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From Persian Wars to Athenian Empire

Background to War

Athenian blundering in international diplomacy set in motion the greatest military threat that the ancient Greeks ever faced. Fearing that the Spartans would again try to intervene at Athens in support of the city's oligarchic faction opposed to the democratic reforms of Cleisthenes, the Athenians in 507 B.C. had sent ambassadors to ask for a protective alliance with the king of Persia, Darius I. The Persian Empire by this time had become the richest, largest, and most militarily powerful state in the ancient world. The Athenian emissaries met with a representative of the king at Sardis, the Persian headquarters in western Anatolia. When the royal representative had heard their plea for an alliance to help protect them against the Spartans, he replied, "But who in the world are you and where do you live?" (Herodotus 5.73). From the Persian perspective, the Athenians were so insignificant that the king's representative had never heard of them. Yet within two generations Athens would be fully in control of what today we call the Athenian Empire. The transformation of Athens from insignificance to international power was startling and swift; it came about in a period of war that marks the beginning of the Classical Age, the modern designation of the period from about 500 B.C. to the death of Alexander the Great in 323 B.C.

The dynamics of this incident between Athens and Persia expose the forces motivating the conflicts that would dominate the military and political history of mainland Greece throughout the fifth century B.C. First, the two major powers in mainland Greece—Sparta and Athens—remained suspicious of each other. The Spartans had sent King Cleomenes with an army to Athens in 508/7 B.C. to intervene on the side of Isagoras in his struggle for power with Cleisthenes, only to have their forces and their king humiliatingly expelled by the men of Athens. Sparta therefore from this date began to see Athens as a hostile state, a feeling naturally reciprocated at Athens after the abortive Spartan intervention, during which the Spartan troops had forced some seven hundred Athenian households into temporary exile. Second, the kingdom of Persia had expanded westward all the way to Anatolia and become the master of Greek city-states along its coast. The Greeks of the mainland therefore had reason to feel anxious about Persian intentions toward their territory. Neither the Persians nor the mainland Greeks yet knew much about each other, however, and their mutual ignorance opened the door to explosive misunderstandings.

Conflict between Unequals

The Athenian ambassadors dispatched to Sardis accepted the usual Persian terms for an alliance by offering tokens of earth and water to the king's representative, thereby indicating Athens's recognition of the superiority of the king, who acknowledged no one as his equal and therefore did not make alliances as if with an equal. The Athenian ambassadors, in their ignorance of Persian diplomatic procedure, had naively assumed that they could strike a kind of partnership with the Persian kingdom because Greeks made alliances on those sorts of terms. Even after they understood that the earth and water demanded by the king's representative, the local governor (a satrap in Persian terminology), amounted to an admission of inferiority on their part, the Athenian ambassadors were evidently reluctant to return to Athens empty-handed. They therefore complied with the symbolic demand. Once the mission had returned home, the men of the Athenian assembly, although outraged at their envoys' symbolic submission to a foreign power, never overtly repudiated the alliance and never sent another embassy to the satrap in Sardis to announce that Athens was unilaterally dissolving the pact. In the aftermath of this fumbled diplomacy the Athenians continued to think of themselves as independent and unencumbered by any obligation to the Persian king. The king, for his part, had no indication that the relationship had changed; as far as he knew, the Athenians remained voluntarily allied to him and still owed him the loyalty and deference all mere mortals should pay to him.

499 B.C.: Beginning of the Ionian revolt.
494 B.C.: Final crushing of the Ionian revolt by the Persians.
490 B.C.: Darius sends Persian force against Athenians; battle of Marathon.
483 B.C.: Discovery of large deposits of silver in Attica; Athenians begin to build large navy at instigation of Themistocles.
482 B.C.: Ostracism of Aristides (recalled in 480 B.C.).
480 B.C.: Xerxes leads massive Persian invasion of Greece; battles of Thermopylae and Salamis.
479 B.C.: Battles of Plataea in Boeotia and Mycale in Anatolia.
478 B.C.: Spartans send Pausanias to lead Greek alliance against Persians.
477 B.C.: Athens assumes leadership of the Greek alliance (Delian League).
475 B.C.: Cimon returns the bones of the hero Theseus to Athens.
465 B.C.: Devastating earthquake in Laconia leads to helot revolt in Messenia.
465–463 B.C.: Attempt of Thasos to revolt from the Delian League.
462 B.C.: Cimon leads Athenian troops to help Spartans, who reject them.
461 B.C.: Ephialtes' reforms to democratize Athenian government further.
450s B.C.: Hostilities between Athens and Sparta; institution of stipends for jurors and other magistrates at Athens.
454 B.C.: Enormous losses of Delian League forces against Persians in Egypt; transfer of league's treasury from island of Delos to Athens.
451 B.C.: Passage of Pericles' law on citizenship.
450 B.C.: End of overseas expeditions against Persians by Delian League forces.
447 B.C.: Athenian building program begins.
446–445 B.C.: Peace treaty meant to last thirty years agreed to by Athens and Sparta.
443 B.C.: Pericles' main political opponent ostracized.
441–439 B.C.: Samos attempts to revolt from Delian League.
430s B.C.: Increasing political tension at Athens as Sparta threatens war.

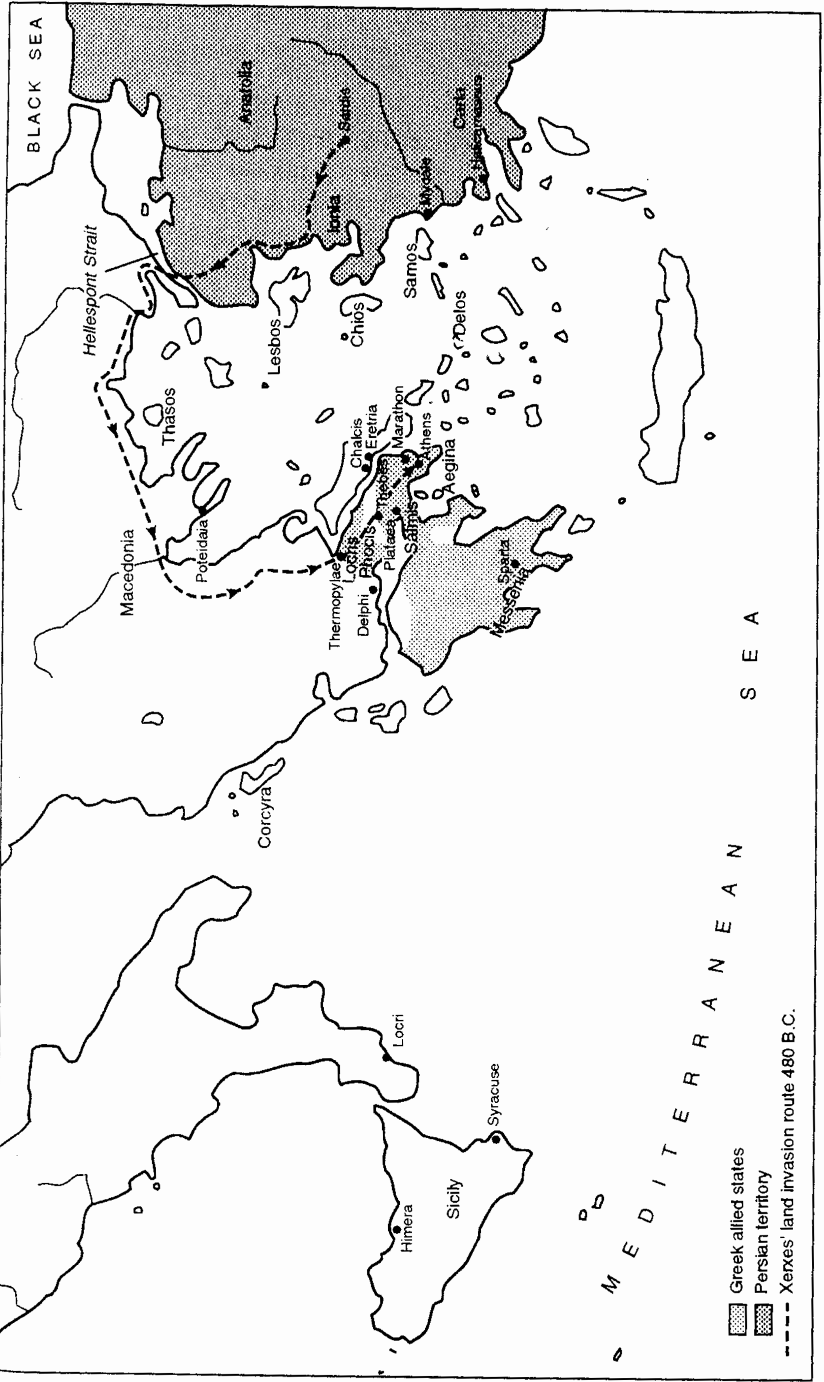
This serious misunderstanding was to set in motion a sequence of events that was to culminate in invasions of mainland Greece by the enormous army and navy of the king of Persia. The Persian kingdom outstripped mainland Greece in every category of material resources, from precious metals to soldiers. The wars between Persians and Greeks pitted the equivalent of an elephant against a small swarm of mosquitoes. In such a conflict a Greek victory seemed improbable, to say the least. Equally improbable, given the

propensity toward disunity and even mutual hostility of the independent Greek city-states, was the coalition of Greek states—although not all of Greece—united to repel the common foe.

