

# The development of the athenian imperialism history essay



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Athens emergence as a major power in Greece is based on organised manpower, unlimited financial resource, a huge armada fleet and vast land. In the late sixth century, Athens began to have enough resource of manpower and sufficient enough to sustain large scale military activity. Athens reformations on democracy and the charismatic leadership enable themselves to have enough support by the citizen of Athens and their allies. In addition, the huge contribution of Athenian fleet into the defeat of the Persian at Salamis and Marathon gave them more opportunity to be seen as a protector of the Greek states apart from Sparta (Meiggs, 1972).

The continuous campaign in maintaining peace in the Aegean exhausted Sparta be it financially or manpower. Therefore, Sparta was eager to stop prosecuting the war. They surrendered the leadership of the ongoing campaign to Athenian which was eager to accept it (Powell, 1988). In 478, The Delian League was formed by several Greek states as an offensive and defensive alliance and the main aim of the Delian League was to maintain the freedom of Greece from Persia. The League was set in place to organise and defensive alliance so that in any future attacks upon their territory, the Greeks would be well prepared and able to resist (Powell, 1995). The principal states in the League were Athens, Chios, Samos and Lesbos but many of the principal islands and Ionian states joined the league in order to benefit from it. In the process, many Greek states wanted a strong alliance with Athens and this alliance designed to gain some form of compensation for the troubles and losses undergone by the Greeks during the war (Fornara, 1977).

It can be said that the inability of Sparta to extend her power and their hesitance to be seen as the Lord Protector of the Aegean after the Persian war resulted in the formation of the Delian League, which in the later stage evolved into the Athenian Empire. The growth and the changing of the Athenian into an empire could be related to their desire to take over the leadership from Spartan hegemony. When Athenian assumed leadership of the Delian League, Athens' intentions were in a good deed. In the earlier years of her hegemony, Athens accomplished the main objective, forcing the Persians out from Aegean and maintained peace (Meiggs, 1972)

However, Athens conducts towards her allies became more oppressive after the Peace of Callias in 449 where there was no more threat from Persia and the region was relatively at peace. Into second half of the sixth century, Athens slowly maintained a tight grip over all ally and imposes her will on her subject states and never let them made their own decision. The way Athens exercised her will could be seen in various approaches. Her interference could be in restriction on freedom of action in internal states relation, political or judicial, conscription on military campaign, payment of tribute (phoros), dispossession of land and setting up the cleruchial system, establishment of military garrisons, economic control measure and trade sanctioning (Osborne, 2000).

Year after year, Athens became less concerned with the rights and privileges of her allies in the League and she continued increasing power and draconian grip on the allies. They no longer consider the allies as a part of friendly pact, instead slowly marginalised them as a subject states. The development of the Athenian into an empire holds that the vital change from <https://assignbuster.com/the-development-of-the-athenian-imperialism-history-essay/>

allied harmony to imperial subjugation occurred in the middle of the fifth century, and the factor behind it was the ratification of the Peace of Callias. Formal recognition of the end of a state of war between the Athenian alliance and Persia, it is supposed, eliminated the rationale for the need of the Delian League and raised the question to Athenian of whether the alliance should be abandoned (Robinson, 2004). During this period of time, a series of measures that tightened Athenian control over the subject-allies occurred and Pericles is squarely given responsibility for the harsher rule and dominance this led to uneasiness among the subject-allies and the tension gradually escalates from time to time.

The subjugation of member states within Delian League created tension and uneasiness among the allies. This situation continued to worsen in 454 when the league treasury which kept all the tributes and revenue at Delos was moved to Athens on the excuse of avoiding possible Persian raid into the Aegean. Although reasons of safety could be justified, the move had been seen by the allies as a provocative act in anticipation of some further intensification of Athenian control and significant step in the transformation of the League into a single Athenian Empire. The decision to transfer the treasure from Delos to Athens and to dedicate a quota of the tribute payment to Athena has angered allies. Initially, the treasury main aim is to put all the revenues that had been collected from the allies for the good deed of the league but it did not happened like the way it should be. Instead, all the money was used to fund various Athenian mega projects. As well as using the tribute reserve she received to build ships, Athens embarked on an ambitious building program. Using this reserve, Athens rebuild the Acropolis,

constructs astonishing and magnificent buildings such as the Parthenon, Erechtheum, Propylaea, as well as the beautification of the city (Fornara, 1977). The tribute was also gave too much luxury to Athens, so much that most already-rich Athenian citizen would not have to pay from their own for the daily administration of Athens.

