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Marathon - Part II

Lead: The victory of the Greek forces at the Battle of Marathon helped set the course of western development.

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

Content: The ever-expanding Persian empire under Cyrus the Great, Darius and Xerxes came to a halt as it collided with the Greek city-states and their colonies on the Aegean Sea. A powerful invasion force landed at the Bay of Marathon, twenty miles northeast of Athens, in the fall of 490 BC. As was often the case, the

democratic Athenians were busy arguing who would command their army even as the Persians were at the gates. Finally, one of the generals, Miltiades, persuaded Callimachus, a civil official, to break the impasse and vote to attack the Persians first.

Apparently there was evidence that some Athenians were sympathetic with the invaders and if the City waited too long the seeds of betrayal would undermine its resistance.

Miltiades moved his outnumbered army down to the Bay and waited. When word was received that the Persian cavalry was temporarily absent from the camp, he gave the word to attack. Using a surprise envelopment maneuver and superior

weapons and armor, the Greeks won the day, losing a third of their troops and several ships.

Not willing to admit defeat, the Persians sailed around the Sunium Promontory in a race to get to Athens before the Athenian army could straggle back. Their attempts to signal their allies within the city failed, and a forced march by the Greeks brought them back in time to thwart this first Persian invasion.

According to legend, suspecting treachery, Miltiades sent a messenger from Marathon to Athens, a distance of about 25 miles. He announced the Persian defeat and that the army was on the way, thus preventing betrayal

from within. The runner then died of exhaustion. This tale may be the basis of the modern marathon foot-race.

The victory of the Greek forces at Marathon and a decade later at Thermopylae and Salamis meant that Greece would remain free of Persian domination and helped insure that Greek political forms and philosophy would continue to be one of the primary driving forces the development 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.

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