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## Greece vs. Persia

Do you know what those two little letters *vs.* mean between Greece and Persia in the name of this story?

Perhaps you have seen them used on football tickets when there was to be a match between two teams as, for example, Harvard vs. Yale.

They stand for *versus*, which means *against*.

Well, there was to be a great match between Greece and Persia, but it wasn't a game; it was a fight for life and death, a fight between little Greece and great big Persia.

Cyrus,<sup>1</sup> the great Persian king, had conquered Babylon and other countries, as well, and he had kept on conquering until Persia ruled most of the world, all except Greece and Italy.

About the year 500 B.C. the new ruler of this vast Persian Empire was a man named Darius.<sup>2</sup> Darius looked at the map, as you might do, and saw that he owned and ruled over a large part of it. What a pity, thought he, that there should be a little country like Greece that did not belong to him!

Darius said to himself, "I must have this piece of land called Greece to complete my empire." Besides, the Greeks had given him some trouble. They had helped some of his subjects to rebel against him. Darius said, "I must punish these Greeks for what they have done and then just add their country to mine."

# Greece PART 1 EXTRA READINGS

He called his son-in-law and told him to go over to Greece and conquer it.

His son-in-law did as he was told and started out with a fleet and an army to do the punishing. But before his fleet could reach Greece it was destroyed by a storm, and he had to go back home without having done anything.

Darius was very angry at this, mad with his son-in-law and mad with the gods who he thought had wrecked his ships, and he made up his mind that he himself would go and do the punishing and conquering the next time.

First, however, he sent his messengers to all the Greek cities and ordered each of them to send him some earth and some water as a sign that they would give him their land and become his subjects peaceably without a fight.

Many Greek cities were so frightened by the threat of Darius and by his mighty power that they gave in at once and sent earth and water as they were told to do.

But little Athens and little Sparta both hotly refused to do so, in spite of the fact that they were only two small cities against the vast empire of Darius.

Athens took Darius's messenger and threw him into a well, saying, "There is earth and water for you; help yourself"; and Sparta did likewise. Then these two cities joined their forces and called on all their neighbors to join with them to fight for their native land against Darius and Persia.

Darius made ready to conquer Athens and then Sparta.

In order to reach Athens his army had to be carried across the sea in boats. Of course, in those days there were no steamboats. Steamboats were invented nearly two thousand years later.

The only way to make a boat go was with sails or with oars. To make a large boat move with oars, it was necessary to have a great many rowers—three rows one above the other on each side of the boat.

Such a boat was called a *trireme*, which means three rows of oars. It took about 600 of these boats

to carry Darius's army over to Greece. Each of these 600 boats carried, besides the rowers or crew, about 200 soldiers. You can see for yourself how many soldiers Darius had in this army, if there were



A trireme

600 shiploads of them and 200 soldiers on each ship. Yes, that is an example in multiplication—120,000 soldiers—that's right.

The Persians sailed across the sea; and this time there was no storm, and they reached the shore of Greece safely. They landed on a spot called the plain of Marathon, which was only about twenty-six miles away from Athens. You will see presently why I have told you just the number of miles—twenty-six.

When the Athenians heard that the Persians were coming, they wanted to get Sparta to help in a hurry, as she had promised to do.

Now, there were no telegraphs or telephones or railroads, of course, in those days. There was no way in which they could send a message to Sparta except to have it carried by hand.

They called on a famous runner named Pheidippides<sup>3</sup> to carry the message. Pheidippides started out and ran the whole way from Athens to Sparta, about one hundred and fifty miles, to carry the message. He ran night and day, hardly stopping at all to rest or to eat, and on the second day he was in Sparta.

The Spartans, however, sent back word that they couldn't start just then; the moon wasn't full, and it was bad luck to start when the moon wasn't full, as nowadays some superstitious people think it bad luck to start on a trip on Friday. They said they would come after a while, when the moon was full.

The Athenians couldn't wait for the moon. They knew the Persians would be in Athens before then, and they didn't want them to get as far as that.

So all the fighting men in Athens left their city and went forth to meet the Persians on the plain of Marathon—twenty-six miles away.

