

# PERSIAN AND GREEK STRATEGIC CONCEPTS IN 480 BC

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**FORISEK, Péter. Perzské a grécke strategické koncepcie v roku 480 pred Kr. In *Annales historici Presovienses*. ISSN 1336-7528, 2023, vol. 23, no. 1, p. 7 – 20.**

Počas grécko-perzských vojen bola kampaň vedená Xerxom v roku 480 pred Kristom najvýznamnejším pokusom Peržanov o dobytie a pripojenie gréckej vlasti. Jednota Grékov a omyly perzských vodcov prispeli k víťazstvu Grécka, ktoré prinútilo Peržanov dočasne sa vzdať plánov dobyť túto oblasť. Ďalším dôsledkom bol značný mocenský posun v gréckom svete, pretože tým, že sa Atény stali námornou veľmocou, sa význačne zvýšil ich geopolitický význam.

**Kľúčové slová:** grécka vojenská stratégia, perzská vojenská stratégia, Atény, Sparta, Xerxes.

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During the Greco-Persian wars, the campaign led by Xerxes in 480 BC was the most significant attempt of the Persians to capture and annex the Greek motherland. The Greeks' unity and the blunders of the Persian leaders all contributed to the Greek victory that made the Persians temporarily renounce their plans to conquer the area. Another consequence was a considerable power shift in the Greek world, because by growing into a maritime power, Athens became a geopolitical factor.

**Key words:** Greek military strategy, Persian military strategy, Athens, Sparta, Xerxes.

Herodotus recounts the following story about Demaratus, the exiled former Spartan king, before the attack by Xerxes in 480 BC: “ *I return now to that place in my history where it earlier left off. The Lacedaemonians were the first to be informed that the king was equipping himself to attack Hellas; with this knowledge it was that they sent to the oracle at Delphi, where they received the answer about which I spoke a little while ago. Now the way in which they were informed of this was strange. Demaratus son of Ariston, an exile among the Medes, was, as I suppose (reason being also my ally), no friend to the Lacedaemonians, and I leave it to be imagined whether what he did was done out of goodwill or spiteful triumph. When Xerxes was resolved to march against*

*Hellas, Demaratus, who was then at Susa and had knowledge of this, desired to send word of it to the Lacedaemonians.*<sup>1</sup>

It is a well-known story – Xerxes built a huge army, marched into Greece, occupied Northern and Central Greece, occupied or conquered the majority of the islands, and the Persians defeated and killed Leonidas, the commander of the Greek alliance, as well as the 300 Spartans at Thermopylae, and marched into the evacuated Athens and destroyed the city. By August 480 BC, Xerxes gained control over a large part of Hellas. Up to this point, the story sounds like the victorious Persian conquests of the previous decades, as the same had happened to Lydia, to the New Babylonian Empire, to numerous Central Asian kingdoms, to Egypt, and to the Ionian Greeks of Asia Minor. At that time, however, an unexpected turn came. Though outnumbered, the allied Greek fleet defeated the Persian king's fleet in the naval battle of Salamis in September, who then commissioned commander Mardonius to continue the military operations and returned to Persia. One year later, the Persian army suffered a defeat from the ground army of the Greek Alliance at Plataia and lost control of the previously conquered Greek territories. The Persian soldiers died in the battle or fled or were caught as prisoners. It is a popular story that has been widely discussed from historical, military, cultural and other aspects in the last 2500 years.

In this paper, I aim to find the answer to four questions: When did the Greeks know about the impending invasion? What was the Persians' strategy for the encounter? What was, or what could be the Greeks' strategy? Are there any regularities and contingencies behind the events of the war?

The most important source for the events of the Greco-Persian war is the work of Herodotus, which is the main description of the actions; and from one point it is the only description, even though several modern researchers have been critical of it. In the introduction, Herodotus says his objective is “so that things done by man not be forgotten in time, and that great and marvelous deeds, some displayed by the Hellenes, some by the barbarians, not lose their glory, including among others what was the cause of their waging war on each other.” With this, Herodotus suggests that the war between the Greeks and the Persians is a part of a great historical process, namely the conflict between East and West. He claims that a divine force organizes history and controls

<sup>1</sup> HERODOTUS. *Histories*. VII. Translated by Godley, Alfred Denis Cambridge (MA) : Harvard University Press, (Loeb Classical Library), 1920 – 25, p. 239. I use Godley's translation from 1920 to cite Herodotus.

