

Ancient may find that
themistocles, an
athenian political



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Ancient Greek history may reveal the secrets of the Greek glorious past, when all political and cultural life of the state was concentrated in a polis. Probably, the most powerful Greek polis was Athens. Exactly political life of Athens inspired this essay. In the writings of some prominent ancient historians one may find a lot of essential information about the political life of Athenian polis and the Athenians themselves.

The works of these historians give an opportunity to state that in spite of the fighting and dying in wars, the Athenians contributed to the good of their polis. The essay is focused on desires and motives of the Athenians that led them to this contribution. Also, it seems to be necessary to understand how these desires and motives affected the political and cultural life of Athens. Herodotus (484-425BC) describes the sea battle of Salamis (480 BC), one of the Greek-Persian wars. The battle took place in Aegean Sea, near the island salamis. The Greeks achieved a glorious victory. The extremely powerful Athenian military fleet was a reliable stronghold of the entire ancient Greece that time.

The Athenian citizens were evacuated from the polis. When the Persians were located in Athens, the Athenian army was positioned in the Eleusinian bay. In spite of the fact that the number of Persian ships excelled that of Greek ones, the masterful military strategy of the Athenians gave them an opportunity to win the battle. Herodotus writes: "...the Hellenic fleet reached its full number of three hundred and eighty ships" (Herodotus, 430 BC). Proceeding from the Herodotus' writing, one may find that Themistocles, an Athenian political leader and a military general, tried to focus the Athenian power on sea, in contrast to his " bitter enemy" Aristides, who was for the <https://assignbuster.com/ancient-may-find-that-themistocles-an-athenian-political/>

land superiority; Herodotus calls him “ the best and the most just man in Athens” (Herodotus, 430 BC, LXXIX). However, their military union allowed them to win.

The historian notes that it was a truly glorious sea battle: ‘ Yet they were brave that day, much more brave than they had been at Euboea, for they all showed zeal out of fear of Xerxes, each one thinking that the king was watching him” (Herodotus, 430 BC, LXXXVI). This way, Themistocles’s fleet sank many Xerxes’ ships, and destroyed the army; however, some of Persian ships managed to escape. Herodotus underlines that after the victory, they were ready to fight again with Persian enemy, and prepared for other battle (Herodotus, 430 BC). Thus, the Athenians showed the military unity in the battle of Salamis. In the face of the common danger, the Greeks were able to unify their strengths, and achieved the victory. The period of tyrannical Pisistratus’ rule found its descriptions in the writings of some historians. Herodotus describes one of his sons, Hipparchus, and his assassination. Also, he writes: “ the Athenians were subject for four years to a tyranny not less but even more absolute than before” (Herodotus, “ The Assassination of Hipparchus, n.

d.). According to Herodotus, he ruled with his brother Hippias. Hippias was responsible for economical and political aspect of Athenian life, Hipparchus was interested in the arts. The historian notes that he had a vision of his death from his dream.

The representatives of Gephyraean clan (Harmodius and Aristogeiton) murdered Hipparchus. The reason is obvious: Hipparchus was in love with

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Aristogeiton's woman, Harmodius; after his death, Hippias turned into an even crueler tyrant. However, the citizens could not stand it for a long time, and finally, "the Athenians got rid of their tyrants" (Herodotus, "The Assassination of Hipparchus, 430 BC, LXV). However, Lacedaemonias' army contributed to the tyranny end, as well. Thucydides (460-395 BC) also described the period of Pisistratus' rule, the tyranny of his sons, and the circumstances of Hipparchus' death. He writes: "The commons had heard how oppressive the tyranny of Pisistratus and his sons had become before it ended, and further that that tyranny had been put down at last, not by themselves and Harmodius, but by the Lacedaemonias" (Thucydides, The Assassination of Hipparchus, n.

d.). As one may see, the Athenians experienced hard times under tyranny, and were able to drive the tyrannical family away.

