

# Power, Democracy and City-State Interests Is Pericles a Supporter of Democracy?

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## ABSTRACT

The importance of democracy itself in classical times is remarkable. Pericles was the most important statesman of Athens in the fifth century BC. His reign is regarded as the golden age of Athenian democracy. During this time, he was a model democratic politician. His power derives entirely from the approval of the people in a democratic system. With the support of the people, the more people he can participate in democracy, the more stable his power will be. Thus, even if democracy is not necessarily linked to the stable development of the city state, the interests of democratic politicians are also linked to democracy. Starting from the value of democracy itself, this paper tries to prove that Pericles's interests are highly correlated with the democratic system of Athens. Berriks, like other successful politicians in a democracy, do not undermine democracy itself. However, Athenian politicians after Pericles were often obsessed with party conflict, and Athens was less capable of decision-making under their leadership than under Pericles's. Finally, Athens lost the hegemony of the Hellenic world due to the lack of good strategic talents.

**Keywords:** Pericles, Athens, democratic politician

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Pericles was the most important statesman in Athens in the fifth century BC. His time in power was considered the golden age of Athenian democracy. After the death of Pericles, the democratic politics and Athenian supremacy in Greece began to weaken. But the question of whether Pericles himself was a supporter of democracy is controversial. On the one hand, Pericles himself served as the chief general for a long time, which made him look more like an ancient king. On the other hand, during the period of Pericles, Athens' democratic political participation reached a peak. [1]

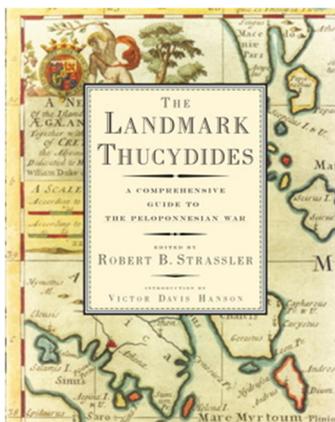


Figure 1: The Landmark Thucydides

Starting from the value of democracy itself, this article attempts to show that Pericles' interests were highly related to the democratic system of Athens. Therefore, he himself could not oppose the democratic system, and his power came from the legal authorization of the people under the democratic system. Thus, his long-term possession of political power did not destroy democracy itself. But this does not mean that Pericles' admiration of democracy could guarantee the prosperity of Athens, nor does it mean that Pericles' own political position was not for personal power. Hence the chaos that Athens experienced after the death of Pericles cannot be used to prove that Pericles destroyed the democratic system of Athens during his lifetime. [2]

## 2. PERICLES' POSSIBLE DESTRUCTION OF ATHENIAN DEMOCRACY

It seems that for many reasons, it can be argued that in the golden age of Athenian democracy, Pericles, who was the leader of Athens for a long time, was not a supporter of democracy.

First of all, Pericles' domestic and foreign policy recommendations were approved by the Ecclesia for a long time, and became the actual policy of Athens. When Attica was invaded and Athens was suffering from a severe plague, the people began to oppose Pericles. Not only did they think Pericles was the cause of their difficulties, they also tried to change Pericles' hostile policy towards the Spartans:

καὶ τὸν μὲν Περικλέα ἐν αἰτία εἶχον ὡς πείσαντα σφᾶς πολεμεῖν καὶ δι' ἐκεῖνον ταῖς ξυμφοραῖς περιπεπωκότες,

πρὸς δὲ τοὺς Λακεδαιμονίους ὄρμητο ζυγῶρεϊν: καὶ πρέσβεις τινὰς πέμπαντες ὡς αὐτοὺς ἄπρακτοι ἐγένοντο. πανταχόθεν τε τῇ γνώμῃ ἄποροι καθεστηκότες ἐνέκειντο τῷ Περικλεῖ. (Thuc. 2.59.2)

This was the biggest difficulty that Pericles encountered in his political career, but by means of a successful speech, Pericles still regained the support of the people. The people quickly stopped opposing Pericles' policies and returned to them. They soon returned to the larger confrontation with the Spartans and further supported Pericles through their actions. [3]

However, the fact that Pericles was the leader for a long time destroyed the operation of the Athenian democracy. He effectively became the ruler of Athens. Under his rule the actual political system of Athens was no longer a "demokratia" but "Periclekratia". [4] A more serious problem is that the long-term dependence on Pericles led to the lack of mature heads of state in Athens, so that after the death of Pericles, no one could completely replace Pericles in his role. Under the democracy after Pericles' death, there were frequently changing policies, which eventually led to Athens' defeat in the war.

Secondly, Pericles' own political position was not to trust ordinary people. In his speech, Pericles repeatedly emphasized that Athens was democratic, and that every citizen could participate in its public life, but he advised citizens to abandon their personal interests and obey the interests of the city-state:

ἐγὼ γὰρ ἡγοῦμαι πόλιν πλείω ζύμπασαν ὀρθομένην ὠφελεῖν τοὺς ιδιώτας ἢ καθ' ἕκαστον τῶν πολιτῶν εὐπραγοῦσαν, ἀθρόαν δὲ σφαλλομένην. (Thuc. 2.60.2)

Pericles always not only tried to persuade the people at the policy level, but also tried to persuade them to give up their own interests. This is unbelievable from the perspective of modern democracy. After all, the most basic trust in the people lies in allowing them to make decisions based on their own interests.

