

# Greek vs. Greek

In the 5th century B.C., Athens and Sparta fought a nearly 30-year war for control of the Greek empire

## Characters

Thucydides (*thoo-SID-uh-deez*),  
a historian of Athens

Pericles (*PER-uh-kleez*), leader of Athens

\*Alexis

\*Cyrus

\*Minos (*MY-nuss*)

Diodotus (*dye-ODD-uh-tus*)

Euclates (*yoo-KRATE-eez*)

members  
of the  
Athenian  
Assembly

Archidamus (*ark-uh-DAH-moos*), king  
of Sparta

Ambassador from Corinth

Sthenelaidas (*sthen-uh-LAY-eh-dus*),  
Spartan magistrate

\*Chrysanthe (*kry-SAN-thee*), Athenian

\*Hector, Athenian

Cleon, Athenian leader

Narrators A-E

\*Indicates fictional or composite  
character. All others were actual people.

## Words to Know

- **city-state** (*n*): an independent city and its territory
- **demagogue** (*n*): one who gains power by appealing to popular prejudices and fears
- **elegy** (*n*): a speech or poem honoring the dead
- **oligarchy** (*n*): a government controlled by a small group of people

## PROLOGUE

**Narrator A:** Few civilizations have exerted as much influence on the world as ancient Greece. From this group of **city-states** located around the Aegean Sea (*see map*) came much of the classical literature and philosophy we know today. In fact, America's Founders looked to the city-state of Athens as a model in developing our democracy.

**Narrator B:** Athens was also a strong military power, leading an alliance of city-states called the Delian League. But it had a fierce rival, Sparta. This city-state had its own alliance, the Peloponnesian League, named for the peninsula where Sparta was located. Unlike Athens, Sparta was an **oligarchy**. Devoted to the art of war, its soldiers were renowned for their ferocity and discipline (*see p. 18*).

**Narrator C:** In 479 B.C., Athens and Sparta united to defeat an empire controlled by Persia [present-day Iran]. But as the Athenian empire expanded, tension between the cities grew. Finally, the two came to blows. An account of this epic clash, the Peloponnesian War (431 B.C.–404 B.C.), was written by Thucydides, a Greek historian.

**Narrator D:** In his *History*, Thucydides tells the tragic story of how Greek turned against Greek. It

was the beginning of the end of a remarkable civilization.

## SCENE 1

**Thucydides:** It is 438 B.C. Our story starts in the Assembly, a democratic chamber of debate and law-making in Athens. Under Pericles (461 B.C.–429 B.C.), the city-state is enjoying a golden age of art and architecture, erecting such monumental buildings as the Parthenon.

But trouble is brewing. The cities of the Delian League resent the growing power of Athens—and the burdensome tribute [payments] that it demands from them.

**Pericles:** Citizens, Athens is the envy of the world. Our allies benefit from our might, and we expect them to pay for this protection.

**Alexis:** Yet we are unpopular among these so-called allies. They resent contributing to our military.

**Cyrus:** We showed the city of Samos what happens to rebels. Their men are taken hostage, and their walls burned down.

**Minos:** I think we'll regret treating the people who have been our allies with such a heavy hand.

**Pericles:** This discontent is unfortunate. But we must stand firm to guard our empire.

**Narrator E:** Complaints among

“ We must stand firm to guard our empire. ”

The Parthenon—dedicated to Athena, the patron goddess of Athens—has overlooked the city for centuries.

members of the Delian League against Athens grow increasingly bitter, and Sparta takes notice.

## SCENE 2

**Thucydides:** In 431 B.C., Sparta holds a meeting of the Peloponnesian League to discuss the threat from Athens. The King of Sparta, Archidamus, tries to keep tempers cool. But the Ambassador from Corinth, Sparta's ally, is furious.

**Ambassador:** First, one of our  
*continued on p. 19 →*



**Helmet** The bronze helmet provided good protection against head injuries. Its crest, made of horsehair, was designed to make the hoplite look taller and more fierce.

**Spear** The spear was about 6 feet long, with a wooden shaft and iron point. It was used for thrusting. Soldiers in a phalanx ran together in a tight line with spears poking through gaps in their shields. A hoplite used his sword only if his spear was lost or broken.

**Tunic** Spartan soldiers distinguished themselves from other Greek hoplites by their long hair and crimson tunics. On land, they were the most feared fighting force in the Greek world.