The Athenians were led by a man named Miltiades,<sup>4</sup> and there were only ten thousand soldiers. Besides these, there were one thousand more from a little nearby town, which was friendly with Athens and wished to stand by her—eleven thousand in all. If you figure it out, you will see that there were perhaps ten times as many Persians as there were Greeks, ten Persian soldiers to one Greek soldier.

The Greeks, however, were trained athletes, as we know, and their whole manner of life made them physically fit. The Persians were no match for them. In spite of the small number of Greeks, the large number of Persians were beaten, and beaten badly. Of course the Greeks were far better



soldiers than the Persians, for all their training made them so, but more than all this, they were fighting for themselves to save their homes and their families.

Perhaps you have heard the fable of the hound who was chasing a hare. The hare escaped. The hound was made fun of for not catching the little hare. To which the hound replied, "I was only running for my supper; the hare was running for his life."

The Persian soldiers were not fighting for their homes or families, which were away back across the sea; and it made little difference to them who won, anyway, for most were merely hirelings or slaves; they were fighting for a king because he ordered them to.

Naturally the Greeks were overjoyed at this victory.

Pheidippides, the famous runner, who was now at Marathon, started off at once to carry the joyful news back to Athens, twenty-six miles away. He ran the whole distance without stopping for breath. He had not had time to rest up from his long run to Sparta, which he had taken only a few days before, and so fast did he run this long distance that as soon as he had reached Athens and gasped the news to the Athenians in the market-place he dropped down dead!

In honor of this famous run, they have nowadays in the new Olympic Games, what is called a Marathon race, in which the athletes run this same distance: twenty-six miles. This battle of Marathon took place in 490 B.C. and is one of the most famous battles in all history, for the great Persian army was beaten by one little city and its neighbor, and the Persians had to go back to their homes in disgrace.

A little handful of people, who governed themselves, had defeated a great king with a large army of only hired soldiers or slaves.

But this was not the last the Greeks were to see of the Persians.

## Fighting Mad

DARIUS was now angrier than ever, and still more determined to whip those stubborn Greeks, who dared to defy him and his enormous power; and he began to get ready for one more attempt. This time, however, he made up his mind that he would get together such an army and navy that there would be no chance in the world against it, and he made a solemn oath to destroy the Greeks. So for several years he gathered troops and supplies, but something happened, and in spite of his oath he did not carry out his plan. Why? You guessed it. He died.

But Darius had a son named Xerxes<sup>1</sup>—pronounced as if it began with a Z.

When I was a boy, there was an alphabet rhyme that began, “A is for Apple,” and went on down to “X is for Xerxes, a great Persian king.” I learned the rhyme, though I did not know at that time anything about either Xerxes or Persia.

Xerxes was just as determined as his father had been that the Greeks must be beaten, so he went on getting ready.

However, the Greeks also were just as determined that they must *not* be beaten, so they, too, went on getting ready, for they knew the Persians would sooner or later come back and try again.

At this time there were two chief men in Athens, and each was trying to be leader. One was named Themistocles—pronounced *The MIS to kleez*—and the other Aristides—pronounced *Ar is TI deez*. Notice how many Greek names seem to end in the letters *es*.

Themistocles urged the Athenians to get ready for what he knew was coming, the next war with Persia. Especially did he urge the Athenians to build a fleet of boats, for they had no boats and the Persians had a great many.

Aristides, on the other hand, didn’t believe in Themistocles’s scheme to build boats. He thought it a foolish expense and talked against it.

Aristides had always been so wise and fair that people called him Aristides the Just. Even so, some people wanted to get rid of him, because they thought he was wrong about building a fleet of boats and Themistocles was right. They waited till the time came to vote, when they could ostracize anyone they wanted to get rid of. Do you remember who started this custom? Cleisthenes—about 500 B.C.

When the day for voting came, a man who could not write and did not know Aristides by sight happened to ask his help in voting. Aristides inquired what name he should write, and the man replied, “Aristides.”

Aristides did not tell who he was, but merely said: “Why do you want to get rid of this man? Has he done anything wrong?”

