# Marathon 490 BC

## The first Persian invasion of Greece

Nicholas Sekunda · Illustrated by Richard Hook

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## Artist's note

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## Acknowledgements

## KEY TO MILITARY SYMBOLS

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THRACE

MACEDONIA

Thasos

Mt Athos

Lemnos

PHRYGIA

Tenedos

AEGEAN SEA

Lesbos

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LYDIA

Thebes

Plataea

Peiraieus

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Andros

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Ikaria

Miletus

Tenos

CARIA

Mykonos

Lade
494 BC

Halicarnassus

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Psthenea

Paros

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N

SEA OF CRETE

Crete

# ORIGINS OF THE CAMPAIGN

The Persians attempted to invade mainland Greece twice – once in 490 and again in 480–479. These are conventionally called the First and Second Persian Wars. These terms are not entirely satisfactory, as they betray a Greek- and European-centred perspective. I would prefer to use the terms First and Second Persian invasions of Greece. The key battle of the first campaign was Marathon. Its strategic effect was limited, for it did nothing to prevent the second invasion which came a decade later. The moral effect was enormous. It was the first time a Greek army had successfully faced the Persian enemy and demonstrated the superiority of hoplite tactics and equipment.

### Tyranny and democracy at Athens

At the time of Marathon, Athens had only recently emerged as a democracy from nearly half a century of government under the Peisistratid dynasty of 'tyrants'. The Greek definition of a tyrant does not have the connotations of modern usage. An absolute ruler, be he good or bad, who had established his rule through force was a tyrant, as opposed to a king, who ruled in accordance with natural custom.

Peisistratos first made himself tyrant around 561BC. His enemies succeeded in expelling him, but he returned in 546. Landing at Marathon, he defeated his enemies at Pallene and re-took Athens. After the death of Peisistratos from disease in 527 the tyranny was assumed by his two sons Hippias and Hipparchos. Conditions worsened as foreign dependencies were lost with the advance of Persia. In 514 Hipparchos was assassinated



The evidence from literary sources can to some extent be supplemented by representational evidence. The richest source is the 'Oxford Brygos cup', so-called because the potter Brygos has left his name painted on one of the handles. Although the date of production of the vase cannot be established with complete certainty, it seems likely to refer to the battle of Marathon.

by the 'tyrant-slayers' Harmodios and Aristogeiton. Hippias became increasingly apprehensive, and made an alliance to strengthen his position – giving his daughter away in marriage to Aiantides the son of Hippokles tyrant of Lampsakos, who had great influence with King Darius. Three years later Hippias was deposed by an invasion of the Lakedaimonian King Kleomenes and fled under truce to Sigeion, from there to Lampsakos, and then to the court of Darius. He had to wait a further 20 years before he returned to Attica, by then an old man, accompanied by a Persian army. Athens became a democracy and a new constitution was introduced by Kleisthenes in 508/07.

### The Ionian Revolt, 499–494BC

The Persian Empire had reached the Aegean in 547BC and the local Greek cities had a new set of masters. During the reigns of Cyrus and Cambyses Persian imperial expansion was largely directed elsewhere, and it was only after Darius came to the throne in 521 that Persia again looked to the west. Darius left Susa to start a campaign against Scythia. He crossed the Bosphorus, and then the Danube, on bridges of boats. Darius was forced to retreat, spent the next year in Sardis and then returned to Susa, leaving his brother Artaphernes as satrap in Sardis. His generals Megabazos and then Otanes continued the gradual pacification of Europe south of Scythia.

In 508, increasingly threatened by pressure from Sparta, Athenian envoys entered negotiations with Artaphernes at Sardis. When the satrap

Detail from the Great Relief of Darius from Behistun in Iran, carved about 30 years before Marathon, when Darius first seized the throne. The king, holding a bow, stands at his natural height of 5ft 10ins. Behind him stands the commander of the Spearbearers, Gobryas, the second man in the Empire. (Photo: Claus Breede, West Asian Department, Royal Ontario Museum)

demanded earth and water the Athenian envoys obliged (Hdt. 5.73). We do not fully understand what these symbolic gifts represented in Achaemenid diplomacy: alliance, submission, hospitality? The Athenian envoys possibly misunderstood the depth of the obligations they had entered into, and their actions were later disavowed by the Athenian assembly. In 505 Hippias turned up at Sardis and Artaphernes ordered the Athenians to take him back (Hdt. 5.96). The Athenians refused and relations between Athens and the Persians deteriorated.

This is why Athens became involved in the Ionian Revolt, which brought about the first Persian invasion of Greece. The Ionian Revolt was led by Aristagoras tyrant of Miletus. Aristagoras sought support for the revolt in the states of mainland Greece. King Kleomenes of Sparta refused aid, as he was reluctant to become involved in a largely naval campaign. However, the Athenians agreed to send 20 triremes to help the Ionians, tempted by the prospect of plentiful booty. They were supported by 5 triremes sent by the Eretrians.

