
Second year of the war, 430–29 [II 47.2–70]

Summer [II 47.2–68]

As soon as summer began the Peloponnesians and their allies, under the leadership of Archidamus, son of Zeuxidamus and king of the Spartans, invaded Attica with two-thirds of their forces just as they had done the year before. They established themselves and set about wasting the land. They had not been there many days when the plague first broke out [3] among the Athenians, and although it is said to have struck in many places before, particularly at Lemnos but also elsewhere, there is no previous record anywhere of a pestilence so severe and so destructive to human life.¹ The physicians were not able to help at its outset since [4] they were treating it in ignorance, and indeed they themselves suffered the highest mortality since they were the ones most exposed to it. Nor were other human arts of any avail. Whatever supplications people made

¹ The plague narrative of 47.3–54 is another famous passage, the first in a literary genre which runs through Lucretius (VI 1138–1286), Virgil (*Georgics* III 478–566), Ovid (*Metamorphoses* VII 523–81) and Procopius (*Persica* II 22) in the ancient world to such later works as Boccaccio's *Decameron*, Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year*, Mann's *Death in Venice* and Camus' *The Plague*. Questions have been raised about the historicity of Thucydides' account, partly because there is so little independent reference to the plague in other sources and partly because of its literary qualities. Its close juxtaposition to the idealistic Funeral Speech has great dramatic and symbolic effect, of course, but that is not by itself reason to doubt its reliability. See further the discussions in A. J. Woodman, *Rhetoric in Classical Historiography* (Routledge, 1988), pp. 32–40, Rusten, pp. 179–80 and Hornblower I, pp. 316–18.

at sanctuaries and whatever oracles or the like they consulted, all were useless and in the end they abandoned them, defeated by the affliction.

It first came, so it is said, out of Ethiopia beyond Egypt, and then 48 spread into Egypt and Libya and into most of the territory of the Persian King. When it got to Athens it struck the city suddenly, taking hold first [2] in the Peiraeus, so that it was even suggested by the people there that the Peloponnesians had put poison in the rain-water tanks (there being no wells yet in the Peiraeus). Later on it reached the upper city too and then the mortality became much greater. I leave it to others – whether [3] physicians or lay people – to speak from their own knowledge about it and say what its likely origins were and what factors could be powerful enough to generate such disruptive effects.¹ For my part I will say what it was like as it happened and will describe the facts² that would enable anyone investigating any future outbreak to have some prior knowledge and recognise it. I speak as someone who had the disease myself and witnessed others suffering from it.

This particular year, it was generally agreed, happened to be exception- 49 ally free from other forms of illness; but if anyone did suffer anything at all it always turned into this disease. In other cases there was no apparent reason [2] for it, but suddenly people who were previously healthy were affected by sensations of violent fever in the head and a redness and inflammation of the eyes; internally, both the throat and the tongue immediately became bloody and emitted an unnatural and foul-smelling breath. At the [3] next stage the victims suffered an onset of sneezing and hoarseness, and soon afterwards the affliction went to the chest, accompanied by violent coughing; when it took hold in the stomach it caused severe upset there, and every kind of bile that has been named by physicians was discharged, attended by extreme distress. In most cases an empty retching ensued, [4] producing violent spasms, in some cases straight after the emissions had ceased, in others much later. Externally, the body was not particularly [5] hot to the touch nor pale but was reddish and livid, breaking out in small

¹ The Greek is rather laboured, as indicated in Rusten's literal rendering, 'what causes (*aitias*) of so great a change (*metaboles*) he considers sufficient to have the capacity for disruption (*to metastasai*)', but the general intention must be to place special stress on the idea of *change*, which looks forward to the changes in behaviour described at II 53 below and then, more distantly, to the celebrated account of *stasis* and the breakdown of values and society in III 82–4.

² The usual translation is 'symptoms', but this is slightly anachronistic since in fact Thucydides has no word for that and just says 'these things', though he does of course go on to describe in 49 what we should certainly call the 'symptoms'.

blisters and sores; internally, however, sufferers were on fire and could not bear contact with the lightest of clothing and linens or anything other than going naked, and what they most felt like was throwing themselves into cold water. Indeed many who were not being looked after actually did so, jumping into rain-tanks, possessed by a thirst that could not be quenched – since it made no difference whether they drank much or little.

