

= Siege of Naxos (499 BC) =

The Siege of Naxos (499 BC) was a failed attempt by the Milesian tyrant Aristagoras , operating with support from , and in the name of the Persian Empire of Darius the Great , to conquer the island of Naxos . It was the opening act of the Greco @-@ Persian Wars , which would ultimately last for 50 years .

Aristagoras had been approached by exiled Naxian aristocrats , who were seeking to return to their island . Seeing an opportunity to bolster his position in Miletus , Aristagoras sought the help of his overlord , the Persian king Darius the Great , and the local satrap , Artaphernes to conquer Naxos . Consenting to the expedition , the Persians assembled a force of 200 triremes under the command of Megabates .

The expedition quickly descended into a debacle . Aristagoras and Megabates quarreled on the journey to Naxos , and someone (possibly Megabates) informed the Naxians of the imminent arrival of the force . When they arrived , the Persians and Ionians were thus faced with a city well prepared to undergo siege . The expeditionary force duly settled down to besiege the defenders , but after four months without success , ran out of money and were forced to return to Asia Minor .

In the aftermath of this disastrous expedition , and sensing his imminent removal as tyrant , Aristagoras chose to incite the whole of Ionia into rebellion against Darius the Great . The revolt then spread to Caria and Cyprus . Three years of Persian campaigning across Asia Minor followed , with no decisive effect , before the Persians regrouped and made straight for the epicentre of the rebellion at Miletus . At the Battle of Lade , the Persians decisively defeated the Ionian fleet and effectively ended the rebellion . Although Asia Minor had been brought back into the Persian fold , Darius vowed to punish Athens and Eretria , who had supported the revolt . In 492 BC therefore , the first Persian invasion of Greece , would begin as a consequence of the failed attack on Naxos , and the Ionian Revolt .

= = Background = =

In the Greek Dark Ages that followed the collapse of the Mycenaean civilization , significant numbers of Greeks had emigrated to Asia Minor and settled there . These settlers were from three tribal groups : the Aeolians , Dorians and Ionians . The Ionians had settled about the coasts of Lydia and Caria , founding the twelve cities which made up Ionia . These cities were Miletus , Myus and Priene in Caria ; Ephesus , Colophon , Lebedos , Teos , Clazomenae , Phocaea and Erythrae in Lydia ; and the islands of Samos and Chios . The cities of Ionia had remained independent until they were conquered by the famous Lydian king Croesus , in around 560 BC . The Ionian cities then remained under Lydian rule until Lydia was in turn conquered by the nascent Achaemenid Empire of Cyrus the Great . The Persians found the Ionians difficult to rule . Elsewhere in the empire , Cyrus was able to identify elite native groups to help him rule his new subjects ? such as the priesthood of Judea . No such group existed in Greek cities at this time ; while there was usually an aristocracy , this was inevitably divided into feuding factions . The Persians thus settled for the sponsoring a tyrant in each Ionian city , even though this drew them into the Ionians ' internal conflicts . Furthermore , a tyrant might develop an independent streak , and have to be replaced . The tyrants themselves faced a difficult task ; they had to deflect the worst of their fellow citizens ' hatred , while staying in the favour of the Persians .

About 40 years after the Persian conquest of Ionia , and in the reign of the fourth Persian king , Darius the Great , the stand @-@ in Milesian tyrant Aristagoras found himself in this familiar predicament . Aristagoras 's uncle Histiaeus had accompanied Darius on campaign in 513 BC , and when offered a reward , had asked for part of the conquered Thracian territory . Although this was granted , Histiaeus 's ambition alarmed Darius 's advisors , and Histiaeus was thus further ' rewarded ' by being compelled to remain in Susa as Darius 's " Royal Table @-@ Companion " . Taking over from Histiaeus , Aristagoras was faced with bubbling discontent in Miletus .

Indeed , this period in Greek history is remarkable for the social and political upheaval in many Greek cities , particularly the establishment of the first democracy in Athens . The island of Naxos ,

part of the Cyclades group in the Aegean Sea , was also in this period affected by political turmoil . Naxos had been ruled by the tyrant Lygdamis , a protege of the Athenian tyrant Peisistratos , until around 524 BC , when he was overthrown by the Spartans . After this , a native aristocracy seems to have flourished , and Naxos became one of the most prosperous and powerful of the Aegean islands . Despite its success , Naxos was not immune to class tensions and internal strife , and shortly before 500 BC , the population seized power , expelling the aristocrats and establishing a democracy .

