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Primary source analysis; “It’s the Law”

An important period of war in the ancient world was the Persian invasion of Greece. Among these two ancient civilizations, multiple battle accounts happened on land and within the sea. The Persian empire was led by King Xerxes I while King Leonidas of Sparta led the Greek army. This paper will interpret the significance of the Invasion of Greece and explain the significance for a research project about war in the ancient world.

This invasion provides much insight into ancient Persian and Greek’s approached on the nature of warfare, such as superior tactical methods and advantages. According to the text, “King Xerxes pitched his camp in the region of Mails called Trichina, while on their side the Greeks occupied the straights.” [[1]](#footnote-1) This is referring to the Battle of Thermopylae taken place at the narrow pass of Thermopylae or as the Greek’s referred to it as “The Hot Gates” [[2]](#footnote-2) during 480 BC, between the overwhelming southward-advancing force of the Persian empire and the less formidable Greek army who were defending their city-states. Despite the Persian’s vast numbers, the Greeks will utilize their exceptional skillful movements with the conjunction of their equipment of bronze armor, massive shields, and long spears to decimate the less equipped Persian infantry. “Persians under Hydarnes, whom the king called his "Immortals” …when they joined battle with the Greeks…the barbarians using shorter spears than the Greeks and having no advantage from their numbers. The Lacedaemonian…showed themselves far more skillful in fight than their adversaries destroying vast numbers of the enemy.” [[3]](#footnote-3) The Greeks were born resilient and bred into an exceptional group of warriors who fought with great strategic mentality. Even the “immortals” who were the supreme infantry unit at the time had an exceptionally hard time fighting the Greeks.

These warriors positioned themselves within the choke of the straight to funnel the enemy into their deadly formation, creating both tactical defensive and offensive options. Shoulder to shoulder formation the Greeks use their shields to create an almost impenetrable wall from attackers but was also capable of striking their enemies from afar with the help of their spear. Although the Persians had a vast archer unit as mentioned by a Trachinian "they shot forth their arrows the sun would be darkened by their multitude.” [[4]](#footnote-4) the Greeks again strategically positioned packed together tightly with their massive shields to defend themselves from the onslaught coming from the skies with the help of the tight channel minimized many casualties.

Although, the Greeks were only capable of delaying the inevitable sweeping death of the Persian army within this part of the invasion for three whole days. The Persian’s seemingly endless force lost a tremendous and unexpected number of casualties due to the Greek’s having a superior military intelligence, equipment, and quality of soldiers. Finally, the Invasion of Greece serves as a useful source for a research project on ancient war because it not only illustrates Greek and Persian superior military tactics and advantages but also can be compared to sources from other ancient societies.

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1. Halsall, Paul, “Herodotus: Xerxes Invades Greece, from The Histories,” Internet Ancient History Sourcebook, August, 2000. February 1, 2020, <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/ancient/herodotus-xerxes.asp>. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Halsall, Paul, “Herodotus: Xerxes Invades Greece, from The Histories,” Internet Ancient History Sourcebook, August, 2000. February 1, 2020, <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/ancient/herodotus-xerxes.asp>. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Halsall, Paul, “Herodotus: Xerxes Invades Greece, from The Histories,” Internet Ancient History Sourcebook, August, 2000. February 1, 2020, <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/ancient/herodotus-xerxes.asp>. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Halsall, Paul, “Herodotus: Xerxes Invades Greece, from The Histories,” Internet Ancient History Sourcebook, August, 2000. February 1, 2020, <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/ancient/herodotus-xerxes.asp>. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)