people's fate, although people's actions are also significant.<sup>2</sup> Hubris against the gods brings about inevitable fall. The gods deemed Xerxes' campaign of 480 BC to fail, due to the Persian king's hubris. He tells in the chapter about Egypt that his descriptions reflect his own opinion which was based on the results of his research, and he also adopted stories he had heard from others but was unable to verify. He decided to write down everything he had heard and warns his readers to believe it only if they want to. When he heard two different stories about a topic, he recorded both,<sup>3</sup> although he was convinced that one of them was merely a tale. This was the first and very simple case of historical source criticism. Among today's scholars, many criticize Herodotus and his works, claiming they are misleading and contain falsehood regarding several historical issues.<sup>4</sup> In this paper I do not deal with the question of his criticism, but I will mention the ancient and modern arguments against his works when discussing the events of the war.<sup>5</sup>

First, I seek to clarify the date when the Greeks may have known about the impending attack against them, based on the introductory source. In ancient times, rulers of states openly built alliances against a third party and directly aided each other under agreements. Herodotus, for example, narrates in detail how the Lydian King Croesus forged an alliance with the Egyptian Pharaoh Amasis and Polycrates, tyrant of Samos, against the Persians.<sup>6</sup> Persian kings made no secret of their foreign policy either. They would prepare for the conquests with the help of Persian collaborators from the target state and never kept secret that they intended to attack a people or a state; they put pressure on the enemy by revealing and circulating their plan.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> HARRISON, Thomas. *Divinity and History: The Religion of Herodotus*. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2000. Based on Herodotus's approach to history, gods affect people's luck, and Harrison summarizes the roles prophecies and miracles played in history according to Herodotus.

<sup>3</sup> HERODOTUS. *Histories*. II., p. 99., 123., III. p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> RHODES, Peter. The Literary Sources. In *A Companion to the Classical Greek World*. Edited by Konrad H. Kinzl, 2006, p. 27.

<sup>5</sup> For Herodotus: DEWALD, Carolyn – MARINCOLA, John (Eds.). *The Cambridge Companion to Herodotus*. Cambridge 2006.; FEHLING, Detlev. *Herodotus and His "Sources": Citation, Invention and Narrative Art*. Translated by Howie, J. G. Berlin : Walter de Gruyter, 1989.

<sup>6</sup> HERODOTUS. *Histories*. I., p. 77.

<sup>7</sup> To give an example, Phanes of Halicarnassus, who fought in Amasis' army as a mercenary leader, betrayed the Egyptian army to Cambyses (HERODOTUS. *Histories*. III., p. 4.). For the Persian diplomacy: Plat. Leg. III. 698e-699b. See RAHE, Paul A. *The Grand Strategy of Classical Sparta*. New Haven and London : Yale University Press, 2015, p. 192 – 193.

Herodotus recounts multiple pre-war events in which Xerxes made it clear that he was preparing to attack Hellas. I will highlight one. The Persians apprehended three Greek spies who were merchants<sup>8</sup> and were thus able to inspect the Persian army. After they were taken into custody, they were led before the king and they – as well as the Persians – expected that Xerxes would have them executed. The King of Kings, on the contrary, “*having inquired of them the purpose of their coming, ordered his guards to lead them around and show them his whole army. When the spies had seen all to their heart’s content, they were to send them away unharmed to whatever country they pleased.*”<sup>9</sup> By doing so, Xerxes repeatedly informed the Greeks that he was preparing for a war against them and did not hide his plans or the size and the composition of his army.

Xerxes sent a message to the Greeks from Sardis, Asia Minor, directly notifying them about his intention to attack them, and dispatched ambassadors to every Greek polis, except Athens and Sparta, demanding earth and water as a sign of surrender. In doing so, he followed the example of Darius, his father and royal predecessor, who also used to send his ambassadors to Greek poleis to make them surrender and send him earth and water that represented the authority over the land in Zoroastrianism and symbolised subordination. The Athenians threw the envoys into a pit, while the Spartans threw them into a well, and this way they rejected the king’s demand.<sup>10</sup>

Since the arrival of Darius’ envoys, the Greeks were aware that the Persians were preparing to conquer their cities. They may have also heard about the succession crisis that followed Darius’ death. However, after 484 BC the abovementioned events clearly indicated that the Persian army was preparing for an invasion.

<sup>8</sup> At that time, merchants were used for intelligence gathering on both sides. Xen. *Hell.* III. 4., Diod. XVI. 22. See RICHMOND, J. A. Spies in Ancient Greece. In *GaR.* 45 (1), 1998, p. 3 – 5.

<sup>9</sup> HERODOTUS. *Histories.* VII., p. 146 – 147.

