

their help, since they were so powerful—and in the earnestness of his pleas, he cared little what he promised—until, at last, he prevailed and won them over. It seems indeed to be easier to deceive a multitude than one man—for Aristagoras, though he failed to convince Cleomenes the Lacedaemonian, succeeded with the Athenians, who were 30,000. Won by his persuasions, they voted that twenty ships should be sent to aid the Ionians, under the command of Melanthius, one of the citizens, a man of distinction in every way. These ships were the beginning of mischief for the Greeks and for the barbarians.

*The revolt that followed was a disaster for the Greeks of Asia Minor. According to Herodotus, one of the chief causes of their loss was the sloth and general fecklessness of the Ionians. Even when warned by their commander that their "fate hung on a razor's edge between being free men and slaves—and runaway slaves at that," they "reposed in the shade all day and refused to go aboard the ships and train themselves." Accordingly "when the Samians (Greek islanders allied to the Ionians) saw that all was disorder among the Ionians" (6.12–13), they decided that the revolt was going to fail. Among other allies, they soon abandoned the Ionians to their fate. Miletus was captured and the population killed or sold into slavery.*

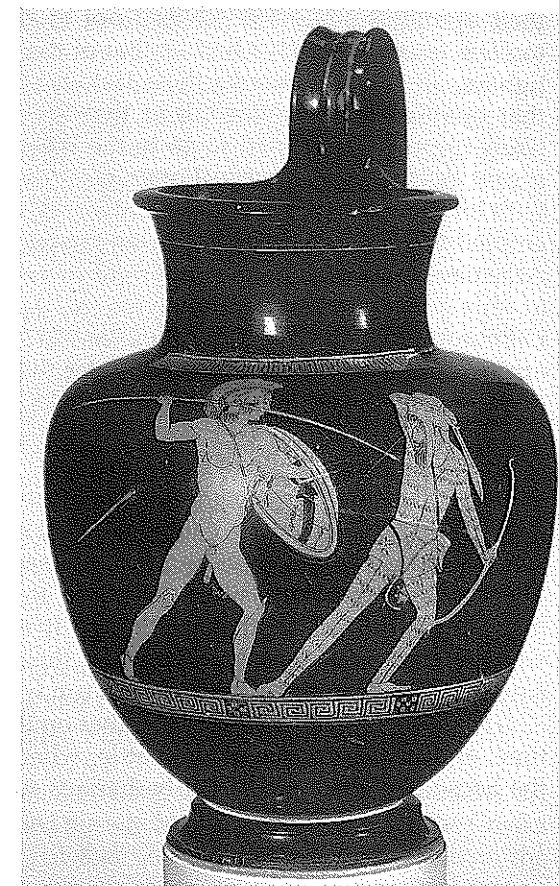
#### 4. THE BATTLE OF MARATHON

*After their victory over the Ionian Greeks the Persians launched an expedition to punish those from the mainland of Greece who had helped in the revolt, namely the Athenians and Eretrians on the nearby island of Euboea. The usual pattern of plotting and betrayal immediately makes its appearance.*

100. Meanwhile, the Eretrians learned that the Persian expedition was sailing against them, and asked the Athenians for assistance. Nor did the Athenians refuse their aid, but assigned to them as auxiliaries the 4000 landholders whom they had settled on land confiscated from the Euboeans in a previous war. At Eretria, however, things were not in a healthy state, for although they had called in the aid of the Athenians, yet they were not agreed among themselves how they should act. Some of them thought of leaving the city and taking refuge in the backwoods of Euboea, while others who looked to receiving a reward from the Persians, were making ready to betray their country. So when these things came to the ears of Aeschines, the son of Nothion, one of the first men in Eretria, he made known the whole state of affairs to the Athenians who had already arrived, and urged them to return home to their own land and not to perish with his countrymen. The Athenians followed his advice and crossing over to Oropus, in this way escaped the danger.

