**Prescribed Source - Plutarch, *Life of Pericles* 30–31**

**30**

People say that when ambassadors had come from Sparta to Athens to discuss the subject, Pericles was claiming that a certain law stopped him from taking down the tablet where decree was written. Polyalces, one of the ambassadors, shouted: “Well then, don’t take it down: turn the tablet to the wall; surely there’s no law preventing that?” The proposal was clever, but Pericles still would not give in. He must have secretly had a private grudge against the Megarians. In public, he accused them of using the sacred land of Eleusis for their own mundane uses, and proposed that a messenger should be sent to tell them, and then go to the Spartans with a complaint about the Megarians. Pericles made this proposal, aiming to justify his actions reasonably and humanely. But it is believed that the messenger who was sent, Anthemocritus, was killed by the Megarians. So Charinus made a proposal against them that from now on Athens and Megara were immovable enemies, and if any Megarians set foot on the soil of Attica they would be punished with death. He said that whenever the generals swore their traditional oath of office, a clause should be added that they would invade the Megarian lands twice each year after. He also said that Anthemocritus should be buried honourably at the Thriasian gates, which are now called the Dipylon.

But the Megarians denied the murder of Anthemocritus, and blamed the Athenian hatred of them on Aspasia and Pericles, quoting those famous and over used verses from Aristophanes’ play “Acharnians”:

“Simaetha the Megarian prostitute was stolen by young men drunk from a drinking game, and so the Megarians angry and wound up, stole away Aspasia’s two prostitutes.”

**31**

It is not easy to discover what the original reason was for the proposal being accepted, but everyone blames Pericles for the fact that it was not overturned. But some say that he kept up his refusal for a good reason and because he had clear view of what was best for the city. They say that he saw the demand as a test of resistance, and giving in would have been a sign of weakness. Others say that he went against the Spartans because of his arrogance and love of conflict, as well as to display his power. But the worst charge of all, and the one with the most support, goes something like this. As I have said, Pheidias the sculptor was the contractor for the great statue of Athena and a friend of Pericles with very great influence on him. Pheidias had made some enemies because people were jealous of him; others also used him to test the people and see what sort of a judge it would be in a case where Pericles was involved. These persuaded a man called Menon, an assistant of Pheidias, to sit in the market place and, as a suppliant, demand protection from punishment for bringing information and accusation against Pheidias. The people accepted Menon’s proposal and a formal prosecution of Pheidias was made in the assembly. The charge of embezzlement was not proved because, from the very start, at the wise suggestion of Pericles, Pheidias had shaped the gold for the statue and put it on in such a way that it could all be taken off and weighed, and this is what Pericles ordered the accusers of Pheidias to do at this time. But the reputation of Pheidias’ work still brought jealous hatred on him, especially because when he carved the battle of the Amazons on the shield of the goddess, he carved out a figure that looked like himself as a bald old man lifting a stone high with both hands, and also made a very good image of Pericles fighting with an Amazon. The position of the hand which holds out a spear in front of Pericles’ face is cunningly made as if to try to hide the likeness, but it can be seen plainly from either side. So Pheidias was led away to prison and died there of an illness. But some people say he died from poison which Pericles’ enemies provided to make him look bad. Glycon’s proposal about Menon the informer was accepted and the people let him off paying tax and told the generals to keep the man safe.

1. **What was the Megarian Decree?**
2. **There are four main theories as to why the decree was created, as you read the text from Plutarch find, highlight and number each of them:**
3. Megara had sent eight ships to support the Corinthians against the Athenians at the battle of Leucimme and decree may have been designed to deter other states from helping Athens’ enemies
4. A theory passed on by Plutarch was that the Megarians had profaned a religious land and then killed an envoy who was sent to complain about this. Killing an envoy was a serious religious offence
5. Pericles may have created the decree to distract Athenian attention away from the trial of his friend Pheidias for embezzlement
6. Some blamed Pericles’ mistress Aspasia for passing the decree