

THUCYDIDES

Thucydides' *Peloponnesian War* describes the splendor and fall of Athens in its war with the garrison state, Sparta. After the Persian Wars, Athens had acquired tribute-paying allies, and the growth of Athenian power and the fear which this caused in Sparta sparked a conflict between the two city-states and their allies.

The book is more than an account of military battles, since it also gives us our best account of the government and leaders of Athens. Pericles serves as Athens' general as the war starts, and Thucydides remarks that "it was under him that Athens was at her greatest." Pericles' Funeral Oration is a remarkable statement of the values of a liberal state. Thucydides contrasts Pericles with the low demagogue Cleon and the brilliant but unscrupulous Alcibiades.

In the latter stages of the war, Athens reacts with brutality when its allies revolt. It sends out a fleet to conquer Sicily, and suffers a catastrophic defeat. In the end, the ills that ail Athens are internal as much as external.

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