

Volume 2

Number 083

Marathon - Part I

Lead: On the plain at Marathon, Greek armies met a much larger Persian invasion force. For a time, the outcome was in doubt.

Tag: "A Moment In Time" with Dan Roberts.

Content: In 500 BCE the Persian Empire stretched from India to the shores of the Black Sea. From their capital at Persepolis, Cyrus the Great and his successors, Darius and Xerxes, extended the borders and generally benevolent rule of Persia to most of the civilized world. As they moved west the Persians began to encounter those

regions colonized by the major city-states of Greece.

During a furious period of expansion from about 1100 to 800 BC the various Greek cities planted colonies around the Mediterranean basin. This meant that the Greek language, its art and religion, and most significantly for the future, its notions of democratic government, would form the dominant culture of the region, that is, if another power did not supplant it.

The arrival of the Persians and their more oriental approach to life guaranteed an important clash of cultures. In 490 BC, Greek colonies in Iona on the western coast of modern day Turkey, already conquered by the

Persians, rebelled. In this they were assisted by Athens.

The Persians determined to stamp out this rebellion and finish their conquest of the Greek peninsula, and sent a large invasion force with Athens as its major target. After several preliminary skirmishes in the outer islands of the Aegean Sea, the Persians landed at the Bay of Marathon, twenty miles from Athens and began staging for the final assault.

In the face of this threat the Athenian military leaders were demonstrating the disunity that was nearly always getting them in trouble. So as to prevent any single leader from getting too much power and

subverting Athenian democracy, they had an elaborate system whereby each of ten generals would command the army for only single day at a time. While this certainly prevented a concentration of power in any single man's hands, it also left the city vulnerable to outside threat. An enemy could be at the gates and the Athenians would still be debating who would lead the defense of the city. Next time: The Battle of Marathon helps determine the course of western civilization.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

Lloyd, Alan. *Marathon: The Story of Civilizations on Collision Course*. New York, NY: New American Library, 1975.

Sealey, Raphael. *A History of the Greek City States: ca 700-338 BC*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986.

Copyright by Dan Roberts Enterprises, Inc.