**Aeschylus, *The Persians* (ca. 472 B.C.)**

1. **A “traitorous” message**: A Hellene, a man from the Athenian force, came and spoke to your son these words: that when the twilight of dark night should fall the Hellenes would not remain but onto the benches of the **ships** would jump and each to his own place in furtive flight would try to save his own life.
2. **All-night rowing by Persian fleet**: They not in unruly fashion but with obedient minds prepared supper and the sea-going man tied the **oar-handle to the well-fitting pin**. When the blaze of the sun was extinguished and night followed, each man, **lord of the oar**, went into his **ship**, each a master of arms. Rank encouraged rank of the long **ship** and they sailed as each had been positioned. All night they maintained sailing on the sea, lords of the fleet, all the men of the **ships**. And night came but the forces of the Hellenes did not at all attempt to sail away.
3. **Battle About to Begin**: And fear was felt by all the barbarians, deceived in their plan, for not as if for flight did the Hellenes sing out their solemn paean but like men going to battle with resolute courage. A trumpet with its blare set all these on fire. At once with a united sweep and **rush of oars** on order they stuck the deep water of the sea.
4. **Greek Paean & Attack**: At first the right wing in good battle order led the array but then the whole fleet began the attack and at the same time could be heard a great cry: "Children of the Hellenes, advance, and set free your fatherland. Set free your children, your wives, the temples of your *theoi* and ancestors' tombs. The struggle is for them all." From us a confused babble of the Persian tongue rose up in reply and the time of planning was over. At once **ship** against **ship** its **bronze ram** struck. A **ship** of the Hellenes began the attack and broke off completely the beak of a **Phoenician ship**: **ship** rushed against **ship**.
5. At first at this point the mass of the Persian force resisted but the bulk of the fleet in a narrow strait was confined and ship could not help **ship** but they with their **bronze-mouthed rammings** struck each other and broke the **banks of oars**. The **ships** of the Hellenes, not without cunning, **attacked us in a circle** and upturned were the hulls of **ships** and the sea could not be seen but was **full of shipwrecks and the death of men**.
6. Each **ship** in disorder rushed for flight, as many as were of the barbarian force.

Like mackerel or a catch of fish, with **scraps of oars** and **fragments of wreckage**

they struck, hacked them while moaning and mourning filled all the waters of the sea until the black eye of night removed them. The total of evils, not even if for ten days I enumerated them, could I tell you in full. For know this well: **never in a single day did so great a number of men die**.

**Source:** [**http://homepage.usask.ca/~jrp638/DeptTransls/Persians.html**](http://homepage.usask.ca/~jrp638/DeptTransls/Persians.html)

**Herodotus, *Histories* (ca. 440s B.C.) Book VIII**

1. **Themistocles’ speech**: If you [Eurybiades] take them on in the Isthmus, **you will be fighting a naval battle on the open sea, and this is not at all favorable to us**, our ships being heavier and fewer in number. Furthermore, you are going to lose Salamis, Megara, and Aegina, even if we are generally successful. Also, their infantry will follow the fleet, and so you **will be drawing them to the Peloponnese and putting all Greece at risk**. [8.60.a]
2. If you do as I suggest, however, you will find the following to be to our advantage. First, **by taking them on in a confined space, with our few ships facing their superior number**s, we shall, if the battle goes as one may expect, win a great victory—fighting in a confined space is to our advantage just as fighting in an open space is to theirs. In addition, there is the preservation of Salamis, where our children and women have been taking for safekeeping. And there is this further advantage in the strategy, one which you hold to be the most important. Staying here you will be **fighting a battle at sea in defense of the Peloponnese just as much as you would at the Isthmus**, and you will not, if you are wise, draw the enemy to the Peloponnese. [8.60.b]
3. If the result is what I expect and **we defeat them with our navy, the barbarians will not reach the Isthmus—in fact, they will not get beyond Attica but will retreat in total disarray**. We shall gain, too, by saving Megara, Aegina, and Salamis, the latter being where, it is prophesied, we shall prevail over the enemy. When men base their plans on reason, the result is usually success; if their plans are *not* based on reason, even god will not go along with men’s designs… [8.60.c]
4. As for the Persians, **they accepted the veracity of the message** [of Themistocles], and their first move was to put ashore a large number of men on the little island of Psyttaleia that lies between Salamis and the mainland. Next, in the middle of the night, they launched their western wing toward Salamis to encircle the island, with the men deployed off Ceos and Cynosura also put to sea; and they also blockaded the entire passage as far as Munychia with their ships. Their reason for putting to sea was to **remove from the Greeks any possibility of flight**, **to keep them bottled up on Salamis**, and have them pay for the battles off Artemisium…. These moves they made silently so their enemy should not become aware of them, and **they did the job at night, without taking any sleep**. [8.76.1-3]

