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THE SILENCE IS DEAFENING

PERSIAN ARROWS DID NOT INSPIRE THE GREEK CHARGE AT MARATHON

Summary: The evidence presented in this essay leads to the conclusion that the Greek charge at Marathon was not inspired by the danger of Persian arrows. In fact, the unexpected and ferocious Greek advance in the early morning not only put the barbarian cavalry to flight, but also eliminated the possibility of the Persians discharging their customary barrage of arrows before engagement.

Key words: Marathon, Persian arrows, cavalry, Philaids, Poikile Stoa, Herodotus, Aeschylus.

Almost every modern account of the battle of Marathon includes the suggestion that the Greeks began their charge at speed when they came into the effective range of the Persian arrows. I assume that this means that the Greeks were advancing (at a trot?), Persian arrows began to take their toll, and, as a result, the Greeks charged the Persian line at the double (δρόμῳ).¹ But there is no evidence whatsoever that the famous charge of the Marathonomachae was related to the length and potency of the Persian bowshot.

There is only one ancient author, the rhetorical and unreliable Justin, who mentions Persian arrows in connection with this incident (2.9.11). Justin, as Herodotus, says that one mile separated the armies. But he adds the incredible assertion that the Greeks crossed the intervening mile before the Persians had time to release their arrows.²

This victory over the barbarian became for all time an Athenian event, a reflection of the glory of Athens and the courage of the Marathon men. Following the

¹ E.g., J. F. LAZENBY, *The Defense of Greece 490–479 B.C.* (Warminster, 1993), 67, “probably at anything from between 300 and 200 metres, they would have begun to come under fire from the Persian archers”; N. G. L. HAMMOND, “The Campaign and Battle of Marathon,” *JHS* 88 (1968), 46 – “the hail of Persian arrows,” reprinted with some additions in his *Studies in Greek History* (Oxford, 1973) at 225 for the reference to Persian arrows; for Hammond’s final version of the Greek charge, accepting the results of DONLAN and THOMPSON (see note 28 below), *CAH*.IV 511 – “the barrage of arrows for the last 140 m.”; P. GREEN, *The Greco-Persian Wars* (Berkeley, 1996), 36 – “As the Greeks came within range of the Persian archers (at about 150 yards distance) they broke into a double, to get through that murderous hail of arrows as fast as possible.” C. HIGNETT, *Xerxes’ Invasion of Greece* (Oxford, 1963), 58, prudently avoids mention of the hail of arrows.

² Comp. Xen. *Ana.* 1.8.19 on Cunaxa where the Greek charge was so fearsome that the barbarians fled before an arrow reached them.

battle, the Athenians took steps in remembrance of their victory: the temple at Athens (Paus. 1.14.5); the trophy-bearing base for their treasury at Delphi (Paus. 10.10.1–2 & 11.5); the trophies at Marathon including the individual trophy to Miltiades;³ the decision to bury the dead on the battlefield (Paus. 1.29.4); the formation of the local cult of the dead (Paus. 1.32.4).⁴

The Athenians continued to reinforce the memory of Marathon. Their hoplites at Plataea appealed to their actions at Marathon when arguing that they should occupy the left wing of the Greek army (Hdt. 9.27.5, 46.2; Plut. *Mor.* 872A). Aristophanes referred to the Marathon trophy several times (*Eq.* 1334, *Vesp.* 711, *Lys.* 285) and mentioned the almost yearly remembrances of the courage and glory shown on that day (*Eq.* 781f.). The south wall of the Acropolis contained a representation of the battle (Paus. 1.25.2, Plut. *Mor.* 349D) and the Athena Promachus statue came from the Persian tithe from Marathon (Paus. 1.28.2). In Plutarch's time there was an annual celebration (*Mor.* 349E). The Poikile Stoa had helped to elevate the events of Marathon to the level of heroic legend. Marathon gained its special place because it was a purely Athenian victory.⁵

But there was no one view of the victory at Marathon.⁶ This moment of glory was too big, with too much potential meaning and political overtones, to be chronicled in a straight-forward, factual manner. Then, ten years later, when the second Persian invasion and the important Athenian victory of Salamis further clouded the memories of the earlier struggle, it became even easier for reports of Marathon to transcend pure facts and to lend themselves to interpretation by leading politicians and their families, by Marathonomachae and their children, and by later authors and orators.⁷ Marathon, from the beginning, became a cornerstone in the folkloric history of Athens, but the events of the battle lay open to interpretation as the beholder saw them and according to his agenda.⁸

³ Paus. 1.32; Plut. *Them.* 3.4, *Thes.* 6.7 and *Mor.* .84C. E. VANDERPOOL, "A Monument to the Battle of Marathon," *Hesperia* 35 (1966), 93–106.

⁴ Two important discussions on the much-debated epigrams for the Marathon victory are F. JACOBY, "Some Athenian Epigrams from the Persian Wars," *Hesperia* 14 (1945), 157–211 and B. D. MERITT, "Epigrams from the Battle of Marathon," *The Aegean and the Near East, Studies Presented to Hetty Goldman on the Occasion of Her Seventy-Fifth Birthday* (New York, 1956), 268–80. There has been a suggestion that the Simonidean couplet quoted in Lycurg. *Leoc.* 109 was actually a part of the decorations in the Poikile Stoa: E. D. FRANCIS & M. VICKERS, "The Marathon Epigram in the Stoa Poikile," *Mnemosyne* 38 (1985), 390–3.

⁵ N. LORAUX, "Marathon ou l'histoire ideologique," *REA* 75 (1973), 13–42. Reprinted with revisions in N. LORAUX (tr. A. SHERIDAN), *The Invention of Athens: The Funeral Oration in the Classical City* (Cambridge, 1986), 155–71.