They were beset by a constant restlessness and by insomnia. The body [6] did not waste away while their illness was at its height but was surprisingly resistant to the ordeal, so that most people died from the internal fever in six to eight days with some strength still left in them, but if they survived that and the disease descended to the bowels, simultaneously causing serious ulceration and acute diarrhoea, then many died later from the weakness so caused. For the illness spread through the whole body [7] after starting at the top and establishing itself in the head, and even if anyone survived the most serious stages the assault on the extremities still left its mark. It struck the genitals and the fingers and toes, and many [8] people escaped its clutches only with the loss of these parts – and in some cases their eyes too. Some suffered a total loss of memory straight after their recovery and no longer knew who they themselves or their friends were.¹

Indeed the form the plague took defied all reason.² When it attacked 50 anyone it was beyond all human endurance and in one respect in particular it showed itself quite different from any of the more familiar diseases. Despite there being many unburied bodies the birds and animals which feed on human flesh either kept away from the corpses or if they started eating them died themselves. The evidence for this is that there was a [2] marked absence of such birds, which were not to be seen at the bodies or anywhere else at all.³ The dogs on the other hand offered a better chance for one to observe the effects since they live alongside man.

¹ There have been many inconclusive attempts to identify the disease from this detailed description, the main candidates being some unknown form of typhus, smallpox, bubonic plague or influenza.

² Literally, ‘the *eidos* (form, kind, nature) of the disease is *genomenon* (an occurrence) *kreisson* (stronger/greater) than [any] *logou* (word/account)’. At 61.3 and 64.1 below Pericles describes the plague’s unpredictability in similar language.

³ An interesting detail, since the evidence is that vultures can eat carrion infected with anthrax, botulism and other diseases without ill effects because of the very strong acids in their stomachs which neutralise bacteria; indeed vultures have actually been relied on to dispose of the dead in many cultures (see ‘Towers of Silence’ on the web), and the generic name for the turkey vulture is *Cathartes* (‘the purifier’).

This, then, was the general character of the plague, leaving aside its 51
many peculiarities in the different ways it affected different people. While
it lasted there were none of the usual complaints, or if they did occur
they ended up turning into this one. Some people died from neglect, [2]
others despite devoted care. Not a single remedy was found, one has to
say, whose application guaranteed relief, since what helped one person
harm another. No one's constitution was proof against it,¹ regardless [3]
of their strength or weakness, but it swept them all away, whatever kind
of care and treatment they had received. The most terrible thing of all in [4]
this affliction, however, was the sense of despair when someone realised
that they were suffering from it; for then they immediately decided
in their own minds that the outcome was hopeless and they were much more
likely to give themselves up to it rather than resist. There was also the
fact that one person would get infected as a result of caring for another
so that they died in their droves like sheep, and this caused more deaths
than anything else. If in their fear they were unwilling to go near each [5]
other they died alone (and many homes were emptied through the lack of
someone to give care); but if they did make contact they lost their lives
anyway, particularly those with pretensions to virtue, who were ashamed
to spare themselves from visiting friends at a time when even the relatives
were finally wearied of lamenting the dying, so overcome were they by
the sheer weight of the disaster. Yet it was those who had survived the [6]
disease that showed most compassion for the sufferers, both because they
knew from experience what it was like and because they were now feeling
more confident about themselves – since the plague did not strike the
same person twice, at least not fatally. These people were congratulated
by others on their good fortune and in the exhilaration of the moment
entertained the blithe hope that at no time in the future would they ever
be killed by any other disease.

Their general misery was aggravated by people crowding into the city 52
from the fields, and the worst affected were the new arrivals. There were [2]
no houses for them but they lived in huts that were stifling in the heat of
summer and they were visited by death in conditions of total disorder.
The bodies of those dying were heaped on each other, and in the streets
and around the springs half-dead people reeled about in a desperate desire

¹ Literally, 'no *soma* (body/person) was *autarkes* (self-sufficient)', a deliberate echo surely of the boast in the Funeral Speech about the self-sufficiency of the Athenian character at 4.1.1, where precisely the same words are used.

for water. The sanctuaries in which they had taken shelter were full of the [3] bodies of those who had died there. Overwhelmed by the disaster people could not see what was to become of them and started losing respect for the laws of god and man alike.¹ All the funeral customs they usually [4] observed were cast into confusion and each buried their dead as best they could. Many people resorted to quite shameless forms of disposal through their lack of means after so many of their relatives had already died. They took advantage of the funeral pyres others had raised, and some of them would move in first, place their own dead on the pyre and set fire to it, while others threw whoever's body they were carrying on top of one that was already burning and went away.