<sup>10</sup> HERODOTUS. *Histories.* VII., p. 32. The dispatch of the envoys. HERODOTUS. *Histories.* VII., p. 131 – 133. The return of the envoys. HERODOTUS. *Histories.* VI., p. 48 – 49. Darius’ envoys. In HERODOTUS. *Histories.* VII., p. 133. Herodotus says the Athenians threw the envoys into a pit and the Spartans threw them into a well. Concerning the arrival of the envoys in 491 BC, see Sealey 1976. Herodotus states (HERODOTUS. *Histories.* IV., p. 126 – 127.) that Darius also demanded earth and water from Idanthyrus, the Scythian king, who declined it. The Macedonian Amyntas gave the earth and water, but the Persian envoys abused the Macedonians’ hospitality and were then executed by his son, Alexander (HERODOTUS. *Histories.* V., p. 17 – 21.).

### **The Persians' strategy and preparation**

In the following I examine the Persian strategy as well as the preparation for the military campaign against Greece. The expansion of the Persian Empire reached Europe at the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC with Darius' Scythian campaign. Thracia became a vassal of Persian kings, the Macedonians and the Greeks also came into contact with the Persians, and Athens made her first treaty with them at that time, according to historical tradition.<sup>11</sup> With the campaign of 492 BC led by Mardonius, who had suppressed the Ionian Revolt, the Persian authority in Thracia was restored and Alexander I, the Macedonians' ruler, became a vassal of Persian kings, although Macedonia continued a policy of opportunism, aiming to favor both the Persians and the Greek poleis. Balcer claims that Mardonius tried to reach the Greek poleis step by step, by conquering the Thracian and Macedonian territories and establishing this way a stable logistic supply line for the incoming Persian army. The campaign led by Datis in 490 BC at Marathon resulted in a defeat for multiple causes, one of which was that the Persians attacked from the Aegean isles instead of the inland route that had been prepared. By doing so, Datis caused difficulties in the reinforcements of his army which thus ran short of food and water.<sup>12</sup>

It was an important element of the Persians' strategy to weaken the defences of their target with the help of traitors before the attack. Herodotus gave an account of the debate between Xerxes, Mardonius and Artabanus about launching the campaign of 480 BC and listed the Greeks, who were present before King Xerxes. Peisistratids from Athens, the exiled Spartan king Demaratus, as well as Aleuds from Thessaly were all urging the Persian king to attack their homeland.<sup>13</sup> The essence of the Persian strategy was to outnumber the enemy, overwhelmingly, and to reveal and circulate the numerosity of the army before the fighting began. They also used to announce that the enemy should surrender and submit, otherwise would face demise. This happened in the case of the Greeks too.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> BALCER, Jack Martin. The Persian Wars against Greece. A Reassessment. In *Historia*. 38, (2), 1989. HERODOTUS. *Histories*. V., p. 73.

<sup>12</sup> BALCER, Jack Martin. The Persian Wars against Greece. A Reassessment, p. 131.

<sup>13</sup> HERODOTUS. *Histories*. VII., p. 3., VI., p. 2 – 3., 102 – 104., 130., 209., 234 – 5., 237. About the motives of pro-persian Greeks, see BALCER, Jack Martin. The Persian Wars against Greece. A Reassessment, p. 134.

<sup>14</sup> HERODOTUS. *Histories*. IX., p. 17, VII., p. 172.; RAHE, Paul A. *The Grand Strategy of Classical Sparta*. New Haven and London : Yale University Press, 2015.

The Persian king demoralized his Greek enemies by implementing other grand campaigns which also played a role in the war. By Xerxes' command, a canal was built in 484–483 BC intersecting the Akté (Mount Athos) Peninsula. According to Herodotus and later history, this construction was motivated by Xerxes' superstition, i.e. he wanted to prevent that the menacing events of 492 BC be repeated, when a storm destroyed the majority of Mardonius' fleet at Mount Athos.<sup>15</sup> A similar action was performed by Cyrus, the founder of the state, when he ordered his troops to dig 360 trenches at the shores of the fast flowing river Gyndes (today's Diyala River in Iraq), redirecting this way the river to be able to invade Babylon.<sup>16</sup> This demonstration of power is mentioned by Herodotus too, who claims that the King of Kings wished to have a canal constructed which two or even three warships could pass through, side by side.<sup>17</sup>

Preparing against the Greeks, the Persians established a network of stores on the Aegean shores (see Map). This network of provisions went from the White Point to Macedonia, passing through Tyrodiza, Doriscus and Eion.<sup>18</sup> An enormous amount of food was stockpiled there for the soldiers, the horses and the draught animals. The rulers of towns and communities were ordered to provide the king and his escort with a predetermined amount of food. In some cases, Herodotus noted shocking amounts and sums, which indicates the overwhelming numerosity of the Persian army.<sup>19</sup> However, a brief story suggests that Xerxes planned on Greek resources as well, because when he saw from the coast that some ships carrying commodities were heading for Greece, he prohibited his troops to stop them, trusting they would seize the wheat carried by the ships after the occupation of the Greek towns.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>15</sup> The demise of Mardonius' army. HERODOTUS. *Histories*. VI., p. 44 – 45. Regarding the aim of the campaign, it is debated whether the target was Athens or the control over the Thracian and Macedonian territories, which they managed to gain. Xerxes' canal construction: HERODOTUS. *Histories*. VII., p. 22 – 24.

