

## Warfare and Society in Ancient Greece

### Lecture 8

## The Persian War and the development of Greek warfare



### *Ordinary wars, extraordinary wars*

#### **Demosthenes, *For the Liberty of the Rhodians*, 17-18**

You should also observe, Athenians, that you have waged many wars against both democracies and oligarchies, as you know well. But perhaps none of you considers what were the causes of war with either. So, what are these causes? With democracies, either private complaints, when these could not be settled by the city, or an issue concerning portions of land or boundaries, or an eager rivalry or a struggle for ascendancy; but with oligarchies, none of these things: you fight for your constitution and liberty. I should therefore not hesitate to say that I think it a more advantageous situation if all the Greeks were your enemies under democratic governments than your friends, but ruled by oligarchies. For I think that it would not be difficult for you to make peace with free men whenever you fished, but I do not think that friendly relations with oligarchies could ever be stable, since the few can never be well disposed to the many, nor those who want to rule to those who have chosen to live in equality.



### *The remote causes of the Greek-Persian Wars*

#### **Herodotus, 1.1-6**

These are the researches of Herodotus of Halicarnassus, which he publishes, in the hope of thereby preserving from decay the remembrance of what men have done, and of preventing the great and wonderful actions of the Greeks and the Barbarians from losing their due meed of glory; and withal to put on record what were their grounds of feud.

1. According to the Persians best informed in history, the Phœnicians began to quarrel. This people, who had formerly dwelt on the shores of the Erythræan Sea, having migrated to the Mediterranean and settled in the parts which they now inhabit, began at once, they say, to adventure on long voyages, freighting their vessels with the wares of Egypt and Assyria. They landed at many places on the coast, and among the rest at Argos, which was then pre-eminent above all the states included now under the common name of Hellas. Here they exposed their merchandise, and traded with the natives for five or six days; at the end of which time, when almost everything was sold, there came down to the beach a number of women, and among them the daughter of the king, who was, they say, agreeing in this with the Greeks, Io, the child of Inachus. The women were standing by the stern of the ship intent upon their purchases, when the Phœnicians, with a general shout, rushed upon them. The greater part made their escape, but some were seized and carried off. Io herself was among the captives. The Phœnicians put the women on board their vessel, and set sail for Egypt. Thus did Io pass into Egypt, according to the Persian story, which differs widely from the Phœnician: and thus commenced, according to their authors, the series of outrages.

2. At a later period, certain Greeks, with whose name they are unacquainted, but who would probably be Cretans, made a landing at Tyre, on the Phoenician coast, and bore off the king's daughter, Europé. In this they only retaliated; but afterwards the Greeks, they say, were guilty of a second violence. They manned a ship of war, and sailed to Aea, a city of Colchis, on the river Phasis; from whence, after despatching the rest of the business on which they had come, they carried off Medea, the daughter of the king of the land. The monarch sent a herald into Greece to demand reparation of the wrong, and the restitution of his child; but the Greeks made answer that, having received no reparation of the wrong done them in the seizure of Io the Argive, they should give none in this instance.

3. In the next generation afterwards, according to the same authorities, Alexander the son of Priam, bearing these events in mind, resolved to procure himself a wife out of Greece by violence, fully persuaded, that as the Greeks had not given satisfaction for their outrages, so neither would he be forced to make any for his. Accordingly he made prize of Helen; upon which the Greeks decided that, before resorting to other measures, they would send envoys to reclaim the princess and require reparation of the wrong. Their demands were met by a reference to the violence which had been offered to Medea, and they were asked with what face they could now require satisfaction, when they had formerly rejected all demands for either reparation or restitution addressed to them.

4. Hitherto the injuries on either side had been mere acts of common violence; but in what followed the Persians consider that the Greeks were greatly to blame, since before any attack had been made on Europe, they led an army into Asia. Now as for the carrying off of women, it is the deed, they say, of a rogue: but to make a stir about such as are carried off, argues a man a fool. Men of sense care nothing for such women, since it is plain that without their own consent they would never be forced away. The Asiatics, when the Greeks ran off with their women, never troubled themselves about the matter; but the Greeks, for the sake of a single Lacedaemonian girl, collected a vast armament, invaded Asia, and destroyed the kingdom of Priam. Henceforth they ever looked upon the Greeks as their open enemies. For Asia, with all the various tribes of barbarians that inhabit it, is regarded by the Persians as their own; but Europe and the Greek race they look on as distinct and separate.

5. Such is the account which the Persians give of these matters. They trace to the attack upon Troy their ancient enmity towards the Greeks. The Phoenicians, however, as regards Io, vary from the Persian statements. They deny that they used any violence to remove her into Egypt; she herself, they say, having formed an intimacy with the captain, while his vessel lay at Argos, and perceiving herself to be with child, of her own free will accompanied the Phoenicians on their leaving the shore, to escape the shame of detection and the reproaches of her parents. Whether this latter account be true, or whether the matter happened otherwise, I shall not discuss further. I shall proceed at once to point out the person who first within my own knowledge inflicted injury on the Greeks, after which I shall go forward with my history, describing equally the greater and the lesser cities. For the cities which were formerly great have most of them become insignificant; and such as are at present powerful, were weak in the olden time. I shall therefore discourse equally of both, convinced that human happiness never continues long in one stay.