⁶ For a discussion of the literary sources for Marathon: MACAN, vol. 2 Appendix X, 149f. and HAMMOND (1968; note 1), 47f.

⁷ LORAUX (1986; note 5), *id.*

⁸ MACAN, 202, lists distortions that developed as a result of the way that the legend of Marathon developed. To these, add Herodotus' inclusion of a mile run by the Greeks, an impossible feat, but used by Herodotus to magnify the feat of the Marathon men.

THE PHILAIDS AND THE POIKILE STOA

In 489, the year after Marathon, Miltiades was the talk of Athens (Plut. *Them.* 3.3). But his excellent generalship did not stem the tide of politics in Athens with the result that he was prosecuted. His defense was based on his leadership at Marathon. Although the ailing Miltiades was not acquitted, he was spared to die a natural death. Cimon, his son, paid the fine. During the next decade (inadequately covered in the sources) the Philaid's political importance grew as they aggressively attacked the Peisistratid party and related clans, a move reflected in a series of ostracisms (Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 22.6). The Philaids did not miss the opportunity to ennoble Miltiades as the hero of Marathon (Paus. 1.32.4, Plut. *Them.* 3.3), an emphasis solidified by the leadership of Cimon in Athenian foreign affairs during the 470s and 460s. The powerful clan was able to put an indelible stamp on future remembrances of Marathon (e.g. Plut. *Mor.* 350E).

Cimonic influence was reflected in the Poikile Stoa, an important piece of propaganda.⁹ Miltiades, father of Cimon, apparently held the most prominent position as he harangued the troops and gave the signal for battle (Nep. *Milt.* 6.3–4),¹⁰ something that would have been to Cimon's liking since it would diminish the aura of Themistocles and Salamis by elevating the reputation of Miltiades at Marathon. Various paintings in the Stoa flattered the family of Cimon. In the picture of the sack of Troy, Laodice had the face of Elpinice, sister of Cimon (Plut. *Cim.* 4.5). The scene of the victory of the Greeks over the Amazons on the middle wall has Theseus leading the Greeks. Cimon had transported Theseus' bones back to Attica from Scyros, an imaginative propaganda coup (Plut. *Cim.* 8.6). There is no other explanation than the influence of the family of Cimon for Miltiades' prominence on this memorial.¹¹

The depiction of the events of Marathon in the Stoa did not focus on the charge of the Marathonomachae and there is no reference to arrows in the picture in any ancient author. Obviously, since the charge was omitted, there would have been no reason for the inclusion of the most famous of all weapons of the Persians, the bow and arrow, as the initiator of the charge. The fresco in the portico contained a depiction of Plataeans and Athenians meeting the Persians with the battle still equal, of barbarians in the center fleeing through the marsh, and of the Greeks slaughtering Persians on the beach. There are conspicuous fighters: Callimachus, Miltiades, and a hero named Echetlus (Paus. 1.32.5). The portrait of Marathon himself provided an

⁹ E. D. FRANCIS and M. VICKERS suggest that Cimon's brother-in-law had been involved in the original construction of the Stoa: "The Oenoe Painting in the Stoa Poikile, and Herodotus' Account of Marathon," *BSA* 80 (1985), 100, incl. n. 6.

¹⁰ Paus. 1.15.3 does not assign a more prominent place to Miltiades. E. B. HARRISON, "The Victory of Callimachus," *GRBS* 12 (1971), 22, thinks that Callimachus was higher up in the painting than any other human figure. The Greek charge is not a part of the painting.

¹¹ There are questions about Miltiades' position at Marathon. Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 22.5 says that it was not until 487/6 that the archon polemarch was elected by lot and, therefore, until that year, could have commanded the Athenian army. This has caused some controversy. See, e.g. C. HIGNETT, *A History of the Athenian Constitution* (Oxford, 1952), 169f. and P. BICKNELL, "The Command Structure and Generals of the Marathon Campaign," *AC* 39 (1970), 427–42.

heroic air, as did Theseus coming from the underworld and Athena and Heracles.¹² There was no subtlety in these mythical antecedents and their connection with Cimon. The beginning of the battle was portrayed by showing Miltiades as he was haranguing the troops and giving the order to advance,¹³ not by showing the charge of the Greeks.

HERODOTUS

Herodotus' account of Marathon is notoriously lacking in information.¹⁴ He describes the events of the three phases of preparation and attack, the victory of the Greek line, and the pursuit and fighting at the ships. *Preparation and Attack* (6.108–112): Miltiades wanted to attack before the arrival of the Spartans and convinced Callimachus the polemarch to vote in his favor. With the Plataeans having arrived in full force, the Greek line was extended with the center thinned and the wings deepened. The lines were about one mile apart, the sacrifices were good, and the Greeks charged at the double (δρόμῳ). The Persians were astounded. *The Greek Victory* (6.113): After difficult fighting, with the barbarians having success in the middle, the victorious Greek wings fell on them and caused a rout. *Pursuit and Fighting at the Ships* (6.113–115, 117): The Athenians captured seven ships in this fighting in which Callimachus and Stesilaus, a general, were killed, Cynaegirus, brother of Aeschylus, lost his hand, and Epizelus was blinded.

It is not possible to know with certainty whether the brief space that Herodotus gave to Marathon was intentional, whether or not he had an agenda, or what political or personal goals he was satisfying.¹⁵ We do not know exactly when he wrote the section on Marathon, but if he penned books 7, 8 and 9 before 450, and if, as Hammond believes on the evidence of Syncellus and Jerome, he gave recitations in Athens 446/5,¹⁶ a fair guess is that he wrote the story of Marathon between 450 and 445 before going to Thurii in 444/3.

