

= Second Persian invasion of Greece =

The second Persian invasion of Greece (480 ? 479 BC) occurred during the Greco @-@ Persian Wars , as King Xerxes I of Persia sought to conquer all of Greece . The invasion was a direct , if delayed , response to the defeat of the first Persian invasion of Greece (492 ? 490 BC) at the Battle of Marathon , which ended Darius I 's attempts to subjugate Greece . After Darius 's death , his son Xerxes spent several years planning for the second invasion , mustering an enormous army and navy . The Athenians and Spartans led the Greek resistance . About a tenth of the Greek city @-@ states joined the ' Allied ' effort ; most remained neutral or submitted to Xerxes .

The invasion began in spring 480 BC , when the Persian army crossed the Hellespont and marched through Thrace and Macedon to Thessaly . The Persian advance was blocked at the pass of Thermopylae by a small Allied force under King Leonidas I of Sparta ; simultaneously , the Persian fleet was blocked by an Allied fleet at the straits of Artemisium . At the famous Battle of Thermopylae , the Allied army held back the Persian army for seven days , before they were outflanked by a mountain path and the Allied rearguard was trapped and annihilated . The Allied fleet had also withstood two days of Persian attacks at the Battle of Artemisium , but when news reached them of the disaster at Thermopylae , they withdrew to Salamis .

After Thermopylae , all of Boeotia and Attica fell to the Persian army , which captured and burnt Athens . However , a larger Allied army fortified the narrow Isthmus of Corinth , protecting the Peloponnesus from Persian conquest . Both sides thus sought a naval victory that might decisively alter the course of the war . The Athenian general Themistocles succeeded in luring the Persian navy into the narrow Straits of Salamis , where the huge number of Persian ships became disorganised , and were soundly beaten by the Allied fleet . The Allied victory at Salamis prevented a quick conclusion to the invasion , and fearing becoming trapped in Europe , Xerxes retreated to Asia leaving his general Mardonius to finish the conquest with the elite of the army .

The following spring , the Allies assembled the largest ever hoplite army , and marched north from the isthmus to confront Mardonius . At the ensuing Battle of Plataea , the Greek infantry again proved its superiority , inflicting a severe defeat on the Persians and killing Mardonius in the process . On the same day , across the Aegean Sea an Allied navy destroyed the remnants of the Persian navy at the Battle of Mycale . With this double defeat , the invasion was ended , and Persian power in the Aegean severely dented . The Greeks would now move to the offensive , eventually expelling the Persians from Europe , the Aegean islands and Ionia before the war finally came to an end in 479 BC

= = Background = =

The Greek city @-@ states of Athens and Eretria had supported the unsuccessful Ionian Revolt against the Persian Empire of Darius I in 499 ? 494 BC . The Persian Empire was still relatively young , and prone to revolts among its subject peoples . Moreover , Darius was a usurper , and had spent considerable time extinguishing revolts against his rule . The Ionian revolt threatened the integrity of his empire , and Darius thus vowed to punish those involved (especially those not already part of the empire) . Darius also saw the opportunity to expand his empire into the fractious world of Ancient Greece . A preliminary expedition under Mardonius , in 492 BC , to secure the land approaches to Greece ended with the re @-@ conquest of Thrace and forced Macedon to become a fully subordinate kingdom part of Persia . It had previously been a vassal as early as the late 6th century BC , but remained having autonomy and not fully subordinate yet .

In 491 BC , Darius sent emissaries to all the Greek city @-@ states , asking for a gift of ' earth and water ' in token of their submission to him . Having had a demonstration of his power the previous year , the majority of Greek cities duly obliged . In Athens , however , the ambassadors were put on trial and then executed ; in Sparta , they were simply thrown down a well . This meant that Sparta was also now effectively at war with Persia .

Darius thus put together an ambitious task force under Datis and Artaphernes in 490 BC , which attacked Naxos , before receiving the submission of the other Cycladic Islands . The task force then

moved on Eretria , which it besieged and destroyed . Finally , it moved to attack Athens , landing at the bay of Marathon , where it was met by a heavily outnumbered Athenian army . At the ensuing Battle of Marathon , the Athenians won a remarkable victory , which resulted in the withdrawal of the Persian army to Asia .

Darius therefore began raising a huge new army with which he meant to completely subjugate Greece ; however , in 486 BC , his Egyptian subjects revolted , indefinitely postponing any Greek expedition . Darius then died while preparing to march on Egypt , and the throne of Persia passed to his son Xerxes I. Xerxes crushed the Egyptian revolt , and very quickly restarted the preparations for the invasion of Greece .

