

(the *agora*), claiming that the Greeks maintained "a special place, marked out, where they meet to cheat one another."

Yet, the Persian emperors were also absolute monarchs who considered themselves the earthly regents of the supreme god Ahura Mazda. Even their satraps were termed "slaves" of the emperor.

### THE FIRST PHASE OF THE PERSIAN WARS, 499–490 B.C.

#### The Ionian Rebellion

In 499 B.C., disgruntled with Persian taxes and puppet dictators, the Ionians rebelled against Persia. The Ionians succeeded in expelling most of the dictators and the small Persian garrisons that kept them in power. Most of the Ionian poleis then replaced the dictatorships with democratic governments. Sympathetic to the Ionian cause for cultural and ideological reasons, and concerned that Persian control of the Hellespont might disrupt vital grain shipments from the north, Athens dispatched twenty warships to the aid of the Ionians. The polis of Eretria, located north of Athens on the island of Euboea, contributed an additional five ships. By contrast, the Spartans refused to send an army to Ionia, fearing that while their army was so far from home, Argos would attack Sparta and incite a helot revolt. In the following year, the Ionians, with Athenian and Eretrian help, burned Sardis. In 494 B.C., Darius put down the Ionian revolt and burned Miletus in revenge. The surviving men of Miletus were deported to Mesopotamia and the city's women and children were enslaved. Nevertheless, in an attempt to mollify the other Ionians, Darius allowed them to maintain their democratic systems, though they still had to follow the orders of the satraps in matters important to the empire.

In 492 B.C., Darius, who had already shown signs of interest in adding Greece to his empire, dispatched a Persian fleet to attack Athens and Eretria in retribution for their aid to the Ionians. The fleet was destroyed by Aegean storms, which drove the Persian ships onto the sharp rocks of Mount Athos. Nevertheless, Mardonius, the fleet's commander, completed the conquest of Thrace and persuaded Macedon to form an alliance with Persia, thereby extending Persian influence into northern Greece.

### PHASE TWO, 490–480 B.C.

Still determined to gain revenge against the Greeks as well as to add Greece to the Persian Empire, Darius sent a second fleet across the Aegean Sea to attack Eretria and Athens in 490 B.C. The Persians captured and burned Eretria and enslaved its citizens through the treachery of some of the city's dis-

sident factions, who opened one of the gates to the enemy. The Eretrians were deported to Persia, where they were held in the village of Ardericca. Their despair was captured on a tombstone: "We who once left behind the loud-roaring swells of the Aegean lie here in the midst of Ecbatana's plain. Farewell famous Eretria, our lost fatherland; farewell Athens, bordering on Euboea; farewell beloved sea. We are Eretrians from Euboea by birth, but we lie here, near Susa—alas!—so far from our country."

#### The Battle of Marathon (490 B.C.)

After sacking Eretria, the Persians executed a flawless landing at Marathon, twenty-five miles northeast of Athens. Persian commanders Datis and Artaphernes selected Marathon as the landing site on the advice of Athens's former dictator Hippias, because it possessed a protected beach and level ground for the Persian cavalry. Hippias also hoped that the Persians might gather aid from his former supporters as they marched toward Athens. (Darius had agreed to make Hippias satrap of Athens once it was conquered.) But the Athenians had no intention of allowing the Persians to march on Athens. They quickly dispatched a force under the command of Miltiades. The Persians were astonished when the outnumbered but more heavily armored Athenians charged their illustrious army. By keeping his center weak, Miltiades fooled the Persians into attacking it, breaking through it, and surging forward. The Persians then found themselves surrounded, after the right and left wings of the Athenians defeated the Persians' weak wings, composed of Ionian subjects, and closed in around them. The Persians fled in a wild panic, leaving behind 6,400 dead, out of a total force of 30,000, while the Athenians lost only 192 out of 10,000 soldiers. The Spartans arrived late from an important religious festival, grunted their approval at the Athenian victory, and returned home.