The fleet landed at Ephesus in 499, supported by Ionian and Milesian triremes. The expeditionary force marched on Sardis, the Persian administrative centre for their westernmost provinces, and occupied it, whereupon Artaphernes retired to the citadel. An isolated fire started by a Greek soldier spread and burnt the city to the ground with considerable loss of civilian life. The Athenians sailed home with no booty. Herodotus (5.101) does not convey the outrage the Persians surely felt over the incident. A campaign of revenge on the Athenians and Eretrians was now inevitable.

The Ionian revolt was only suppressed following a decisive Persian naval victory at Lade in 494 and the destruction of the city of Miletus. The Persian fleet sailed along the eastern coast of the Aegean Sea, subduing, in turn, the islands of Chios, Lesbos and Tenedos, which it reached in 493. In the following year, 492, a large Persian force under Mardonios invaded Macedonia. Herodotus (6.43.4) believed that their ultimate goal was Athens and Eretria. The expedition was a combined land and naval operation, but was called off when half the fleet was lost in a storm off Mount Athos.

Darius sent heralds to the states of Greece in 491 (or possibly 492), demanding earth and water. The states reacted differently. Most of the islands and many mainland cities complied with the Persian request. The Athenians, says Herodotus (7.133), threw the envoys into a chasm, the *barathron*, used for executing serious criminals. It was Miltiades, says Pausanias (3.12.7), who was responsible for their death. The envoys sent to Sparta were thrown into a well 'to collect their own earth and water'. Here too, their murder was probably designed to unify the citizens against Persia by complicity in the crime (Sealey 18). Darius ordered the construction of warships and horse-transports (Hdt. 6.48-9) and prepared for war.

# OPPOSING COMMANDERS

## ATHENIAN COMMANDERS

The command structure of the Athenian army was constantly evolving during the first half of the 5th century. Its precise form in 490 is not fully understood.

The leader of the army, according to Aristotle's *Athenian Constitution*, was one of the three traditional principal magistrates or *archons* called the Polemarch (22.2). This office, he says (3.2), had come into being 'because some of the kings were not good soldiers'. According to Herodotus (6.109.2) at the time of Marathon the Polemarch was selected by lot rather than elected, although Aristotle (22.5) says that selection of the archons by lot was introduced only in 487/86. Aristotle is probably correct. After this date the role of the Polemarch diminished and he was soon relegated primarily to religious functions necessary for the army.

At the time of Marathon the Polemarch still had many duties aside from his religious functions. He led the army as it marched out of the city and took up the post of honour on the extreme right wing of the battle line. It is possible that, contrary to the impression created by Herodotus, the Polemarch still retained overall command over the board of *strategoi*. Herodotus may have deliberately sought to emphasize the role Miltiades played in the battle and minimize the role of Kallimachos.

The Athenian army had been restructured into ten tribal regiments of hoplites in 508/507. The command structure was reformed in 501/500 to conform with this change. From that date on, ten generals (*strategoi*) were elected, one from each tribe. In the later 5th century the strategoi became separated from command of the tribal regiments, and one of the ten was appointed as overall commander of any particular expeditionary force. At Marathon their primary role was still as commanders of the ten tribal regiments. They also met as a board of generals to take common command decisions.

**Kallimachos of Aphidna** held the post of Polemarch at Marathon. A monument from the Athenian Acropolis, destroyed in the later Persian sack of 480/79, appears to have been dedicated during his year of office. It consisted of a tall column supporting a winged female figure, either Iris (the female messenger of the gods) or Nike (the goddess of victory). The inscription is only partly preserved, but well enough to identify a Polemarch from Aphidna who fought bravely in battle.

This inscription helps us understand the role of Kallimachos in 490. According to one restoration of the inscription (see illustrations) Kallimachos had been victorious in the Panathenaic Games of 490



Fragment of a pot from Eleusis (1223) painted by Euthymides showing Iris, the rainbow, the fleeting but brilliant phenomenon in the sky, which vanishes as quickly as it appears, the swift messenger of the gods. She is identified by her wings and her messenger's wand or *kerykeion*. Though painted two decades before Marathon, it shows her popularity in late Archaic Athens, and gives an idea of the appearance of the crowning element of the Kallimachos Monument. (*Hesperia* 5, p.66, fig. 5)
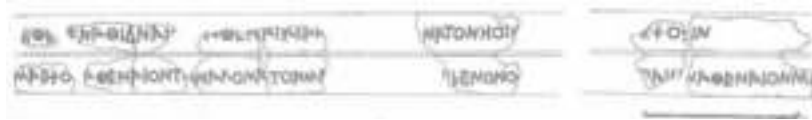
[Kallimachos] of Aphidn[a ded]icated [me] to Athena:
I am the mess[enger of the imm]ortals who have [their thrones on] O[lympos],
[because he was victorious, when he was Pole]march, in the festival of the Athenians.
And fighting mo[st bravely] of them all he won [fairest renown]
for Athenian men-at-arms and a mem[orial of his own valour].

before the battle was fought. The festival was celebrated on the 28th day of the month *Hekatombaion*, eight days or so before news of the Persian landing arrived at Athens. It may be that his victory was believed to have brought luck to the whole army. Other restorations of the inscription are possible. In one of them Kallimachos vows to erect the monument if he was victorious, apparently after making a personal vow to Iris.