= = Persian preparations = =

Since this was to be a full @-@ scale invasion , it required long @-@ term planning , stock @-@ piling and conscription . It was decided that Xerxes ' Pontoon Bridges were to be set up to allow his army to cross the Hellespont to Europe , and that a canal should be dug across the isthmus of Mount Athos (rounding which headland , a Persian fleet had been destroyed in 492 BC) . These were both feats of exceptional ambition , which would have been beyond any contemporary state . However , the campaign was delayed one year because of another revolt in Egypt and Babylonia .

In 481 BC , after roughly four years of preparation , Xerxes began to muster the troops for the invasion of Europe . Herodotus gives the names of 46 nations from which troops were drafted . The Persian army was gathered in Asia Minor in the summer and autumn of 481 BC . The armies from the Eastern satrapies was gathered in Kritala , Cappadocia and were led by Xerxes to Sardis where they passed the winter . Early in spring it moved to Abydos where it was joined with the armies of the western satrapies . Then the army that Xerxes had mustered marched towards Europe , crossing the Hellespont on two pontoon bridges .

= = = Size of the Persian forces = = =

= = = = Army = = = =

The numbers of troops that Xerxes mustered for the second invasion of Greece have been the subject of endless dispute , because the numbers given in ancient sources are very large indeed . Herodotus claimed that there were , in total , 2 @.@ 5 million military personnel , accompanied by an equivalent number of support personnel . The poet Simonides , who was a contemporary , talks of four million ; Ctesias , based on Persian records , gave 800 @,@ 000 as the total number of the army (without the support personnel) that was assembled by Xerxes . While it has been suggested that Herodotus or his sources had access to official Persian Empire records of the forces involved in the expedition , modern scholars tend to reject these figures based on knowledge of the Persian military systems , their logistical capabilities , the Greek countryside , and supplies available along the army 's route .

Modern scholars thus generally attribute the numbers given in the ancient sources to the result of miscalculations or exaggerations on the part of the victors , or disinformation by the Persians in the run up to the war . The topic has been hotly debated but the modern consensus revolves around the figure of 300 @,@ 000 ? 500 @,@ 000 . Nevertheless , whatever the real numbers were , it is clear that Xerxes was anxious to ensure a successful expedition by mustering overwhelming numerical superiority by land and by sea , and also that much of the army died of starvation and disease , never returning to Asia .

Herodotus tells us that the army and navy , while moving through Thrace , was halted at Doriskos for an inspection by Xerxes , and he recounts the numbers of troops found to be present :

Herodotus doubles this number to account for support personnel and thus he reports that the whole army numbered 5 @,@ 283 @,@ 220 men . Other ancient sources give similarly large numbers . The poet Simonides , who was a near @-@ contemporary , talks of four million ; Ctesias gave 800

@, @ 000 as the total number of the army that assembled in Doriskos .

An early and very influential modern historian , George Grote , set the tone by expressing incredulity at the numbers given by Herodotus : " To admit this overwhelming total , or anything near to it , is obviously impossible . " Grote 's main objection is the supply problem , though he does not analyse the problem in detail . He did not reject Herodotus 's account altogether , citing the latter 's reporting of the Persians ' careful methods of accounting and their stockpiling of supply caches for three years , but drew attention to the contradictions in the ancient sources . A major limiting factor for the size of the Persian army , first suggested by Sir Frederick Maurice (a British transport officer) is the supply of water . Maurice suggested in the region of 200 @, @ 000 men and 70 @, @ 000 animals could have been supported by the rivers in that region of Greece . He further suggested that Herodotus may have confused the Persian terms for chiliarchy (1 @, @ 000) and myriarchy (10 @, @ 000) , leading to an exaggeration by a factor of ten . Other early modern scholars estimated that the land forces participating in the invasion at 100 @, @ 000 soldiers or less , based on the logistical systems available to the Ancients .

Munro and Macan note Herodotus giving the names of six major commanders and 29 myriarchs (leaders of a baivabaram , the basic unit of the Persian infantry , which numbered about 10 @, @ 000 @-@ strong) ; this would give a land force of roughly 300 @, @ 000 men . Other proponents of larger numbers suggest figures from 250 @, @ 000 to 700 @, @ 000 . One historian , Kampouris , even accepts as realistic Herodotus ' 1 @, @ 700 @, @ 000 for the infantry plus 80 @, @ 000 cavalry (including support) for various reasons including the size of the area from which the army was drafted (from modern @-@ day Libya to Pakistan) , the ratios of land troops to fleet troops , of infantry to cavalry and Persian troops to Greek troops .

