

# Notes on Quiz #4: Athens and the Art of Society

## 1. Persia was more powerful than Greece. What factors made it possible for the Greeks to defeat the Persians?

The Greek hoplite army was better trained and tactically superior to the motley Persian infantry, capable of wielding great damage even against superior numbers through the crushing power of the phalanx. The hoplite soldier was also better equipped.

The Persians were far from home and dependent on long chains of supply, whereas the Greeks, at home, knew how to take advantage of the terrain (as at Marathon). The Persians lost a number of ships and men trying to weather a difficult passage in the north Aegean.

Psychologically, the Greeks were fiercely invested in what they were fighting for—freedom; the soldiers in the Persian army were not. The Greeks saw the war as a war of free men against slaves, since to the Greek mind no one in Persia has any rights other than the king; the free man fighting for freedom will not give up and prevail over any number of unfree men forced to fight by an oppressive king.

This also meant that the great weakness of the Greeks that Darius and Xerxes were counting on—their fragmentedness and mutual hostility—was overcome by the Greeks uniting in military alliance against a common enemy under the command of the famous Spartans, whose warriors inspired the other Greeks and intimidated the Persians, while the Athenians and others proved they were strong enough to stand alongside the Spartans.

## 2. Solon wrote, "I took my stand with strong shield covering both sides, allowing neither unjust dominance." What sides was he talking about? How was this reflected in his reforms, do you think?

Solon had the trust of both aristocrats and the commoners and so was able to enact reforms that benefitted Athens as a whole. He weakened the power of local and family influence by making participation in Athenian politics dependent on wealth, not blood, creating new classes that cut across local and family loyalties in order to strengthen Athenian unity and the prosperity that would come from a stronger and more vibrant unified economy. He strengthened Athenian agricultural production and relieved the debt slavery crisis that was crippling the poor peasantry. He fought not for the poor against the rich (as with the tyrants), or vice versa, but for a stronger Athens.

### EC1. Stages of Athens's political development included all of the following EXCEPT:

- (a) The harsh penalties under the laws of Draco
- (b) Solon's class-related reforms
- ✓ (c) Pisistratus killing everyone and painting the statues in blood
- (d) Cleisthenes's reorganization of the tribes

### EC2. Briefly describe the significance of as many of the following as you can (including who won and why): (a) the Battle of Marathon; (b) the Battle of Thermopylae; (c) the Battle of Salamis; (d) the Battle of Plataea.

(a) The battle of Marathon saw Athens (without Sparta) defeat a much larger Persian army on the beaches of Marathon in Attica. It demonstrated that the Persians could be beaten despite their vast numbers and Persia's vast resources, and in particular it could be beaten by the free Greek fighting for freedom against disenfranchised Persians fighting for a despot.

(b) At Thermopylae, a narrow pass into the heart of mainland Greece, 300 Spartans held the narrow pass to the last man, forever remembered as the ideal of bravery.

(c) At Salamis, the Athenian navy under Themistocles thoroughly defeated the larger Persian navy through clever tactics. This marks the beginning of Athens as a naval military power, and thus of the Athenian navy as a rival to the Spartan hoplite army as the protector of Greece.

(d) At Plataea, a combined Greek land army led by the Spartans defeated the Persians, forcing them into retreat and ending the Persian invasions.