

## Pericles of Athens, ca. 495-429 BCE



- ca. 495: born to Agariste, niece of Kleisthenes and member of the Alcmaeonid family, and Xanthippos, in the tribe Acamantis, the deme Cholargus. Xanthippos was the leader of Athens after Kleisthenes (presumably after Kleisthenes' (undated) death: Arist. AC 28.2); ostracized in 484 BCE (Arist. AC 22.6); recalled in 481/480 before the battle of Salamis; as *strategos*, victorious in the last battle of the Perisan War, at Mycale (off the coast of Asia Minor: Plut. *Per.* 3.1 for the victory at which Xanthippos "conquered the generals of the [Persian] king" and *Per.* 3.2 for the legend that Agariste "in her dreams, once fancied that she had given birth to a lion, and a few days thereafter bore Pericles")
- 472: first public notice of Pericles, who provided the funds for the chorus (as *choregos*) of Aeschylus' *Persians* (from an inscription: *Inscriptiones Graecae* II<sup>2</sup> 2318 lines 9-11: "Tragedies: Pericles of Cholargus was *choregos*; Aeschylus was producer")
- ca. 470: marries (name of wife unknown) and has two sons
- 462: protégé of Ephialtes, who opposed Cimon's pro-Spartan policies, reformed the Areopagus and was assassinated shortly thereafter (Arist. AC 25.2)
- 460: elected *strategos*, and office he held for the next 29 years (Pericles supreme in Athens – Arist. AC 25.4)
- 445-429: divorces first wife, takes as companion Aspasia, courtesan (*hetaira*) of Miletos; a teacher of rhetoric and friend of Socrates, Aspasia was accused by Aristophanes of causing the war (*Acharnians* 523-527); Aspasia gives birth to Pericles, son of Pericles
- 430: effect of plague on Athens prompts citizens to vote Pericles out of office
- 429: Pericles reelected as *strategos* but dies of plague

## Domestic and Hellenic policies ca. 462-429 BCE

| Domestic Policies  | Hellenic Policies  |
|--|--|
| Pay for jurors (462) (Arist. <i>AC</i> 27.3)   | Creation of cleruchies in allied territory (450's-430's: Chersonese, Thrace, Aegean Islands, Black Sea)  |
| Long walls (462-457: Thuc. 1.107)  | Architect of Peace of Callias, ending war with Persia (449: Plut. <i>Cimon</i> 13.4-5)   |
| Transference of Delian League treasury to Athens (454: Plut. <i>Per.</i> 12)   | Author of Congress Decree, offering new rationale for Delian League (449: Plut. <i>Per.</i> 17)  |
| Citizenship law (451: Arist. <i>AC</i> 26.4)   | Negotiator of 30 years' peace with Sparta (446/5: Plut. <i>Per.</i> 24.1)  |
| Promotes civic welfare, including the construction of the Parthenon and the Propylaea or gateway to the Acropolis, and public festivals, processions and cultural pleasures (450-430: Plut. <i>Per.</i> 12-13)   | Quashing of Samian revolt, paid for with League funds borrowed from temple treasuries (440 – Thuc. 1.115-117)<br>Embrace of Themistoclean maritime policy (432-430: Thuc. 2.39-46) |
| Policy victor over Thucydides son of Melesias “champion of the aristocracy” (Thuc. ostracized 437 – Plut. <i>Per.</i> 16.3)  | Architect of policies re: Corcyra, Megara (432 – Aristoph. <i>Acharnians</i> 523-527)  |
| Censorship law (439-437) ( <i>Scholia</i> , or ancient commentary, on Aristophanes' play <i>Acharnians</i> line 67, that the law of 440/439 was repealed two years later. It might refer to comedies of 439 that made reference to the Samian revolt and included allies in the audience; ref. = <i>Sch.</i> Aristoph. <i>Ach.</i> 67) | War with Sparta: win by attrition, avoid set battles (432-429 – see refs. below to three speeches – war speech, funeral oration, final speech – and Thucydides' summary at 2.65)   |
| Architect of moving all citizens within the Long Walls to avoid devastation by Archidamus' army (432: Plut. <i>Per.</i> 34.4)  |  |
| Policies: on war Thuc. 1.40-46; funeral oration 2.35-46; last speech 2.59-64   |  |
| Summation of Pericles' policies: Thuc. 2.65; Plut. <i>Per.</i> 33.4  |  |

## Primary sources for Pericles' policies

Aristophanes *Acharnians* 523-527: But now some young drunkards go to Megara and carry off the courtesan Simaetha; the Megarians, hurt to the quick, run off in turn with two harlots of the house of Aspasia; and so for three gay women Greece is set ablaze. Then Pericles, aflame with ire on his Olympian height, let loose the lightning, caused the thunder to roll, upset Greece and passed an edict, which ran like the song, that the Megarians be banished both from our land and from our markets and from the sea and from the continent.

