

Source Text Unit 4

The Second Persian War

One of the most famous wars fought by the ancient Greeks was the second Persian War. After the Persian king, Darius, had unsuccessfully tried to conquer Greece in the first war, his son Xerxes set out to do so. In about 480 BC he headed for the city-state of Athens with a very big army. Some historians say he had almost two million men, but others say it was hundreds of thousands. It is difficult to know for sure the exact number, but it was huge.

This caused Greek city-states to unite to stop them. The city-states of Sparta sent three hundred of its warriors to help. Spartans were known as great fighters who never surrendered. They fought alongside thousands of Greek soldiers to block the passage into Athens called Thermopylae. They bravely faced the massive army and held them back for three days. They were defeated when a traitor told the Persians of a secret path over the mountains. But their brave stand gave the people of Athens time to flee. When the Persians finally broke through, the city was deserted. The Persians burned Athens to the ground.

However, all was not lost. A brilliant Greek leader lured Persian ships into a trap. He pretended to be a traitor and came to Xerxes. He gave the king bad advice. With Xerxes watching from a hill, the Greek navy totally defeated the Persian ships. Xerxes was irate. He left. Greece won the war.