pocratic medical doctrine apparently made little or no mention of a divine role in sickness and its cures, although various cults in Greek religion, most famously that of the god Asclepius, offered healing to petitioners. Hippocrates' contribution to medicine is remembered today in the oath bearing his name that doctors customarily swear at the beginning of their professional careers.

The impact on ordinary people of the new developments in history and medicine is hard to assess, but their misgivings about the new trends in education, oratory, and philosophy with which Pericles was associated definitely heightened the political tension in Athens in the 430s B.C. These intellectual developments had a wide-ranging effect because the political, intellectual, and religious dimensions of life in ancient Athens were so intricately connected. A person could feel like talking about the city-state's foreign and domestic policies on one occasion, about novel theories of the nature of the universe on another, and on every occasion about whether the gods were angry or pleased with the community. By the late 430s B.C., the Athenians had new reasons to worry about each of these topics.

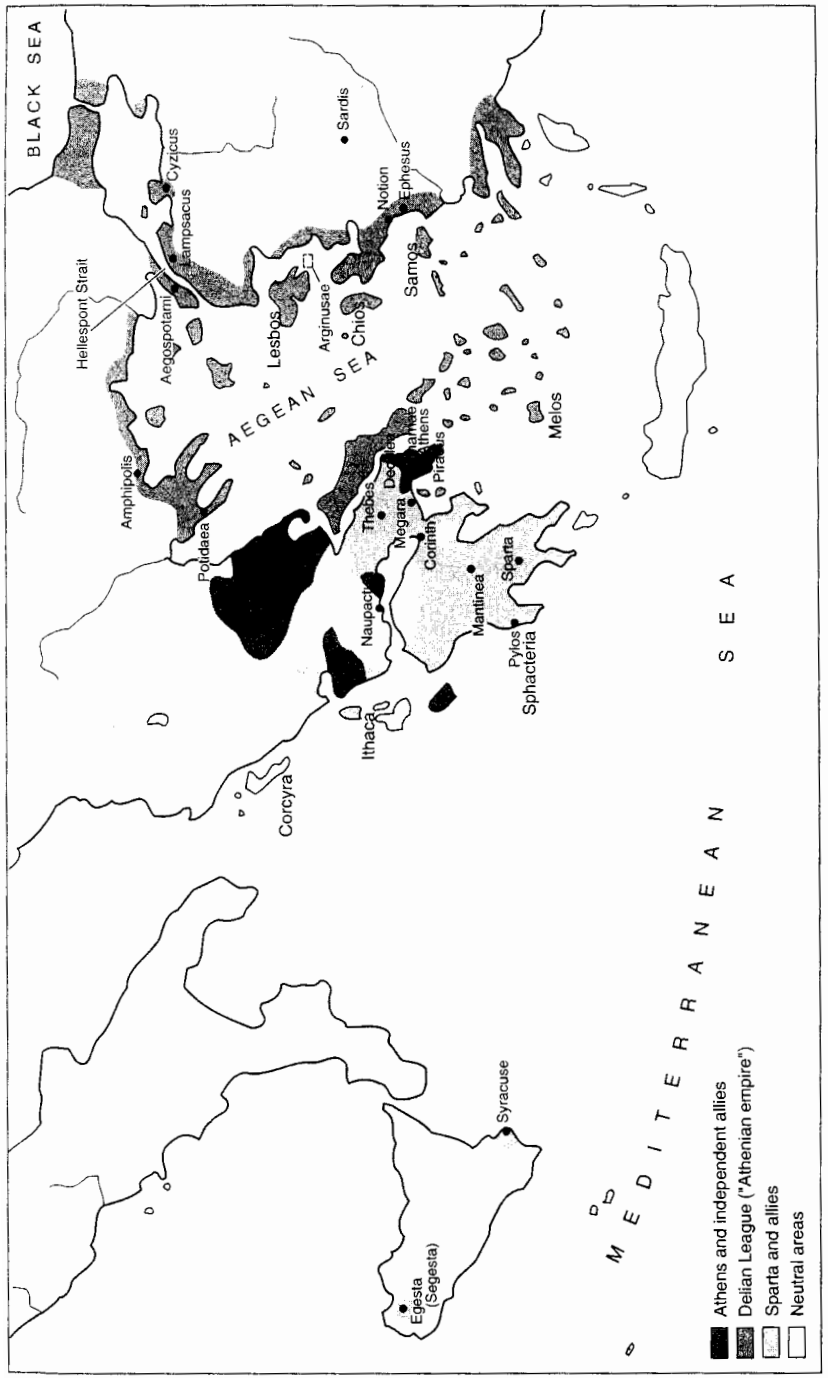
8

The Peloponnesian War and Its Aftermath at Athens

A Generation of Conflict

Athens and Sparta had cooperated in the fight against Xerxes' great invasion of Greece, but the relations between the two most powerful states of mainland Greece had deteriorated to such a point by the middle of the fifth century that open hostilities erupted. The peace struck in 446/5 was supposed to endure for thirty years, but events of the 430s led once again to a high level of tension. The resulting Peloponnesian War lasted twenty-seven years, from 431 to 404, and engulfed most of the Greek world at one time or another. This bitter conflict, extraordinary in Greek history for its protracted length, wreaked havoc on the social and political harmony of Athens, sapped its economic strength, decimated its population, and turned upside down the everyday life of most of its citizens. The sharp divisions in Athenian public opinion that the war exposed were expressed most eloquently and bitingly by the comic poet Aristophanes in the comedies that he produced during the war years. The trial and execution of the Athenian philosopher Socrates in 399 B.C. revealed that the bitterness dividing Athenians survived the end of the war.

The Peloponnesian War shows the consequences of the repeated reluctance of the Athenian assembly to negotiate peace terms with the enemy instead of simply dictating them. The other side of the coin is the remarkable



Map 6. The Peloponnesian War

433 B.C.: Athens and Corinth clash over former Corinthian ally.

432 B.C.: Athens imposes economic sanctions on Megara.

431 B.C.: War begins with first Spartan invasion of Attica and Athenian naval raids on Peloponnese.

430 B.C.: Epidemic strikes Athens.

429 B.C.: Pericles dies in epidemic.

425 B.C.: Athenians commanded by Cleon capture Spartan hoplites at Pylos; Aristophanes' comedy *The Acharnians* produced at Athens.

424 B.C.: Aristophanes' comedy *The Knights* produced at Athens.

422 B.C.: Cleon and Brasidas killed in battle of Amphipolis.

421 B.C.: Peace of Nicias reestablishes prewar alliances.

418 B.C.: Athenians recommence hostilities at urging of Athenian Alcibiades; defeat at Mantinea.

416 B.C.: Athens attacks the island of Melos.

415 B.C.: Athenian expedition launched against Syracuse on the island of Sicily; Alcibiades defects to Sparta.

414 B.C.: Aristophanes' comedy *The Birds* produced at Athens.

413 B.C.: Establishment of Spartan base at Decelea in Attica; destruction of Athenian forces in Sicily.

411 B.C.: Athenian democracy temporarily abolished; Aristophanes' comedy *The Lysistrata* produced at Athens.

404 B.C.: Athens surrenders to Spartan army commanded by the Spartan general Lysander.

404–403 B.C.: Reign of terror of the Thirty Tyrants at Athens.

403 B.C.: Overthrow of the Thirty Tyrants and restoration of Athenian democracy.

399 B.C.: Trial and execution of Socrates at Athens.

by **393 B.C.**: Rebuilding of Long Walls of Athens completed.

resilience shown by Athens in recovering from defeats and losses of manpower. The magnitude of the conflict and the unprecedented, if controversial, evidence about it provided by Thucydides justify the attention traditionally devoted to it.

The Causes of the Peloponnesian War

Most of our knowledge of the causes and the events of this decisive war depends on the history written by the Athenian Thucydides (c. 460–400 B.C.). Thucydides served as an Athenian commander in northern Greece in the early years of the war until in 424 the assembly exiled him for twenty

years as punishment for losing a valuable northern outpost, Amphipolis, to the enemy. During his exile, Thucydides was able to interview witnesses from both sides of the conflict. Unlike Herodotus, Thucydides concentrated on contemporary history and presented his account of the events of the war in an annalistic framework—that is, according to the years of the war, with only occasional divergences from chronological order. Like Herodotus, he included versions of direct speeches in addition to the description of events. The speeches in Thucydides, usually longer and more complex than those in Herodotus, deal with major events and issues of the war in difficult and dramatic language. Their contents often address the motives of the participants in the war and offer broad interpretations of human nature and behavior. Scholars disagree about the extent to which Thucydides has put words and ideas into the mouths of his speakers, but it seems indisputable that the speeches deal with the moral and political issues that Thucydides saw as central for understanding the Peloponnesian War as well as human conflict in general. His perceptive chronicle and interpretation made his book a pioneering work of history as the narrative of great contemporary events and power politics.

The Peloponnesian War, like most wars, had a complex origin. Thucydides reveals that the immediate causes centered on disputes between Athens and Sparta in the 430s concerning whether they had a free hand in dealing with each other's allies. Violent disputes broke out concerning Athenian aid to Corcyra, an island naval power in conflict with Corinth (a principal Spartan ally), concerning Athenian economic sanctions against the city-state of Megara, a Spartan ally located immediately west of Athenian territory, and concerning the Athenian blockade of Potidaea, a strategically positioned city-state in northern Greece formerly allied to Athens but now in revolt and seeking help from Corinth. The deeper causes involved the antagonists' ambitions for hegemony, fears of each other's power, and concern for freedom from interference by a strong rival.