The kingdom of Persia had originally taken shape when Cyrus (ruled 560–530 B.C.) established himself as its first king by overthrowing the monarchy of the Medes. The Median kingdom, centered in what is today northern Iran, had emerged in the late eighth century, and its army had joined that of Babylonia in destroying the Assyrian kingdom in 612 B.C. Median power had then been extended as far as the border of Lydia in central Anatolia. The languages of the Medes and the Persians descended from Indo-European, and the language of today's Iran is a descendant of ancient Persian. By taking over Lydia in 546 B.C., Cyrus also acquired dominion over the Greek city-states on the western coast of Anatolia that the Lydian king Croesus had previously subdued. This expansion of Persian power set the stage for the great conflict that erupted in the early fifth century between Persia and the coalition of Greek city-states.

By the reign of Darius I (ruled 522–486 B.C.), the Persian kingdom, whose ancestral heart lay in southern Iran east of Mesopotamia, covered a vast territory stretching east-west from modern Afghanistan to Turkey, and north-south from inside the southern border of the former Soviet Union to Egypt and the Indian Ocean. Its heterogeneous population numbered in the millions. The empire took its administrative structure from Assyrian precedents, and its satraps ruled enormous territories with little, if any, direct interference from the king. Their duties were to keep order, enroll troops when needed, and send revenues to the royal treasury. From the many different subject peoples of the kingdom, the Persian kings exacted taxes in food, precious metals, and other valuable commodities and demanded levies of soldiers to serve in the royal army.

The revenues of its vast kingdom made the Persian monarchy wealthy beyond comparison. Everything about the king was meant to emphasize his grandeur and superiority to ordinary mortals. His purple robes were more splendid than anyone's; the red carpets spread for him to walk upon could not be trod on by anyone else; his servants held their hands before their mouths in his presence to muffle their breath so that he would not have to breathe the same air as they; in the sculpture adorning his palace, he was depicted as larger than any other human being. To display his concern for his loyal subjects, as well as the gargantuan scale of his resources, the king provided meals for some fifteen thousand nobles, courtiers, and other followers every day, although he himself ate hidden from the view of his guests. The Greeks, in awe of the Persian monarch's power and lavishness, referred to him as "The Great King."



Map 5. The Persian Wars

The Persian kings did not, however, regard themselves as gods, but rather as the agents of the supreme god of Persian religion, Ahura Mazda. Persian religion, based on the teachings of the prophet Zoroaster, was dualistic, conceptualizing the world as the arena for a constant battle between good and evil. Unlike other peoples of the ancient Near East and the Greeks, the Persians shunned animal sacrifice. Fire, kindled on special altars, formed an important part of their religious rituals. The religion of ancient Persia survives in the modern world as Zoroastrianism, whose adherents have preserved the central role of fire in its practice. Despite their autocratic rule, the ancient Persian kings usually did not interfere with the religious practices or everyday customs of their subjects.

The Outbreak of Hostilities

The most famous series of wars in ancient Greek history—the so-called Persian Wars, which took place in the 490s and in 480–479 B.C.—broke out with a revolt of the Greek city-states of Ionia (a region on the western coast of Anatolia) against Persian rule. The Ionian Greeks had originally lost their independence not to the Persians but to the Lydian kingdom, which overpowered them during the reign of King Croesus (ruled c. 560–546). Buoyed by this success and his legendary riches, Croesus next tried to conquer territory in Anatolia that had previously been in the Median kingdom. Before initiating a campaign, he had requested advice from Apollo's oracle at Delphi about the advisability of attacking a region that the new Persian monarchy was now claiming. The oracle gave the famous response that if Croesus attacked the Persians, he would destroy a great kingdom. Encouraged, Croesus sent his army eastward in 546 B.C., but he was defeated and lost his territory, including Ionia, to Cyrus, the Persian king. When Cyrus later allowed Croesus to complain to the Delphic oracle that its advice had been disastrously wrong, the oracle testily replied that, if Croesus had been truly wise, he would have asked a second question: Whose kingdom was he going to destroy, his enemy's or his own?

By 499 B.C., local factional strife among the Ionian Greeks led to revolt against the tyrannies that the Persian kings had installed after taking over the area, in keeping with their policy of supporting local tyrants on whom they relied to maintain order in conquered Greek city-states. The Ionian rebels sent representatives to mainland Greece seeking support in their effort to throw off Persian control. The Spartan king, Cleomenes, ruled out any chance of help from his city-state after he saw the map that the Ionians had brought and learned that an attack on the Persian capital (in modern Iran) would entail a march of three months inland from the Ionian coast. He, like the other Spartans and most Greeks in general, had previ-

ously had no idea of the geography and dimensions of the Near East. The men of the Athenian assembly, in contrast to the Spartan leaders, voted to join the city-state of Eretria on the neighboring island of Euboea in sending military aid to the Ionian revolt. Their force proceeded as far as Sardis, Croesus's old capital and now a Persian headquarters. After burning Sardis to the ground, including a famous sanctuary, the Athenians and Eretrians returned home when a Persian counterattack caused the Ionian allies to lose their coordination. Subsequent campaigns by the Persian king's commanders crushed the Ionian rebels entirely by 494 B.C. King Darius then sent his general Mardonius to reorganize Ionia, where some democratic regimes were now permitted in place of the unpopular tyrannies.

King Darius was doubly furious when he learned that the Athenians had aided the Ionian revolt: not only had they dared attack his kingdom, but they had done so after having indicated their submission to him by offering the tokens of earth and water. Insignificant though the Greeks were in his eyes, he vowed to avenge their disloyalty as a matter of justice, if not of grand strategy. The Greeks later claimed that, to keep himself from forgetting his vow in the press of his many other concerns as the ruler of a huge kingdom, Darius ordered one of his slaves to say to him three times at every meal, "Sire, remember the Athenians" (Herodotus, *History* 5.105). In 490 B.C. Darius dispatched a flotilla of ships carrying troops to punish the misguided Greeks. This force burned Eretria and landed on the northeastern coast of Attica near a village called Marathon. The Persians brought with them the elderly Hippias, exiled son of Pisistratus, expecting to reinstall him as tyrant of Athens under their sway. Since the Persian troops outnumbered the citizen militia of Athenian hoplites, the Athenians asked the Spartans and other Greek city-states for military help. The Athenian courier dispatched to Sparta became famous because he ran the hundred and forty miles from Athens to Sparta in less than two days. But by the time the battle of Marathon took place, the only troops to arrive were a contingent from the small city-state of Plataea in Boeotia, the region just north of Athenian territory.

Everyone expected the Persians to win. The Greek soldiers, who had never seen Persians before, grew afraid just gazing at their (to Greek eyes) frighteningly outlandish outfits. Moreover, the Persian troops greatly outnumbered the Athenian and Plataean contingents. The Athenian commanders—the board of ten generals elected each year as the civil and military leaders of Athens—felt enormous pressure to act because they feared that the disparity in forces might induce the assembly to surrender rather than fight or that the oligarchic sympathizers in the city might try to strike a treacherous deal with the Persians. They therefore prepared for an attack on the wider line of the enemy by thinning out the center of their own line

