

MARATHONAS

4 POEMS

ABOUT

MARATHON

490 BC

With a Little Bit of History

by

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The Persian Invasion of 490 BC and the Battle of Marathon



Prelude: The 6th century BCE (Before the Christian Era: hereafter (BC)) was a time of huge change all over the whole of the Middle East. The Assyrian Empire had just collapsed (608 BC). Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, had sacked Jerusalem in 586 BC, and took the Jews into slavery. Then the Persian Empire started to expand dramatically under Cyrus, who became the King of Persia in 559 BC.

In 546 BC, Cyrus conquered Lydia and also the Ionian (essentially Greek) cities of Asia Minor, on the western shores of modern-day Turkey. In 538 BC, Cyrus took the city of Babylon; and his successor, Cambyses, conquered Egypt in 525 BC. In 521 BC, after the assassination of Cambyses and his brother Bardiya, Darius became Emperor (or Great King) of all the Persians. In 513 BC, he led the first Persian expedition into Europe, crossing the Dardanelles to conquer Thrace and then he went north, crossed the Danube, and raided Scythia (to the north and west of the Black Sea); then in 512 BC, he turned south, heading towards Greece.



Meanwhile, most of the “Greeks” (though they didn’t necessarily think of themselves as that) were living in a loose collective of small city-states, with some out-lying territory around each city, and had been fighting each other fairly assiduously on a regular basis for a long while, whilst also trying to make alliances with one or two others, as they jostled each other for supremacy. Sparta, one of the larger Greek ‘states’ to the south, had already fought ‘Argos’ in 546 BC. Pisistratus, the ‘tyrant’ (leader) of Athens, was killed in 527 BC and was then superseded by Hippias and Hipparchus. Cleomenes had become King of Sparta in 520 BC. At this point, Athens went to war with Thebes in 519 BC to support Plataea, but this action also broke up the Athenian–Theban alliance that was main force of (internal) resistance against the ‘hegemony’ of Sparta.

In 510 BC, the Spartans received an oracle that told them to “set Athens free”, so Cleomenes, King of Sparta, attacked Attica (the Athenian territory) and besieged the Acropolis, but was – at first – repulsed. The second time, he attacked more successfully and the ‘tyrant’ (leader) of Athens, Hippias, was expelled and fled to the court of Darius (in Persia) hoping to seek assistance from him to become reinstated, in some way, or to seek his revenge through the betrayal of his countrymen.

Athens was now ‘free’ of its “tyrants”. In 508 BC, Cleisthenes proposed some new and radical reforms and these reorganized the old ‘structure’ (4 tribes, 12 brotherhoods, and 360 clans) into 10 new and much more democratic ‘tribes’, each with an ‘Eponymous Hero’ after whom the tribe was named, and it soon became clear that these new tribes significantly included large numbers of previously disenfranchised ‘outsiders’. This was the beginning of the Athenian ‘democratic’ system of government.

The number of Athenian “citizens” – men who were eligible for military service – was effectively more than doubled, by a stroke of the pen, from 10,000 to about 25,000. But this action also threatened what the Spartans really wanted – a weak and fractured Athens: i.e. posing no threat to Sparta! However, at the same time, there was a massive external threat: the Persians. Their joint adversary was very different. The Persian Empire then incorporated a great number of tribes: including the northern Indians, the Assyrians, the Syrians, the Babylonians, the Chaldeans, the Phoenicians, the nations of Palestine, the Armenians, the Bactrians, the Lydians, the Phrygians, the Parthians, and the Medes (only 2nd in honour to the native Persians), and they were all obedient to the sceptre of the Great King, Darius. The Persian Empire had also quite recently expanded (as mentioned) to include Egypt and Cyrene, the previously Greek colonists who lived in various city-states in Asia Minor, as well as several islands in the Aegean, and added to these were the recent conquests in Scythia and Thrace, and the submission of Macedonia, so all these were now Darius’ subjects and the Persian empire stretched from the Indus to the borders of the Greece confederation.

The (513 BC) Scythian war, though unsuccessful in its immediate object, had also brought about the subjugation of Thrace and the submission of Macedonia. So, Athens was becoming very, very worried by this Persian encroachment ‘encroachment’ to the north. Athens was just one city – compared to the vast size of the Persian Empire – but it contained a significant threat to the Persians: this new concept of ‘democracy’. It was a very dangerous doctrine, giving an elective power to the ordinary populace, and Darius was determined to suppress it, by destroying Athens and thus also expanding the Persian Empire further.

In 499 BC, the confederation of Ionian (Greek) city-states in Asia Minor rebelled against Persia. Aristagoras of Miletus (one of these Asian-Greek city-states) asked for support from all of the mainland Greek city-states, quite validly decrying the poor situation of the Greeks in Asia under the Persian yoke. This was somewhat also somewhat spurious, as Aristagoras had just tried to subjugate the nearby island of Naxos, populated by Greeks, using Persian troops, in order to curry favour with Artaphenes, the satrap (deputy) of Darius. The citizens of Naxos managed to repel the attack, and Aristagoras was therefore terrified of seeming as a failure in the eyes of the Great King, so he then turned ‘sides’ so-to-speak and – taking advantage of an incident between Persian and Greek officers –persuaded these Ionian city-states (in Turkey) to overthrow their Persian tyranny and declare for ‘democracy’, thus he essentially instigated this revolt. The Athenians and Eretrians sent a task force of 25 triremes to Asia Minor to aid the revolt, thereby earning Darius’ lasting enmity, and he vowed to punish both city-states.

Aristagoras added insult to injury and managed to steal the Persian fleet, moored nearby. He then sailed to mainland Greece, hoping to gain further support. After travelling unsuccessfully throughout Greece, he approached the Athenians, who decided to send him just one contingent of soldiers, and, with some additional support from Eretria, this tiny force managed to burn the Persian-ruled city of Sardis (where Hippias had fled to) and that was the capital city of Artaphernes (the Persian governor). The Spartans sent no support for this – essentially – rather foolish expedition. Because Athens and Eretria had supported the revolt of these Ionian cities against the Great King, this gave Darius the excuse that he now needed to attack mainland Greece. Only one ‘good’ thing came out of this foray. The Athenians had met the Persians in battle – for the first time – and realised that their army (consisting of mostly foot-soldiers with spears, shields and very light armour) had absolutely no way of dealing with the power (range and speed) of the Persian light cavalry and had also no way of properly protecting themselves against the masses of Persian archers.

So, the Persian king, Darius, having sworn revenge on the Greeks for the revolt of these city-states in Asia Minor, and ordered his cup-bearer to remind him before every meal about the Athenians (who he saw as the instigators of this revolt). He eventually attacked them in 494 BC and the Ionians (Greeks) were defeated in a sea battle at Lade, and the city of Miletus was captured, sacked, and burnt: the Greek men were killed, the women raped, the young men castrated, and the young women enslaved. This was the usual fate of anyone who displeased the Great King. With the failure of this Ionian revolt against the Persian Empire, Darius then turned his vengeful eyes on mainland Greece, especially the Athenians and Eretrians, and looked at how to punish them for their part in the Asian revolt. Therefore, in 492 BC he dispatched an army under his son-in-law, Mardonius. This army crossed the Hellespont and moved west towards northern Greece. He reduced Thrace and compelled Alexander I of Macedon to submit to Persia. However, in attempting to advance further into Greece, much of the supporting Persian fleet was wrecked in a storm and Mardonius was forced to retreat back into Asia. The storm that destroyed the Persian fleet was believed by the Greeks to have been sent by the gods in Olympus. But this only provided a temporary respite.

Darius sent envoys to the Greek states in the spring 491 BC, demanding that each Greek city-state send him the traditional “earth and water” symbols of vassalage. This was accepted by many of the Greek city-states, especially from the northern Aegean to the Dardanelles, but it was refused by Athens, and also by Sparta. With so many of the Greek city-states submitting to him, Darius felt that mainland Greece was now ready to fall to his rule and that the key to the domination of Greece was to defeat the city-state of Athens.

