political enemies were mounting an effort to ostracize him. Despite the support of the youthful Pericles, the Athenians did in fact ostracize Themistocles at some point late in the 470s. The exact chronology of these events unfortunately cannot be established. Pericles seems to have cultivated the association with the great hero of Salamis throughout his career.

I suspect the historian has more in mind here than fittingly introducing Pericles. As Thucydides is about to embark on his account of the great war between the Athenians and the Lacedaemonians, these reminders of Pausanias, the Spartan victor at Plataea, and of Themistocles, the Athenian victor at Salamis, seem somehow particularly appropriate. They had been allies, as had their two countries, in the miraculous victory over the Persians in 480 and 479. These two men, whatever their flaws, had been authentic war heroes, the most famous Greeks of their time. The accounts of their fall from grace among their own people and their ignominious deaths—they ought not to have died so—strike a regretful tone that surely is appropriate to the extended tale of war that will now unfold. I do not mean just the defeat of Athens. If, as I think most probable, Thucydides composed this passage at or near the end of the war, he and his audience knew that an important factor in the eventual victory of the Peloponnesians was that they received money from their old enemy Persia to build a fleet against the Athenians. There was a tragedy manifest in that for all Hellenes.

9. Thucydides (1.95, 130–131) describes Pausanias's high-handed arrogant behavior; Herodotus reports several examples of alleged corrupt behavior on Themistocles' part (taking and making bribes at 8.4–5, taking credit for some one else’s ideas at 8.58.2, double dealing at 8.110, and greed at 8.112).

The actual narrative of the war starts in book 2. Indeed, Thucydides opens book 2 with the following words: “Now from this point begins the war of the Athenians and Peloponnesians and their allies.” He gives Pericles two speeches in this book, the famed funeral oration in sections 35–46 and a final speech rallying the Athenians to stay the course in sections 60–64.1 He also summarizes in section 13 Pericles’ exhortation to his fellow citizens as they faced the fact of actual invasion.

As the Peloponnesian invading force was starting out, King Archidamus, leader of the Spartans, sent a final ambassador to Athens. The Athenians did not admit him into the city or to the assembly, for Pericles as general had passed a measure that forbade

1. This final speech will be presented and discussed in the next chapter.
receiving a herald or embassy of the Lacedaemonians when they were on the march (2.12.2). Suspecting that his own estates, which were in the path of the invading force, might be spared by King Archidamus either out of friendship—they were friends—or with the purpose of creating ill feeling against him, Pericles, who was one of the generals, announced in the assembly that if his property was spared, he would give it to the city. He thus avoided suspicion on this account (2.13.1). We hear nothing more about this property.

Thucydides 2.13.2–14

(13.2) Pericles continued to advise in the present crisis what he had in the past, namely, to prepare for war and to bring their possessions in from the fields, not to go forth to battle, but to come into the city and safeguard it, to outfit the fleet wherein lay their strength, and to keep their allies in hand. He affirmed that their strength came from their spendable income and that they would in most respects prevail because of this strategy and the abundance of their money. He bade them be of good cheer, since the city had roughly 600 talents income a year as tribute from the allies apart from other revenue. There remained still on the Acropolis 6,000 talents of silver coinage—at the most it had amounted to 9,700, but some had been spent for the Propylaea and the other buildings and for Potidaea. This sum did not include the uncoined gold and silver contained in private and public dedications, the holy regalias for processions and the games, the Persian booty, and other such, which came to not less than 500 talents. Moreover, the possessions from other temples added not a little that they might use and, if they were forced to do it, they could avail themselves of the gold of the goddess herself. He revealed that the statue had 40 talents’ weight of pure gold and that it was all removable. If they used it for their own preservation, they would need to replace it exactly. In this way, he encouraged them about their financial resources. They had, he reminded them, 13,000 infantry, not counting the 16,000 on guard duty in the forts and on the walls. (So great a number were on guard when the enemy first attacked; they were drawn from the very old, the very young, and from the metics who were of infantry status. They needed so many because the wall from Phaleron to the city circuit was 35 stades [4 miles]; the guarded part of the circuit was 43 stades [about 5 miles]. The part that was unguarded is the stretch between the Long Wall and the wall from Phaleron [see map 3]. The Long Walls to Piraeus cover 40 stades [about 4 1/2 miles], of which the outer was manned. The wall surrounding Piraeus and Munychia was 60 stades [roughly 7 1/2 miles], half of which was under guard.) He revealed that there were 1,200 cavalry including mounted archers, 1,600 archers, and 300 seaworthy triremes. These were the resources that the Athenians possessed, and not less in each category, when the initial attack of the Peloponnesians was imminent and they were on the brink of the war. In addition, Pericles repeated his usual arguments to demonstrate that they would be victorious in the war.