After the battle, Miltiades ordered Phidipides, who had trained as a long-distance runner, to run from Marathon to Athens and proclaim the victory. According to legend, Phidipides ran the twenty-five miles to Athens, cried, "We have been victorious!", collapsed, and died. In honor of this exploit, the modern Olympic Games instituted the "marathon race."

The Athenians' stunning victory at Marathon punctured the Persian aura of invincibility and gave the Athenians a tremendous sense of self-confidence. The victory convinced the Athenians that their radical experiment in democracy might actually succeed.

The revolt of Egypt against Persia (487–485 B.C.) and the death of Darius (486 B.C.) combined to delay the next, and by far the largest, Persian invasion of Greece. Darius had become so single-minded in his quest for revenge that he had instructed a slave to whisper in his ear three times every night while serving dinner: "Master, remember the Athenians!"

Xerxes I, his successor, initially cared little about vengeance, until his brother-in-law Mardonius, who wished to be satrap of all of Greece, began provoking him to rage over the humiliating defeat at Marathon.

#### **Themistocles (c. 524–459 B.C.)**

Meanwhile, Themistocles, strategos and leader of Athens, made two vital contributions to the Greek victory in the Persian Wars. First, he persuaded the Athenians to allocate new funds for the expansion of the Athenian fleet from 70 to 200 ships. After the mines at Laurium, south of Athens, yielded an unusually large quantity of silver in 483–482 B.C., some Athenian leaders proposed dividing the money among the citizens, since few expected the Persians to return. Themistocles was able to convince the Athenian people to support his alternative proposal to expand the fleet by playing on popular fears of Athens's traditional enemy, Aegina, and by persuading them to accept his interpretation of an important prophecy. When an Athenian delegation had asked the oracle of Delphi for advice on the Persian threat, she had shrieked that they should "flee to the ends of the earth"—by which she had meant that they should leave Greece to the Persians and establish a colony in the western Mediterranean, the ends of the known world. But the stubborn Athenians had refused to leave until Pythia gave them "some better oracle about our country." Pythia had then replied that Athens would be destroyed. But she had added: "Safe shall the wooden wall continue for you and your children. . . . Holy Salamis, you shall destroy the offspring of men." While some Athenians interpreted this prophecy as advising them to huddle behind the "wooden wall" of the Acropolis, Themistocles persuaded most Athenians that the "wooden wall" represented the fleet, an interpretation bolstered by the mention of Salamis, one of Athens's island possessions. Since the priestess had used the term "Holy Salamis," instead of "Cruel Salamis," Themistocles argued that the Athenians were destined to win a major victory there. Themistocles had probably known for a long time that the narrow strait between Salamis and Attica was the ideal location for a battle with the Persian navy. He may even have included a reference to Salamis in his question in order to coax the priestess into answering as he desired. At any rate, the construction of so large a fleet meant that the new Athenian ships had to be manned, in large part, by rowers paid by the state. The lower classes had never before played so large a role in Greek warfare. It was the Athenian fleet, expanded between 483 and 480 B.C., that proved the crucial factor in the Greek victory over the Persians.

Second, Themistocles played a leading role in reconciling many of the quarrelsome cities of Greece and forging them into a confederacy against Persia. In 481–480 B.C., representatives from thirty-one Greek poleis met at

Corinth to formulate defensive plans. The Athenians agreed to grant Sparta command of the confederacy's army and the navy, though Athens was contributing more than half of the Greek fleet. Themistocles understood that this concession was necessary to avoid dangerous squabbling. But Athens and many other poleis strongly objected to the Spartan proposal to station the entire Greek army at the Peloponnesian isthmus, a plan that would have surrendered all of northern and central Greece to the Persians. The Spartans argued that the Persian army so outnumbered the Greek infantry that the Greeks' only hope of victory was to make their stand at a narrow point like the isthmus. But since the other Greeks were unwilling to surrender their homes to the Persians, the Spartans were forced to agree to a compromise plan, which involved keeping most of the army at the isthmus, but stationing a Greek detachment at a mountain pass in northern Greece called Thermopylae.