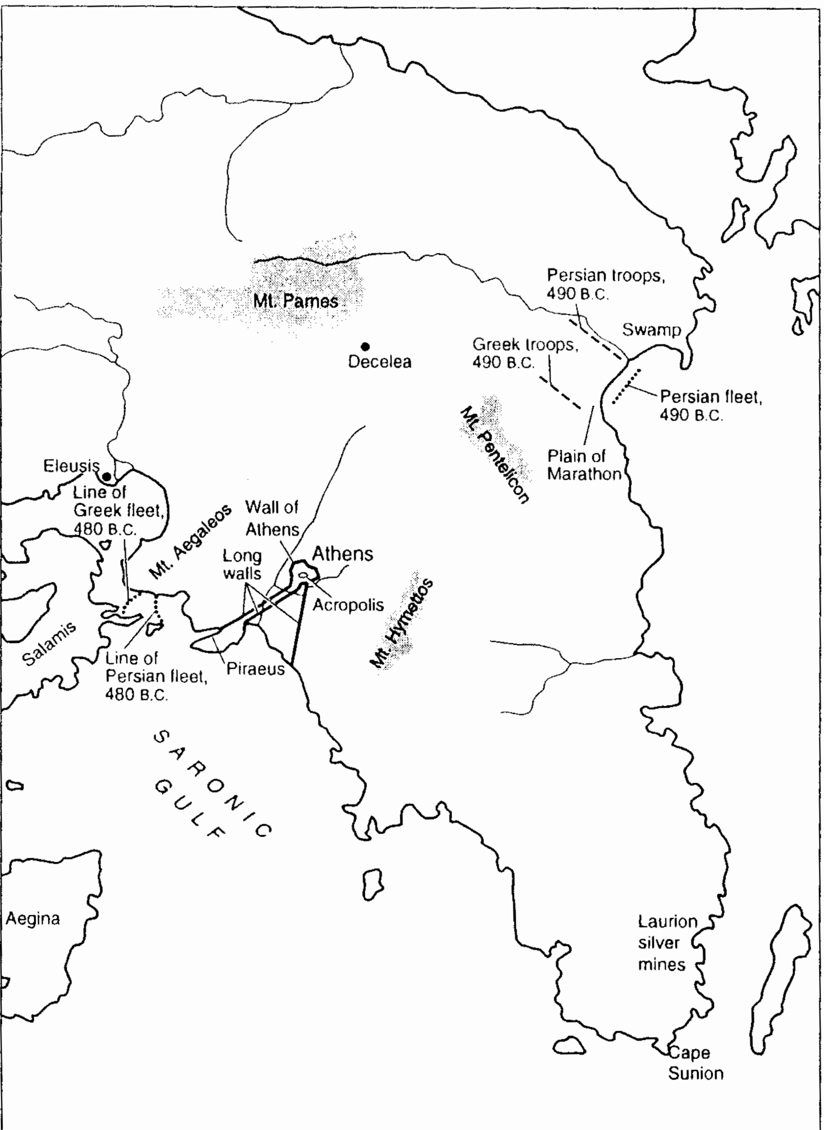
of soldiers from the citizen militia while putting more men on the wings. Carefully planning their tactics to minimize the time their soldiers would be exposed to the fire of Persian archers, the generals, led by Miltiades (c. 550–489 B.C.), sent their hoplites against the Persian line at a dead run. The Greek hoplites clanked across the Marathon plain in their metal armor under a hail of arrows. Once engaged in hand-to-hand combat with the Persians, the Greek infantrymen benefited from their superior armor and longer weapons. In a furious struggle the strengthened wings of the Greek army defeated the Persians opposite them and then turned inward to crush the Persian center from the flanks. They then drove the Persians back into a swamp where any invaders unable to escape to their ships could be picked off one by one.

The Athenian army hurried the more than twenty miles from Marathon to Athens to guard the city against a naval attack by the Persian fleet. Today's long foot races called marathons commemorate in their name and distance this famous trek in 490 B.C. When the Persians sailed home without taking Athens, the Athenians (at least those who favored democracy) rejoiced in disbelief. The Persians, whom they had feared as invincible, had retreated. For decades afterwards, the greatest honor an Athenian man could claim was to say he had been a "Marathon fighter."

The symbolic importance of the battle of Marathon far outweighed its military significance. The defeat of his punitive expedition enraged Darius because it insulted his prestige, not because it represented any threat to the security of his kingdom. The ordinary Athenian men who made up the city-state's army, on the other hand, had dramatically demonstrated their commitment to preserving their freedom by refusing to capitulate to an enemy whose reputation for power and wealth had made a disastrous Athenian defeat appear certain. The unexpected victory at Marathon gave an unparalleled boost to Athenian self-confidence, and the city-state's soldiers and leaders thereafter always boasted that they had stood fast before the feared barbarians even though the Spartans had not come in time to help them.

Full-scale Invasion

This newly won confidence helped steel the population of Athens to join in the resistance to the gigantic Persian invasion of Greece that arrived in 480 B.C. Darius had vowed the invasion as revenge for the defeat at Marathon, but it took so long to marshal forces from all over the far-flung Persian kingdom that he died before it could be launched. His son, Xerxes I (ruled 486–465), therefore led the massive invasion force of infantry and ships against the Greek mainland. So huge was Xerxes' army, the Greeks later claimed, that it required seven days and seven nights of continuous march-



Plan 1. Attica Showing Battle of Marathon (490 B.C.) and Battle of Salamis (480 B.C.)

ing to cross the Hellespont, the narrow passage of sea between Anatolia and mainland Greece, on a temporary bridge lashed together from boats and pontoons. Xerxes expected the Greek states simply to surrender without a fight once they realized the size of his forces. The city-states in northern and central Greece did just that because their location placed them directly in the line of the invading Persian forces, while the small size of their populations left them without any hope of effective defense. The important Boeotian city-state of Thebes, about forty miles north of Athens, also supported the Persian invasion, probably hoping to gain an advantage over its Athenian neighbors in the aftermath of the expected Persian victory. Thebes and Athens had previously become hostile to one another about 519 B.C. when Plataea successfully sought Athenian protection from Theban dominance.

Thirty-one Greek states, however, most of them located in southern Greece, formed a military coalition to fight the Persian invasion, and they chose Sparta as leader because it fielded Greece's most formidable hoplite army. The coalition sought aid from Gelon, the tyrant of Syracuse, the most powerful Greek city-state on Sicily. The appeal failed, however, when Gelon demanded command of the Greek forces in return for his assistance, a price the Spartan and Athenian leaders were unwilling to meet. In this same period Gelon was engaged in a struggle with Carthage, a powerful Phoenician city on the coast of North Africa, over territory in Sicily, and in 480 his forces defeated a massive Carthaginian expedition in battle at Himera, on the island's northern coast. It is possible that the Carthaginian expedition to Sicily and the Persian invasion of mainland Greece were purposely coordinated to embroil the Greek world simultaneously in a two-front war in the west and the east.

The Spartans showed their courage when three hundred of their men led by Leonidas, along with allies, held off Xerxes' huge army for several days at the narrow pass called Thermopylae ("warm gates") on the eastern coast of central Greece. Xerxes was flabbergasted that this paltry force did not immediately retreat when confronted with his magnificent force. The Spartan troops characteristically refused to be intimidated. When one of Xerxes' scouts was sent ahead to observe the situation at the pass, he reported that the Spartans were standing casually in front of their fortification, leisurely combing their long hair. The Persians were astonished at this behavior, but it was in fact customary for Spartan soldiers to fix their hair as a mark of pride before proceeding into battle. Their defiant attitude was summed up by the reputed response of a Spartan hoplite to the remark that the Persian archers were so numerous that their arrows darkened the sky in battle. "That's good news," said the Spartan, "we will get to fight in the shade" (Herodotus, *History* 7.226). The pass was so narrow that the Per-

sians could not employ their superior numbers to overwhelm the Greek defenders, who were more skilled at close-in fighting. Only when a local Greek, hoping for a reward from the Persian king, revealed to him a secret route around the pass was his army able to massacre its defenders by attacking them from the front and the rear simultaneously. The Persian army then continued its march southward into Greece.

The Athenians soon proved their mettle. Rather than surrender when Xerxes arrived in Attica with his army, they abandoned their city for him to sack. Women, children, and noncombatants packed up their belongings as best they could and evacuated to the northeast coast of the Peloponnese. The Athenian commander Themistocles (c. 528–462), purposely spreading misinformation in his characteristically shrewd manner, maneuvered the other, less aggressive Greek leaders into facing the larger Persian navy in a sea battle in the narrow channel between the island of Salamis and the west coast of Attica. Athens was able to supply the largest contingent to the Greek navy at Salamis because the assembly had been financing the construction of warships ever since a rich strike of silver had been made in Attica in 483 B.C. The proceeds from the silver mines went to the state, and, at the urging of Themistocles, the assembly had voted to use the financial windfall to build a navy for defense, rather than to disburse the money to individual citizens. As at Thermopylae, the Greeks in the battle of Salamis in 480 B.C. used their country's topography to their advantage. The narrowness of the channel prevented the Persians from using all their forces at once and minimized the advantage of their ships' greater maneuverability, while the heavier Greek ships could employ their underwater rams to sink the less sturdy Persian craft. When Xerxes observed that the most energetic of his naval commanders appeared to be the one woman among them, Artemisia, the ruler of Caria (today the southwest corner of Turkey), he reportedly remarked, "My men have become women, and my women, men" (Herodotus, *History* 8.88).

