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Discussion: Athenian Long Walls

The Athenian walls, which were built in order to stop land-attacks from enemies and provide a safe corridor to the sea ports of Phalerum and Piraeus, turned Athens into an island located on land. During the time of the reconstruction of the city, the Athenian's enemies recognized that the construction of the walls was a war strategy planned in advance¹. For instance, the Spartans opposed the reconstruction of the walls, claiming that the walls would make Athens a critical base for an invading army. They continued to oppose the construction of the walls, arguing that the forces of the Isthmus of Corinth would give enough support to protect the city against external and internal invaders. However, regardless of the concerns among the enemy forces of Athens (or Athens's allies), the Athenians disregarded all outside advice. They based their judgment on the realization that failing to build the wall would leave them vulnerable to enemy forces, particularly the Peloponnesians. From an account given by Thucydides, regarding the conflicts of the time, the Athenians had employed multifaceted machinations, staged to distract and delay the attacks of Spartan forces, until they had built the walls to a level that would offer them defense².

¹ Croix G.E.M, *The Origins of the Peloponnesian War* (London: Duckworth and Co., 1972), 67.

² Croix G.E.M, *The Origins of the Peloponnesian War* (London: Duckworth and Co., 1972), 67

Later, in approximately 450 BC, fighting broke out between Athens and the allies of Sparta, including Aegina and the Corinth. Halfway through the war, during the years between 462 and 458 BC, the Athenians began the construction two additional walls. One of the new walls ran from Athens to the old sea port at Phalerum. The second new wall ran from the city to the port of Piraeus. During 457 BC, Spartan forces overpowered Athenian forces at Tanagara, during an attempt to stop the construction of the walls. However, the construction of the walls went on and they were completed by Athenian forces soon after the end of the battle. By extending the long walls to the port-cities helped Athens ensure that their supplies would never be interrupted, as long as they maintained the control of the adjacent sea³.

Bibliography

Fine, John. *The Ancient Greeks: A Critical History*. London: Harvard University Press, 1983.

G.E.M. de Ste. Croix. *The Origins of the Peloponnesian War*. London: Duckworth and Co., 1972.

³ John Fine, *The Ancient Greeks: A Critical History* (London: Harvard University Press, 1983), 171