The outbreak of the war finally came when the Spartans issued ultimatums to Athens that the Athenian assembly rejected at the urging of Pericles. The Spartans threatened open warfare unless Athens lifted its economic sanctions against Megara and stopped its military blockade of Potidaea. The Athenians had forbidden the Megarians from trading in all the harbors of the Athenian empire, a severe blow for Megara, which derived much income from seaborne trade. The Athenians had imposed the sanctions in retaliation for alleged Megarian encroachment on sacred land along the border between Megara and Athens. Potidaea retained ties to Corinth, the city that had originally founded it, and Corinth, an ally of Sparta, had protested the Athenian blockade of its erstwhile colony. The Corinthians were by this

time already angry at the Athenians for having supported the city-state of Corcyra in its earlier quarrel with Corinth and securing an alliance with Corcyra and its formidable navy. The Spartans issued their ultimatums in order to placate the Megarians and, more important, the Corinthians with their powerful naval force. Corinth had threatened to withdraw from the Peloponnesian League and join the Athenian alliance if the Spartans delayed any longer in backing them in their dispute with the Athenians over Potidaea. In this way, the actions of lesser powers nudged the two great powers, Athens and Sparta, over the brink to war in 431 B.C. Hostilities were assured when Athens rejected a final Spartan ultimatum which required only that the Athenians rescind the Megarian Decree, as the economic sanctions are called today. To this demand, Pericles is said to have replied frostily that the Athenian assembly had passed a law forbidding anyone to take down the inscribed panel on which the text of the sanctions against Megara had been publicly displayed. "All right, then," exploded the head of the Spartan delegation, "you don't have to take the panel down. Just turn its face to the wall. Surely you have no law forbidding that!" (Plutarch, *Pericles* 30). This anecdote about the Megarian Decree eloquently expresses the rancor that had come to characterize Spartan-Athenian relations in the late 430s.

The disputes over Athenian sanctions against Megara, as well as over its use of force against Potidaea and alliance with Corcyra, reflected the larger issues of power motivating the hostility between Athens and Sparta. The Spartan leaders feared that the Athenians would use their superiority in long-distance offensive weaponry—the naval forces of the Delian League—to destroy Spartan control over the Peloponnesian League. The majority in the Athenian assembly, for their part, resented Spartan interference in their freedom of action. For example, Thucydides portrays Pericles as making the following arguments in a speech to his fellow male citizens: "If we do go to war, harbor no thought that you went to war over a trivial affair. For you this trifling matter is the assurance and the proof of your determination. If you yield to their demands, they will immediately confront you with some larger demand, since they will think that you only gave way on the first point out of fear. But if you stand firm, you will show them that they have to deal with you as equals. . . . When our equals, without agreeing to arbitration of the matter under dispute, make claims on us as neighbors and state those claims as commands, it would be no better than slavery to give in to them, no matter how large or how small the claim may be" (*History of the Peloponnesian War*, 1.141).

It is true that the Athenians had offered to submit to arbitration of the Spartan complaints, the procedure officially mandated under the sworn terms of the peace treaty of 445 B.C. The Spartans nevertheless refused arbi-

tration because they could not risk the defection of Corinth from their alliance if the decision went against them. The Spartans needed Corinth's sizable fleet to combat Athens's formidable naval power. The Spartan refusal to honor an obligation imposed by an oath amounted to sacrilege. Although the Spartans continued to argue that the Athenians were at fault by refusing all concessions, they nevertheless felt uneasy about the possibility that the gods might punish them for refusing their sworn obligation.The Athenians, on the other hand, exuded confidence that the gods would favor them in the war because they had respected their obligation.

Periclean Strategy

Athens's fleet and fortifications made its urban center impregnable to direct attack. Already by the 450s the Athenians had encircled the city center with a massive stone wall and fortified a broad corridor with a wall on both sides leading all the way to the main harbor at Piraeus some four miles to the west. Cimon in the late 460s had spent great sums to lay the foundations for the first two Long Walls, as they were called, and Pericles had seen to their completion in the early 450s, using public funds. A third wall was added about 445. The technology of military siege machines in the fifth century was unequal to the task of breaching fortifications of the thickness of the Long Walls. Consequently, no matter what damage was done to the agricultural production of Attica in the course of the war by Spartan invasions of the territory outside the walls around the city center, the Athenians could feed themselves by importing food by ship through their fortified port. They could pay for the food with the huge financial reserves they had accumulated from the dues of the Delian League and the income from their silver mines. The Athenians could also retreat safely behind their walls in the case of attacks by the superior Spartan infantry. From this impregnable position, they could launch surprise attacks against Spartan territory by sending their ships from the fortified harbor to land troops behind enemy lines. Like aircraft in modern warfare before the invention of radar warning systems, Athenian warships could swoop down unexpectedly on their enemies before they could prepare to defend themselves. The two-pronged strategy, which Pericles devised for Athens, was therefore simple: avoid set battles with the Spartan infantry even if it ravaged Athenian territory, but attack Spartan territory from the sea. In the end, he predicted, the superior resources of Athens in money and men would enable it to win a war of attrition.

The difficulty in carrying out Pericles' strategy was that it required the many Athenians who resided outside the urban center to abandon their homes and fields to the depredations of the Spartan army during its regular invasions of Attica each year. As Thucydides reports, people hated coming

in from the countryside where "most Athenians were born and bred; they grumbled at having to move their entire households [into Athens] . . . , abandoning their normal way of life and leaving behind what they regarded as their true city" (2.16). When in 431 B.C. the Spartans began the war by invading Attica for the first time and proceeded to destroy property in the countryside, hoping to force the Athenians into an infantry battle, the country dwellers of Attica became enraged as, standing in safety on Athens's walls, they watched the smoke rise from their burning homes and fields. The men of Acharnae, the most populous deme of Attica and visible just to the north from the city walls, were particularly furious, and Pericles barely managed to stop the citizen militia from rushing out to take on the Spartan hoplites. Somehow he managed to prevent the assembly from meeting to ratify a new strategy; precisely how Pericles blocked normal democratic procedures at this critical juncture, Thucydides does not reveal. The Spartan army returned home from this first attack on Athenian territory after about a month in Attica because it lacked the structure for resupply over a longer period and could not risk being away from Sparta too long for fear of helot revolt. For these reasons, the annual invasions of Attica that the Spartans sent in the early years of the war never lasted longer than forty days. Even in this short time, however, the Spartan army could inflict losses on the Athenian countryside that were felt very keenly by the Athenians holed up in their walled city.

Unforeseen Disaster

The innate unpredictability of war soon undermined Pericles' strategy for Athenian victory, for an epidemic began to ravage Athens's population in 430 B.C. and raged for several years with disastrous consequences. The disease struck while the Athenians from the countryside were jammed together in unsanitary conditions behind the city walls. The failure to provide adequate housing and sanitation for this mass of the population was a devastating oversight by Pericles and his fellow leaders. The symptoms of the disease, described in detail by Thucydides, were gruesome: vomiting, convulsions, painful sores, uncontrollable diarrhea, and fever and thirst so extreme that sufferers threw themselves into cisterns vainly hoping to find relief in the cold water. The rate of mortality was so high that it crippled Athenian ability to man the naval expeditions that Pericles' wartime strategy demanded. Pericles himself died of the disease in 429 B.C. He apparently had not anticipated the damage to Athens which the loss of his firm leadership could mean. The epidemic also seriously hampered the war effort by destroying the Athenians' confidence in their relationship with the gods. "As far as the gods were concerned, it seemed not to matter whether one

worshipped them or not because the good and the bad were dying indiscriminately," Thucydides wrote (2.53).

The epidemic thus hurt the Athenians materially by devastating their population, politically by removing their foremost leader, Pericles, and psychologically by damaging their self-confidence and corroding social and religious norms. Nevertheless, they fought on resiliently. Despite the loss of manpower inflicted by the epidemic, the Athenian military forces proved effective in several locations. Potidaea, the ally whose rebellion had exacerbated the hostility between Athens and Corinth, was compelled to surrender in 430. The Athenian navy won two major victories in 429 off Naupactus in the western Gulf of Corinth under the general Phormio. A serious revolt in 428–427 of allies on the island of Lesbos, led by the city-state of Mytilene, was forcefully put down. One of the most famous passages in Thucydides is the set of vivid speeches on the fate of the Mytilenians presented by Cleon and Diodotus. The opposing speeches respectively argue for capital punishment based on justice and clemency based on expediency. Their arguments represent stirring and provocative positions that bear on larger political and ethical questions than the immediate issue of what to do about the rebels of Mytilene. Equally impressive and disturbing is Thucydides' report of the civil war that broke out on the island of Corcyra in 427 when the opposing factions, one supporting Athens and one Sparta, tried to gain advantage by appealing to these major powers in the Peloponnesian War. His blunt analysis reveals how civil war can bring out and inflame the worst features of human nature:

> [The citizens supporting democracy in the civil war in the city-state of Corcyra] captured and executed all their enemies whom they could find. . . . They then proceeded to the sanctuary of Hera and persuaded about fifty of the suppliants [from the opposing faction] who had sought sacred refuge there to agree to appear in court. The democrats thereupon condemned every last one of the erstwhile suppliants to death. When the other suppliants who had refused to go to trial comprehended what was going on, most of them killed each other right there in the sanctuary. Some hanged themselves from trees, while others found a variety of ways to commit suicide. [For a week] the members of the democratic faction went on slaughtering any fellow citizens whom they thought of as their enemies. They accused their victims of plotting to overthrow the democracy, but in truth they killed many people simply out of personal hatred or because they owed money to the victims. Death came in every way and fashion. And, as customarily occurs in such situations, the killers went to every extreme and beyond. There were fathers who murdered their sons; men were dragged out of the temples to be put to death or simply butchered on the very altars of the gods; some people were actually walled up in the temple of Dionysus and left there to die [of starvation].
>
> In numerous Greek cities these factional struggles produced many catastrophes—as happens and always will happen while human nature remains what it is. . . . During periods of peace and prosperity, cities and individuals alike adhere to more demanding standards of behavior, because they are not forced into a situation where they have to do what they do not want to do. But war is a violent teacher; in stealing from people the ability to fulfill their ordinary needs without undue difficulty, it reduces most people's temperaments to the level of their present circumstances.
>
> So factional conflicts erupted in city after city, and in cities where the struggles took place at a later date than in other cities, the knowledge of what had already happened in other places led to even more inventiveness in attacking rivals and to unprecedented atrocities of revenge. In accordance with the changes in conduct, words, too, exchanged their customary meanings to adapt to people's purposes. What had previously been described as a reckless act of aggression was now seen as the courage demanded of a loyal co-conspirator in a faction; to give any thought to the future and not take immediate action was simply another way of calling someone a coward; any suggestion of moderation was just an attempt to cover up one's cowardice; ability to understand different sides of an issue meant that one was wholly unsuited to take action. Fanatical enthusiasm was the defining characteristic of a real man. . . . Ties of family were weaker obligations than belonging to a faction, since faction members were more prepared to go to any extreme for any reason whatsoever. (3.81–82)

The manpower losses of the great epidemic prevented Athens from launching as many naval expeditions as would have been needed to make Periclean strategy effective, and the annual campaigns of the war in the early 420s brought losses to both sides without any significant chance of one side overcoming the other. In 425 B.C., however, Athens stumbled upon a golden chance to secure an advantageous peace when the Athenian general Cleon won an unprecedented victory by capturing some 120 Spartan Equals and about 170 allied Peloponnesian troops after a protracted struggle on the tiny island of Sphacteria in the gulf fronting Pylos in the western Peloponnese. No Spartan soldiers had ever before surrendered under any circumstances. They had always taken as their martial creed the sentiment expressed by

the legendary advice of a Spartan mother handing her son his shield as he went off to war: "Come home either with this or on it" (Plutarch, *Moralia* 241F), meaning that he should return either as a victor or as a corpse. By this date, however, the population of Spartan Equals had been so reduced that the loss of even such a small group was perceived as intolerable. The Spartan leaders therefore offered the Athenians favorable peace terms in return for the captives. Cleon's unexpected success at Pylos had vaulted him into a position of political leadership, and he advocated a hard line toward Sparta. Thucydides, who apparently had no love for Cleon, called him "the most violent of the citizens" (3.36). At Cleon's urging, the Athenian assembly refused to make peace with Sparta: he convinced his fellow citizens that they could win even more, and they took the gamble.

The lack of wisdom in the Athenian decision became clear with the next unexpected development of the war: a sudden reversal in the traditional Spartan policy against waging extended military expeditions far from home. In 424 the Spartan general Brasidas led an army on a daring campaign against Athenian strongholds in far northern Greece hundreds of miles from Sparta. His most important victory came with the conquest of Amphipolis, an important Athenian colony near the coast that the Athenians regarded as essential to their strategic position. Brasidas's success there robbed Athens of access to gold and silver mines and a major source of timber for warships. Even though he was not directly involved in the battle at Amphipolis, Thucydides lost his command and was forced into exile because he was the commander in charge of the region when the city was lost and was thus held responsible for the catastrophe.

A Fighting Peace

Cleon, the most prominent and influential leader at Athens after the Athenian victory at Pylos in 425, was dispatched to northern Greece in 422 to try to stop Brasidas. As it happened, both he and Brasidas were killed before Amphipolis in 422 B.C. in a battle won by the Spartan army. Their deaths deprived each side of its most energetic military commander and opened the way to negotiations. Peace came in 421 B.C., when both sides agreed to resurrect the balance of forces as it had been in 431. The agreement made in that year is known as the Peace of Nicias, after the Athenian general who was instrumental in convincing the Athenian assembly to agree to a peace treaty. The Spartan agreement to the peace revealed a fracture in the coalition of Greek states allied with Sparta against Athens and its allies because the Corinthians and the Boeotians refused to join the Spartans in signing the treaty.

The Peace of Nicias failed to quiet those on both sides of the conflict who were pushing for a decisive victory. A brash, rich, and young Athenian named Alcibiades (c. 450–404 B.C.) was especially active against the uneasy peace. He was a member of one of Athens's richest and most distinguished families, and he had been raised in the household of Pericles after his father had died in battle against allies of Sparta in 447, when his son was only about three years old. By now in his early thirties—a very young age at which to have achieved political influence, by Athenian standards—Alcibiades rallied some support in the Athenian assembly for action against Spartan interests in the Peloponnese. Despite the ostensible conditions of peace between Sparta and Athens, he managed to cobble together a new alliance among Athens, Argos, and some other Peloponnesian city-states that were hostile to Sparta. He evidently believed that Athenian power and security, as well as his own career, would be best served by a continuing effort to weaken Sparta. Since the geographical location of Argos in the northeastern Peloponnese placed it astride the principal north-south route in and out of Spartan territory, the Spartans had reason to fear the alliance created by Alcibiades. If the alliance held, Argos and its allies could virtually pen the Spartan army inside its own borders. Nevertheless, support for the coalition seems to have been shaky in Athens, perhaps because the memory of the ten years of war just concluded was still vivid. The Spartans, recognizing the threat to themselves, met and defeated the forces of the coalition in battle at Mantinea in the northeastern Peloponnese in 418. The Peace of Nicias was now a dead letter in practice, whatever its continuing validity in theory.

In 416 an Athenian force besieged the tiny city-state on the island of Melos situated in the Mediterranean southeast of the Peloponnese, a community sympathetic to Sparta that had taken no active part in the war, although it seems to have made a monetary contribution to the Spartan war effort. In any case, Athens had long considered Melos an enemy because Nicias had led an unsuccessful attack on the island in 426. Now once again Athens demanded that Melos support its alliance voluntarily or face destruction, but the Melians refused to submit despite the overwhelming superiority of Athenian force. What the Athenians hoped to gain by this campaign is not clear because Melos had neither much property worth plundering nor a strategically crucial location. When Melos eventually had to surrender to the besieging army of Athenian and allied forces, its men were killed and its women and children sold into slavery. An Athenian community was then established on the island. Thucydides portrays Athenian motives in the affair of Melos as concerned exclusively with the amoral politics of the use of force, while the Melians he shows as relying on a concept of justice that they insisted should govern relations between states. He represents the leaders of the opposing sides as participating in a private meeting to discuss

their views of what issues are at stake. This passage in his history (5.84–114), called the Melian Dialogue, offers a chillingly realistic insight into the clash between ethics and power in international politics that is timeless in its insight and its bluntness.

The Sicilian Expedition

In 415 B.C. Alcibiades convinced the Athenian assembly to launch a massive naval campaign against the city-state of Syracuse, a Spartan ally on the great island of Sicily. With this expedition the Athenians and their allies would pursue the great riches awaiting conquerors there and prevent any Sicilian cities from aiding the Spartans. Formally speaking, in launching the Sicilian expedition, Athens was responding to a request for support from the Sicilian city of Egesta (also known as Segesta), with which an alliance had been struck more than thirty years earlier. The Egestans encouraged Athens to prepare a naval expedition to Sicily by misrepresenting the extent of the resources that they had to devote to the military campaign against their enemies on the island. The prosperous city of Syracuse near the southeastern corner of the island represented both the richest prize and the largest threat to Athenian ambitions.

In the debate preceding the vote on the expedition, Alcibiades and his supporters argued that the numerous warships in the fleet of Syracuse represented an especially serious potential threat to the security of the Athenian alliance because they could sail from Sicily to join the Spartan alliance in attacks on Athens and its allies. Nicias led the opposition to the proposed expedition, but his arguments for caution failed to counteract the enthusiasm for action that Alcibiades generated with his speeches. The latter's aggressive dreams of martial glory appealed especially to young men who had not yet experienced the realities of war for themselves. The assembly resoundingly backed his vision by voting to send to Sicily the greatest force ever to sail from Greece.

The arrogant flamboyance of Alcibiades' private life and his blatant political ambitions had made him many enemies in Athens, and this hostility came to the fore at the very moment of the expedition's dispatch when Alcibiades was suddenly accused of having participated in sacrilegious events on the eve of the sailing. One incident involved the herms of Athens. Herms, stone posts with sculpted sets of erect male organs and a bust of the god Hermes, were placed throughout the city as guardians of doorways, boundaries, and places of transition. A herm stood at nearly every street intersection, for example, because crossings were, symbolically at least, zones of special danger. Unknown vandals outraged the public by knocking off the statues' phalluses just before the fleet was to sail. When Alcibiades

was accused of having been part of the vandalism, his enemies immediately upped the ante by reporting that he had earlier staged a mockery of the Eleusinian Mysteries. This was an extremely serious charge of sacrilege and caused an additional uproar. Alcibiades pushed for an immediate trial while his popularity was at a peak and the soldiers who supported him were still in Athens, but his enemies cunningly got the trial postponed on the excuse that the expedition must not be delayed. Alcibiades therefore set off with the rest of the fleet, but it was not long before a messenger was dispatched telling him to return alone to Athens for trial. Alcibiades' reaction to this order was unforeseen: he defected to Sparta.