(14) The Athenians were persuaded by his words and brought in from the fields their children and wives, as well as the furnishings in their homes and the woodwork that they removed from these dwellings. Their sheep and cattle they sent across to Euboea and nearby islands. The move was hard on most of them because they were always accustomed to live out in the fields.

2. This is a reference to the gold and ivory statue of Athena created by Phidias that adorned the interior of the Parthenon. See above, p. 40.
Faced with the actual invasion, Thucydides is at pains here to show Pericles in action. He is one of the generals in the first campaign. He prevents craven dealing with an enemy who is on the move and steadfastly repeats for his citizens his strategic policy, namely, to bring themselves and their property within the walls and to rely on their fleet. He reminds them in detail of their vast economic and strategic resources, pointing out that they will be the winners. He exhorts them to leave the countryside to the invading Peloponnesians. Nearly his first act on the approach of the enemy was to promise to turn his own property over to the Athenians if it escaped devastation. Good leaders, and Pericles is consummately a good leader, do not ask their followers to do anything they are not willing to do. They lead by example, just as Pericles does here.

The Peloponnesian army approached Attica in the spring of 431 (see map 4). Proceeding to the border fort at Oenoe, King Archidamus halted the army for a siege apparently in hopes that the Athenians would yet make some concessions (2.18). After failing to take Oenoe and hearing nothing from the Athenians, the king encamped his army at Eleusis in the Thriasian Plain, one of the places most important in the religious life of the Athenians, and started to devastate the area. Surely he expected the Athenians to come out in defense of the sacred land of Eleusis. Except for some minor cavalry action, they did not respond. He then proceeded toward the most heavily populated suburb of Athens, Acharnae, which supplied 3,000 men, one of the largest contingents of Athenian infantry. Moreover, in contrast to Archidamus’s devastation of the territory of Eleusis, which could not be seen from Athens, his occupation of Acharnae was highly provocative, since it was visible from the city walls. His strategy quite obviously was to provoke the Athenians into fighting a pitched land battle (2.19–20). It nearly worked, indeed would have, had not Pericles exerted firm leadership in the face of heavy criticism.

Thucydides 2.21.2–22.2

(21.2) When they saw the army at Acharnae just 60 stades [about 7 1/2 miles] from the city, they no longer thought it bearable, but it seemed terrible that their land was being ravaged before their very eyes, an abomination that the young had never witnessed nor had the old, except at the time of the Persian Wars. It seemed a good idea to everyone, but especially to the
young, to go out and not to ignore it. Gathering in groups, they argued heatedly, some urging them to sally forth, others forbidding it. Soothsayers chanted many prophecies that each sought out according to his inclination. The Acharnians thought they had the greatest stake in the matter, since it was their land that was being destroyed, and pressed vigorously for an attack. The city was stirred up in every way. They angrily blamed Pericles and remembered nothing that he had advised in the past. Rather they bad-mouthed him, because, although a general, he would not lead them out. (22) They considered him responsible for everything that they were suffering. Since he realized that they were angered for the moment and not thinking clearly and since he believed that his strategy of not giving battle was correct, he allowed no assemblies or other meetings. He kept them from erring, which they would have done had they met in anger rather than with reasoned counsel. He safeguarded the city and, to the extent possible, maintained calm. He had a policy of continually sending out cavalry to prevent raiding parties from the army from attacking the fields near the city.

