

ANCIENT GREECE

Background Information 2: Battle of Marathon

Background:

- The Persian empire (founded by King Cyrus II, 559-529BC) was the greatest empire known. In **546BC** it invaded Lydia. Most of the Greek cities (off western coast of modern day Turkey) under Lydian suzerainty came into Persian control.
- In **499BC** there was an Ionian rebellion. Athens and Eretria sent a fleet to assist with the revolt. The rebellion was put down in **494BC**. Persia wanted revenge on the two Greek cities for their assistance.
- **490BC** – the Cycladic islands had already surrendered to the Persians. Eretria fell to the Persians (with some help from traitors inside the city) after a six day siege. Now the Persian fleet sailed to Attica, to Marathon – a broad plain some 25 miles east of Athens.

The Marathon Runner:

By the time the Persians were coming into Marathon Phillipides (renowned Athenian athlete) was on his way to request help from Sparta. He covered the 150 mile journey in 2 days. However, owing to a festival, the Spartans were unable to give any help until the full moon, which was still some days away.

Delays to Battle:

Persia waited for political strife within Athens to give them a helping hand in the battle. But Athens remained strong. The Persians eventually decided to sail to Sounion hoping that when they landed their supporters in Athens would make a move. Miltiades realised that this was the perfect time to attack.

Miltiades:

Although not technically the leader of the Athenian troops, Miltiades is credited with masterminding the military tactics at Marathon. He knew where the Persians put their best troops, and rearranged the Athenian army accordingly.

The Battle Begins:

At first light Kallimachos led out his armoured force (around 10,000 men). They lined up so that they covered the length of the Persian army. The centre was thin and both wings were reinforced.

His men charged for a mile across the plain. The Persians pushed forward, with the Greek centre hanging back. The two wings of the Greek force moved fast and closed in on the enemy flanks. They charged through the Persians and 'joined hands' behind the Persian centre.

This caused wide-scale panic among the Persian troops. They rushed to get to their naval base and many were trampled to death. 64,000 Persians were killed.

Traitors in Athens?:

The remaining Persians reboarded their ships and made off for Athens, hoping to reach there before the Athenians returned. According to Herodotus, soon after they started off they received a signal from someone (or some group) within Athens' walls, giving them the all-clear. No one knows who the traitors were. In any case the Athenian troops reached Athens first and the Persians sailed back home.

Athens triumphant

As a result of their triumph, Athens could now claim the status of a formidable military power, a status before that could only be claimed by Sparta.