All in all, Thucydides' evaluation of Pericles is very pertinent:

ἐγίγνετό τε λόγῳ μὲν δημοκρατία, ἔργῳ δὲ ὑπὸ τοῦ πρώτου ἀνδρὸς ἀρχή. (Thuc. 2.65.9)

In fact, Pericles was only using the platform of Athenian democracy. His political activities were mainly for his own long-term power, not for the continuation of democracy itself. Cleon, an Athenian statesman after Pericles, gives a direct speech about the tension between democracy and empire: *πολλάκις μὲν ἤδη ἔγωγε καὶ ἄλλοτε ἔγνω δημοκρατίαν ὅτι ἀδύνατόν ἐστιν ἐτέρων ἄρχειν, μάλιστα δ' ἐν τῇ νῦν ὑμετέρα περὶ Μυτιληναίων μεταμελεία.* (Thuc. 3.37.1)

Here, Cleon explicitly said that democracy cannot manage the empire, and Pericles happened to be the first to remind people that they rule their empire by tyranny: *ὡς τυραννίδα γὰρ ἤδη ἔχετε αὐτήν, ἣν λαβεῖν μὲν ἄδικον δοκεῖ εἶναι, ἀφεῖναι δὲ ἐπικίνδυνον.* (Thuc. 2.63.2)

Therefore, Pericles himself was not actually a supporter of democracy, but destroyed the operation of democracy.

this is not proportion with the model size. The efficiency of our framework depends only on the time of a counterexample (indicate that the probabilistic safety

property is violated) appears in conjectured assumptions. The earlier a counterexample appears, the more efficient our framework performs.

In Table 3, the component sizes of the M1 and M2 is also denoted as |M1| and |M2|. The performance is measured only by total runtimes (Time), because both methods have the same amount of MQ if the model satisfies the properties. Because of the cost of early detection, we can find that our methods need to spend more time than Feng et al. [23] and cost grows with the model size. But compared with acquirement of optimization in Tables 1 and 2, the cost is acceptable in Table 3.

### 3. PERICLES' CONTRIBUTION TO ATHENIAN DEMOCRACY

But from another perspective, it is unfair to question Pericles' support for the Athenian democracy because Pericles himself made a great contribution to it by his deeds. And in his public speeches he also supported democracy. Therefore, in both his speech and his behavior, Pericles was a supporter of Athenian democracy. [5]

First of all, the time when Pericles was active was roughly the same as the heyday of Athenian democracy. Therefore, Pericles' political activities were carried out within the framework of Athenian democracy. As the leader of Athens at that time, he gained long-term influence within this framework, as the remark from Thucydides above demonstrates.

Generally speaking, a mature politician cannot directly confront his source of power, which puts his political life in great danger. To understand the source of Pericles' power, one can observe his political experience.

Pericles' political activities had two main aspects. On the one hand, he was a general in Athens; on the other hand, he was an orator, persuading the people to vote for his proposals in the Ecclesia. Because of the special nature of military command, the former position is that of a technocrat. In Athens, although generals had decision-making power on the battlefield, their powers were actually given by the Ecclesia. If a general did not perform well on the battlefield, when he returned, he was most likely to be tried by the Ecclesia. In fact, in 406 BC, the Athenians executed several of their naval commanders because their generals did not rescue those who fell into the sea during a battle. Although this caused the naval power of Athens to collapse, it also showed that military command was not superior to democracy in Athens.

On the other hand, as a speaker, Pericles could easily persuade the people, but there is no evidence that Pericles would have been able to gain the same political influence under another political system. Therefore, even assuming that Pericles is a politician who used democracy for his own personal interests, maintaining the democratic system in Athens was also a very advantageous choice for him, because under democratic conditions, as described in the previous section, even when the people of Athens were

extremely dissatisfied with him, Pericles could change their minds.

Therefore, Pericles himself was a direct beneficiary of democracy. From the perspective of his own interests, it was difficult to imagine that he would oppose democracy, because if under other political systems his skills would be less effective. For example, in Eastern-style court politics, the ability to speak to all citizens is not practical. Although it is conceivable that he would have had the ability to participate in political activities in other ways, there is no obvious evidence that he needed to change the political ecology of Athens at that time.

In addition, as a reformer of the Athenian democratic system, Pericles was promoting the participation of all citizens in the democratic system. Under Pericles' leadership, all male adult citizens could participate in discussions in the Ecclesia. Considering the supreme power of the Ecclesia in Athens, Pericles did allow more citizens to decide on city-state affairs. During the period when Pericles ruled Athens as a democratic leader, the democratic politics of Athens gradually transformed from the rule of a few to the rule of the majority. Therefore, Pericles' actions really supported Athenian democracy.

