

CLAH4005 Defenders, Conquerors, Vanquished

Lecture 5: *The Persian Wars II*

Xerxes' campaign

- The death of Darius in 486 BCE, the accession of his son Xerxes to the throne and a revolt in Egypt delayed the second invasion.
- In 481, the Persians advanced against the Greeks once more. This time it was a coordinated land and sea attack.

The greatest army the world had ever seen

- I cannot give the exact number that each part contributed to the total, for there is no one who tells us that; but the total of the whole land army was shown to be one million and seven hundred thousand. [2] They were counted in this way: ten thousand men were collected in one place, and when they were packed together as closely as could be a line was drawn around them; when this was drawn, the ten thousand were sent away and a wall of stones was built on the line reaching up to a man's navel; [3] when this was done, others were brought into the walled space, until in this way all were numbered. When they had been numbered, they were marshalled by nations. Hdt. 7.60

The Greek preparations

- On the other side, the Greeks aware of Xerxes' intention at least from 483 BCE began preparing for war.
- Some poleis went on the Persian side, such as Thebes, but many decided to fight against Persia.

Medising Apollo

- The Athenians had sent messages to Delphi asking that an oracle be given them, and when they had performed all due rites at the temple and sat down in the inner hall, the priestess, whose name was Aristonice, gave them this answer:
- [2] Wretches, why do you linger here? Rather flee from your houses and city,
Flee to the ends of the earth from the circle embattled of Athens!
The head will not remain in its place, nor in the body,
Nor the feet beneath, nor the hands, nor the parts between;
But all is ruined, for fire and the headlong god of war speeding in a Syrian chariot will bring you low.
- [3] Many a fortress too, not yours alone, will he shatter;
Many a shrine of the gods will he give to the flame for devouring;
Sweating for fear they stand, and quaking for dread of the enemy,
Running with gore are their roofs, foreseeing the stress of their sorrow;
Therefore I bid you depart from the sanctuary.
Have courage to lighten your evil. Herodotos 7.140

The first line of Defence

- Thereupon the Greeks resolved that they would send a land army to Thessaly by sea to guard the pass. When the forces had assembled, they passed through the Euripus and came to Alus in Achaea, where they disembarked and took the road for Thessaly, leaving their ships where they were. They then came to the pass of Tempe, which runs from the lower [1](#) Macedonia into Thessaly along the river Peneus, between the mountains Olympus and Ossa. [2] There the Greeks were encamped, about ten thousand men-at-arms altogether, and the cavalry was there as well. The general of the Lacedaemonians was Euaenetus son of Carenus, chosen from among the Polemarchs, yet not of the royal house, and Themistocles son of Neocles was the general of the Athenians. [3] They remained there for only a few days, for messengers came from Alexander son of Amyntas, the Macedonian. These, pointing out the size of the army and the great number of ships, advised them to depart and not remain there to be trodden under foot by the invading host. When they had received this advice from the messengers (as they thought their advice was sound and that the Macedonian meant well by them), the Greeks followed their counsel. [4] To my thinking, however, what persuaded them was fear, since they had found out that there was another pass leading into Thessaly by the hill country of Macedonia through the country of the Perrhaebi, near the town of Gonnus; this was indeed the way by which Xerxes' army descended on Thessaly. The Greeks accordingly went down to their ships and made their way back to the Isthmus. Hdt 7.173

The second line of defense

- When they had come to the Isthmus, the Greeks, taking into account what was said by Alexander, deliberated as a body how and where they should stand to fight. It was decided that they should guard the pass of Thermopylae, for they saw that it was narrower than the pass into Thessaly and nearer home. [2] The pass, then, which brought about the fall of those Greeks who fell at Thermopylae, was unknown to them until they came to Thermopylae and learned of it from the men of Trachis. This pass they were resolved to guard and so stay the barbarian's passage into Hellas, while their fleet should sail to Artemisium in the territory of Histiaea. These places are near to each other, and each force could therefore be informed of the other's doings. As for the places themselves, their nature is as follows. Hdt 7.175

Another Spartan festival

- The Spartans sent the men with Leonidas on ahead so that the rest of the allies would see them and march, instead of medizing like the others if they learned that the Spartans were delaying. At present the Carneia was in their way, but once they had completed the festival, they intended to leave a garrison at Sparta and march out in full force with all speed. [2] The rest of the allies planned to do likewise, for the Olympiad coincided with these events. They accordingly sent their advance guard, not expecting the war at Thermopylae to be decided so quickly. Hdt. 7.206

Thermopylai

- The Greeks managed to stop the Persian at the pass of Thermopylai.
- But, possibly due to treachery, the Persians managed to bypass Thermopylai.
- Leonidas, his bodyguard, 700 Thespians and some Theban hostages stayed as a rearguard while the remainder of the Greek army retreated.

A Last-Stand

- There is an inscription written over these men, who were buried where they fell, and over those who died before the others went away, dismissed by Leonidas. It reads as follows:
- Here four thousand from the Peloponnese once fought three million.
- [2] That inscription is for them all, but the Spartans have their own:
- Foreigner, go tell the Spartans that we lie here obedient to their commands.
- [3] That one is to the Lacedaemonians, this one to the seer:
- This is a monument to the renowned Megistias,
Slain by the Medes who crossed the Spercheius river.
The seer knew well his coming doom,
But endured not to abandon the leaders of Sparta.
- Hdt 7.228

A Peloponnesian war

- When the generals from the aforementioned cities, met at Salamis, they held a council and Eurybiades proposed that whoever wanted to should give his opinion on what place under their control was most suitable for a sea battle. Attica was already lost, and he proposed that they consider the places which were left. [2] The consensus of most of the speakers was to sail to the Isthmus and fight at sea for the Peloponnese, giving this reason: if they were defeated in the fight at Salamis they would be besieged on an island, where no help could come to them, but if they were at the Isthmus they could go ashore to their own lands. Hdt 8.49

The Battle of Salamis

- The Greeks were trapped at Salamis by the advancing Persian fleet.
- Due to the strategic advantage of the narrows and the fleetness of their ships, the Greeks managed to defeat the Persians.

Xerxes Retreating

- The destruction of the Persian fleet meant that Xerxes was no longer safe in the campaign.
- He left quickly, leaving an army under Mardonios to continue the campaign.

The Battle of Plataiai

- In 479 BCE, the Greeks defeated the remainder of the Persian army at Plataiai in a land-battle.
- This was the last battle of the Persian Wars.
- The Persians would never again invade mainland Greece, although they remained a major player in Greek affairs until Alexander the Great.

Questions?

Follow-up Reading

- Herodotos Books 8
- Link on Moodle to Perseus.