#### **PHASE THREE, 480–479 B.C.**

The Persian invasion force was the largest ever fielded in Greece, consisting of approximately 200,000 men and 1,000 ships. The empire's motley army consisted of Persians and numerous subject peoples and mercenaries, including Ethiopians, who carried stone weapons and painted themselves red and white before battle, an Arab camel corps, and Iranian horsemen with lassoes. Though Xerxes knew that these subject peoples were less loyal to him than his own Persians were, he considered them useful because they were more expendable and because their outlandish dress and behavior might frighten the enemy. The Greek army was much smaller than the Persian army and the Greek fleet consisted of only about 450 ships.

Starting from Sardis in May 480 B.C., the Persian army marched to the Hellespont. The Persians crossed the turbulent Turkish Straits by lashing ships together to form a bridge. The army had to raise walls on either side of the bridge so that the expedition's animals would not be alarmed at the sight of the sea surrounding them as they crossed. In June, the Persians marched through Thrace, clearing forests to fashion a road for their huge army. In July and August, they crossed Macedon and Thessaly. Meanwhile, Persian emissaries were collecting enough bowls of earth and water from terrified Greeks to hold a mud wrestling contest. Persian custom required a surrendering nation to present a bowl of earth and a bowl of water to the imperial messenger to symbolize Persian control of the surrendering nation's land and water. Every polis except Athens and Sparta obliged the Persians in this manner. The Athenians threw their messenger into a pit and told him to collect his own earth; the Spartans threw theirs into a well and told him to collect his own water.

### The Battle of Thermopylae

At its narrowest, the mountain pass at Thermopylae is only fifty feet wide, making it a perfect defensive position for a small number of men. The Persians would not be able to use their overwhelming numerical superiority to advantage by surrounding the Greeks, since they could only fit a certain number onto the battlefield at a given time. Nor would so small an area allow the Persians to take advantage of their superiority in cavalry and archery. (According to Herodotus, Persians were taught only "to ride, to shoot, and to tell the truth.") A mere 7,000 Greeks, led by King Leonidas I and his 300 Spartans, awaited the massive Persian army in the August heat. Leonidas had ascended one of the two Spartan thrones after his half-brother King Cleomenes had lost his mind and begun beating respected aristocrats with his walking stick. (While imprisoned for his insanity, Cleomenes had died a mysterious death, which the Spartans called suicide.) Leonidas's army at Thermopylae was supposed to have been larger than it was, but most of his troops arrived late from the Olympics.

When Xerxes' scouts reported that the Spartan soldiers were lounging around and combing their hair, the Persian king laughed at their effeminacy. But Demaratus, a former Spartan king who had been deposed through the conspiracy of his colleague Cleomenes and had taken refuge in Persia, told Xerxes that he should not laugh. The Spartans always took care to groom themselves before a battle because they were prepared to die and wished to look good when they did so. Xerxes was hardly impressed. He could not believe that anyone would dare to oppose his massive army, particularly the Greeks, who lacked kings to instill a proper fear and obedience in their soldiers. But Demaratus shrewdly identified the source of Greek power and discipline: "They are free, but not completely free; for law is their master, and they fear it more than your men fear you. They do whatever it commands, and it always commands the same thing: they must never flee from battle, no matter how many are their enemies; they are to hold their ground, and there they are required either to conquer or die." Indeed, there was not a single major battle in which a defeated Greek general survived. When a Spartan soldier reported the rumor that the Persians were so numerous their arrows blocked out the sun, Leonidas remarked: "How pleasant then, if we're going to fight them in the shade."

Amazed that so small a detachment would dare to resist his massive army, Xerxes ordered his men to *capture* the Greek army. But the Spartans, fighting at the front of the Greek line, repelled three charges, sending the Persian lines crashing backwards each time. Jumping up and down in frustration, Xerxes then called on his elite corps, "the Immortals," to attack the Greek line. Handicapped by the shorter length of their spears, most of the Immortals died. On the third day of the battle, however, a

Greek named Ephialtes showed the Persians a secret pass that led behind the Greek army. Once a Persian detachment had gotten behind him, Leonidas realized that his army would be encircled and slaughtered. He ordered all but his 300 Spartans to retreat. Seven hundred Thespians remained with the Spartans, refusing to leave. Leonidas instructed the remaining 1,000 Greeks to eat breakfast in expectation of dinner in Hades.