Citizen soldiers of the ancient Greek city-states were called hoplites. Charging together in a formation called a phalanx, hoplites made for a powerful army. Check out the armor of this Spartan soldier.

## Breastplate and shield

The hoplite's bronze shield was carried on the forearm rather than hung around the neck as in earlier days, providing greater mobility. The breastplate, also bronze, deflected many blows.

## Greaves

Smaller bronze shields, called greaves, worn on the lower legs, protected the shins.

SHUMATE



colonies claimed independence—and Athens defended *it*. Then Athens besieged a city where many of our people live. When will you stop them from bullying us?

**Archidamus:** I've seen many wars, so I never go into battle lightly. I promise that we won't turn a blind eye to Athenian aggression forever. We'll talk to them. But prepare for war, just in case.

**Sthenelaidas:** We can't waste time. All those in favor of war, stand on this side of the room.

The rest of you, stand over there.

**Archidamus:** I fear we'll end up starting a war that our children will have to finish.

**Narrator A:** The majority votes for war. A reluctant Archidamus braces himself for the coming conflict.

### SCENE 3

**Thucydides:** Sparta demands that Athens break up its empire to avoid war. When Athens refuses, the Peloponnesian League attacks.

**Narrator B:** Fearing the mighty Spartan army, Pericles orders his people to leave their farms and take shelter behind the stone walls of Athens. Still, the city suffers great losses. Pericles delivers a speech that becomes a famous **elegy** for his fallen warriors.

**Pericles:** Citizens, these men fought and died so Athens could shine for generations to come. We are different from the Spartans, who are trained to mindlessly obey. We think for ourselves—and above all, we prize freedom.

**Narrator C:** The speech stirs the hearts of Athenians. But the war continues to cause suffering.

**Chrysanthe:** We were forced to leave our farm and have nowhere to live.

**Hector:** The Spartans are destroying our houses and land. What's the point of this war?

**Narrator D:** In the second year of battle, a plague sweeps through Athens. It kills one third of the city's soldiers and many of the people crowded inside the walls. In 429 B.C., Pericles dies. A wealthy merchant named Cleon rises to power and addresses the Assembly.

**Cleon:** Athenians, we have been

whipped by our own timidity. The Spartans are barbarians who threaten our way of life. We must defeat them!

**Thucydides:** I despise Cleon. He's a warmonger who presses Athens ruthlessly toward violence.

### SCENE 4

**Narrator E:** At the same time, Athens' alliance begins to unravel. In 428 B.C., the leaders of Mytilene declare their city to be independent. At a gathering of the Assembly . . .

**Cleon:** We must crush the rebellion immediately. Put all of Mytilene's adult males to death!

**Diodotus:** Stop! It's foolish for us to act in anger.

**Eucrates:** No. Make Mytilene an example to all who oppose us.

**Diodotus:** But if we ruin every city that way, no one will be left to pay taxes to our empire.

**Narrator A:** In the end, the Athenians execute 1,000 supporters of the rebellion. The

war against Sparta continues. In 425 B.C., after Athens wins a major victory, Sparta asks for a truce. Again, Cleon addresses the Assembly.

**Cleon:** Peace? They're saying that only because they're losing.

**Eucrates:** We must fight on!

**Cleon:** The people of Athens should no longer be taxed to finance this war. Let the other cities of our empire pay more in tribute.

**Eucrates:** Absolutely! Show those barbarians who's boss.

**Thucydides:** Cleon has that kind of power. He's a **demagogue** who will get his war—no matter the cost.

### EPILOGUE

**Thucydides:** Cleon died in battle in 422 B.C., as did Sparta's commanding general. The two powers, exhausted and depleted, made peace the next year. But the war resumed in 413 B.C. Sparta finally defeated Athens in 404 B.C. Still, the Peloponnesian War left both sides vulnerable. By 339 B.C., King Philip II of Macedonia had conquered all of Greece.

Philip's son, who revered Greece, later spread its culture as he conquered much of the known world. His name was Alexander the Great.

—Ruth Hamel and Bryan Brown

### Think About It

1. Do you think that war could have been avoided between Athens and Sparta? Explain.
2. Was it hypocritical for Athens to call itself a democracy and yet have an empire? Why or why not?