<sup>16</sup> HERODOTUS. *Histories*. I., p. 189 – 190.

<sup>17</sup> HERODOTUS. *Histories*. VII., p. 24. Herodotus also highlights that “Xerxes gave the command for this digging out of pride, wishing to display his power and leave a memorial.”

<sup>18</sup> HERODOTUS. *Histories*. VII., p. 25. RAHE, Paul A. *The Grand Strategy of Classical Sparta*, p. 168 – 170.

<sup>19</sup> HERODOTUS. *Histories*. VII., p. 118 – 119. The towns only had to provide for the alimention of the army, but concerning Xerxes and his escort, they were obliged to make them rich feasts, provide tents, decorated, golden or gilded furnishing, cutlery and lavish repasts.

<sup>20</sup> HERODOTUS. *Histories*. VII., p. 146. RAHE, Paul A. *The Grand Strategy of Classical Sparta*. 2015.

Having arrived in Asia Minor, Xerxes decided his army would not cross the Dardanelles in ships, but he had a tremendous pontoon bridge built, using a portion of the ships. After the first pontoon bridge was demolished by a storm, the Persian god-king whipped the sea and a double pontoon bridge was built, so huge that some smaller ships could pass through under it. Besides the military aspects, this grand campaign demonstrated the power of the Persian king and the Persian army, and served to intimidate the Greeks.<sup>21</sup>

The attack in 480 BC was the continuation of Mardonius' earlier strategy; the army was marching towards Greece on land, through Persian controlled Thracian and Macedonian territories, and a naval fleet of considerable significance was escorting the ground army on the seashore. In addition to combating the Greek fleet and providing reinforcements, the Persian fleet may have been prepared for amphibious operations as well, in today's parlance; since Diodorus claims the fleet involved 850 ships that carried horses. The Persians probably aimed to deploy the cavalry right behind the Greeks, after winning at sea.<sup>22</sup>

The Persian army and its leadership had several advantages compared to the Greeks. Later I will discuss in detail the numbers stated by Herodotus, as well as the critics regarding them. The Persians had a unified system of commanders, the decisions were made by King Xerxes directly, being personally present at the scene and consulting his military leaders. The army was organized on the basis of the decimal system, and the commanders of each unit made up a clear-cut chain of command.<sup>23</sup> Another advantage of the Persian leadership was that the majority of the leaders and soldiers had decades of experience about military campaigns conducted in distant places. Due to their successful strategy, the Persians dominated the war until the battle of Salamis.

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<sup>21</sup> HERODOTUS. *Histories*. VII., p. 34 – 36.

<sup>22</sup> Diod. Sic. XII. 7.; RAHE, Paul A. *The Grand Strategy of Classical Sparta*, p. 170.

<sup>23</sup> HOW, W. W. Arms, Tactics and Strategy in the Persian War. In *JHS*. 43, (2), 1923, p. 120. According to HERODOTUS. *Histories*. VII., p. 81. the structure of the Persian army was based on the decimal system. However, based on Thucydides, How claims that the Spartan hoplite army also had a chain of command, such as king-polemarch-lochagos-penteconter-enomotarch. About the Persian and Greek officer staffs see HOW, W. W. Arms, Tactics and Strategy in the Persian War, p. 123. Lazenby analysed in detail the differences between the command structures of the two armies, and claims that the leaders of the Persian army were also rather appointed by the king, having his favour, and were not professional leaders. LAZENBY, John Francis. *The Defence of Greece 490–479 BC*. Warminster : Aris-Phillips, 1993, p. 17 – 45.