The successful revolt was a natural response to it. However, there are other essential pages in Athenian political life. In one of his writings, Thucydides mentions Theseus, king of Athens. It was the time, when there were many independent towns near Athens. The historian states that this king was "of equal intelligence and power", whose main organizational feature in policy was "to abolish the council chambers and magistrates of the petty cities, and to merge them in the single council-chamber and town-hall of the present capital" (Thucydides, 431 BC, XV). As Athena was the main goddess honored by the Athenians, Theseus established the traditional feast: Synoecia. Thucydides believes that "from him dates the Synoecia, or Feast of Union; which is paid for by the state, and which the Athenians still keep in honor of the goddess" (Thucydides, 431 BC, XV).

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Thus, the king preserved the Athenian traditions, and became one of the Greek heroes. Nevertheless, the peaceful golden period finished, and Athens was involved in the military conflict. Thucydides dedicated several works to the Peloponnesian war, where Sparta (Dorians) and Athens (Ionians) took part.

There was a long tension between them; the reason lies in their political life. Athens was a democratic polis, while Sparta's political rule was oligarchy. Thucydides mentions Pericles as a famous Athenian ruler (Thucydides, 431 BC). Under his rule, Athens experienced the golden peak of their political, economic and cultural development. He turned Athens into the sea mistress: the polis had the most powerful fleet in ancient Greece. However, Peloponnesian war became the fatal event in the history of Athens. It was a tragic page of the Athenians; many citizens died in that war.

In his work, Thucydides describes the funeral and Pericles' oration. The author writes: " the dead are laid in the public sepulcher in the most beautiful suburb of the city, in which those who fall in war are always buried" (Thucydides, 431 BC, XXXIV). The Athenian ruler, Pericles pronounced his eulogium on the elevated platform near the sepulcher.

His embittered speech was saturated with deep patriotism and bitterness of defeat. Pericles recollected the glorious background of the Athenians. Also, Pericles mentioned that the Athenian constitution is unique that makes democratic, liberal and highly-developed Athens a pattern for others to follow. He stresses the powerful military policy that makes Athens different from its antagonists. He tells the following words: " We throw open our city

to the world, and never by alien acts exclude foreigners from any opportunity of learning or observing, although the eyes of the enemy may occasionally profit by our liberality; trusting less in system and policy than to the native spirit of our citizens; while in education, where our rivals from their very cradles by a painful discipline seek after manliness, at Athens we live exactly as we please, and yet are just as ready to encounter every legitimate danger" (Thucydides, 431 BC, XXXIX). It is obvious that the Athens ruler realizes all the valor of those who died in one of numerous Peloponnesian wars. Pericles' speech reflects all the glorious pages of Athenian history and military policy of their neighbors.

However, Thucydides draws reader's attention to another episode of the Peloponnesian war. In one of his works, he describes Mytilenian debate that occurred in Athens in the period of the Peloponnesian wars. In general, these wars were the result of political and ethnical diversity of Greece, where the Athenian played the role of authoritative centre. Nevertheless, the Mytilenians' (from the island Lesbos) rebellion that signed their desire to defeat Athenian authority, did not have success, and the Athenians divided most of the Lesbian land (Thucydides, 427 BC). The analyzed historians' works give an opportunity to make some general conclusions about political motives and desires of the Athenians in the period, when Athens was considered to be the powerful political and cultural centre. The glorious battle of Salamis proves the Athenians' desire to defeat the foreign enemy, the Persians. The victory of Greeks would be impossible without powerful military unity of several Greek peoples (Ionians, Dorians, etc.

). Moreover, the Athenians managed to overthrow their tyrants (Pisistratus and his sons) that showed their negative reaction to the tyranny (Athens was a democratic polis). However, ancient Greece flooded in internecine wars, and the Peloponnesian wars worsened the political situation for the Athenians. Nevertheless, such prominent figures as Theseus and Pericles were those political leaders that improved the life of the Athenians.

Sea military power, constitution and successful political way of life gave Athens an opportunity to prove their significance.