It was the plague that first led to other forms of lawlessness in the city 53 too. People were emboldened to indulge themselves in ways they would previously have concealed, since they saw the rapid change in fortunes – both for those who were well off and died suddenly and for those who originally had nothing but in a moment got possession of the property of these others. They therefore resolved to exploit these opportunities [2] for enjoyment quickly, regarding their lives and their property as equally ephemeral. No one was eager to add to their own hardships for supposedly fine objectives, since they were uncertain whether they would die [3] before achieving them. Whatever gave immediate pleasure or in any way facilitated it became the standard of what was good and useful. Neither [4] fear of the gods nor law of man was any restraint: they judged it made no difference whether or not they showed them respect, seeing that everyone died just the same; on the contrary, no one expected to live long enough to go on trial and pay the penalty, feeling that a far worse sentence had already been passed and was hanging over their heads, and that it was only reasonable to get some enjoyment from life before it finally fell on them.²

Such was the burden of suffering the Athenians bore, with people 54 dying inside the city and their land ravaged outside it. And in their [2] distress they not surprisingly remembered the following verse, which the old men claimed had been recited long ago, 'A Dorian war shall come

¹ *Hosion* would usually mean 'holy', but in contrast with *hieron* here it means 'profane', permitted by the gods but outside their sphere (see glossary and II 53.4).

² This brilliant piece of social commentary, like III 82–4 to which it looks forward, has many stylistic features more characteristic of the speeches than the regular narrative: great compression, complex oppositional devices, *variatio* and the frequent construction of abstract nouns and noun phrases.

and with it plague.’ There was some disagreement among them as to whether the word used by the men of old was not ‘plague’ but ‘famine’,¹ but in the present circumstances the view naturally prevailed that it was ‘plague’, as people matched their memories to their sufferings. I fancy at any rate that if another Dorian war should visit them after this one and if that were accompanied by a famine they would probably recite the verse that way. There were those who also recalled an oracle given to the Spartans when the Spartans asked the god whether they should go to war and he answered that victory would be theirs if they fought with all their might and promised that he would himself take their side. They therefore supposed that what then happened was the fulfilment of the oracle, and indeed the plague did begin straight after the invasion of the Peloponnesians; and although it did not get into the Peloponnese to any significant extent, it invaded Athens in particular and after that other densely populated areas elsewhere.

These were the occurrences² relating to the plague.

The Peloponnesians, meanwhile, after destroying the crops in the plain, went on to the coastal district called Paralus and got as far as Laureium, where the Athenians had their silver mines. They first ravaged the part of it that looks towards the Peloponnese and then the part facing Euboea and Andros. Pericles, however, who was general, still held to the same opinion he had had at the time of the earlier invasion: namely, that the Athenians should not go out to oppose them.

Nonetheless, while the Peloponnesians were still in the plain and before they reached the coast, Pericles began preparing a naval force of a hundred ships to attack the Peloponnese and when they were ready he put to sea. He took on board these ships 4,000 Athenian hoplites and 300 cavalry on horse-transporters that were newly constructed from old vessels; and with them went a further force of fifty ships from Chios and Lesbos. When the Athenian force set sail they had left the Peloponnesians occupying the coastal district of Attica. On reaching Epidaurus in the Peloponnese they despoiled most of the land there and then attacked the city. They had some hopes of taking it but did not succeed. Putting to sea again from Epidaurus they despoiled the land at the Troezen, Halieis and Hermione, all of them coastal areas of the Peloponnese. They then set off from there and came to Prasiae, a coastal town in Laconia, where they

¹ There is a word-play in the Greek between *loimos* (pestilence) and *limos* (famine).

² *Ta genomena* literally ‘the happenings’, a common expression in Thucydides, which here seems to embrace both ‘the facts’ and ‘the events’.

wasted the land, captured the town itself and destroyed it. After these operations they returned home, where they found that the Peloponnesians were no longer in Attica but had also withdrawn.