= = = = Fleet = = = =

The size of the Persian fleet is also disputed , though perhaps less so . According to Herodotus the Persian fleet numbered 1 @, @ 207 triremes and 3 @, @ 000 transport and supply ships , including 50 @-@ oared galleys (Penteconters) (???????????) . Herodotus gives a detailed breakdown of the Persian triremes :

Herodotus also records that this was the number at the Battle of Salamis , despite the losses earlier in storms off Sepia and Euboea , and at the battle of Artemisium . He claims that the losses were replenished with reinforcements , though he only records 120 triremes from the Greeks of Thrace and an unspecified number of ships from the Greek islands . Aeschylus , who fought at Salamis , also claims that he faced 1 @, @ 207 warships there , of which 1 @, @ 000 were triremes and 207 fast ships . Diodorus and Lysias independently claim there were 1 @, @ 200 at Doriskos . The number of 1 @, @ 207 (for the outset only) is also given by Ephorus , while his teacher Isocrates claims there were 1 @, @ 300 at Doriskos and 1 @, @ 200 at Salamis . Ctesias gives another number , 1 @, @ 000 ships , while Plato , speaking in general terms refers to 1 @, @ 000 ships and more .

These numbers are (by ancient standards) consistent , and this could be interpreted that a number around 1 @, @ 200 is correct . Among modern scholars some have accepted this number , although suggesting that the number must have been lower by the Battle of Salamis . Other recent works on the Persian Wars reject this number , 1 @, @ 207 being seen as more of a reference to the combined Greek fleet in the Iliad generally claim that the Persians could have launched no more than around 600 warships into the Aegean .

= = Greek preparations = =

The Athenians had been preparing for war with the Persians since the mid @-@ 480s BC , and in 482 BC the decision was taken , under the guidance of the politician Themistocles , to build a massive fleet of triremes that would be necessary for the Greeks to fight the Persians . The Athenians did not have the man @-@ power to fight on land and sea ; therefore combatting the Persians would require an alliance of several Greek city states . In 481 BC Xerxes sent

ambassadors around Greece asking for earth and water , but making the very deliberate omission of Athens and Sparta . Support thus began to coalesce around these two states .

= = = Hellenic alliance = = =

A congress of states met at Corinth in late autumn of 481 BC , and a confederate alliance of Greek city @-@ states was formed . This confederation had the power to send envoys asking for assistance and to dispatch troops from the member states to defensive points after joint consultation . Herodotus does not formulate an abstract name for the union but simply calls them " ?? ?????? " (the Greeks) and " the Greeks who had sworn alliance " (Godley translation) or " the Greeks who had banded themselves together " (Rawlinson translation) . Hereafter , they will be referred to as the ' Allies ' . Sparta and Athens had a leading role in the congress but interests of all the states played a part in determining defensive strategy . Little is known about the internal workings of the congress or the discussions during its meetings . Only 70 of the approximately 700 Greek cities sent representatives . Nevertheless , this was remarkable for the disjointed Greek world , especially since many of the city @-@ states in attendance were still technically at war with each other .

The majority of other city @-@ states remained more @-@ or @-@ less neutral , awaiting the outcome of the confrontation . Thebes was a major absentee , and was suspected of being willing to aid the Persians once the invasion force arrived . Not all Thebans agreed with this policy , and 400 " loyalist " hoplites joined the Allied force at Thermopylae (at least according to one possible interpretation) . The most notable city actively siding with the Persians (" Medised ") was Argos , in the otherwise Spartan @-@ dominated Peloponnese . However , the Argives had been severely weakened in 494 BC , when a Spartan @-@ force led by Cleomenes I had annihilated the Argive army in Battle of Sepeia and then massacred the fugitives .

= = = Size of allied forces = = =

The allies had no ' standing army ' , nor was there any requirement to form one ; since they were fighting on home territory , they could muster armies as and when required . Different @-@ sized allied forces thus appeared throughout the campaign . These numbers are discussed fully in the article for each battle .

= = Spring 480 BC : Thrace , Macedonia and Thessaly = =

Having crossed into Europe in April 480 BC , the Persian army began its march to Greece . Five major food depots had been set up along the path : at White Headland on the Thracian side of the Hellespont , at Tyrodiza in Perinthian territory , at Doriskos at the Evros river estuary where the Asian army was linked up with the Balkan allies , at Eion on the Strymon river , and at Therme , modern @-@ day Thessaloniki . There , food had been sent from Asia for several years in preparation for the campaign . Animals had been bought and fattened , while the local populations had , for several months , been ordered to grind the grains into flour . The Persian army took roughly three months to travel unopposed from the Hellespont to Therme , a journey of about 360 miles (600 km) . It paused at Doriskos where it was joined by the fleet . Xerxes reorganized the troops into tactical units replacing the national formations used earlier for the march .