Between 490 B.C. and the middle of the fifth century much had occurred in Athens that had the capability of influencing material that Herodotus received about Marathon and how he interpreted that material. (1) He would have been about thirty-five years old ca. 450 B.C. He had not been born at the time of Marathon, was about four years old during the second Persian wars, about twenty-seven when the Athenians fought at Tanagra and Oenophyta, and perhaps thirty-eight when Athens lost Boeotia in the engagement at Cororea, ca. 446. There is no evidence that he had fought in a hoplite battle or was *intimately* acquainted with the horrors of these types

¹² Theseus at Marathon: Plut. *Thes.* 35.5. For a thorough discussion of the personages in the painting see E. B. HARRISON, "The South Frieze of the Nike Temple and the Marathon Painting in the Painted Stoa," *AJA* 76 (1972), 356f.

¹³ Nepos, *Milt.* 6.3–4.

¹⁴ MACAN, 169 f.

¹⁵ MACAN, 202, suggests that Herodotus wrote his account of the second Persian war before he decided to include the first in his history.

¹⁶ (1968; note 1), 28.

of confrontations.¹⁷ (2) Although the heroism of the Marathonomachae had gained a permanent place in Athenian patriotic history (Thuc. 2.34.5),¹⁸ the events of 490 were past history and remembrances of the second Persian wars may have been fresher, especially for those veterans who had served in the more recent conflicts, but had not been present at Marathon. (3) Athens had been engaged in much military and naval activity, as well as intensive internal political infighting, 490–ca. 450 B.C., including the activities and confrontations of the Athenian Confederacy of Delos, various other skirmishes, the rise and fall of Cimon and the supremacy of Pericles, an Alcmaeonid, who would have had little sympathy with the Philaid account of Marathon.¹⁹ (4) Fifth century Athens had witnessed the “exaltation of Marathon” engineered by the family of Cimon, a hoplitic victory, as opposed to Salamis, a victory of the oarsmen.²⁰ Herodotus may have relied on members of this influential Philaid family for material and, if so, it is not surprising that his account agrees with the representation in the Cimonic Poikile Stoa in several respects: the arrival of the Plataeans, the absence of Greek cavalry, the prominence of Miltiades as opposed to Callimachus, the death of Callimachus and the loss of Cynaegirus’ hand in the battle at the ships, and the blinding of Epizelus.²¹

(5) There is also the important question of the probability as to whether or not Herodotus would have been able to rely on information from participants in the battle, the true men of the hour. Hammond felt strongly that Herodotus spoke to men of Marathon sixty-five years and older by 445 B.C.; these would have been age twenty when they fought at Marathon.²² But, in all likelihood, not many of the Marathonomachae would still have been living in the middle of the fifth century. Those aged thirty, forty, and fifty in 490 would have been seventy, eighty, and ninety in 450

¹⁷ On the peculiar horrors of hoplite battles see V. D. HANSON, *The Western Way of War: Infantry Battle in Classical Greece* (New York, 1989), chap. IV and J. LAZENBY, “The Killing Zone” in V. D. HANSON (ed.), *Hoplites: The Classical Greek Battle Experience* (London, 1991), 87–109. It is widely known that, although the war in Vietnam was widely *televised*, its most intimate horrors, as I know personally from talking with my brother, are known only to those who were actually present.

¹⁸ L. H. JEFFERY has argued that, because Marathon had become a part of heroic history by the middle of the fifth century, it could be portrayed in the Poikile Stoa as a direct representation of the battle: “The Battle of Oinoe in the Stoa Poikile, a Problem in Greek Art and History,” *BSA* 60 (1965), 50–2.

¹⁹ Pericles could have used Marathon as a part of his own propaganda by eliminating portrayals of Miltiades and Cimon in representation of the battle. The benefit for him was that the confrontation at Marathon could represent the defense of Ionia: E. G. PEMBERTON, “The East and West Friezes of the Temple of Athena Nike,” *AJA* 76 (1972), 310.

²⁰ LORAUX (1986; note 5), 161.

²¹ BICKNELL (note 11), 432, on Stesileus, Cynaegirus and Epizelus. Also HARRISON (note 12). Herodotus’ reliance, or non-reliance, on the painting in the Stoa is an unsolvable enigma. Jeffery (note 18, 44), HARRISON (note 12, 370) and FRANCIS & VICKERS (note 9, 109) accept his dependence on the painting. Unfortunately Herodotus does not indicate that he saw the Marathon painting in the Stoa. It was perhaps the most celebrated painting in the city: M. ROBERTSON, *A Shorter History of Greek Art* (Cambridge, 1981), 106.

²² (1968; note 1), 28. He also suggests that some of these young participants were around in 425 B.C. having lived to age eighty-five. It was not unknown for young men to be pressed into service (Diod. Sic. 12.68.5) and the critical situation surrounding the landing of the Persians at Marathon would not have allowed for a leisurely calling up of the troops. Many young men may have served.