The defection of Alcibiades left the Athenian expedition against Sicily without a strong and decisive leader. The Athenian fleet was so large that it won initial victories against Syracuse and its allies even without brilliant leadership, but eventually the indecisiveness of Nicias undermined the attackers' successes. The Athenian assembly responded to the setbacks by authorizing large reinforcements led by the general Demosthenes, but these new forces proved incapable of defeating Syracuse, which enjoyed effective military leadership to complement its material strength. Alcibiades had a decisive influence on the quality of Syracusan military leadership because Sparta adopted his suggestion to send an experienced Spartan commander to Syracuse to combat the invading expedition. The Athenian forces were eventually trapped in the harbor of Syracuse and completely crushed in a climactic naval battle in 413. When the survivors of the attacking force tried to flee overland to safety, they were either slaughtered or captured almost to a man, including Nicias. The Sicilian expedition ended in ignominious defeat for Athens and the crippling of its navy, its main source of military power.

Ten More Years of War

Alcibiades' defection turned out to cause Athens still more trouble after the Sicilian catastrophe. While at Sparta, he had advised the Spartan commanders to establish a permanent base of operations in the Attic countryside, and in 413 they at last acted on his advice. Taking advantage of Athenian weakness in the aftermath of the ongoing losses in men and equipment sustained in Sicily, the Spartans installed a garrison at Decelea in northeastern Attica, in sight of the walls of Athens itself. Spartan forces could now raid the Athenian countryside year around, whereas earlier in the war the annual invasions dispatched from Sparta could never linger longer than forty days in Athenian territory. The presence of the garrison made agricultural work in the fields of Attica dangerous and forced Athens to rely even more heavily than in the past on food imported by sea. The damage to Athenian fortunes increased when twenty thousand slaves owned by the state

who worked in Athens's silver mines sought refuge in the Spartan camp. The loss of these slave miners put a stop to the flow of revenue from the veins of silver ore. So immense was the distress caused by the crisis that an extraordinary change was made in Athenian government: a board of ten officials was appointed to manage the affairs of the city, virtually supplanting the council of five hundred.

The disastrous consequences of the Athenian defeat in Sicily in 413 were further compounded when Persia once again took a direct hand in Greek affairs. Athenian weakness seemed to make this an opportune time to reassert Persian dominance in western Anatolia by stripping away the allies of Athens there. The satraps governing the Persian provinces in the region therefore began to supply money to help outfit a fleet for the Spartans and their allies. Led by the powerful city-state of the island of Chios in the eastern Aegean, some restless allies of Athens in Ionia took advantage of the depleted state of their erstwhile leader to revolt from the Delian League. They were urged on by Alcibiades, whom the Spartans had sent to Ionia in 412 to foment rebellion among the members of the Athenian alliance there. A particularly dangerous result of these latter developments was the threat to the shipping lanes by which Athens imported grain from Egypt to the southeast and the fertile shores of the Black Sea to the northeast.

Athens demonstrated a strong communal will in the face of the great hardships that had begun in 413, however, by beginning to rebuild its fleet and train new crews to man it. The emergency reserve funds that had been stored on the Acropolis since the beginning of the war were tapped to finance the rebuilding. By 412–411 Athenian naval forces had revived sufficiently that they managed to prevent a Corinthian fleet from sailing to aid Chios, to lay siege to that rebellious island ally, and to win some other battles along the Anatolian coast.

Despite these successes, the turmoil in Athenian politics and revenues resulting from the Sicilian defeat opened the way for some influential Athenian men, who had long harbored contempt for the broad-based democracy of their city-state, to stage what amounted to an oligarchic coup d'état. They insisted that a small group of elite leaders could manage Athenian policy better than the democratic assembly. Alcibiades furthered their cause by letting it be known that he would make an alliance with the Persian satraps in western Anatolia and secure funds from them for Athens on condition that the democracy was overturned and an oligarchy installed. He apparently hoped that this would make it possible for him to return to Athens. He had reason to want to return because his negotiations with the satraps had by now aroused the suspicions of the Spartan leaders, who rightly suspected that he was intriguing in his own interests rather than theirs. He had also

made Agis, one of Sparta's two kings, into a powerful enemy by seducing his wife.

Alcibiades' promises helped the oligarchic sympathizers in Athens to play on the assembly's hopes by holding out the lure of Persian gold. In 411 they succeeded in having the assembly members turn over all power to a group of four hundred men, hoping that this smaller body would provide better guidance for foreign policy in the war and improve Athens's finances. These four hundred were then supposed to choose five thousand men to act as the city's ultimate governing body, but the four hundred in fact kept all power in their own hands. Their oligarchic regime soon began to fall apart, however, because the oligarchs destroyed their unity by struggling with each other for dominance. The end came for them when the crews of the Athenian war fleet, which was stationed in the harbor of the friendly island city-state of Samos in the eastern Aegean, threatened to sail home to restore democracy by force unless the oligarchs stepped aside. In response, a mixed democracy and oligarchy called the Constitution of the Five Thousand was created, which Thucydides praised as "the best form of government that the Athenians had known, at least in my time" (*History of the Peloponnesian War* 8.97). This new government voted to recall Alcibiades and others in exile in the hope that they could improve Athenian military leadership.

With Alcibiades as one of the commanders, the revived Athenian fleet won a great victory over the Spartans in 410 at Cyzicus on the southern shore of the Black Sea. The Athenians intercepted the plaintive and typically brief dispatch sent by the defeated Spartans to their leaders at home: "Ships lost. Commander dead. Men starving. Do not know what to do" (Xenophon, *Hellenica* 1.1.23). The prodemocratic fleet demanded the restoration of full democracy at Athens, and in this year Athenian government returned to the form and membership that it had possessed before the oligarchic coup of 411. It also returned to the uncompromising bellicosity that had characterized the decisions of the Athenian assembly in the mid-420s. Just as after the defeat at Pylos in 425, the Spartans offered peace after their defeat at Cyzicus in 410. Athens refused and the Athenian fleet went on to reestablish the safety of the grain routes to Athens and to compel some of the allies who had revolted to return to the alliance.

The aggressive Spartan commander Lysander ultimately doomed Athenian hopes in the war by using Persian money to rebuild the Spartan fleet and by ensuring that it was well led. When in 406 he inflicted a defeat on an Athenian fleet at Notion, near Ephesus on the Anatolian coast, Alcibiades, who had not been present but was held to have been responsible for the safety of the Athenian forces, was forced into exile for the last time. The Athenian fleet nevertheless won a victory later in 406 off the islands of

Arginusae, south of the island of Lesbos, but a storm prevented the rescue of the crews of wrecked ships. The Athenian commanders were condemned to death for alleged negligence in a mass trial at Athens that contradicted the normal guarantee of individual trials. Once again the assembly rejected a Spartan offer of peace on the basis of the status quo. Lysander thereupon secured more Persian funds, strengthened the Spartan naval forces still further, and decisively eliminated the Athenian fleet in 405 in a battle at Aegospotami, near Lampsacus on the coast of Anatolia. He subsequently blockaded Athens and finally compelled Athens to surrender in 404 B.C. After twenty-seven years of near-continuous war, the Athenians were at the mercy of their enemies.

The Spartan leaders resisted the demand of their allies the Corinthians, the bitterest enemy of the Athenians, that Athens be totally destroyed. They feared that Corinth, with its large fleet and strategic location on the isthmus potentially blocking access to and from the Peloponnese, might grow too strong if Athens were no longer in existence to serve as a counterweight. Instead of ruining Athens, Sparta installed as the conquered city's rulers a regime of antidemocratic Athenian collaborators, who became known as the Thirty Tyrants. These men came from the wealthy elite, which had always harbored a faction despising democracy and admiring oligarchy. Brutally suppressing their opposition in Athens and stealing shamelessly from people whose only crime was to possess desirable property, these oligarchs embarked on an eight-month-long period of terror in 404–403 B.C. The metic and famous speechwriter-to-be Lysias, for example, whose father had earlier moved his family from their native Syracuse at the invitation of Pericles, reported that the henchmen of the Thirty seized his brother for execution as a way of stealing the family's valuables. The plunderers even ripped the gold earrings from the ears of his brother's wife in their pursuit of loot. So violent had been the rule of the Thirty Tyrants that the Spartans did not interfere when a prodemocracy resistance movement came to power in Athens after a series of street battles in 403 B.C. To put an end to the internal strife that threatened to tear Athens apart, the newly restored democracy proclaimed a general amnesty, the first known in Western history, under which all further charges and official recriminations concerning the terror were forbidden. Athens's government was once again a functioning democracy; its financial and military strength, however, was shattered, and its society harbored the memory of a bitter divisiveness that no amnesty could completely dispel.

Hardship and Comedy in Wartime Athens

Not only did the Peloponnesian War drain the state treasury of Athens, splinter its political harmony, and devastate its military power, but the long years of the war also exacted a heavy toll on the domestic life of Athenians. Many people both urban and rural found their livelihoods threatened by the economic dislocations of the war. Women without wealth whose spouses or male relatives were killed in the war experienced particularly difficult times because dire necessity forced them to seek work outside the home to support themselves and their children.

Perhaps the most ruinous personal losses and disruptions caused by wartime conditions at Athens were imposed on the many people who usually lived outside the walls of the urban center. These country dwellers periodically had to take refuge inside the city walls while the Spartan invaders wrecked their homes and damaged their fields. If they did not also own a house in the city or have friends who could take them in, these refugees had to camp in public areas in Athens in uncomfortable and unsanitary conditions, inevitably causing friction between them and the city dwellers.