One thing is certain. The column was an impressive monument erected by the Athenians to the honour of Kallimachos. It was sited on the Acropolis, overlooking the city, and was constructed shortly after the battle. At the same time Miltiades was dying in prison, fined 50 talents for deceiving the Athenian people. The picture we have of the relative roles played by Kallimachos and Miltiades may have been seriously distorted by the propaganda campaign mounted by Miltiades' son Kimon in the 460s to glorify the memory of his father. The monument is testimony in stone to the fact that the Athenians of 490 thought that Kallimachos had fought most bravely 'of them all', and he rather than Militiades had been the hero of the battle.

**Miltiades** was born in the late 550s, son of Kimon of the noble Philaid family, early opponents of the Peisistratid tyranny. Kimon left Athens and his brother, also Miltiades, established himself as ruler of the

The shaft of the Kallimachos monument (*IG* i$^2$ 609; Athens, Epigraphic Museum 6339) has been reassembled from the debris of the Persian sack of 480/79. The difficulties of reading the inscription (drawing Helen Besi) are evident. The translation is of the restoration proposed by Harrison. The two surviving fragments of the female figure from the top (Athens, Epigraphic Museum 690) pose considerable problems of identification. Most favour Iris, but Harrison prefers Nike. The reference to 'the messenger of the immortals' suggests Iris. Reconstruction drawing after P. Lemerle *Bulletin de Correspondance Hellenique* 58 (1938) 443.

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Thracian Chersonese along with a group of Athenian colonists. During his second period of rule, Peisistratos had succeeded in reconciling some of the noble families opposed to him, including the Philaids. Kimon returned to Athens, but lost his life in the power struggle following Peisistratos' death.

Kimon's son Miltiades continued to enjoy favour. He was appointed archon for the year 524/23, and about this time he married for the first time, possibly to a relative of Hippias. Around 516 Hippias sent Miltiades to rule in the Thracian Chersonese. This followed the death of Miltiades' brother, Stesagoras, who had earlier succeeded his childless uncle, the elder Miltiades.

Relations with Hippias became increasingly strained. Miltiades possibly divorced his first wife when Hippias gave his daughter away to Aiantides of Lampsakos. Lampsakos, on the opposite side of the Hellespont, was the arch-rival of the Thracian Chersonese. He took as his second wife Hegesipyle, daughter of the Thracian king Oloros. His son and heir Kimon was born about 510. Miltiades was obliged to seek an accommodation with the Persians, and accompanied Darius as a subject on his Scythian Campaign. Miltiades was left with the other Ionian commanders at the bridge of boats over the Danube. He later claimed to have recommended that the Greeks break up the bridge, leaving Darius stranded in Scythia, but this could be a later fabrication aimed at improving his image in Athens.

Miltiades became increasingly insecure. He sought rapprochement with the new democratic government in Athens and co-operated with the Athenians in seizing the island of Lemnos (possibly in 499). In 493, after the collapse of the Ionian Revolt, when the Persian fleet reached Tenedos, Miltiades fled for Athens. He succeeded in surviving a trial for tyranny, and re-entered Athenian political life. Metiochos, his son by his first marriage, was captured by the Phoenician fleet and never returned to Athens, but was granted a Persian wife and lands by Darius. The Persian kings liked to collect Greek noble exiles who could be put to work for them in the future.

Miltiades would have been in his early 60s when the battle of Marathon was fought. He had lived only a year or two in the new democratic Athens. It would be wrong to see him as a passionate defender either of liberty or democracy, as many ancient authors imply. Miltiades had no choice but to return and fight for Athens.

There are good reasons for thinking that the role Miltiades played in the victory is exaggerated in our sources at the expense of Kallimachos. Nevertheless, his service alongside the Persians in the Scythian campaign must have given insights into Persian methods of operation that were invaluable to the Athenians. Much of the credit for the Athenian victory must be due to the courage and determination of Miltiades, to save his own skin if nothing else.

**Arimnestos** commanded the Plataean contingent at Marathon. After the battle the Plataeans built a temple to Athena Areia 'the Warlike' in Plataea with their share of the spoils of the battle. At the feet of the cult
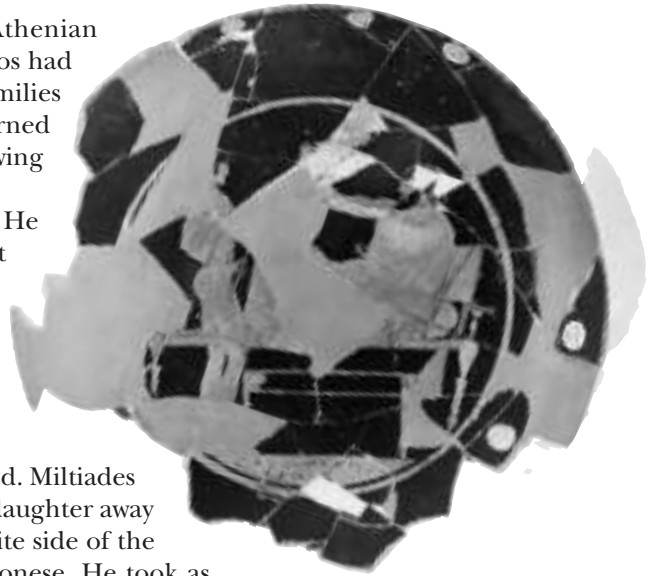