(but life expectancy in ancient Greece was not long). The twenty-year-olds who participated at Marathon would have been sixty in 450, but would have been liable for much military service during the intervening years including, for example, the conflicts of the second Persian wars in 480–79 (the Athenians had 8000 hoplites at Plataea, Hdt. 9.28.6), service as marines in Athenian activities in the Aegean, and such affairs as the Athenian expedition to Cyprus and Egypt (459 B.C.?), conflicts with Aegina, the battles of Tanagra and Oenophyta (458 ?), the failure of the Egyptian expedition (454), and the campaigns of Tolmides and Pericles. Aristides, as an example, participated in the battles at Marathon, Salamis, and Plataea. At the beginning of the Peloponnesian war, the Athenian crack hoplite army numbered only 13,000 (Thuc. 1.13.6). Old Dicaeopolis in Aristophanes' *The Acharnians* (596), produced in 425 B.C., complained that he had been on the front line since the beginning of the war. The question of Herodotus' reliance on participants at Marathon for his information is unanswerable, but there could not have been many still living. It is also most problematical as to the veracity of material provided both by battle participants and by children of participants.²³

It will never be known how, or from whom, Herodotus compiled his information on Marathon, but it is abundantly clear that the result of his editing was that he put his own stamp on the battle. Unlike some later authors, Herodotus gives ample credit to the Plataeans (6.108.1, 111.2–3, 113.1).²⁴ He purports to know what the Persians were thinking (6.112.2), but fails to mention the catastrophe inflicted on them because of their lack of knowledge of the terrain, an important omission since the Poikile Stoa depicts the retreating Persians pushing one another into the marsh (Paus 1.32.7). He includes a long defense of the Alcmaeonids, family of Pericles, including a reference to the grandfather of the influential Callias (6.121 f.).

Most of the details about actual fighting are lacking. Herodotus says very little about the meeting of the lines and the ensuing fighting (6.113.1–2) and we learn little of the intense fighting at the ships, a rather glaring omission since the Athenian trophy was later set up in the vicinity of the fighting near the beach, where the Persians incurred their greatest losses, not in the area of the main battle where the Soros is located.

Most importantly, Herodotus created his own Marathon. In firmly removing himself from the Philaid version, he took the battle away from Miltiades. Although he had placed Miltiades in a position of extreme importance (6.109–111.1), he failed to note Miltiades' place in the line (6.111.1) and did not specify who made the tactical decision to lengthen the line and deepen the wings at the expense of the center, a critical and dangerous decision when considering the fact that the best Persian troops were in the center, something that Herodotus knew (6.113.1). The Poikile Stoa's fresco pictured Miltiades haranguing the troops and giving the order to

²³ N. WHATLEY, "On the Possibility of Reconstructing Marathon and Other Ancient Battles," *JHS* 84 (1964), 129–30 on the unreliability of information provided by a participant in a battle. When fighting, hoplites could have no knowledge of anything except what was happening to themselves and their very immediate area: Thuc. 7.44.1, Eur. *Supp.* 855–6.

²⁴ It is well-known that the Marathon victory became very quickly an Athenian victory, e.g. Plut. *Mor.* 305B&C. See LORAUX (1986; note 5), 161f.

charge. Herodotus did not give Miltiades the same credit; he does not indicate who issued the order.²⁵ Herodotus' reference to Callimachus as polemarch with the deciding vote, as well as his elevation of Callimachus to the level of a hero in the fighting, certainly did not follow the Philaid account.²⁶

The Herodotean version of Marathon focused not on Miltiades, not on the actual hand-to-hand combat, but on the intense charge of the Marathonomachae. Herodotus' interest is clear (paraphrased):

6.112: The distance between the armies was about 1600 yards. The Greeks charged **at a run** (δρόμῳ). When the Persians saw the Greeks coming **at a run** (δρόμῳ) they prepared to receive them, thinking that the Greeks were foolish coming **at a run** (δρόμῳ) without horsemen or archers. The Greeks fought valiantly. These were the first Greeks to Herodotus' knowledge who charged the enemy **at a run** (δρόμῳ), and the first who were able to endure the sight of the Medes and their garments.²⁷

For Herodotus the battle of Marathon *was* the charge at speed. He exaggerated its length beyond the limits of human capability to make it even more outstanding²⁸ and remarks that, to his knowledge, it was the first time the Greeks charged the enemy at the run. There is no better evidence of Herodotus' desire to emphasize the charge than his repetition of δρόμῳ four times in a short paragraph.

He made the run even more spectacular since it was made against the barbarian and these were the first Greeks who were able to endure the sight of the Medes and their <unusual?> <fearsome?> garments. It is interesting that, when the barbarians who were defeated on the wings were allowed to run, Herodotus gives no indication whatsoever of the urgency that must have accompanied their flight.

The Poikile Stoa had included the meeting of the lines, the Greek victory and chase, and the slaughter of the barbarians. Phases of the battle are shown through three figures: Miltiades urging the troops into battle, Callimachus in the center inspiring the Greek victory and Cynaegirus taking part in the fighting involved in the flight of the Persians. The Greek charge is not a part of the painting. In the Stoa, Miltiades' urging the troops was the representation of the attack. Herodotus chose to highlight the charge of the Marathonomachae; for him, the charge *was* the battle.

²⁵ Nepos, *Milt.* 6.3–4. HARRISON (note 12), 363, suggests that the Marathon section of the Stoa contained a sort of trilogy of attack (Miltiades), victory (Callimachus), and pursuit (Cynaegirus).

²⁶ In giving credit to Miltiades but not centering his version on him, Herodotus was placating the influential family of Cimon, not offending the party of Pericles, and, most importantly, telling the story the way he wanted, as a battle centering around a great and marvelous deed.

²⁷ HANSON has pointed out that hoplite armies liked to close at the run (1989 note 17), 135f. See W. W. HOW, "On the Meaning of ΒΑΛΗΝ and ΔΡΟΜΩΙ in Greek Historians of the Fifth Century," *CQ* 13 (1919), 40–42. On the Marathon charge in particular: W. DONLAN and J. THOMPSON, "The Charge at Marathon: Herodotus 6.112," *CJ* 71 (1976), 339–43 and "The Charge at Marathon Again," *CW* 72 (1979), 419–20.

²⁸ It would be interesting to know how closely Herodotus had observed the clash of hoplite armies in light of the fact that he suggests that an armed hoplite phalanx, farmers of all ages, could actually run a mile. This would not have been a marvelous deed, it would have been a miracle.

