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Turn of the Tide

An important period of war in the ancient world was the Persian invasion of Greece in the 5th Century before the common era. Among these two ancient civilizations, multiple battle accounts happened on land and within the sea. The mighty Persian empire was led by King Xerxes I while Themistocles an Athenian politician and admiral led the Greek cities’ state fleet on the sea. 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, “At the dawn of day, all the men-at-arms were assembled together, and speeches were made to them, of which the best was that of Themistocles, he told them to go at once on board their ships…whereupon the Greeks put to sea with all their fleet.” [[1]](#footnote-1) This is referring to the Battle of Salamis or what is referred to as the turn of the tide of this war between these two ancient civilizations. With the recent loss at the Battle of Thermopylae, a swift strategic decision by King Leonidas of Sparta to divide his army into two forces. One was to hold off the Persian force at “The Hot Gates” while the other was ordered to retreat and regroup with Themistocles at the port of Salamis.

The additional aid of these troops will provide Themistocles and the Greeks with much-needed reinforcements for this upcoming battle at sea.  In reference to the text, “Of these last a few only followed the advice of Themistocles, to fight backwardly; the greater number did fare otherwise…made every effort to force their way to the front, and thus became entangled with such of their own vessels as were retreating.” [[2]](#footnote-2) The battle raged within an unforgiving storm riddled sea, a Persian fleet comprised of 1,207 triremes was locked in warfare with the Greek fleet of 371 triremes and penteconters. The Persian’s had greater numbers and with that Ariabignes the Persian’s admiral pressed his fleet forward to make swift work of the Greeks. However, Themistocles observant of the increasing ferocious elements considered a tactical disengage effectively luring the Persian fleet into the strait of Salamis. At that moment with the elements behind the sails of the Greek ships charged forward with their iron-tipped bows directly into the incoming Persian fleet, who without the wind on their side incapable of retreat converged with one another. Just as the text suggests, “There fell in this combat Ariabignes brother of Xerxes; and with him…vast number of men of high repute, Persians, Medes, and allies…Greeks there died only a few” [[3]](#footnote-3), the Amphibious combat resulted in a great loss in numbers and the retreat of the Persians and a monumental victory for the Greeks.

The Greek forces were against a seemingly endless Persian force. However, despite the Persians’ enormous navy strength, the Persians lost a tremendous and unexpected number of casualties. Due to the Greeks’ navy having superior military intelligence, equipment, and being fortunate to have the elements of the weather on their side.  Finally, the Invasion of Greece serves as a useful source for a research project on ancient war because it serves to illustrate Greek and Persian superior military tactics and advantages on either faction.

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1. Herodotus, *Herodotus: the Persian Wars*, George Rawlinson, translated by Francis R. B. Godolphin (New York: Modern Library, 1947), 519-575. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Herodotus, *Herodotus: the Persian Wars*, George Rawlinson, translated by Francis R. B. Godolphin (New York: Modern Library, 1947), 519-575. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Herodotus, *Herodotus: the Persian Wars*, George Rawlinson, translated by Francis R. B. Godolphin (New York: Modern Library, 1947), 519-575. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)