ABOVE **The inside of this cup, painted by Douris c. 490, shows a reclining adult and a youth. The painted inscription reads 'Kallimachos is fair'. The adult possibly represents Kallimachos of Aphidna, whose age is unknown, but more likely the recipient of this cup was a younger man of the same name, perhaps a relative. It is generally believed that inscriptions of this type have a homosexual context. (Paris, Louvre C 10907)**

statue was a portrait of Arimnestos, who, according to Pausanias (9.4.2), commanded the Plataeans at the battle of Marathon and also at Plataea 11 years later. The fact that the same person held command in both crucial campaigns surely attests to the decisive role of Arimnestos in the politics of the small state. He may have been instrumental in the brave decision of this tiny city to stand by their Athenian allies. Many historians (Lazenby 10–11) believe he is the direct source for Herodotus' account (9.72) of the death of Kallikrates the Lakedaimonian at the battle of Plataea. It is possible that he also supplied Herodotus with information on Marathon.

## PERSIAN COMMANDERS

The satrap was the king's representative in each satrapy, or province, of the Persian Empire. The key satrap of western Anatolia was **Artaphernes the Elder**, who was based at Sardis. It was Persian practice to separate military from administrative functions in the same area, though one individual could be both satrap in one region and military commander

ABOVE **Remains of one of a number of statues from the Acropolis (606), destroyed by the Persians in 480, showing young Athenian aristocrats mounted**

TOP, LEFT **Attic plate (Oxford, Ashmolean Museum 310) by Paseas, about 515BC showing a youth, not yet wearing a beard as all adults did at this time, dressed and equipped as a Scythian mounted archer, and inscribed 'Miltiades is beautiful'. Wade-Gery (*Journal of Hellenic Studies* 1951) suggested it may show an equestrian statue of the young Miltiades dedicated earlier on the Acropolis, but the inscription probably refers to a younger relative of the general.**



LEFT **Corroded fragment of the left cheek-piece of a Corinthian helmet found in the sanctuary of Nemesis at Rhamnous. The inscription on the whole helmet (drawing K. Eliaki) states that 'The Rhamnousians dedicated [this, taken] on Lemnos, to Nemesis' as booty from Miltiades' expedition to Lemnos c. 499. It was dedicated by the deme-contigent from Rhamnous. (Archaeological Society at Athens)**
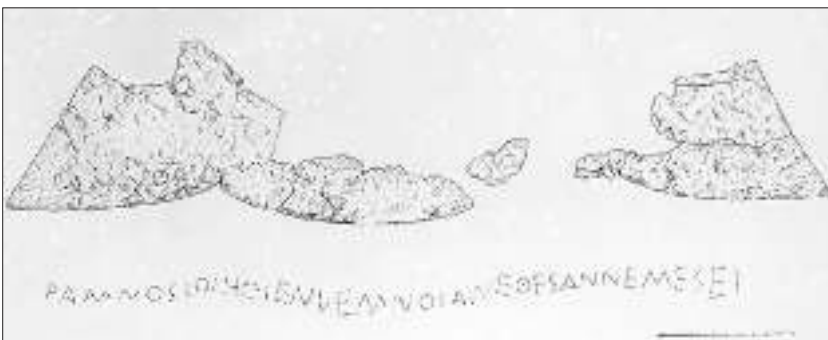
Fragment of a helmet dedicated on the Acropolis. The punch-dots preserve a few letters of an inscription (*IG* i, 453) which suggest that it had also been captured at Lemnos. Like most booty, this helmet was hammered onto the wooden beams of a temple: note the nail-hole bottom right. (Athens, National Museum 7322)

in another. Artaphernes, although responsible for security within his own satrapy, did not take command of the expedition. Nor did **King Darius** take personal command of the expedition. He had now been ruling for more than three decades. We do not know his age precisely, but he was to die shortly after the campaign in 486.

**Datis** was appointed to supreme command of the 490 invasion force in place of Mardonios, after the expedition in the northern Aegean had met with such ill-fortune in 493 (Hdt. 6.94). Very little is known about Datis. Both Herodotus (6.94) and Diodorus (10.27) state he was 'of Median race', but this may be a Greek misunderstanding of the Achaemenid practice of naming eminent Persians after the provinces they governed. In his *Moralia* (305B) Plutarch says that Datis was a satrap, information repeated in Suidas (*Hippias*). It seems probable that Datis was a Persian, holding the office of satrap of Media in parallel with a field command.