In 500 BC , Aristagoras was approached by some of the exiles from Naxos , who asked him to help restore them to the control of the island . Seeing an opportunity to strengthen his position in Miletus by conquering Naxos , Aristagoras approached the satrap of Lydia , Artaphernes , with a proposal . If Artaphernes provided an army , Aristagoras would conquer the island in Darius 's name , and he would then give Artaphernes a share of the spoils to cover the cost of raising the army . Furthermore , Aristagoras suggested that once Naxos fell , the other Cyclades would also quickly follow , and he even suggested that Euboea could be attacked on the same expedition . Artaphernes agreed in principle , and asked Darius for permission to launch the expedition . Darius assented to this , and a force of 200 triremes was assembled in order to attack Naxos the following year .

= = Prelude = =

The Persian fleet was duly assembled in the spring of 499 BC , and sailed to Ionia . Artaphernes put his (and Darius 's) cousin Megabates in charge of the expedition , and dispatched him to Miletus with the Persian army . They were joined there by Aristagoras and the Milesian forces , and then embarked and set sail . In order to avoid warning the Naxians , the fleet initially sailed north , towards the Hellespont , but when they arrived at Chios they doubled back and headed south for Naxos .

Herodotus recounts that Megabates made inspections of the ships (probably whilst beached for the night) , and came across one ship from Myndus which had not posted any sentries . Megabates ordered his guard to find the captain of the ship , Scylax , and then had the captain thrust into one of the ship 's oar holes with his head outside and his body inside the ship . News reached Aristagoras of the treatment of his friend and he went to Megabates and asked him to reconsider his decision . When Megabates refused to grant Aristagoras 's wishes , Aristagoras simply cut the captain loose himself . Predictably , Megabates was furious with Aristagoras , who in turn retorted " But you , what have you to do with these matters ? Did not Artaphernes send you to obey me and to sail wherever I bid you ? Why are you so meddlesome ? " . According to Herodotus , Megabates was so enraged by this that he sent messengers to the Naxians to warn them of the approach of the Persian force .

Modern historians , doubting that a Persian commander would have sabotaged his own invasion , have suggested several other possible scenarios . It is , however , impossible to know exactly how the Naxians became aware of the invasion , but undoubtedly they were aware , and began to make preparations . Herodotus tells us that the Naxians had previously had no inkling of the expedition , but that when news arrived they brought everything in from the fields , gathered enough food with which to survive a siege and reinforced their walls .

= = Opposing forces = =

Herodotus does not provide complete numbers for either side , but gives some idea of the strength of the two forces . Clearly , since they were fighting on home territory , the Naxian forces could theoretically have included the whole population . Herodotus says in his narrative that the " Naxians have eight thousand men that bear shields " , which suggests that there were 8 @, @ 000 men capable of equipping themselves as hoplites . These men would have formed a strong backbone to the Naxian resistance .

The Persian force was primarily based around 200 triremes . It is not clear whether there were additional transport ships . The standard complement of a trireme was 200 men , including 14 marines . In the second Persian invasion of Greece , each Persian ship had carried thirty extra

marines , and this was probably also true in the first invasion when the whole invasion force was apparently carried in triremes . Furthermore , the Chian ships at the Battle of Lade also carried 40 marines each . This suggests that a trireme could probably carry a maximum of 40 ? 45 soldiers ? triremes seem to have been easily destabilised by extra weight . If the Persian force at Naxos was similarly made up , then it would have contained somewhere in the region of 8 @, @ 000 to 9 @, @ 000 soldiers (in addition to many unarmed rowers) .

= = Siege = =

When the Ionians and Persians arrived at Naxos , they were faced by a well @-@ fortified and supplied city . Herodotus does not explicitly say , but this was presumably the eponymous capital of Naxos . He provides few details of the military actions that ensued , although there is a suggestion that there was an initial assault on the city , which was repelled . The Ionians and Persians thus settled down to besiege the city . However , after four months , the Persians had run out of money , with Aristagoras also spending a great deal . Thoroughly demoralised , the expedition prepared to return to Asia Minor empty handed . Before leaving , they built a stronghold for the exiled Naxian aristocrats on the island . This was a typical strategy in the Greek world for those exiled by internal strife , giving them a base from which to quickly return , as events permitted .