All the time the Peloponnesians were in Athenian territory and the Athenians were away on naval ventures the plague was taking its toll both of the Athenians in the armed forces and those in the city. Indeed it was even said that the Spartans were making haste to leave the territory through their fear of the plague, since they learned from those deserting the city that it was present there and they could at the same time see people burying their dead. But in this invasion they did in fact stay longer than ever before and despoiled all the land, remaining in Attica for about forty days.

During the same summer Hagnon son of Nicias and Cleopompus son of Cleinias, who were fellow generals with Pericles, took over the army he had employed and went straight on to attack the Chalcidians in Thrace and Potidaea (which was still under siege). On their arrival they brought siege-engines to bear on Potidaea and did all they could to take it. But they made no progress either in capturing the city or in achieving any other objective commensurate with their efforts; for the plague had attacked them here too and was a terrible affliction for the Athenians, wreaking destruction on their army as even soldiers who had previously been healthy now caught the disease from those in Hagnon's army. (Phormio, and his 1,600 men, however, were no longer in the Chalcidice.) Hagnon therefore returned to Attica with his ships, having in the space of about forty days lost to the plague 1,050 hoplites from a total of 4,000, while the original force of soldiers stayed in the area and went on besieging Potidaea.

After the second invasion by the Peloponnesians the Athenians had undergone a change of heart. Their land had been ruined a second time and they were feeling the combined pressure of the plague and the war. They now began to criticise Pericles, holding him responsible for persuading them to go to war and for being the agent of the misfortunes they had encountered; and they became eager to come to terms with the Spartans. They even sent ambassadors to them, though to no effect. And in complete despair they turned their anger on Pericles. When he saw that they were suffering in the present situation and were reacting just as he had himself expected he called a meeting (he was still a general), wanting to give them fresh heart and draw the sting of their anger and so

restore them to a calmer and more confident frame of mind. And he came forward and spoke as follows.¹

‘I have been expecting your outbreak of feeling against me – and I 60 know the reasons for it.² I have therefore summoned this assembly for a particular purpose. I mean to administer some reminders to you and take you to task for any misplaced resentment against me or any undue weakening in the face of difficulties.

I hold that a city confers greater benefits on its individual citizens [2] when it is succeeding as a whole than it does when the citizens flourish individually but the city fails collectively. A man can be doing well in his [3] own affairs, but if his country is destroyed he nonetheless falls with her; on the other hand if he is faring badly while his country is faring well, then he is more likely to come through safely. Therefore, since the state can [4] bear the misfortunes of individuals but each one of them is incapable of bearing hers,³ it must follow that all should rally to her defence – and not do as you are now doing! In your distress at your domestic misfortunes you are sacrificing our common security, and you are not only blaming me for advocating war but are also blaming yourselves for supporting that decision. I am the object of your anger, but I think I am as good as any [5] man at knowing what has to be done and communicating it. I also love my city⁴ and am above corruption. The man who can conceive a policy but [6] cannot expound it might as well never have had the ideas, while the man who can do both these things but is unpatriotic is unable to speak out with the same loyalty; and if he has the loyalty too but cannot resist money, then for that one reason all the other qualities would be up for sale. So, if [7] you were persuaded by me to go to war because you believed me to be at least to some degree better qualified than others in these respects, then I cannot reasonably now be blamed for anything like misconduct.

If people are free to choose and are in other respects faring well, then 61 it would be the height of folly to go to war. But if one is forced to

¹ This is Pericles' last speech. Dionysius was highly critical of it, both on grounds of style and logic (*Thuc.* 44–7), but it is now rightly seen as a very powerful and important complement to the more famous Funeral Speech of 35–46, setting out the realities of Athenian imperial policy to justify his own military strategy.

² A reference back to I 140.1.

³ There may be a subtle point of logic or emphasis here in that Pericles chooses the formulation ‘each one of them is incapable’ rather than the expected ‘no one of them is capable’ (the usual rendering).

⁴ *Philopolis*, a term Alcibiades later exploits for his own purposes at VI 92.2.

choose between giving in to your neighbours with the immediate result of subjection or risking danger to secure success, more blame attaches to the man who runs away from danger than the one who stands up to it. I [2] have not changed and my position remains the same.¹ What has happened is that you were persuaded to go to war when you were still unscathed but you regret it now that you are suffering harm, and with your resolve weakened you have come to think my policy wrong because each of you is already experiencing the suffering while no one can yet see evidence of the benefit; and now that you have been visited by this great disaster – with very little warning – you lack the strength of mind to persevere with the policy you decided on. The spirit is crushed when something so sudden, [3] unexpected and so completely unaccountable comes along; and that is what has happened to you, especially as regards the plague. Nevertheless, [4] since you come from a great city and were brought up in a way of life worthy of her, you must willingly endure even the worst misfortunes and do nothing to eclipse your fame. After all, people feel as justified in blaming someone who is too faint-hearted to live up to the reputation he already enjoys as they do in hating someone who is arrogant enough to grasp at a reputation he does not deserve. You must therefore put aside private sorrows and concentrate on securing our common safety.