Finally, Pericles was the leader of Athens for a long time. If he deliberately undermined the Athenian democratic politics, it is difficult to imagine why the Athenian democracy could have been intact while he was in power, but then gradually weakened after his death. Therefore, in terms of actual results, it can also be proved that Pericles was indeed a supporter of Athenian democracy, without which the democratic politics could not be well.

All in all, as a beneficiary of the Athenian democracy, Pericles himself had power derived from the platform of the democratic system. Therefore, he had no motivation to destroy the democratic system, and his actual behavior only promoted the development of the democratic system and maintained it. Democracy flourished in Athens in the 5th century BC due to him.

#### **4. A POSSIBLE PROBLEM**

Thus far my argument has not resolved an obvious problem: as far as the common sense of modern people is concerned, under the framework of democracy, the leader of a political body should be changed from time to time. In fact, the Athenians did the same, and the chairmanship of the Ecclesia was not held by a specific citizen for a long time. But Pericles was re-elected as the leader of the city-state for a long time under a democratic system. [6]

If this phenomenon can be allowed in democracy, then this issue had not been resolved during the rule of Pericles. Because Pericles actually became the decision-maker of Athens for such a long period, Athenians had not cultivated a mature democratic decision-making system. After the death of Pericles, the Athenian democracy was in fact in a state where there were no decision-makers. As a result, Athens' strategy was constantly changing during the complex Peloponnesian War and lacked stability, which eventually led to the city's defeat.

If Pericles believed that his long-term reelection was unproblematic, then his political philosophy was not to promote democracy, but to protect the power of an individual. And if Pericles believed that this is wrong, then his behavior undermined democracy. In short, from this point of view, Pericles did not seem to be a supporter of the Athenian democracy.

But the above ideas have an obvious flaw, in that it relies on the belief that democracy must be helpful to the prosperity and stability of a city-state.

In fact, relative to other city-states of the same era, the Athenian democracy was not the mainstream. The purpose of any political system was to maximize the interests of the city-state and its individuals. When the interests of the city-state and the individuals conflicted, only during the intense crisis of survival of the classical era could citizens be convinced to give up their personal interests. Athenians' enthusiasm for democratic politics also lay in the fact that, under the conditions of the time, democratic politics could guarantee their interests to the greatest extent. Not everyone supported democratic politics. A famous counterexample is Cleon. Some politicians argued that democracy was not suitable for Athenians, based on the two points that "the interests of empire are the guarantee of personal interests" and "democracy is not suitable for ruling an empire."

Therefore, maintaining democracy was not always necessarily for the public interest of the entire city-state. It could also be a tool for protecting personal interests. As mentioned above, Pericles could not oppose democratic politics, even assuming that Pericles acted solely for the sake of personal power. Since he had the greatest political energy in a democratic system, he cannot be considered an enemy of democracy. From this point, it can be seen that even though in some cases democracy itself was not suitable for Athens, it was still the most suitable system for Pericles to hold power in Athens.

As a result, the objection raised above is no longer a problem: Pericles had a huge influence over ordinary people, so for him, even if he had foreseen that the Athenian democracy would harm the interests of Athens, for the purpose of safeguarding his personal power, he would also support the democracy himself. Therefore, the fact that Pericles was elected leader for a long time, and that Athens lacked political talent, does not constitute evidence that Pericles did not support democracy.

Moreover, the position held by Pericles and the source of his political influence are in line with the democratic decision-making process, so it cannot be argued that Pericles was destroying the Athenian democracy for the sake of his long-time possession of power. In summary, if it is recognized that there is no decisive connection between democracy and the rise and fall of city-states, then no matter what impact Pericles had on the actual prosperity of Athens, this should not be used as a reason to draw conclusions about his support or disapproval of democracy.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The significance of democratic politics itself in the classical era is exceedingly worthy of attention. In fact, for the city-states of the classical era, democratic politics was only one kind of political system. It coexisted alongside other political systems such as monarchy, tyranny, oligarchy, and so on. Athens was the dominant power in Greece in the fifth century BC, and its political system is often tied to its own success. But even within Athens during this period, not everyone was supporting democracy, and it was difficult to determine whether democracy would bring long-term prosperity to Athens.

But Pericles was the model democratic statesman during this period. His power came entirely from the approval of the people under the democratic system. Since the people supported him, the more people could participate in democratic politics, the more stable his power was. Therefore, even though democracy and the stable development of city-states were not linked by necessity, the interests of democratic politicians was bound up with democratic politics. Pericles, like other successful statesmen under democratic systems, would not undermine democratic politics itself. However, the Athenian politicians after Pericles were often obsessed with party conflicts, and under their leadership Athens' decision-making ability was not as good as it was under Pericles'. In the end, Athens lost the hegemony of the Greek world because of the lack of excellent strategic talents, which had nothing to do with democracy.

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