The traitor Hippias’ information on the internal politics within Athens proved to be considerably out of date, as, since his banishment as leader and ‘tyrant’ and during his 20 years of exile, the government in Athens had been through many changes. The influence (hegemony) of the old ruling families had now been broken and the ruling power was shared much more and most of ‘rulers’ and ‘leading positions in the city were democratically elected. In time of war, the Commander-in-Chief was called a ‘Polemarch’, and the 10 senior military officers were called ‘Strategoï’: and these were now all elected positions. The new government was determined to maintain Athens’ democratic independence and these radical reforms to their system of government. The currently elected Polemarch was called Callimachus and the main Athenian planner and strategist was Miltiades, who had fought alongside the Persians in Sycthia and knew something of their tactics. He now served as a Strategoi, a commander of one of the ten main ‘tribal’ infantry divisions (Lochoi).

Darius the King had learned through Hippias, (who might have more than a vested interest in giving him this news) that the Alcmaeonidae, a powerful old Athenian family, were opposed to Miltiades (which was true) and were ready to help reinstate Hippias (which was probably not the case). Apparently, according to Hippias, this group were also ready to bow to any Persian demands ... in exchange for being excused for any part in the Ionian Revolt. Darius looked to take advantage of this factional situation and decided to conquer Athens, which would then isolate Sparta, and also essentially give him the remainder of the Greek mainland unopposed. In order for Athens to fall, in Hippias’ mind,

two things would need to happen: the populace (or a portion of it) would need encouragement to revolt (or to betray) the city, and the Athenian army would have to leave the security of Athens, an almost invincible city due to the impregnability of the Acropolis. Darius needed Athens to be defeated overwhelmingly, convincingly and also immediately.

So, the Persian plan was to sail directly to Attica (the Athenian territory – only about 700 square miles) and, on the way, it first attacked Eretria, the city on Euboea (a large peaceful island to the north of Attica) conveniently on the way to Athens. This island city-state could offer only nominal resistance to the Persians, and its fall – and punishment – for its part in the Ionian revolt, would hopefully terrify the Athenian citizens. Darius's army was led by Artaphernes, son of the satrap of Sardis, and also by Datis, a Median admiral (Mardonius having been injured in a previous attack). It assembled near Tarsus in the spring of 490 BC, with a fleet of over 600 ships and a huge army. This Persian army probably numbered at least 25,000 infantry and 1,000 cavalry. Some accounts put it at 60,000, and other accounts put it at 100,000, with all the conscripts and camp followers. However the lesser figure is more probable, since it had to be transported entirely by sea. They also had with them the exiled & traitorous Athenian, Hippias, acting as a guide and advisor. There were still many old scores to be settled. Hippias recommended that the Persian army land on the beach in the Bay of Marathon, and then they would only have to make a short (25 mile) overland attack to reach Athens.

The Persian transports, escorted by the fleet, sailed sometime in July, 490 BC, from Samos went through the Cyclades to Naxos, which they assaulted and looted, and then continued crossing the Aegean Sea, travelling slightly northwest towards Attica. The fleet sailed from island to island, conscripting troops and taking hostages, as it went. Eventually, it reached the north point of Euboea and sailed through the Euboean channel to Eretria, where their aims suddenly became clear to the Greeks. Artaphernes, seeking revenge for the burning of the city of Sardis, took part of the Persian army ashore and laid siege to Eretria, and, after a week of resistance, the city finally fell to a betrayal from inside. Eretria was pillaged and looted without mercy, and then burnt. Meanwhile, the rest of the fleet and the rest of the army had already moved on towards the shores of Attica and the beach at Marathon.

The Athenians had already long been warned of the rough size of the Persian assemblage and the sailing of the Persian invasion by a series of beacon fires. They had realized that to repel an army of this size, they really needed some substantive assistance, and so they had warned the other city-states, in general terms, well in advance, sending messengers out through the length of Greece, but – of course – the exact time of arrival was unknown, the landing place was unknown, and, since the politics between the various city-states was ever-changing, the outcome was very dubious. Many of the city-states had agreed to give homage to Darius. Furthermore, as it was now nearly August and the harvests had of course to be got in first. On sighting the fleet, the Eretrians sent an urgent message to Athens, giving more specific details and desperately asking then for help. It was their last message. *“And first, before they left the city, the generals sent to Sparta a herald, one Pheidippides, who was by birth an Athenian, and by profession and practice a trained runner...”* (Herodotus, *The Persian Wars*, VI, 106.)

Sparta was a fair distance to the south and it would take several days to get there and back. Almost certainly another messenger was also sent to their nearest neighbours, the Plataeans, who had also not offered the “earth and water” tribute to the Persians. The Athenian courier, Pheidippides, arrived in Sparta in the first days of August, and whilst the Spartans, nominally allies with the other Greeks against Persia (but also with a lot of ancient rivalry and with a greatly differing culture), agreed that they might help, but ... they (regretfully) pointed out that they were forbidden – by their religious beliefs – to send their troops into combat until after the full moon when their Carneian festival ended. The full moon would not be for at least another week and so, they replied, they unfortunately could not possibly arrive in Athens until nearer the end of August or perhaps even early September. And they could only send (perhaps) 1,000 men: they could not leave Sparta defenceless.

This then is the background setting for the first poem: Marathonas 1

Marathonas 1

I remember when their messenger first came to Sparta
He was the Olympic champion, Pheidippides.
But he only brought bad news: the Medes were coming
In their ships, with their armies, in their thousands:
They were coming to conquer Hellas
And the Athenians had sent this messenger to ask us for help
Again.

I remember speaking to him, the night he arrived in Sparta
He lodged in my house, ate my meat, drank my wine
I, Aristarkhos, of the Kleomenids, had that honour.
He was very tired having run all the way from Athens
A full week's journey in just three days and two nights
Two hundred stadia -
Incredible!

I remember what he told us:
That the Persians were coming, in their thousands
That the Athenians needed all the help they could get
That the Persians would not stop at Athens
That they would conquer all Hellas, and
Then Korinth and Sparta would be next
Inevitably!

I remember the reply of our kings and wise *ephors* on the next day
“We are a war-like people; we train for war
Yet we choose carefully where and when we fight.”
“This war is of your making. You supported
The Greek cities in Asia when they rebelled
Against the Medes under Aristagoras,
Futilely.”

“Now your retribution comes. Yours, not ours!
And yet again you ask us for help and assistance,
For five thousand Spartan warriors: for our whole army.
You would leave us defenceless!
Our *Spartiates* are the flower of our people
If they are gone, Sparta will be gone
Forever.”

“We cannot and will not send our full army.
Our neighbours might attack,
The Messenians and the Arcadians,
When our soldiers are gone away:
And then there are the slavish Helots
Who might rise up in revolt.
We cannot and will not leave all our women and children
Defenceless.”

“It is true that there are old alliances - and rivalries - between our cities
We have fought wars with each other and against each other
Maybe there will be more wars to come.
By asking for help from us now, maybe you are also looking to the future.

When we are weakened. We must consider all these matters
Carefully.”

“We make decisions in ways that may seem strange to you.
We have two kings: one goes to war, the other stays;
We have the five *ephors*, and their voices must be heard.
There is the *Apella*, the assembly of the people,
You think that we do not listen to our people
But you are wrong, my democratic friend,
Indubitably.”

“And then there are the Gods!
A decision to go to war can only be made
After the Festival of the Full Moon of Artemis is over in a week’s time.
The Assembly of Warriors and
The Families of Equals will decide then
In accordance with the Gods
Properly.”

The Athenian messenger was shaken. Everyone could see that.
He was not a “man who trembles”
But an Olympic Champion; yet his hope had gone.
These words were as a sentence of death
On his city, on his people, on their trust in allies against the common enemy,
This ‘decision’ – this prevarication – broke his heart
Absolutely.

He would not stay another day to rest
“I must get back” he said,
“And tell my people we are doomed.
If I cannot bring hope of even a thousand Spartan warriors,
Feared by all – known by all – as the greatest of fighters.
Then I will bring just my two arms, to fight the Medes.
Alone.”

“You say you Spartans are the descendants of Herakles,
The strongest and bravest mortal man who ever lived
But your words are those of old women;
Your actions are not brave, but cautious;
You do nothing: you are not heroes!
I cannot see that a single drop of his blood is left in you,
Distinctly.”

