

Military career of pericles



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Pericles was born into the first generation able to use the new weapon of the popular vote against the old power of family politics. His father, Xanthippus, a typical member of this generation, almost certainly of an old family, began his political career by a dynastic marriage into the controversial family of the Alcmaeonids. His Alcmaeonid mother, Agariste, provided him with relationships of sharply diminishing political value and her family curse, a religious defilement that was occasionally used against him by his enemies.

His family's nobility and wealth allowed him to fully pursue his inclination toward education. He learned music from the masters of the time (Damon or Pythocleides could have been his teacher) and he was considered to have been the first politician to attribute great importance to philosophy. Pericles' manner of thought and rhetorical charisma may have been in part products of Anaxagoras' emphasis on emotional calm in the face of trouble and skepticism about divine phenomena. His proverbial calmness and self-control are also regarded as products of Anaxagoras' influence.

Before his death, Pericles' friends were concentrated around his bed, enumerating his virtues during peace and underscoring his nine war trophies. Pericles lived during the first two and a half years of the Peloponnesian War and, his death was a disaster for Athens, since his successors were inferior to him; they preferred to incite all the bad habits of the rabble and followed an unstable policy, endeavoring to be popular rather than useful.

Military career of Pericles

Military achievement

For more than 20 years Pericles led many expeditions, mainly naval ones. Being always cautious, he never undertook of his own accord a battle involving much uncertainty and peril and he did not accede to the vain impulses of the citizens. Pericles also tried to minimize the advantages of Sparta by rebuilding the walls of Athens. The strategy of rebuilding the walls radically altered the use of force in Greek international relations. During the Peloponnesian War, Pericles initiated a defensive grand strategy whose aim was the exhaustion of the enemy and the preservation of the status quo. The two basic principles of the Periclean Grand Strategy were the rejection of appeasement (in accordance with which he urged the Athenians not to revoke the Megarian Decree) and the avoidance of overextension. Pericles' vehement insistence that there should be no diversionary expeditions may well have resulted from the bitter memory of the Egyptian campaign, which he had allegedly supported. The Athenians remained true to the larger Periclean strategy of seeking to preserve, not expand, the empire, and did not depart from it until the Sicilian Expedition. Critics of Pericles' strategy, however, have been just as numerous as its supporters. A common criticism is that Pericles was always a better politician and orator than strategist. Pericles had not worked out a clear strategy for an effective offensive action that could possibly force Thebes or Sparta to stop the war. The Periclean strategy on four counts: first that by rejecting minor concessions it brought about war; second, that it was unforeseen by the enemy and hence lacked credibility; third, that it was too feeble to exploit any opportunities; and fourth, that it depended on Pericles for its execution and thus was bound to

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be abandoned after his death. Pericles' expenditure on his military strategy in the Peloponnesian War to be about 2, 000 talents annually, and based on this figure concludes that he would only have enough money to keep the war going for three years. The strategy was too defensive and would not succeed. The Athenians lost the war only when they dramatically reversed the Periclean grand strategy that explicitly disdained further conquests. The Periclean strategy was not innovative, but could lead to stagnancy in favor of Athens.

Peloponnesian war

Pericles and the Athenians incited the war, scrambling to implement their belligerent tactics with a sort of arrogance and a love of strife. The reason for the war was Sparta's fear of Athenian power and growth.

Prelude to the war

Pericles was convinced that the war against Sparta, which could not conceal its envy of Athens' pre-eminence, was inevitable if not to be welcomed. Therefore he did not hesitate to send troops to Corcyra to reinforce the Corcyraean fleet, which was fighting against Corinth. In 433 BC the enemy fleets confronted each other at the Battle of Sybota and a year later the Athenians fought Corinthian colonists at the Battle of Potidaea; these two events contributed greatly to Corinth's lasting hatred of Athens. The Athenians' justification was that the Megarians had cultivated the sacred land consecrated to Demeter and had given refuge to runaway slaves, a behavior which the Athenians considered to be impious. Pericles advised the Athenians not to yield to their opponents' demands, since they were militarily stronger. Pericles was not prepared to make unilateral concessions.

