

The Delian League and the Peloponnesian War Background Guide

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Letter from the Chair

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to WAMNUC XXVII! My name is Breanna Crossman and I am incredibly excited to serve as your Crisis Director for the Delian League and Peloponnesian War Crisis Committee. I am currently a sophomore at the George Washington University studying International Affairs with a minor in Classical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies. I've always loved ancient history, and Athenian political history is one of my favorite subjects! I did Model UN throughout high school and always loved doing crisis committees, so I'm looking forward to serving as Crisis Director for the first time!

On campus at GWU, I'm involved in the GW Undergraduate Law Review, The Globe (our international affairs publication), and the Women's Pre-Law Student Organization. I also serve as a Peer Advisor for our Honors program. Outside of class, you'll often find me exploring DC's coffee shops, baking, and reading.

If you have any questions about the research process, writing your position paper, or anything about WAMNUC in general, don't hesitate to reach out! My email is below. I look forward to meeting all of you soon!

Sincerely,

Breanna Crossman

brennan.crossman@gwu.edu



Introduction

In 449 BC, the victory of the allied Greek city-states against the Persian Empire marked a turning point in Greek history. The fragmented Greek city-states had miraculously defeated the most powerful Empire in the world, and preserved the spirit of Greek culture and democracy.

Throughout the Greco-Persian Wars, Athens had distinguished itself as a singularly organized and powerful city. Their superior tactical skill at the Battle of Marathon (490 BC)¹ was an early sign of their strategic prowess, which would later lead to their appointment as leaders of the Delian League. Under Athenian leadership, the Delian League sought to eradicate Persian influence in the Aegean and strengthen the partnerships between the Greek city-states. The Spartans, dissatisfied with Athenian influence over the League, choose to abstain from membership.

The Delian League (founded 478 BC) was built on a promise of mutual defense in the event of another Persian invasion.² Each member city-state would contribute ships, men, or money to a joint force to clean up Persian garrisons and maintain a treasury held at Delos. Though initially successful in these aims, Athenian control over the League grew, and some states grew dissatisfied with their costly contributions to the League. When city-states like Naxos and Thasos attempted to defect, they were sieged from Athens and forced to remain in the Delian

¹ Figuiera, Thomas. "7. the Membership of the Early Delian League." *Classics Journal*, December 2023. <https://classics-at.chs.harvard.edu/7-the-membership-of-the-early-delian-league/>.

² The Editors of *Encyclopædia Britannica*. 2015. "Delian League | Ancient Greece." In *Encyclopædia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Delian-League>.

League.

By the mid-5th century, the Delian League had evolved into an Athenian empire.

Increasingly Athens's navy was the main military force of the League, and the relocation of the League's treasury to Athens under Pericles marked Athenian hegemony in the region. Sensing the growing threat of Athens, Sparta formed its own mutual defense alliance in the form of the Peloponnesian League (550 BC).³

Amid growing resentment towards the power configuration of the Delian League, Athenian leaders must choose whether to stifle rebellions or to uphold the Delian League's promise of democracy and diplomacy. The pressure of a rising Sparta and growing internal dissent will force delegates in the Delian League to navigate military strategy, domestic policy, and diplomatic relations throughout the Aegean.

History of the Greco-Persian Wars

Prior to the Greco-Persian Wars, Greece was a relatively fragmented and agricultural collection of city-states with a wide variety of governments and cultures. Around 500 BCE, Greece was organized into hundreds of city-states with colonies across the Mediterranean. Citizenship in

³ The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica. 2008. "Peloponnesian League | Ancient Greek History." In *Encyclopædia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Peloponnesian-League>.

most city-states was limited to land-owning men, and most city-states relied on slaves for labor.⁴

However, early forms of democracy began to develop throughout Greece at this time, specifically in Athens (more information about Athenian politics in later section).

Like Greece, the Persian Empire started as a collection of semi-nomadic tribes who raised sheep and cattle on the Iranian plateau. Cyrus the Great officially founded the Persian Empire, then known as the Achaemenid Empire, in 550 BC.⁵ He was immortalized in the Cyrus Cylinder, a clay cylinder inscribed in 539 BC with the story of his victory over Babylonian King Nabonidus. The Empire encompassed much of the Ancient Near East, including Mesopotamia, the Nile Valley, and the Indus Valley. Darius I was the fourth king of the Persian Empire, and ruled at the Empire's territorial peak, stretching throughout Eastern Europe, West Asia, and North Africa. Darius was known for unifying the empire through introducing standard currency, infrastructure projects like roads, and making Aramaic the official language of the Persian Empire. Darius I was also a tyrant who enslaved many of the people in the lands he conquered.