The war meant drastic changes in their way of making a living for many working men and women of Athens, both those whose incomes depended on agriculture and those who operated their own small businesses. Wealthy families that had money and valuable goods stored up could weather the crisis by using their savings, but most people had no financial cushion to fall back on. When their harvests were destroyed by the enemy, farmers used to toiling in their own fields had to scrounge for work as day laborers in the city, but such jobs became increasingly scarce as the pool of men looking for them grew. Men who rowed the ships of the Athenian fleet could earn wages for the time the ships were at sea, but they had to spend long periods away from their families and faced death in every battle and storm. Men and women who worked as crafts producers and small merchants or business owners in the city still had their livelihoods, but their income levels suffered because consumers had less money to spend.

The pressure of war on Athenian society became especially evident in the severe damage done to the prosperity and indeed the very nature of the lives of many previously moderately well-off women whose husbands and brothers died during the conflict. Such women had traditionally done weaving at home for their own families and supervised the work of household slaves, but the men had earned the family's income by farming or practicing a trade. With no one to provide for them and their children, these women were forced to take the only jobs open to them in such low-paying occupations as wet nurse, weaver, or even vineyard laborer, in the event there were not enough men to meet the need. These circumstances brought more women into public view, but they did not lead to a woman's movement in the modern sense, or to any inclusion of women in Athenian political life.

The financial health of the city-state of Athens suffered during the Peloponnesian War from the many interruptions to agriculture and from the

catastrophic loss of income from the state's silver mines that occurred after the Spartan army took up a permanent presence at Decelea in 413 B.C. Work could thereafter no longer continue at the mines, which were not far from the Spartan base, especially after the desertion of thousands of slave mine workers to the Spartan fort. Some public building projects in the city itself were kept going, like the Erectheum temple to Athena on the Acropolis, to demonstrate the Athenian will to carry on and also as a device for infusing some money into the crippled economy. But the demands of the war depleted the funds available for many nonmilitary activities. The great annual dramatic festivals, for example, had to be cut back. The financial situation had become so desperate by the end of the war that Athenians were required to exchange their silver coins for an emergency currency of bronze thinly plated with silver. The regular silver coins, along with gold coins that were minted from golden objects borrowed from Athens's temples, were then used to pay war expenses.

The stresses of everyday life were reflected in Athenian comedies produced during the Peloponnesian War. Comic plays were the other main form of dramatic art in ancient Athens besides tragedies. Like tragedies, comedies were composed in verse and had been presented annually since early in the fifth century B.C. They formed a separate competition in the Athenian civic festivals in honor of Dionysus in the same outdoor theater used for tragedies. The ancient evidence does not make it clear whether women could attend the performance of comedies, but if they could see tragedies, it seems likely that they could attend comedies as well. The all-male casts of comic productions consisted of a chorus of twenty-four members in addition to regular actors. Unlike tragedy, comedy was not restricted to having no more than three actors with speaking parts on stage at the same time. The beauty of the soaring poetry of the choral songs of comedy was matched by the ingeniously imaginative fantasy of its plots, which almost always ended with a festive resolution of the problems with which they had begun. The story of *The Birds* by Aristophanes, for example, produced in 414 B.C., has two men trying to escape the wrangles and disappointments of everyday life at Athens by running away to seek a new life in a world called Cloudcuckooland that is inhabited by talking birds, portrayed by the chorus in colorful bird costumes.

The immediate purpose of a comic playwright naturally was to create beautiful poetry and raise laughs at the same time in the hope of winning the award for the festival's best comedy. The plots of fifth-century Athenian comedies primarily dealt with current issues and personalities, while much of their humor had to do with sex and bodily functions and much of their ribaldry was delivered in a stream of imaginative profanity. Insulting attacks on prominent men such as Pericles or Cleon, the victor of Pylos, were a staple of the comic stage. Pericles apparently instituted a ban on such attacks in response to fierce treatment in comedies after the revolt of Samos in 441–439 B.C., but the measure was soon rescinded. Cleon was so outraged by the way he was portrayed on the comic stage by Aristophanes (c. 455–385 B.C.), the only comic playwright of the fifth century from whose works entire plays have survived, that he sued the playwright. When Cleon lost the case, Aristophanes responded by pitilessly parodying him in *The Knights* of 424 B.C. as a reprobate foreign slave. Other well-known men who were not portrayed as characters in the play could nevertheless come in for insults in the dialogue as sexually effeminate and cowards. On the other hand, women characters who are made figures of fun and ridicule in comedy seem to have been fictional.

Slashing satire directed against the mass of ordinary citizens seems to have been unacceptable in Athenian comedy, but fifth-century comic productions often criticized governmental policies that had been approved by the assembly by blaming political leaders for them. The strongly critical nature of comedy was never more evident than during the war. Several of the popular comedies of Aristophanes had plots in which characters arranged peace with Sparta, even though the comedies were produced while the war was still being fiercely contested. In *The Acharnians* of 425 B.C., for example, the protagonist arranges a separate peace treaty with the Spartans for himself and his family while humiliating a character who portrays one of Athens's prominent military commanders of the time. The play won first prize in competition for comedies that year.

The most remarkable of Aristophanes' comedies are those in which the main characters, the heroes of the story as it were, are women, who use their wits and their solidarity with one another to compel the men of Athens to overthrow basic policies of the city-state. Most famous of Aristophanes' comedies depicting powerfully effectual women is the *Lysistrata* of 411 B.C., named after the female lead. It portrays the women of Athens compelling their husbands to end the Peloponnesian War. The women first seize the Acropolis, where Athens's financial reserves are kept, and prevent the men from squandering them further on the war. They then beat back an attack on their position by the old men who have remained in Athens while the younger men are out on campaign. When their husbands return from battle, the women refuse to have sex with them. Teaming with the women of Sparta on this sex strike, which is portrayed in a series of risqué episodes, they finally coerce the men of Athens and Sparta to agree to a peace treaty.

The *Lysistrata* presents women acting bravely and aggressively against men who seem bent both on destroying their family life by staying away

from home for long stretches while on military campaign and on ruining the city-state by prolonging a pointless war. In other words, the play's powerful women take on masculine roles to preserve the traditional way of life of the community. Lysistrata herself emphasizes this point in the very speech in which she insists that women have the intelligence and judgment to make political decisions. She came by her knowledge, she says, in the traditional way: "I am a woman, and, yes, I have brains. And I'm not badly off for judgment. Nor has my education been bad, coming as it has from my listening often to the conversations of my father and the elders among the men" (1124–1127). Lysistrata thus explains that she was schooled in the traditional way, by learning from older men. Her old-fashioned training and good sense allowed her to see what needed to be done to protect the community. Like the heroines of tragedy, Lysistrata is a reactionary: she wants to put things back the way they were. To do that, however, she has to act like a revolutionary, a response that Athenians in the audience would see as ludicrous. Ending the war would be so easy that women could do it, Aristophanes is telling Athenian men, and Athenians should concern themselves with preserving the old ways, lest they be lost.

Postwar Athenian Society

The losses of population, the ravages of the plague, and the financial constraints brought on by the war caused special difficulties for Athens. Not even the amnesty that accompanied the restoration of Athenian democracy in 403 B.C. could quell all the social and political animosities that the war and the rule of the Thirty Tyrants had exacerbated, and the most prominent casualty of this divisive bitterness was the famous philosopher Socrates, whose trial for impiety in 399 B.C. resulted in a sentence of death. The traditional institution of the Athenian household—the family members and their personal slaves—nevertheless survived the war as the fundamental unit of the city-state's society and economy, and over time Athens recovered much of its strength as an international power.

Many Athenian households lost fathers, sons, or brothers in the Peloponnesian War, but resourceful families found ways to compensate for the economic strain that such personal tragedies could create. An Athenian named Aristarchus, for example, is reported by the writer Xenophon (c. 428–354 B.C.) to have experienced financial difficulty because the turmoil of the war had severely diminished his income and also caused his sisters, nieces, and female cousins to come live with him. He found himself unable to support this swollen household of fourteen, not counting the slaves. Aristarchus's friend Socrates thereupon reminded him that his female relatives knew quite well how to make men's and women's cloaks, shirts, capes, and

smocks, "the work considered the best and most fitting for women" (*Memorabilia* 2.7.10), although they had always just made clothing for the family and never had to try to sell it for profit. But others did make a living by selling such clothing or by baking and selling bread, Socrates pointed out, and Aristarchus could have the women in his house do the same. The plan was a success, but the women complained that Aristarchus was now the only member of the household who ate without working. Socrates advised his friend to reply that the women should think of him as sheep did a guard dog: he earned his share of the food by keeping away the wolves from the sheep.

Many Athenian manufactured goods were produced in households like that of Aristarchus or in small shops, although a few larger enterprises did exist. Among these were metal foundries, pottery workshops, and the shield-making business employing 120 slaves owned by the family of Lysias (c. 459–380 B.C.); businesses larger than this were unknown at this period. Lysias, a metic from Syracuse in Sicily whose father had been recruited by Pericles decades earlier to come live in Athens, had to use his education and turn to writing speeches for others to make a living after the Thirty Tyrants seized his property in 404 B.C. Metics could not own land in Athenian territory without special permission, but they enjoyed legal rights in Athenian courts that other foreigners lacked. In return, metics paid taxes and served in the army when called upon. Lysias lived near the harbor of Athens, Piraeus, where many metics were to be found because they played a central role in the international trade in such goods as grain, wine, pottery, and silver from Athens's mines that passed through Piraeus. The safety of Athenian trade was restored to prewar conditions when the Long Walls that connected the city with the port, demolished after the war as punishment, were rebuilt by 393 B.C. Another sign of the recovering economic health of Athens was that the city by the late 390s had resumed the minting of its famous silver coins to replace the emergency bronze coinage produced during the last years of the war.