Consequently, Pericles asked the Spartans to offer a quid pro quo. In exchange for retracting the Megarian Decree, the Athenians demanded from Sparta to abandon their practice of periodic expulsion of foreigners from their territory (xenelasia) and to recognize the autonomy of its allied cities, a request implying that Sparta's hegemony was also ruthless. Another consideration that may well have influenced Pericles' stance was the concern that revolts in the empire might spread if Athens showed herself weak.

First year of the war

This deputation was not allowed to enter Athens, as Pericles had already passed a resolution according to which no Spartan deputation would be welcomed if the Spartans had previously initiated any hostile military actions. The Spartan army was at this time gathered at Corinth, and, citing this as a hostile action, the Athenians refused to admit their emissaries. Pericles also gave his compatriots some advice on their present affairs and reassured them that, if the enemy did not plunder his farms, he would offer his property to the city. In any case, seeing the pillage of their farms, the Athenians were outraged, and they soon began to indirectly express their discontent towards their leader, who many of them considered to have drawn them into the war. Even when in the face of mounting pressure, Pericles did not give in to the demands for immediate action against the enemy or revise his initial strategy. He also avoided convening the ecclesia, fearing that the populace, outraged by the unopposed ravaging of their farms, might rashly decide to challenge the vaunted Spartan army in the field. While the Spartan army remained in Attica, Pericles sent a fleet of 100 ships to loot the coasts of the Peloponnese and charged the cavalry to guard

the ravaged farms close to the walls of the city. When the enemy retired and the pillaging came to an end, Pericles proposed a decree according to which the authorities of the city should put aside 1, 000 talents and 100 ships, in case Athens was attacked by naval forces.

Last military operations

In 430 BC, the army of Sparta looted Attica for a second time, but Pericles was not daunted and refused to revise his initial strategy. Unwilling to engage the Spartan army in battle, he again led a naval expedition to plunder the coasts of the Peloponnese, this time taking 100 Athenian ships with him. According to Plutarch, just before the sailing of the ships an eclipse of the sun frightened the crews, but Pericles used the astronomical knowledge he had acquired from Anaxagoras to calm them. In the summer of the same year an epidemic broke out and devastated the Athenians. The exact identity of the disease is uncertain, and has been the source of much debate. In any case, the city's plight, caused by the epidemic, triggered a new wave of public uproar, and Pericles was forced to defend himself in an emotional final speech. This is considered to be a monumental oration, revealing Pericles' virtues but also his bitterness towards his compatriots' ingratitude. Temporarily, he managed to tame the people's resentment and to ride out the storm, but his internal enemies' final bid to undermine him came off; they managed to deprive him of the generalship and to fine him at an amount estimated between 15 and 50 talents. Ancient sources mention Cleon, a rising and dynamic protagonist of the Athenian political scene during the war, as the public prosecutor in Pericles' trial. Nevertheless, within just a year, in 429 BC, the Athenians not only forgave Pericles but also

re-elected him as strategist. He was reinstated in command of the Athenian army and led all its military operations during 429 BC, having once again under his control the levers of power.

Samian war

The Samian War was one of the last significant military events before the Peloponnesian War. After Thucydides' ostracism, Pericles was re-elected yearly to the generalship, the only office he ever officially occupied, although his influence was so great as to make him the de facto ruler of the state. In 440 BC Samos was at war with Miletus over control of Priene, an ancient city of Ionia on the foot-hills of Mycale. Worsted in the war, the Milesians came to Athens to plead their case against the Samians. When the Athenians ordered the two sides to stop fighting and submit the case to arbitration at Athens, the Samians refused. In a naval battle the Athenians led by Pericles and the other nine generals defeated the forces of Samos and imposed on the island an administration pleasing to them. When the Samians revolted against Athenian rule, Pericles compelled the rebels to capitulate after a tough siege of eight months, which resulted in substantial discontent among the Athenian sailors. Pericles then quelled a revolt in Byzantium and, when he returned to Athens, gave a funeral oration to honor the soldiers who died in the expedition. Between 438-436 BC Pericles led Athens' fleet in Pontus and established friendly relations with the Greek cities of the region.