The Greek victory at Salamis in 480 B.C. induced Xerxes to return to Persia, but he left behind an enormous infantry force under his best general, Mardonius, and an offer for the Athenians: If they capitulated, they would remain unharmed and become the king's overlords over the other Greeks. The assembly refused, the population evacuated again, and Mardonius wrecked Athens for the second time in as many years. In 479 B.C., the Greek infantry headed by the Spartans under the command of a royal son named Pausanias (c. 520–470 B.C.) outfought the Persian infantry at the battle of Plataea in Boeotia, while a Greek fleet caught the Persian navy napping at Mycale in Ionia. The coalition of Greek city-states had thus done the astonishing: they had protected their homeland and their independence from the strongest power in the world.

The Greeks' superior armor and weapons and adroit use of topography to counterbalance their enemy's greater numbers help to explain their victories on the military level. What is truly remarkable about the Persian Wars, however, is the decision of the citizen militias of the thirty-one Greek city-states to fight in the first place. They could easily have surrendered and agreed to become Persian subjects to save themselves. Instead, these Greek warriors chose to strive together against apparently overwhelming odds. Their courage found support in the encouragement to fight offered by noncombatants in their communities, such as the women of Corinth, who as a group offered public prayers to the goddess Aphrodite for the Greek cause. Since the Greek forces included not only the wealthiest men and hoplites but also thousands of poorer men, who rowed the warships, the effort against the Persians cut across social and economic divisions. The Greek decision to fight the Persian Wars demonstrated courage inspired by a deep devotion to the ideal of political freedom, which had emerged in the preceding Archaic Age.

The Establishment of the Athenian Empire

The struggle against the Persian invasion had occasioned a rare interval of interstate cooperation in ancient Greek history. The two most powerful city-states, Athens and Sparta, had put aside their mutual suspicions stemming from their clash at the time of the reforms of Cleisthenes to share the leadership of the united Greek military forces. Their attempt to continue this cooperation after the repulse of the Persians, however, ended in failure, despite the lobbying of pro-Spartan Athenians who believed that the two city-states should be partners rather than rivals. Out of this failure arose the so-called Athenian Empire, a label invented to point out the harsh dominance Athens came to exercise over numerous other Greek states in an alliance that had originated as a voluntary coalition against Persia.

Following its victories in 479 B.C., the Greek coalition decided to continue as a naval alliance aimed at driving out the Persian outposts that still existed in far northern Greece and western Anatolia, especially Ionia. The Spartan Pausanias, the victor of the battle of Plataea, was chosen to lead the first expedition in 478. The Greek forces under his command soon became enraged by his arrogant and violent behavior toward both his allies and local Greek citizens in Anatolia, especially women. This kind of outrageous conduct was to prove common in the future for Spartan men in positions of power when away from home. Their regimented training in Sparta apparently left them ill prepared to operate humanely and effectively once they had escaped from the constraints imposed by their way of life at home, where they were always under the scrutiny of one another.

By 477 B.C., the Athenian leader Aristides (c. 525–465 B.C.) had successfully persuaded the other Greeks to request Athenian leadership of the alliance against the Persians. The leaders at Sparta were happy to cede their position at the head of the alliance because, in the words of the Athenian historian Thucydides (c. 460–400 B.C.), "they were afraid any other commanders they sent abroad would be corrupted, as Pausanias had been, and they were glad to be relieved of the burden of fighting the Persians . . . . Besides, at the time they still thought of the Athenians as friendly allies" (*History of the Peloponnesian War* 1.95). Sparta's ongoing need to keep its army at home most of the time to guard against helot revolts also made prolonged overseas operations difficult to maintain.

The Greek alliance against Persia now took on a permanent organizational structure under Athenian leadership. Member states swore a solemn oath never to desert the coalition. The members were predominantly located in northern Greece, on the islands of the Aegean Sea, and along the western coast of Anatolia—that is, in the areas most exposed to Persian attack. Most of the independent city-states of the Peloponnese, on the other hand, remained in their long-standing alliance with the Spartans, which had been in existence since well before the Persian Wars. Thus, Athens and Sparta each now dominated a separate coalition of allies. Sparta and its allies, whose coalition modern historians refer to as the Peloponnesian League, had an assembly to set policy, but no action could be taken unless the Spartan leaders agreed to it. The alliance headed by Athens also had an assembly of representatives to make policy. Members of this alliance were in theory supposed to make decisions in common, but in practice Athens was in charge.

The special arrangements made to finance the Athenian-led alliance's naval operations promoted Athenian domination. Aristides set the different levels of dues the various member states were to pay each year, based on their size and prosperity. Larger member states were to supply entire warships complete with crews and their pay; smaller states could share the cost of a ship or simply contribute cash, which would be pooled with others' dues to pay for ships and crews. The warship of the time was a narrow vessel built for speed called a trireme, a name derived from its having three stacked banks of oarsmen on each side for propulsion in battle. One hundred and seventy rowers were needed to propel a trireme, which fought by ramming enemy ships with a metal-clad ram attached to the bow. Triremes also usually carried a complement of ten hoplite warriors and four archers on their decks to engage the enemy crews in combat when the ships became entangled. Officers and other crew brought the total of men on board to two hundred. The alliance's funds were kept on the Aegean island of Delos,

in the temple of Apollo to whom the whole island was sacred, and consequently the alliance is today customarily referred to as the Delian League.

Over time, more and more of the members of the Delian League paid their dues in cash rather than by going to the trouble of furnishing warships. Most members of the alliance preferred this option because it was beyond their capacities to build ships as specialized as triremes and to train crews in the intricate teamwork required to work triple banks of oars. Athens, far larger than most of the allies, had the shipyards and skilled workers to build triremes in large numbers, as well as a large population of men eager to earn pay as rowers. Therefore, Athens built and manned most of the alliance's warships, using the dues of allies to supplement its own contribution. The Athenian men serving as rowers on these warships came from the poorest social class, that of the laborers (thetes), and their essential contribution to the navy earned them not only money but also additional political importance in Athenian democracy as naval strength increasingly became the city-state's principal source of military power. Athens continued to be able to muster larger numbers of hoplite infantry than many smaller city-states, but over time its fleet became its most powerful force.

Since most allies eventually lacked warships of their own, members of the Delian League had no effective recourse if they disagreed with decisions made for the league as a whole under Athenian leadership. By dispatching the superior Athenian fleet to compel discontented allies to adhere to league policy and to continue paying their annual dues, the men of the Athenian assembly came to exercise the dominant power. The modern reference to allied dues as "tribute" is meant to indicate the compulsory nature of these payments. As Thucydides observed, rebellious allies "lost their independence," making the Athenians as the league's leaders "no longer as popular as they used to be" (*History of the Peloponnesian War* 1.98–99).

The most egregious instance of Athenian compulsion of a reluctant ally was the case of the city-state of the island of Thasos in the northern Aegean Sea. Thasos in 465 B.C. unilaterally withdrew from the Delian League after a dispute with Athens over control of gold mines on the neighboring mainland. To compel the Thasians to keep their sworn agreement to stay in the league, the Athenians led allied forces against them in a protracted siege, which ended in 463 B.C. with the island's surrender. As punishment, the league forced Thasos to pull down its defensive walls, give up its navy, and pay enormous tribute and fines.

The Delian League did accomplish its principal strategic goal: within twenty years after the battle of Salamis, league forces had expelled almost all the Persian garrisons that had continued to hold out in some city-states

along the northeastern Aegean coast and had driven the Persian fleet from the Aegean Sea, ending the direct Persian military threat to Greece for the next fifty years. Athens meanwhile grew stronger from its share of the spoils captured from Persian outposts and the tribute paid by its members. By the middle of the fifth century B.C., league members' annual tribute alone totaled the equivalent of perhaps $200 million in contemporary terms (assuming $80 as the average daily pay of an ordinary worker today). For a state the size of Athens (around thirty to forty thousand adult male citizens), this annual income meant general prosperity.

