(pĕrˈĭklēz), c.495–429 B.C., Athenian statesman. He was a member of the Alcmaeonidae family through his mother, a niece of Cleisthenes. He first came to prominence as an opponent of the Areopagus (462) and as one of the prosecutors of Cimon, whom he replaced in influence. From then on he was the popular leader in Athens. As strategos, or military commander, c.454 he campaigned unsuccessfully against Sicyon and Oeniadae, and his plans to bring these Peloponnesian regions under Athenian control failed. While in Athens between campaigns, Pericles carried through a number of reforms that advanced democracy. As a result, all officials in Athens were paid salaries by the state and every office was opened to most citizens. In 451–450 he limited citizenship to those of Athenian parentage on both sides. He made an attempt, probably in 448, to call a Panhellenic conference, but Spartan opposition defeated his effort. Under Pericles the Delian League reached its maximum efficiency as an instrument of Athenian imperialism; in 446 Pericles destroyed Euboea (now évvoia), which had revolted against the league. A 30-year truce was arranged in 445 between Athens and Sparta. The 14 years of peace that followed gave Pericles a chance to develop the splendor of Athens. He became a great patron of the arts and encouraged drama and music. Under his direction Ictinus and Callicrates, Phidias and others produced such monuments as the Parthenon and the Propylaea on the Acropolis. Pericles established colonies at Thurii in Italy and at Amphipolis. He was one of the participants in the events that led to the Peloponnesian War. The war, which began in 431, brought on the ruination of Athens. The celebrated funeral oration that Pericles made at the end of the first year of war (as told by Thucydides) was a strong appeal to the pride and patriotism of the citizens. However, Pericles was driven from office by his enemies, only to be reelected strategos in 429. He died six months later.

See Ehrenberg, V., Sophocles and Pericles (1954);
Burn, A. R., Pericles and Athens (1966);
Bowra, C. M., Periclean Athens (1971);
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