Plut. *Cimon* 13.4-5: the [Persian] king made the terms of that notorious peace, by which he was to keep away from the Hellenic sea-coast as far as a horse could travel in a day, and was not to sail west of the Cyanean and Chelidonian isles with armored ships of war."

Plut. *Per.* 12: [1] But that which brought most delightful adornment to Athens, and the greatest amazement to the rest of mankind; that which alone now testifies for Hellas that her ancient power and splendor, of which so much is told, was no idle fiction,--I mean his construction of sacred edifices,--this, more than all the public measures of Pericles, his enemies maligned and slandered. They cried out in the assemblies: "The people has lost its fair fame and is in ill repute because it has removed the public moneys of the Hellenes from Delos into its own keeping, [2] and that seemliest of all excuses which it had to urge against its accusers, to wit, that out of fear of the Barbarians it took the public funds from that sacred isle and was now guarding them in a stronghold, of this Pericles has robbed it. And surely Hellas is insulted with a dire insult and manifestly subjected to tyranny when she sees that, with her own enforced contributions for the war, we are gilding and bedizening our city, which, for all the world like a wanton woman, adds to her wardrobe precious stones and costly statues and temples worth their millions." [3] For his part, Pericles would instruct the people that it owed no account of their moneys to the allies provided it carried on the war for them and kept off the Barbarians; "not a horse do they furnish," said he, "not a ship, not a hoplite, but money simply; and this belongs, not to those who give it, but to those who take it, if only they furnish that for which they take it in pay."

Plut. *Per.* 16.3: [3] And after the deposition of Thucydides and his ostracism, for no less than fifteen of these years did he secure an imperial sway that was continuous and unbroken, by means of his annual tenure of the office of general. During all these years he kept himself untainted by corruption, although he was not altogether indifferent to money-making; indeed, the wealth which was legally his by inheritance from his father, that it might not from sheer neglect take to itself wings and fly away, nor yet cause him much trouble and loss of time when he was busy with higher things, he set into such orderly dispensation as he thought was easiest and most exact.

Plut. *Per.* 17: [1] When the Lacedaemonians began to be annoyed by the increasing power of the Athenians, Pericles, by way of inciting the people to cherish yet loftier thoughts and to deem it worthy of great achievements, introduced a bill to the effect that all Hellenes wheresoever resident in Europe or in Asia, small and large cities alike, should be invited to send deputies to a council at Athens. This was to deliberate concerning the Hellenic sanctuaries which the Barbarians had burned down, concerning the sacrifices which were due to the gods in the name of Hellas in fulfillment of vows made when they were fighting with the Barbarians, and concerning the sea, that all might sail it fearlessly and keep the peace. [3] ... But nothing was accomplished, nor did the cities come together by deputy, owing to the opposition of the Lacedaemonians, as it is said, since the effort met with its first check in Peloponnesus.

Plut. *Per.* 24: [1] ... peace had been made for thirty years between the Athenians and the Lacedaemonians.

Plut. *Per.* 34: [4] They said that Pericles was responsible for [the devastating plague], who, because of the war, had poured the rabble from the country into the walled city and then gave that mass of men no employment whatever, but suffered them, thus penned up like cattle, to fill one another full of corruption, and provided them no change or respite.

*Sch. Aristoph. Ach.* 67: "the decree prohibiting comic ridicule passed under Morychides was repealed." Morychides was archon in 440/439.

Plut. *Per.* 33.4: [4] Pericles, however, looked upon it as a terrible thing to join battle with sixty thousand Peloponnesian and Boeotian hoplites (those who made the first invasion were as numerous as that), and stake the city itself upon the issue. So he tried to calm down those who were eager to fight, and who were in distress at what the enemy was doing, by saying that trees, though cut and lopped, grew quickly, but if men were destroyed it was not easy to get them again. [5] And he would not call the people together into an assembly, fearing that he would be constrained against his better judgement, but, like the helmsman of a ship, who, when a stormy wind swoops down upon it in the open sea, makes all fast, takes in sail, and exercises his skill, disregarding the tears and entreaties of the sea-sick and timorous passengers, so he shut the city up tight, put all parts of it under safe garrison, and exercised his own judgement, little heeding the brawlers and malcontents. [6] And yet many of his friends beset him with entreaties, and many of his enemies with threats and denunciations, and choruses sang songs of scurrilous mockery, railing at his generalship for its cowardice, and its abandonment of everything to the enemy.

Thucydides: 1.39-46; 107; 114-117; 2.35-46; 59-65: [www.perseus.tufts.edu](http://www.perseus.tufts.edu)  
Plut. *Pericles*: [ucalgary.ca/~vandersp/Courses/texts/plutarch/plutperi.html](http://ucalgary.ca/~vandersp/Courses/texts/plutarch/plutperi.html)