Datis is perhaps mentioned in a tablet from Persepolis written in Elamite (Lewis):

'7 *marris* beer Datiya received as rations. He carried a sealed document of the King. He went forth from Sardis (via) express (service), went to the King at Persepolis. 11th month, year 27. (At) Hidali.'

It is possible that 'Datiya' is the Datis of Greek texts. Few individuals mentioned in the Persepolis ration documents are issued with a ration as large as 70 quarts of wine or beer to distribute among their entourage, which means that Datiya was an extremely important official of the Empire. The tablet was issued between 17 January and 15 February 494 at Hidali, only three stations on the road from Persepolis. The date falls within the winter preceding the final campaign of the Ionian Revolt. He is travelling on the authorization of the king. Journeys were normally authorized at their point of origin, and so 'Datiya' would have been returning from a journey to Sardis on the orders of Darius. This could have been a tour of inspection and co-ordination for the final campaign. Datiya (Datis?) may therefore have held an earlier command in the west.
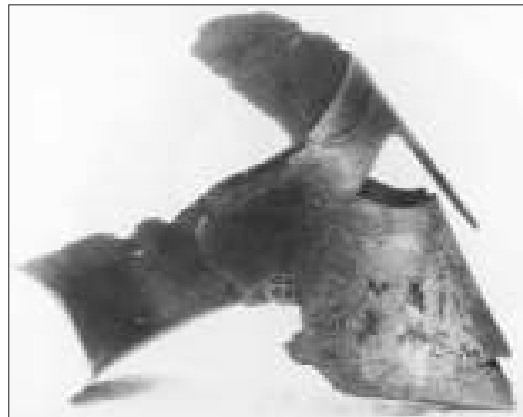
A relatively complete Corinthian helmet discovered during excavations at Olympia and published by Emil Kunze, *Festschrift C. Weikert* (Berlin 1955) 9–11. The inscription states it was captured on Lemnos and dedicated by the Athenians. (Athens, National Museum 15189)

Bringing these few scraps of information together, it seems that Datis was overall commander of all Persian forces in the West, superior in rank to all local satraps and other generals appointed by the king, perhaps both during the closing stages of the Ionian Revolt and throughout the Marathon campaign. Perhaps his title was 'Leader of the Hosts' – *kara-naya*.

**Artaphernes the Younger** is the only other Persian commander mentioned at Marathon. Herodotus (6.94-5) merely states that Datis and Artaphernes commanded the expedition, that they left the King's presence and went to Cilicia and took over the fleet assigned to each of them. This might lead one to believe that the two held equal commands, but it is evident that Datis held the supreme command. In a reference of much later date, Pausanias (1.32.7) mentions the 'mangers of the horses of Artaphernes' in the rocks at Marathon, which suggests that Artaphernes commanded the cavalry.

Artaphernes 'the Younger' was son of Artaphernes the Elder, previously mentioned, brother of Darius and satrap in Sardis. Herodotus distorts his name as Artaphrenes, while Ktesias calls his father Ataphernes. This is nearest to the Old Persian form of the name, Atrfarnah – 'with the majesty of the fire-god'.

Of Artaphernes the Younger we know very little. He first appears during the Marathon campaign. He may have already gained some experience of service in the west in the company of his father, or he may

Fortification tablet excavated at Persepolis. The main body of text on the obverse mentions the return of Datiya (Datis?) to Persepolis from Sardis in 494. On the reverse is a small stamp seal bearing a figure at left facing an altar with an animal on it, with a moon above. This is Datiya's seal, or perhaps that of a guide acting for him. The left edge is stamped with a much simpler seal, which perhaps belonged to the ration supplier at Hidali. (University of Chicago, Oriental Institute, Q-1809)

have remained at court. Following the Marathon campaign he accompanied Datis back to Susa with the Eretrian prisoners (6.119). He later took part in the second Persian campaign against Greece in 480, commanding one of the army contingents (7.74).

# OPPOSING ARMIES

## THE ATHENIANS

The Athenian army at Marathon was a wholly infantry force of hoplites.[1] It had been completely reorganized by Kleisthenes in 508/07. Previously different political factions at Athens had drawn support from three regions of Attica, known as 'Town', 'Shore' and 'Inland'. The Peisistratid tyrants had drawn much of their support from 'Inland', the mountainous areas of Attica. Kleisthenes' aim was to mix up contingents from different areas in a new military and political division called a 'tribe' (*phyle*). Kleisthenes sent a list of 100 heroes to Delphi, from which the Delphic priestess selected ten. Each of the new tribes was given the name of one of these heroes.

Each new tribe had three 'thirds' (*trittyes*) assigned to it by lot, one each from 'Town', 'Shore' and 'Inland' areas. There were a total of 30 trittyes, ten located in the 'Town', ten in the 'Shore', and ten in the 'Inland'. Each *trittys* was of about the same size, and fielded a company, or *lochos*, of 300 hoplites commanded by a *lochagos*.