The male citizens meeting in the assembly decided how to spend the city-state's income. Rich and poor alike had a self-interested stake in keeping the fleet active and the allies paying for it. Well-heeled leaders such as Cimon (c. 510–450), the son of Miltiades, the victor of Marathon, enhanced their prestige by commanding successful league campaigns and spending their share of the spoils on benefactions to Athens. Cimon, for example, reportedly paid for the foundations of the massive defensive walls that were eventually to connect the city's urban core with its harbor several miles away. Such financial contributions to the common good were expected of wealthy and prominent men. Political parties did not exist in ancient Athens, and political leaders formed informal circles of friends and followers to support their ambitions. Disputes among these ambitious leaders often stemmed more from competition for election to the highest public offices of the city-state and influence in the assembly than from disagreements over pure matters of policy. Arguments tended to concern how Athens should exercise its growing power internationally, not whether it should refrain from interfering with the affairs of the other members of the Delian League in the pursuit of Athenian interests. The numerous Athenian men of lesser means who rowed the Delian League's ships came to depend on the income they earned on league expeditions. Since these men represented the numerically largest group in the male population eligible to vote in the assembly of Athens, where decisions were rendered by majority vote, they could make certain that assembly votes were in their interest. If the interests of the allies did not coincide with theirs, the allies were given no choice but to acquiesce to official Athenian opinion concerning league policy. In this way, alliance was transformed into empire, despite Athenian support of democratic governments in some allied city-states previously ruled by oligarchies. From the Athenian point of view, this transformation was justified because it kept the alliance strong enough to carry out the overall mission of the Delian League: protecting Greece from the Persians.

The Democratic Reform of the Athenian System of Justice

Poorer men of the thete class powered the Athenian fleet, and in the decades following the Persian Wars, both their military and their political importance grew. As these poorer citizens came to recognize that they provided the foundation of Athenian security and prosperity, they apparently felt the time had come to make the administration of justice at Athens just as democratic as the process of making policy and passing laws in the assembly, which was open to all male citizens over eighteen years old. Although at this time the assembly could serve as a court of appeals, most judicial verdicts were rendered by the nine annual magistrates of the city-state, the archons, and the Areopagus council of ex-archons. The nine archons had been chosen by lot rather than by election since 487 B.C., thus making access to those offices a matter of random chance and not liable to domination by wealthy men from the highest Solonian income class, who could afford expensive electoral campaigns. Filling public offices by lot was felt to be democratic because it gave an equal chance to all eligible contestants and was thought to be overseen by the gods. But even democratically selected magistrates were susceptible to corruption, as were the members of the Areopagus. A different judicial system was needed if those men who decided cases were to be insulated from pressure by socially prominent people and from bribery by those rich enough to buy a favorable verdict. That laws were enacted democratically meant little if they were not applied fairly and honestly.

The final impetus to a reform of the judicial system came from a crisis in foreign affairs. The crisis had its roots in a tremendous earthquake near Sparta in 465 B.C. It killed so many Spartans that the helots of Messenia, the Greeks in the western Peloponnese who had long ago been subjugated by the Spartans, instigated a massive revolt against their weakened masters. By 462 B.C. the revolt had become so serious that the Spartans appealed to Athens for military help, despite the chill that had fallen over their relations since the days of their cooperation against the Persians. The tension between the former allies had arisen because rebellious members of the Delian League had received at least moral support from the leaders at Sparta, who felt that Athens was growing powerful enough someday to threaten Spartan interests in the Peloponnese. Cimon, the hero of the Delian League's campaigns, marshaled all his prestige to persuade a reluctant Athenian assembly to send hoplites to help the Spartans in 462 B.C. against a serious revolt of the helots. Cimon, like many among the Athenian elite, had always been an admirer of the Spartans, and he was renowned for registering his opposition to proposals in the assembly by saying, "But that is not what the Spartans would do" (Plutarch, *Cimon* 16). His Spartan friends let him down, however, by soon changing their minds and sending him and his army home. Spar-

tan leaders feared that the democratically inclined Athenian soldiers might decide to help the helots escape from Spartan domination.

This humiliating rejection of their help outraged the Athenian assembly and provoked hostile relations between the two states. The disgrace it brought to Cimon carried over to the elite in general, thereby establishing a political climate ripe for further democratic reforms. A man named Ephialtes promptly seized the moment in 461 B.C. and convinced the assembly to pass measures limiting the power of the Areopagus. The details are obscure, but it appears that up to this time the Areopagus council had held authority to judge accusations of misconduct brought against magistrates, a competence referred to as "guardianship of the laws." The Areopagus was constituted by ex-magistrates, who would presumably have been on generally good terms with current magistrates, the very ones whose conduct they were responsible for punishing if necessary. There existed, therefore, at least the appearance of a conflict of interest, and instances of illegal conduct by magistrates being whitewashed or excused by the Areopagus no doubt had occurred. The reforms apparently removed the guardianship of the laws from the Areopagus, although the council remained the court for premeditated murder and wounding, arson, and certain offenses against the religious cults of the city-state.

The most significant of the Ephialtic reforms was the establishment of a judicial system of courts manned by juries of male citizens over thirty years old, chosen by lot to serve for a year. Previously, judicial power had belonged primarily to the archons and the Areopagus council of ex-archons, but now that power was largely transferred to the jurors, a randomly chosen cross-section of the male citizen body, six thousand men in all, who were distributed into individual juries as needed to handle the case load. Under this new judicial system the magistrates were still entitled to render verdicts concerning minor offenses, the Areopagus had its few special judicial competencies, and the council and assembly could take action in certain cases involving the public interest, but the citizen-manned courts were otherwise given an extraordinary jurisdiction. Their juries in practice defined the most fundamental principles of Athenian public life because they interpreted the law by deciding on their own how it should be applied in each and every case. There were no judges to instruct the jurors and usually no prosecutors or defense lawyers to harangue them, although a citizen could be appointed to speak for the prosecution when a magistrate was on trial for misconduct in office or when the case involved the public interest. In most cases citizens brought the charges, and the only government official in court was a magistrate to keep fights from breaking out during the trial. All trials were concluded in a single day, and jurors made up their own minds after hearing

speeches by the persons involved. They swore an oath to pay attention and judge fairly, but they were the sole judges of their own conduct as jurors and did not have to undergo a public scrutiny of their actions at the end of their term of service, as other officials in Athenian democracy regularly did. Improperly influencing the outcome of cases by bribing jurors was made difficult because juries were so large, numbering from several hundred to several thousand. Nevertheless, jury tampering apparently was a worry, because in the early fourth century the system was revised to assign jurors to cases by lot and not until the day of the trial.

Since few, if any, criminal cases could be decided by forensic evidence of the kind used in modern trials, such as blood tests and fingerprints, persuasive speech was the most important element in the legal proceedings. The accuser and the accused both had to speak for themselves in Athenian court, although they might pay someone else to compose the speech that they would deliver and frequently asked others to speak in support of their arguments and as witnesses to their good character. The characters and civic reputations of defendants and plaintiffs were therefore always relevant, and jurors expected to hear about a man's background and his conduct as citizen as part of the information necessary to discover where truth lay. A majority vote of the jurors ruled. No higher court existed to overrule their decisions, and there was no appeal from their verdicts. The power of the court system after Ephialtes epitomized the power of Athenian democracy in action. As a trial-happy juror boasts in Aristophanes' comic play about the Athenian judicial system, *The Wasps*, produced in 422 B.C., "our power in court is no less than royal!" (548–549).

The structure of the new court system reflected underlying principles of what scholars today call the "radical" democracy of Athens in the mid-fifth century B.C. This system involved widespread participation by a cross-section of male citizens, selection of the participants at random for most public offices, elaborate precautions to prevent corruption, equal protection under the law for individual citizens regardless of wealth, and the authority of the majority over any minority or individual when the vital interests of the state were at stake. This last principle appears most dramatically in the official procedure for exiling a man from Athens for ten years, called ostracism. Every year the assembly voted on whether to go through this procedure, which gets its name from the word *ostraca*, meaning pieces of broken pottery, which were inscribed with names of candidates for expulsion and used as ballots. If the vote on whether to hold an ostracism in a particular year was affirmative, all male citizens on a predetermined day could cast a ballot on which they had scratched the name of the man they thought should be exiled. If six thousand ballots were cast, whichever man

was named on the greatest number was compelled to go live outside the borders of Attica for ten years. He suffered no other penalty, and his family and property could remain behind undisturbed. Ostracism was emphatically not a criminal penalty, and men returning from their period of exile enjoyed undiminished rights as citizens.

Ostracism existed because it helped protect the Athenian system from real or perceived threats. At one level, it provided a way of removing a citizen who seemed extremely dangerous to democracy because he was totally dominating the political scene, whether because he was simply too popular and thus a potential tyrant by popular demand or whether he was genuinely subversive. This point is made by a famous anecdote concerning the Aristides who set the original level of dues for the members of the Delian League. Aristides had the nickname "The Just" because he was reputed to be so fair-minded. On the day of the balloting for an ostracism, an illiterate man from the countryside handed Aristides a potsherd, asking him to scratch the name of the man's choice for ostracism on it. "Certainly," said Aristides. " Which name shall I write?" "Aristides," replied the countryman. "Very well," remarked Aristides as he proceeded to inscribe his own name. "But tell me, why do you want to ostracize Aristides? What has he done to you?" "Oh, nothing; I don't even know him," sputtered the man. "I'm just sick and tired of hearing everybody refer to him as 'The Just' " (Plutarch, *Aristides* 7).

