Notes on the Golden Age of Athens and the Peloponnesian War

Golden Age of Athens...

Athens dominated the Delian League
- spent D.L. money on itself instead of the defense of all the city-states in the league

Pericles is the leader of Athens (460-429 BCE)
- focused on rebuilding Athens (w/D.L. money)
- Athens thrives & becomes more democratic
  - had a “direct democracy” (people directly vote on each issue, unlike the U.S. where we elect representatives to do that for us)
  - it was every Athenian citizen’s responsibility to take a turn serving on the Assembly (like Congress)
    - needed 6,000 members of the Assembly to take a vote

The Peloponnesian War (431 BCE-404 BCE, a series of battles)...

Note: Greek warfare was traditionally pretty organized and there were a lot of “rules of engagement.” This series of battles featured atrocities and the breaking of previous taboos (religious & cultural.)

-Sparta is irritated w/the way Athens dominates the Delian League, & so makes its own league (Peloponnesian League)

-Sparta tells members of its league to use oligarchy as their form of gov’t, while Athens tells it’s members to use democracy

-Sparta launched a land attack on Attica, while Athens responded by raiding the coasts of the Peloponnesus by sea

-Since Sparta itself was far inland, it couldn’t be attacked by sea, but Sparta could easily attack Athens by land
People from rural areas ran into Athens for protection behind the city walls. This leads to a great plague in Athens. 1/3 of the population dies (including Pericles himself).

-Sparta then bands w/Persia, & they go after Athens together. (Mainly Sparta’s army & Persia’s navy.)

-By 404 BCE Athens is stripped of all power & their naval fleet.

-Greek historian Thucydides wrote about the wars, & that’s how we know what happened.

-Eventually Athens recovers, but never reaches its former greatness again.

-All this turmoil leads to unrest among the city-states. There is fighting between them.

-Shortly thereafter, Sparta is attacked by Greek city-state Thebes & is cut down to size as well.

Causes of the Peloponnesian War
-Sparta was tired of Athens thinking only about themselves.

-Sparta was afraid Athens wanted to be an empire and maybe even would try to conquer Sparta.

-In 465 BCE a helot revolt broke out in Sparta. Sparta sent for Athenian help, but when they arrived the Spartans sent them away, saying they were afraid those Athenians would betray them & help the helots. This insulted the Athenians. They
said they didn’t want to be allied w/Sparta anymore. When the helot revolt was settled, the Athenians invited the helots to come live in one of their territories.

-In 433 BCE Athens refused to trade equally w/one of Sparta’s allies (Megara). This was disastrous for little Megara’s economy.

Some of the types of atrocities of the Peloponnesian Wars...
- temples were desecrated
- dead were left to rot
- captives & people who surrendered were butchered
- civilians were targeted
- defeated generals were shamed & executed
- some Spartans were willing to surrender (never would have in past)
- your role in the Athenian military did not depend on who you were
- fighting wasn’t always “out in the open” anymore