Pericles is here portrayed as acting firmly, some might say high-handedly, in the face of very heated opposition. As general he prevented meetings that were sure to result in poor decision-making. At the same time as he refused to allow a pitched battle, which he knew they would lose, he mollified at least some by using the cavalry to harass the Peloponnesians who approached too near the city. The result was a standoff. King Archidamus did not lay siege to the city of Athens. Since it was supplied with ample food by the fleet, he knew that he could not starve it out and take it, so he soon withdrew. The Athenians spent the rest of the spring and the summer of 431, the first year of the war, using their fleet for raiding expeditions against the Peloponnesians and
their allies and securing allies for themselves. In the late summer, the Athenian army, under the leadership of Pericles, invaded the territory of Megara (see map 4) in force and, after laying it waste, retired to Athens (2.31). This retaliation no doubt did much to cool the ardor of the youngbloods who had wished to take the field against the Peloponnesians.

In the winter, perhaps November, of 431 the Athenians held a state funeral for the fallen of the first year’s campaigns. Pericles was elected by his fellow citizens to deliver the eulogy. As a type, the funeral oration over the city’s fallen soldiers was evidently an Athenian invention. Thucydides’ version is by universal acclaim one of the greatest speeches ever written.

Thucydides 2.34.8-46

(34.8) Pericles the son of Xanthippus was elected to speak over the fallen of this first year. And when the time came, he proceeded from the grave marker to a high speaker’s platform constructed so that he might be heard by as much of the gathering as possible, and spoke as follows.

(35) “The majority of those who have spoken here in the past praise the man who instituted this speech by law on the grounds that it is a fine custom for an oration to be delivered over the war dead. But for my part it appears sufficient to honor men who were brave in action also by our action, such as this burial that you see prepared at public expense. It does not seem sensible for the brave deeds of many to be risked on one man’s ability to speak persuasively or not. Indeed, in a situation where perceptions of the truth are so divided, it is a hard thing for a man to speak in a measured way. The hearer, who knows and is well disposed, perhaps might think that what has been said comes up somewhat short of what he wishes and knows. The one who has no knowledge might suspect from envy that things are exaggerated, should he hear anything that exceeds his own capabilities. Praise accorded to others, I remind you, is palatable only so long as an individual thinks that he also could have accomplished the exploits he hears. Men envy and even disbelieve anything that overshoots this limit. However, since our ancestors of old approved this custom, it is now incumbent upon me, obedient to the law, to make the effort, trying to achieve to the greatest degree what each of you wants and thinks.

(36) “I take my beginning first of all from our ancestors. It is both right and fitting to give honored remembrance to them on this occasion, for they through successive generations always inhabited this land and by their courage passed it down to us free and independent. They are worthy of praise, and even more so are our fathers, who increasing what they received by painful trials left to us the great empire we now possess. We too, the men in the maturity of our years, have augmented the greater parts of the empire and made our city the most self-sufficient in every way for war and for peace. I do not wish to speak at length to you what you know perfectly well, so I shall pass over our exploits in war that added to our rule, whether those we ourselves wrought or those of our fathers exacting revenge from barbarian or Greek foes who attacked us. Rather, the pursuits through which we have reached this pinnacle and the sort of government and lifestyle that have made us preeminent, these I shall first elucidate before I turn to the eulogy of these men. It is entirely fitting on this occasion that these things be uttered and it is an advantage that the whole crowd here, both citizens and foreigners, hear them.

3. We do not know who that was, although Solon and Cleisthenes are considered likely candidates. Naturally, the Athenians in the audience knew perfectly well to whom Pericles was referring.