6. Croesus, son of Alyattes, by birth a Lydian, was lord of all the nations to the west of the river Halys. This stream, which separates Syria from Paphlagonia, runs with a course from south to north, and finally falls into the Euxine. So far as our knowledge goes, he was the first of the barbarians who had dealings with the Greeks, forcing some of them to become his tributaries, and entering into alliance with others. He conquered the Aeolians, Ionians,

and Dorians of Asia, and made a treaty with the Lacedaemonians. Up to that time all Greeks had been free. For the Cimmerian attack upon Ionia, which was earlier than Croesus, was not a conquest of the cities, but only an inroad for plundering.



*The Athenians become sailors*

**Herodotus, 7.144**

The advice of Themistocles had prevailed on a previous occasion. The revenues from the mines at Laurium had brought great wealth into the Athenians' treasury, and when each man was to receive ten drachmae for his share, Themistocles persuaded the Athenians to make no such division but to use the money to build two hundred ships for the war, that is, for the war with Aegina. [2] This was in fact the war the outbreak of which saved Hellas by compelling the Athenians to become seamen. The ships were not used for the purpose for which they were built, but later came to serve Hellas in her need. These ships, then, had been made and were already there for the Athenians' service, and now they had to build yet others. [3] In their debate after the giving of the oracle they accordingly resolved that they would put their trust in the god and meet the foreign invader of Hellas with the whole power of their fleet, ships and men, and with all other Greeks who were so minded.

**Herodotus, 7.140-143**

The Athenians had sent messages to Delphi asking that an oracle be given them, and when they had performed all due rites at the temple and sat down in the inner hall, the priestess, whose name was Aristonice, gave them this answer: [2] "Wretches, why do you linger here? Rather flee from your houses and city,  
Flee to the ends of the earth from the circle embattled of Athens!  
The head will not remain in its place, nor in the body,  
Nor the feet beneath, nor the hands, nor the parts between;  
But all is ruined, for fire and the headlong god of war speeding in a Syrian chariot will bring you low.

" [3] "Many a fortress too, not yours alone, will he shatter;  
Many a shrine of the gods will he give to the flame for devouring;  
Sweating for fear they stand, and quaking for dread of the enemy,  
Running with gore are their roofs, foreseeing the stress of their sorrow;  
Therefore I bid you depart from the sanctuary.  
Have courage to lighten your evil.

" 141.

When the Athenian messengers heard that, they were very greatly dismayed, and gave themselves up for lost by reason of the evil foretold. Then Timon son of Androbulus, as notable a man as any Delphian, advised them to take boughs of supplication and in the guise of suppliants, approach the oracle a second time. [2] The Athenians did exactly this; "Lord," they said, "regard mercifully these suppliant boughs which we bring to you, and give us some better answer concerning our country. Otherwise we will not depart from your temple, but remain here until we die." Thereupon the priestess gave them this second oracle: [3] "Vainly does Pallas strive to appease great Zeus of Olympus;

Words of entreaty are vain, and so too cunning counsels of wisdom.  
Nevertheless I will speak to you again of strength adamantine.  
All will be taken and lost that the sacred border of Cecrops  
Holds in keeping today, and the dales divine of Cithaeron;  
Yet a wood-built wall will by Zeus all-seeing be granted  
To the Triton-born, a stronghold for you and your children.  
” [4] “Await not the host of horse and foot coming from Asia,  
Nor be still, but turn your back and withdraw from the foe.  
Truly a day will come when you will meet him face to face.  
Divine Salamis, you will bring death to women's sons  
When the corn is scattered, or the harvest gathered in.  
” 142.

This answer seemed to be and really was more merciful than the first, and the envoys, writing it down, departed for Athens. When the messengers had left Delphi and laid the oracle before the people, there was much inquiry concerning its meaning, and among the many opinions which were uttered, two contrary ones were especially worthy of note. Some of the elder men said that the gods' answer signified that the acropolis should be saved, for in old time the acropolis of Athens had been fenced by a thorn hedge, [2] which, by their interpretation, was the wooden wall. But others supposed that the god was referring to their ships, and they were for doing nothing but equipping these. Those who believed their ships to be the wooden wall were disabled by the two last verses of the oracle:

“Divine Salamis, you will bring death to women's sons  
When the corn is scattered, or the harvest gathered in.”

[3] These verses confounded the opinion of those who said that their ships were the wooden wall, for the readers of oracles took the verses to mean that they should offer battle by sea near Salamis and be there overthrown. 143.

Now there was a certain Athenian, by name and title Themistocles son of Neocles, who had lately risen to be among their chief men. He claimed that the readers of oracles had incorrectly interpreted the whole of the oracle and reasoned that if the verse really pertained to the Athenians, it would have been formulated in less mild language, calling Salamis “cruel” rather than “divine ” seeing that its inhabitants were to perish. [2] Correctly understood, the gods' oracle was spoken not of the Athenians but of their enemies, and his advice was that they should believe their ships to be the wooden wall and so make ready to fight by sea. [3] When Themistocles put forward this interpretation, the Athenians judged him to be a better counsellor than the readers of oracles, who would have had them prepare for no sea fight, and, in short, offer no resistance at all, but leave Attica and settle in some other country.

### **Thucydides, 1.14.3**

Aegina, Athens, and others may have possessed a few vessels, but they were principally fifty-oars. It was quite at the end of this period that the war with Aegina and the prospect of the barbarian invasion enabled Themistocles to persuade the Athenians to build the fleet with which they fought at Salamis; and even these vessels had not complete decks.