### The strategy and the preparation of the Greek states

Next, I examine the Greeks' preparation as well as their potential strategic concepts. Xerxes' envoys demanded the Greek poleis to fully submit, and a large portion of them did obey. However, some poleis decided to confront the Persians, under Sparta's and Athens' leadership, and formed a military alliance, while some other poleis decided to wait, in order to join the victorious party at the right time.<sup>24</sup> The aim of the Greek allied forces was to stop the Persians to the north of the poleis that chose resistance or hesitated, in order to keep as many potential allies as possible. Outnumbered by the Persians, they discarded the option of open war and chose to confront at geographically favourable locations where the Persians were unable to make use of their numerosity (Vale of Tempe, Thermopylae, and Artemisium and Salamis at sea, and finally the Isthmos leading to the Peloponnese).<sup>25</sup> Rahe notes that the two greater poleis of the Greek alliance, Athens and Sparta had an agreement, but they also worked out their own strategies in addition.<sup>26</sup> Sparta's main objective was to prevent the Persians from reaching the Peloponnese and to avoid that pro-Persian states be in the majority in mainland Greece. This latter objective could not be accomplished until the battle of Salamis, as the cities of Northern and Central Greece surrendered to the Persians; the one and only considerable resistance, i.e. the heroic resistance of Leonidas and his Spartans, was easily suppressed. However, the heroic self-sacrifice of the 300 Spartans significantly improved the morale of the Spartans and every Greek in later battles.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> The poleis surrendering to the Persians are listed in HERODOTUS. *Histories*. VII., p. 132. Even Delphoi advised the Greeks not to resist the Persians but to submit. Later, it was an important element of the Athenian propaganda that while many poleis submitted, Athens chose to fight and saved Greece. For the first, very unfavourable, and the second, promising prophecy given by Delphoi to the Athenians see HERODOTUS. *Histories*. VII., p. 14 – 142.; RAHE, Paul A. *The Grand Strategy of Classical Sparta*, p. 193 – 196 About the Delphoi prophecies.

<sup>25</sup> The significance of the sea battle at Artemisium has been neglected in modern historiography. Although the battle ended in a draw due to a seastorm – as noted in BALCER, Jack Martin. *The Persian Wars against Greece. A Reassessment*, p. 137 – the myth about the invincibility of the Persian fleet was proved false. Lazenby calls it a milestone too, see LAZENBY, John Francis. *The Strategy of the Greeks in the Opening Campaign of the Persian War*. In *Hermes*. 92, (3), 1964, p. 264 – 284.

<sup>26</sup> RAHE, Paul A. *The Grand Strategy of Classical Sparta*, p. 202 – 208.

<sup>27</sup> RAHE, Paul A. *The Grand Strategy of Classical Sparta*, p. 122 – 124; STARR, Chester G. Why did the Greeks defeat the Persians? In *PP*. 86, 1962, p. 330 highlights one sentence of the Sicilian Diodorus that the battle of Thermopylae was a greater contribution to the freedom of Hellas than the later battles against Xerxes.



The Greek alliance suffered various disadvantages compared to the Persians. In contrast to the unified leadership of the Persians, the Greeks chose a Spartan to be the commander of the ground army (namely Leonidas, who was followed by Pausanias after his death), but the army was not unified. The alliance comprised about thirty bigger poleis, among which some used to be loathed enemies of each other a couple of years or decades earlier, like Athens and Aegina or Sparta and Argos. This was depicted in the historiography of later times, since both the Athenians and the Aeginians declared that the victory at Salamis was achieved due to their own bravery and determination.<sup>28</sup> However, Starr believes that the most important factor behind the Greeks' victory was that the Greeks set up an alliance and accepted the Spartan leadership in it. This opinion is acceptable, but I find it important to note that a commander of the calibre of Themistocles could manipulate the Spartan leadership and impose his will upon them, using a trick if necessary.

The Greeks lacked the Persians' experience in waging long and distant wars, as they had mainly fought smaller, local wars, usually against each other.<sup>29</sup> Athens was the only polis to have some experience, after sending an expeditionary force to Asia Minor to support the Ionian uprising. Another disadvantage was that the Greek commanders took up their position on the basis of origin, like the Spartan kings, or in the framework of politics, like the Athenian strategoi, in contrast to the professional Persian leaders. Consequently, a large part of Greek commanders were already unfit for leadership.<sup>30</sup> An example for this is the battle of Marathon which took place only because during the strategoi's debate on whether they should surrender or confront, Miltiades finally convinced Callimachus to attack.

After all, we still have two questions: Which events of the war can be considered regularities, and which events were contingencies? One of Herodotus's most questionable claim is that the victory over the Persians was due to

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<sup>28</sup> HERODOTUS. *Histories*. VIII., p. 86. Besides STARR, Chester G. Why did the Greeks defeat the Persians? 1962. several modern historians suggest that the creation of the Athenian thalassocracy was the result of the conflict between Aegina and Athens. Even so, the two poleis managed to put aside their conflict during the war with Persia and to fight together against their common enemy.

<sup>29</sup> RAHE, Paul A. *The Grand Strategy of Classical Sparta*, p. 138 – 139, 187 – 189; STARR, Chester G. Why did the Greeks defeat the Persians?, p. 323.