He left then, to run all the way back to Athens.
We never saw him again. When a small force of our soldiers
Arrived in Athens three weeks later, we heard he had died,
After the battle was over. The Athenians had won,
And we carried back to Sparta our shame, our silence,
Completely.

The History Continues:

By contrast to Sparta, the city-state of Plataea, a close neighbour of Athens that had been helped by the Athenians a few years previously to resist the aggression of Thebes, responded to the Athenian cry for help immediately. In their gratitude, they now sent about 1,000 men directly to meet the Persian army. No other city-states would have, or could have, responded in time. Many of them had already given tribute to the Persians just a year before. And so, they waited – to see if Athens would be destroyed – either hopefully or fearfully.

Hippias, the traitor, had previously advised the Persian military commanders, especially Artaphenes, that the most logical place for landing and disembarking the huge Persian army in the attack on Athens was the Bay of Marathon. This was a sheltered bay, with a long, firm, flat plain between the mountains and the sea, and was well protected from the north and east winds by a curving peninsular. The long and sandy beach could accommodate all of the Persians' 600 or more ships, and also the open plain of Marathon was perfect for the useful deployment of the Persian cavalry, against which it was thought the Athenian infantry would be totally ineffective. It was within a relatively easy march of Athens, which was only about 40 kilometers (about 25 miles) away to the southwest, and from Marathon, there were only two different routes to Athens.

Sentinels had been posted all around the Attic peninsular to keep watch for the Persians and to bring news of where they might land. Once the attack on Eritria had proved successful, the Persian invasion of Attica was now a foregone conclusion. But, it seems that the battlefield had been chosen already, long ago, with the aid of the traitor Hippias.



The Attic Peninsula, showing Athens (and Piraeus and Marathon) as well as the neighbouring city-states of Thebes, Plataea, Eritria, Corinth and the direction towards Sparta.

The beach at Marathon was just one possible place for landing such a large Persian army. Another well-known possibility was a beach very close to Athens, Phaleron Bay, alongside Piraeus, the port of Athens. There would have been sentries sent out around the whole of the Attic peninsula, keeping a watch out for the Persian fleet. As it was quite likely to attack Eretia, another landing place could have been on the mainland opposite.

This is thus the point in history at which the second poem is written – Marathonas 2.

Marathonas 2

I was walking on the beach, a lonely sentinel,
 Early one morning.
My sergeant had gone off sick (too much wine last night)
 And so I was alone, on this beach.
I saw a white speck rise over the horizon to the East
 Then another, and another,
And a hundred more, not gulls, not just sails,
 A nightmare.
Six hundred sails and sixty thousand oars
 Rose over that horizon,
Beetle-like, crawling towards me, yet massive, unstoppable
 As a tidal wave that will engulf the land
Their ships drifting towards me on a treacherous breeze
 As vultures drift across the sky
Towards a fresh carcass; and the wind bore their stink.
 The Persians came across the sea
 Towards the white hills of Attica
I hid and watched them come ashore in the bay
 Crabs scuttle across the shore; bees swarm in a tree branch;
Ants run around scurrying
 If their nest is disturbed.
They crawled out of the wine dark sea
 Their army and horses turning the sand black
The smoke of their fires darkening the day
 And I tried to count their impossible numbers
 Littering the beach.
Then I turned to carry the news
 A single sentinel cannot guard against
The rising of the sea, or a black human tide,
 Now I must become swift
Like winged Hermes, the messenger of the Gods,
 Or the champion, Pheidippides, Athens' greatest runner.
Whom I admired and had often seen
 In training and in races
 Ye, Gods: he was fast.

Thus, I left my watch-post; my hiding place, I left my duty;
 Near that beach,
I cast aside my helmet, spear and shield;
 They would weigh me done
And could easily be replaced.
 I started to run, towards Athens,
 Leaving the beach at Marathon.

The History Continues:



A picture reconstructing the beached Persian ships at Marathon before the battle

Having landed totally unopposed in Marathon Bay, the Persians situated their camp near the Makaria Spring, which provided a plentiful supply of water, and the nearby plain of Marathon also had good grazing for their horses. The plain has a crescent shape and is about six miles in length. It is about two miles broad in the centre, where the space between the mountains and the sea is greatest, but it narrows towards either end, with the mountains coming close down to the water at the horns of the bay. There is a valley leading inward from the middle of the plain, and a ravine comes down to it from the south, and it is from this point that the two roads to Athens separate (one going south and one (more direct) going west. Elsewhere, the landscape is closely girt round by rugged limestone mountains, which are thickly studded with pines, olive-trees and cedars, and overgrown with the myrtle, arbutus, and other shrubs that perfume the Attic air. The northern part of the plain was quite marshy and – in August – it is difficult to know how treacherous (or dry) this area was, then.

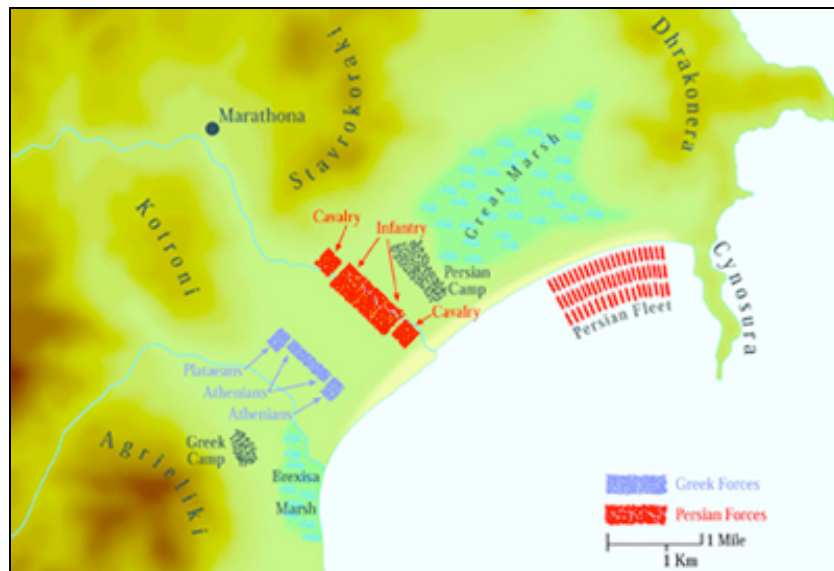
As has been mentioned, the reports about the numbers of the armies differ, but the Persians had a massive army - for those days (only limited by the number of their available ships) - containing both infantry and cavalry (which the Greeks did not have at all), which probably totalled around 25,000 men, with additional thousands of camp followers, grooms, auxiliaries and servants, thus vastly outnumbering the Athenian's army. On the Athenian side, every free Greek was trained in military duty, and it was unlikely that few Greek citizens reached manhood without having seen some military service – especially given the number of incessant border wars and inter-city rivalries. The 'muster-roll' of free Athenians of military age (at this particular time) probably did not exceed 10,000. So, the Persians probably outnumbered the Athenians by a ratio of about three to one. The Persians also used archers extensively, much more so than the Athenians and – finally – there was no effective Greek form of defence against the Persian cavalry: so, the odds



would have seemed overwhelming. The Persian soldiers, drawn from many different countries, would have appeared as outlandish, brightly coloured, diverse, heathen – almost alien. However, in close foot combat, the Greeks had a definite advantage: most of their soldiers wore solid bronze armour, and their

spears were also longer than the Persians'. The poorer Greek soldiers would not have been provided with proper equipment and may not have had much experience. But, if they could get into close combat with just a small portion of the Persians, there might – possibly – some small chance of some small success. The Athenian army, under Callimachus the Polemarch and accompanied by his ten tribal generals, as soon as it received the news of the landing at Marathon, marched northwest from Athens. Callimachus then wheeled right and gained a position in the valley of Avlona and encamped his army at the shrine of Heracles on the slopes of Mt. Agrieliiki, overlooking the plain of Marathon from the southern end. This was a raised position and lay astride the point at which the two roads to Athens separated. It was eminently defensible and the Plataean soldiers joined them there.