*In due course Eretria was betrayed to the Persians, who then burned the town and sold its inhabitants into slavery. After this the Persians moved on to Attica and landed at Marathon, a plain to the north of the city. The Athenians in turn marched to Marathon and took up a defensive position there. In the meantime, they sent Pheidippides, a runner, to ask for help from the Spartans.*

**Figure 3.3** The vase depicts the different styles of fighting engaged in by Greeks and Persians. The nudity of the Greek is an artistic convention. In reality the warrior would have been well armored and surrounded by his fellow hoplites. Greek and Persian. Attic red-figure Oinoche by the Chicago Painter. Francis Bartlett Donation. By permission of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

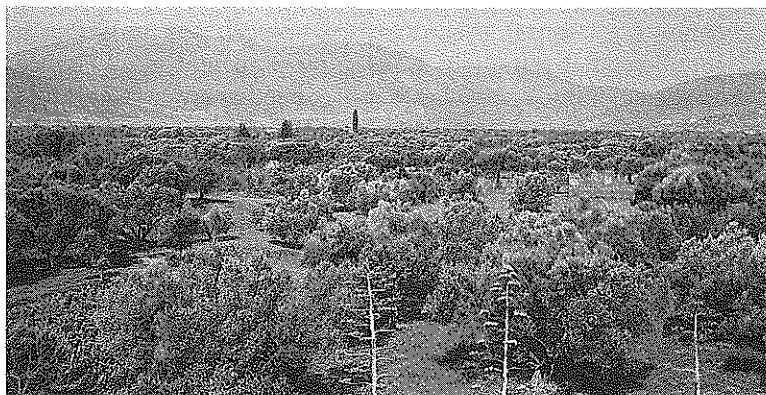


105. Before they left the city for Marathon the generals sent off to Sparta a herald, one Pheidippides, who was by birth an Athenian and by profession and training a long-distance runner. . . . 106. He reached Sparta the day after leaving Athens and on his arrival went before the rulers and said: "Men of Lacedaemon (*i.e.*, Sparta), the Athenians beseech you to hasten to their aid, and not allow that state, which is the most ancient in all Greece, to be enslaved by the Persians. Eritrea is already carried away captive, and Greece weakened by the loss of no mean city." Thus did Pheidippides deliver the message committed to him, and the Spartans wished to help the Athenians, but were unable to give them any present aid as they did not like to break their established law. It was the ninth day of the month and they could not march out of Sparta on the ninth, when the moon had not reached the full. So they waited for the full moon. . . .

108. The Athenians were drawn up in order of battle in the precinct belonging to Heracles, when they were joined by the Plataeans, who came in full force to their aid. . . . 109. The Athenian generals were divided in

their opinions; and some advised not to risk a battle because they were too few to engage such a host as that of the Persians; while others were for fighting at once, and among these last was Miltiades. He, therefore, seeing that opinions were divided, and that the less worthy counsel appeared likely to prevail, resolved to go to the Polemarch (*an annually chosen office; it gave the office-holder nominal command of the army*), and have a conference with him. For the man on whom the lot fell to be Polemarch, at Athens was entitled to give his vote with the ten generals, since from ancient times the Athenians allowed him an equal right in voting with them. The Polemarch at this juncture was Callimachus of Aphidnae. (*Miltiades won over Callimachus, and the battle was launched.*) 111. Now as they marshaled their army on the field at Marathon, in order that the Athenian front might be of equal length with the Persian, the ranks of the center were diminished, and it became the weakest part of the line, while the wings were both made strong with a depth of many ranks. . . . 112. So when these dispositions were in place and the victims showed themselves favorable, instantly the Athenians, as soon as the command was given, charged the enemy at a run. Now the distance between the two armies was little short of a mile. The Persians, therefore, when they saw the Greeks coming on at speed, made ready to receive them, although it seemed to them the Athenians were bereft of their senses, and bent on their own destruction, for they saw a mere handful of men coming on at a run without either cavalry or archers. . . . 113. The two armies fought together on the plain of Marathon for a long time, and in the middle of the battle, where the Persians themselves and the Sacae had their place, the barbarians were victorious, and broke and

**Figure 3.4** After the battle of Marathon the 191 Greeks who were killed were buried under a mound, from which this photograph was taken. The exact site of the battle and how it was conducted is a much disputed topic among scholars despite Herodotus' description of it. Plain of Marathon from mound. Photo: D. B. Nagle.



pursued the Greeks into the inner country. On the two wings, however, the Athenians and the Plataeans defeated the enemy. Having done so, they allowed the routed barbarians to flee, joined their two wings into one and fell on those who had broken their own center, and defeated them. . . . 117. There fell in this battle of Marathon, on the side of the Persians about 6400 men; on that of the Athenians, 192.

