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THE PERSIAN DESTRUCTION OF ATHENS

Sources and Archaeology

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DESTRUCTION

The Sources

The Persian sack of Athens in 480/479 B.C. is one of the landmarks both for Greek archaeology and the history of Athens. Thucydides and Herodotos are concise but absolutely unequivocal as to the damage done. Herodotos gives the more detailed account of the actual events, telling us that Xerxes, when he took the citadel: “plundered the temple and burned the entire acropolis” (8.53) and when, ten months after the battle of Salamis, and having wintered in Thessaly, the Persian general Mardonios returned and occupied Athens and then withdrew to Plataia, he “first burnt Athens, and utterly overthrew and demolished whatever wall or house or temple was left standing” (9.13). Thucydides, setting the stage for his description of the Themistoklean wall writes: “For of the encircling wall only small portions were left standing and most of the houses were in ruins, only a few remaining in which the chief men of the Persians had themselves taken quarters” (1.89). Diodoros Siculus gives the longest account of all, drawing on sources other than Herodotos or Thucydides. For the first attack, “Xerxes entered Attika and ravaged the countryside, and then he razed Athens to the ground and sent up in flames the temples of the gods. And while the king was concerned with these affairs, his fleet sailed from Euboia to Attika, having sacked on the way both Euboia and the coast of Attika” (11.14). And for

the second assault and occupation: “Mardonios was so angry with them that he ravaged the entire countryside, razed the city to the ground, and utterly destroyed the temples that were still standing” (II.28.6).

So, there we have it. Athens was wiped off the map. The literary sources are clear and largely unanimous as to the extent of the destruction: total. The primary question we are asked to consider is: “How reliable are the sources?” Our best way of checking is to turn to the archaeology.¹

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE: ATHENS AND ATTIKA

When we consider the archaeology of Athens in the early fifth century B.C., we find ample evidence of Persian destruction. On the acropolis, the Old Temple of Athena – made of limestone, with marble trim and pedimental figures of a gigantomachy – was destroyed. So was the Older Parthenon, with its superstructure of marble, unfinished and under construction at the time. The Older Propylon which gave access to the sanctuary, and the Archaic version of the Athena Nike temple were also destroyed. That is, all three Archaic temples dedicated to Athena and the gateway into the sanctuary were all destroyed in the first half of the fifth century B.C. Also ruined were several small limestone Doric buildings, decorated with pedimental sculpture, all recently restudied by N. Klein, and often referred to as “treasuries” because of their similarity to buildings at Olympia, Delphi, Delos, and perhaps Nemea.² In addition to buildings, broken votive sculptures of *korai* and animals, marble *perirrhanteria*, inscribed bases, and shattered votive pottery were found in great numbers. Dozens of scholars of different disciplines – architecture, pottery, sculpture, stratigraphy, and epigraphy – have been over the evidence with a fine-toothed comb, and there are few if any dissenting voices expressing doubt that the acropolis fared as recorded in our sources. The evidence shows that the buildings and sculptural monuments of the principal sanctuary of Athena were reduced to rubble, burned or broken, or both.

When we descend to the agora, we find that here too the Persians can be identified, though the evidence and the conclusions drawn from it have been somewhat more contentious. The chronology of Attic pottery has been the subject of much discussion, and in the 1980s an attempt was made to question the date of several early agora buildings. The response came from T. L. Shear

¹ I am indebted to Sylvian Fachard and Edward Harris for assigning me this review of the evidence and scholarship on the Persian destruction of Athens, delivered at the conference in May of 2019.

² Klein 2015. The other groups of these buildings, also known sometimes as *oikoi*, are found in sanctuaries with a panhellenic participation, or in the case of Delos, a panionian focus. The acropolis versions presumably were used and perhaps built by local Athenian groups, such as *geneis* or *phratries*.

Jr., analyzing in detail the evidence cited for the Persian destruction.³ For the agora, the evidence is of a very different nature than that from the acropolis, consisting primarily of five pits and sixteen wells, largely deriving from the houses and shops crowded around the periphery of the agora square. Most wells usually produce massive amounts of pottery and once abandoned fill up and become conveniently closed deposits. Shear's detailed catalog of sherd and shape counts allowed him to demonstrate the general homogeneity and contemporaneity of these wells in comparison with the other 400 wells excavated in the area, all but proving they were abandoned at close to the same time, evidently as a result of the Persian sack.