<sup>30</sup> HERODOTUS. *Histories*. VII., p. 139. *As it is, to say that the Athenians were the saviors of Hellas is to hit the truth. It was the Athenians who held the balance; whichever side they joined was sure to prevail. choosing that Greece should preserve her freedom, the Athenians roused to battle the other Greek states which had not yet gone over to the Persians and, after the gods, were responsible for driving the king off.*

the Athenians' resoluteness and fleet building. Thucydides, on the contrary, writes that the outcome of Xerxes' campaign was not Greek victory, but Persian defeat. On the eve of the Peloponnesian war, the Corinthians, who went to Sparta as her ally, said: "And yet you know that on the whole the rock on which the barbarian was wrecked was himself..."<sup>31</sup> Among modern historians, Lazenby claims after Thucydides that it was the Persians' blunders that led to the Greeks' victories in 480 and 479 BC.<sup>32</sup>

Modern historians agree with Herodotus and later ancient historiographers on that the Persians' successful advance can be attributed to the overwhelming numerosity of their ground and naval forces. According to Herodotus, Xerxes' army numbered over 2.5 million soldiers, while Simonides talks of 4 million soldiers. As a physician at the court of Artaxerxes II, Ctesias from Cnidus had access to Persian sources and was thus able to give a more reliable account of Xerxes' Persian army, stating it counted 800,000 soldiers. The numbers stated by Herodotus and Simonides are obviously absurd, as modern scientists claim; in fact, the number of 800,000 recorded by Ctesias is also improbable. Sir Maurice, a British officer who was staying in Istanbul in 1922 during the Chanak Crisis, went through the Dardanelles and assessed its geography, supply capacities and water sources, and estimated the number of Xerxes' army. He published his findings and opinion stating that the Persian army comprised at most 250,000 soldiers.<sup>33</sup> Modern calculations suggest the Persians were even less in number. Young believes their army was not significantly greater than the united Greek army, based on the grain and water supplies. The most recent studies estimate the number of Xerxes' soldiers to have been between 50 and 100 thousand.<sup>34</sup> In my opinion, the Greeks

<sup>31</sup> THUCYDIDES. *History of the Peloponnesian War*. Translated by Smith, C. F. Cambridge (MA) : Harvard University Press, (Loeb Classical Library 108.), 1919, p. 69.

<sup>32</sup> LAZENBY, John Francis. *The Defence of Greece 490–479 BC*, p. 248 – 260. He does not think that it was the free men's courage that defeated the Eastern despotism, and that the Greek strategy was not better than the Persian one. He claims that the Greek victory had the following causes: the creation and the preservation of unity, the courage of the soldiers, the many moral examples and the Persians' blunders.

<sup>33</sup> MAURICE, Frederick. The Size of the Army of Xerxes in the Invasion of Greece 480 B. C. In *JHS*. 50, (2), 1930, p. 210 – 235. Reviewed in RAHE, Paul A. *The Grand Strategy of Classical Sparta*, p. 176 – 177.

<sup>34</sup> YOUNG, T. Cuyler. 480/479 B. C. – A Persian Perspective. In *IrAnt*. 15, 1980, p. 213 – 39.; RAHE, Paul A. *The Grand Strategy of Classical Sparta*, p. 175 – 178 presumes an army of maximum 100,000 soldiers, while FLOWER, Michael A. The Size of Xerxes' Expeditionary Force. In *The Landmark Herodotus*. Translated by Andrea L Purvis, edited by Strassler, Robert B. New York : Pantheon Books, 2007, p. 819 – 823 and GARLAND, Robert. *Athens*

were definitely outnumbered by the Persians, because a large portion of their poleis had surrendered, which meant that their armies were added to the advancing Persian army while the Greek allies decreased in number.

Regarding the morale of the Persian army, the king's person played an important role. Xerxes' personal presence encouraged his soldiers, which he deliberately intensified. He watched the battle of Salamis in person, from the beginning until its end, and noted the names of the bravest captains with his scribes, in order to reward them.<sup>35</sup> In addition, intimidation played a significant role too, when he strictly punished anyone who resisted his will. When the Lydian Pythius wanted to return home with his eldest son, leaving his other four sons with Xerxes and ensuring this way that his family would not extinct, Xerxes set an example by having the eldest son cut in half and his army marched away between the two halves of the body placed on either side of the road. By doing so, he made it clear that he demanded unconditional loyalty.<sup>36</sup> Another proof of the importance of the king's personal presence was that in the battle of Salamis the Persian naval captains were competing against each other in performing heroic deeds, because the king was watching them from the coast, taking notes of their heroic deeds or cowardly retreats. The most famous story, recounted sarcastically by Herodotus, is the story of Artemisia, Queen of Halicarnassus, who attacked and sank a Calyndan ship, which was not Greek but Persian allied, because it was obstructing her in the battle. Observing the action from the coast, Xerxes believed she sank a hostile, Greek ship, and to his escort he made the comment: *"My men have become women, and my women men."*<sup>37</sup>

Once they rejected to submit to Xerxes, the allied Greeks had no choice. They remembered how Miltiades fought to prevent his fellow Greeks from surrendering and to make them confront Datis. As an example of heroic self-sacrifice, they kept in mind the story of Leonidas and his fellows as well as the abovementioned Spartan envoys, who were ready to die for their city.<sup>38</sup>

As I mentioned above, some authors and scholars believe the Greek victory chiefly relied on the Greeks' union. It had a geopolitical antecedent that Herodotus already mentioned, but its significance was highlighted only later,

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*Burning. The Persian Invasion of Greece and the Evacuation of Attica.* 2017. write about even less, 50-100,000 Persian militants.