*A footnote to the battle: The Spartans showed up three days after the battle.*



### C. The Second Persian Invasion of 480 B.C.

*The Greeks were fortunate that before the Persians could return to take revenge for Marathon, Darius, the energetic king of Persia, died and was replaced by a weaker king, Xerxes. Egypt, the richest and most populous province of the empire, revolted. This forced the Persians to postpone the war of revenge against Greece for a full ten years. During these years the Athenians were lucky in that they found a great leader in Themistocles and were persuaded by him to build up their fleet. Unfortunately, the usual local rivalries, internal dissensions, and calculations of expediency weakened the Greek response.*

#### 1. THE MUDDLED GREEK RESPONSE: "IT WAS PLAIN THAT THE GREATER NUMBER OF THE STATES WOULD TAKE NO PART IN THE WAR BUT WARMLY FAVORED THE PERSIANS"

7.138. The expedition of the Persian king, thought it was in name directed against Athens, in reality threatened the whole of Greece. And of this the Greeks were aware some time before, but they did not all view the matter in the same light. Some of them had given the Persians earth and water [*symbols of submission*], and were bold on that account, deeming themselves thereby secured against suffering hurt from the barbarian army. Others, who had refused compliance, were thrown into extreme alarm. For whereas they considered all the ships in Greece too few to engage the enemy, it was plain that the greater number of states would take no part in the war, but warmly favored the Persians. 139. And here I feel constrained to deliver an opinion, which most men, I know will dislike, but which as it seems to be true, I am determined not to withhold. Had the Athenians from fear of approaching danger, left their country, or had they without leaving it submitted to the power of Xerxes, there would certainly have been no attempt to resist the Persians by sea; in which case, the course of events by land would have been the following. Though the Peloponnesians might have built ever so many walls across the Isthmus, yet their allies would have fallen off from the Lacedaemonians, not by voluntary desertion, but because city after city must have been taken by the enemy fleet. And so, the Spartans, would at last have stood alone, and, standing alone would have displayed prodigies of valor, and died nobly. Either they would have done thus, or else, before it came to

that extremity, seeing one Greek city after another embrace the cause of the Persians, they would have come to terms with King Xerxes. Thus either way Greece would have been brought under Persia. For I cannot understand of what possible use the walls across the Isthmus would have been if the King had mastery of the sea. If then a man should now say that the Athenians were the saviors of Greece, he would not exceed the truth. For they truly held the scales, and whichever side they chose must have carried the day. They too it was who, when they had determined to maintain the freedom of Greece, roused up that portion of the Greek people which had not gone over to the Persians and so, next to the gods, they repulsed the invader. Even the terrible oracles which reached them from Delphi, and struck fear into their hearts, failed to persuade them to fly from Greece. They had the courage to remain faithful to their land, and await the coming of the foe.

## 2. THEMISTOCLES AND THE "ALLIANCE OF THE WILLING"

*The reference to the oracles (end of last reading) is to the responses the Athenians received from Delphi when they sent messengers there to consult the god. The first oracle was devastating. It told of the complete destruction of Athens, including its holy places, and urged the Athenians "to flee to the ends of the earth." The priests, seeing that the Athenian delegation was appalled by the first oracle, suggested that they approach the priestess again. The second time they got the famous, ambiguous "wooden walls" oracle.*

141. Upon this [*the Athenians had threatened not to leave the sanctuary and to stay there until they died*], the priestess gave them a second answer, which was the following:

Pallas Athena has not been able to soften the lord of Olympus,  
 Though she has often prayed to him and urged him with excellent counsel.  
 Yet once more I address thee in words firmer than adamant.  
 When the foe shall have taken whatever the limit of Cecrops  
 Holds within it, and all which divine Cithaeron shelters,  
 Then far-seeing Zeus grants this to the prayers of Athena:  
 Safe shall the wooden wall continue for thee and thy children.  
 Wait not the tramp of the horse, nor the footmen mightily moving  
 Over the land, but turn your back to the foe, and retire ye.  
 Yet shall a day arrive when ye shall meet him in battle.  
 Holy Salamis, thou shalt destroy the offspring of women  
 When men scatter the seed, or when they gather the harvest.

