



## DECISIVE BATTLES OF THE WORLD

### (1) The Battle Of Marathon

A MAP of Europe as it stands to-day will furnish a very close parallel with the map of the known world as the Athenians surveyed it, and their prospects of survival, in 490 B.C., 2,430 years ago.

Now, Germany includes a vast area of Europe from the western seaboard eastward almost to the Black Sea. Some smaller nations pretend to survive. For all purposes they remain merely as names on the map. Westward across a small strip of sea lies a small island—an island in the sea, and an island of free people in the sea of suppression. It is Britain.

Then, the geographical domains of Darius blended most of the known civilisations with the Persian Empire. This empire included the northern Indians, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Chaldees, the Phoenicians, the nations of Palestine, the Armenians, the Bactrians, Lydians, the Phrygians, Parthians, and the Medes. Westward across a small strip of sea lay Athens, another island of free people standing out against despotism.

#### Legend of Invincibility

Then, as now, a legend of invincibility had grown up about the armies of aggression. The Greeks had met the Persians in Asia Minor and had been repulsed. For Darius these were small matters, mere skirmishes. In fact, he had not even heard of Athens until Hippias betrayed her. Hippias had been tyrant of Athens, but was overthrown by this determinedly independent people in 510 B.C. Sparta refused to help Hippias back into Athens, so he sought assistance from one of Darius's satraps, Artaphernes, ruling part of the kingdom from Sardis.

The Athenians heard of his attempts to stir up anger against them, and protested. Artaphernes replied that they had better receive Hippias back. The Athenians rejected this command and fitted out an expedition against Sardis. They boldly assailed and captured the city and burned it. The Persians rallied and drove them back on their fleet of galleys. The Athenians escaped, but the insult was remembered. Darius demanded the submission of the Greek city-states.

Many agreed. Athens and Sparta refused. The first fleet sent to subdue them was shipwrecked, but Darius gathered

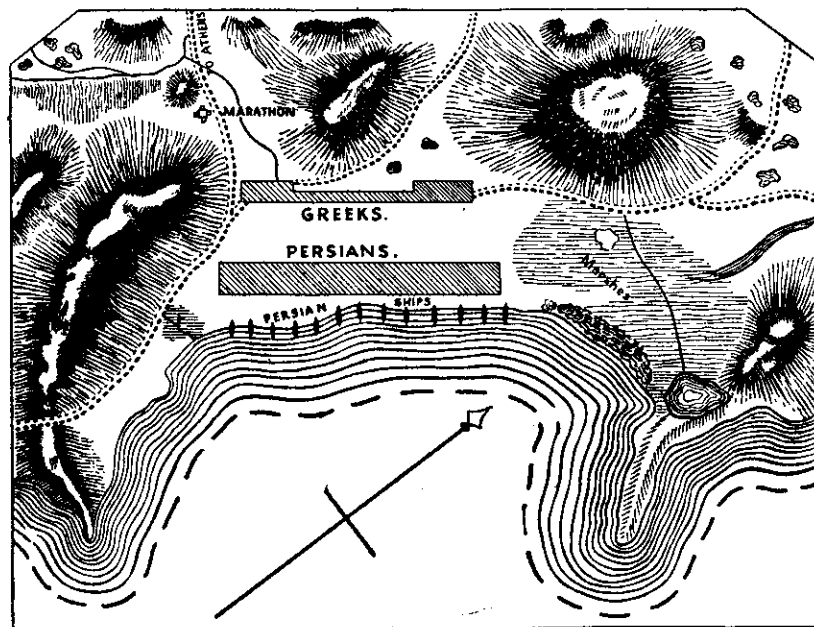
another, placed it under the command of Datis, and sent it against Athens. Datis subdued several islands on his way across the Aegean, and finally landed at Marathon, advised by Hippias.