The Allied ' congress ' met again in the spring of 480 BC . A Thessalian delegation suggested that the allies could muster in the narrow Vale of Tempe , on the borders of Thessaly , and thereby block Xerxes 's advance . A force of 10 @, @ 000 Allies led by the Spartan polemarch Euenetus and Themistocles was thus despatched to the pass . However , once there , they were warned by Alexander I of Macedon that the vale could be bypassed by at least two other passes , and that the army of Xerxes was overwhelming ; the Allies therefore retreated . Shortly afterwards , they received the news that Xerxes had crossed the Hellespont . The abandonment of Tempe meant that all of Thessaly submitted to the Persians , as did many cities to the north of the pass of Thermopylae when it seemed help was not forthcoming .

A second strategy was therefore suggested to the Allies by Themistocles . The route to southern Greece (Boeotia , Attica and the Peloponnesus) would require the army of Xerxes to travel through the very narrow pass of Thermopylae . This could easily be blocked by the Allies , despite the overwhelming number of Persians . Furthermore , to prevent the Persians bypassing Thermopylae by sea , the allied navy could block the straits of Artemisium . This dual strategy was adopted by the congress . However , the Peloponnesian cities made fall @-@ back plans to defend the Isthmus of Corinth should it come to it , while the women and children of Athens were evacuated en masse to the Peloponnesian city of Troezen .

= = August 480 BC : Thermopylae and Artemisium = =

When the Allies received the news that Xerxes was clearing paths around Mount Olympus , and thus intending to march towards Thermopylae , it was both the period of truce that accompanied the Olympic games , and the Spartan festival of Carneia , during both of which warfare was considered sacrilegious . Nevertheless , the Spartans considered the threat so grave that they despatched their king Leonidas I with his personal bodyguard (the Hippeis) of 300 men (in this case , the elite young soldiers in the Hippeis were replaced by veterans who already had sons) . Leonidas was supported by contingents from the Peloponnesian cities allied to Sparta , and other forces that were picked up en route to Thermopylae . The Allies proceeded to occupy the pass , rebuilt the wall the Phocians had built at the narrowest point of the pass , and waited for Xerxes 's arrival .

When the Persians arrived at Thermopylae in mid @-@ August , they initially waited for three days for the Allies to disperse . When Xerxes was eventually persuaded that the Allies intended to contest the pass , he sent his troops to attack . However , the Greek position was ideally suited to hoplite warfare , the Persian contingents being forced to attack the phalanx head on . The Allies thus withstood two full days of battle and everything Xerxes could throw at them . However , at the end of the second day , they were betrayed by a local resident named Ephialtes who revealed a mountain path that led behind the Allied lines to Xerxes . Xerxes then sent his elite guards , the Immortals on a night march to outflank the Allied . When he was made aware of this maneuver (while the Immortals were still en route) , Leonidas dismissed the bulk of the Allied army , remaining to guard the rear with 300 Spartans , 700 Thespians , 400 Thebians and perhaps a few hundred others . On the third day of the battle , the remaining Allies sallied forth from the wall to meet the Persians and slaughter as many as they could . Ultimately , however , the Allied rearguard was annihilated , and the pass of Thermopylae opened to the Persians .

Simultaneous with the battle at Thermopylae , an Allied naval force of 271 triremes defended the Straits of Artemisium against the Persians . Directly before Artemisium , the Persian fleet had been caught in a gale off the coast of Magnesia , losing many ships , but could still probably muster over 800 ships at the start of the battle . On the first day (also the first of the Battle of Thermopylae) , the Persians detached 200 seaworthy ships , which were sent to sail around the eastern coast of Euboea . These ships were to round Euboea and block the line of retreat for the Allied fleet . Meanwhile , the Allies and the remaining Persians engaged in the late afternoon , the Allies having the better of the engagement and capturing 30 vessels . That evening , another storm occurred , wrecking the majority of the Persian detachment which had been sent around Euboea .

On the second day of the battle , news reached the Allies that their lines of retreat were no longer threatened ; they therefore resolved to maintain their position . They staged a hit @-@ and @-@ run attack on some Cilician ships , capturing and destroying them . On the third day , however , the Persian fleet attacked the Allies lines in full force . In a day of savage fighting , the Allies held on to their position , but suffered severe losses (half the Athenian fleet was damaged) ; nevertheless , the Allies inflicted equal losses on the Persian fleet . That evening , the Allies received news of the fate of Leonidas and the Allies at Thermopylae . Since the Allied fleet was badly damaged , and since it no longer needed to defend the flank of Thermopylae , they retreated from Artemisium to the island of Salamis .