The first instructions for battle from the planner Miltiades were to try to contain the invading army and block its march on Athens. Since it was obvious, from the Persians' dispositions, that they did not intend to march immediately on Athens, the Athenians decided to wait, hoping in vain (as it turned out) for the Spartan's arrival, and the return message – prevaricating their arrival – had not yet arrived, Sparta being several days journey to the south. The only other possible route to Athens was by sea, around the bottom of the Attic peninsular. So, if the Persian commander decided to split his forces, the Greeks would be in a truly horrible position. There would only have been a token force left guarding the city. If a Persian force ever arrived at Athens, there was also a fair chance that some Athenians might let them in, 'betraying' the city. The Persians certainly hoped for this from the friends of Hippias, the former tyrant, who had been brought along: however, this might also not have been forthcoming as he was still hated. Not everyone would have been for holding out against the Persians, especially when they were offering "favoured status" to those who sided with them, and threatened massacre and death to all those against them. It just took one or two persons to betray a city (two in the case of Eritrea) and (later) one small farmer at the battle of Thermopylae. Switching sides – and these sorts of betrayals – were endemic in Greece.



The plain of Marathon and the surrounding hills, showing the line up of the two armies just before the battle.

Thus the combined Greek force, totalling about 10,000 armed Athenians and about 800 Plataeans, took up their position at the southern end of the Plain of Marathon with Mount Agrieliiki behind them; Mount Kotroni to their left; the sea on their right flank; and the Brexisa Marsh protecting them to the south. With this position, they had effectively blocked both roads to Athens. The Athenian commanders had also ordered many trees to be cut down and manhandled into position with their branches facing the Persian line to create a defensive wall against the dreaded Persian cavalry: the Greeks did not have any cavalry themselves. So, for a period of about eight days, the armies confronted each other in a stalemate. The Persians might also have had some fairly reasonable hopes of the Greek army disintegrating from internal dissention and treachery, however, as there were only two city states involved – the Spartans not being present – and Plataea was 'bound' to Athens in gratitude: this was one of the very rare occasions

when such dissention did not happen. So, the days passed. Until the 11th of August, these lines remained static, five kilometres apart, neither side willing to make the first move to attack the other. The Athenians did not wish to advance onto the plain where the advantage would then lie with the Persian's overwhelming numbers, their mobile cavalry, and their deadly archers. The Persians on their part remained stationary, as they did not want to engage the Greek line, where it had taken up a good defensible position that was very unfavourable to the Persian cavalry. Once having landed, they discovered that they were also quite trapped as the marshes, hills and sea to the north and west meant that they could not find another way through, to Athens. It was a virtual stand-off.

Then, the news became generally known that Eretria had fallen (by treachery) and the Persians had now sacked it: both the two armies could probably see the smoke. Shortly after Artaphernes, with the rest of the Persian army, arrived at Marathon – triumphant. As more ships and more men arrived – the Athenian's desperation grew, especially with no word coming from Sparta. Datis, the Persian commander at Marathon, had grown frustrated by the stalemate, and – perhaps not wishing to be superseded by the already successful Artaphernes – decided to put his secondary battle plan into action.

During the night of the 11th-12th of August, Artaphernes embarked with most of the Persian cavalry into his ships, along with those infantry under his direct command, and, slipped away under cover of darkness, sailing for Phaleron Bay, situated very close to Athens alongside Piraeus, the post of Athens, leaving the other Persian general, Artaphernes, with a holding force facing the Athenians at Marathon. There was often considerably rivalry between generals on the same side, and the Persian generals at that time were no exception, and often acted quite independently (and mostly ambitiously and for their own benefit). It was also a logically brilliant plan – as the Athenian army was effectively 'trapped' at Marathon, and the city – just about a day's sail away – was therefore relatively undefended. The Greeks' dilemma therefore increased considerably, as they did not have enough anything like enough men to split their army and so this meant that the city itself was relatively, if not totally, undefended – unless the Spartans came (now a very doubtful possibility). Given the mobility of the Persian fleet, plus the superiority of the Persian cavalry, a significant Persian force could now easily outflank the Greek army, sail around and land somewhere else (closer to Athens) and then attack the city unimpeded. The destruction of Athens was therefore potentially only a day or so away!

Whilst, the Greeks were also effectively stuck in their position, if they wished to prevent the main Persian army marching on towards Athens, the Persian army was also equally "trapped" as there were marshes and hills preventing from moving anywhere – except forward against the Greek army: - though they still had their ships, but attempts to re-embark would probably provoke an attack by the Greeks, which could be fatal with the possible loss of the ships as well. Furthermore, whilst the Persian army had just been "reinforced" and the remainder, even after the split, still outnumbered the Greeks by at least three-to-one: one of the main differences was that the 'relieving force' had been fighting on Eretria for about 10 days – and the second was that most of the Persian cavalry – their main strength – had gone by sea with Datis, towards Athens. These two factors thus created a serious imbalance between the two armies: which turned out, in retrospect, to become a fatal mistake: as it removed the invincible Persian cavalry from where they were most effective (on the plains of Marathon) to where they were virtually useless, in the holds of the Persians ship. On a one-to-one basis, the Greek foot soldier was much better armoured, with a longer spear, than the Persian foot soldier, and he was also defending himself from death and his city (and whole way of life) from total destruction. By contrast, the Persian soldier was a foreign 'conscript', probably now more than three thousand miles and three years away from home, with no particular loyalties or vested interests – except for being paid, and for the possibilities of loot, rape and pillage. Therefore, the only remaining Persian advantages were their numbers and their archers. Inevitably, Miltiades' scouts and spies discovered Datis' departure – as thousands of men and horses, baggage and equipment, cannot board ships in the dark totally unnoticed – and he was quickly informed of this change in the stalemate. The Athenian leaders were summoned together in the middle of the night, and Miltiades laid out the only possible chance of a Greek victory.

The third poem explores something of Miltiades' dilemma at this crucial point.

Marathonas 3

What to do? What to do?

Oh, ye Gods of Olympus, tell me what to do.

We are trapped here.

We are in despair

We have been stuck here now for eight days

At least, we are safe for the moment

Waiting for the accursed Spartans to arrive

Waiting for that thrice-accursed hoard

Of stinking barbarians

To make a move off that damned beach

And we are stuck on this fucking hillside

Our city lies undefended behind us

Like a naked women with bare breasts

Our women and children

Our homes, our treasures

Our lives – our hopes - are all there

And we are stuck here.

Thousands more Persians arrived today

With news of the destruction of Eretria

Oh, my cousins!

Your beautiful city is gone: white jewel by the sea

And peaceful Euboea is now war-torn.

We can see the smoke

You were betrayed from within.

Now pillaged by these barbarians

and I mourn for you.

I would weep and rent my clothes for you

But I have an army to fight and I have my city to save

We will be next

What can possibly stop this invasion?

And still the Gods do nothing

They must have deserted us.

What is that you say, my dear Pheidippides!

You have only just arrived from Sparta – with the news of their ‘betrayal’.

Now what is this you tell me?

Part of the Medes’ army is going back on board their ships.

You, and the poet Aeschylus, have seen them

You crept close in the dark of the night

What can this mean?

It is that slimy trickster, Datis

I know it is!

He can’t stand that Artaphernes had success in Eritrea.

I know him of old

So, where is he going now?

And what next?

He has suddenly decided to do something sneaky

The scout says it is all the cavalry and all his infantry

Where can he be taking all those horses?

And in the middle of the night?

What is he planning to do?

Oh, my Goddess, my Pallas Athena
Grant me a morsel of your wisdom.

Oh, my God! This cannot be true!
If he is going to attack the city, our city, our home We are lost!

I see it all now: thank you, Athena.
It will take Datis just a day to sail round the Attic isthmus to Athens
And then he is going he will - to land There is no time!
There is now no time!

What to do? What to do?
It is 'my day' to command today.
What to do? What can I do? We have to act now!
Oh, Pallas Athena,
Help me, your Miltiades, I have always prayed to you.
We must attack!
It is the only chance
But how can we possibly win?

They still have 30,000 men
Without the Spartans, we have a mere 10,000
Oh Athena! Help me!
Tell me what to do!
We will have to do something different.
We will have to be tricky ...

Catch them unawares ... Somehow!
But I will have to convince the other commanders ...