Attica was divided into more than 100 'parishes', each known as a 'deme' (*demos*) with a *demarchos* at its head. Parish registers listing its citizens formed the basic documentation for elections and for military mobilization. An Athenian citizen remained liable for military service outside the borders of Attica until the age of 50. In times of national danger all males capable of bearing arms were pressed into service. Neighbouring demes were grouped together into trittyes. The number of demes in a trittys varied. For example the trittys of Acharnai, a large town lying outside the city of Athens, was formed of a single deme, also called Acharnai.

Kleisthenes expanded the military strength of Athens by admitting to citizenship free foreigners resident in Attica, and freed slaves. They would have been enrolled in the numerically weaker demes, balancing them to achieve a strength of 300 for each trittys and a total strength of 9,000 for the army as a whole.

Over the 17 years between the reforms of Kleisthenes and the battle of Marathon the balance of the strength of these administrative divisions may have shifted. The number of citizens becoming too old for service would rarely match the number of younger citizens coming of age, and the overall size of the army might fluctuate up and down from 9,000.



**Armour typically worn by contemporary Athenian warriors is shown in this back view, a detail from the Oxford Brygos cup. Plate armour has been completely replaced by composite constructions. This is shown most clearly in the shoulder-pieces: the scales laid running upwards, not downwards as was more normal. Note the square nape-protector, an extension of the back-plate of the shoulder-pieces. The skull of the helmet is of an extremely interesting and rare construction. It also seems to be a composite construction of plates or scales covered in leather. The lighter spots visible probably represent the ends of rivets holding them together. Greaves and a hoplite shield and spear complete the panoply. The scene is most plausibly interpreted as showing the veterans of Marathon arming themselves to defend their homeland again.**

[1] See Warrior 27, *Greek Hoplite*, N. Sekunda (Osprey 2000).

Pausanias (7.15.7) states that Miltiades and the Athenians set slaves free before the battle of Marathon. Later (10.20.2) he notes that no more than 9,000 Athenians marched to Marathon 'including the old and slaves'. It seems that the army had fallen significantly from its establishment strength, even after 'old men' over 50 had been mobilized. Miltiades therefore persuaded the Athenian assembly to move the necessary legislation to free the number of slaves necessary to bring the army up to full strength. Hammond (1992, 147–50) has suggested that the slaves fought in a separate unit. But, in view of the earlier practice, it is more probable that they were integrated into the tribal regiments to bring them up to strength.

## THE PLATAEANS

The small Boeotian city of Plataea, which bordered Attica, had been allied to Athens for three decades before Marathon. Plataea sought Athenian protection against Thebes, the most important city of the region, and the Thebans' long term policy of bringing the whole of Boeotia under their power. Herodotus does not record the strength of the Plataean contingent, but he (6.108.1) does state that they sent a full levy (*pandemei*). Justin (2.9) and Nepos (*Milt.* 5) say the Plateans numbered 1,000 hoplites. Strangely, when fighting against the Persians 11 years later in 479 Herodotus gives their number as 600 (Hdt. 9.28). It may be that some of the Plataeans had gone over to the Persian camp, as had happened in most other Boeotian states. A Plataean strength of 1,000 at Marathon seems reasonable.

Pausanias (1.32.3) reports a grave of the Plataeans and slaves at Marathon, though some modern historians have doubted that Plataean citizens and Athenian slaves would have been buried together. Van Der Veer (303) suggests that as 'non-Athenians' they could have been. We do not know whether the slaves had been given freedom before the battle, or only promised the reward of it after, in which case the fallen would have died unfree. Even if freed before the battle, this does not mean they automatically received Athenian citizenship.

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Marinatos believed the 'Classical' tumulus at Vrana to be the tomb of the Plataeans. The stone entrance at the front is modern and allows viewing of the burials in the centre of the tumulus, which were not filled in after excavation.

In 1970 Spyridon Marinatos identified an impressive tumulus over 3m high and 30m in diameter, as the tomb of the Plataeans, even though it lies at Vrana, 2.5km from the Sorós. This identification has obvious problems, not least that Pausanias implies it lay close to the tomb of the Athenians, which can certainly be identified with the Sorós (Welwei, *Historia* 28 (1979) 101–6). If the graves do not belong to the Plataeans and Athenian slaves, their date and the fact that a monumental tumulus was raised over them, indicates a connection with the battle (Van Der Veer 304).
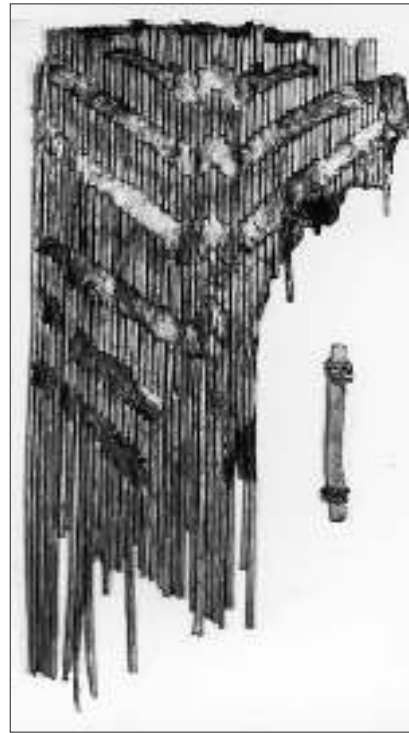
## THE PERSIANS