As for your misgivings about the hardships involved in this war – that 62 they may prove to be great and yet we may still lose in the end – I have often enough demonstrated to you on other occasions that these fears are groundless, and those arguments should now suffice. But I have a further point to make about what your empire and its sheer size mean for you, which you never seem to have fully taken in yourselves and which I have not dealt with in earlier speeches either.² Nor would I do so now, since it involves a rather boastful claim, if I did not see that you were so unreasonably dejected. You think that your rule extends only over your allies, but I would point out that of the two realms available – the land and the sea – you are absolutely dominant throughout the latter, including not only the parts you already occupy but anywhere further you might wish to go too. With the naval power you now possess there is no one to stop you sailing the world's seas – neither the Great King of Persia nor any other people on earth.

¹ Pericles several times emphasises his consistency, here and at I 140.1 and II 13.2. Cleon imitates the claim at III 38.1.

² It was in fact stated, but not developed as an argument, at II 41.4.

This power cannot be compared with the use of your houses and land, which you regard as such a great deprivation. That is self-evident and there is therefore no good reason¹ to take these things so hard. By contrast, you should make light of them and regard the land and houses just as the gardens and ornamental symbols of your wealth. You should also recognise that if we hold fast to our freedom and come through safely we shall easily make good these losses, but that once you become subject to others then even past acquisitions have a habit of disappearing. You must match the twofold example of your fathers: they worked hard to gain their possessions, which were not inherited from others, and then in addition they handed them on safely to you. Remember that losing what one has is more shameful than failing to acquire something more. Confront your enemies not just with confidence but with disdain.² Any fool who strikes lucky can boast, even a coward; but the pride of disdain belongs to the man who has the good judgement to believe that he is better than his opponents – which is the case with us. When luck is not a factor on either side it is intelligence, derived from this sense of superiority, that fortifies one’s courage, placing its trust less in hope, whose force depends on desperation, than in a judgement based on the facts, which offers more reliable foresight.³

It is right for you to uphold the honour, in which you all take such pride, that your city derives from its empire; but if you pursue the privileges of prestige you must also shoulder its burdens. And do not suppose that what is at stake here is a simple issue of freedom versus slavery. On the contrary, it is also about loss of empire and the danger from the hatred your empire has brought you. Nor can you now give up possession of the empire, should anyone be frightened by the present situation and try to make a manly virtue of non-involvement.⁴ For by now your empire is like a tyranny, which it seems wrong to take but perilous to let go.⁵

¹ *eikos* (what is ‘reasonable’ or ‘fair’ or ‘right’) is grammatically the key word introducing all the clauses in this long and complex sentence (which in the Greek extends right to the end of section 3). The word is repeated at 63.1.

² There is word-play in the Greek here between *phronema* (‘pride’) and *kataphronema* (‘contempt’), which Dionysius criticised as vulgar and sophisticated rhetoric (*Thuc.* 46).

³ ‘Intelligence’ here is *sunesis* and ‘judgement’ is *gnome*. Sections 4–5 are very complex and compressed but the basic thought seems clear: it is reasonable to be confident when you know you have certain definite advantages.

⁴ *Apragmosune*, see glossary. Here it is clearly ironic.

⁵ A similar thought is expressed by the Corinthians at I 122.3, Cleon at III 37.2 and Euphemus at VI 85.1.

Men who can suggest this would soon destroy their city if they persuaded [3] others to share their view – as they would destroy any other city they set up under their own control elsewhere. The inactive can only survive with the support of an active element, and inactivity is not an advantage in a state that rules others, only one that is subject and seeks safety in submission.

