number of casualties. In 405, the entire navy of Athens was destroyed on the beach at Aegispotomi. After a protracted siege, the Spartans obtained unconditional surrender in April 404. They destroyed the long walls that gave Athens protected access to the sea and installed the Thirty Tyrants, who called for a garrison to protect them.

## CHRONOLOGY OF THE PELOPONNESIAN WAR

- 433 Corcyraean Debate (Thuc 1.32-43); Athens decides to ally with Corcyra.
- 432 The Siege of Potidaea and the Corinthian Debate (Thuc 1.68-86). Potidaea, a colony of Corinth and tributary of Athens, revolts. Athens puts down the revolt and Corinth supports it. Many cities send envoys to Sparta to denounce Athens. Corinth speaks last, and the Athenians respond, reminding Sparta of their contributions against the Persians. Nevertheless the Spartans declare war and the Thirty Years' Truce is broken.
- 431 Second Peloponnesian War begins with war between Athenian colony Plataea and Thebes.
- 430 Winter  
Pericles' Funeral Oration (Thuc 2.35-46).
- 430 Summer  
The plague devastates Athens but does not affect Peloponnesus. Athens finds fault with Pericles and tries to make peace with Sparta; the effort fails. Pericles' speech to Athens (Thuc 2.60-64).
- 429 Spartan general Archidamus appeals to the gods as witnesses in blockading Plataea. Sidalces of Thraces campaigns against Perdiccas of Macedon. Successful Athenian campaigns.
- 428 Lesbos revolts and seeks union with Mytilene. Athenians sail to Mytilene; Mytilene sends secret embassy to Sparta. Sparta allies with Mytilene and Lesbos. Athens blockades Mytilene.
- 427 Sparta sends a fleet to Mytilene. Athens retakes Mytilene and considers whether to put all male Mytilenians to death: Mytilene Debate (Thuc 3.37-48). Plataea surrenders to the Spartans. Plataean debate (Thuc 3.53-68). Thucydides on evils of revolution (Thuc 3.82-83).
- 427/6 Second plague and numerous earthquakes turn back Peloponnesian invasion of Attica.
- 426/5 Athenians purify Delos. Athenians send reinforcements to Sicily. Etna erupts.
- 425 Engagement at Pylos leads to armistice. Spartans address the Athenian assembly and offer Athens a peace treaty (Thuc 4.17-21). Athens looks for more concessions and the moment passes. Cleon, who opposed the treaty, brags he can take Pylos and brings it off. Civil strife ends in Corcyra by virtue of complete slaughter of one party.
- 424 Eclipse of the sun. Sicilians make peace among themselves. Boiotians defeat Athenians at Battle of Delion; [Thucydides exiled].
- 421 Peace of Nicias with Sparta. Corinthians immediately persuade Argos that Sparta intends by this to dominate the Peloponnesus. Corinth refuses to accept the treaty. Argive alliance begins.
- 420 Sparta makes peace with Argos. Alcibiades leads opposition to Athenian peace with Sparta; treats separately with Argos. Argos drops Sparta and makes treaty with Athens. Alcibiades tricks the Spartan embassy into discrediting themselves before the Athenians.
- 417 Sparta invades Argos.
- 416 Athenian expedition to Melos. Melian dialogue (Thuc 5.85-112).
- 415 Alcibiades is discredited over mutilation of Hermae at Athens
- 412 War resumes with Sparta; Spartans deal with Persians
- 411 Oligarchic coup at Athens