**Further Reading:**

* Aeschylus, *Persians & Other Plays*, translated by Christopher Collard (Oxford University Press, 2009)
* Cartledge, Paul, *Thermopylae: The Battle That Changed the World* (Vintage Books, 2006)
* Green, Maureen, “After 1,500 years a trireme tries its water wings,” *Smithsonian* vol. 18, no. 10, pp. 75-83 (1988)
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* Morrison, J.S. and R. T. Williams, *Greek Oared Ships, 900-322 B.C.* (Cambridge University Press, 1968)
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* Morrison, J. S., J. F. Coates, N.B. Rankov, *The Athenian Trireme: The History and Reconstruction of an Ancient Greek Warship* (Cambridge University Press, 2000)
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* Plutarch, *The Rise & Fall of Athens: Nine Greek Lives* (Penguin Books, 1960)
* Rodgers, William Ledyard, *Greek & Roman Naval Warfare* (United States Naval Institute, 1937)
* Roisman, Joseph and translations by J.C. Yardley, *Historical Sources in Translation: Ancient Greece from Homer to Alexander* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2011)
* Shaw, Timothy (ed.), *The Trireme Project: Operational Experience 1987-90 Lessons Learnt* (Oxbow Monograph, 1993)
* Strauss, Barry, *The Battle of Salamis: The Naval Encounter that Saved Greece— and Western Civilization* (Simon & Schuster, 2005)
* Welsh, Frank, *Building the Trireme* (Constable & Company Ltd, 1988)

**FACT SHEET**

***Trieres*** (“three-rowing”) [6th -4th B.C.]

* **Length:** 120-121 feet
* **Width:** 19-20 feet
* **Oars**: 13’ 9” & 13’ (26 lbs.)

**Overall crew** (*pleroma*): 200 (citizens, metics, slaves, mercenaries)

**Oarsmen** (*nautai*): 170

* **thranites:** 62
* **zygians:** 54
* **thalamians:** 54

**Officers & petty officers, & crew** (*hyperesia*): 170 men

* captain (*trierarch*)
* piper or drummer (*auletes*): 1
* helmsman (steering oars): 1
* navigator & lookout (*prorates*): 1
* accountant (*pentekontarchos*): 1
* shipwright (running repairs): 1
* boatswain & sailors (sails & rigging): 11

**Marines**: 14

* soldiers (*epibatai*): 10
* archers: 4

**Battle of Salamis** (Sept. 20, 480 B.C.)

* 320-378 Greek ships (180 Athenian)
* 1000-1207 Persian ships (600-800)

**Battle losses**

* 40 Greek ships
* 200 Persian ships (up to 40,000 men)

**Tactical terms**

* *diekplous*: “movement through & out”
* *periplous*: “around-movement”
* *anastrophe*: “wheel around”
* *kuklos*: defensive circle

[***H. N. Olympias***](http://wn.com/Olympias_(trireme)) (1985-1987)

* cost: $640,000
* weight: 55,000 lbs (plus crew)
* bronze ram: 200 kg
* 50’ keel: iroko wood (Nigeria)
* hull timbers: Oregon Douglas
* 20,000 tenons: Virginia oak
* *hypozomata* (girding cable): steel
* sea trials: 5 (1987-1994)

**Main Ancient Sources**

* Aeschylus, *Persians*
* Aristophanes
* Aristotle
* Diodorus Siculus
* Herodotus, *Histories*
* Plato
* Plutarch
* Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*
* Xenophon