4. Those who had fallen each year were buried as a group with marble slabs listing their names placed over their remains.
Our constitution does not out of envy imitate the laws of our neighbors; rather than copy others, we provide a paradigm for them. In name, indeed, it is styled democracy because we handle our affairs not for the advantage of the few but for the many. Even so, by law everyone has an opportunity to participate in private disputes; for public office a man is preferred according to his worth, as each distinguishes himself in something, not by the luck of the draw more than as a result of his excellence. If, on the other hand, a man is poor but has some service to offer the city, he is not prevented by the obscurity of his reputation. We conduct public business openly, and, as to the natural suspicion that men have of others' pastimes, we do not get angry at our neighbor if he acts according to his own inclination nor cast at him ugly looks, harmless, but causing resentment. We are completely at ease in our private affairs and are most law-abiding in our public dealings because of fear, paying obedience to those in office and to the laws, especially those that help the wronged and those unwritten ones that, when violated, bring universal shame.

Moreover, as a matter of policy we have provided the most respite from daily toils, employing throughout the year games and festivals as well as elegant private displays. The daily enjoyment they afford drives away care. On account of the greatness of our city all things, in addition, pour into it from all over the earth. It falls thus to us to enjoy with the same familiarity the goods of other peoples as we do our own.

In the pursuit of war we differ from our enemies as follows. We keep our city open and never use deportation as a means of preventing someone from learning or seeing a secret by which an enemy might be aided if he got wind of it. We place little trust in secret preparations and deceits, but rather rely on our own high-spirited bravery. In their upbringing our enemies from the time they are youngsters cultivate courage through painful training; as for us, although we grow up in a more relaxed environment, we confront equivalent dangers no less courageously. As proof, the Lacedaemonians do not march into our territory by themselves, but with all their allies. We by contrast attack nearby territories by ourselves, and, although fighting in a strange land against those defending their own homes, we usually prevail easily. Because of the attention we pay to our fleet and because we dispatch our men on land to many places, no enemy has ever encountered our full might. Should they, encountering a small part of our forces, prevail over some of us, they boast that they have repulsed us all. Similarly, when they have been defeated, they claim to have been bested by all of us. Yet, since we are willing to face danger with easy-hearted confidence rather than from painful practice, and with a courage not engendered by laws but by our natural dispositions, we have the added bonus of not wearing ourselves out over troubles that might be. However, when we do encounter troubles, we show ourselves no less bold than those who are always fretting. Both for these things that I have enumerated and for others I say that our city deserves to be admired.

We love beauty with economy, and we pursue wisdom, but with no softness. We accept wealth as an opportunity for action, not as an occasion for boasting. As for poverty, it is no disgrace to admit it, but quite a disgrace not
to avoid it actively. Most of our citizens can handle competently both private and public affairs, but even those focused primarily on their own businesses understand public affairs adequately. We alone regard a man who does not participate in the affairs of the city to be not 'apolitical,' but useless. In addition, we Athenians can at least judge rightly, if we do not actually formulate, our course of action, since we do not believe that discussion is a detriment to action, but rather we consider it harmful not to be informed by discussion before proceeding to do what is necessary. We stand out in that we are especially daring and unusually able to calculate the risks associated with what we are about to attempt. By contrast, ignorance imparts daring to other men, whereas reasoned calculation causes them to hesitate. Men who understand with absolute clarity both the terrors and the joys of mortal danger and are not on this account dissuaded from it might justly, in my estimation, be accounted the most courageous. In addition, with respect to general goodness we act opposite to most men. We acquire friends not through accepting kindnesses but by conferring them. He who confers the favor is the surer friend, I assure you, because he acts to preserve the obligation due him through kindness to the recipient. The one who owes the favor is less enthusiastic a friend, because he knows that he will return it not as an act of noblesse oblige, but from obligation. Furthermore, we alone assist people not by calculating expediency, but by fearlessly trusting our freedom.