What else would have sufficed? It is quite possible that, in Athens, the events of Marathon had been overshadowed by those of the second Persian invasion, especially Salamis. Perhaps, by Herodotus' time, Aristides' actions at Salamis and Plataea, Themistocles' ascendancy as a result of his naval policy, the rise and fall of Cimon and the current ascendancy of Pericles, son of Xanthippus, prosecutor of Miltiades in 489, had pushed to the background the Philaid emphasis on Miltiades' leadership at Marathon. Herodotus turned to the reckless heroism of the charge as his "great and marvelous deed" for Marathon, a supreme moment of Athenian bravery and courage.

And what of the Persian arrows? If, in fact, Persian bowshots had occasioned this charge, the focal point of Herodotus' Marathon, it is difficult to understand how he could fail to mention the catalyst of this act of bravery, since it would have added to the greatness of the moment. This omission is striking in that he did call attention to the barrage of arrows at Thermopylae (7.218.3)²⁹ and Plataea (9.61.3). As the Greek line narrowed the distance between the armies and Persian arrows began to hit their mark, they would have done so with deadly effect. The effect of the arrows, if they were a factor in initiating the charge, would have been that men were falling and comrades wounded by the piercing arrows. The integrity of the line would have been threatened with wounded hoplites trying to keep the line and complete the charge. The likelihood of the thin ranks in the center reaching the Persians in phalanx order would have been slim. The carnage and the threat of the arrows would have magnified this superb act of heroism by making the urgency of the moment most attractive to Herodotus' readers. But it is not here because it did not happen and, quite frankly, Herodotus actually tells us that Persian bowshots had no effect on the events of Marathon (see conclusion).

AESCHYLUS

No other author adopted the Herodotean approach to the events of Marathon by focusing on the charge and we would, therefore, not expect a mention of the arrows as the catalyst for the Greek charge. But Aeschylus is a special case.

Aeschylus fought at Marathon at age ca. thirty-five and again at Salamis ten years later. The paradox of his career is that in 472, eight years after Salamis and eighteen years after Marathon, Aeschylus wrote about Salamis despite the fact that he considered his participation at Marathon to be the most important day of his life (Paus. 1.14.5). Salamis, of course, was a naval victory over the barbarians, a victory that, at the time of Aeschylus' production, was being confirmed by Athenian leadership in the Aegean and Athenian prominence in the ongoing activities in the Aegean during the 470s. Aeschylus suggests that Salamis was more important than Marathon in the words of the ghost of Darius when the ghost remarks that he, as king, did not bring as dreadful a fate on the Persians as did Xerxes his son, Persian king in 480–79 B.C. (*Pers.* 781).

²⁹ Against the Phocians but not the Spartans.

The Persians is about Salamis, not Marathon. Yet he refers to Marathon on three occasions. While Atossa is awaiting news of Salamis, the chorus reminds her that the Athenians have previously inflicted the Medes with a great disaster (236). After the defeat at Salamis, in an allusion to Marathon, the chorus bewails the number of Persian women Athens has deprived of sons and husbands (286–9). Later, after receiving the devastating news about Salamis, Atossa bewails asking if the losses at Marathon were not enough (472–77).

More interesting, however, is Aeschylus' repeated mention of the Persian bow as characterizing Persian society and as the strength of the Persian army.³⁰ In a sense, the bow, arrow and quiver, by characterizing the barbarian race, dominate *The Persians*. Darius was lord of the bow (554–6). The pride of Persia, those who have perished, are masters of the bow (925–6), a host skilled to manage the bow and steed (25–6). A bellicose archer host opposed a people famous for the spear (85–6). The ghost of Darius asks if the entire army perished “by the spear” and gives credit to the Dorian spear for Plataea (729 and 817). Xerxes, in defeat, calls attention to the ruin of his robes and of his quiver (1020). When the chorus wants to know the outcome of the confrontation of warships at Salamis, it asks if the drawing of the bow prevailed over the might of the lance (147–9). Finally, when the messenger arrives at the Persian court and reports the defeat at Salamis, he remarks that the Persian bows were of no use (278). The last two comments are rather strange since Salamis was, after all, a naval action. For Aeschylus, the confrontation of east and west was between the wielders of the bow and the holders of the spear.

As Hammond and Macan and others have pointed out, arguments from silence are dangerous. But the silence can become deafening. It is more than interesting that Aeschylus, to whom the Persian bow and arrow were most significant, would fail to allude, even once, to Persian arrows at Marathon if the events in that battle had involved deadly arrows flying by his ear and killing his comrades as they ran toward the enemy, especially since Aeschylus considered his hoplite service at Marathon as the greatest moment of his life.³¹

³⁰ Pind. *Pyth* 1.78: “curve-bowed Mede.”

³¹ Regarding the actual battle, Aristophanes focused on the pursuit, the courageous Greeks in the act of chasing the fleeing Mede (*Ach.* 692f.), driving the fleeing barbarians before them “stung in jaw, and cheek, and eyebrow” (*Vesp.* 1087, trans. Loeb). The hand-to-hand combat was important to Aristophanes, not the charge of the Greek line.

Euripides had no interest in the battle apart from the courage of the hoplites. The chorus of the old men of Marathon in the *Heracleidae* (there could not have been many of them living when the play was produced in 430) consists of fearsome individuals despite their age; they make it clear that it is not only the men of Argos who are skilled in the use of the lance and shield (375–6).

Thucydides is not helpful. Diodorus Siculus is silent.

