

THE AGE OF PERICLES: ATHENS AS METROPOLIS

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Favor comes to a man because for a brief moment, in the great space of human change and progress, some general human purpose finds in him a satisfactory embodiment. -F. D. R.

There is some danger that our idea of Pericles may be of a rather chilly and inhuman person. Even the Athenians of his own years of fame found him 'Olympian' and from the super-human to the inhuman is a short step in thought. In his own day he was respected and trusted as none other, but really loved only by a few, who have left no memorial. To this, his own character contributed. Self-effacing he was not, but one might coin the expression "self-immersing."

Athens as he made her was not only his life-work but his most abiding passion, loved to the detriment both of his property and of his family life. It was perhaps his most tragic limitation that Greece, apart from Athens, meant no more to him than Europe to most patriots of the recent past. But few modern people can throw stones at him' His business was Athens' business, his recreation the devising of new means of expression for Athenian art, song, athletics, and lyrical drama ' He had long conversations with the pioneer thinkers of his time on the physical or social sciences as they are called today' His intimate friends included Sophocles, Phidias, Anaxagoras the scientist, Damon the musician, and many others. The woman he loved was one whose intelligence was respected by Socrates--and she, my friends, was a former lady of the evening.

As a young man he was a soldier of conspicuous gallantry' He had also a dry' ironic' sense of humor. Olympian to the outside world he may have been, but chilly he was not Even in Athens no man lived more fully than Pericles. In the middle of the Plain of Athens a miniature range of rocky hills breaks the surface of the land. Highest of them is the spike of Lykabettos, from which you can look over the whole Saronic Gulf to the coast and the mountains of the Peloponnese.

On a clear day you can pick out the citadel of Corinth, some fifty miles away. But of greater interest to early man was a lower rock, with steep sides for defense, space on top for habitation, and copious springs under the rocks, where water could be got without far to venture or far to carry. In the early days the rock was not yet so flat-topped or so precipitous as it became in later days. Its present shape is due to works of building and revetment performed when Pericles was still a youth' r But already it was an almost ideal citadel when Neolithic men first settled there and made of it the "High City"--the ACROPOLIS.

With such a refuge from which to till the good land round about, and

the sea at Phaleron far enough away to deter casual sea-raiders, Athens prospered and gradually developed an exemplary democracy. The wide area of the country helped to support an enormous population for a Greek state. In Pericles' time probably over 250,000 Athenians, in addition to many thousands of free non-citizens, and at least 100,000 slaves lived in Attica. It is significant that there was little bitterness in the internal strife of Athens. Class-struggles were not exacerbated by a congest as in the Dorian states. In old and traditional Attica, even in the revolutionary period, political struggles never led to serious difficulties as in Dorian Megara or half-Asiatic Miletus.

The crowning success of continuity and moderation at Athens came after the triumph of democracy, in the lifetime of Pericles. Most of the old families accepted and worked the democratic constitution, a fact of which Pericles himself is the most conspicuous example. Athens in her prime then, had a population surpassing that of any other Greek state, had an internal solidarity unmatched in the history of that politically all to active people. Pericles was born about 494 BC, probably in the country house of his father, Xanthippos, at Cholargos, the plain near Athens. He must have been over twenty in 473, when his name first appears in an extant official document. He was still in full vigor--probably not over sixty-five--almost up to his death in 429.

Pericles' family was distinguished. His father was a rising general and politician and appears on the list of Archons or Regents elected for life. If Xanthippos' family was distinguished, that of Pericles' mother was famous throughout the Greek world. She came of the magnificent, brilliant, slightly sinister House of the Alkmeonidai, whose family history constituted no small part of the political history of Athens. They claimed descent from the family of the old King Nestor of the Trojan War, which had migrated to Athens when the wild Dorian conquerors overran the Peloponnese and founded the great military power of Sparta. The Alkmeonidai played no small part in the long history that led to Athens' greatness in the fifth century' Pericles had a heritage to live up to and also to live down. The Persian question dominated politics throughout the childhood and youth of Pericles. He was fourteen years old when Athens had to be evacuated because of the Persian threat.

There was a religious service of thanksgiving for the great deliverance after the battle of Salamis ' The soloist was a very handsome boy from Kolonos, near Pericles home, about the same age as Pericles, and for most of his life one of his closest friends. His name was Sophocles. Both were well-born, well-to do, and in mind brilliant, serious, and idealistic. Sophocles' no doubt' was more interested in poetry' Pericles in war and politics. Sophocles was religious, Pericles a rationalist ' interested in Ionian science; Sophocles was passionate and amorous, Pericles, for a Greek of his age, almost austere. But there was no division yet in Athens between men of action and aesthetes. Civilization was still integrated. Pericles, like every intelligent man, was interested as a matter of course

in the art and poetry which expressed the spirit of Athens: and Sophocles the poet, like every good citizen' was a man of action too' Long afterwards, in the year in which he produced his ---' he and Pericles were generals together.

We cannot deal in this brief time with the whole political life and career of Pericles. Let me just make a few remarks about the character of his politics. He was a democrat and a liberal, probably the first liberal in history. I am using liberal to mean a person who understands that liberty includes not only his own liberty to do what he likes' but other people's liberty to do what he does not like. (Read the excerpt of the Funeral Oration to get the fuller meaning of this notion') It was always clear to Pericles that Athens led the world in all the arts of civilization, that Athens, in his own words, was an education to Greece. He never doubted, therefore, that Athens must be the leader politically too.