The importation of grain through Piraeus was crucial for fourth-century Athens. Even before the war, Athenian farms had been unable to produce enough of this dietary staple to feed the population. The damage done to farm buildings and equipment during the Spartan invasions of the Peloponnesian War made the situation worse. The Spartan establishment of a year-round base at Decelea near Athens from 413 to 404 B.C. had given these enemy forces an opportunity to do much more severe damage in Athenian territory than the usually short campaigns of Greek warfare allowed. The invaders had probably even had time to cut down many Athenian olive trees, the source of valuable olive oil. The trees took a generation to replace because they grew so slowly. Athenian property owners after the war

worked hard to restore their land and businesses to production not only to rebuild their incomes but also to provide for future generations, because Athenian men and women felt strongly that their property, whether in land, money, or belongings, represented resources to be preserved for their descendants. For this reason, Athenian law allowed prosecution of men who squandered their inheritance. The same spirit lay behind the requirement that parents must provide a livelihood for their children, by leaving them income-bearing property or training them in a skill.

Most working people probably earned little more than enough to clothe and feed their families. Athenians usually had only two meals a day, a light lunch in midmorning and a heavier meal in the evening. Bread baked from barley or, for richer people, wheat, constituted the main part of the diet. A family could buy its bread from small bakery stands, often run by women, or make it at home, with the wife directing and helping the household slaves to grind the grain, shape the dough, and bake it in a pottery oven heated by charcoal. Those few households wealthy enough to afford meat from time to time often grilled it over coals on a pottery brazier shaped much like modern picnic grills. For most people, vegetables, olives, fruit, and cheese represented the main variety in their diet, and meat was available only as part of animal sacrifices paid for by the state. The wine that everyone drank, usually much diluted with water, came mainly from local vineyards. Water from public fountains had to be carried into the house with jugs, a task that the women of the household had to perform themselves or see that the household slaves did. The war had hurt the Athenian state economically by giving a chance for escape to many of the slaves who worked in the silver mines in the Attic countryside, but few privately owned domestic slaves tried to run away, perhaps because they realized that they would simply be resold by the Spartans if they managed to escape their Athenian masters. All but the poorest Athenian families, therefore, continued to have at least a slave or two to do chores around the house and look after the children. If a mother did not have a slave to serve as a wet nurse to suckle her infants, she would hire a poor free woman for the job, if her family could afford the expense.

The Life of Socrates

The most infamous episode in Athenian history in the aftermath of the Peloponnesian War consisted of the trial, conviction, and execution of Socrates (469–399 B.C.), the most famous philosopher of the late fifth century. Socrates' life had been devoted to combating the idea that justice should be equated with power to work one's will. Coming as it did during a time of social and political turmoil, his death indicated the fragility of Athenian

justice in practice. His passionate concern to discover valid guidelines for leading a just life and to prove that justice is better than injustice under all circumstances gave a new direction to Greek philosophy: an emphasis on ethics. Although other thinkers before him, especially the poets and dramatists, had dealt with moral issues, Socrates was the first philosopher to make ethics and morality his central concern.

Compared to the most successful sophists, Socrates lived in poverty and publicly disdained material possessions, but he nevertheless managed to serve as a hoplite in the army and support a wife and several children. He may have inherited some money, and he also received gifts from wealthy admirers. Nevertheless, he paid so little attention to his physical appearance and clothes that many Athenians regarded him as eccentric. Sporting, in his words, a stomach "somewhat too large to be convenient" (Xenophon, *Symposium* 2.18), Socrates wore the same nondescript cloak summer and winter and scorned shoes no matter how cold the weather. His physical stamina was legendary, both from his tirelessness when he served as a soldier in Athens's army and from his ability to outdrink anyone at a symposium.

Whether participating at a symposium, strolling in the agora, or watching young men exercise in a gymnasium, Socrates spent almost all his time in conversation and contemplation. In the first of these characteristics he resembled his fellow Athenians, who placed great value on the importance and pleasure of speaking with each other at length. He wrote nothing; our knowledge of his ideas comes from others' writings, especially those of his pupil Plato. Plato's dialogues, so called because they present Socrates and others in extended conversation about philosophy, portray Socrates as a relentless questioner of his fellow citizens, foreign friends, and various sophists. Socrates' questions had the unsettling aim of making his interlocutors examine the basic assumptions of their way of life. Employing what has come to be called the Socratic method, Socrates never directly instructed his conversational partners; instead, he led them to draw conclusions in response to his probing questions and refutations of their cherished but unexamined assumptions.

Socrates typically began one of his conversations by asking the interlocutor for a definition of an abstract quality such as happiness or a virtue such as courage. For instance, in the dialogue entitled *Laches*, after the Athenian general who appears as one of the dialogue's interlocutors, Socrates asks Laches and another distinguished military commander what makes a citizen a brave soldier. Socrates then proceeds by further questioning to show that the definitions of courage and instances of courageous behavior stated by the interlocutors actually conflict with their other beliefs about the behavior that constituted courage.

This indirect method of searching for the truth often left Socrates' conversational partners in a state of puzzlement and unhappiness because they were forced to admit that they were ignorant of what they began by assuming they knew perfectly well and that the principles by which they lived were unable to withstand close intellectual scrutiny. Socrates insisted that he, too, was ignorant of the best definition of virtue but that his wisdom consisted of knowing that he did not know. He was trying to improve rather than undermine his interlocutors' personal values and their beliefs in morality, even though, as one of them put it, a conversation with Socrates made a man feel numb just as if he had been stung by a stingray. Socrates wanted to discover through reasoning the universal standards that justified morality. He especially attacked the sophists' view of conventional morality as the "fetters that bind nature" (Plato, *Protagoras* 337d), asserting that it equated human happiness with power and "getting more."

Socrates passionately believed that just behavior was better for human beings than injustice and that morality was justified because it created happiness and well-being. Essentially, he seems to have argued that just behavior, or virtue, was identical to knowledge and that true knowledge of justice would inevitably lead people to choose good over evil and therefore to have truly happy lives, regardless of their material success. Since Socrates believed that knowledge itself was sufficient for happiness, he asserted that no one knowingly behaved unjustly and that behaving justly was always in the individual's interest. It might appear, he maintained, that individuals could promote their interests by cheating or using force on those weaker than themselves, but this appearance was deceptive. It was in fact ignorance to believe that the best life was the life of unlimited power to pursue whatever one desired. Instead, the most desirable human life was concerned with virtue and guided by rational reflection. Moral knowledge was all one needed for the good life, as Socrates defined it.

The Prosecution of Socrates

Although Socrates, unlike the sophists, offered no courses and took no fees, his effect on many people was as upsetting as the relativistic doctrines of the sophists had been. Indeed, Socrates' refutation of his fellow conversationalists' most treasured beliefs made some of his interlocutors decidedly uncomfortable. Unhappiest of all were the fathers whose sons, after listening to Socrates reduce someone to utter bewilderment, came home to try the same technique on their parents. Men who experienced this reversal of the traditional hierarchy of education between parent and child—the son was supposed to be educated by the father—had cause to feel that Socrates' effect, even if it was not his intention, was to undermine the stability of

society by questioning Athenian traditions and inspiring young men to do the same with the passionate enthusiasm of their youth.

We cannot say with certainty what Athenian women thought of Socrates or he of them. His views on human capabilities and behavior could be applied to women as well as to men, and he perhaps believed that women and men had the same basic capacity for justice. Nevertheless, the realities of Athenian society meant that Socrates circulated primarily among men and addressed his ideas to them and their situations. He is, however, reported to have had numerous conversations with Aspasia, the courtesan who lived with Pericles for many years, and Plato has Socrates attribute his ideas on love to a woman, the otherwise unknown priestess Diotima of Mantinea. Whether these contacts were real or fictional devices remains uncertain.

The feeling that Socrates could be a danger to conventional society gave Aristophanes the inspiration for his comedy *The Clouds* of 423 B.C., so named from the role played by the chorus. In the play Socrates is presented as a cynical sophist, who, for a fee, offers instruction in the Protagorean technique of making the weaker argument the stronger. When the protagonist's son is transformed by Socrates' instruction into a rhetorician able to argue that a son has the right to beat his parents, the protagonist ends the comedy by burning down Socrates' "Thinking Shop."

Athenians with qualms about Socrates found confirmation of their fears in the careers of the outrageous Alcibiades and, especially, Critias, one of the Thirty Tyrants. Socrates' critics blamed him for Alcibiades' contempt for social conventions because Alcibiades had been one of Socrates' most devoted followers, while Critias, another prominent follower, had played a leading role in the murder and plunder perpetrated by the Thirty Tyrants in 404–403 B.C. In blaming Socrates for the crimes of Critias, Socrates' detractors chose to overlook his defiance of the Thirty Tyrants when they had tried to involve him in their violent schemes and his rejection of the immorality that Critias had displayed.

The hostility some Athenians felt toward Socrates after the violence of the Thirty Tyrants encouraged the distinguished Athenian Anytus, a supporter of democracy who had suffered personally under the tyrants, to join with two other men of lesser prominence in prosecuting Socrates in 399 B.C. Since the amnesty prevented their bringing any charges directly related to the period of tyranny in 404–403, they accused Socrates of impiety. As Athenian law did not specify precisely what offenses constituted impiety, the accusers had to convince the jurors chosen for the case that what Socrates had done and how he had behaved and what he believed constituted a crime. Impiety ranked as an extremely serious crime because the gods were believed to punish the entire city-state if it harbored impious individuals.

