

Sparta Makes Ready for War

(Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, translated by Rex Warner, Penguin Books, 1972, pages 130-131.)

...Sparta sent messengers through the Peloponnese and to her allies outside. The instructions were to prepare the troops and the supplies necessary for a foreign campaign, the object of which was to be the invasion of Attica [the peninsula where Athens is located].

...When the whole army was gathered together, the Spartan King Archidamus, who led this expedition, summoned the generals of all the states and the most important and influential people in them, and made the following address to them:

'Peloponnesians and allies, our fathers have engaged in many campaigns both in and outside the Peloponnese [the peninsula where Sparta is located], and the elder men in this army of ours are not inexperienced in war. Yet we have never marched out in greater strength than now. And, just as we are in greater numbers and in better spirit than ever before, so the city against which we are moving is at the height of her power. We must not, then, fall short of our fathers' standards, nor fail to live up to our own reputation. For the whole of Hellas [Greece] is eagerly watching this action of ours, and, because of the general hatred against Athens, wishing us success in our undertakings. Therefore, even though it may seem that we are invading in tremendous force and that there is little risk of our enemy coming out to meet us in battle, this must not be made an excuse for relaxing our precautions while we are on the march: officers and soldiers of every individual state should constantly be prepared to find their own particular positions threatened. There is much that is unpredictable in war, and attacks are usually made as the result of a sudden impulse. Very often, too, a numerically inferior force, fearing for its own safety, has beaten off the superior numbers of an enemy who, through overconfidence, has relaxed his precautions...

'And the city against which we are marching is very far from being incapable of defending herself. She is extraordinarily well equipped in every respect, so that we ought to consider it very likely that they will come and meet us in battle; and that, if they have not yet set out against us before we are there, they will do so when they see us in their own country laying waste and destroying their property. People grow angry when they suffer things they are quite unused to suffer and when those things go on actually in front of their own eyes. They do not wait to think, but plunge into action on the spur of their impulse. And the Athenians are especially likely to act in this way, since they think that they have a right to supremacy and are much more used to invading and destroying other people's land than seeing this happening to their own land. Remember, then, that you are marching against a very great city. Think, too, of the glory, or, if events turn out differently, the shame you will bring to your ancestors and to yourselves, and, with all this in mind, follow your leaders, paying the strictest attention to discipline and to security, giving prompt obedience to the orders you receive. The best and safest thing of all is when a large force is so well disciplined that it seems to be acting like one man.'

...Archidamus realized that the Athenians were still resolved to make no concessions, and now at last he moved forward and advanced into Attica.