Although the Spartans and Thespians fought well, driving some of the Persians into the sea and killing two of Xerxes' younger brothers, all but two of the Spartans and most of the Thespians were slain. The two surviving Spartans were so disgraced they later committed suicide. One of them, who was blind, was called a coward for requesting and receiving permission to retreat because of his disability. The Spartans claimed that a soldier did not require sight where the fighting was close and the enemy provided so many targets. At any rate, the infuriated Persians decapitated Leonidas's corpse and placed his head on a stake.

Why did Leonidas choose to die at Thermopylae? First, someone had to cover the retreat of the rest of the army. Second, the oracle of Delphi had prophesied that the Persians would either destroy Sparta or kill a Spartan king. Knowing this, Leonidas was prepared to sacrifice his life for his city. Fully conscious of the perilous nature of his assignment, he had brought with him to Thermopylae only those Spartans who possessed living sons, so that their family lines would continue if they died. After the war, a monument honoring the Spartan dead was erected at Thermopylae. On that monument was inscribed the famous epitaph: "O stranger, go and tell the Spartans that we lie here, obedient to their commands."

The Persians lost 20,000 men to the Greeks' 4,000 in the Battle of Thermopylae. Xerxes' clumsy attempt to hide this fact from his own men—by having 19,000 of the Persian casualties secretly buried in a poorly camouflaged pit—fooled no one. Persian morale was badly damaged, and Xerxes grew suspicious of his contingent of Ionians. Hoping to encourage such suspicion, Themistocles had scrawled Greek messages to them on the rocks. The Battle of Thermopylae inspired the Greeks and became an enduring symbol of courage in a seemingly hopeless cause. To cite just one example, Texans at the Alamo remembered Thermopylae. The battle also provided the Greeks with the time required to inflict a serious naval defeat on the Persians at Artemisium, which, in turn, made possible the crucial victory at Salamis.

### The Battle of Artemisium

At roughly the same time as the Battle of Thermopylae, the Greek fleet, under the Spartan Eurybiades, waged a fierce battle against the Persian fleet nearby at Artemisium. The Persians had already lost 200 of their 1,000

ships merely advancing across the notoriously stormy Aegean Sea. According to Herodotus, a Greek named Ameinocles acquired great wealth from the Persian goblets that washed up on his beachfront property.

Many Greeks wanted to leave Artemisium, so as not to risk the 271 ships stationed there against the remaining 800 Persian ships. But Themistocles bribed Eurybiades and another leading general to insist that the fleet stand and fight. The Persians then made a fatal error. They were so certain of victory that they detached 100 ships from the fleet for the sole purpose of capturing any Greek ships that attempted to escape. Learning of this tactic, the Greeks decided on a surprise attack on the main Persian fleet. The battle itself, fought intermittently for three days, was indecisive: both the Greeks and the Persians lost 100 ships. But the Persian detachment of 100 ships whose task was to prevent a Greek escape was utterly destroyed by a storm. Nevertheless, the defeat of the army at Thermopylae forced the Greek fleet to retreat southward to Salamis.

### The Destruction of Athens

The Persian army then marched into southern Greece. Xerxes' soldiers found few people in Athens, which had been largely evacuated. The women and children had fled to Troezen in the Peloponnesus, and nearly all of the men had joined the fleet at Salamis. The rest of the men refused to leave the city, still insisting that Pythia's "wooden wall" was the wall that encircled the Acropolis. Unfortunately, that wooden wall became a blazing wall after the Persians pounded it with flaming arrows. Still, the feisty Athenians refused to surrender. They extinguished the fires and rolled boulders down on the Persians. But when the Persians found a temple outside of the Acropolis close enough to allow a steep climb over the wall, the situation became hopeless for the Athenians. Some committed suicide, while others were killed. Reveling in their revenge, the Persians burned Athens to the ground. Xerxes dispatched a messenger to Persia to announce the long-sought victory. The Athenians later buried the remnants of these temples, now considered defiled, and rebuilt from scratch. Happily for historians, burial preserved a great deal of early Athenian architecture and sculpture.