In most cases, ostracism served to identify a prominent man who could be made to take the blame for a failed policy that the assembly had originally approved and that was causing extreme political turmoil. Cimon, for example, was ostracized after the disastrous attempt to cooperate with Sparta during the helot revolt of the late 460s. There is no evidence that ostracism was used frivolously, despite the story about Aristides, and probably no more than several dozen men were actually ostracized before the practice fell into disuse after about 416 B.C., when two prominent politicians colluded to have a nonentity ostracized instead of one of themselves. Ostracism is significant for understanding Athenian democracy because it symbolizes the principle that the interest of the group must prevail over that of the individual citizen when the freedom of the group and the freedom of the individual come into conflict in desperate and dangerous cases. Indeed, the first ostracisms had taken place in the 480s B.C., after the ex-tyrant Hippias had appeared with the Persians at Marathon in 490 and some feared he would again become tyrant over the community.

Although Aristides was indeed ostracized in 482 and recalled in 480 to fight the Persians, the anecdote about his encounter with the illiterate citizen sounds apocryphal. Nevertheless, it makes a valid point: the Athenians

assumed that the right way to protect democracy was always to trust the majority vote of free-born, adult male citizens, without any restrictions on a man's ability to say what he thought was best for democracy. This conviction required making allowances for irresponsible types like the kind of man depicted in the story about Aristides. It rested on the belief that the cumulative political wisdom of the majority of voters would outweigh the eccentricity and irresponsibility of the few.

The Leadership of Pericles

The idea that democracy at Athens was best served by involving a cross-section of the male citizenry received further backing in the 450s B.C. when Pericles (c. 495–429 B.C.), whose mother was the niece of the democratic reformer Cleisthenes and whose father had been a prominent leader, successfully proposed that state revenues be used to pay a daily stipend to men who served on juries, in the council of five hundred established by Cleisthenes, and in other public offices filled by lot. Without this stipend, poorer men would have found it hard to leave their regular work to serve in these time-consuming positions. By contrast, the most influential public officials—the annual board of ten generals who had responsibility both for military and civil affairs, especially public finances—were elected and received no stipends. They were elected by the assembly rather than chosen by lot because their posts required expertise and experience. Nor were they paid, because mainly rich men like Pericles, who had access to the education required to handle this top job and had the free time to fill it, were expected to win election as generals. Generals were compensated by the prestige their office carried. The stipend that other officials and jurors received was not lavish, certainly no more than an ordinary laborer could earn in a day. Nevertheless, the provision of a living allowance enabled poorer Athenians to serve in government. Like Cleisthenes before him, Pericles was a man of privilege who became the most influential leader in the Athens of his era by devising innovations to strengthen the egalitarian tendencies of Athenian democracy.

Pericles and others of his economic status had inherited enough wealth to spend their time in politics without worrying about money, but remuneration for public service was essential for Athenian democracy if it were truly going to be open to the mass of working men. Pericles' proposal for state stipends for jurors made him overwhelmingly popular with ordinary citizens. Consequently, beginning in the 450s B.C., he was able to introduce dramatic changes in both Athenian foreign and domestic policy. On the latter front, for instance, Pericles sponsored a law in 451 stating that henceforth citizenship would be conferred only on children whose mother and father both were Athenians. Previously, the offspring of Athenian men who

married non-Athenian women had been granted citizenship. As Pericles' own maternal grandfather had done, wealthy Athenian men in particular had tended to marry rich foreign women. The new law not only solidified the notion of Athenian identity as special and exclusive but also emphatically recognized the privileged status of Athenian women as possessors of citizenship, putting their citizenship on a par with that of men in the crucially important process of establishing the citizenship of new generations of Athenians. Not long after the passage of the citizenship law, a review of the citizenship rolls of Athens was conducted to expel any persons who had claimed citizenship fraudulently. The advantages of citizenship included, for men, the rights to participate in politics and juries, to influence decisions that directly affected their lives, to have equal protection under the law, and to own land and houses in Athenian territory. Citizen women had fewer direct rights because they were excluded from politics, had to have their male legal guardian speak for them in court, and were not legally entitled to make large financial transactions on their own. They did, however, enjoy the fundamental guarantees of citizenship: the ability to control property and to have the protection of the law for their persons and their property. Female and male citizens alike experienced the advantage of belonging to a city-state that was enjoying unparalleled material prosperity and an enhanced sense of communal identity.

The involvement of Pericles in foreign policy in the early 450s is less clear, and we cannot tell how he felt about the massive Athenian intervention in support of a rebel in Egypt trying to overthrow Persian rule there. This expedition, which began perhaps in 460, ended in utter disaster in 454 with the loss of perhaps two hundred ships and their crews, an overwhelming death toll given that each ship had approximately two hundred men on board. Some of these men would have been allies, not Athenians, but the loss of manpower to Athens must have been large in any case. After this catastrophe, the treasury of the Delian League was moved from Delos to Athens, ostensibly to insure its safety from possible Persian retaliation. Whatever the real motive behind this change, it signified the overwhelming dominance that Athens had achieved as leader of the league by this time.

The 450s were a period of intense military activity by Athens and its allies. At the same time that Athenian and Delian League allies were fighting in Egypt, they were also on campaign on the eastern Mediterranean seacoast against Persian interests. In this same decade Pericles supported an aggressive foreign policy against Spartan interests in Greece. Athenian forces were defeated by Peloponnesian forces at the battle of Tanagra in Boeotia in central Greece in 457, but Athenian troops subsequently gained control of that region and neighboring Phocis as well. Victories were won also over the powerful northern Peloponnesian state of Corinth and the island of Aegina. When Cimon, who had returned from ostracism, died in 450 while leading a naval force against the Persians on the island of Cyprus, the assembly finally decided to end military campaigns directed at Persian interests and sent no more fleets to the eastern Mediterranean.

Operations in Greece also failed to secure enduring victory over Sparta's allies in central Greece, and Boeotia and Phocis threw off Athenian control in 447. In the winter of 446–445 B.C. Pericles engineered a peace treaty with Sparta designed to freeze the balance of power in Greece for thirty years and thus preserve Athenian dominance in the Delian League. He was then able to turn his attention to his political rivals at Athens, who were jealous of his influence over the board of ten generals. Pericles' overwhelming political prominence was confirmed in 443 when he managed to have his chief rival, named Thucydides (not the historian), ostracized instead of himself. He was subsequently elected general fifteen years in a row. His ascendancy was challenged, however, after his rashly taking sides in a local political crisis on the island of Samos led to a war with that valuable Delian League ally from 441 to 439 B.C. The war with Samos was not the first break between Athens and its Delian League allies in the period since 450 when action against the Persians—the main goal of the league in its early years after 478—had ceased to be an active part of the league's mission. Strains developed between Athens and several allied city-states that wished to leave the league and end their tribute payments, which were no longer paying for war with Persia. Pericles' position apparently was that the league was indeed fulfilling its primary mission of keeping the allies safe from Persia; that no Persian fleet was to be seen venturing far from its eastern Mediterranean home base was proof that the allies had no cause for complaint. Inscriptions from the 440s in particular testify to the unhappiness of various Athenian allies and to Athenian determination to retain control over its fractious partners in alliance.

When the city-state of Chalcis on the island of Euboea rebelled from the Delian League in 446 B.C., for example, the Athenians soon put down the revolt and forced the Chalcidians to swear to a new set of arrangements. Copies of the arrangements inscribed on stone were then set up in Chalcis and Athens. The differences in the oaths exchanged by the two sides as recorded in this copy of the inscription found at Athens reveal the imperiousness of Athens's dominance of its Greek allies in this period: "The Athenian Council and all the jurors shall swear the oath as follows: 'I shall not deport Chalcidians from Chalcis or lay waste the city or deprive any individual of his rights or sentence him to a punishment of exile or put him in prison or execute him or seize property from anyone without giving him a chance to speak in court without (the agreement of) the People [i.e., the assembly] of

Athens. I shall not cause a vote to be held, without due notice to attend trial, against either the government or any private individual whatever. When an embassy [from Chalcis] arrives [in Athens], I shall see that it has an audience before the Council and People within ten days when I am in charge of the procedure, so far as I am able. These things I shall guarantee to the Chalcidians if they obey the People of Athens.' The Chalcidians shall swear the oath as follows: 'I shall not rebel against the People of Athens either by trickery or by plot of any kind either by word or by action. Nor shall I join someone else in rebellion and if anyone does start a rebellion, I shall denounce him to the Athenians. I shall pay the dues to the Athenians which I persuade them [to assess], and as I shall be the best and truest possible ally to them. And I shall send assistance to the People of Athens and defend them if anyone attacks the People of Athens, and I shall obey the People of Athens' " (*IG*, 3d ed., no. 40).

