

The Peloponnesian War

After the Persian Wars, the Greeks wanted to make sure they were ready if the Persians ever returned. The Greek city-states formed the Delian League.

The purpose of the Delian League was to put money into a shared treasury, to have on hand in case of war. It took money to make weapons and ships and to train men. The Greeks wanted to be ready to fund a war instantly.

Athens guarded the treasury. Corinth probably would have been a better choice for many reasons. First, Corinth was famous for being good with money. They had a bank. They were not constantly at war with Sparta, as was Athens. Athens and Sparta simply could not get along.

But Athens did not discuss who would guard the treasury. They simply started collecting monies from the other city-states, as well as from themselves. Corinth was not happy about this, but they did nothing to stop it. And Sparta could care less who held the money; they just wanted it protected.

Pericles was a young and talented Athenian. He was a leader. He encouraged his people to build a wall to defend the city of Athens from attack should one come. At the same time, he traveled to Sparta, and convinced the Spartans to grant a peace of 30 years, to give everyone in the Greek world a chance to recover from the Persian Wars. That success made him famous in the ancient Greek world. Pericles was a persuasive speaker!

It was a time of great prosperity for the people of Athens. They were loaded with wealth. They were at peace. Art, poetry, philosophy - everything flourished.

They built wonderful buildings on the Acropolis, the rocky hill overlooking Athens. They were happy.

At first, Sparta was fine with Athens guarding the treasury. Athens only kept 1/60th of the money pouring in from the various city-states to pay for guards. They reported promptly to all the city-states on what money had been paid and by whom. But in a short amount of time, the treasury grew so large that even 1/60th of it was a lot of money! Athens grew rich guarding the treasury of the Delian league.

One day, Athens and Sparta quarreled about something. Fuss, fuss, fuss: that's was Athens and Sparta. It was an insignificant quarrel. It was not over the treasury. It was not over anything really. Many historians believe that maybe Sparta was jealous of Athens' wealth, or afraid of its power. But whatever the cause, this quarrel started a war between Athens and Sparta that lasted over 25 years: the Peloponnesian War.

In the third year of the war, more than half the people in the city of Athens died, not from fighting, but from illness. People from the surrounding countryside had fled inside the city gates, fleeing Spartan attacks. The city was not prepared for that many people to live in Athens. There was not enough food. They did not have a way to safely remove waste. It was a mess. One of those who died was the young leader Pericles.

Things got a lot worse after that. Athens suffered from poor leadership, a lack of food, and continued illness. They were starving. The Spartans had the town surrounded. The Athenians could not get to their crops. Finally, in April, in the year 404 BCE, Athens surrendered.

Despite the bitterness, the Spartans were generous. They did not level the town as Corinth and Thebes wanted them to do. Instead, they made Athens a satellite state under a Spartan oligarchy. It was the end of democracy. Ten years later, Sparta gave Athens her independence. Since her defeat, Athens had regained much of her old strength. But never again was ancient Athens the golden city she once was.

Still, great thinkers and great teachers continued to live in Athens. In time, Athens might have rebuilt to her former glory, only time was running out for all the Greek city-states. To the north, in the country of Macedonia, a new king would soon be born. His parents would name him Alexander. The world would call him Alexander the Great. Eventually, Macedonia would conquer Greece and many other parts of the world!

Source: <http://greece.mrdonn.org/peloponnesianwar.html>

Questions for Homework: Answer on a separate piece of paper in complete sentences:

1. Why was the Delian League formed?
2. How did Athens become rich and prosperous?
3. What was Pericles like as a ruler?
4. Why did Athens lose the Peloponnesian War?
5. What was one effect of the Peloponnesian War?