<sup>35</sup> HERODOTUS. *Histories.* VIII., p. 90.

<sup>36</sup> HERODOTUS. *Histories.* VII., p. 39.

<sup>37</sup> HERODOTUS. *Histories.* VIII., p. 87 – 88.

<sup>38</sup> HERODOTUS. *Histories.* VII., p. 136.

by modern historiography. After the victory at Marathon, the Athenians sent a fleet on Miltiades' initiative and under his leadership to drive away the Persians and pro-Persian political leaders from the Persian controlled islands. The action was a success, but Miltiades was injured during the siege of Paros and the Athenians returned home.<sup>39</sup> The Athenian State sentenced to incarceration and imposed a fine on the hero of Marathon who soon after died of his injuries. Even so, the Athenian influence on the Aegean Sea consolidated. This may be the reason why some of the islands, such as Seriphos, Siphnos, Melos and Naxos according to Herodotus, joined the Greeks when Xerxes was attacking in 480 BC and why other islands, such as Keos, Karystos, Andros and Tenos joined the Persians and why Paros was waiting to see which side would become victorious (although Herodotus states the Persians kept it as reserve).<sup>40</sup>

During Xerxes' campaign, the first major Greek victory – and the turning point of the war at the same time – was the battle of Salamis in which the freshly built Athenian fleet played a crucial role. Athens supported the Ionian Revolt with 20 ships, which do not seem to be a huge fleet, but its creation was a hard achievement of the Athens of the time.<sup>41</sup> For the war against Aegina in the early 480s BC, Athens needed to borrow warships from Corinth. The famous debate in Aristotle's Athenian Constitution between Aristeides, who urged the strengthening of the ground army, and Themistocles, who advocated building a fleet, led to the birth of the Athenian maritime empire (thalassocracy). After 483 BC they built 50 triremes due to another war with Aegina, which were regarded as the most modern warships at that time; and soon after they built another 100 of them.<sup>42</sup> The Athenian crew learnt to operate the warships and to wage sea battles.

<sup>39</sup> HERODOTUS. *Histories*. VI., p. 132 – 136.; RAHE, Paul A. *The Grand Strategy of Classical Sparta*, p. 180 – 184.

<sup>40</sup> About Athens' geopolitical interests in the early 5<sup>th</sup> century BC see RAHE, Paul A. *The Grand Strategy of Classical Sparta*, p. 183 – 184. In HERODOTUS. *Histories*. VIII., p. 112 Herodotus describes the political conduct of the Aegean islands during Xerxes' attack in 480 BC. Using the Athenian fleet, Themistocles forced the islands, including Paros, to support the Greek alliance against the Persians. For the fleet of Paros used as reserve: HERODOTUS. *Histories*. VIII., p. 67.

<sup>41</sup> GARLAND, Robert. *Athens Burning. The Persian Invasion of Greece and the Evacuation of Attica*. Baltimore : John Hopkins University Press, 2017, p. 13 – 15.

<sup>42</sup> RAHE, Paul A. *The Grand Strategy of Classical Sparta*, p. 188 – 189. About the triremes: STRAUSS, Barry. *The Battle of Salamis. The Naval Encounter That Saved Greece and Western Civilization*. New York : Simon and Schister, 2004, p. XVII – XXI.

Following the victory at Thermopylae, Xerxes' army took Boeotia and then Attica without hindrance. The evacuated Athens fell after a short siege and the Persians burnt and destroyed the Acropolis, avenging the destruction of the sanctuaries in Sardis.<sup>43</sup> The Athenians became exiled, the inhabitants scattered and settled down on the island of Salamis and in Troezen in the Peloponnese. The Persian fleet was stationing in Phalerum, the port of Athens, while the Athenian fleet was in Salamis, together with the allied Greek fleet.<sup>44</sup> Xerxes did not need to rush, as the whole of mainland Greece and most of the Aegean islands had surrendered to him, except for the Sparta-controlled Peloponnese. The Spartan leadership focused on the defence of the Peloponnesian Peninsula, building a wall across the Isthmus and placing the allied Greek ground army behind it.<sup>45</sup> At the same time, the entire Greek fleet was ordered to return from Salamis to defend the Peloponnesian Peninsula. However, the Athenians were unable to comply, otherwise they would have left behind their city and the inhabitants who were resettled in Salamis. Therefore, Themistocles attempted to get Xerxes involved in a sea battle with a brilliant stratagem (or treason?). The message he sent to the Persian king was in fact partly true, as there were frictions between the Greek allies. But Themistocles sent a message that the king had awaited for long; and since he expressed his loyalty to the king in it, the king expected that he would betray the Greeks in return for becoming a regent.<sup>46</sup>