In his analysis Shear noted that thirteen of the deposits (mostly wells) seem to have been filled immediately after the destruction, while eight (mostly pits, some wells) had material that extended a couple of decades beyond the events of 480/479.⁴ The material from the thirteen older deposits has shapes and forms familiar from the late Archaic period, in particular, the "Haemonian" lekythoi as well as *ostraka* dating to the 480s. The eight later deposits had new shapes or more developed versions of familiar shapes; in particular, Shear cites the Vicups, stemless cups, one-handlers, two globular *lekythoi*, the rims of the household *lekanai*, and the deep *askoi*. A similar distinction is argued also for the chronology of Persian deposits on the acropolis by J. Hurwit, A. Lindenlauf, A. Stewart, and E. Sioumpara, with the early destruction debris (*Perserschutt*) confined to the north side of the citadel.⁵

More recently, a seventeenth well (J 2:4) was excavated in 1994–1995 just to the north of the agora square. In this case, 100 percent of the pottery was kept, allowing a detailed assessment and analysis by K. Lynch (2011). The well had a stone-lined shaft ca. 5.80 meters deep and was about a meter in diameter. In all, 233 objects were inventoried, and forty-eight five-gallon tins of fragmentary pottery were recovered, basically representing the pantry of a house, though perhaps not its storage area. The make-up of the group was close to that of many of the other agora "Persian" deposits, and Lynch was able to make the distinction, established by Shear, between "Immediate" and "Delayed" post-Persian clean-up,⁶ associating well J 2:4 with the earlier group. With the acropolis and the agora we have evidence of two types of material – domestic and votive – both seeming to confirm our ancient testimonia as to the nature and extent of the Persian sack of Athens.

³ Shear 1993.

⁴ Shear 1993, especially pp. 413–417, with citation of relevant ancient sources. See also the chart provided by Lynch 2011, p. 22.

⁵ Hurwit 1989, p. 63 and n. 74, and 1999, pp. 141–142; Lindenlauf 1997; Stewart 2008, and Sioumpara 2019, esp. p. 35.

⁶ Lynch 2011, esp. pp. 20–28.

We are going to defer consideration of the evidence from the Kerameikos for the time being, and turn now to Attika, as it is an inseparable part of Athens. Here, as noted, both Thucydides and Herodotos are largely silent, whereas Diodoros is not. Both Xerxes and Mardonios are said to have “ravaged” the countryside, and Xerxes’ fleet “sacked on the way both Euboia and the coast of Attika” (11.14). The coastal demes of eastern Attika were right on the route from Euboia to Phaleron and here, too, the archaeology seems to confirm the literature, enough so that we might suspect Persian activity, even without the testimony of Diodoros. Those demes or sanctuaries specified as destroyed or plundered in the written sources include Brauron (cult statue taken back to Susa: Pausanias 3.16.6), Hera near Phaleron (burnt by Mardonios: Pausanias 1.1.5 and 10.35.2), Demeter at Phaleron (burnt: Pausanias 10.35.2), and Eleusis (burnt: Herodotos 9.65). Those that show signs in the archaeological record of damage and subsequent rebuilding include Rhamnous, Sounion, and Eleusis.⁷

The sanctuary of Nemesis at the deme of Rhamnous was functioning in the sixth century B.C., to judge by the votive offerings. From fragments recovered at the site there seems to have been a small Doric temple there, as well as a modest fountainhouse, both of which are assumed to have been destroyed in 480/479 B.C.

The sanctuary of Poseidon at Sounion was active in the late Archaic period, with a peripteral temple on the summit of the cape and the sanctuary adorned with more than a dozen *kouroi*, most found discarded in a pit. Dating to ca. 490–480 B.C., the Doric peripteral temple was built of limestone, and many pieces of it (column drums and capitals, wall blocks, and architraves) were reused, built into the foundations of its marble successor, dated to the 440s.