When dissatisfaction with tyrannical Persian rule culminated in the Ionian Revolt in 499 BC, city-states Athens and Eritrea chose to send troops across the Aegean to aid the revolting states.⁶

Athens was partially motivated by the fact that Persia was sheltering Hippias, a former Athenian

⁴ National Geographic Society. 2023. "Democracy (Ancient Greece) | National Geographic Society." Education.nationalgeographic.org. National Geographic. October 19, 2023. <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/democracy-ancient-greece/>.

⁵ History.com Editors. 2018. "Persian Empire." HISTORY. A&E Television Networks. January 25, 2018. <https://www.history.com/topics/ancient-middle-east/persian-empire>.

⁶ Sherry, Bennett . 2023. "Worlds Collide: Persians and Greeks." <https://www.oerproject.com/>. 2023. <https://www.oerproject.com/OER-Materials/OER-Media/HTML-Articles/Origins/Unit4/Worlds-Collide-Persians-and-Greeks/800L>.

tyrant of the Pesisratides clan. When the Persian army defeated the Athenian and Eritrean forces at the Battle of Ephesus, the Greek city-states joined in a Hellenic Alliance against the Persian Empire. At this time, under Darius I, the Persian military was the largest and most powerful military force in the Mediterranean. This Alliance marked the first pan-Hellenic military alliance.

The Greco-Persian Wars officially began at the Battle of Marathon (490 BC), when Persian King Darius I used Athenian involvement in the Ionian Revolt as a pretext for invasion⁷. Persian forces sieged Eritrea and then sailed to Marathon. The Athenians, realizing they were vastly outnumbered by the Persians, sent a professional runner called Phidippides to run to Sparta to request reinforcements. Though the Spartans agreed to help, they claimed they could not join the fight until the full moon due to religious traditions.

The Persian army had 25,000 troops and 600 ships when it arrived at Marathon. The Athenians had only 10,000 troops. Despite this, the Athenians won the Battle of Marathon under the leadership of the Greek general Miltiades. The Persians escaped on their ships and set sail to Athens, but Phidippides was sent to warn them, and the Persians left after seeing a coalition of Athenian forces waiting on the shores of Athens. Sadly, Phidippides passed away after running the 26 miles to Athens.

Despite the decisive Greek victory, political structure in Athens changed significantly after the

⁷ The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica. 2018. "Battle of Marathon | Summary, Facts, & Significance." In *Encyclopædia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Battle-of-Marathon>.

first Persian invasion. While political power had primarily rested in a magistrate called an archon, fears for another Persian invasion rapidly shifted power to military leaders. The Athenians constructed a new fleet of triremes and constructed the Long Walls, a defensive wall that connected Athens and the naval base port city Piraeus.⁸

The Second Persian invasion of Greece began in 480, under Darius's son, Xerxes. Instead of crossing the Aegean, the Persian military went northward around the Greek coast.⁹ Once again, the Greek city-states rallied the Hellenic League and fought off the Persian invaders. At the Battle of Thermopylae (480 BC), the Spartan general Leonidas took a famous stand against the Persians with only 300 after a traitor revealed a secret path to the Persians. The Persians retreated following a decisive Greek victory at the Battle of Platea (479 BC), granting the Greeks a historic win as a unified force.

Founding of the Delian League

Wary of a future conflict with the Persians, the Athenians advocated for the creation of a military alliance that would allow the city-states to stay vigilant against Persian aggression. The Spartans, unwilling to further entangle themselves in the affairs of the other Greek states, withdrew from the alliance. Thus, the Athenians stepped up as the leaders of the Delian League in 478 BC.

⁸ The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. 2016. "Persian Wars Summary | Britannica." Www.britannica.com. 2016. <https://www.britannica.com/summary/Greco-Persian-Wars>.

⁹ Carey, Chris. 2021. "The Persian Invasion of 480 BC: 2500 Years on «Classics# «Cambridge Core Blog." Cambridge Core Blog. September 21, 2021. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/blog/2021/09/21/the-persian-invasion-of-480-bc-2500-years-on/>.