#### Sparta Wasn't There

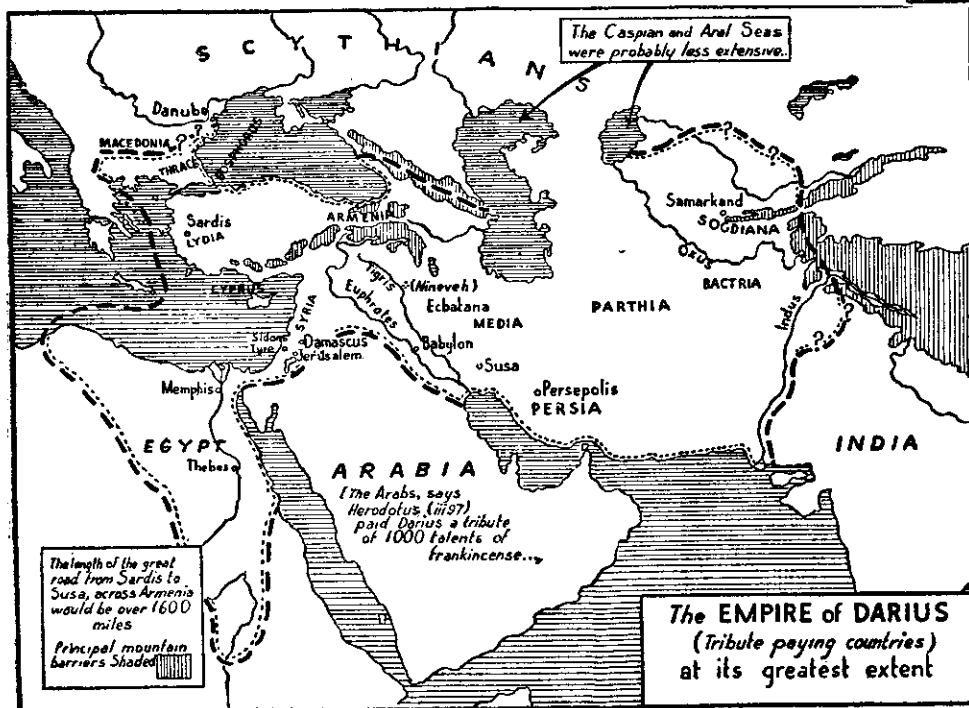
Here the two armies faced each other. Miltiades had his Athenians arrayed upon and behind hills looking down on the plain of Marathon. Datis encamped on the flat ground, hoping to use it to the advantage of his cavalry, or perhaps to rely upon numerical superiority in storming the heights. Only Sparta could have helped Athens against the 100,000-strong army of Persia. But Sparta was occupied with religious observances. It was not considered propitious to march to the aid of Athens before the moon should pass a certain phase. Athens stood almost alone. Only the small State of Plataea sent her small contingent to

vote in favour of attack and Miltiades was selected to command. Tactfully, he waited for the day when his turn to command would normally have come, and then disposed his troops.

His line of battle consisted of heavily-armed spearmen only. The Greeks used light-armed forces only for skirmishes. The troops for the pitched battle carried a long spear, shield, helmet, greaves, and short sword. Usually they advanced slowly and steadily in a firm line about eight spears deep. On this day Miltiades deviated from the usual practice. It was essential that he should use the advantage of position against the Persians' advantage in numbers. His centre had the best ground to cross or fall back upon, so he strengthened his wings at its expense. In this order he drew up the 11,000 infantry whose spears were to



PLAN OF THE BATTLE OF MARATHON



swell the effective number of Athenian troops, estimated at 10,000.

Outnumbered 10 to 1, the Greeks were at first not sure whether to retain their advantageous position or charge down upon the Persians. The ten generals, who by custom would take turns at command on successive days of battle, met in conference to discuss the problem. Presiding was Callimachus, the War-Ruler.

#### Decision to Attack

Miltiades, bold, clever, addressed them, and pleaded that the Athenians should attack. He knew the worth of his troops and the weaknesses of the enemy. He knew also that there were dissident elements among the Athenian authorities, and that time would give them opportunity to divide his strength. The vote went five each way, but Callimachus cast his deciding

decide between the old order of despotism and the new order of democracy.

#### The Battle Joined

To carry his attack down the hillsides and across a mile of flat ground separating them from the Persian outposts, Miltiades ordered his troops to run. All well trained, and thoroughly fit, they were able to do this and still not arrive breathless.

Before the Persian cavalry could collect their horses, fit them out, mount, and charge, the line of Greeks met the hastily assembled Persian foot. At the first shock the front rank of the Persians must have gone down to a man. But they gathered themselves and tried bravely, with their lighter weapons, to push back the Greeks. In the centre they succeeded, but not for long. As Miltiades had anticipated, his weaker centre fell back to favourable ground and there held the enemy. His wings were successful, and sent the Persians fleeing. Restraining their men from any pursuit, the Athenian generals turned them in upon the Persian centre.

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