Personal attacks

Pericles and his friends were never immune from attack, as preeminence in democratic Athens was not equivalent to absolute rule. Just before the eruption of the Peloponnesian war, Pericles and two of his closest associates,

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Phidias and his companion, Aspasia, faced a series of personal and judicial attacks. Pericles' enemies also found a false witness against Phidias, named Menon. Phidias suggested himself as a bald old man, and also inserted a very fine likeness of Pericles fighting with an Amazon. Aspasia, who was noted for her ability as a conversationalist and adviser, was accused of corrupting the women of Athens in order to satisfy Pericles' perversions. Beyond these initial prosecutions, the ecclesia attacked Pericles himself by asking him to justify his ostensible profligacy with, and maladministration of, public money. Pericles was so afraid of the oncoming trial that he did not let the Athenians yield to the Lacedaemonians. Pericles deliberately brought on the war to protect his political position at home. Thus, at the start of the Peloponnesian War, Athens found itself in the awkward position of entrusting its future to a leader whose pre-eminence had just been seriously shaken for the first time in over a decade.

Political career

Entering politics

In 472 BC, Pericles presented the Persae of Aeschylus at the Greater Dionysia as a liturgy, demonstrating that he was then one of the wealthier men of Athens. Pericles stood first among the Athenians for forty years. If this was so, Pericles must have taken up a position of leadership by the early 460s BC. Throughout these years he endeavored to protect his privacy and tried to present himself as a model for his fellow citizens. For example, he would often avoid banquets, trying to be frugal. In 463 BC Pericles was the leading prosecutor of Cimon, the leader of the conservative faction, who was accused of neglecting Athens' vital interests in Macedon. Although Cimon

was acquitted, this confrontation proved that Pericles' major political opponent was vulnerable.

Political leadership

Thucydides was asked by Sparta's king, Archidamus, whether he or Pericles was the better fighter, Thucydides answered without any hesitation that Pericles was better, because even when he was defeated, he managed to convince the audience that he had won. Athens was in name a democracy but, in fact, governed by its first citizen. Pericles' charisma led, convinced and, sometimes manipulated. The fining of Pericles, the accusations against Pericles but instead focuses on Pericles' integrity. Pericles made the Athenians slothful, garrulous and avaricious, by starting the system of public fees. The people were first led on by him into allotments of public lands, festival-grants, and distributions of fees for public services, thereby falling into bad habits, and becoming luxurious and wanton under the influence of his public measures, instead of frugal and self-sufficing. Pericles was not carried away by the people, but he was the one guiding the people. According to King, by increasing the power of the people, the Athenians left themselves with no authoritative leader. During the Peloponnesian War, Pericles' dependence on popular support to govern was obvious.

Leading Athens

Final battle with the conservatives

In 444 BC, the conservative and the democratic factions confronted each other in a fierce struggle. The ambitious new leader of the conservatives accused Pericles of profligacy, criticizing the way he spent the money for the ongoing building plan. When Pericles, the leader of the democrats, took the

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floor, he put the conservatives in the shade. Pericles responded resolutely, proposing to reimburse the city for all the expenses from his private property, under the term that he would make the inscriptions of dedication in his own name. In 442 BC, the Athenian public ostracized for 10 years and Pericles was once again the unchallenged suzerain of the Athenian political arena.