*Some interpreted the "wooden walls" as the acropolis at Athens, which was in ancient times defended by a wooden palisade. But others, led by Themistocles, insisted that the wall referred to was the fleet. Prior to all of this, Themistocles had persuaded the Athenians to devote a find of silver in Attica to building a fleet rather than returning the profits to individual Athenians, which would normally have been the procedure.*

144. Themistocles had before this given a counsel which prevailed very seasonably. The Athenians, having a large sum of money in their treasury,



**Figure 3.5** The trireme was the preeminent warship at the time of the Persian Wars. Its main aim was to ram and sink opposing warships. Powered by 170 rowers, these ships could achieve over 9 knots for short periods of time. Trireme. The Lenormant relief, ca. 400 B.C. Courtesy of the Acropolis Museum, Athens.

the produce of the mines at Laureium, were about to share it among the adult citizens, who would have received ten drachmas apiece, when Themistocles persuaded them to forbear the distribution, and build with the money 200 ships, to help them in their war against the Aeginetans. It was the breaking out of the Aeginetan war which was at this time the saving of Greece, for thereby the Athenians were forced to become a maritime power. The new ships were not used for the purpose for which they were built, but became a help to Greece in her hour of need. And the Athenians had not only these vessels ready before the war, but they likewise set to work to build more. They decided in a council which was held after the debate upon the oracle, that, according to the advice of the god, they would embark their whole force aboard their ships, and with such Greeks as chose to join them, give battle to the barbarian invader. Such, then were the oracles which had been received by the Athenians. 145. The Greeks who were supporters of the Hellenic cause, having assembled in one place, and there consulted together, and interchanged pledges with each other, agreed that, before any other step was taken, the feuds and enmities which existed between the different states should first of all be ended. . . .

## 3. THE THEMISTOCLES DECREE

*This decree was found at Troezen, where most of the wives and children of the Athenians were sent for refuge. In its present form it is a third-century B.C. version of an older, possibly fifth-century original.<sup>4</sup>*

<sup>4</sup> From R. Meiggs and D. M. Lewis, *A Selection of Greek Historical Inscriptions to the End of the Fifth Century* (Oxford, 1969), no. 23.

## 5. THE BATTLE OF THERMOPYLAE

*The difficulty in finding reliable allies who would actually stand and fight the Persians is illustrated by the events preceding the Battle of Thermopylae. Obstacles such as the necessity of observing the religious festivals as they occurred reveal another side of the complex situation. We have already seen how the Spartans could not leave Sparta for religious reasons when Athens was standing virtually alone at Marathon in the first invasion of 490 B.C. Now, on the eve of yet another crucial battle, the celebration of festivals again interferes with the mustering of the Greeks. The first part of the reading deals with the numbers Herodotus gives for the Greek forces at Thermopylae; they are in line with the resources of the small Greek states.*

7.202. The Greeks who at this spot [*i.e.*, Thermopylae] waited the coming of Xerxes were the following: from Sparta 300; from Arcadia 1,000 Tegeans and Mantineans, 500 of each people; 120 Orchomenians from Arcadian Orchomenus; and 1,000 from other cities: from Corinth, 400; from Phlius, 200; from Mycenae, 80. Such was the number from the Peloponnese. There were also present, from Boeotia, 700 Thespians and 400 Thebans. . . . 205. Leonidas [king and therefore army commander of Sparta] had come to Thermopylae, accompanied by the 300 men which the law assigned him, whom he had himself chosen from among the citizens, and who were all of them fathers with sons living. On his way he had taken the troops from Thebes, whose number I have already mentioned, and who were under the command of Leontiades the son of Eurymachus. The reason why he made a point of taking troops from Thebes and Thebes only was, that the Thebans were strongly suspected of having sympathies for the Persians. Leonidas therefore called on them to come with him to the war, wishing to see whether they would comply with his demand, or openly refuse, and disclaim the Greek alliance. They sent the troops although their intentions were traitorous. 206. The force with Leonidas was sent forward by the Spartans in advance of their main body, that the sight of them might encourage the allies to fight, and hinder them from going over to the Persians as it was likely they might have done had they seen the Spartans holding back. They intended presently, when they had celebrated the Carneian festival, which was what now kept them at home, to leave a garrison at Sparta, and hasten in full force to join the army. The rest of the allies also intended to act similarly; for it happened that the Olympic festival fell exactly at this same period. None of them expected that the contest at Thermopylae would be decided so speedily; wherefore they were content to send forward a mere advance guard. Such accordingly were the intentions of the allies.