Herodotus gives no figures for the strength of the Persian forces at the battle, and indeed there is no reason why the Greeks should have had an accurate idea of the enemy strength. Within little more than 10 years the Athenians were claiming to have defeated 46 nations at Marathon (Hdt. 9.27.5). In the absence of fact, later authors wildly exaggerate Persian numbers. The Roman writer Ampelius (5.9) puts the number of troops commanded by Datis (and Tissaphernes!) at 80,000. Simonides, in an epigram commissioned by the Athenians to commemorate the battle, put the Persian strength at 90,000, a figure which Hammond (1968, 33) thought to be 'within the scope of reason'. According to Nepos (*Milt.* 4) Datis commanded a total force of 200,000 infantry, of which 100,000 fought at the battle, while Artaphernes commanded 10,000 horse and the fleet numbered 500 ships. In his *Moralia* (305 b) Plutarch puts the Persian strength at 300,000, a figure repeated in Pausanias (4.25.5) and Suidas (*Hippias* 2). Plato (*Menexenos* 240 A) says Datis was given 500,000 men in 300 ships – a physical impossibility. Lysias (2.21) also quotes 500,000 men, while Justin (2.9) increases this to 600,000.

The 'Classical' tumulus covered 11 burials: nine males aged 20 to 30, a boy aged about ten, and a male about 40. Marinatos suggested that the boy might have been a messenger employed to relay orders. The nine inhumations are marked 1 to 9 and the two cremations A and B. The graves had stone markers erected over them. Lightly incised on the stone over the grave of the older man was the name Archias. Marinatos assumed Archias was a Plataean officer, but the letters are in the Attic alphabet not the Boeotian. The tumulus, of river pebbles, was probably heaped over these marked graves at a later date. The skeleton and skull in burial number 4 were one of the best preserved of the burials in the tumulus. It could be the final resting place of one of the Plataeans killed at Marathon. The grave goods were very poor. The pottery dates to 500–490 and includes this Attic black-figure plate (Marathon Museum K 156). It shows two running hoplites, who are wearing Corinthian helmets and, unusually, cloaks. (Archaeological Society at Athens)

Two later examples of *spara* shields discovered during excavations at Dura-Europos. The complete example is in Damascus (122), the fragmentary one in New Haven (1929.417). The *spara* was constructed by flexing osiers of one colour through geometrically arranged holes in a rectangle of rawhide dyed a different colour. As the rawhide dried and flexed the osiers, the shield took on great resilience and springiness. Note also the handle, which would have been attached to the centre of the shield. (Yale University Art Gallery, Dura-Europos Collection 1933).

Our starting point for an estimate of Persian strength must be Herodotus' statement (6.95) that the fleet numbered 600 triremes. This figure of 600 seems to be a standard strength for the mobilized Persian fleet. The fleets raised for the Scythian campaign (4.87.1) and for the battle of Lade (6.9.1) were both of this strength, as were many Persian fleets mobilized during the 4th century. We know that if a trireme was fully manned with rowers it could carry a maximum of about 200 men – 170 rowers and 30 others. So the absolute maximum number of humans the fleet could physically have transported was 120,000. Troop-carrying triremes had a reduced complement of rowers – 60 has been suggested for Datis' fleet by comparison with contemporary practice (H.T. Wallingha, *Ships & Sea-Power before the Great Persian War* (1993) 184). In

Grace H. Macurdy published this Attic white-ground *lekythos*, 'probably made not long after the battle of Marathon' and perhaps showing it. The fallen Persian is armed with a kopis-type sword, the sheath for which is shown slung at his left side. Macurdy interpreted the striped object under the hoplite's shield as the Persian's *spara*, but it might be a hoplite shield-apron. She also thought the Persian is wearing gold anklets as a badge of rank, but it could be the edges of his trousers. The trees in the background may be an artistic convention rather than a representation of the sacred grove of Marathon (*American Journal of Archaeology* 36 (1932) 27).
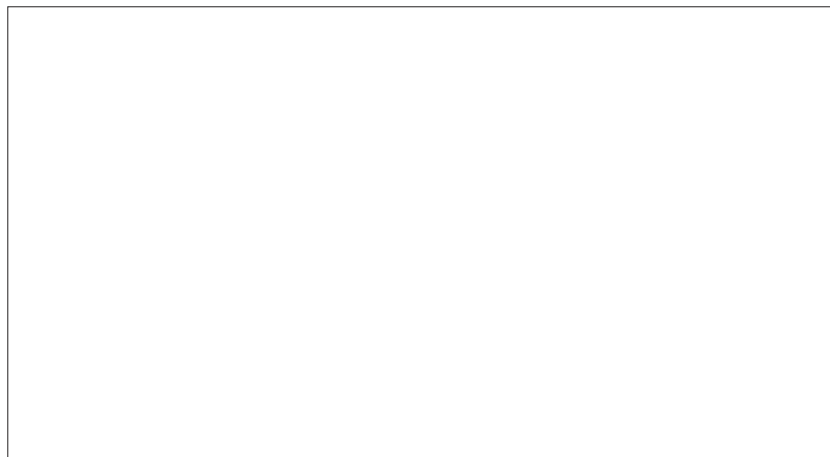
ABOVE **Second Persian soldier from the Oxford Brygos cup. His cuirass is partially covered in decorated leather and the side plates and shoulder plates are made of bronze scales.**