“Oh, no,” the voter replied. “He hasn’t done anything wrong,” but with a long sigh he said, “I’m so tired of hearing him always called *The Just*.”

Aristides must have been surprised by this unreasonable answer, but nevertheless he wrote his own name for the voter, and when the votes were counted, there were so many that he was ostracized.

Though it did not seem quite fair that Aristides should be ostracized, it was fortunate, as it turned out, that Themistocles had his way, and it was fortunate the Athenians went on preparing for war.

They built a fleet of triremes. Then they got all the cities and towns in Greece to agree to join forces in case of war. Sparta, on account of its fame as a city of soldiers, was made the leader of all the others in case war should come.

And then, just ten years after the battle of Marathon in 490 B.C. the great Persian army was again ready to attack Greece. It had been brought together from all parts of the vast Persian Empire and was far bigger than the former army with its 120,000 men, although that was a large army for those days.

This time the army is supposed to have consisted of over two million soldiers—two million; just think of that! The question then was how to get so many soldiers over to Greece. Such a multitude could not be carried across to Greece in boats, for even the largest triremes only held a few hundred men, and it would have taken—well, can you tell how many boats, to carry over two million? Probably many more triremes than there were in the whole world at that time. Xerxes decided to have his army march to Greece, the long way but the only way round. So they started.

## One Against a Thousand

Now, there is a strip of water called a *strait*, something like a wide river, right across the path the Persian army had to take. This strait was then called the Hellespont.<sup>2</sup> It is, of course still there, but if you look on the map you will find it is now called the Dardanelles.<sup>3</sup> There was no bridge across the Hellespont, for it was almost a mile wide, and they didn't have bridges as long as that in those days. Xerxes fastened boats together in a line that stretched from one shore to the other shore, and over these boats he built a floor to form a bridge so that his army could cross upon it.

Hardly had he finished building the bridge, however, when a storm arose and destroyed it. Xerxes, in anger at the waves, ordered that the water of the Hellespont be whipped as if it were an enemy or a slave he were punishing. Then he built another bridge, and this time the water behaved itself, and his soldiers were able to cross over safely.

So vast was Xerxes's army that it is said to have taken it seven days and seven nights marching continuously all the time in two long unbroken lines to get over to the opposite shore. Xerxes's fleet followed the army as closely as they could along the shore, and at last they reached the top of Greece. Down through the north of Greece the army came, overrunning everything before it, and it seemed as though nothing on earth could stop such numbers of men.

THERE is a little narrow passageway with the mountains on one side and the water on the other through which the Persians had to go to reach Athens. This pass is called Thermopylae,<sup>1</sup> and you might guess what Thermopylae means if you notice that the first part is like Thermos bottle, which means *hot* bottle. As a matter of fact, Thermopylae meant Hot Gateway and was so named because this natural gateway to Greece had hot springs near by.

The Greeks decided that it was best to stop the Persians at this gate—to go to meet them there first before they reached Athens. In such a place a few Greek soldiers could fight better against a much larger number.

It also seemed wise to send picked Greek troops to meet the Persians, the very best soldiers in Greece with the very bravest general to lead them.

The Spartan king, who was named Leonidas<sup>2</sup>—which in Greek means *like a lion*—was chosen to go to Thermopylae, and with him seven thousand soldiers—seven thousand soldiers to block the way of two million Persians! Three hundred of these were Spartans, and a Spartan was taught that he must never surrender, never give up. A Spartan mother used to say to her son:

“Come back *with* your shield or *on* it.”

When Xerxes found his way blocked by this ridiculously small band of soldiers, he sent his messengers ordering them to surrender, to give themselves up.

What do you suppose Leonidas replied?

It was what we should expect a Spartan to answer, brief and to the point; that is, *laconic*. He said simply: “Come and take us.”

As there was nothing left for Xerxes to do but fight, he started his army forward.

For two days the Persians fought the Greeks, but Leonidas still held the pass, and the Persians were unable to get through.

Then a Greek traitor and coward, who thought he might save his own life and be given a rich prize by Xerxes, told that king of a secret path over the mountains by which he and his army might slip through and get around Leonidas and his soldiers who blocked the way.