Around 300 city-states took a pledge at the sacred island of Delos to protect each other in the case of another Persian invasion and to contribute to a joint treasury held at Delos. The members threw lumps of bronze in the Aegean and vowed to remain allies until the bronze resurfaced.¹⁰

The Athenians quickly established a system of tribute in which member-states would contribute ships, money, or men to a joint military force. Aristides, nicknamed “The Just,” was in charge of determining contributions.¹¹ Though each member-state of the Delian League had an equal vote, Athens quickly emerged as the dominant force in the alliance. The powerful Athenian navy became the dominant military force of the League, while other city-states mainly contributed money. In 454, Pericles moved the League’s treasury from Delos to Athens, clearly signaling the Delian League was to become the Athenian Empire. The Athenian’s unwillingness to let other city-states leave the League also became a major source of tension in Greece.

Athenian Politics

]Athens has a complicated history of political upheaval and tyranny. In the 8th century, Athens was a collection of villages run by a small set of aristocratic families. The city-state was ruled by 3 *archons* (rulers), a *basileus* (religious leader), a *polemarch* (military leader), and nine *thesmothetai* (treasurers). At this time, most Greek city-states were divided by tribes based on

¹⁰ Figuiera, Thomas. “7. the Membership of the Early Delian League.” *Classics Journal*, December 2023. <https://classics-at.chs.harvard.edu/7-the-membership-of-the-early-delian-league/>.

¹¹Editors of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* . 2017. “Aristides the Just | Greek Statesman.” *Encyclopedia Britannica*. 2017. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Aristides-the-Just>.

family, called *genos*.¹²

The first law code of Athens was given by Draco in 621.¹³ Widely considered one of the harshest law codes of all time, the penalty for any crime, from stealing to homicide, was death. The code was reformed by Solon, a famous Athenian statesman, to free a majority of debt-slaves in Athens and create a new social hierarchy based on land ownership.¹⁴ However, internal conflict over class divisions in Athens continued after Solon's reforms, leading to tyranny. (At this point in history, tyranny simply means when someone seizes power who was not meant to rule, it does not have a negative political connotation.)

The Peisistratid Tyranny began with the rise of Pisistratus in 560. Pisistratus, sensing the political turmoil was an opportunity to consolidate power, seized leadership of Athens through coups.¹⁵ Pisistratus championed the lower classes and diluted the powers of the aristocracy, and expanded trade with the Near East and other city states. However, Pisistratus's sons Hippias and Hipparchus were unable to live up to the political prowess of their father. Hipparchus was murdered in 514 in the "Tyranicides" and Hippias fled to the Persian court for refuge.

After the Tyranicides, Athens embraced an experimental method of government called

¹²Cartwright, Mark. 2018. "Athenian Democracy." World History Encyclopedia. World History Publishing. April 3, 2018. https://www.worldhistory.org/Athenian_Democracy/.

¹³Loizides, Antonios. 2015. "Draco's Law Code." World History Encyclopedia. June 12, 2015. https://www.worldhistory.org/Dracos_Law_Code/.

¹⁴Britannica. 2019. "Solon's Laws | Greek History." In *Encyclopædia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Solons-laws>.

¹⁵Mara Kutter. 2015. "The Peisistratid Tyranny at Athens: Conflicting Sources and Revisionist History at Work" Aleph. 2015.

<https://aleph.humanities.ucla.edu/2015/07/17/the-peisistratid-tyranny-at-athens-conflicting-sources-and-revisionist-history-at-work/>.

democracy. In 508, Cleisthenes took power and established a new Athenian constitution in which all citizens were equal.¹⁶ He also instituted ostracism as a punishment, a process in which citizens voted to kick out individuals who had accrued too much political influence for 10 years. Up until the Peloponnesian War, Athens would continue to function as a democracy.

Spartan Politics

Sparta had a unique political and social structure different from all other Greek city-states. Under a mixed constitution, Sparta had two kings, an Assembly of Citizens composed of all Spartan men over the age of 30, and a Council of Elders called the *Gerusia*. The kings served as both commanders of the army and religious leaders, and one would remain in Sparta and the other would participate in fighting during war.¹⁷

Spartans believed they were descended from Lacedaemon, a son of Zeus who founded Sparta and named the surrounding region Laconia. Though a relatively insular city-state, the Spartans conquered nearby Messenia for slave labor, a class known as the *helots*. The second tier of Sparta's class division was the *perioikoi*, people who lived in the areas surrounding Sparta and worked primarily as merchants. The *perioikoi* had no political rights but often served in the Spartan military. Those who lived in Sparta were considered citizens and devoted most of their life to the famed Spartan military.¹⁸

¹⁶ Meiggs, Russell. 2017. "Cleisthenes of Athens | Biography & Facts." In *Encyclopædia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Cleisthenes-of-Athens>.