However, the allies were indeed furious at the way their money was spent, and they argued that by doing this, Athens abandoned the goodwill spirit of the League (Meiggs, 1972). Instead of using the money for the mutual benefit of the league, all money went to Athens alone and during the Peloponnesian war, the amount of tributes from the subject states were increased and became so excessive that many states could not afford to pay the tribute. This shows how Athens was taking control of the League to benefit herself. Athens no longer is seen as friendly alliance as decades earlier. They no longer consulted allies, who now had little or no control over their own internal and foreign affairs.

When the tribute were firstly introduced, it been seen as a good deed in order to financed the league fleet and other expenditures but things changed over time as Athens became more dominant. The change can be seen in of the word phoros meaning. Originally it meant ' contribution', but as the Delian League changed into an Athenian Empire, it came to mean ' tribute.' The allies, with exception on Chios, Lesbos and Samos, were required to pay tribute to Athens. Evidence of this tribute payment is clearly stated on the Athenian Tribute Lists, the list which the inscriptions that provide evidence of the money paid to Athens by other members of the League dated in 453 (Fornara, 1977). The amount of early tribute that had been mutually agreed <https://assignbuster.com/the-development-of-the-athenian-imperialism-history-essay/>

by the allies in the beginning of the establishment of the Delian League is approximately 460 talents.

After decades, more allies have tendency to donate money as a mode of payment in paying tribute (phoros) rather than contributing ships and manpower. This act even though initially was dislike by Athens, but it slowly became Athens preference for monetary rather than naval contribution. It is partially justified by the fact that it was beyond the capabilities of many of the states in the Delian League to build triremes and man the ships. As a result, Athens naval strength was increasing at the expense of the allies and at the height of its power, Athens had approximately 300 seaworthy triremes and this had been achieved due to the increasing tribute from the allies (McGregor, 1987).

In 453, the payment has been increased as Athens considered the early payments had been far less than the maximum the allies could give. In 425, the amount of the tribute was increased by Athens three times the amount of the original tribute and it is believed that allies had to pay more than 1, 460 talents altogether and this definitely burdens the subject states (Meiggs, 1972). In 413, following the failed Sicilian expedition where Athens was financially exhausted and desperately attempted to raise more revenues, Athens replaced the phoros with another measures of revenue collecting. In order to generate more income, Athens had imposed five percent levy on every economic or trade activity on subject states and it proved to be a great burden for them. This inconsiderate act is being seen as the major factors that many allies revolted and seceded from the alliance .

It is interesting to see how the transition of the Delian League into the Athenian Empire as a progressive intensification of control by Athens, exercised to all subject states. The revolt and subjugation of Naxos in 469 was one of the first circumstances where a League member lost its autonomy. It became apparent in the coming year that Athens, as the leader of the League, would not hesitate to use force to make sure that obligations were fully met. The consequences of secession would be hard to bear because any intention of revolting or an attempt to secede from the League will be dealt with severe punishment. Although revolt or secession is being put down in a gruesome manner, it did not stop other League members from seceding, for by now Athens was no longer the popular liberators they had been. Their strict control of the League, together with increasing interference in the internal affairs of member states, had aroused widespread resentment ( Ma, Papazarkadas & Parker, 2009).

Apart from trade and tribute, Athens also imposed her will on their subject states in judicial system. The constitutions that were models of Athens were imposed on allies and serious cases were placed under the jurisdiction of Athens. Law courts often prosecuted anti-Athenian elements and any disputes between the subject states and Athens will be referred in Athens court and frequently in most cases, the verdict will always be in favour of the Athenian. The control of law became so absolute that eventually no allies could sentence someone to death without first obtaining Athenian permission. The subject states control of their own judicial processes was vitally limited, disputes with Athenians were resolved by Athenian juries and they endured the abuse by Athenians of special privileges in their own lands.

In general, they were regarded as city-states of inferior status. A point to note that Athens interference was not also restricted into economic, jurisdiction or internal affair of the states but also in cultural and religious matters. The example of the city of Erythrae where the people are instructed to send envoys with offerings to the great Panathenaic Festival which held in Athens every four years shows the interference of Athens in daily life and ritual of their subject states (Powell, 1988).

Another imperial act of Athenian is the introduction of Athenian Coinage Decree in 446 which is being imposed to all subject states. This decree enforced the use of only Athenian coinage, weights and measures throughout the empire and it applied as a uniform transaction of trade (Fornara, 1977). The significant enforcement on the decree is merely political, which only shows Athens intention to diminish her allies' sovereignty by removing right to trade with their own currency carrying their own state's emblem. This act inflames Athens-allies relation which denied their right for transaction using their well established coinage.