The sanctuary of Demeter at Eleusis provides some of the clearest evidence – both literary and archaeological – for the Persian destruction of the deme sites and sanctuaries of Attika. Herodotos refers indirectly to the destruction of the sanctuary in his account of the battle of Plataia (9.56): “I find it surprising that though the battle took place by the grove of Demeter not a single Persian, as it turned out, either entered the precinct or died in there; most of them fell around the outside of the sanctuary on unconsecrated ground. In so far as one may speculate about divine matters, I think the goddess herself kept them away because they had burnt her temple, the *anaktoron*, in Eleusis” (ἐμπρήσαντας τὸ ἱερὸν τὸ ἐν Ἐλευσίῃ ἀνάκτορον). In terms of archaeology, Eleusis has been among the most extensively excavated and studied of the Attic sites; Persian destruction debris was reported by the excavators, and the contemporary peribolos of the sanctuary, made of mudbrick resting on a stone socle of

⁷ Rhamnous: Petrakos 1999, pp. 24–26, 194–195, and 205–207; 1987, pp. 302–305; 1984, pp. 150–176; 1982, pp. 136–142. Sounion: Miles and Paga 2016 and Goette 2000. Eleusis: Shear 1982.

polygonal masonry, was breached at its southeast angle.⁸ Following a careful reading of late fifth century inventories and noting the fresh condition of many blocks reused from the Archaic Telesterion, Shear has argued that the Peisistratid building was deliberately dismantled, to make way for a larger version, which was under construction when the Persians arrived and destroyed the sanctuary.⁹

There are also several sites in Attika which from their coastal locations we might expect to have been destroyed as well, but for which we have no clear evidence, literary or archaeological, though excavations have been conducted in several of them. The very name of Marathon is intimately associated with the first Persian invasion and the battle of 490 B.C., yet the location of the actual deme-site is not agreed upon and no reliable archaeological material can be associated with the events of 480/479 B.C.¹⁰ The sanctuary of Artemis Tauropolos at Halai Araphenides has produced painted Corinthian rooftiles of the late Archaic/Early Classical period, and Archaic pottery and votives.¹¹ The excavators at Thorikos, though they do not report Persian destruction debris *per se*, do note a period of abandonment of the site between 480 and 450 B.C., and the sanctuary of Apollo at Cape Zoster had an Archaic phase preceding a Classical one, though no specific date or manner of transition has been published.¹² Brauron, mentioned by Pausanias (3.16.6) as having been robbed of its cult statue by the Persians, has been partially excavated, but the untimely death of I. Papademetriou has impeded the publication of the architectural development and history of the sanctuary.

RECOVERY

What happened in Athens after the defeat of the Persians at Plataia and their withdrawal from Greece is by no means clear. Two issues, in particular, concerning the Athenian recovery have been a source of uncertainty and controversy: the pre-Persian fortification wall and the temples on the post-Persian acropolis and in Attika.

City Walls

Was there a wall protecting the lower city when the Persians attacked Athens? Thucydides seems to imply so when he writes (1.93.2) “the bounds of the city

⁸ Mylonas 1961, pp. 88–90, 107–112.

⁹ Shear 1982. The situation would then be analogous to the Persian destruction of the Older Parthenon on the acropolis. Shear notes Herodotos’ use of the word *anaktoron*, the sacred core of the Telesterion, and perhaps the only element available for burning.

¹⁰ For the deme site: Vanderpool 1966 and Petrakos 1995, p. 55 and 68. Around Plasi near the coast and close to Vrana, somewhat inland, have been favored.

¹¹ Kalogeropoulos 2013. Rooftiles: Vol. 1, pp. 212–214, 499–504, and Vol. II, pls. 12–20 and 125–127. Period 6 (575–450 B.C.) Vol. I, pp. 266–305, Vol. II, pp. 65–67 and 87–92.

¹² Mussche 1975, p. 54.

were extended at every point of the circumference.” It should be noted that no certain trace of the pre-Persian Archaic circuit wall has ever been reported, and not everyone believes there was one. From the sources, and R. Frederiksen’s study of Archaic city walls, it seems to me almost certain that such a wall once existed. One place we may still get a good shot at it is in the agora excavations, where, when we have removed eighty meters of Hadrianou Street, we should be able to determine if the Eridanos river served as the northern boundary of the city (as seems likely), or whether the river was bridged in order to carry the wall farther to the north; or something like the west wall of Eretria, which follows a watercourse, with a gate and tower serving also as a bridge across.¹³

Frederiksen’s survey lists 101 fortified Archaic cities known from external evidence, literary sources, or masonry styles. In addition to Athens, his list includes Argos, Corinth, Eretria, Thebes, and Aegina. It seems that Archaic Greek cities did not actually follow the belief, expressed by Alkaios (fr. 426 and 110.10): “Not stone nor timber, nor the craft of the joiner make the *polis*, but wheresoever are men who know how to keep themselves safe, there are walls and there a *polis*,” paraphrased by Plato (*Laws* 778d) that “bronze and iron must form the ramparts of the city rather than rock.” In Themistokles, the Athenians had a leader who knew when to build a wall, and why.