Nepos and Plutarch provide no information on the Herodotean charge. Nepos emphasizes Miltiades' leadership and the ability of a small number of Greeks to defeat a very large number of the enemy (*Milt.* 4–6). In his description of the painting in the Poikile Stoa he stresses the role of Miltiades in haranguing the troops and giving the signal for battle (although he suggests that it was Datis, not the Greeks, who began the battle: 5.5). Plutarch is, of course, interested in his subject, Aristides. His account emphasizes the hard fighting in the center of the line because Aristides was stationed there and performed well (*Arist.* 5.3).

CONCLUSION

Since the Persians were not prepared to receive the Greek onslaught or to initiate their own charge, the Greeks must have been closer than the Persians expected in the semi-darkness of the morning.³²

The thinness of the center of the Greek line made it mandatory to arrive in a state of at least semi-order to avoid an almost instant rout by the crack Persian troops in the center.³³ The Greek army would have been comprised of young *and old* men (e.g. Thuc. 4.92.7)³⁴ of varying levels of fitness (there is no evidence at all of aerobic training for Greek hoplites) with the result that the charge would have had to have been short enough for the oldest and most unfit of the soldiers to arrive in battle order and ready to engage.³⁵

Pausanias visited the site and gathered information from local tradition. He had no interest in battle details: the foreigners landed, were defeated, and lost a number of their ships (1.32.3). He is more interested in describing the site as it was when he visited it than talking about the events of the battle.

³² Greek armies tended to come quite close to the enemy: Eur. *Heracl.* 674–5 and 800–1. It appears that they avoided long runs. But, unfortunately, there is not much evidence as to the distance between the armies before engaging. At Mantinea (418 B.C.) the Spartans advanced within a stone's throw although there was no engagement. Then, before the battle, the armies were close: Thuc. 5.65.1–2 & 66.1. Xenophon says that, at Cunaxa (401 B.C.), the opposing lines were not 600–800 yards apart when the Greeks began to advance (not at the run). Then, at some undetermined point, the Greeks charged at the double: Xen. *Ana.* 1.8.17–19. At the Nemea River (394 B.C.) the armies were less than 200 yards apart when the charge started: Xen. *Hell.* 4.2.20. The Thebans at Coronea (394 B.C.) began their charge at about 220 yards from the enemy: Xen. *Ages.* 2.10–11 and *Hell.* 4.3.17. At Leuctra (371 B.C.) the charge of Pelopidas' soldiers must have been short for the Spartans to have been so completely taken by surprise: Plut. *Pel.* 23.2–4.

³³ It was not easy for a hoplite army of any size to operate as a unit: e.g. Hdt. 9.62.1. At Plataea, the Athenians were resting while the Spartans were engaged in a life and death struggle and it was not until shouts reached them, and a messenger from Pausanias, that they quickly started to the rescue (Plut. *Arist.* 18.4).

Maintaining the order of the line was considered important even if it meant slowing down. Thuc. 5.70 for the deliberately slow Spartan advance at Mantinea, 418 B.C., to maintain the line. At Cunaxa, 401 B.C., the Greeks pursued the fleeing enemy while exhorting each other *not* to run at a headlong pace (δρόμῳ) so that the line be kept intact (Xen. *Ana.* 1.8.17–19). See Hansen (1989; note 17), 160f. It should not be forgotten that, ultimately, a hoplite battle revolved around man-to-man fighting within the ranks: Pl. *Lach.* 182A–B.

³⁴ Although the Greeks were aware of the value of veteran soldiers (e.g., Thuc. 2.11.1, Justin 11.6.4), old age was considered a hindrance (Ar. *Ach.* 209f., Eur. *HF*, 119f.). Solon considered ca. age thirty as the prime of life (27).

³⁵ On the run see the DONLAN–THOMPSON entries cited in note 27. These articles have been relied upon as support for the conviction that the Greeks at Marathon could not have run the distance recorded by Herodotus, ca. 1600 yds., and for the belief that they could have run for the approximate distance of the range of Persian bows, ca. 200 yds. There are difficulties. The last two tests reported in the study were conducted indoors on a treadmill and produced the following result: "Given a total panoply weight of between 50–70 lbs. (including a hoplite shield of 15 lbs., carried isometrically), a grade of approximately 2 1/2% (which simulated uneven terrain), and a reduced rate of 5 mph for 1.5 minutes, well-conditioned men can traverse a distance of 220 yards with sufficient energy reserves to engage in combat." (1979; note 27), 420. The subjects did their runs carrying fifteen lbs. total weight, nine lbs. of which was a simulated shield. The most important factor in energy output was the difficulty of carrying the shield isometrically.

There is a problem in that the Greek army at Marathon consisted of men who had been tending their farms only a few days earlier. They were not in excellent condition (comp. e.g., *CAHIV*, 510). Lack

Not much has been made of Herodotus' curious and enigmatic remark that this was the first time that the Greeks, in his knowledge, charged the enemy at a run. Later hoplite armies preferred to engage on the run³⁶ but literary sources for the Archaic period do not allow for documentation. Clearly if modern estimates of the weight of a full panoply of hoplite armor (50–70 lbs.) from the Archaic period are accurate, not only the weight of the armor (especially the shield carried isometrically as the Donlan–Thompson experiments demonstrated) but also a helmet which limited sight and hearing, would have prevented a charge of any length. It is hard to conceive of two fully-clad hoplite armies doing anything but “lumbering” toward each other. It is often forgotten that the adoption of hoplite armor, in the beginning, was to enable farmers to settle boundary disputes *without being killed*. It was for utmost protection that hoplites of Archaic Greece endured the discomfort of the full panoply and joined in the phalanx formation, a veritable Bronze Roller, to afford even more protection. This archaic body armor was only suitable for local disputes.

