Thucydides

And Athens in the time of the Peloponnesian War
Pericles

- Son of Xanthippus and Agariste
  - The Alcmaonid family
- Born 595, died 429.
- Entered politics in the democratic faction
  - Opposed to Cimon, leader of the Oligarchic faction
  - Co-sponsor of the reform bill of 462 creating ‘Radical Democracy.’
- Elected *strategos* ten times, never Archon.
  - ‘The Olympian’, because of his ability to influence the Ecclesia.
  - Instituted state pay for service
Athenian Politics

- Kaloi K’Agathoi:
  - Aristocratic faction
  - Good relations with Sparta
  - War with Persia
  - Preserve social order

- Demos:
  - Democratic faction
  - Hegemony of Hellas
  - Control Aegean
  - Increase rights of citizens
The New Pisistratus

• 443 – Thucydides ostracised
  • “And so, Athens, though in name a democracy, gradually became in fact a government ruled by its foremost citizen.” (Thuc. 2.65.9)

• 441 – 39 – Revolt and suppression of Samos
  • “For all this the allies themselves were responsible” (Thuc. i.99.2)
The Ecclesia

• Quorum of 6000 citizens
• Met in the Agora; after 462 BC on the Pnyx
• Four “ordinary” sessions per month
  • “Extraordinary” sessions could be called
• Anyone could speak
• Voted on measures approved by the Boule
The City
According to Aristotle (Ath. Pol. 24.3)

• 20,000 Citizens under state pay
  • 6000 dikastai (jurymen)
  • 5350 guards
  • 1400 civil servants (imperial administration)
  • 500 members of the Boule
  • 2500 hoplite soldiers
  • 2000 sailors on 20 administrative ships
  • Orphans of fallen soldiers
The Acropolis:

- Project began in 448 BC
- Phidias – main architect
- Ca. 500 AD
  - Christians destroy pediment sculptures
- 1687
  - Venetians bomb Ottoman armoury
Parthenon

- Temple of Athena Parthenos (the virgin)
- 447 – 432
- Ictinus and Callicrates architects
- Doric style
- Proportional elegance
Doric style:
Comparison of Greek Columns: Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian
Archidamus’ Strategy for Sparta:

• “they will take the field against us... when they see us destroying their property” (Thuc. ii 11.6)
  • “...to provoke rather than to ruin the Athenians” Hanson, 2006:

• Olive trees and barley crops:
  • Hanson 1998:
  • 431 – 421: Spartans in Attica less than 150 days (Hanson, 2006: 57)
Pericles’ Strategy for Athens

• Withdraw inside the walls
• Do not engage in hoplite battle
• When Archidamus sees he cannot win, he will stop
  • Pericles “never really had any clear strategy for how to mount an offensive…” (Hanson, 2006: 20).
• Is Hanson correct?
Olympias
SIDE, TOP AND SECTION VIEWS of *Olympias* are shown in these scale drawings. The 170 rowers were arranged in three files on each side: 31 in the top bank and 27 in each of the two lower banks. The six files are arranged in a V shape, with the lowest bank farthest inboard and the top one farthest outboard. The pivots for the topmost oars were placed on outriggers. The seats of the rowers in the top and bottom files were angled a few degrees inboard, so that all the oar tips were evenly spaced.
Pericles

• Both of his sons by his first wife died of the plague.
• Pericles married Aspasia of Miletus
  • Their two sons could not be citizens by his own law!

• September of 429, Pericles died of the plague
• His successors:
  • “...fell the victims of their own intestine disorders” (Thuc. ii.64)
Melian Dialogue: Thuc. v 84-116

• 416/5
• Athens attacks and sacks Melos:

• “The powerful exact what they can, while the weak yield what they must” (Thuc. 5.89).
Between 415 and 413 BC, Athens lost over 20,000 men in Sicily, including all of the generals. It caused Sparta to renew the war, and brought Syracusan naval expertise to the Aegean.
Ionian War
The Revolution of 411

- To what extent does fear precipitate irrational decisions?
- For fear they would lose the war, the Athenians voted the democracy out of existence.
  - Late May 411 BC.
- A council of 400 aristocrats assumed power.
  - Their secret policy was surrender to Sparta.
- Democracy restored in Sept of 411.
Aegospotami

- 405 BC
- Lysander attacking Lampsacus
- Athens with 180 ships
  - Put in at Aegospotami
  - 170 ships captured on the beach

- “When the Athenians heard... they abandoned the policy of control of the sea...” (Diod. xiii 107.1)
Aegospotami
Thucydides

- Athenian aristocrat
- Born ca. 460
- Strategos in 424
  - Failed at Amphipolis
  - Exiled
- Died ca. 400 (?).
History of the Peloponnesian War

• “Thucydides, an Athenian, wrote the war between the Athenians and Peloponnesians”
• “The war,” or “this war.”
• Incomplete
  • Text breaks off in mid 411.
  • Did he die before he finished?
  • Or did he just not like the ending?
Method

• Distant past cannot be known with certainty.
  • Disassociation with traditions of Epic poetry
  • “We will need no Homer to sing our praises...”

• No “chance informant”

• Verification through critical comparison

• But:
  • “I have put into the mouth of each speaker the sentiments proper to the occasion” (1.22).
Publication and Audience

• Published posthumously.
• Written in high academic Attic style
  • Thucydides’ style is “generally tortuous, involved, difficult to unravel...” and is similar to the style used by Gorgias of Leontini, Polus and Lycymnius, et al. (Dion. Hal. *Thuc.* 24)
• Never presented orally
Arguments

• Self interest
• Power

• Ethical relativism:
• No absolute truth = no absolute right.
• Right is defined by power.
• Might is right.
• “The powerful take what they can... the weak give what they must” (Thuc. 5.89)
Message
Inevitable Outcome Sequencing

• Fear:
  • Primary human motivation
  • The “truest explanation” for the of war is Athenian power and Spartan fear of that power (Thuc. 1. 23)
  • Fear of outcome A, hope for outcome B
  • Action taken to promote outcome B causes outcome A.
Reception

• “... the number of men who can understand the whole of Thucydides can easily be counted, and even these cannot understand certain passages without a linguistic commentary” (Dion. Hal. *Thuc.* 51).

• “those famous speeches contain so many dark and obscure sentences as to be scarcely intelligible, which is a prime fault in public oration.” (Cic. *Orator* 9.30)
Just the facts ma’am…

- πραγματικῆς ιστορίας
- pragmatic history
  - Polybius i.2.8; xii.25e1.
- wie es eigentlich gewesen