### The Battle of Salamis (480 B.C.)

The Greek naval commanders at Salamis voted to sail for the isthmus to support the army, which was building a wall across it in preparation for the Persians. But Themistocles realized that if the commanders were allowed to sail away, each would make a panic-stricken dash for his own polis, and Greece would be enslaved. Even if the commanders sailed for

the isthmus, they would find themselves fighting the Persians in the open sea, where the Persians could exploit their greater numbers and maneuverability. Therefore, Themistocles persuaded Eurybiades, this time without a bribe, to call a second council meeting. There, Themistocles noted the wisdom of facing the Persians in the narrow strait of Salamis. When Adeimantus of Corinth rebuked Themistocles for speaking, since he no longer had a polis to represent now that Athens lay in ruins, Themistocles retorted that Athens had a greater polis than Corinth, since, with its ships and soldiers, it could take any polis it desired. Finally, Themistocles warned that if the Greek fleet did not remain and fight at Salamis, the Athenians would immigrate to Siris in Italy. Without the Athenian fleet, Greece would surely fall to the Persians. Themistocles' threat persuaded the other captains to remain at Salamis for a while.

But soon the Peloponnesian captains, fearful of being cut off from their homes, began to agitate for a third council meeting. In fact, it appeared that these captains might even sail away without permission. To prevent their flight, Themistocles dispatched a trusted slave to tell Xerxes that he wished to defect to the Persian side and that the Persians should encircle Salamis to keep the Greek fleet from escaping. His message also exaggerated the degree of disunity within the Greek camp, implying an easy Persian victory.

Xerxes swallowed the bait. When the news that Xerxes had surrounded Salamis reached the Greek captains, they were left with no choice but to stand and fight.

Although outnumbered by 600 to 370 ships, the Greeks possessed two significant advantages that help explain their victory in the Battle of Salamis. First, the narrowness of the strait, only one mile in width, prevented the Persians from using their greater numbers and maneuverability to surround the Greeks and allowed the Greeks to use their battering rams to great effect. Second, the Greeks were more highly motivated than the Persians. While the Greeks were fighting for their families, their poleis, and their liberty, the conscripted Phoenician, Egyptian, and Ionian sailors who formed the bulk of the Persian navy would benefit little from the conquest of Greece. This is what Herodotus meant when he wrote, "Free men fight better than slaves."

The battle proceeded disastrously for the Persians. On the frequent occasions when the Persian captains were forced to retreat, they found it impossible, since the waters behind them were crowded with other Persian ships. Trapped, the Persian vessels were rammed by the Greek triremes. The Persian ships sank, and their crews, floundering in long robes, generally drowned. In one instance, the brilliant Queen Artemisia of Caria (south of Ionia), in a desperate attempt to escape an Athenian battering ram, bore down on a Persian ship blocking her retreat and sank it. This act

of "friendly fire" by the queen, who commanded five ships in the battle, actually redounded to her benefit, since none of the crew of the ill-fated ship survived. Assuming that Artemisia had defected from the Persians, the captain of the Athenian ship who had been chasing her broke off his pursuit, and Xerxes, who assumed that the ship she had sunk must have been Athenian, heaped praise on her. In fact, overwhelmed by frustration and anger at the looming disaster, Xerxes, who was watching the battle from a throne erected on an Attic hill, declared: "My men have behaved like women, my women like men!" Later, the Athenians, who were among the most chauvinistic of Greeks, offered a 10,000 drachma reward for Artemisia's capture, since, as Herodotus put it, "there was great indignation felt that a woman should appear in arms against Athens."