But hoplite armor became lighter during the fifty years or so before the Persian wars.³⁷ We do not know how the hoplites at Marathon were clad. Other than the es-

of hoplite training is attested: Pl. *Lach.* 181E, Thuc. 2.39.1, Xen. *Mem.* 3.5.15, and Anderson in *Hoplites* (note 17), 30. For a thorough discussion see W. K. PRITCHETT, *The Greek State at War II* (Berkeley, 1974), 208–31 and J. K. ANDERSON, *Military Theory and Practice in the Age of Xenophon* (Berkeley, 1970), chaps. V and VI. It has to be emphasized that gymnastic training and gymnastic-type training, an important aspect of Greek society (e.g. Ar. *Nub.* 1002–3), while suitable for preparing men for hand-to-hand combat, do not provide the type of fitness that would enable men to sprint distances at speed. Xenophon is not correct in maintaining that farmwork helps produce better runners (*Oec.* 5.8). Comp. V. D. HANSON, *The Other Greeks: The Family Farm and the Agrarian Roots of Western Civilization* (New York, 1995) 264–5 for a view different from my own. Pausanias, alone, suggested that the Olympic race in armor was connected with military training (5.8.10).

The hoplite army consisted of men of all ages. They were not under the ideal conditions of being isolated on a treadmill, running with the express purpose of testing endurance, but on a dusty field jammed with men trying to run in a straight line without hindering their neighbor, fearing for their lives, and trying to reach the enemy under the most trying of circumstances. The Argive shield used by the hoplites at Marathon was six lbs. heavier than those carried by the young men in the tests, and it was the shield carried isometrically that gave those young men the most problem. Also, the men in the modern tests were probably taller, on the average, than the ancient hoplites, which made it easier to keep the shield from banging on their thighs as they ran, not an easy task. It might be noted that I recently measured the hoplite shield on display in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts at 31 inches in diameter but the “shields” used in these tests at Penn State were approximately the size of a garbage can cover and my own cover measures about 22 inches. Clearly the task was easier for the participants in the modern tests. It is much easier to conceive of the Greek charge at Marathon by envisioning hoplites *not* wearing the full panoply. For the shield and its difficulties: HANSON, (1989; note 17), 65–71.

³⁶ HANSON (1989; note 17), 135f.

³⁷ A. M. SNODGRASS, *Arms and Armour of the Greeks* (Ithaca, 1967), 90f. The Olympic race in armor was inaugurated in 520 B.C. (Paus. 5.8.3 & 6.10.4) with the runner wearing shield, helmet, and greaves (Paus. 6.10.4). The first winner was Demaratus of Heraea (Paus. 5.8.10). One runner ran the course with a shield for one race and without for another (Paus. 2.11.8). Eventually they eliminated the helmet and greaves (Paus. 6.10.4). This was a 400 yard race (Paus. 10.34.5).

Apparently only with reluctance did the Spartans lighten their armor as the sixth century passed into the fifth. At Plataea, hoplites came together from a number of city-states. The fully-armed Spartans were hampered by a lack of mobility (Plut. *Arist.* 14.2). When the Athenians, whose armor was apparently lighter, learned of the plight of the Lacedaemonians, they were able to rush to their aid although they never reached the point of the Spartan engagement (Plut. *Arist.* 18.4). In another incident at Plataea, three hundred Athenians hoplites sent by Aristides, with the help of cavalry, had sufficient

sential helmet and spear, there is uncertainty as to the type of cuirass or whether, in fact, all hoplites present even wore a breastplate on that day. This is a crucial problem for one who wishes to envision the Greek army at Marathon. Recently, Jarva has argued that, during the Archaic period, panoplies were not overly expensive with the breastplate being the decisive factor, ordinary (poorer) hoplites may not have worn greaves, and the phalanx may have been composed of hoplites and non-hoplites. He further suggests that, by the end of the sixth century, helmets and greaves may have been lighter, perhaps in the interest of tactical mobility, and lighter linen and leather corslets, both very effective, were in widespread use.³⁸ These conclusions, based on an exhaustive study, suggest that the armor that the hoplites actually wore on that day at Marathon may have been lighter than generally thought and, if correct, they have a direct bearing on the ability of the Athenians and Plataeans to make the famous Marathon charge at speed. Is it possible that Herodotus was acknowledging the tendency toward lighter hoplite armor at the end of the Archaic period by suggesting that the hoplites at Marathon were the first to use the custom of running at the enemy?

An event that occurred at Plataea points to the same conclusion. Herodotus tells the story that Pausanias approached the Athenians and suggested that they switch places with the Spartans. If this occurred, the Athenians would be on the right wing opposite the Medes while the Spartans, now on the left wing, would face the Boeotians and Thessalians. Herodotus gives as Pausanias' reason for this strange request that the Athenians knew the Medes and their manner of fighting as a result of the encounter at Marathon.³⁹ It is not conceivable that, in fifth century Greece, a Spartan commander would suggest that an Athenian force was superior to a Spartan in hand-to-hand combat. The only reasonable reaction to this story is that the Athenian armor was lighter and they would be able to close faster with the Medes thereby increasing their chances for success. It also would not have been conceivable that a Spartan commander would actually say that Athenian armor was more suitable than the traditional heavy Spartan equipment. It may be recalled that Plutarch (*Arist.* 14.2) remarks that the fully-armed Spartans at Plataea were hampered by a lack of mobility.

Finally, it must be remembered that Herodotus is precise in telling us about the Persian line's reaction to the charging Greeks. He tells us that they were astounded by the action of the Greeks to the point of thinking them bereft of their senses and, more importantly, they were preparing (*παρασκευάζοντο*) to receive the Greeks. By his use of the Imperfect Tense he is telling us that the Persians never did actually get ready because they were caught off guard.⁴⁰ Their arrows, if shot at all, were either

mobility to drive off the Persian cavalry which was having much success against the Megarians who had been pinned down on ground favorable to cavalry (Hdt. 9.21–23, Diod. Sic. 11.30.3–4, Plut. *Arist.* 14). On this episode see Hignett (note 1), 300 and Lazenby (note 1), 222. Spartan armor also caused a mobility problem at Pylos, 424 B.C.: Thuc. 4.33.2.