207. Meanwhile the Greeks at Thermopylae, when the Persian army drew near to the entrance of the pass, became frightened and a council was held to consider a retreat. It was the wish of the Peloponnesians generally that the army should fall back upon the Peloponnese, and there guard the Isthmus. But Leonidas, when he saw how indignant the Phocians and Locrians became when they heard this plan [*their cities and lands would be*

*abandoned by a retreat to the Isthmus*], gave his vote to remaining where they were, while they sent envoys to the several cities to ask for help, since they were too few to make a stand against an army like that of the Persians.

*The pass at Thermopylae was betrayed by a local Greek to the Persians. Nevertheless, Leonidas decided to stay while the rest of the army melted away (or, in a more favorable version, was dismissed by Leonidas himself—Herodotus reports both versions). The Thespians alone remained with him, along with the Thebans who were kept as hostages. With the exception of the Thebans, all the Greeks, including Leonidas, perished. The self-sacrifice of Leonidas and the Spartans, however, gave heart to the allies, especially after the Greeks were forced to retreat after an indecisive naval battle with the Persian fleet at nearby Artemisium.*

## 6. ATHENS EVACUATED

8.40. Meanwhile, the Greek fleet which had left Artemisium [*after the battle there*] proceeded to Salamis, at the request of the Athenians, and there cast anchor. The Athenians had begged them to take up this position in order that they might convey their women and children out of Attica, and further might deliberate upon the course of action which they ought to follow. Disappointed in the hopes which they had previously entertained, they were about to hold a council concerning their present situation. For they had looked to see the Peloponnesians drawn up in full force to resist the enemy in Boeotia, but found nothing of the kind. On the contrary, they learned that the Peloponnesians, only concerning themselves about their own safety, were building a wall across the Isthmus, and intended to guard the Peloponnese, while letting the rest of Greece take its chances. . . . 41. Immediately upon their arrival, proclamations were made that every Athenian should save his children and household as best he could; whereupon some sent their families to Aegina, some to Salamis, but the greater number to Troezen. This removal was made with all possible haste, partly from a desire to obey the advice of the oracle, but still more for another reason. The Athenians say that they have in their Acropolis a huge serpent, which lives in the temple, and is guardian of the whole place. Nor do they only say this, but, as if the serpent really lived there, every month they lay out its food, which consists of a honey-cake. Up to this time the honey cake had always been consumed; but now it remained untouched. So the priestess told the people what had happened; whereupon they left Athens the more readily, since they believed that the goddess had already abandoned the citadel.

## 7. THE GREAT DEBATE: FIGHT AT SALAMIS OR DEFEND THE ISTHMUS OF CORINTH?

*Soon after the Athenians abandoned Athens, the Persians arrived and destroyed the temples on the Acropolis.*

56. Meanwhile at Salamis, the Greeks no sooner heard what had befallen the Acropolis than they fell into such alarm that some of the captains did not even wait for the council to come to a vote [*over where to fight the Persians*], but embarked hastily on board their vessels, and hoisted sail as though they would take to flight immediately. The rest, who stayed at the council board, came to a vote that the fleet should give battle at the Isthmus. Night drew on; and the captains, dispersing from the meeting, proceeded on board their respective ships.

*On his return to his ship after the meeting, the Athenian commander Themistocles was confronted by an Athenian who persuaded him that the Isthmus was indefensible and that all the individual contingents would soon give up and scatter to their individual cities. At a second council Themistocles did not present this negative argument for the fleet to stay at Salamis, but tried to persuade the Peloponnesians that if it was their aim to keep the Persians out of the Peloponnese it would be easier to do if they stayed and fought in the narrow waters of Salamis. His most resistant opponent was the Corinthian commander Adeimantus.*