Because the Battle of Salamis determined the outcome of the Persian Wars, which determined the fate of Western civilization, it must rank as one of the most significant battles in history. The Greeks sank more than 200 Persian ships, killing as many as 40,000 Persians, including another of Xerxes' brothers, while the Greeks lost only 40 ships. Essential to furnishing the massive Persian army with food and other vital supplies and to maintaining communications with the Persian Empire, the Persian fleet had been routed. Xerxes issued a frantic order for his remaining ships to retreat to Persia.

### Mardonius's Final Offensive

Fearful of what might happen to him, since he had been the one who had urged Xerxes to invade Greece, Mardonius begged Xerxes to allow him to remain in Greece with a large detachment. Xerxes agreed. After wintering in Thessaly, Mardonius prepared to resume hostilities in the spring of 479 B.C.

Mardonius dispatched the king of Macedon, an old friend of Athens, to persuade the Athenians to form an alliance with the Persians. Alarmed, the Spartans sent their own envoys to Athens to convince the Athenians to reject the Persian offer. The Macedonian king reported that Xerxes would give the Athenians whatever land in Greece they desired and would rebuild their city if the Athenians joined him. On the other hand, if the Athenians did not form an alliance with the Persians, they could expect the Persians to single them out for further reprisals. The Spartans then appealed to the Athenians' reputation as a freedom-loving people and to the common bonds of Greek culture. Finally, the Spartans offered to help feed Athens, since Xerxes had destroyed the harvest, and even promised to give the Athenians a new home in the Peloponnesus, which could be better defended against future Persian attacks.

According to Herodotus, the Athenians replied to the Macedonian king:

We know as well as you that the power of the Mede is many times greater than our own. We did not need to have *that* cast in our teeth. Nevertheless,

we cling so to freedom that we shall offer what resistance we may. Tell Mardonius this: "So long as the sun keeps his present course, we will never join alliance with Xerxes." Nay, we shall oppose him unceasingly, trusting in the aid of those gods and heroes whom he has lightly esteemed, whose houses and whose images he has burnt with fire. And come not again to us with words like these; nor, thinking to do us a service, persuade us to unholy actions. You are the guest and friend of our nation; we would not have you receive hurt at our hands.

To the Spartans, the Athenians replied:

It was natural no doubt that the Lacedaemonians should be afraid that we might make terms with the barbarians. But, nonetheless, it was a base fear in men who knew so well of what temper and spirit we are. Not all the gold that the whole earth contains, not the fairest and most fertile lands, would bribe us to take part with the Medes and help them to enslave Greece. Even could we have brought ourselves to do such a thing, there are many very powerful motives that would now make it impossible. The first and chief of these is the burning and destruction of our temples and the images of our gods. . . . Again, there is our common brotherhood with the Greeks, our common ancestry and language, the altars and sacrifices of which we all partake, the common character we bear. . . . Know then . . . that while one Athenian remains alive we will never join alliance with Xerxes. We thank you, however, for your forethought on our behalf and for your wish to give our families sustenance, now that ruin has befallen us . . . but, for ourselves, we will endure as we may, and not be burdensome to you.

In the spring of 479 B.C., Mardonius again occupied and destroyed Athens. Still, the Athenians refused an offer of alliance, even killing one of their own councilors who dared propose its consideration.

### The Battles of Plataea and Mycale (479 B.C.)

The Athenian rejection of Xerxes' offer of alliance made another battle inevitable. This final battle was fought at Plataea, on the spurs of Mount Cithaeron, where the ground was impassable for the Persian cavalry. Under the leadership of the Spartan Pausanias, Leonidas's nephew, a large Greek army faced off against an even larger Persian army. Each Greek soldier swore an oath before the battle: "I shall fight to the death, and I shall not count my life more valuable than freedom." After withstanding a fierce assault by Persian archers, the Spartans charged the Persian center. Mardonius was killed, along with 50,000 of his troops. The Persians fled in panic, nearly all of them slaughtered in their retreat from Greece. Pausanias then ordered that the lavish dinner the Persians had prepared beforehand be served to his own staff, exclaiming: "By the gods, with food like this what greedy characters the Persians were to chase after our

barley-bread!" The same day a Greek fleet of 110 ships, under Latychidas of Sparta and Xanthippus of Athens, attacked remnants of the Persian fleet beached at Mycale off the coast of Asia Minor. Fighting off the Persian marines, the Greeks torched the fleet.