= = September 480 BC : Salamis = =

Victory at Thermopylae meant that all Boeotia fell to Xerxes ; the two cities that had resisted him , Thespieae and Plataea , were captured and razed . Attica was also left open to invasion , and the remaining population of Athens was thus evacuated , with the aid of the Allied fleet , to Salamis . The Peloponnesian Allies began to prepare a defensive line across the Isthmus of Corinth , building a wall , and demolishing the road from Megara , thereby abandoning Athens to the Persians . Athens thus fell ; the small number of Athenians who had barricaded themselves on the Acropolis were eventually defeated , and Xerxes then ordered Athens to be torched .

The Persians had now captured most of Greece , but Xerxes had perhaps not expected such defiance from the Greeks ; his priority was now to complete the war as quickly as possible ; the huge invasion force could not be supplied indefinitely , and probably Xerxes did not wish to be at the fringe of his empire for so long . Thermopylae had shown that a frontal assault against a well defended Greek position had little chance of success ; with the Allies now dug in across the isthmus , there was therefore little chance of the Persians conquering the rest of Greece by land . However , if the isthmus 's defensive line could be outflanked , the Allies could be defeated . Such an outflanking of the isthmus required the use of the Persian navy , and thus the neutralisation of the Allied navy . In summary , if Xerxes could destroy the Allied navy , he would be in a strong position to force a Greek surrender ; this seemed the only hope of concluding the campaign in that season . Conversely by avoiding destruction , or as Themistocles hoped , by destroying the Persian fleet , the Greeks could avoid conquest . In the final reckoning , both sides were prepared to stake everything on a naval battle , in the hope of decisively altering the course of the war .

Thus it was that the Allied fleet remained off the coast of Salamis into September , despite the imminent arrival of the Persians . Even after Athens fell to the advancing Persian army , the Allied fleet still remained off the coast of Salamis , trying to lure the Persian fleet to battle . Partly as a result of subterfuge on the part of Themistocles , the navies finally engaged in the cramped Straits of Salamis . There , the large Persian numbers were an active hindrance , as ships struggled to manoeuvre and became disorganised . Seizing the opportunity , the Greek fleet attacked , and scored a decisive victory , sinking or capturing at least 200 Persian ships , and thus ensuring the Peloponnesus would not be outflanked .

According to Herodotus , after this loss Xerxes attempted to build a causeway across the straits to attack Salamis (although Strabo and Ctesias place this attempt before the battle) . In any case this project was soon abandoned . With the Persians ' naval superiority removed , Xerxes feared that the Greeks might sail to the Hellespont and destroy the pontoon bridges . According to Herodotus , Mardonius volunteered to remain in Greece and complete the conquest with a hand @-@ picked group of troops , while advising Xerxes to retreat to Asia with the bulk of the army . All of the Persian forces abandoned Attica , with Mardonius over @-@ wintering in Boeotia and Thessaly . The Athenians were thus able to return to their burnt @-@ out city for the winter .

= = Autumn / winter 480 / 479 BC = =

= = = Siege of Potidaea = = =

Herodotus tells us that a Persian general , Artabazus , having escorted Xerxes to the Hellespont with 60 @, @ 000 men , began the return journey to Mardonius in Thessaly . However , as he neared Pallene ,

" he thought it right that he should enslave the people of Potidaea , whom he found in revolt . "

Despite attempts to capture the city by treachery , the Persians were forced to keep up the siege for three months . Then , attempting to use an unusually low tide to attack the town from sea , the Persian army was caught by the returning tide , many drowning and the survivors being attacked by the Potideans in boats . Artabazus was thus forced to lift the siege , and return to Mardonius with the remnants of his men .

== Siege of Olynthus ==

While besieging Potidea , Artabazus also decided to besiege Olynthus , which was also in revolt . The town was held by the Bottiaean tribe , who had been driven out of Macedon . Having taken the town , he massacred the defenders , and handed over the town to the Chalcidian people .

== June 479 BC : Plataea and Mycale ==

Over the winter , there seems to have been some tension between the Allies . In particular , the Athenians , who were not protected by the isthmus , but whose fleet were the key to the security of the Peloponnesus , felt hard done by . They demanded an Allied army march north the following year . When the other Allies failed to commit to this , the Athenian fleet probably refused to join the Allied navy in the spring . The navy , now under the command of the Spartan king Leotychides , thus skulked off Delos , while the remnants of the Persian fleet skulked off Samos , both sides unwilling to risk battle . Similarly , Mardonius remained in Thessaly , knowing an attack on the isthmus was pointless , while the Allies refused to send an army outside the Peloponnesus .

