

Influential factors that affected athens history essay



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Some of the most influential factors that affected Athens' rise and fall were their form of government, their leadership, and their arrogance. Athens' democracy greatly affected their rise and collapse because it helped them rise to power, but it also caused them to make bad choices, leading to their fall. Similarly, the superior leadership of the Athenians facilitated the growth of Athens and was also a key factor in its downfall. Because of their outstanding leadership in the Persian Wars, the Athenian self-image was boosted, and this arrogance caused many other city-states, chiefly Sparta and Corinth, to dislike Athens and bring their city-state to ruins.

Athens' democracy greatly affected their rise and collapse because it helped them rise to power, but it also caused them to make bad choices, leading to their fall. The democracy allowed for regular citizens of the city-state to have a say in their government. In 507 B. C., Cleisthenes created ten tribes which each had 50 representatives in the Boule. This was the start of democracy in Athens. Also, an Assembly was established where all male citizens over the age of 18 could go and discuss matters. Since anyone could stand up to speak at the Assembly, a feeling of equality was established. Now it was the common people who could make decisions for their city-state, not the selfish aristocrats. Under the democracy, many great leaders were elected, such as Themistocles and Pericles who both made great contributions to Athens. However, many poor leaders were also chosen such as Cleon, who was a leather tanner. This shows a big flaw in the democracy of Athens. How could a leather tanner, the lowest of the low, be elected to lead a critical invasion? Also, the democracy made bad decisions. In 413 B. C., even after Nicias had reported that there was no hope in fighting the Sicilians any longer, the

Athenians voted to send another 15, 000 men to fight! The Sicilian Expedition was a failure, and it cost thousands of men their lives with only a handful of them making it back alive to Athens. The democracy of Athens was a major factor in its rise to power, but it also played a part in bringing about its downfall.

Similarly, the superior leadership of the Athenians facilitated the growth of Athens and was also a key factor in its downfall. In both Persian Wars, great generals led the Athenians to victory over the Persians. In the First Persian War in 490 B. C., one of the Athenian generals, Miltiades, was daring and attacked the Persian army while their cavalry was away in the Battle of Marathon. This led to an overwhelming win for Athens. They only lost 192 men while Persia lost a staggering 6, 400 men. The great leadership of Miltiades led the Athenians to a huge victory over the Persians. A strategic decision made by Themistocles before the Second Persian War was to use the silver that the Athenians found in early fifth century B. C. to build a navy of triremes. He knew that after losing the first war, the Persians would be back to get revenge. This turned out to be a crucial decision because the Greek win at Salamis was a turning point in the war. In the Second Persian War, Athens was given command of the Greek navy. In 480 B. C., Themistocles, who was in charge of the navy, tricked Xerxes, the king of Persia, into thinking the Greek navy was in disarray. Xerxes took the bait and chased the Greek navy into the Strait of Salamis. There, the larger size of the Persian navy was of no use because there was no room to maneuver, and the Greeks destroyed the Persian navy. The trickery of Themistocles resulted in a decisive win for the Athenians and one of the most important wins for

the Greeks in the Second Persian War. However, leadership was also one of the causes of the fall of Athens. In the Peloponnesian War, many bad choices by leaders caused them to be defeated by Sparta. For example, in 425 B. C., Cleon, a leather tanner, convinced the Athenians that launching a direct attack on Sparta would be smart because the Spartans would not dare attack while the Athenians were in their territory. The invading force, however, got stuck on an island just off the shore, and after two years, the invasion failed. This failure cost the Athenians a large amount of their funds. Cleon's failure to think his actions through was clearly a sign of bad leadership that cost Athens. Another example of bad leadership comes from the Sicilian Expedition in 415 B. C. Nicias, a leader that was opposed to war, was the only one left in charge of the expedition after Alcibiades had been arrested and escaped, and Lamachus had been killed in battle. He turned out to be a terrible leader because he was indecisive and missed many opportunities to defeat the Sicilians. Even when he finally realized that it was hopeless to fight the Sicilians, he hesitated, and the night before the Athenian army was about to leave, their entire fleet was burned by fire ships. The Sicilian Expedition had exhausted the Athenian treasury because they had sent an unprecedented amount of men, and it had ended in an utter failure. The poor leadership of Nicias ended horrifically and resulted in the deaths of thousands of Athenians. Clearly, great leadership was a factor in helping Athens rise to power, but ironically, it was also a major factor in its decline.