¹⁷ Cartwright, Mark. 2013. "Sparta." World History Encyclopedia. World History Publishing. May 28, 2013. <https://www.worldhistory.org/sparta/>.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Military service was at the core of Spartan society. Boys joined the *agoge*, or Spartan education system at age 7 and left at 30. Young boys were separated from their families and forced into rigorous military training, usually under the tutelage of an older male mentor.¹⁹ Girls were forbidden to join the military, but enjoyed greater freedoms relative to women in other city-states at the time. They received an education, could own property, and could choose who to marry. They were encouraged to have children with the strongest fighters, thereby ensuring Spartan military prowess would be passed down through the generations. However, due to the frequency of conflict throughout Greece and Sparta's aversion to welcoming outsiders, Sparta's population maintained a steady decline throughout the city-state's history.

Current State of Affairs

The year is 478 BC, and Athens has established itself as the leader of the Delian League. Approximately 300 city-states have joined you to pledge a perpetual alliance against the Persian Empire. However, notably, Sparta has elected to not join the League. As members of the Delian League, you convene to determine a response to remaining Persian military bases in the Aegean, the potential threat of Sparta, and domestic unrest over democratic reforms.

¹⁹Mark, Joshua J. 2021. "Agoge, the Spartan Education Program." World History Encyclopedia. Joshua J. Mark. June 15, 2021. <https://www.worldhistory.org/article/342/agoge-the-spartan-education-program/>.

Guiding Questions

1. One of the key questions the Athenians must answer is what role they should play in the changing power dynamics of Greece. How will Athens balance its power with other city-states or expand its influence over the Delian League?
2. Sparta is both an internal threat to the political stability of Athens's divided leaders and an external threat to the balance of the Greek city-states.
 - ❖ How will Athens respond to the internal discord over its policy towards Sparta? Will it take a more hawkish approach (favored by leaders like Pericles, Alcibiades, Cleon, Themistocles, Ephialtes, Phormio, and Hyperbolus) or attempt to maintain peace (like Callias II, Cimon, Nicias, and Aristides)?
 - ❖ And how will you respond to this growing threat and ensure Athenian hegemony throughout Greece?
3. How will you deal with tensions between Athenian leaders on the basis of class? The democratization of Athens has meant that non-aristocrats like Themistocles and Cleon have gained power. How will the more traditional, noble ruling class (Pericles, Nicias, Alcibiades, and Laches) respond to this change of power?
4. Additionally, the threat of Persia still looms, and Persian military bases stretch across Greek lands. How will you rally the Greek city-states to destroy these bases and rid the region of Persian influence?

Helpful Resources

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Delian-League>

https://www.worldhistory.org/Delian_League/

https://www.worldhistory.org/timeline/Delian_League/

<https://classics-at.chs.harvard.edu/7-the-membership-of-the-early-delian-league/>

Movies/Other:

1. 300 (2006 movie about the Battle of Thermopylae, not incredibly accurate but very fun)
2. The War That Never Ends (1991): Tells the story of the important battles of the Peloponnesian War
3. There are also lots of videos on Youtube about the Peloponnesian War/Delian League! Khan Academy is a good place to start.

The Delian League - Character list

Pericles The Delian League - Character List

Athenian Statesman and General

Pericles was an Athenian statesman known for expanding the Delian League into an Athenian Empire following the Greco-Persian wars. He was the son of Xanthippus, a wealthy politician, and Agariste, a noble of the family of the Almaeonidae. Pericles aimed to expand Athenian democracy and was key in prompting Athens' reputation as a cultural center in Hellas.

Aristides

Athenian Statesman

Aristides "the Just" was an Athenian statesman known for his generalship in the Greco-Persian Wars. He rose to prominence following the victory in the Battle of Marathon, after which he was elected eponymous archon in 488. Aristides, a moderate, clashed with Themistocles over Athenian naval policy and aimed to maintain the balance of power with other city-states. Following the Battle of Plataea, Aristides was elected as leader of the Delian League.