In the early days of the Athenian Empire, most of the inhabitants of the ''cities'', as the speakers in the Assembly usually called the Empire, followed Athens willingly' Athens was the deliverer both from the Great King of Persia without and from the little tyrants and oligarchs within. If a little coercion was temporarily necessary to break down parochial prejudices in favor of local money, or to see that reactionary elements did not gain political power, then coercion must be applied' until all men' or enough of them should see reason'

The cleruchies or colonies of the 5th century were said to have been his idea' or that of his mentor Damonides. Apart from their strategic importance, they were part of his 6 social policy, a measure to plant out any poor Athenian who was able and willing, on a farm of his own. The years of Pericles' supremacy saw the construction of the great buildings, among which the new Temple of Athena was only one, though the greatest. Released from war, Athenian energies flowed swiftly into the new channel.

Plutarch gives us a vivid picture of Athens under what might be called the ''full employment policy''. For Pericles wished the common people, too, to have their share in the profits of empire, but not to be paid for doing nothing; and so he brought before them the great projects for buildings, and plans that would employ many handicrafts, so that those at home, no less than those who served in the fleet and army and garrisoned the empire, might have their share in support from the public funds. For every kind of material was used--stone and bronze, ivory and gold, ebony and cypress wood and there was work for every craft: carpenters and molders and smiths and masons, dyers, goldsmiths, ivory-workers, embroiderers, turners; as well as the transport services, the merchants and sailors and navigators at sea, and by land the wainwrights and the breeders of oxen, the drivers, the rope makers, the workers in flax and leather, the road makers and miners; and every art had, as it were, an army under its command, of the unskilled laborers, as the instrument and body of its work. Thus the need for workers disseminated prosperity

through the ranks of men of every age and character.

And as the buildings rose, imposing in size and matchless in their beauty and grace, while the workers vied with one another in the skill of their craftsmanship, the most surprising thing was the speed of their building; for works that one would have thought could hardly be accomplished in several successive generations were all accomplished in the prime of one man's political life. An early item among these public works was the Middle Long Wall directed by Pallikrates. It looks as though he was regularly retained by the state. For the great temple of Athena in the City his name is joined with that of another architect, Iktinos.

So we can assume that Iktinos was the artist and designer and Pallikrates the organizer and engineer. Many other works were started at the same time. In two of them Greek architects had to tackle the problem of roofing a space to accommodate a considerable audience, without use of the arch or dome, a problem which involved the difficulty of setting the necessary pillars so as not to obstruct the view. One of these was the Hall of the Mysteries at Eleusis, where the devotees witnessed those secret rites of the Corri Goddess. These secret rites gave hope of a glorified resurrection, like that of the 'corn of wheat' that falls into the ground and give birth to something new. The other hall was the Concert Hall, the Odeion, by an unnamed architect, with a high, vault like, conical roof, said to have been inspired by Xerxes' great pavilion captured during the Persian Wars.

This building was particularly near to Pericles' heart. In it were held the musical contests in lyre-playing and flute playing and singing, which on Pericles' proposal were at this time added to the athletic contests and processions to the Akropolis, at the four yearly festivals known as the Great Panathenaia. Pericles himself was elected a Marshal of the Games at the next Panathenaia (probably 442), and personally drew up the regulations for the musical contests.

Kratinos has a typical crack at him, his skull, his Odeion, his escape from ostracism and his liking for appearing in a helmet, all in three lines: "And here, behold, our onion-headed Zeus approaches, with the Odeion on his crown, now that the ostrakon has passed him by." In the early forties another temple was begun on the Market Hill, the little rising ground overlooking the Agora, behind the Council Chamber and the Round House where the Prytaneis on duty lived. This temple was smaller and plainer than the Parthenon, yet dignified enough when seen, as it was meant to be and can now be seen again, at the top of its bank above the heart of the city.

This was the temple of Hephaistos, god of metal-workers, long known to travelers as the Theseum. Its true dedication has been proved by the American discovery of the sites of many little forges in the area around it. Its building took longer than that of the Parthenon, and its unknown architects in the later stages borrowed some ideas from the great work of Iktinos. Perhaps one can infer that it was paid for not by state funds but

chiefly by the craftsmen who lived and worked around it, in the same quarter of the old town--the Athens inhabited from that time to this where the street of the smiths still rings with the beating of iron and copper at the present day.

But all other buildings were outshone, then no less than now, by the great house of Athena of the City, which shortly came to be called the Parthenon. On the foundations laid long since on the highest part of the Citadel, the workmen under Pallikrates, Iktinos, and the sculptor Phidias erected that most perfect of European buildings. There it stood with all its sculptures, as temple or as church of another Virgin or as mosque, until in a modern siege, in 1687, a German gunner in the service of an Italian general blew up a Turkish powder magazine inside the building, demolishing the roof and both side walls with their pillars. This episode is only too typical of the history of modern Greece between the Great Powers of East and West.

After that it only remained for a British Ambassador to Turkey (Lord Elgin) to remove the sculptures. There is little point for us to engage in lyrical generalities about the great buildings. The way to study them is to see them under their own sky, bright in the sun or ethereal under the moon, an experience, I am told, which will make a believer out of any one. The second best thing to do is to look at pictures and use our imagination, something we all can do.

The facts about the new temple are clear enough. It was to be a large one, as befitted the dignity of Athens, nearly 230 feet by just over 100 (70x31 meters) along the top step of its foundations, and in that Doric style which was still the only style for Greek temples west of the Aegean, a style exceedingly simple. It was the translation into stone of a Bronze Age chieftain's log hall, with porch and veranda, but enriched through generations of experience with all manner of subtleties designed to lead, rest, and delight the eye with the deliberate repetition of vertical and horizontal lines, with the contrast between restrained but elaborate ornament above and the plain colonnade below, and with the play on delicately proportioned masses of the dry Mediterranean light.