... I can count on Themistocles and Aristides
... but what of the others? Some of them hate me, or envy me

Some others will support me
How do I convince the others? What will the PoleMarch say?
We are safe on this mountain-side And we are also now stuck here

Like a butterfly on a pin
How do I convince the Pole-March? The General Which way will he vote?
What do I say? What do I do?

It is a choice between slavery or death, or is there just a chance of honour.
How Darius would like to get hold of me, after so many years ...
And the smile on the face of Hippias, that traitor ...

I could not bear it.
Will Callimachus decide not to fight?
Can he see that that would be a worse betrayal?
Which way will the Gods decide?

Glorious Athena will fight with us – of course
– but what of Apollo, or Zeus?
The odds are overwhelming ... How to break their army, their Immortals?
We cannot push through them – they are too many – so what can we do?

Athena! Help me!
Please don't maintain this silence.
So much is at stake I feel caught, trapped
Like a nut between the claws of a crab

Like a nut ... between the claws ... of a crab!

Oh, thank you, dear Goddess, Thank you.
I now know what to do. I now know how we might be able to win.

The History Continues:

Given the geography of the region, even with an unfavourable wind, it would only take the Persian fleet a minimum of about 10-12 hours to sail (or row) around the Attic peninsular and reach Athens by sea. A disembarkation would then take only a few hours more, so it would be very late afternoon or early evening – at the earliest – before a Persian force could possibly get sufficiently ready to attack the city – always assuming that the Gods would not intervene again and destroy the Persian fleet in another storm, or something, as they had done once before. Prayers were almost certainly offered up for just this eventuality.

So, this - very tight - timing gave the Athenians just about one day's grace: a very small window of opportunity, and a very slim chance for victory; compared to almost certain defeat and the destruction of their city, and thus the whole of Greece. If they could possibly find a way to defeat the remaining Persians at Marathon – immediately – and then return to Athens (a 5-6 hour forced march through the hills) before Datis and his army could arrive by sea, disembark, and attack their almost undefended city, they might – just – stand a very slim chance. No one any longer really counted on any help from the Spartans, let alone them arriving on time.

Artaphernes, the Persian general, who was now left behind at Marathon (somewhat abandoned by Datis, envious of his success at Eritria), was without most of his cavalry, yet he had a significantly large portion of the Persian infantry, and he still retained a large number of archers. With this in mind, Miltiades set forth a daring and revolutionary plan – an attempt to defeat Artaphernes' forces quickly enough so that the Athenians would then be able to return to Athens in time to meet Datis' outflanking naval force. This was – of course – a huge risk: and incredible gamble! The prospect of fighting a pitched battle against an enemy so superior in numbers and so formidable in military renown was daunting enough. Their own present position on the heights was strong, and offered great advantages to their small defending force against the assailing multitude. It would therefore – logically – be incredibly foolhardy to desert this position and descend onto the plain, possibly to be trampled down by these barbaric Asiatic hoards, overwhelmed by their archery, and cut to pieces by the Persian veterans, their 'standing army', known as "The Immortals". But if they stayed, their city would be destroyed.

Any major military tactical decision had to be made by a voting majority of all the 10 Greek generals. Democracy was now firmly in action! Herodotus reports that the Greek generals were also rotating their days of command, and that it was Miltiades who was (technically) 'in charge' at this particular point. He therefore had the biggest part in persuading the others to attack as well. It is recorded that five Strategoi voted for the attack and five voted against it.

According to Herodotus (lib. Vi. Sec. 209), Miltiades then spoke poetically like this: *"It now all rests with you, Callimachus, either to enslave Athens, or, by assuring her freedom, to win yourself an immortality of fame, such as not even Harmodius and Aristogeiton have acquired. For never, since the Athenians became a people, were they in such danger as they are in at this moment. If they bow the knee to these Medes, they are to be given up to the tyrant Hippias, and you know what they will have to suffer then. But if Athens comes victorious out of this contest, she has it in her to become the first city of Greece. Your vote is to decide whether we are to join in battle, or not. If we do not bring on a battle presently, some factious intrigue will disunite us, the Athenians, and the city will be betrayed to the Medes. But, if we fight, before there is anything rotten in the state of Athens, I believe that, provided the Gods will give fair play and no favour, there is a chance we will be able to get the best of it in such an engagement."*

Callimachus, the Polemarch, cast the deciding vote ... in favour of an attack. So, at 5:30 am, about 2 hours after dawn, on 12th August, with the time factor becoming increasingly short, and with only about three hours in which to win the battle, the order came for the Greeks to leave their defensive positions and to attack the Persian host was given. The battle of Marathon had started! Whilst it was over in less than 3 hours, the ramifications of this battle have lasted for more than 2,500 years.

The Battle of Marathon

The Athenian army was drawn up in a battle order planned by Miltiades. Callimachus, the Polemarch traditionally commanded the right flank; the extreme left flank was held by the Plataean allies, and the centre of the army was commanded by Themistocles and Aristides. Miltiades stayed – as tactician – in a position where he could see everything and also be seen.

Despite the fact that the Persians were the invading army, their fighting style was traditionally defensive. Their armour was quite light, a form of padded tunic with overlapping leaves of mail. Their main weapon was the bow and arrow, and their key tactic was to wait until the enemy came close, at which point in time the Persians would “bury” them with a heavy barrage of arrows. Their cavalry would then charge in and ‘mop up’ any escapees and the main army would move forward inexorably and finish off any survivors. The much faster moving cavalry usually protected their flanks, but most of the cavalry had just been shipped out to sea. Up to the actual day of Marathon, the armies of the Medes (Persians) were reputed to be invincible throughout the known world.



The Athenians, on the other hand, had a more offensive military doctrine. Their main weapon was the long, heavy spear and a leaf-shaped sword, mostly made from bronze, and they also shielded themselves with heavy bronze armour, including beaten metal helmets, shields, and breastplates. They favoured close-combat battle formations, advancing with overlapping shields and a wall of spears, lacking both cavalry and many archers. The poorer citizens who went to war, were probably armed with javelins, cutlasses, and leather shields (or targets), slings, knives, etc.

Each regular heavy-armed soldier was also attended in the camp by one or more slaves, who would have been armed like the inferior freemen. The average Greek heavy infantryman, or hoplite, was thus much more heavily armoured than their Persian counterparts, and the long spear or pike that the Greeks carried gave them a greater range than the shorter spears and swords of the Persian foot soldier. The Persian advantage from the bow (that most of them carried) was somewhat nullified by the heavy Greek armour. The main Persian advantage was their almost overwhelming force of numbers ... and their (now absent) cavalry.

Since the bulk of Persian infantry were also archers, Miltiades’ plan was to advance in close formation until they reached the limit of the archers’ effectiveness, roughly 200 yards, and then suddenly quicken the advance to double-time while they traversed through the “beaten zone” or the “killing field” of the archers, in order to engage the enemy as quickly as possible and bring their heavy infantry into play. This meant that they would almost certainly end up fighting in slightly disordered ranks from their fast advance, but this was infinitely preferable to giving the Persian archers more time to pick them off at a distance.

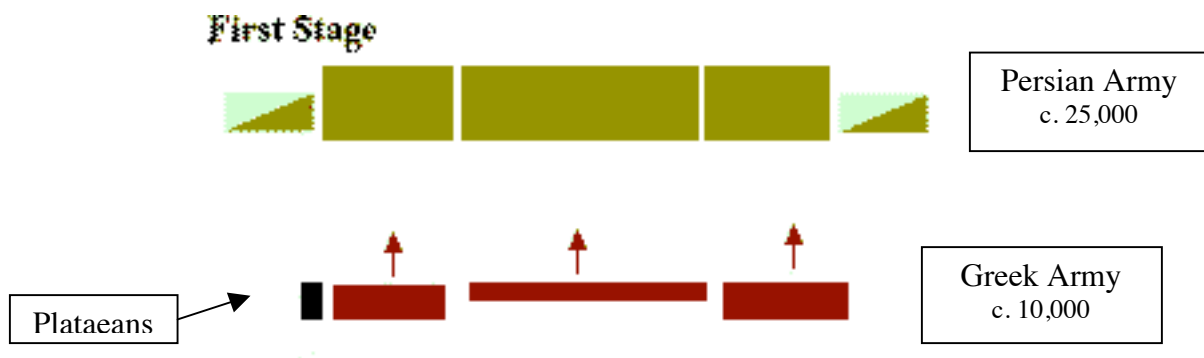
Now, an additional innovatory concept of Miltiades came into play, as the accepted wisdom in military strategy at that time was that power and effectiveness of an army was in the ‘weight’ or solidity of the centre of that army, which was then added to by the more mobile side-sections or ‘flanks’, either

on foot or (in the case of the Persians) sometimes on horseback, so as to outflank the slow-moving central ‘body’ of the enemy’s army. So, Miltiades therefore encouraged his men to attack at a run, instead of advancing at the usual (slow) pace of the central close-order phalanx. All his men had been trained in exercises of the ‘palaestra’ (the Greek wrestling / athletic schools), so there was little chance that such a fast attack would end totally in chaos. But, he really needed to get the main body of his army into close action ... **before** the residual Asian cavalry could manoeuvre properly; or before the Persian archers could use their bows too devastatingly; and before their generals could deploy the mass of their army.