Cleon

Athenian General

Cleon was an Athenian general during the Peloponnesian War known for his ruthless war

strategy and politics. He clashed with Pericles over taking military action against Peloponnesian League invaders in 431 BC, and later accused Pericles of maladministration which led to his removal as Athenian leader. Cleon is known for his hatred of the nobility and animosity towards Sparta, which he wished to see completely defeated in the Peloponnesian War.

Nicias

Athenian politician and General

Nicias was an Athenian politician and general known for his moderate political views. He was often elected to serve as a strategos, or general, for Athens during which he led many unsuccessful expeditions. Nicias was a member of the Athenian aristocracy and inherited substantial wealth from his father from the silver mines in Attica. Nicias opposed Athenian hegemony and aimed for peace with Sparta on terms favorable to Athens, and was key in the negotiation of the Peace of Nicias. He was considered a rival to Cleon's democratic rule.

Alcibiades

Athenian Statesman and General

Alcibiades was an Athenian statesman and general from the powerful Alcmaeonidae family. He was famously taught by Socrates and remained a close friend of his throughout his life. His marriage to Hipparete, the daughter of a wealthy Athenian, brought him further wealth. An advocate for Athenian expansion, he supported aggressive action following the signing of the Peace of Nicias in 421 BC.

Laches

Athenian Aristocrat and General

Laches was an Athenian aristocrat of the Cecropis tribe known for his prowess as a general. In 427, Laches defended Athenian allies in Sicily against Syracuse and emerged victorious. He was appointed supreme commander of the Athenian fleet and conquered the cities of Mylae and Messana. Laches was later replaced by Pyrrhodoros as supreme commander, and was prosecuted by Cleon upon his return to Athens.

Themistocles

Athenian Politician and General

Themistocles was an Athenian general and politician, known for his populist policies and popularity among lower-class Athenians. Themistocles fought at the Battle of Marathon against the Persians and was later elected archon. His goal was to increase the naval power of Athens, and persuaded the Athenians to build a large fleet in case of another Persian invasion. Notably, unlike most Athenian politicians, Themistocles did not come from a wealthy family, this played a large role in his support from lower-class Athenians.

Cimon

Athenian Statesman and General

Cimon was an Athenian general and politician, and the son of war hero Miltiades. Cimon was famous for his bravery during the naval Battle of Salamis, and was elected as one of ten

strategoi. Cimon was a commander in the early Wars of the Delian League against the Achaemenid Empire. Cimon was also instrumental in the transformation of the Delian League to the Athenian Empire, and led forces to suppress the Thasian rebellion. Cimon was generally supportive of aristocrats and also advocated to support the Spartans during the helot rebellion.

Callias II

Athenian Statesman and Diplomat

Callias II was an Athenian statesman and diplomat, and one of the richest men in Athens. He fought at the Battle of Marathon and later became a supporter of Pericles. Callias II served as the ambassador of Athens as a diplomat for the Delian League, and made journeys to Persia to end the Greco-Persian wars through the Peace of Callias. He was later responsible for peace treaties with Rhegion and Leontinoi and the Thirty Years' Peace with Sparta.

Ephialtes

Athenian Politician

Ephialtes was an Athenian politician known for fostering the democratic movement following the Greco-Persian wars. He served as a *strategos* for the Athenian fleet in the Aegean. Following the massive earthquake in Sparta in 464, Ephialtes represented those who wished to refuse Sparta's request for military assistance, as he considered Spartans enemies. However, Cimon's argument to aid the Spartans prevailed, but the Spartans rejected the assistance and Cimon was ostracized. Following Cimon's ostracization, Ephialtes spearheaded attacks against the

Areopagus, the council of former archons that diluted the voices of the Athenian citizenry.

Phormio

Athenian General

Phormio was an Athenian general of the Peloponnesian War, considered one of Athens' great admirals. He commanded the Athenian fleet during the Samian War and also fought against the Chalcidians. He established a naval base at Naupactus to blockade Corinthian shipping, and fought the Spartans for control of the base and won. Phormio's command greatly increased the prestige and power of the Athenian fleet before and during the Peloponnesian War.

Hyperbolus

Athenian Politician

Hyperbolus was an Athenian politician prominent during the Peloponnesian War. He was a demagogue like Cleon who supported Athenian aggression, and was a member of the *boule*. Hyperbolus is known for attempting to ostracize powerful Athenian leaders like Cleon and Nicias, and was ostracized himself around 416 BC.

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