As usual in Athenian trials, no judge presided to rule on what evidence was admissible or how the law should be applied. Speaking for themselves as the prosecutors, as also required by Athenian law, the accusers argued their case against Socrates before a jury of 501 men that had been assembled by lot from that year's pool of eligible jurors, drawn from the male citizens over thirty years old.

The prosecution of Socrates had both a religious and a moral component. Religiously, the prosecutors accused Socrates of not believing in the gods of the city-state and of introducing new divinities. Morally, they charged, he had led the young men of Athens away from Athenian conventions and ideals. After the conclusion of the prosecutors' remarks, Socrates spoke in his own defense, as required by Athenian legal procedure. Plato presents Socrates as taking this occasion not to rebut all the charges or try to curry favor or beg for sympathy, as jurors expected in serious cases, but to reiterate his unyielding dedication to goading his fellow citizens into examining their preconceptions. This irritating process of constant questioning, he maintained, would help them learn to live virtuous lives. Furthermore, they should care not about their material possessions but about making their true selves—their souls—as good as possible. If he were to be acquitted, he baldly stated, he vowed to remain their stinging gadfly no matter what the consequences to himself.

After the jury narrowly voted to convict, standard Athenian legal procedure required the jurors to decide between alternative penalties proposed by the prosecutors and the defendant. Anytus and his associates proposed death. In such instances the defendant was then expected to offer exile as the alternative, which the jury would usually accept. Socrates, however, replied to the prosecutors' proposal of the death penalty with the brash claim that he deserved a reward rather than a punishment, until his friends at the trial in horror prevailed upon him to propose a fine as his penalty. The jury chose death, by a wider margin than for the conviction. Socrates accepted his sentence with equanimity because, as he put it in a famous paradox, "no evil can befall a good man either in life or in death" (Plato, *Apology* 41d). In other words, nothing can take away the knowledge that constitutes virtue, and only the loss of that wisdom can count as a true evil.

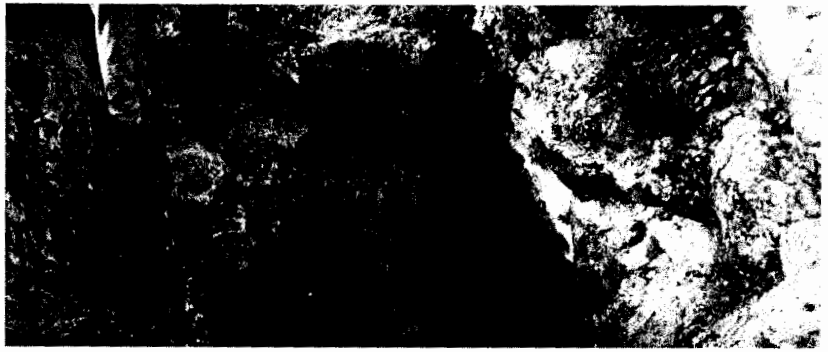
After his sentencing, Socrates had to wait in prison for some time before his execution because the city-state had a sacred delegation on the Cycladic island of Delos to honor Apollo and did not allow executions to be carried out while such official religious activity was in progress. While he waited, Socrates was visited regularly by a wealthy follower named Crito, who tried to convince Socrates to escape from his cell and flee Attica to his friends in other regions. Crito was apparently confident that he and his associates

could secure Socrates' freedom through bribery. Socrates refused to go, explaining his reasons by imagining that the laws of Athens were brought to life and held a dialogue with him as the interlocutor in which they set out a notion of a voluntary, implicit social contract between citizens and the state:

> Consider, Socrates [the Laws would most likely say], whether we are correct in saying that you are now trying to do something to us that is wrong [that is, to escape from prison and execution]. Although we brought you into this world and reared you and educated you and gave you and all your fellow citizens a share in all the good things that we could, nevertheless by the very fact of granting our permission we openly proclaim this principle: that any Athenian, once he becomes an adult and understands the political organization of the city and us its Laws, is allowed, if he is dissatisfied with us, to move away to wherever he likes and take his family property with him. If any citizen who is unhappy with us and with the city decides to go to one of our colonies or to emigrate to any other country, not one of us Laws hinders or stops him from going to wherever he pleases, without any penalty of loss of property. On the other hand, if any one of you stays here once he grasps how we administer justice and the rest of the official organization of our city, we claim that the fact of his remaining here means that he has agreed to follow any order that we may give him; and we further believe that anyone in this situation who disobeys us is guilty of wrongdoing on three separate counts: first because we are his parents, and second because we are his guardians, and third because, after promising us obedience, he neither obeys us nor persuades us to change our decision if we are in any way in the wrong; and although we issue all our orders as proposals, not as fierce commands, and we give him the choice either to persuade us or to carry out our order, he in fact does neither. (*Crito* 51cd)

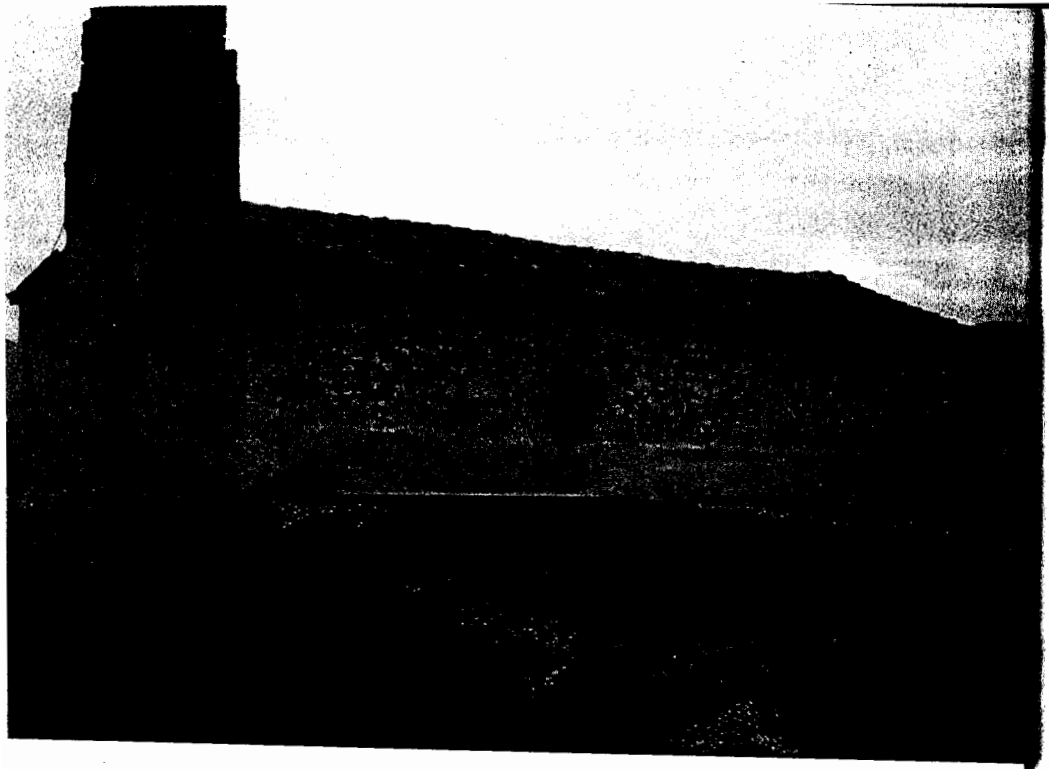
Spurning his friends' pleas to escape with arguments such as these, Socrates was executed in the normal Athenian way, by being given a poisonous drink concocted from powdered hemlock. The intellectual controversy that Socrates provoked in his life continued after his death, as philosophers and sophists churned out work after work in the genre called "Socratic conversations," arguing both for and against the positions on a wide variety of issues that they ascribed to Socrates. Xenophon, in a memoir on Socrates perhaps written decades after the philosopher's execution, summed up the feelings of his admirers: "All those who knew what sort of person Socrates was and who aim at excellence [*arete*] in their lives continue even now to long for him most of all because he was the most helpful of all in learning about excellence" (*Memorabilia* 4.8.11).

31. The large size of the initiation hall (telesterion) in the sanctuary of Demeter and Kore (Persephone) at Eleusis near Athens shows the popularity of this international Greek mystery cult. (Photo by author)

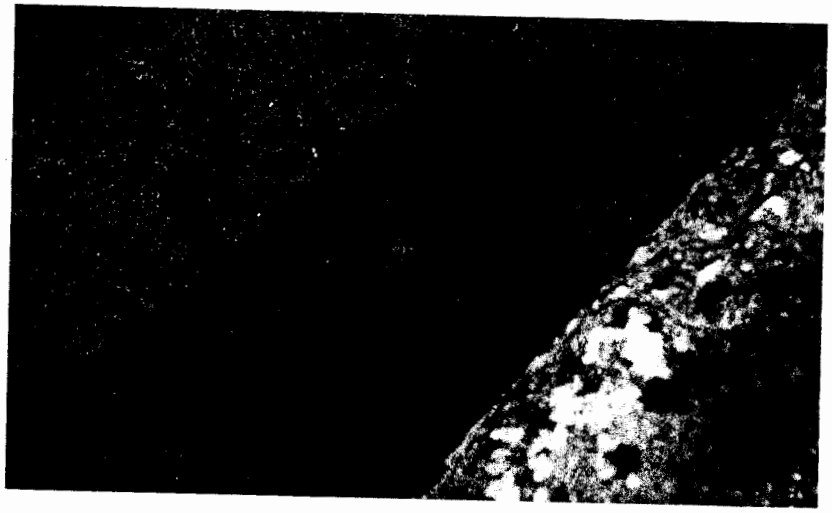


32. Greek religion found sacred space in a variety of locations; this cave near modern Vari in Athenian territory housed a shrine of the god Pan. (Photo by author)

