

Assess the respective contributions of Athens and Sparta and other Greeks to Greek victory over Persia in 480-79 B.C.

The war between Persia and Greece is one that has been remembered in history, particularly recorded by Herodotus in his ~~History~~ *History*. Athens and Sparta, along with other Greeks contributed greatly to the victory over Persia in 480-79 B.C. along with other factors. This essay will assess how their contributions and other factors contributed to the Greek victory over Persia.

The Persians were very well prepared for their invasion of Greece which can be seen through the canal which was dug through isthmus north of Mt Athos (VII 1-24). The Persians also built a bridge to cross the Hellespont and made provision dumps which were carefully chosen by a survey to feed the army as they made their march. (VII. 25-26) Herodotus also states that for four years "the mustering of troops and the provision of stores and equipment continued, and towards the close of the fifth Xerxes... began his march." (VII 20-21) The vast preparations of Xerxes' invasion would mean that the Greeks would be facing a huge challenge and would have to come together to repel the invasion.

Athens and Sparta could be seen to be the two major contributors to the victory over Persia. Athens could be seen as the major contributor in terms of naval contribution. Themistocles persuaded the Athenians to use the new silver found at Laurium to build a great fleet instead of distributing it amongst themselves. (VII. 144) The Greek fleet was a key component to the Greeks victories over Persia at sea as the Athenians provided the Greek Navy with about half of the total ships they had. The fact that the Persian navy was beaten also meant that the invasion was slowly beginning to lose momentum as the navy provided support to the land forces and guarded supply ships crossing the Aegean. Without it, the land force was on its own.

Hermann Bengtson in his book ~~History of Greece~~ *History of Greece* raised the argument that the Greeks' strategy was that the Greek fleet would inflict "a decisive defeat on the Persian at a favourable place" (Chapter 6: 99) While the Greek land force held up the Persian advance as the Greeks didn't want to risk an all out fight against a much larger Persian force. This argument further emphasises the point that if it not for the Athenian contribution to the fleet, then the Greeks may not have been able to hold their own on the seas and the outcome of the naval battles may have been very different.

The Spartans also contributed greatly to the Greek defence of their homeland. Were it not for the actions of the Spartan King, Leonidas and his 300 Spartans; and the other Greeks that stayed behind to fight at the Battle of Thermopylae, the Greeks that were sent home may not have escaped, and it could be argued that the delay

caused by them staying behind allowed the Greeks to make further preparations. This time would have allowed the Greeks to muster more men and plan their defence so they would be ready for the invasion which may not have been possible if those who stayed also left.

There were also the other Greek city states that joined to help but there were others who, when asked, didn't partake. One of these was Argos which offered to join the coalition if they had equal command which the Spartans refused. The Cretans also didn't join, although they were ready to due to what the Delphic Priestess told them. (VII. 168-170) The Corcyraeans did offer to send a fleet in support but later began to change their mind and as Herodotus states "the dawdled about before getting to sea, and then sailed only as far as the Peloponnese" making their support to Greece redundant. The Greeks also asked for help from Gelon of Sicily; however his help was refused as he wanted command of the whole Greek army which the Spartans were unwilling to give up. There were still some states which helped a great deal such as Corinth and Aegina which Bengtson states that they provided the Greek fleet with ships. (Chapter 6: 101) Their contribution of ships was only beaten by Athens, yet Corinth and Aegina's contributions helped greatly/The lack of help from some of the more dominant and powerful Greek city states meant that the Greeks would be weakened and while some smaller one's did help, their contribution was not as great as that of Sparta or Athens.

Despite the contributions of Sparta and Athens to the victory over Persia, there were other factors that contributed to the victory. For example, the Greeks strategy of using the topography of Greece to render the Persian numbers useless such as the use of narrow passages to use as the battlefield to condense the Persians into a small space to make use of their Phalanx and longer spears. This factor greatly contributed to the Greek victory as it meant Persia's numbers were not utilised and the Greeks could take benefits of their superior armour and weapons.

The morale of each of the army's men would have also played a huge role in the invasion. The Greeks were fighting for their homeland, family and the lasting honour of Greece and were willing to fight to the death as exemplified in the Battle of Thermopylae. The Persians on the other hand were fighting because they were told to do so; and for the wealth, booty and honour. The argument is supported by Bengtson as he states that "the Greeks were fighting for their homeland and for freedom, whereas the Persians were merely induced by a reward." (Chapter 6: 102)

There is further evidence of morale playing a huge role in the conflict as at the Battle of Salamis "the Phoenicians and Ionian mariners had a better knowledge of the sea... and had a distinct feeling of superiority towards their opponents." (Bengtson 6:102) So although outnumbered by the Persian fleet, the Ionians and Phoenicians

felt that because they had greater knowledge of the sea than the Persians, they felt they could win.

The Persian invasion of Greece in 480-79 B.C. was what seemed to be one of the largest invasions to ever take place. Herodotus stated that Persia had an "army consisting, in all, of 5,283,220 men." (VII. 186) Scholars are in the agreement that this number is grossly exaggerated and that, while the Persians would have greatly outnumbered the Greeks, a more plausible number would have stood around 150,000 – 200,000 Persians. N. G. L. Hammond argued that "The very size and slowness of the Persian host contributed to its failure." Implying that due to its large size, the fact they were on foreign soil meant that they had to feed and keep the army in check which gets more difficult, the bigger the army is. The speed of the army to travel also contributed to its failure as it allowed the Greeks to prepare an army and navy to repel the Persians, whereas if they had been quick, they would not have had time to settle their differences and the outcome may have had been very difficult.

The weather also contributed to the Greek victory as Herodotus states that "the weather, which was clear and calm, suddenly changed, and the (Persian) fleet was caught in a heavy blow." (VII. 188-89) The storm resulted in a suspected four hundred ships destroyed in the Persian fleet (VII. 190) which would have not only left the fleet greatly weakened but would have also caused a huge dip in morale in the Persian army. The fact the weather changed so quickly may also have caused the Persians to believe that it was a God who did it, and in contrast, this would have shown to the Greeks that the Gods were on their side and their morale would have been boosted.

The fact the Persians fell into Themistocles' trap at the Battle of Salamis also contributed to the Greek victory as it allowed the Greeks to utilise their ships better fighting prowess in narrow straights while rendering the Persians' faster and more manoeuvrable ships (cf. VIII, 10, 60) useless. If the Persians had waited or landed on the Peloponnese they may have won but the victory for the Greeks proved to be the turning point of the invasion (VIII. 75-95) and would have greatly improved the Greek morale and damaged the Persians with it.

In conclusion while the Athenians, Spartans and other Greeks contributed greatly to the victory over Persia, however there were other factors such as the morale of the men and lucky events such as the weather, which altogether contributed to the victory over the Persians. Were it not for them, then the outcome of the war may have been very different.