Do not be led astray by citizens like these and do not direct your anger 64 at me when you yourselves joined me in the decision to go to war – not even though the enemy has invaded us and has reacted as you might expect to your unwillingness to submit; and even though this plague has been inflicted on us, coming out of nowhere (it is in fact the only thing out of all that has happened to have defied prediction). I know it is largely because of this that I am even more a hated figure now – unjustly so, unless when you get some positive gain you did not reckon on you put that down to me as well. We must treat afflictions sent by the gods as [2] necessary ills and bear with courage those that come from our enemies. That was the character of our city in the past and you should do nothing to reverse it now.

Remember that the reason why Athens has the greatest¹ name in the [3] world is because she never yielded to misfortunes but has to an extraordinary degree lavished her lives and labours upon war. She has acquired the greatest power that has ever existed, whose memory will live on for ever, and even if we do now have to accept some eventual loss (everything being subject to natural decline) posterity will always recall that we were the Greeks to rule over most fellow Greeks,² that in the greatest of all wars we held out against them, whether in combination or separately, and that we inhabited a city which was the richest in every resource and the greatest.

True, those given to apathy may disparage all this; but men of action [4] and ambition will want to emulate us and those of them who fail to match these achievements will be envious. To be hated and unpopular [5] in the short term has been the common experience of all those who have presumed to rule over other people than themselves; the wise decision is

¹ There is a constant repetition of the same superlatives in this section, which I have reproduced as part of the rhetoric.

² Literally, ‘we Greeks ruled over most Greeks’, which could mean ‘we ruled over more Greeks than any other Greek state ever did’ or ‘we ruled over most of the Greek world, being ourselves Greeks’. I have tried to preserve something of the ambiguity, which may of course be deliberate.

to accept the odium in pursuit of the larger purpose. For hatred is short-lived, but the brilliance of present deeds shines on to be remembered in everlasting glory.¹ Fix your minds, then, on achieving that fine future [6] to come and on incurring no present shame, and commit yourselves to both objectives. Do not negotiate with the Spartans, and do not let them see you weighed down by your present troubles, since those who in the face of misfortunes show the least distress of mind and the greatest active resistance, be they cities or men, these are the ones to prevail.⁷

With such words Pericles tried to dispel the anger the Athenians felt [65] towards him and distract them from their present troubles.² On matters of [2] public policy they did take his advice— they made no more approaches to the Spartans and committed themselves more wholeheartedly to the war; but as individuals they were all feeling the pains of their sufferings. In the case of the populace this was because they started out with little enough and were now deprived even of that; while in the case of the leading men it was because they had lost their fine property in the country with all their buildings and expensive furnishings, and worst of all because they [3] had war instead of peace. Indeed the people as a whole did not put aside [3] their anger towards him until they had punished him with a fine.³ But [4] not much later, in the way typical of people when acting as a crowd, they again chose him as general and entrusted all their affairs to him, having now become inured to their private pains and because they regarded him as indispensable to the needs of the city as a whole. Indeed, as long as he [5] was the city's leader in the time of peace he ruled them with moderation and kept Athens safe and secure, and under him it reached the height of its greatness; and after the war broke out he then too showed himself a far-sighted judge of the city's strengths.

¹ This striking sentence has been much worked over. Literally, it is 'the brilliance of the moment *and* the future glory are left in everlasting remembrance'. Stahl and others have queried the text on the rather pedantic grounds that 'the brilliance of the moment' cannot logically last forever in the same way as 'future glory' can. But Macleod is surely closer to the spirit of the original when he says, 'In this phrase Pericles rolls "present splendour and future fame" into one syntactical ball and tries to tear them through the gates of oblivion' (*Collected Essays*, p. 153).

² Whatever view one takes of Thucydides' authorial voice in the speeches it is clear that section 65, in which he assesses Pericles and his policies and gives his explanation for Athens' eventual defeat in the war, is one of the most important *direct* political statements of his own opinions in the whole work; it was evidently written at a late stage in composition since it refers to the failure of the Sicilian expedition in 413 and some subsequent events.

³ Surprisingly, Thucydides gives us no further information about the nature of the charge or the penalty in what must surely have been a celebrity case.