Mardonius moved to break the stalemate , by offering peace , self @-@ government and territorial expansion to the Athenians (with the aim of thereby removing their fleet from the Allied forces) , using Alexander I of Macedon as an intermediary . The Athenians made sure that a Spartan delegation was on hand to hear the offer , but rejected it . Athens was thus evacuated again , and the Persians marched south and re @-@ took possession of it . Mardonius now repeated his offer of peace to the Athenian refugees on Salamis . Athens , along with Megara and Plataea , sent emissaries to Sparta demanding assistance , and threatening to accept the Persian terms if not . The Spartans , who were at that time celebrating the festival of Hyacinthus , delayed making a decision for 10 days . However , when the Athenian emissaries then delivered an ultimatum to the Spartans , they were amazed to hear that a task force was in fact already marching to meet the Persians .

When Mardonius heard that the Allied army was on the march , he retreated into Boeotia , near Plataea , trying to draw the Allies into open terrain where he could use his cavalry . The Allied army however , under the command of the Spartan regent Pausanias , stayed on high ground above Plataea to protect themselves against such tactics . Mardonius ordered a hit @-@ and @-@ run cavalry attack on the Greek lines , but the attack was unsuccessful and the cavalry commander killed . The outcome prompted the Allies to move to a position nearer the Persian camp , still on high ground . As a result , the Allied lines of communication were exposed . The Persian cavalry began to intercept food deliveries and finally managed to destroy the only spring of water available to the Allies . The Allied position now undermined , Pausanias ordered a night @-@ time retreat towards their original positions . This went awry , leaving the Athenians , and Spartans and Tegeans isolated on separate hills , with the other contingents scattered further away , near Plataea itself . Seeing that he might never have a better opportunity to attack , Mardonius ordered his whole army forward . However , as at Thermopylae , the Persian infantry proved no match for the heavily armoured Greek hoplites , and the Spartans broke through to Mardonius 's bodyguard and killed him . The Persian force thus dissolved in rout ; 40 @,@ 000 troops managed to escape via the road to Thessaly , but the rest fled to the Persian camp where they were trapped and slaughtered by the Allies , thus finalising their victory .

On the afternoon of the Battle of Plataea , Herodotus tells us that rumour of the Allied victory reached the Allied navy , at that time off the coast of Mount Mycale in Ionia . Their morale boosted , the Allied marines fought and won a decisive victory at the Battle of Mycale that same day , destroying the remnants of the Persian fleet . As soon as the Peloponnesians had marched north of the isthmus , the Athenian fleet under Xanthippus had joined up with the rest of the Allied fleet . The fleet , now able to match the Persians , had first sailed to Samos , where the Persian fleet was based . The Persians , whose ships were in a poor state of repair , had decided not to risk fighting , and instead drew their ships up on the beach under Mycale . An army of 60 @,@ 000 men had been left there by Xerxes , and the fleet joined with them , building a palisade around the camp to

protect the ships . However , Leotychides decided to attack the camp with the Allied fleet 's marines . Seeing the small size of the Allied force , the Persians emerged from the camp , but the hoplites again proved superior , and destroyed much of the Persian force . The ships were abandoned to the Allies , who burnt them , crippling Xerxes ' sea power , and marking the ascendancy of the Allied fleet .

= = Aftermath = =

With the twin victories of Plataea and Mycale , the second Persian invasion of Greece was over . Moreover , the threat of future invasion was abated ; although the Greeks remained worried that Xerxes would try again , over time it became apparent that the Persian desire to conquer Greece was much diminished .

In many ways Mycale represents the start of a new phase of the conflict , the Greek counterattack . After the victory at Mycale , the Allied fleet sailed to the Hellespont to break down the pontoon bridges , but found that this was already done . The Peloponnesians sailed home , but the Athenians remained to attack the Chersonesos , still held by the Persians . The Persians in the region , and their allies made for Sestos , the strongest town in the region , which the Athenians then laid siege to ; after a protracted siege , it fell to the Athenians . Herodotus ended his Historia after the Siege of Sestos . Over the next 30 years , the Greeks , primarily the Athenian @-@ dominated Delian League , would expel the Persians from Macedon , Thrace , the Aegean islands and Ionia . Peace with Persia came in 449 BC with the Peace of Callias , finally ending the half @-@ century of warfare .

= = Tactical analysis = =

The Greek style of warfare had been honed over the preceding centuries . It revolved around the hoplite , members of the middle @-@ classes (the zeugites) who could afford the armour necessary to fight in this manner . The hoplite was , by the standards of the time , heavily armoured , with a breastplate (originally bronze , but probably by this stage a more flexible leather version) , greaves , a full helmet , and a large round shield (the aspis) . Hoplites were armed with a long spear (the doru) , which was evidently significantly longer than Persian spears , and a sword (the xiphos) . Hoplites fought in the phalanx formation ; the exact details are not completely clear , but it was a close @-@ knit formation , presenting a uniform front of overlapping shields , and spears , to the enemy . Properly assembled , the phalanx was a formidable offensive and defensive weapon ; on occasions when it is recorded to have happened , it took a huge number of light infantry to defeat a relatively small phalanx . The phalanx was vulnerable to being outflanked by cavalry , if caught on the wrong terrain , however . The hoplite 's heavy armour and long spears made them excellent troops in hand @-@ to @-@ hand combat and gave them significant protection against ranged attacks by light troops and skirmishers . Even if the shield did not stop a missile , there was a reasonable chance the armour would .