= = Aftermath = =

With the failure of his attempt to conquer Naxos , Aristagoras found himself in dire straits ; he was unable to repay Artaphernes the costs of the expedition , and had moreover alienated himself from the Persian royal family . He fully expected to be stripped of his position by Artaphernes . In a desperate attempt to save himself , Aristagoras chose to incite his own subjects , the Milesians , to revolt against their Persian masters , thereby beginning the Ionian Revolt . Although Herodotus presents the revolt as a consequence of Aristagoras 's personal motives , it is clear that Ionia must have been ripe for rebellion anyway , the primary grievance being the tyrants installed by the Persians . Aristagoras 's actions have thus been likened to tossing a flame into a kindling box ; they incited rebellion across Ionia (and Aeolis and Doris) , and tyrannies were everywhere abolished , and democracies established in their place .

Having brought all of Hellenic Asia Minor into revolt , Aristagoras evidently realised that the Greeks would need other allies in order to fight the Persians . In the winter of 499 BC , he sailed to mainland Greece to try to recruit allies . He failed to persuade the Spartans , but the cities of Athens and Eretria agreed to support the rebellion . In the spring of 498 BC , an Athenian force of twenty triremes , accompanied by five from Eretria , for a total of twenty @-@ five triremes , set sail for Ionia . They joined up with the main Ionian force near Ephesus . This force was then guided by the Ephesians through mountains to Sardis , Artaphernes 's satrapal capital . The Greeks caught the Persians unawares , and were able to capture the lower city . However , the lower city then caught on fire , and the Greeks , demoralised , then retreated from the city , and began to make their way back to Ephesus . The Persian troops in Asia Minor followed the Greek force , catching them outside Ephesus . It is clear that the demoralised and tired Greeks were no match for the Persians , and were completely routed in the battle which ensued at Ephesus . The Ionians who escaped the battle made for their own cities , while the remaining Athenians and Eretrians managed to return to their ships , and sailed back to Greece .

Despite these setbacks , the revolt spread further . The Ionians sent men to the Hellespont and Propontis , and captured Byzantium and the other nearby cities . They also persuaded the Carians to join the rebellion . Furthermore , seeing the spread of the rebellion , the kingdoms of Cyprus also revolted against Persian rule without any outside persuasion . For the next three years , the Persian army and navy were fully occupied with fighting the rebellions in Caria and Cyprus , and Ionia seems to have had an uneasy peace during these years . At the height of the Persian counter @-@ offensive , Aristagoras , sensing the untenability of his position , decided to abandon his position as leader of Miletus , and of the revolt , and he left Miletus . Herodotus , who evidently has a rather

negative view of him , suggests that Aristagoras simply lost his nerve and fled .

By the sixth year of the revolt (494 BC) , the Persian forces had regrouped . The available land forces were gathered into one army , and were accompanied by a fleet supplied by the re @-@ subjugated Cypriots , and the Egyptians , Cilicians and Phoenicians . The Persians headed directly to Miletus , paying little attention to other strongholds , presumably intending to tackle the revolt at its centre . The Ionians sought to defend Miletus by sea , leaving the defense of Miletus to the Milesians . The Ionian fleet gathered at the island of Lade , off the coast of Miletus . The Persians were uncertain of victory at Lade , so attempted to persuade some of the Ionian contingents to defect . Although this was unsuccessful at first , when the Persians finally attacked the Ionians , the Samian contingent accepted the Persian offer . As the Persian and Ionian fleets met , the Samians sailed away from the battle , causing the collapse of the Ionian battle line . Although the Chian contingent and a few other ships remained , and fought bravely against the Persians , the battle was lost .

With defeat at Lade , the Ionian Revolt was all but ended . The next year , the Persians reduced the last rebel strongholds , and began the process of bringing peace to the region . The Ionian Revolt constituted the first major conflict between Greece and the Persian Empire , and as such represents the first phase of the Greco @-@ Persian Wars . Although Asia Minor had been brought back into the Persian fold , Darius vowed to punish Athens and Eretria for their support for the revolt . Moreover , seeing that the myriad city states of Greece posed a continued threat to the stability of his empire , he decided to conquer the whole of Greece . In 492 BC , the first Persian invasion of Greece , the next phase of the Greco @-@ Persian Wars , would begin as a direct consequence of the Ionian Revolt .

= = = Ancient sources = = =

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