James Sickinger has been studying the *ostraka* found in recent years north of Hadrian street and mostly behind the Painted Stoa. He has identified more than 300, which make up five main groups. He reports that all are from *ostrakophoria* of the 480s. From the Kerameikos, S. Brenne has recently published the huge deposit found there in the 1960s, some 8,000, all dating to the late 470s.¹⁴ That, of course, agrees with the notion that the various groups were deposited outside the line of the city wall in use at that time, before or after 479 B.C.

On the question of the post-Persian wall, Herodotos is silent; it is not part of his story and he has the battle of Mykale to relate. Thucydides, however, makes clear that the defense of the city was a primary concern (1.89–93). Themistokles’ instruction to the Athenian people was: “that the whole population of the city, men, women, and children, should take part in the wall-building, sparing neither private nor public building that would in any way help to further the work, but demolishing them all” (Thuc. 1.90.3). That is, if Thucydides is reliable here, the Athenians built their fortification to a defensible height before they dealt with their private needs and housing.¹⁵

His description of the result, “It was in this manner that the Athenians got their wall built in so short a time, and even today the structure shows that it was put together in haste. For the lower courses consist of all sorts of stones, in some

¹³ Cf. Frederiksen 2011, pp. 138–142, Fachard 2004, Thuc. 6.57.1 (514 B.C.), and Andocides 1.108.

¹⁴ Sickinger 2017 and *Hesperia*, forthcoming; Brenne 2019.

¹⁵ For an echo of the story: Plut. *Them.* 19.

cases not even cut to fit but just as they were when the workers brought them, and many *stelai* from grave monuments and other worked stones were built in. For the circuit of the city wall was extended all around, and because of this they laid hands in haste on everything” (1.93.2).

Diodoros also has an account of the building of the walls, somewhat more lengthy than Thucydides, again indicating that he drew from additional sources. His account of the actual construction (11.39–40): “. . . the Athenians began with great enthusiasm to build the walls, sparing neither houses nor tombs. And everyone joined in the task, both children and women, and, in a word, every *xenos* and slave, no one of them showing any lack of zeal.” In short, he is specifying that metics and slaves were part of the workforce.

Perhaps equally interesting in the matter of the wall, Diodoros (14.18) provides some indirect evidence about the scale of the task, in his discussion of the fortifications at Syracuse, built by Dionysios in 401 B.C.: “He gathered the peasants from the countryside, from whom he selected 60,000 capable men and parcelled out to them the space to be walled. For each stade he appointed an *architekton* and for each *plethron* a mason, and the laborers from the common people assigned to the task numbered 200 for each *plethron*. Besides these other workers, a multitude in number, quarried out the rough stone and six thousand yoke of oxen brought it to the appointed place.” After describing various incentives to get the work done quickly, Diodoros concludes: “The wall was brought to completion in twenty days. It was 30 stades in length and of corresponding height (. . .) there were lofty towers at frequent intervals and it was constructed of stones four feet long and carefully joined.”

The Themistoklean circuit at Athens is close to the same length as Syracuse, at ca. 6.5 kilometers long and it too was built in haste. Like Syracuse, it will have required literally tens of thousands of workers. Did it take about the same twenty days as Syracuse, or less? Note that the Athenians foraged tombstones and building debris, which will have spared them much of the huge expense of time and labor transporting new stone from the quarries (as well as the challenge of finding 6000 yoke of oxen), as did the fact that they had only to build the wall to a “defensible” height, as noted twice by Thucydides (1.90–91).¹⁶

We also need to consider how much time Themistokles’ well-known delaying tactics, as described in Thucydides, created for the Athenians to build their wall. That in turn depends on how long it took ambassadors to

¹⁶ Thomas Rose recently reminded me of another instance of fast wall-building, at Alexandria Eschate on the Tanais, a circuit twice as long, at 60 stades, built by Alexander, in either seventeen or twenty days, depending on your source: Curtius 7.6.25–27: 60 stades in seventeen days. Arrian (*Anab*, 4.4.1) and Justin (12.5.12) both have it at twenty days. See also Pliny 6.49.

get from Athens to Sparta and back. The distance from Athens to Sparta is somewhere between 235–250 kilometers (140–150 miles), depending on the route taken, which is to say that an average trip on foot should be eight or nine days.¹⁷ Somewhat faster if they traveled on horseback – perhaps closer to five or six days. Themistokles’ well-known delaying tactics, as outlined by Thucydides, should have provided ample time for the construction of the wall.