³⁸ E. JARVA, *Archaologia on Archaic Greek Body Armour* (Rovaniemi, 1995), 154–8 for his conclusions.

³⁹ Hdt. 9.46.2. On this story see G. SHRIMPTON, "The Persian Cavalry at Marathon," *Phoenix* 34 (1980), 28–9 and LAZENBY (note 1), 231.

⁴⁰ SHRIMPTON, (note 39), 26 n. 15 for *παρασκευάζω* in Herodotus and 27–8 for the reasons why the Persians did not expect a Greek attack. Shrimpton's conclusion in this essay is that the Plataeans and

inaccurate (probably too far) or non-existent. Aristides' comment to the Athenian hoplites at Plataea about Persian archers at Marathon reflects either their absence or their ineffectiveness, or some combination thereof, in the encounter at Marathon (Plut. *Arist.* 16.4).

It might be noted that Herodotus uses the same precise wording in connection with other battles to indicate the process of soldiers getting ready. At Thermopylae the Lacedaemonians were preparing to kill or be killed (7.209.1) and the Greeks were preparing to contend for the passage (7.209.3). The Phocians prepared to perish (7.218.3). At Salamis the Greeks were making ready for battle (8.83.1). In all of these instances the subjects were doing exactly what Herodotus says, namely, "getting ready." At Marathon they were not prepared for an Athenian attack.

Xenophon has an account of a confrontation between the Assyrians and the Persians in which, once again, a contender was unable to use the bow to advantage (*Cyr.* 1.4.23). In this instance it was the Assyrians who were caught off guard. Cyrus was chasing Assyrian foragers. The Assyrians saw their foragers running back to them with Cyrus in pursuit. They expected Cyrus to stop at bowshot range so that, as customary, the two sides could discharge arrows at each other before engaging. Cyrus did not stop, nor did his father Astyges and the cavalry, with the result that the Assyrians were so surprised that they fled without engaging.

The Near Easterners were so used to beginning an engagement with volleys of arrows that a surprise move, with no archers (Hdt. 6.112.2), could catch them off guard and render their prized national weapon ineffective. The Persians at Marathon, just as the Assyrians above, were stationary, not advancing. They wanted to have time to discharge arrows in a fashion that might even be called leisurely in contrast to the Greeks whose need was to bring them to close combat (comp. Hdt. 9.49.2).⁴¹ But the Greeks, in their ability to surprise the Persians early in the morning, put the barbarian cavalry to flight⁴² and did not afford the Persians the opportunity to fire off their customary barrage of arrows.⁴³ The men of Marathon, by closing quickly,

Athenians were successful at Marathon because they surprised the enemy and, because of this, the unprepared cavalry broke formation and fled (36–7). See his convincing analysis of the important passage in the Suda (ed. ADLER, vol. 4, p. 818), *χωρὶς ἰππεῖς*, on pp. 20–1 & 37 (accepted by LAZENBY, note 1, 60, n. 35 and by this author). Of course, many scholars believe that the Persian cavalry was elsewhere when the Greek attack occurred (for a summary see SHRIMPTON, 23, n. 9).

⁴¹ If we accept HARRISON's strong identification of the south frieze of the Nike temple as representing Marathon, there is no question of the presence of Persian archers (note 12), 353–78.

⁴² SHRIMPTON (note 39), 37.

⁴³ For arrowheads found at Marathon see HAMMOND (1968; note 1), 7 and SHRIMPTON (note 38), 30–31 n. 22. W. MCLEOD, "The Range of the Ancient Bow," *Phoenix* 19 (1965), 13 suggests that the Greeks were under fire for 200–300 yards. This is disputed by HAMMOND, who accepts ca. 150 metres for the length of the Persian bowshot (1968; note 1), 17 n. 27). MCLEOD responded in *JHS* 90 (1970) 197–8. If the Greeks began to receive arrows at about 300 yards the arrows could not have caused the line to advance *δρόμῳ* because a 300-yard run at speed would have been impossible if the integrity of the line were to be preserved and the Greeks were to have the strength to engage in battle (note 36). Also, as the Greeks came closer to the Persians, the angle of the bowshot became smaller, and fewer Persian arrows could have been fired, as the archers in the rear would be hindered by their comrades in front. The arrowheads found at Marathon, if they relate to this battle, were probably fired at a longer distance (300 yds?) and are unrelated to the famous charge. Arrows fired at a distance longer than fifty yards suffer a significant decrease in penetration power (MCLEOD 7–8).

eliminated the arrows as a factor – their charge needed no catalyst except courage. They won the day and, because of Herodotus, it was not forgotten.

Note: Herodotus maintained that only 192 Greeks lost their lives in this battle while 6400 barbarians fell. Since the Greeks had no archers, all Persian deaths must have resulted from hand-to-hand combat. Clearly a good number of the 192 Greek hoplites must have perished during that fighting. Regardless of the exactness of Herodotus' numbers, if there had been a significant firing of Persian arrows, those archers would have been most inaccurate. For men who grew up learning how to use the bow (*Xen. Cyr.* 1.2.9,12 & 1.3.15), it would also have been quite embarrassing. The inscription on the tomb of Darius included the words: "As a bowman I am a good bowman both afoot and on horseback." (Quoted from Olmstead's, *History of the Persian Empire* <Chicago, 1948>, 125.)

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