

Pericles Encyclopedia Article

Pericles by William Shakespeare

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Pericles

495-429 B.C.

Greek statesman who led Athens to its democratic and cultural golden age, and directed construction of the Parthenon and Acropolis. Pericles rose to power as head of Athens' democratic party in 461 B.C. After the once feuding Greek city-states reached a truce in 451, Pericles worked to establish Athens as Greece's cultural and political center. He called for a massive building project, including the reconstruction of temples destroyed by the Persians, and the magnificent Acropolis and Parthenon were erected. Later, he extended Athenian settlements to accommodate the rapidly growing population, and constructed a third Long Wall to protect Athens and the port of Piraeus. In the late 430s, the Thirty Years' Peace with Sparta was at an end, and Pericles evacuated the countryside, calling his people within the Athens city walls. The city became crowded and unsanitary, and an ensuing plague decimated as much as one-third of the population. Pericles himself became ill and died in 429.