When we turn back to the archaeology, we make our way to the Kerameikos. We have the ancient accounts of a new, hastily built wall, making extensive use of reused material or spolia, especially gravestones, and that is what we find. The situation is summarized by A. Thecharaki in her study of the Themistoklean circuit: “Representing a rare instance where one can observe a concurrence between literary evidence and archaeology, the reuse of materials in the construction of the wall that was noted by Thucydides (1.93.2) has been confirmed by archaeological investigation at a minimum of 10 excavation sites (. . .). The surfaces of grave reliefs were often hacked off for reuse among other building materials”.¹⁸ The archaeology and the literary tradition go largely hand in hand.

The evidence for the Persian destruction reviewed above can be subdivided chronologically, as Lindenlauf, Stewart, Hurwit, Sioumpara, and Klein have done on the acropolis, and Shear and Lynch in the agora. It can also be divided functionally, the acropolis and shrines of Attica showing particular savagery on the part of the Persians, matched by the eventual lavish Athenian rebuilding of the destroyed temples. In the agora, we can sense the loss and burden of rebuilding hundreds of houses, the extent of the damage preserved in the household wells and domestic deposits. And in the Kerameikos we find the resilient Athenians dealing with devastated cemeteries by reusing the material immediately available to provide themselves with a new circuit wall in order to meet whatever challenges lay in the decades ahead. Temples, houses, grave monuments, and city walls are all part of the story.

¹⁷ Herodotos, in his account of the Persian Royal Road (5.52–54) tells us that it was about 2,700 kilometers, from Susa to Sardis, and he goes on to say that a caravan could do the journey in ninety days, which comes out to about 30 kilometers (18 miles) a day. The Vicarello cups, dating to the first century A.D., carry inscribed itineraries which record the total distance from Cadiz to Rome, listing all 104 stops along the way. Amazingly, the distance is almost exactly the same as that of the Persian Royal Road (2,700 kilometers) and the average daily distance covered in the itinerary is 27–30 kilometers (16–18 miles) a day. For the four inscribed silver cups found at Vicarello, now on display at the Museo Nazionale Romano, see *CIL* 3281, 3282, 3283 and 3284, and Marchi 1852, Heurgon 1952, and Gasperini 2008.

¹⁸ Thecharaki 2011, p. 105; see also Thecharaki 2015, pp. 37–39 and 183–192. Cf. Bäbler 2001, and C. Nepos, *Themistokles* 6.

Temples and the Oath of Plataia

The other issue concerning the aftermath which we cannot entirely ignore is the so-called Oath of Plataia and the rebuilding of sanctuaries destroyed by the Persians. I will summarize briefly the issue, which involves both the literary tradition and the interpretation of archaeological evidence. The oath purports to be one sworn by some or all of the Greeks before the battle of Plataia. It survives in several versions, with not all clauses appearing in all versions.¹⁹ Diodoros (11.29.1–4) includes the phrase: “nor will I rebuild any of the sanctuaries which have been burnt or demolished, but I will let them be and leave them as a reminder to coming generations of the impiety of the barbarians.” Lykourgos (vs. *Leocr.* 81), also preserves that particular clause: “I will not rebuild a single one of the shrines burnt and razed by the barbarians, but they are to be left for future generations as a memorial of the impiety of the barbarians.” The third source is epigraphical, a stele of the fourth century or Hellenistic period found at the deme of Acharnai, carrying a version with more clauses than either Diodoros or Lykourgos, though omitting the rebuilding prohibition. Finally, Pausanias at Abai (10.35.2) records: “(.) the army of Xerxes burned down the very sanctuary at Abai. The Greeks who withstood the barbarian resolved not to restore the burnt sanctuaries, but to leave them for all time as records of hate. That is why the temples in the land of Haliartos, and the temple of Hera at Athens on the road to Phaleron, and the temple of Demeter at Phaleron remain half-burnt even in my time.” Against these stands the testimony of Theopompos of Chios (*Philippica*, Book 25), cited by Theon, who includes the oath in a list of Athenian lies: “The Hellenic oath which the Athenians say the Hellenes swore before the battle of Plataia is falsified, as is the treaty of the Athenians and the Hellenes with King Darius. And furthermore, he says the battle of Marathon was not what everyone keeps repeating it was (.)”

