

Notes on Quiz #5: The Legacy of the Persian Wars

1. What was the Delian League? What was its original purpose, and how did it change over the years?

The Delian League is the modern historians' term for the naval alliance formed after the Persian Wars. The intent was to counterstrike against the Persians and win back Greek lands in the eastern Aegean and Anatolia previously conquered by Persia. A tribute of either ships or money was levied on all members of the league. Its treasury was at a neutral location, the temple of Apollo at Delos.

Originally Athens led the League as military hegemon. In a few short years the League had achieved its goal of winning back the Greek lands from the Persians, however, and after that the League became more and more about ensuring the cultural and economic preeminence of Athens, in opposition to its rivals Corinth and Sparta. Worse, Athens started punitively enforcing its dominance on member cities, forbidding them to leave the alliance and exacting retribution on cities that tried to do so or otherwise showed resistance. From the mid-century onward some modern historians call this alliance the Athenian Empire.

2. What was a metic? What kinds of roles did they play in Athens's society and economy?

"Metic" is the term for a resident alien. As skilled artisans and entrepreneurs who contributed to the robustness of Athens's economy. Though they could not vote and paid special taxes, they were often wealthy or respected for their craft. Many were deeply integrated into culture and were often close friends of wealthy Athenians and aristocrats, joining the nobility in public and private social gatherings. This means they had cultural and even political influence behind the scenes.

EC1. All of the following are true about the Athenian Assembly EXCEPT:

- (a) A law passed in 451 meant that both parents had to be Athenian to vote
- ✓ (b) It required a quorum of at least 60 citizens to pass important legislation
- (c) The frequency of its meetings increased from once in a month to as often as once in every ten days
- (d) It met on the Pnyx

EC2. Athens took pride in its radical democracy. In what ways was it unevenly representative of its (male) citizens? How might it be abused?

A number of factors prevented Athenian democracy from being representative of all its citizens. For example, the sprawling size of Attica meant that those living further from the urban center had to travel long distances to vote (the assembly met in Athens and you had to go there physically to participate). The frequency of assembly meetings also effectively disenfranchised those who could not easily leave their farms or workshops, giving disproportionate power to the wealthier citizens who could more easily be away from their jobs and lands.

There are also problems inherent in pure democracy. For example, the value of each citizens' vote led to people attempting to sway voters to their speakers' interests by telling the voters what they wanted to hear (demagoguery), as well as a market for those who teach how to argue convincingly regardless of morality or truth (sophistry).

The citizens divided into opposing groups, each working to block the other and preventing constructive action (faction). Finally, with majority vote comes the likelihood that the needs of the minority will be ignored (tyranny of the majority).

An example of these problems in action might be the way in which the Athenian practice of ostracism, the exile of one undesirable citizen by majority vote, gradually became a weapon wielded by politicians against their rivals.

Another, more unexpected problem was that the faceless, ephemeral nature of Athenian leadership, thanks to archons and council being chosen by the lot, led to a need for persistent faces; over time this empowered the board of generals (who could be reelected) and so men like Themistocles and Pericles, whose continued presence in a shifting government Athenians found reassuring.

Note: Male citizens are specified because no ancient society enfranchised its female citizens, so excluding women from voting is not a flaw of Athenian democracy specifically.

EC3. What struck you as most interesting or surprising in the text's discussion of family, marriage, and childhood, and why?

(This is a subjective question; the main point here is to discuss a distinctive element of Athenian society.)