Thus, in his desperation, Miltiades decided to reduce the Greek centre from its normal eight ranks, to just four ranks, partially so as to extend their line and prevent the much larger Persian line from overlapping and encircling them. However, he maintained the Greek wings at their eight ranks, because his only chance lay in striking a very heavy flanking pincer-movement-like blow: like the claws of a crab, cracking a nut. The main Greek strength would therefore – controversially – be in the massed formations on their two flanks, which were (hopefully) to drive off the Persian flanks, and then wheel in and attack the Persian centre. So, this manoeuvre was planned ... in total contravention to all known military tactics to date ... and out of desperation ... and maybe with a little help from the Goddess.

Obviously, he hoped that the Persians would not have anticipated anything like this. It was also very risky as, if the Persian central phalanx could advance significantly, it could easily cut the Greek army in two and it would still have sufficient numbers then to turn and face off each half. Everything therefore depended on the strength, the speed and the determined nature – and the success – of the reduced central attack. This attack would then ‘pretend’ to retreat and draw the Persian centre forward in between the two stronger Greek flanks.

The Persian force was deployed traditionally, with its centre being formed from their crack troops (the Immortals) and the flanks were held by inferior battalions drawn from the various conscripts of the Persian Empire: these were mountaineers from Hyrcania and Afghanistan, wild horsemen from the steppes of Khorassan, the black archers of Ethiopia, swordsmen from the banks of the Indus, the Oxus, the Euphrates and the Nile, and these were all ready to fight against the enemies of the Great King – for pay. But no single national unifying cause inspired them; and, within their large host, there was absolutely no uniformity of language, creed, race, or even military system. Many were just conscripts. Still, amongst them there were many gallant men: they were familiar with victory and had a contemptuous confidence, and they were led by a veteran general, who was also seeking revenge and glory. Their infantry, which only just had time to form up, awaited the sudden Athenian charge. And this was exactly what Miltiades had predicted.



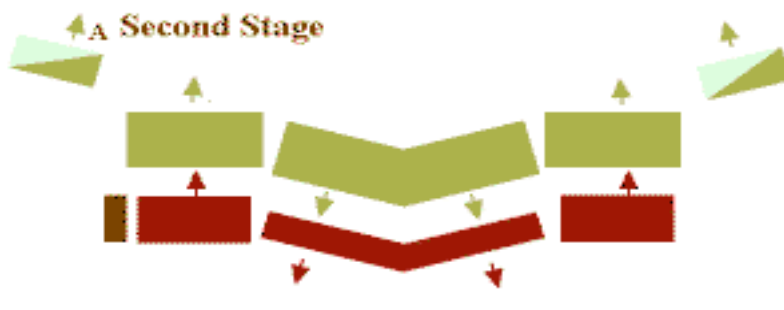
The Athenians were still at a very great risk however, as they only had a little over one-third of the strength of the remaining Persian elite troops. They would also have to advance down a slope, and across an open plain, whilst probably being fired upon by the deadly Persian archers: there were also a few cavalry. And their city, which lay 25 miles behind them, with their wives & children, their wealth, and their life, was almost totally undefended, with a massive armed fleet bearing down in it. It was a very desperate situation.

Thus, the armies were quickly arrayed and the battle started. Some sort of alarm must have been given; horns would have been sounded; the movement of 10,000 men down the hillside could not go unnoticed, even in the early dawn. The Persian foot soldiers were therefore formed up, ready to resist this sudden Greek attack.

At about 6:00am, the distance between the two armies was approximately fifteen hundred meters when the advance was sounded and then, we are told, the Athenian ranks moved quickly forward. The Greek advance started at a brisk walk, then developed into a trot, and then into a double-time run as they rushed the last 140-150 meters through the “beaten zone” with its deadly hail of arrows. This fast advance was the first ever double-time advance by hoplites and it was done in hope of minimizing casualties from the arrows of the Persian troops. It had a devastating effect: “*When the Persians saw the Athenians coming down on them without cavalry or archers and scanty in numbers, they thought them as an army of madmen running toward their certain destruction,*” wrote the historian Herodotus.

As the Greeks advanced, their faster moving wings drew ahead of the centre, which was under heavy fire from the Persian archers. As the two centres of the armies met in close-order battle, the clash resounded. The shouts and screams of the fallen filled the air. The dust rose.

After a few minutes, the massive numbers of Persian royal troops, made up of the Immortals and other elite units, began to tell. It began to force the already weakened Athenian centre back on itself: it cracked under their weight and began to retreat a little ... **but it did not break.** As the two centres struggled, some Persians even broke through gaps in the Greek forces and drove the main body of the centre even further back.



Meanwhile, on either side, the Athenians' fast attack and the deeper formations of relatively more experienced troops had crushed and carried before them the lighter and less disciplined Persian flanks, putting them almost instantly to flight. With the Persian flanks destroyed, or starting to disappear from the field, instead of pursuing them, the Athenian and Plataean flanking forces methodically wheeled inward, hinging themselves upon the retreating Athenian centre, and catching the vast numbers of Persian elite troops in a classic ‘crab-like’ pincer manoeuvre. The real killing then started.



The Greek retreat in the centre, besides pulling the Persian elite units in, also brought the Greek wings further inwards, shortening the Greek line. The inadvertent result was a (now classic) double envelopment, and the battle was effectively ended when the whole centre of the Persian army, crowded

into confusion, found itself being attacked from three sides. The Persians had no choice but to try to extricate their army out of the battle and fight their way back to their ships. They broke in panic, some towards the north and some towards their ships, and so by the Greeks pursued them into the marshes or the sea.

The enemy directly in their path ... realised to their horror that [the Athenians], far from providing the easy pickings for their bowmen, as they had first imagined, were not going to be halted ... The impact was devastating. The Athenians had honed their style of fighting in combat with other phalanxes, wooden shields smashing against wooden shields, iron spear tips clattering against breastplates of bronze ... in those first terrible seconds of collision, there was nothing but a pulverizing crash of metal into flesh and bone; then the rolling of the Athenian tide over men wearing, at most, quilted jerkins for protection, and armed, perhaps, with nothing more than bows or slings. The hoplites' ash spears, rather than shivering ... could instead stab and stab again, and those of the enemy who avoided their fearful jabbing might easily be crushed to death beneath the sheer weight of the advancing men of bronze. (Holland, pp. 194–197)

Many Persians had died on the actual battlefield; many others died by drowning in the marshes to the north, where they had retreated, and those who tried to flee into the sea were also drowned (as it is not really advised to try to swim in battle armour). By 9:00 am – 3 hours after the battle started – the Persian's beaten-up surviving royal troops – all that could get on board – and all such ships that could get away, were now all heading out to sea. These remnants of Artaphernes' Persian army steered south and west heading toward Phaleron Bay and the rest of their fleet. Herodotus says that the Persian fleet sailed around Cape Sounion to attack Athens directly: he also said that - on the next day - the Spartan army arrived at Marathon, having covered the intervening distance in only three days. The Spartans toured the battlefield at Marathon, and agreed that the Athenians had won a great victory.