Athens' rule over its alliance

Pericles wanted to stabilize Athens' dominance over its alliance and to enforce its pre-eminence in Greece. The final steps in the shift to empire may have been triggered by Athens' defeat in Egypt, which challenged the city's dominance in the Aegean and led to the revolt of several allies. Either because of a genuine fear for its safety after the defeat in Egypt and the revolts of the allies, or as a pretext to gain control of the League's finances, Athens transferred the treasury of the alliance from Delos to Athens in 454-453 BC. It was from the alliance's treasury that Pericles drew the funds necessary to enable his ambitious building plan, centered on the "Periclean Acropolis", which included the Propylaea, the Parthenon and the golden statue of Athena, sculpted by Pericles' friend, Phidias. The utilization of the alliance's treasury, initiated and executed by Pericles, is one of the largest embezzlements in human history; this misappropriation financed.

Ideas of Pericles on democracy

Rise to democratic leadership

Pericles immediately succeeded the assassinated Ephialtes as head of the Democratic Party in 461 is an ancient oversimplification; there were other men of considerable weight in Athens in the next 15 years. In 451 or 450

Pericles carried a law confining Athenian citizenship to those of Athenian parentage on both sides. Pericles was merely forging a low-level political weapon for use against Cimon, who had a foreign mother. The upper classes certainly had no prejudice against foreign marriages; the lower classes may well have had more, and, on the whole, it is possible to view Pericles here as championing exclusivist tendencies against immigrants who might break down the fabric of Athenian society. The law provided even the poorest Athenian girl with a dowry in the form of her citizenship. There was never any disposition on the part of Athenians to restrict economic opportunities for foreigners—who served in the fleet, worked on public buildings, and had freedom of trade and investment, with the crucial, but normal, exception of land and houses.

Restoring Athens' preeminence

Pericles now embarked on a policy designed to secure Athens' cultural and political leadership in Greece. If peace with Persia did not end the alliance, it may have ended the annual tribute paid to that treasury. Whether to regain this tribute, or simply to assert Athenian leadership, Pericles summoned a conference of all Greek states to consider the questions of rebuilding the Greek temples destroyed by the Persians, the payment of sacrifices due to the gods for salvation, and the freedom of the seas. Sparta would not cooperate, but Pericles continued on the narrower basis of the Athenian alliance. Tribute was to continue, and Athens would draw heavily on the reserves of the alliance for a magnificent building program centered on the Acropolis. Pericles argued that the allies were paying for their defense, and, if that was assured, Athens did not have to account for how the money was

actually spent. Pericles was attributed a desire to stimulate economic activity and employment in Athens, but these motives may be anachronistic and in actuality may not have influenced the voters very much.

Conclusion

Pericles was the son of Xanthippus and Agariste. Pericles funded and produced Aeschylus' entry into the year's dramatic competition. In the 460s the Helots rebelled against the Spartans, who asked for help from Athens. In response to Sparta's request for help, Athens' leader, Cimon, led troops into Sparta. The Spartans sent them back, probably fearing the effects of their democratic ideas. A descendant of democracy's founder Cleisthenes, Pericles came to power in about 460. Pericles was elected strategos for the next 29 years. From about 458-56, Pericles had the Long Walls built between Athens and the Piraeus, a peninsula with three harbors about 4.5 miles from Athens. He also had temples and shrines built to other gods to replace those that had been destroyed by the Persians during the wars. The treasury from the Delian alliance funded the building projects. Among the contributions made by Pericles to the Athenian democracy was the payment of magistrates. In 430, the Spartans and their allies invaded Attica. Pericles was suspended from the office of strategos. He was found guilty of theft and fined 50 talents. Because Athens still needed him, Pericles was then re-instated, he died in the fall of 429, two and a half years after the Peloponnesian War began.

His pattern of behaviour before the Peloponnesian War seems to me to accord with a more general pattern of behaviour in relation to foreign policy, but on this occasion he badly misjudged the consequences; of course he