Another method of control used by the Athenians on imposing her will on their subject states was to put garrisons in rebellious cities. These Athenian garrisons not only served as a military purpose but were a political device as well. Apart from that, in terms of economic and lands, Athens exploited all the resources in their subject-states and practised a harsh land policy.

Between 450 and 446, Athens introduced a system of cleruchies, which were settlements of Athenian citizens abroad. They implant settlers of their own on a large scale basis on the territory of the conquered states especially of the rebellious allies like Samos, Euboea, Lesbos and Mytilene. Athens

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benefited most from the exploitation of this cleruchial system which meant to reduce the population pressure in Athens itself. This kind of action also increased Athenian military power and also increased the economic power of Athens which the cleruchs will form military garrisons and will also enable more of its citizens to become property holders. These establishment of cleruchies also strengthened Athens hold on her empire, as some of the land were located at strategic points in the Aegean (Finley, 1978).

These actions greatly strained her relationship with allies, that according to Diodorus Siculus :

“ In general, the Athenians were making great gains in power and no longer treated their allies with decency as they had done before; instead they ruled with arrogance and violence. For this reason most of the allies could not bear their harshness and spoke to one another of rebellion; some of them even disdained the League Council and acted according to their own wishes.” (DS II. 70. 3-4)

The behaviour of Athens toward her allies during the Periclean era had changed, mainly due to the growing power of imperialism and a real sense of arrogance that they were no longer pleasant as leader. This aggressive behaviour usually left no choice for some states but to rebel and secede from the alliance. For most of them, Athens no longer behaved as equal as their allies and found it easy to put down any states that willing to turn against them (Fornara & Samons, 1993). Rebellions occurred when members of the alliance were unwilling or unable to pay the tribute, supply ships or contributing troops for military service. Athens was so rigid about tribute

collection and exaction of service. The punishment for revolt of Naxos, Thasos and Lesbos shows how strict Athens on this and the severe punishment were often executed in order to be a lesson to anyone who have any intention in breaching the Oath of the Alliance :

“ After the Athenians had gained their empire, they treated their allies rather dictatorially, except for Chios, Lesbos and Samos. These they regarded as guardians of the empire, allowing them to keep their own constitution and rule over any subjects they happened to have.” (Constitution of Athens XXIV)

Rebellions and reductions in tribute proved to be fatal for the allies. It will resulted in which each rebel state was forced to dispossessed their land, surrender their right to vote in the alliance and have to pay more amount of tribute. The already weak became weaker while Athens grew proportionately stronger. The way how Athens suppressed any revolt in the Athenian empire can be seen during the repression of the Thasos in 463, Erythrae in 453, Euboea in 446, Samos in 440 Miletus by 434 and the massacre of the Melians in 428 (. Thucydides in the Peloponnesian War wrote :

“ The Athenian fleet was increased by their payments, while whenever they themselves revolted, they set about the war without preparation and without experience.” (Thucydides I. 99. 3)

As a whole, Athens had become predatory in Greece itself, such a policy was the firmly were made to maintain strict control over subject allies. In some cases, she also imposed a double standard policy on her allies. The obvious examples can be seen on the construction of the Long Walls. The

construction of Long Walls at Athens itself, although been strongly objected <https://assignbuster.com/the-development-of-the-athenian-imperialism-history-essay/>

by Sparta, had been constructed for the reason of safety and purposely built to repulse any possible enemy attack on Athens soil but when Megara did the same, Athens immediately asked them to demolish it. This significant policy illustrates the conjuncture of two different policies brought into alignment (Crawford & Whitehead, 1983).

As a conclusion, the materials that Athens drew from their empire were considerable. Athens grows prosperous at the allies' expense and they became poorer as Athens grew richer. Athens drained the wealth of the Greek states and exploited allies in order to improve their status of an empire which Athens profited handsomely from the tribute and the subjugation of their allies. It is true to say that the membership of the empire provides the allies with many advantages such as peace, better protection, democratic governments and prosperity through increased trade. However the loss of the member's independence in domestic and foreign affairs, their economic dependence on Athens and her iron claw leadership towards the allies far outweighed any advantages gained. Allies saw her as a tyrant state and they have regret on joining the alliance and eager to secede from the alliance. This can be seen at the result of the Peloponnesian War where Athenian imperialism leads to its own demise. Their behaviour, conducts and arrogance on the subject states were big mistakes and led to the defection of the allies to Sparta as this act that eventually won the war for the Spartans in 404.

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