Pericles in the mid-430s faced an even greater challenge than restive and rebellious allies as relations with Sparta greatly worsened despite the provisions of the peace that had been struck in 446/5. An impasse developed when the Spartans finally threatened war unless the Athenians ceased their interference in the affairs of the Corinthian colonies of Corcyra and Potidaea, but Pericles prevailed upon the assembly to refuse all compromises. His critics claimed he was sticking to his hard line against Sparta and insisting on provoking a war in order to revive his fading popularity by whipping up a jingoistic furor in the assembly. Pericles retorted that no accommodation to Spartan demands was possible because Athenian freedom of action was at stake. By 431 B.C. the thirty-years' peace made in 445 B.C. had been shattered beyond repair. The Peloponnesian War (as modern historians call it) between Athens and its allies and Sparta and its allies thus began in 431; at that point no one could know that its violence would drag on for twenty-seven years.

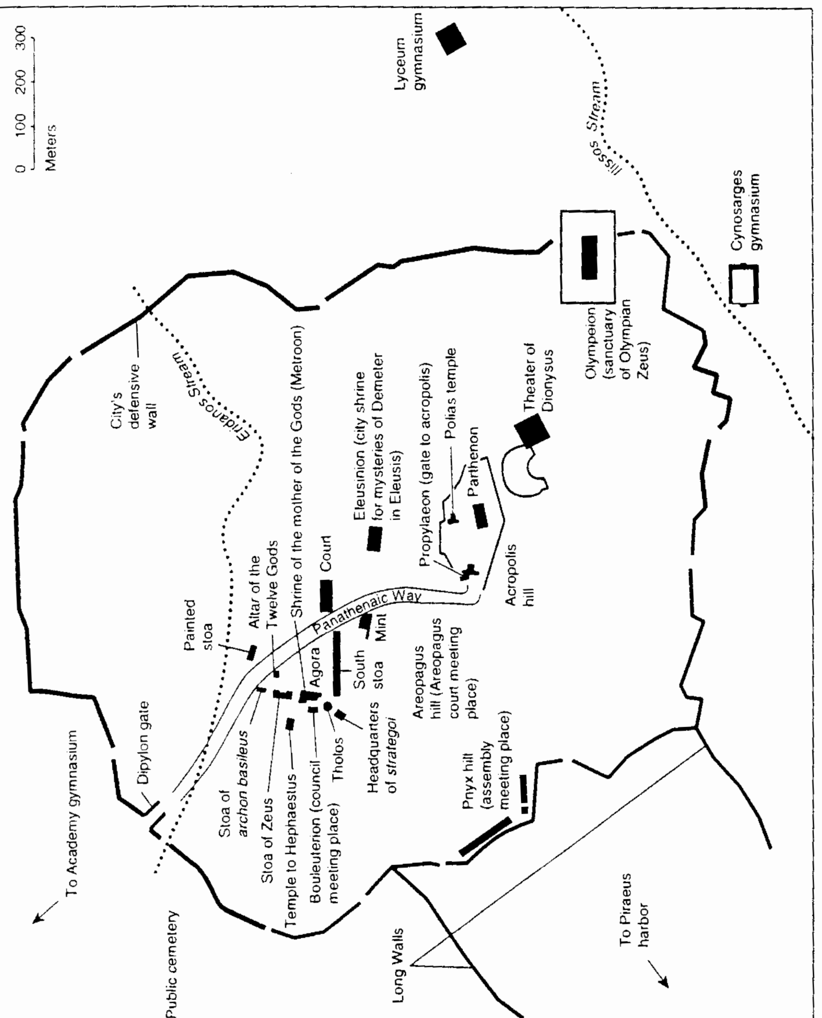
Prosperous Athens

Athens reached the height of its power and prosperity in the decades just before the Peloponnesian War, the period accordingly referred to today as the Golden Age of ancient Athens. Private homes, whether in the city or in the countryside, retained their traditionally modest size even during this period of communal abundance. Farmhouses were usually clustered in villages, while homes in the urban center were wedged tightly against one another along narrow, winding streets. Even the residences of rich people followed the same basic design, which grouped bedrooms, storerooms, work rooms, and dining rooms around the one constant in a Greek house: an open-air courtyard in the center. The courtyard was not open to

the street, however, thus insuring privacy, a prime goal of Greek domestic architecture. Wall paintings or works of art were as yet uncommon as decoration in private homes, with sparse furnishings and simple furniture the rule. Sanitary facilities usually consisted of a pit dug just outside the front door, which was emptied by collectors paid to dump manure outside the city at a distance set by law. Poorer people rented houses or small apartments.

Benefactions donated by the rich provided some public improvements, such as the landscaping with shade trees and running tracks that Cimon paid to have installed in open areas. On the edge of the central market square and gathering spot at the heart of the city, the agora, Cimon's brother-in-law paid for the construction of the renowned building known as the Painted Stoa. Stoas were narrow buildings open along one side, and their purpose was to provide shelter from sun or rain. The crowds of men who came to the agora daily for conversation about politics and local affairs would cluster inside the Painted Stoa, whose walls were decorated with paintings of great moments in Greek history commissioned from the most famous painters of the time, Polygnotus and Mikon. That one of the stoa's paintings portrayed the battle of Marathon in which Cimon's father, Miltiades, had won glory was only appropriate since the building had been donated to the city by the husband of Cimon's sister, probably with financial assistance from Cimon himself. The social values of Athenian democracy called for leaders like Cimon and his brother-in-law to provide such gifts for public use to show their good will toward the city-state and thereby earn increased social eminence as their reward. Wealthy citizens were also expected to fulfill costly liturgies, or public services, such as providing theatrical entertainment at city festivals or fitting out a fully equipped warship and then serving on it as a commander. This liturgical system for wealthy men compensated to a certain extent for the lack of any regular income or property taxes in peacetime after the reign of the tyrant Pisistratus. (A levy on property, the *eisphora*, could be voted for war costs.)

Athens received substantial public revenues from harbor fees, sales taxes, and the tribute of the allies. Buildings paid for by public funds from these sources constituted the most conspicuous architecture in the city of the Classical period of the fifth and fourth centuries. The scale of these public buildings was usually no greater than the size required to fulfill their function, such as the complex of buildings on the agora's western edge in which the council of five hundred held its meetings and the public archives were kept. Since the assembly convened in the open air on a hillside above the agora, it required no building at all except for a speaker's platform. In 447 B.C., however, at Pericles' instigation, a great project be-



Plan 2. Athens near the End of the Fifth Century B.C.

gan atop the Acropolis, the mesa-like promontory at the center of the city, which towered over the agora. Most conspicuous of all were a mammoth gate building with columns straddling the broad entrance to the acropolis at its western end and a new Athena temple, the Parthenon, to house a towering image of the goddess. These buildings alone cost easily more than the equivalent of a billion dollars in modern terms, a phenomenal sum for an ancient Greek city-state. The program was so expensive that the political enemies of Pericles railed at him for squandering public funds. The finances for the program apparently came in part from the tribute paid by the members of the Delian League. Other funds came from the financial reserves of the goddess, whose sanctuaries, like those of the other gods throughout Greece, received both private donations and public support. The new buildings seemed spectacular not only because they were expensive but also because their large scale, decoration, and surrounding open spaces contrasted so vividly with the private architecture of Athens in the fifth century B.C.

Parthenon, the name of the new temple built for Athena on the Acropolis, meant "the house of the virgin goddess." As the patron goddess of Athens, Athena had long had another sanctuary on the acropolis honoring her in her role as Athena Polias ("guardian of the city"). The focus of this earlier shrine was an olive tree regarded as the sacred symbol of the goddess, who in this capacity provided for the agricultural and thus the essential prosperity of the Athenians. The temple in the Athena Polias sanctuary had largely been destroyed by the Persians in the invasion of 480 B.C. For thirty years, the Athenians purposely left the Acropolis in ruins as a memorial to the sacrifice of their homeland in that war. When at Pericles' urging the assembly decided to rebuild the temples on the Acropolis, it conspicuously turned first not to reconstruction of the olive-tree sanctuary but rather to building the Parthenon. This spectacular new temple was to honor Athena in her capacity as a warrior serving as the divine champion of Athenian military power. Inside the Parthenon was placed a gold-and-ivory statue over thirty feet high portraying the goddess in battle armor and holding in her outstretched hand a six-foot statue of the figure of Victory (*Nike* in Greek).