The Persian infantry used in the invasion were a heterogeneous group drawn from across the empire . However , according to Herodotus , there was at least a general conformity in the type of armour and style of fighting . The troops were , generally speaking , armed with a bow , ' short spear ' and sword , carried a wicker shield , and wore at most a leather jerkin . The one exception to this may have been the ethnic Persian troops , who may have worn a corslet of scaled armour . Some of the contingents may have been armed somewhat differently ; for instance , the Saka were renowned axemen . The ' elite ' contingents of the Persian infantry seem to have been the ethnic Persians , Medians , Cissians and the Saka . The foremost of the infantry were the royal guards , the Immortals , although they were still armed in the aforementioned style . Cavalry was provided by the Persians , Bactrians , Medes , Cissians and Saka ; most of these probably fought as lightly armed missile cavalry . The style of fighting used by the Persians was probably to stand off from an enemy , using their bows (or equivalent) to wear down the enemy before closing in to deliver the coup de grace with spear and sword .

The Persians had encountered hoplites in battle before at Ephesus , where their cavalry had easily routed the (probably exhausted) Greeks . However , at the battle of Marathon , the Athenian hoplites had shown their superiority over the Persian infantry , albeit in the absence of any cavalry . It is therefore slightly surprising that the Persians did not bring any hoplites from the Greek regions , especially Ionia , under their control in Asia . Equally , Herodotus tells us that the Egyptian marines serving in the navy were well armed , and performed well against the Greek marines ; yet no Egyptian contingent served in the army . The Persians may not have completely trusted the Ionians and Egyptians , since both had recently revolted against Persian rule . However , if this is the case , then it must be questioned why there were Greek and Egyptian contingents in the navy . The Allies evidently tried to play on the Persian fears about the reliability of the Ionians in Persian service ; but , as far as we can tell , both the Ionians and Egyptians performed particularly well for the Persian navy . It may therefore simply be that neither the Ionians nor Egyptians were included in the army because they were serving in the fleet ? none of the coastal regions of the Persian empire appear to have sent contingents with the army .

In the two major land battles of the invasion , the Allies clearly adjusted their tactics to nullify the Persian advantage in numbers and cavalry , by occupying the pass at Thermopylae , and by staying on high ground at Plataea . At Thermopylae , until the path outflanking the Allied position was revealed , the Persians signally failed to adjust their tactics to the situation , although the position was well chosen to limit the Persian options . At Plataea , the harassing of the Allied positions by cavalry was a successful tactic , forcing the precipitous (and nearly disastrous) retreat ; however , Mardonius then brought about a general melee between the infantry , which resulted in the Persian defeat . The events at Mycale reveal a similar story ; Persian infantry committing themselves to a melee with hoplites , with disastrous results . It has been suggested that there is little evidence of complex tactics in the Greco - Persian wars . However , as simple as the Greek tactics were , they played to their strengths ; the Persians however , may have seriously underestimated the strength of the hoplite , and their failure to adapt to facing the Allied infantry contributed to the eventual Persian defeat .

= = Strategic analysis = =

At the beginning of the invasion , it is clear that the Persians held most advantages . Regardless of its actual size , it is clear that the Persians had brought an overwhelming number of troops and ships to Greece . The Persians had a unified command system , and everyone was answerable to the king . They had a hugely efficient bureaucracy , which allowed them to undertake remarkable feats of planning . The Persian generals had significant experience of warfare over the 80 years in which the Persian empire had been established . Furthermore , the Persians excelled in the use of intelligence and diplomacy in warfare , as shown by their (nearly successful) attempts to divide and conquer the Greeks . The Greeks , by comparison , were fragmented , with only 30 or so city states actively opposing the Persian invasion ; even those were prone to quarrel with each other . They had little experience of large scale warfare , being largely restricted to small scale local warfare , and their commanders were chosen primarily on the basis of the political and social standing , rather than because of any experience or expertise . As Lazenby therefore asks : " So why did the Persians fail ? "