The poet Simonides composed two of the greatest epitaphs in history for those who died in defense of Greek liberty at Plataea. For the Athenian dead he wrote: "Hastening to ensure the freedom of Greece, we lie here, enjoying ageless glory." And for the Spartan dead: "Though they have died, they have not died, for their courage raises them in glory from the rooms of Hades."

### Exile and Death

But Themistocles was not able to enjoy the glory of his victory for long. In 471 B.C., his rivals succeeded in having him ostracized. Themistocles complained that the Athenians treated him like a plane-tree: when it was stormy they ran under his branches for shelter, but as soon as the storm cleared, they plucked his leaves and lopped off his branches. On another occasion he used a more pungent analogy to convey the fickleness of the Athenian people toward himself, saying, "I do not admire the sort of men who use the same vessel as a wine pitcher and a chamber pot."

Themistocles lived in Argos for several years, until called back to Athens to stand trial on the ridiculous charge of plotting treason against Athens with Persia. The accusation was not only the work of Themistocles' rivals in Athens, but also of the Spartans, who may have feared his presence in Argos, Sparta's traditional enemy. The Spartans pressed Athens to force Themistocles to stand trial before a general Greek congress, which the Spartans dominated, rather than before an Athenian jury.

Realizing that he could not prevail in such a trial, Themistocles made his way to Persia, ironically the only secure place of refuge from his Greek enemies. The shrewd Athenian learned the Persian language within a year and acquired influence at the court of Artaxerxes, Xerxes' son, who had assumed the throne following his father's assassination in 465 B.C. Thrilled to have in his custody the Athenian who had inflicted so great a defeat on Persia, Artaxerxes gave Themistocles three cities in Asia Minor, including Magnesia, where Themistocles died around 459 B.C.

### The Legacy of Themistocles

Unquestionably, Themistocles was arrogant, unscrupulous, and greedy. After the war, he attempted to enrich himself by using the threat of the Athenian fleet to extort money from various poleis. Nevertheless, it is equally certain that Themistocles contributed more than anyone else to

the Greek victory in the Persian Wars. When all of the Greek commanders met after the war to determine who had contributed the most to victory, each commander voted for himself first and Themistocles second.

The victories of the Persian Wars gave the Athenians a strong sense of pride and confidence. In the eyes of the Athenians, Athens had given up its rightful command of the Greek fleet, had rejected the tempting offer of a Persian alliance, and had twice suffered the terrible vengeance of Xerxes, all for the sake of Greek freedom. Athens's participatory democracy had weathered great storms, and by demanding much of its citizens, had produced great men. Interpreting the outcome of the Persian Wars as the victory of democracy over monarchy, Athenians began to perceive their system of government as the source of their strength and became determined to expand the power of the majority even further.

The victory of the tiny Greek republics over the seemingly invincible Persian Empire inspired countless republicans across the centuries—most notably American revolutionaries over two millennia later, when they too took up a seemingly hopeless struggle against the greatest empire of their day. The Founding Fathers read with admiration Herodotus's *Histories* and Plutarch's life of Themistocles. They accepted without reservation Herodotus's conclusion as to the source of the Greek victory over the Persians: "Free men fight better than slaves." This insight inspired the founders to believe that they could defeat the British and secure American independence at a time when few objective observers shared that opinion. After the Coercive (or Intolerable) Acts were passed in 1774, John Adams expressed a common view: "The Grecian Commonwealths were the most heroic Confederacy that ever existed. . . . The Period of their glory was from the Defeat of Xerxes to the Rise of Alexander. Let Us not be enslaved, my dear Friend, Either by Xerxes or Alexander." When Thomas Jefferson wished to compliment Adams, a staunch supporter of a strong American navy, he compared Adams with Themistocles, whose success in building the Athenian fleet had secured victory for Greece in the Persian Wars.