BELOW, RIGHT **This Persian struck down by the charging hoplite, also from the Oxford Brygos cup, wears a composite cuirass, identical to those used by the Greeks.**



the event of a naval battle, these reduced crews could be consolidated into a smaller number of fully manned fighting triremes.

The aim of the expedition was to enslave the populations of Eretria and Athens – tens of thousands of people – and to bring them before Darius, so space would have to be made for this human cargo on the way home. Similarly, the requirement of storage space for supplies on the way out meant that the ships could not have been loaded to their maximum capacity with fighting men.

Herodotus (7.184) records that during Xerxes' invasion of Greece each trireme carried 30 Persians, Medes or Sakai. This is the standard number of fighting men we would expect to travel in a Persian or Greek trireme. Chiot triremes carried the maximum number recorded, 40, at the battle of Lade (Hdt. 6.15.1). This would give a total number of either 18,000 or 24,000 men. Lazenby (46) reaches the second figure by the same reasoning; other historians have arrived at similar figures by different methods. Hammond (1968, 32) suggested that the Persians
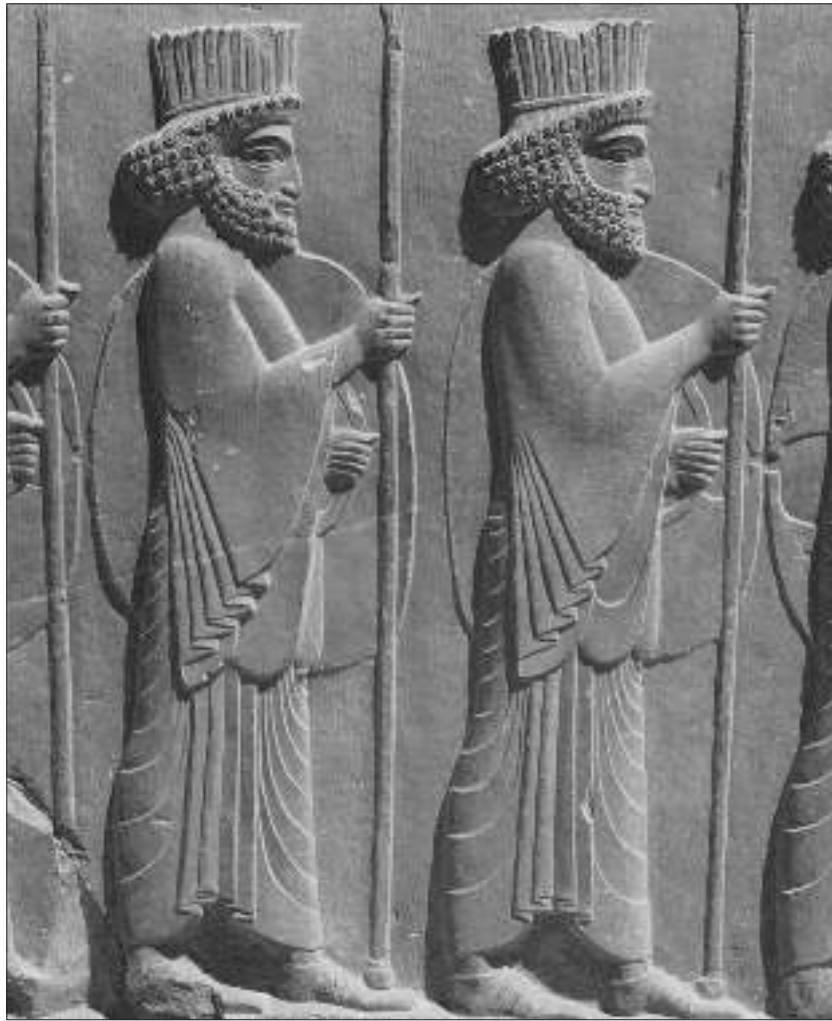
Two views of Persian *arstibara* 'spear-bearers' from Persepolis. Unlike the archers shooting from behind the cover of the shields of the *sparabara*, the *arstibara* put most reliance on their spears. The Persians in the centre of the line at Marathon may have been armed in this way. Note the 'scallops' in the side of their shields. (Michael Roaf)

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