Because of their outstanding leadership in the Persian Wars, the Athenian self-image was boosted, and this arrogance caused many other city-states, chiefly Sparta and Corinth, to dislike Athens and bring their city-state to

ruins. Their boosted self-image can be seen best in their artwork after the Persian Wars. Before the wars, their sculptures of humans all had the same posture, with one foot forward and arms at the side. This showed a humbleness towards the gods because gods were portrayed as strong and tall. However, after the wars, sculptures of humans could not be distinguished from the gods. Humans were now portrayed with rippling muscle, tall, and freedom of movement. In the Parthenon frieze, the humans look exactly the same as the gods on the pediments, albeit smaller and in low relief. Also, they portrayed themselves as rational in the metopes, and the savages were shown as irrational and crazy. Their arrogance can be seen in Pericles' Funeral Oration when he says, "...I declare that our city is an education to Greece." He clearly thought very highly of his city and that it was the best in all of Greece. Their arrogance caused them to become power-hungry. In the Melian Dialogue, the Athenians speak with a condescending tone towards the Melians when they try to force them into becoming part of the Athenian empire. This is evident when they say, "... your actual resources are too scanty to give you a chance of survival against the forces that are opposed to you at this moment." The Athenians clearly think that they are superior to the Melians. Furthermore, they did not let members of the Delian League to withdraw their membership. This was shown when Naxos tried to withdraw, and the Athenians waged war against them and took down their walls. The arrogance of the Athenians also caused them to become overambitious. They started to expand into mainland Greece, which made city-states such as Sparta and Corinth worry. Their expansion was one of the major factors that lead to the Peloponnesian War.

In the war, their overambition caused them to make many costly mistakes
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that eventually led to their end. The arrogance of the Athenians clearly was a key factor in their destruction.

Three major causes of the rise and fall of Athens were its democracy, its leadership, and its arrogance. The democracy produced many great leaders, but unfortunately, also many bad leaders. Their arrogance was a result of great leadership in the Persian Wars, and it led to the end of Athenian power in Greece.

Democracy

Let ordinary people feel equal to wealthier people

Triremes promoted democracy

Because they felt equal and could make a difference in the government, they did not revolt against the government

Everyone had a say during the Assemblies

Caused downfall because they made bad decisions

Supported the Sicilian Expedition

After Nicias told them that there was no hope left in fighting, they sent over another 15, 000 men!

Lost thousands of men and only a handful of the men made it back to Athens

Also allowed for bad leaders to be chosen, such as Cleon, who was a leather tanner

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Leadership

Great generals led Athens to victory against the Persians

First Persian War: Sparta refused to help Athens, so they had only 10, 000 Athenians and 1, 000 soldiers from Plataea against 25, 000 Persians

Only had 10 generals, but Miltiades was daring and attacked while the Persian cavalry was away

Won overwhelmingly, losing only 192 men to Persia's 6, 400

Second Persian War: Athens was given command of the navy

Themistocles tricked Xerxes, king of Persia, into thinking that the Greek fleet was in disarray, so the Persians attacked and were destroyed by the Greek triremes

When Athens found a huge deposit of silver, Themistocles' suggested that it be used to build a huge fleet of triremes

Turned out to be a great idea in the Second Persian War

Bad leadership in the Peloponnesian War caused their defeat by the Spartans

Cleon, a leather tanner, convinced the Athenians to launch an attack on Sparta

Invading force got stuck on an island just off shore

Failed after two years

Spend a huge amount of funds on this invasion

Alcibiades convinced the Athenians to approve of the Sicilian Expedition which was intended to cut off supplies from Sparta and Corinth

Sent a huge force, larger than any other Athens had previously sent anywhere, to take Syracuse

Spent almost all of the money in the treasury

Alcibiades was arrested the day the expedition left for defacing public statues, but he escaped and told Sparta all of his plans

Lamachus was killed in the first few days of fighting, so only Nicias was left

Nicias missed many opportunities

Athenians decided to send another 15000 men, commanded by Demosthenes, to attack, but it failed

Even when the orders had been given to sail back to Athens, Nicias was hesitant, and that night, the entire fleet was burned by fire ships

Arrogance

Arrogance after winning both Persian Wars

Shown in their artwork and sculptures

Portrayed themselves the same as gods in the Parthenon frieze

Humans were shown as rational and the savages were shown as crazy creatures in the metopes of the Parthenon

Statues of humans could not be distinguished from gods

Showed the " ideal" human being

Tall and strong

Freedom in movement

Before, they portrayed humans as all uniform in shape and they all held the same posture

Pericles' Funeral Oration

"...I declare that our city is an education to Greece."

Shows he thinks very highly of Athens

Melian Dialogue

"...your actual resources are too scanty to give you a chance of survival against the forces that are opposed to you at this moment."]

Clearly condescending

Arrogance caused overambitious actions

Started to expand into mainland Greece

Made some city-states worry such as Sparta and Corinth, which caused the Peloponnesian War

Forced members into the Delian League and would not let them leave