At that point Xerxes made a strategic mistake that decided the outcome of the maritime war, because he chose to confront the Greeks without considering the victories on the mainland and that the Persian fleet outnumbered the Greeks.<sup>47</sup> The heroic fight of the Greeks described by Herodotus was helped by several advantageous factors. The Persian fleet blocked both sides of the strait of Salamis. The Peloponnesians wanted to sail back home to defend their own coast against the Persian fleet. Therefore, the Spartan commander

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<sup>43</sup> HERODOTUS. *Histories*. VIII., p. 52 – 54.; BALCER, Jack Martin. *The Persian Wars against Greece. A Reassessment*, p. 137.

<sup>44</sup> HERODOTUS. *Histories*. VIII., p. 66 – 67.

<sup>45</sup> About the Spartan strategy: RAHE, Paul A. *The Grand Strategy of Classical Sparta*. 2015.

<sup>46</sup> BALCER, Jack Martin. *The Persian Wars against Greece. A Reassessment*, p. 138.

<sup>47</sup> I must add that the above mentioned Artemisia, Queen of Halicarnassus, advised Xerxes in the council of war to settle the conflict on the ground, where the Persian army outnumbered the Greeks. After an eventual defeat in the mainland, the Greek fleet would not have a base. Artemisia wanted to make use of the Athenian–Spartan conflict at the same time, because if the Persians had attacked the Peloponnese, Sparta would not have cared about Athens. However, Xerxes did not take Artemisia's advice. HERODOTUS. *Histories*. VIII., p. 68.

Eurybiades held a council of war. At that time Aristеides returned from exile and informed them that they could not flee, because they were encircled by the Persians.<sup>48</sup> The words of Aristеides were confirmed by the crew of a ship from Tinos that had switched allegiance from the Persians. The Greeks had no option but to fight for their lives. Herodotus writes that Xerxes decided to flee after the defeat, to avoid getting captured by the Greeks. However, his narration reveals that Xerxes in fact consulted his commanders and then decided to retreat with a portion of his army and to leave a greater portion of the army behind, under Mardonius's command.<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, Herodotus later described Xerxes's retreat directly as a flee, and wrote multiple versions for it. Having arrived in Sardeis, the king still kept contact with his army, but then travelled further on.<sup>50</sup>

Salamis did not bring ultimate victory, since the Persian ground army was still stationing in Central Greece, in Boeotia that allied with the Persians, without Xerxes though. Mardonius made an attempt at disintegrating the Greek alliance; through the mediation of King Alexander I of Macedonia he offered the Athenians the opportunity to rebuild their city with Persian help and to rule the rest of Greece and the Aegean Sea, in exchange for their submission to Xerxes.<sup>51</sup> Athens did not accept the offer, but the Spartans were forced to move, taking the risk of a campaign to keep the Greek alliance in one, to recapture Athens' territories together. The victory at Plataia in 479 BC was again a result of Mardonius' strategic and tactical mistakes, which in the end led to his death, to the Persians' complete defeat and to the Greeks' victory.

To sum it up, during the Greco-Persian wars, the campaign led by Xerxes in 480 BC was the most significant attempt of the Persians to capture and annex the Greek motherland. The Greeks' unity and the blunders of the Persian leaders all contributed to the Greek victory that made the Persians temporarily renounce their plans to conquer the area. Another consequence was a considerable power shift in the Greek world, because by growing into a maritime power, Athens became a geopolitical factor.

<sup>48</sup> HERODOTUS. *Histories*. VIII., p. 79 – 82.

<sup>49</sup> HERODOTUS. *Histories*. VIII., p. 97 and 100 – 102. He left the army behind with Mardonius, on the advice of Queen Artemisia, because if the Greeks had been defeated, his kingdom would have become greater, but if his army had been defeated, then only a servant of the king would have been defeated, not he himself.

<sup>50</sup> HERODOTUS. *Histories*. VIII., p. 117 – 120.

<sup>51</sup> HERODOTUS. *Histories*. VIII., p. 140., 144., IX., p. 13. BALCER, Jack Martin. *The Persian Wars against Greece. A Reassessment*, p. 140.