In a mere three hours, according to Herodotus, about 6,400 Persian troops had been killed (but it is unknown how many died in the marshes to the north or in the sea): this was maybe about a third of the army that remained at Marathon after Datis had sailed in the night. There was also an uncounted number of prisoners and wounded, along with (at least) seven ships destroyed. The really amazing statistic is that the Athenians had lost only 192 dead, and the Plataeans only lost 11 men. Amongst the dead was the Greek war-leader, Callimachus, and the general, Stesilaos. The dead of Marathon and the Plataeans were buried on the battlefield: the dead Persians were probably burnt. On the tomb of the Athenians at Marathon, an epigram (composed by Simonides) was written:

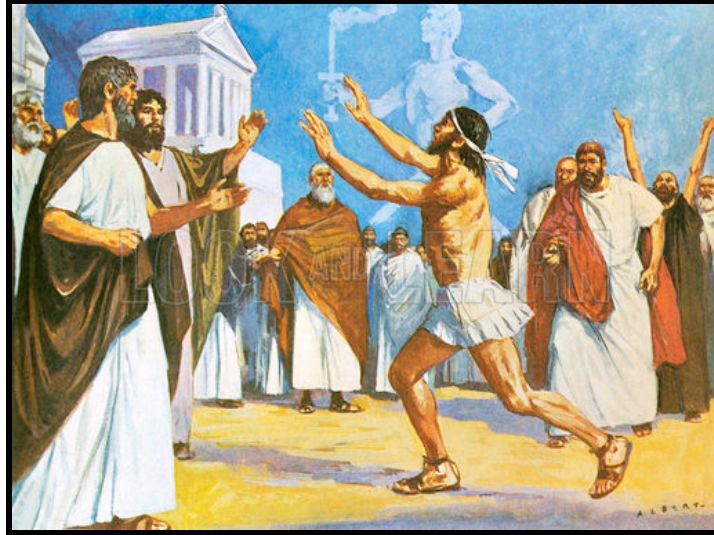
Ἑλλήνων προμαχοῦντες Ἀθηναῖοι Μαραθῶνι χρυσοφόρων Μήδων ἐστόρεσαν δύναμιν
'Fighting at the forefront of the Greeks, these Athenians at Marathon were laid low by the army of the gilded Medes'.

The Greeks had therefore decisively won the battle of Marathon; but their city of Athens was still at very serious risk and almost totally undefended. One fleet had set out during the previous night, and now another, heavily mauled but still potentially dangerous, followed it. Athens was about 25 miles away, about a 5-6 hours march, and the army had just fought a desperate 3-hour battle.

Miltiades detached one division under Aristeides to guard the prisoners and all the captured arms, equipment and treasure, and then started off with his troops, in a quick-march, back to Athens: hoping against hope to be in time to defend the city against the threat of the Persian fleets. He also sent runners ahead to warn Athens.

One of these runners (not actually named by Herodotus, but traditionally Pheidippides) ran the 40 km (25 miles) from Marathon to Athens with the news, in the heat of the day and after the stresses and exhaustions of the battle, to announce the defeat of the Persian army: "*Nenikamen – Rejoice, we have conquered*". Having given this good news - and also warned the city of the impending threat by sea – according to legend, he dropped dead of exhaustion and thus became a martyr. It is in celebration of this feat, that the modern race is given its name, and thus the battle has also been given its immortality.

The reality is that Pheidippides – if he really was that last runner – did not **just** run the 40 km (25 miles) from Marathon to Athens, as described; in the previous two or three weeks or so he had run more than 200 km (between 140-150 miles) from Athens to Sparta – and it was across difficult, mountainous terrain; and then almost immediately he had run back (another 200 km, or 150 miles) to Athens with the bad news that the Spartans were not coming. He then would have ran with this news to Marathon, so as to be at the battle; and then – after the battle – he made his iconic run back to Athens: running a total of maybe more that 350 miles in about 3 weeks.



Ancient records (Herodotus) say that it was definitely Pheidippides who made the first journey from Athens to Sparta in about 36 hours - and he must have slept at some point, as he could not have run through the night (no street lights and rough mountains). He would have done no less on the way back – with the bad news. We also know (from Plutarch) that he made the last journey from Marathon to Athens in about 3 hours – already exhausted from the battle – and as he gave the news, he expired – his spirit left him. Truly a Champion runner!

So, these are the events that lead up to the fourth poem.

Marathonas 4

How to go on running
This is the third, or fourth time
I have brought the news
I went to Sparta, and then
I brought the bad news back.

Then we marched
We waited
We fought
And then I'm told
Go tell the news – again

'Don't kill the messenger'
He'll probably kill himself
I was up all night –
Then I fought in the battle –
Now I've got to run

40,000 paces all told
I counted them on the way here
Kept my thoughts from my girl
She's back there in the city
Maybe I'll get to see her

But maybe they will get there first
I saw them leave
Like jackals in the night
I pray to Hermes
Let me get there first

My feet hurt: my lungs hurt
My legs are like lead
My head hurts from the sun
And that arrow wound
Still hurts in my shoulder

At least I fought, what a fight!
Even though they kept me back
I am a messenger: a scout
Trustworthy, valuable
But those arrows were everywhere

Now I am running again
I have to get the news to Athens
We won – and it's not over yet
There's a fleet; I saw it leave,
And now there will be another.

I have to keep going
I have to get through
The city has to be warned
I have to tell them
The others won't get there in time

Maybe I'll see my girl there
If I get there in time
I *have* to get there in time
The Persian ships left so long ago
And then we fought the rest

Good battle, inspired tactics,
But we lost the Commander
How to tell them?
Good news and bad news
Will they believe me?

What can they do?
The damn Spartans won't help
I went there as well.
There is no one else
They must hold on

I was up all night
I must keep going, I am so tired.
Then we fought all morning
Now the sun is up
I am dying of thirst in this heat

The arrows came
Like dark clouds across the sun
Some of us died as we ran across
That killing ground
Despite our armour

I can't go on running
I can't see where I am going
The sun is blinding me
The heat is killing me
What is this noise? Am I there?

"I have news - great news"
"Let me through, let me pass"
"We won at Marathon"
"And yet a Persian fleet is coming"
"And ... now all grows dark."

Aftermath:

As soon as the remaining defeated Persians had put to sea in their reduced fleet, the Athenian forces left the battlefield and marched hurriedly towards Athens. They arrived just in time, in the late afternoon, of the same day, to prevent Datis from securing a landing at Phaleron Bay.

When the Persian invasion force sailed up close, they found the Athenian army had already taken up defensive positions at Cynosarges, south of the city. Datis thus found Athens now to be well-defended, and calculated that another attempt to land would be useless, so he anchored and waited for Artaphernes to arrive with the news of the battle. When Artaphernes arrived with his battered and depleted forces and the news of the staggering defeat at Marathon, there was only one course of action left for the Persians, and that was to return to Asia.

After the battle had been fought, and while the dead bodies were still on the ground, the promised re-enforcement from Sparta eventually arrived. Two thousand Lacedaemonians (Spartans) arrived, apologizing regretfully (of course) that they had been forced to delay their departure because of their sacred festivals, and so had regrettably missed the battle. They had started immediately after the full moon, had marched the hundred and fifty miles between Athens and Sparta in the wonderfully short time of three days, but there was now nothing for them to do on their arrival. They toured the battlefield at Marathon, viewed the spoils, and magnanimously agreed that the Athenians had won a great victory. There might even have been some other (un-stated) regrets, however they were diplomatic about the Athenian victory and were also delighted that their own city-state was now no longer threatened, and soon departed south.

Conclusion:

Marathon was in no sense a decisive victory over the Persians: it just marked the end of the first ten-year period of conflict between Greece and Persia. However, it was the first time that the Greeks had bested the vastly superior numbers of Persians on land, and "*their victory endowed the Greeks with a faith in their destiny which was to endure for three centuries, during which western culture was born.*" (J.F.C. Fuller)

This victory gave the Greeks great faith in their established destiny as a newly democratic nation, and therefore this battle is considered one of the most important events marking the birth of European culture and later Western civilization: possibly the first of the 15 greatest battles that formed our world (E.S. Creasy). Had not the various dimensions of geography, ignorance by a traitor, desire for revenge, impatience, desperation, divisions, and inspired tactics (with maybe a little help from the Gods) combined together to give the Greeks the advantage, the new formulation of democracy (which was then only 20 years old) would have been swamped at its outset. Marathon was a battle – the battle – in which tactics and morale triumphed over numbers, as the vastly outnumbered and heroic Athenians defended their home and their heritage. This upset of the Persians caused great problems for the Persian dreams of an empire extending across the Bosphorous into Grecian lands. They had not, as yet, been defeated on land for many decades, and this defeat, by relative ‘upstarts’, caused a number of other uprisings that then had to be put down. However, order was not fully restored for several years.