(41) "All in all, I say that our entire city is the education of Hellas, and I think that from among us individually the city provides men self-sufficient for every sort of enterprise and endowed with unusual grace. That these are not merely boastful words for the present occasion but, in fact, the truth is shown by the power that has accrued to the city from this lifestyle. Our city alone of all current ones comes to a test more powerful than its reputation. This city alone causes neither chagrin in its warring foes that they have been beaten by lesser men nor blame among its subjects that they are not ruled by worthy men. We are a source of admiration for men now and for generations to come. Since we display power that is witnessed by all with great proofs, we require no Homer to praise us nor any other whose words fill us with momentary pleasure, but whose account the true extent of our deeds will render hollow. Rather, our daring has made every sea and land accessible to us, and everywhere we have left undying memorials of our failures and our successes. For this glorious city, then, these men fought and nobly died rather than see it lost, and it is right that every one of us who survives also toil on its behalf.

(42) "I have expatiated at length on the attributes of our city to persuade you that what is at stake for us is not the same as for those who have nothing similar and, at the same time, to make glorious with proofs the eulogy I now deliver over these fallen. Indeed, the most important parts of that eulogy have now been uttered. The courage of these men and of men like them has added to the sheen of glory for which I have praised our city. Moreover, not for many Hellenes would it be the case, as it is for these men, that the account of their deeds in fact matched their actions. The fine bravery of an individual, it appears to me, death in battle either first intimates or completely confirms. It is generally just, even in the case of those who might not have been totally admirable in other respects, to give first place to courage displayed against the enemy on behalf of their country. Effacing evil with good, they
accomplished more for the common good than the harm they did privately. Be that as it may, the men we praise here today did not put off the evil day. They were not unmanned, neither the men of means preferring continued enjoyment of their wealth nor the paupers by the prospect of accumulating wealth and escaping poverty. Rather, they considered the punishment of the enemy more desirable than their own dreams. Since they believed it the most beautiful of risks, they wished to pursue the enemy and to postpone their own desires. They consigned to hope the uncertainty of future success and trusted themselves to take boldly in hand what was in front of them. Thinking that fighting and dying were preferable to giving in and surviving, they avoided shameful repute and endured with their bodies the ultimate deed. In the briefest moment of fortune, at the height of glory, not fear, they found release.

(43) "Indeed, these men, as I have described them, fittingly became their city. As for the rest of us, it is right to pray for a less dangerous, but no less courageous, resolve in the face of the enemy. Consider the gain not just in words of the sort that someone might utter at length to you who already know it very well as he spouts the benefits in repelling your foes; rather, contemplate every day the real power of our city and become its lovers. And if it has a glorious reputation, keep in mind that men achieved it in the past by their daring, by doing their duty, and with pride in their deeds. If they failed in some venture, they did not then think it right to deprive their city of their valor but offered it to the city as their finest contribution. Relinquishing their bodies for the common good, they received praise that is ever young and the most notable tomb, not that in which they rest, but one where their glory on any occasion of speech or action is preserved eternally. The whole earth is the tomb of famous men, and not only do the inscriptions in their family plots signal it, but even among strangers an unwritten remembrance of their courage more than their deeds dwells in each man. Therefore take them as your models, and, judging that happiness comes from freedom and freedom from courage, do not overlook dangers from the enemy. Wretches, for whom there is no prospect of good, would not more rightly be prodigal of their lives than those like yourselves, for whom there is risk of a major reversal of their good fortune if they continue to live, and if they falter at all, their fall would be greatest. For a wise man craven cowardice is more painful than a death that happens suddenly amidst courage and common aspirations.

(44) "For these reasons, I do not weep for the parents of these men who are here today, rather I hope to comfort you. You know that you were reared in a world of many changing fortunes. Fortunate are those who, like these men, meet an end most glorious, even as you meet pain, and those to whom the length of life has been allotted such that their happiness terminates with their death. I know that it is hard to persuade you of this when you will often have reminders of what you once enjoyed, when you see the happiness of others. There is no pain when someone is deprived of good things that he has not experienced; pain comes from losing the good that one has grown accustomed to. It is right for those of you who are still of an age to have children to bear up in the hope of them. Their advent will blur for some of you privately the memory of those you have lost, and it will be a twofold advantage to the city in not being emptied of men and for its security. As to the latter, it is not possible for someone to advise on public policy fairly or justly who does not also, when offering counsel, put his own children equally at risk. Those of you who are past that age believe that the greater part of your life during which you were fortunate was to your gain and that the rest will be brief. Be cheered by the glory of your sons. Love of honor alone is ageless. In feeble
old age, money does not, as some claim, afford pleasure; only honor can do that.