Pericles lived on two years and six months longer,¹ and after he died his [6]
foresight about the war became still more fully recognised. He told them [7]
that if they held back, looked after their navy, did not try to extend their
empire during the war and did not expose the city to risk, then they would
prevail. But they did just the opposite of this in every way,² and in other
respects apparently unconnected with the war they were led by private
ambition and personal greed to pursue policies that proved harmful both
to themselves and to their allies; for when these policies succeeded they
brought honour and benefit just to individuals but when they failed they
were detrimental to the city in its war effort. The explanation for this [8]
was that Pericles, through his personal ability, his judgement and his
evident integrity could freely restrain³ the masses. He led them more
than he was led by them. That is, he did not say things just to please
them in an unseemly pursuit of power, but owed his influence to his
personal distinction and so could face their anger and contradict them.
At any rate, whenever he sensed that arrogance was making them more [9]
confident than the situation merited he would say something to strike
fear into their hearts; and when on the other hand he saw them fearful
without good reason he restored their confidence again. So it came about
that what was in name a democracy was in practice government by the
foremost man.

His successors, by contrast, being more on a level with each other and [10]
in competition each to be first, began to surrender even the conduct of
affairs to the whims of the people. The consequence was – this being [11]
a great city and one in possession of an empire – that many mistakes
were made, in particular the Sicilian expedition. That was not so much a
mistake of judgement about the enemy they were attacking as a failure on
the part of those sending the men abroad to follow up this decision with
further support for them. Instead they engaged in personal intrigues over
the leadership of the people and so blunted the effectiveness of the forces

¹ We are told by Plutarch that Pericles died from the after-effects of the plague (*Pericles* 38.1). Thucydides removes him from the narrative at this point and does not even mention his death in its chronological place in the autumn of 429.

² One would have liked examples to explain the judgements here and at 65.10 and 11. Pericles died in 429 but the Sicilian expedition was not until 415–13, so what were the major mistakes in the interim that Pericles would have avoided, who were the culprits, and what are the implications of ‘for the first time’ in the last sentence of 65.11 below? For comment and suggestions see Gomme II, pp. 191–2 and Hornblower I, pp. 342–3.

³ A deliberate oxymoron, combining the ideas that he controlled them ‘in the manner of a free society’ and that he did it ‘easily and without constraint’.

in the field and for the first time embroiled the city at home in factional turmoil.

Despite their failure in Sicily, involving most of their fleet as well as [12] other forces, and the arrival of civil disorder in Athens, they nonetheless held out for eight years longer against their original enemies, who were joined now by the Sicilians and by the majority of the allies in revolt. They were also joined later on by Cyrus son of the King of Persia, who provided the Peloponnesians with money for their fleet. And they only finally capitulated when they fell on each other in their private disputes and brought about their own ruin.

Thus there were ample reasons why Pericles was in a position to [13] make his prediction that the city could easily prevail in the war over the Peloponnesians alone.¹

In the course of the same summer the Spartans and their allies made 66 an expedition with 100 ships against the island of Zacynthus, which lies opposite Elis. The people of Zacynthus are colonists of the Achaeans from the Peloponnese and were in alliance with the Athenians. There were 1,000 Spartan hoplites on board the invading fleet under the command of the Spartiate Cnemus. They made a landing and devastated most of the land, but as the Zacynthians would not come to terms with them they sailed back home.

At the end of the same summer Aristeus the Corinthian and three Spar- 67 tan envoys, Aneristus, Nicolaus and Pratodamus, together with Timagoras of Tegea and Pollis of Argos (in his case in a private capacity) set out for Asia to visit the King and see if there was any way of persuading him to give them financial support and join in the war on their side. On the way they first called on Sitalces son of Teres in Thrace, meaning to do what they could to persuade him to break away from the Athenian alliance and lead an expedition to Potidaea, where there was a besieging Athenian force. They also wanted, as a particular objective, to arrange through him

¹ An important but obscure sentence. The main verb *perisseuo* is usually taken to mean ‘present in abundance’ (LSJ II 1, citing this sentence), though what exactly is thought to be ‘in abundance’ varies: thus, ‘So overwhelmingly great were the resources Pericles had in mind when he prophesied . . .’ (Warner); ‘such abundant grounds had Pericles at that time for his own forecast . . .’ (Smith). However, the verb later also came to mean ‘be superior in, have an advantage’ (LSJ III 2) and Hobbes may have had this sense in mind in his version: ‘So much was in Pericles above other men at that time that he could foresee . . .’ This latter picks up better on the comparison between Pericles and later leaders, which is surely the main point of this section and thus also makes better sense of the emphatic *autos* (himself) which tends to be untranslated in the first set of versions. I have tried to retain some of the ambiguity of the original.