The Persian strategy for 480 BC was probably to simply progress through Greece in overwhelming force . The cities in any territory that the army passed through would be forced to submit or risk destruction ; and indeed this happened with the Thessalian , Locrian and Phocian cities who initially resisted the Persians but then were forced to submit as the Persians advanced . Conversely , the Allied strategy was probably to try and stop the Persian advance as far north as possible , and thus prevent the submission of as many potential Allies as possible . Beyond this , the Allies seem to have realised that given the Persians ' overwhelming numbers , they had little chance in open battle , and thus they opted to try to defend geographical bottle necks , where the Persian numbers would count for less . The whole Allied campaign for 480 BC can be seen in this context . Initially they attempted to defend the Tempe pass to prevent the loss of Thessaly . After they realised that

they could not defend this position , they chose the next @-@ most northerly position , the Thermopylae / Artemisium axis . The Allied performance at Thermopylae was initially effective ; however , the failure to properly guard the path that outflanked Thermopylae undermined their strategy , and led to defeat . At Artemisium the fleet also scored some successes , but withdrew due to the losses they had sustained , and since the defeat of Thermopylae made the position irrelevant . Thus far , the Persian strategy had succeeded , while the Allied strategy , though not a disaster , had failed .

The defence of the Isthmus of Corinth by the Allies changed the nature of the war . The Persians did not attempt to attack the isthmus by land , realising they probably could not breach it . This essentially reduced the conflict to a naval one . Themistocles now proposed what was in hindsight the strategic masterstroke in the Allied campaign ; to lure the Persian fleet to battle in the straits of Salamis . However , as successful as this was , there was no need for the Persians to fight at Salamis to win the war ; it has been suggested that the Persians were either overconfident , or overeager to finish the campaign . Thus , the Allied victory at Salamis must at least partially be ascribed to a Persian strategic blunder . After Salamis , the Persian strategy changed . Mardonius sought to exploit dissensions between the Allies in order to fracture the alliance . In particular , he sought to win over the Athenians , which would leave the Allied fleet unable to oppose Persian landings on the Peloponnesus . Although Herodotus tells us that Mardonius was keen to fight a decisive battle , his actions in the run @-@ up to Plataea are not particularly consistent with this . He seems to have been willing to accept battle on his terms , but he waited either for the Allies to attack , or for the alliance to collapse ignominiously . The Allied strategy for 479 BC was something of a mess ; the Peloponnesians only agreed to march north in order to save the alliance , and it appears that the Allied leadership had little idea how to force a battle that they could win . It was the botched attempt to retreat from Plataea that finally delivered the Allies battle on their terms . Mardonius may have been overeager for victory ; there was no need to attack the Allies , and by doing so he played to the main Allied tactical strength , combat in the melee . The Allied victory at Plataea can also therefore be seen as partially the result of a Persian mistake .

Thus , the Persian failure may be seen partly as a result of two strategic mistakes that handed the Allies tactical advantages , and resulted in decisive defeats for the Persians . The Allied success is often seen as the result of " free men fighting for their freedom " . This may have played a part , and certainly the Greeks seem to have interpreted their victory in those terms . One crucial factor in the Allied success was that , having formed an alliance , however fractious , they remained true to it , despite the odds . There appear to have been many occasions when the alliance seemed in doubt , but ultimately it withstood ; and while this alone did not defeat the Persians , it meant that even after the occupation of most of Greece , the Allies were not themselves defeated . This is exemplified by the remarkable fact that the citizens of Athens , Thespieae and Plataea chose to carry on fighting from exile rather than submit to the Persians . Ultimately , the Allies succeeded because they avoided catastrophic defeats , stuck to their alliance , took advantage of Persian mistakes , and because in the hoplite they possessed an advantage (perhaps their only real advantage at the start of the conflict) , which , at Plataea , allowed them to destroy the Persian invasion force .

= = Significance = =

The second Persian invasion of Greece was an event of major significance in European history . A large number of historians hold that , had Greece been conquered , the Ancient Greek culture that lies at the basis of Western civilization would have never developed (and by extension Western civilization itself) . While this may be an exaggeration (it is obviously impossible to know) , it is clear that even at the time the Greeks understood that something very significant had happened .

Militarily , there was not much in the way of tactical or strategic innovation during the Persian invasion , one commentator suggesting it was something of " a soldier 's war " (i.e. , it was the soldiers rather than generals that won the war) . Thermopylae is often used as a good example of the use of terrain as a force multiplier , while Themistocles 's ruse before Salamis is a good example of the use of deception in warfare . The major lesson of the invasion , reaffirming the events at the

Battle of Marathon , was the superiority of the hoplite in close @-@ quarters fighting over the more @-@ lightly armed Persian infantry . Taking on this lesson , the Persian empire would later , after the Peloponnesian War , start recruiting and relying on Greek mercenaries .

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