Like all Greek temples, the Parthenon was meant as a house for its divinity, not as a gathering place for worshippers. In its general design, the Parthenon was representative of the standard architecture of Greek temples: a rectangular box with doors on a raised platform, a plan that the Greeks probably derived from the stone temples of Egypt. The box was fenced in by columns all around. The columns were carved in the simple style called Doric, in contrast to the more elaborate Ionic or Corinthian styles that have often been imitated in modern buildings (for example, in the Corinthian-style façade of the Supreme Court Building in Washington, D.C.). Only

priests and priestesses could enter the temple, but public religious ceremonies took place around the altar outside its east end.

The Parthenon was extraordinary in its great size and expense, but it was truly remarkable in the innovation of its refined architecture and elaborate sculptural decoration. Constructed from twenty thousand tons of Attic marble, it stretched nearly 230 feet in length and 100 feet in width, with eight columns across the ends instead of the six normally employed in Doric style, and seventeen instead of thirteen along the sides. These dimensions gave it a massive look conveying an impression of power. Since perfectly rectilinear architecture appears curved to the human eye, subtle curves and inclines were built into the Parthenon to produce an optical illusion of completely straight lines: the columns were given a slight bulge in their middles, the corner columns were installed at a slight incline and closer together, and the platform was made slightly convex. These technical refinements made the Parthenon appear ordered and regular in a way a building built entirely on straight lines would not. By overcoming the distortions of nature, the Parthenon's sophisticated architecture made a confident statement about human ability to construct order out of the entropic disorder of the natural world.

The sculptural decoration of the Parthenon also proclaimed Athenians' confidence about their city-state's relationship with the gods. The Parthenon had sculptured panels along its exterior above the columns and tableaux of sculptures in the triangular spaces (pediments) underneath the roof line at either end of the building. These decorations were part of the Doric style, but the Parthenon also presented a unique sculptural feature. A continuous band of figures was carved in relief around the top of the walls inside the porch formed by the columns along the edges of the building's platform. This sort of continuous frieze was usually put only on Ionic-style buildings. Adding an Ionic frieze to a Doric temple was a startling departure from architectural tradition intended to attract notice to its subject, even though the frieze itself was difficult to see clearly from ground level. The Parthenon's frieze probably depicted the Athenian religious ritual in which a procession of citizens paraded to the Acropolis to present to Athena in her olive-tree sanctuary a new robe woven by specially selected Athenian girls, although it has also been suggested that the frieze refers to the myth of the sacrifice of the daughers of Erechtheus to save the city in a time of crisis. Depicting the procession in motion, like a filmstrip in stone, the frieze showed men riding spirited horses, women walking along carrying sacred implements, and the gods gathering at the head of the parade to observe their human worshippers. As usual in the sculptural decoration on Greek temples, the frieze sparkled with shiny metal attachments serving, for example, as the horsemen's reins and brightly colored paint enlivening the figures and the background.

No other city-state had ever gone beyond the traditional function of temples—glorifying and paying honor to the community's special deities—by adorning a temple with representations of its citizens. The Parthenon frieze made a unique statement about the relationship between Athens and the gods by showing its citizens in the company of the gods, even if the assembled deities carved in the frieze were understood to be separated from and perhaps invisible to the humans in the procession. A temple adorned with pictures of citizens, albeit idealized citizens of perfect physique and beauty, amounted to a claim of special intimacy between the city-state and the gods and a statement of confidence that these honored deities favored the Athenians. Presumably, this claim reflected the Athenian interpretation of their success in helping to turn back the Persians and thus playing their role as the defenders of Greek civilized life, in achieving leadership of a powerful naval alliance, and in controlling, from their silver mines and the allies' tribute, an amount of revenue that made Athens richer than all its neighbors in mainland Greece. The Parthenon, like the rest of the Periclean building program, paid honor to the gods with whom the city-state was identified and expressed the Athenian view that the gods looked favorably on their empire. Their success, the Athenians would have said, proved that the gods were on their side.

Representing the Body

Like the design of the sculpture attached to the outside of the Parthenon, the enormous size and expense of the free-standing figure of Athena placed inside the temple expressed the innovative and confident spirit of Athens in the mid-fifth century B.C. The statue's creator, the Athenian Phidias, gained such fame that he became a close friend of Pericles and was invited by other Greek states to make great statues for their temples, such as the giant seated Zeus for the main temple at Olympia.

Other artists as well as sculptors were experimenting with new techniques and artistic approaches in this period, but free-standing sculpture provides the clearest demonstration of the innovation and variety in the representation of the human body that characterized Greek art in the fifth century. Such sculptures could either be public in the sense of having been paid for with state funds, as was the Parthenon, or private, but they did not serve as pieces of private art in the modern sense. Greeks who ordered statues privately from sculptors had not yet developed the habit of using them to decorate the interior of their homes. Instead, they set them up on public display for a variety of purposes. Privately commissioned statues of

gods could be placed in a sanctuary as a proof of devotion. In the tradition of offering lovely crafted objects to divinities as commemorations of important personal experiences such as economic success or victories in athletic contests, people also donated sculptures of physically beautiful human beings to the sanctuaries of the gods as gifts of honor. Wealthy families would commission statues of their deceased members, especially if they had died young, to be placed above their graves as memorials of their virtue. In every case, private statues were meant to be seen by other people. In this sense, then, private sculpture in the Golden Age served a public function: it broadcast a message to an audience.

Archaic statues had been characterized by a stiff posture imitating the style of standing figures from Egypt. Egyptian sculptors had gone on producing this style unchanged for centuries. Greek artists, on the other hand, had begun to change their style by the time of the Persian Wars, and the fifth century B.C. saw new poses become ever more prevalent in free-standing sculpture, continuing an earlier evolution toward movement visible in the sculpture attached to temples. Human males were still being generally portrayed nude as athletes or warriors, while women were still clothed in fine robes. But their postures and their physiques were evolving toward ever more naturalistic renderings. While Archaic male statues had been made striding forward with their left legs, arms held rigidly at their sides, male statues might now have bent arms or the body's weight on either leg. Their musculature was anatomically correct rather than sketchy and almost impressionistic, as had been the style in the sixth century B.C. Female statues, too, now had more relaxed poses and clothing, which hung in such a way as to hint at the shape of the body underneath instead of disguising it. The faces of Classical sculptures, however, reflected an impassive calm rather than the smiles that had characterized Archaic figures.

Bronze was the preferred material of the sculptors who devised these daring new styles, although marble was also popular. Creating bronze statues, which were cast in molds made from clay models, required a particularly well-equipped workshop with furnaces, tools, and foundry workers skilled in metallurgy. Because sculptors and artists labored with their hands, the wealthy elite regarded them as workers of low social status, and only the most famous ones, like Phidias, could move in high society. Properly prepared bronze had the tensile strength to allow outstretched poses of arms and legs, which could not be done in marble without supports. (Hence the intrusive tree trunks and other such supporting members introduced in the marble copies made in Roman times of Greek statues in bronze. These Roman copies of the sort commonly seen in modern museums are often the only surviving examples of the originals.) The strength and malleability of

bronze allowed innovative sculptors like the Athenian Myron and Polyclitus of Argos to push the development of the free-standing statue of the human form to its physical limits. Myron, for example, sculpted a discus thrower crouched at the top of his backswing, a pose far from the relaxed and serene symmetry of early Archaic statuary. The figure not only assumes an asymmetrical pose but also seems to burst with the tension of the athlete's effort. Polyclitus's renowned statue of a walking man carrying a spear is posed to give a different impression from every angle of viewing and to impart a powerful sensation of motion. The same is true of the famous statue by an unknown sculptor of a female (perhaps the goddess of love, Aphrodite) adjusting her diaphanous robe with one upraised arm. The message these statues conveyed to their ancient audience was one of energy, motion, and asymmetry in delicate balance. Archaic statues impressed a viewer with their appearance of stability; not even a hard shove looked likely to budge them. Statues of the Classical period, by contrast, showed greater range, a variety of poses and impressions. The spirited movement of some of these statues suggests the energy of the times but also the possibility of change and instability that underlies even a Golden Age.

Ancient Greece

From Prehistoric to Hellenistic Times

THOMAS R. MARTIN

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