Another legacy of Marathon, was that the Athenians realized the threat that an armed fleet could bring upon them and so began to diversify their limited resources and started to build a proper navy. This eventually gave them a huge trading advantage, and a much wider political advantage, especially over Sparta. It was 10 years later, in 480 BC, that the successor of Darius, Xerxes, re-entered Greece with a huge land army across the Dardanelles and was eventually halted by 300 Spartans at Thermopylae (on land). But that is another story. Even though Athens was occupied (twice: in 480 and 478) and burnt (once), Darius’ fleet was ultimately defeated by the Athenians at Salamis (at sea), and the last remnants of the Persian invasion were defeated at Plataea

the next year. The Persian threat was eventually over. But that was not the end of the Athenian problems: their superiority at sea, gave the Spartans superiority on the land.

“In this hour of national danger, the Lacedaemonians (Spartans) as being the strongest state, took command of the Greek confederate forces, and the Athenians, who had decided on the approach of the Persians, to break up their houses and leave their city, went on board ship and became sailors. The Confederates repulsed the barbarian; but not long afterwards they, and like Greeks who had thrown off the Persian yoke, grouped themselves into two parties; one around the Athenians, and one round the Lacedaemonians. For these two states had been shown to be the most powerful; the strength of the one was on land, and that of the other in her ships.” (Thucydides, I, 18)

The real enemy now lay much closer to home and the rivalries between the different Greek city-states continued unabated. Despite noble sentiments: *“We are all Greeks’*, as Aristides proudly asserted to the Spartan ambassadors in 479 BC when countering the accusation that his city might side with the Persian general Mardonius in later political manoeuvrings: *‘We all share the same blood, the same language, the same temples, the same holy rituals. We all share the one common way of life. It would be a terrible thing for Athens ever to betray this heritage.’* It didn’t.

In 480 BC, Xerxes, the son of Darius, personally led the second Persian invasion with one of the largest armies ever assembled. It took the army seven days to cross a bridge across the Hellespont. The defeat of the Spartans at the battle of Thermopylae led to the evacuated city of Athens being torched. However, while seeking to destroy the combined Greek fleet, the Persians suffered a severe defeat at the Battle of Salamis. The following year, the confederated Greeks went on the offensive, defeating the Persian army at the Battle of Plataea, and ending that invasion of Greece. Another Persian invasion in 467 BC was stopped at the battle of Eurymedon, and peace between Athens and Persia was eventually declared in about 448-449 BC.

The temporary alliance of the Greeks had followed up their success by destroying the rest of the Persian fleet at the Battle of Mycale, before expelling Persian garrisons from Sestos (479 BC) and then Byzantium in 478 BC. But the actions of the Spartan general, Pausanias, at the siege of Byzantium – by releasing some of the captives who were friends and relatives of the king of Persia (though he claimed they escaped) - alienated many of the Greek states from the Spartans, and the anti-Persian alliance was therefore reconstituted around Athenian leadership, as the so-called “Delian League”, isolating Sparta. The Delian League continued to campaign against Persia for the next 30 years, beginning with the expulsion of the remaining Persian garrisons in Europe. At the Battle of the Eurymedon in 466 BC, the League had won a double victory that finally secured freedom for the cities of Ionia. However, the League's involvement in an Egyptian revolt (from 460–454 BC) resulted in a disastrous defeat, and any further campaigning was suspended. A fleet was sent to Cyprus in 451 BC, but achieved little, and when it withdrew the Greco-Persian Wars drew to a quiet end.

The existence of a common enemy, Persia, had helped unite the feuding Greek city-states by providing some initial solidarity. However, fractious wars between them continued to occur and the battle of Marathon had done nothing to improve relationships between Sparta and Athens.

The most tangible memorial of this time was the rebuilding of temples on the Acropolis, destroyed by the Persians in 480 and 479 BC. The symbol of their success (and arrogance) was the Parthenon, sponsored by Pericles, designed by Phidias, and started in 447 BC: *“marks and monuments of our city’s empire’* so perfect that *‘future ages will wonder at us, as the present age wonders at us now.’* Plato remembers the heroes of Marathon like this: *“For they were the fathers not merely of children, of mortal flesh and blood, but of their children’s freedom, and of the freedom of every person who dwells in the continent of the West.”* (Plato: *Menexenus*)

The Athenian successes at Marathon, Salamis and Plataea; their naval, trading and financial predominance; and now this magnificent temple dedicated to the Goddess Athena, marked the ascendancy of Athens. But, the long rivalry with Sparta eventually precipitated the bitterly

contested Peloponnesian Wars, between Athens and Sparta in 431 BC that lasted for about 28 years until the final defeat of Athens in 404 BC.

The Spartan culture, two kings, a council of *ephors*, and an assembly of a very few select families holding all power and honour, increasingly supported (or propped up) by many subservient Helots, could not last either: it was demographically suicidal. Sparta was the dark side of Greek civilization: whilst it carried its most triumphant glories against the Persians (at Plataea and at Thermopylae), but it was also despised and feared by the rest of the Hellenes. They were too arrogant.

However Sparta also had certain fascinating and surprising aspects. Women had a dignity and freedom unimaginable in male-dominated 'democratic' Athens, where the Athenian women were considered as harlots if they were even glimpsed on the streets. Surprisingly, Spartan women could possess and bequeath property: girls competed with boys equally in the gymnasium. Plutarch listed a series of "maxims of the Spartan women" that suggests a storehouse of female wisdom unheard of in other Mediterranean cultures.

The Spartans saw themselves as a proud and austere race: and they were incredibly hard on themselves, as well as on others. Spartan warriors were told to come back - either with their shields (after honourable battle) or on their shields (dead): losing one's shield was an intolerable disgrace. They were so confident of their strength, they did not wall their city: the "chests of their warriors" were sufficient. Eventually the Thebans defeated the Spartans sensationally at Leuctra, invaded Lacedaemon and freed Messenia. The Spartan culture, deprived of its helots, itself disappeared within a few hundred years.

The victory at Marathon had helped solidify the general cultural view that Greeks (Europeans) were "civilized" and that the Persians (Asiatics) were "barbarians." This was reinforced by the startling successes of another (sort-of) Greek, Alexander, Prince of Macedon, when in 334 BC he crossed the Hellespont, invaded Asia and conquered the Persian Empire. This cultural hegemony is a view that still holds some sway, even today, and a view which also totally ignores the incredible advances in mathematics and medicine (amongst other disciplines) as well as the amazingly rich cultural progressions made in the first millennium AD by descendants of these Persian 'barbarians'.

However, in mainland Greece, the concept of 'hubris' also began to be expounded: the examples of Croesus, Artaphernes, Hippias and other tyrants, contrasting with and complementing the failures of Darius and Xerxes, kings of Kings, brought low by inferior forces of numbers gave piquancy to Nemesis, (fate) being conquered by Hubris (pride over others leading to a fall).

Such examples from the Greek concepts of civilization and democracy later spread throughout the Mediterranean, especially with the Greek colonization of Sicily & Calabria, and the later rise of Syracuse as a major Western barrier against the spread of the Carthaginian 'barbarians', even though the mainland Greeks looked down on and despised these Sicilian Greeks as half-cast (they had married local women) and provincials. The rise and success of Gelon and Dionysius, the tyrants of Syracuse, did nothing to help the spread the concept that democracy is workable and the best political system.

So, it might be said that the century after the battle of Marathon also contained Athens' "golden period" with the rise and fall of Pericles, the plays of Aristophanes, Euripides and Sophocles, the teachings of Socrates, the poetry of Aeschylus, and the history of Thucydides to name a few, all giving such a rich impression of the life of the first democratic commonwealth and a heritage of civilization and democracy that has lasted for nearly two and a half thousand years.

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