61. When Themistocles had thus spoken, Adeimantus the Corinthian again attacked him and bade him be silent since he was a man without a city. At the same time he called on Eurybiades [*the Spartan overall commander of the fleet*] not to put the question at the instance of one who had no country; and he urged Themistocles should show of what state he was an envoy, before he gave his voice with the rest. This reproach was made because the city of Athens had been taken and was in the hands of the barbarians. Thereupon Themistocles spoke many bitter things against Adeimantus and the Corinthians generally; and for proof that he had a country, reminded the captains that with two hundred ships at his command, all fully manned for battle, he had both city and territory greater than theirs; since there was no Greek state which could resist his men should they attack it. 62. Then he turned to Eurybiades, and said with still greater warmth and earnestness, "If you stay here and behave like a brave man, all well be well—if not, you will bring Greece to ruin. For the whole fortune of the war depends on our ships. Be persuaded by my words. If not, we will take our families on board and go, just as we are, to Siris in Italy, which is ours from old, and which the prophecies declare we are to colonize some day or other. You then, when you have lost allies like us, will hereafter call to mind what I have now said." 63. At these words of Themistocles, Eurybiades changed his mind, principally, as I believe because he feared that if he withdrew the fleet to the Isthmus, the Athenians would sail away, and he knew that without the Athenians, the rest of their ships would be no match for the fleet of the enemy. He therefore decided to remain and give battle at Salamis. . . . 66. Meanwhile men of the fleet of Xerxes after they had seen the Spartan dead at Thermopylae. . . . sailed down the coast of Euboea and arrived at Phalerum [*the port of Athens*]. In my judgment, the Persian forces both by land and sea when they invaded Attica were not less numerous than they had been on their arrival at Sepias and Thermopylae. For against the Persian loss in the storm and at

Thermopylae, and again in the sea-fights off Artemisium, I set the various nations which had since joined the King. These were the Malians, the Dorians, the Locrians and the Boeotians, each serving in full force in his army except the last, who did not number in their ranks the Thespians or the Plataeans. Together with these were the Carystians, the Andrians, the Tenians, and the other peoples of the island, who fought on the King's side except the five states already mentioned. For as the Persians penetrated farther into Greece, they were joined continually by fresh nations.

*The Greek commanders continued to dither, but in the end Themistocles resolved the stalemate by sending a secret message to Xerxes that he was willing to betray the allies. He suggested that the king should block the western exits from the straits of Salamis before the Greek fleet broke up and escaped. This precipitated the battle in which the Persian fleet (actually made up mostly of Greek and Phoenician ships) was routed, and Xerxes was forced to withdraw most of his army from Greece.*

## 8. THE BATTLE OF PLATAEA

*After Salamis and Xerxes' exit from Greece, a part of the Persian army remained in Greece and wintered in Thessaly, where there was forage for their cavalry. The Persian commander was Mardonius. The Thebans urged a cynical strategy of selective bribery to sow division among the allies.*

9.1. Mardonius . . . left Thessaly, and led his army with all speed against Athens; forcing the several nations through whose land he passed to furnish him with additional troops. The chief men of Thessaly, far from repenting of the part which they had taken in the war hitherto, urged on the Persians to the attack more earnestly than ever. Thorax of Larissa in particular, who had helped to escort Xerxes on his flight to Asia, now openly encouraged Mardonius in his march upon Greece. 2. When the army reached Boeotia, the Thebans sought to induce Mardonius to make a halt: "He would not," they told him, "find anywhere a more convenient place in which to pitch his camp; and their advice to him was, that he should go no further, but fix himself there, and from there take measures to subdue all Greece without striking a blow. If the Greeks, who had held together hitherto, still continued united among themselves, it would be difficult for the whole world to overcome them by force of arms. But if you will do as we advise," they went on to say, "you will easily obtain control of all their counsels. Send presents to the men of most weight in the several states, and by so doing you will sow division among them. After that, it will be a light task, with the help of such as side with you, to bring under your control all your adversaries." Such was the advice of the Thebans: but Mardonius did not follow it.

*Mardonius left Boeotia to once more enter Attica, which he found deserted. He burned the city of Athens (having previously destroyed the temples on the Acropolis) and returned to Boeotia. Meanwhile, the Spartans and their allies were dragging their feet despite promises to come to the help of the Athenians when the winter was over. Once more the Spartans were celebrating a festival, this time the Hyacinthia.*