The next morning Leonidas learned that the Persians had found the secret path and were already on the way to pen him in from behind. There was still a chance, however, for his men to escape, and Leonidas told all those who wanted to do so to leave. Those who remained knew that the fight was absolutely hopeless and that it meant certain death for all of them. In spite of this, however, one thousand men, including all the three hundred Spartans stood by their leader, for, said they:

“We have been ordered to hold the pass, and a Spartan obeys orders, and never surrenders, no matter what happens.”

There Leonidas and his thousand men fought to the bitter end until all except one of their number was killed.

The gateway to the city of Athens was now open, and things looked very bleak for the Greeks, for there was nothing to prevent the Persians from marching over the dead bodies of Leonidas and his men straight on to Athens.

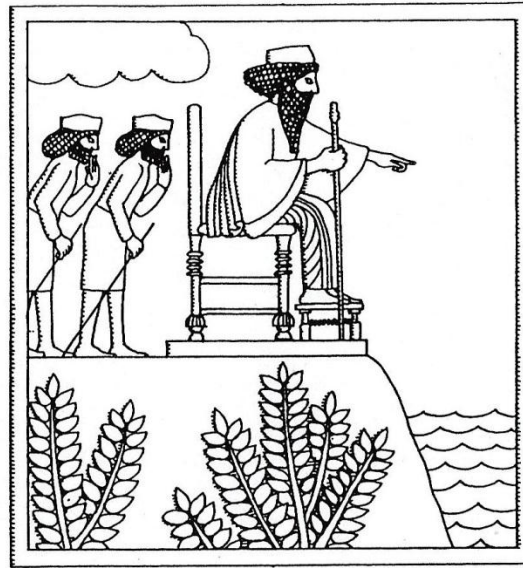
The Athenians, wondering what was to happen to them, hurriedly went to the oracle at Delphi and asked what they should do.

The oracle replied that the city of Athens itself was doomed, that it would be destroyed, there was no hope for it, but that the Athenians themselves would be saved by wooden walls.

This answer, as was usually the case in whatever the oracle said, was a riddle, the meaning of which seemed hard to solve. Themistocles, however, said that he knew the answer. You remember that it was he who had been working so hard to have a fleet of ships built. Themistocles said that the oracle meant these ships when it spoke of the wooden walls.

The Athenians, following the supposed advice of the oracle, left their city as Themistocles told them and went on board the ships, which were not far away, in a bay called Salamis.<sup>3</sup>

The Persian army reached Athens and found it deserted. They burned and destroyed the city as the oracle said. Then they marched on to the Bay of Salamis, where the Athenians were on board the ships. There, on a hill overlooking the bay, Xerxes had a throne built for himself so that he could sit, as if in a box at the theater looking at a play, and watch his own large fleet destroy the much smaller one of



*Xerxes on his throne watching Battle of Salamis*

the Greeks with all the Athenians on board.

The Greek fleet was commanded, of course, by Themistocles. His ships were in this narrow bay or strait of water, somewhat in the same way that the soldiers of Leonidas had been in the narrow valley at Thermopylae.

Themistocles, seeing that the Bay of Salamis looked somewhat like the Pass of Thermopylae, had an idea. He made believe he was a traitor like the traitor at Thermopylae and sent word to Xerxes that if the Persian fleet divided and one half stayed at one end of the strait and the other half closed off the other end of the strait, the Greeks would be penned in between and caught as in a trap.

Xerxes thought this a good idea, so he gave orders to have his ships do as Themistocles had suggested. But Xerxes, sitting smiling on his throne, had the surprise of his life. The result was just the opposite of what he had expected. With the Persian fleet separated in two parts, the Greeks in between could fight both halves of the divided fleet separately, and the space was so narrow that the Persians' ships got in the way of each other and rammed and sank their own boats.

The Persian fleet was completely beaten, and the proud and boastful Xerxes, with most of his army and all the navy that was left, made a hasty retreat back to Persia the way they had come.

This was the last time the Persians ever tried to conquer little Greece.

If Themistocles had not had his way and built such a strong fleet, what do you think would have become of Athens and Greece!