(45) "To the children here present and brothers, you have a great challenge. It is always the custom to praise the one gone, and perhaps in exaggeration of their excellence you may be counted not quite up to them, but a bit inferior. Envy exists as a stumbling block to the living; the dead receive praise with uncontested goodwill. If it is necessary that I also be mindful of the excellence of the wives who will now be widows, I shall indicate it all with a brief admonition. Great glory will come to you if you live up to your existing natures, and greatest will be hers who is least spoken of among men whether for her excellence or for blame.

7. Pericles grants the wives of the fallen this brief mention as he comes to his close; this injunction to them, austere in the extreme, no doubt reflects a widow's traditionally passive role in the Greek world. Widows were to raise the children and were not free to remarry. They had no public role.

The great empire that they now possess, Pericles turns to the main topic of his speech, praise of the Athenian way of life and form of government (37–41). Then he praises the dead whose heroism has made the city what it is (42), exhorts the living to be lovers of their city and to emulate these dead, who have received imperishable glory (43). He consoles briefly the parents (44), sons, brothers, and wives (45) and finally pronounces the rites at an end and invites the mourners to depart (46).

Among many memorable phrases, "our entire city is the education of Hellas" (41.1) and "the whole earth is the tomb of famous men" (43.3) stand out. In the end, however, the speech is notable for what it leaves out. There are no specifics, no individual is named, though undoubtedly some commanders and leading citizens had fallen during the year. Furthermore, Pericles makes almost no mention of any details of present or past campaigns. We learn nothing about which contingents suffered the greatest casualties and where. In talking of the power and greatness of the city, he makes no mention of the Parthenon and the other buildings on the Acropolis, the great building program that he had promoted and that in many people's eyes gave visible expression to Athens' might. Perhaps he felt no need to, for the speech was given just outside the main gate of the city. The Acropolis, then, was in plain view for much of his audience. Even after 2,500 years these buildings are still impressive. Instead, he focuses in lofty, often abstract language on the present greatness of the Athenians, their government and way of life. The delivery of the speech itself was an act meant to exemplify Athens. By exalting their city, Pericles exalted its dead, each and every one equally. To have died for such a great city is, as he presents it, both ennobling and, in an abstract way, consoling.
This is notably not primarily a speech of consolation; it does not offer comfort on a personal level. As Thucydides presents him here, Pericles comes across as proud and austere. One cannot think, for example, that the widows will have been much encouraged to hear that their greatest glory is to be “least spoken of among men” (45). Moreover, right at the opening in his first words (35), he sets himself apart. He will not say what the majority has said on these occasions. His tone toward his audience throughout is didactic.

Following immediately on the funeral oration, that brilliant account of Athenian democracy delivered by the city’s greatest statesman, and standing in juxtaposition to it, is Thucydides’ clinically vivid description of the plague that attacked the city like an invading army (2.47–54). Thucydides details the symptoms of the disease and its inexorable progression both through the bodies of those infected and through the city. Easily spread, the plague had a devastating effect on the populace, who had come in from the countryside and were crowded into the city.¹

1. Despite Thucydides’ very detailed description, modern authorities have not been able to identify the disease with certainty. Smallpox, typhus, measles, typhoid fever, and influenza are frequently mentioned, but none quite suits the pathology of the disease. It appears very probable, in view of the fact that many disease-causing microorganisms mutate rapidly, that the particular disease Thucydides described no longer exists or is no longer as virulent.