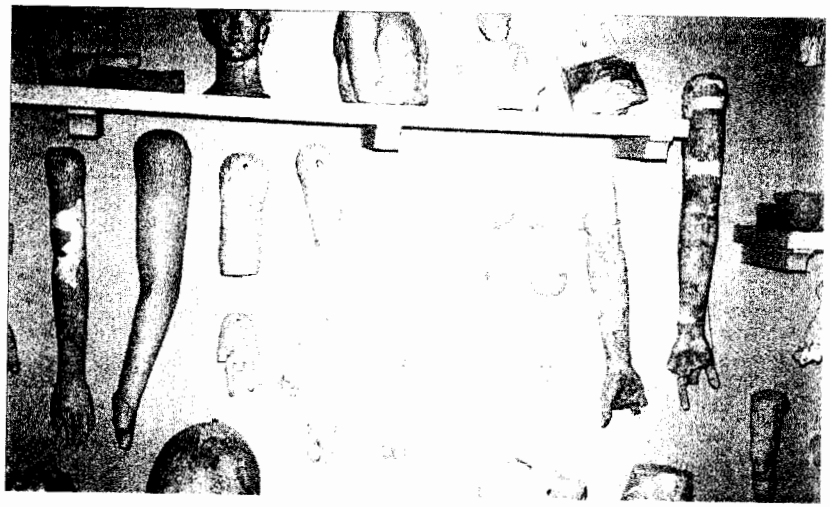
33. These niches cut in a cliff alongside a main road outside Athens housed dedications to Aphrodite, the goddess of erotic passion. (Photo by author)



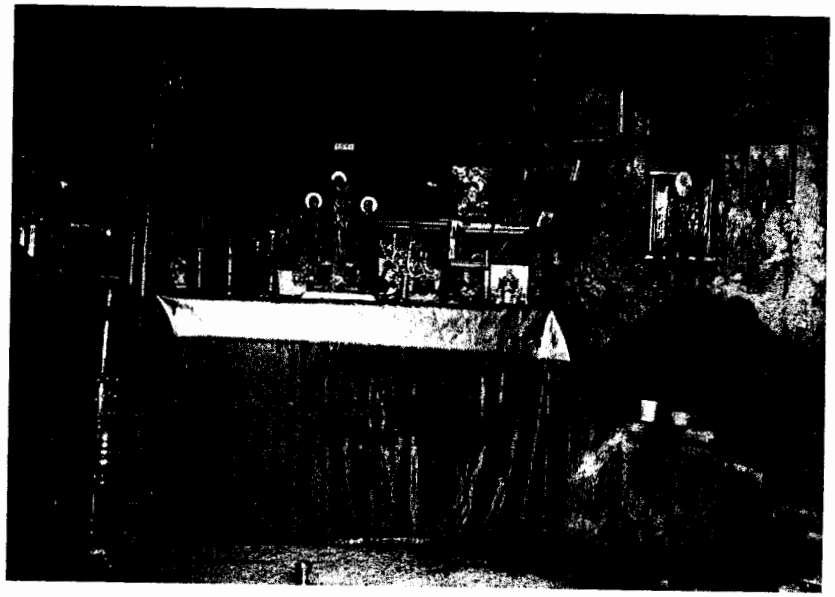
34. Under this church in northwest Greece lay a subterranean labyrinth housing an oracle of the dead (*nekromanteion*), where petitioners sought information that the everyday world could not supply. (Photo by author)



35. Petitioners had to descend into the earth, where the deceased resided, to consult the oracle of the dead. (Photo by author)



36. Worshipers of the god Asclepius sought healing in his sanctuaries, often dedicating models of body parts such as these to commemorate their experience. (Photo by author)

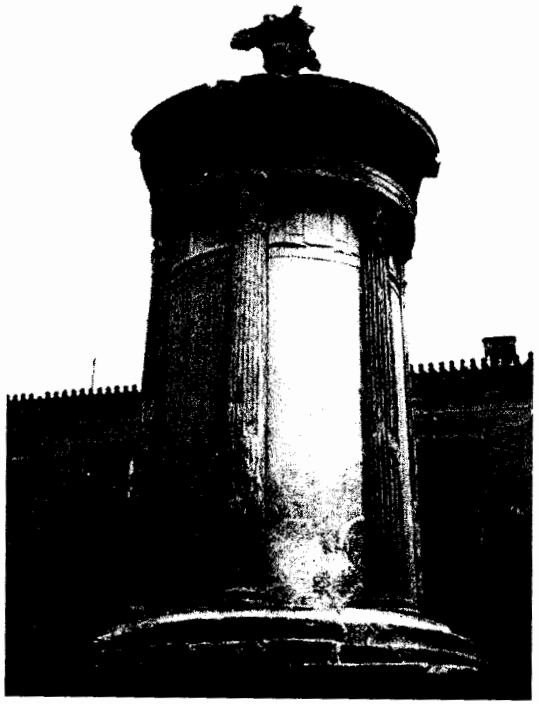


37. This Christian shrine is located in a cave at the site of an ancient sanctuary of the healing divinity Asclepius; modern worshipers seeking divine healing leave small plaques showing parts of the body. (Photo by author)

38. This vase painting of Heracles dispatching Kyknos ("Swan"), a brigand who preyed on travelers to the oracle of Apollo at Delphi, shows the most popular heroic figure of Greek mythology using his great power to benefit the Greek world. (Courtesy of the Worcester Art Museum)

39. Theseus (right), shown here shaking hands with the god Poseidon, was the Athenian rival to Heracles as a famous hero. (Courtesy of the Yale University Art Gallery)

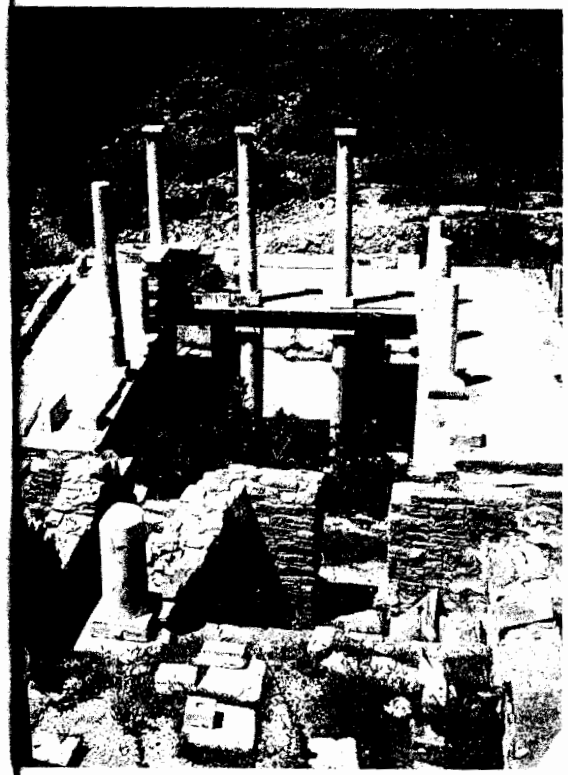
40. The civic theater at Eretria on the island of Euboea had a tunnel from backstage to the playing area that allowed actors to pop up from the ground as ghosts in dramas. (Photo by author)



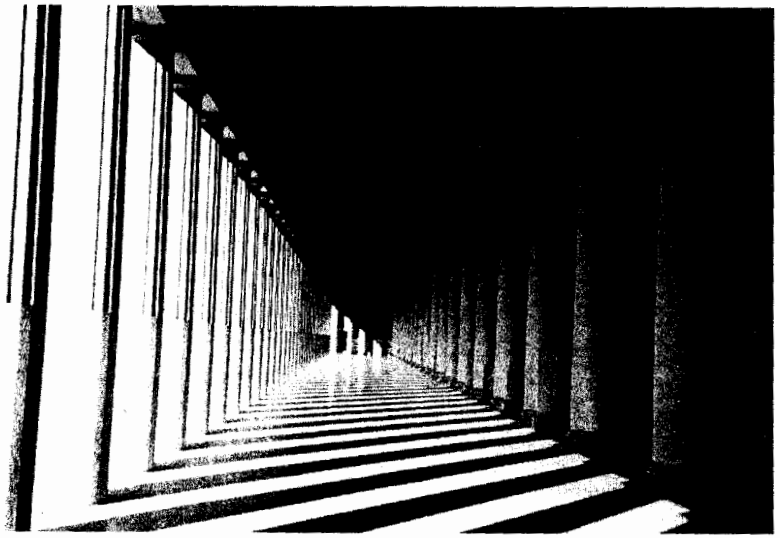
41. Wealthy citizens who sponsored winning plays in the public dramatic festivals at Athens were allowed to put up monuments such as this one to commemorate their victory and civic-minded generosity. (Photo by author)

42. This statue of Victory (Nike), which originally stood atop the stoa of Zeus in the Athenian agora, illustrates the exuberant style of Greek sculpture of the Classical period. (Photo by author)

43. These Classical-period sculptures served as Athenian grave monuments, in a typically public function of Greek art. (Photo by author)



44. This terraced multistory house on Delos shows the scale of a luxurious residence in the Hellenistic period. (Photo by author)



45. The stoa in the Athenian agora paid for in the Hellenistic period by King Attalus of Pergamum, now restored as a museum and archaeological workspace, was a magnificent example of the public architecture of Greek city-states designed to shelter people from the elements when they gathered in the city center for conversation, business, and politics. (Photo by author)

Ancient Greece

From Prehistoric to Hellenistic Times

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