Here too, in theory, we can examine the sources through the lens of archaeology, where the case seems strong that Archaic temples which were damaged or destroyed were not replaced for a generation or more, until the second half of the fifth century B.C. The list, most of which we have actually covered already, is a substantial one: all four buildings dedicated to Athena on the Athenian acropolis, along with some of the so-called treasuries, the altar of the Twelve Gods, the altar tentatively identified as that of Aphrodite Ourania, the Telesterion at Eleusis, the sanctuary of Nemesis at Rhamnous, the temple of Poseidon at Sounion, and possibly some of the buildings in the sanctuary of Artemis at Brauron. All of these are in Athens or Attika, justifying the outrage of the allies and some Athenians when Delian league funds were diverted to these projects by Perikles, as vividly described by Plutarch (*Per.* 12).

¹⁹ For a recent review of the issue of the oath of Plataia, see Sioumpara 2019, p. 37 and n. 44.

Also generated by the Persian wars, though not sacred nor rebuilt following Persian destruction was the structure known as the Odeion of Perikles, said to have been a version of the tent of Xerxes, captured after the battle at Plataia.²⁰

Not mentioned by any source, though perhaps relevant, is the north wall of the acropolis, with its prominent reuse of pieces of both the Older Parthenon and the Old Temple of Athena. It still serves as a constant and effective daily reminder of the Persian destruction for anyone looking up at the acropolis from the area of the agora in the lower city. Sioumpara, however, has recently argued that the reuse and placement of the elements of the two destroyed peripteral temples in the north wall of the acropolis was more likely to have been practical rather than ideological.²¹

Some other Athenian monuments, such as the Theseion/Hephaisteion, above the Agora, do not make the “Periklean” list since there is no clear evidence of any Archaic predecessor. In other cases, cult activity can be argued despite the ruinous state of the temples or sanctuary. Within the ruins of the *poros naiskos* that preceded the final marble version of the temple of Athena Nike, for instance, and with the “opisthodomos” or “megaron facing west” which many take to be the damaged but useable remains of the Old Athena Temple.²² In addition, material from the treasuries “B” and “C,” also on the Acropolis, was not reused until it was built into the foundations of the Pinakothekē of the Propylaia, leading Klein to suppose the buildings stood in some fashion between 480 and 437 B.C.²³ Beyond Athens it is worth noting also that the sanctuary at Kalapodi in Phokis was burnt, according to Pausanias, and interestingly this provides the occasion and impetus – rather than Athens – for his version of the oath of Plataia (10.35.2, quoted above). The excavations by the German Archaeological Institute offer extraordinary evidence for a shrine not rebuilt – but kept in use despite its ruinous state – in the decades immediately after the Persian attack.²⁴

²⁰ For a thorough recent review of the buildings associated with the Periklean building program, including the Odeion, see now Shear, 2016. For the Odeion see Pausanias 1.20.4, Plut. *Per.* 13.9–11, and Vitruvius 5.9.1; see also Shear 2016, pp. 197–228.

²¹ Sioumpara 2015, pp. 35–36.

²² For the most recent discussion of the “opisthodomos,” “megaron facing west” (Hdt 5.77), and the “Parthenon,” see now van Bookhuijzen 2020.

²³ Klein 2015, pp. 146–149 and 154–157. The fact that they were not included in the program of rebuilding perhaps suggests they were not considered part of the state’s responsibility.

²⁴ Felsch 1980, pp. 85–99 and Felsch 2007, pp. 16–20. There has been uncertainty as to whether the site at Kalapodi is that of Apollo at Abai or Artemis Elaphebolos at Hyampolis: both cities were destroyed by the Persians as they made their way south through Phokis after Thermopylai (Hdt. 8.33). The “provisional shrine,” buried under the late fifth century B.C. Doric temple, includes a bench/altar on which were found various votive gifts *in situ*, along with a small bronze kouros (evidently Apollo) leaded in place in one corner of the block.

CONCLUSIONS

Seen from a Persian perspective, it could be argued that the expedition was a clear though costly success. Xerxes took and utterly destroyed the remaining Greek mainland city that had participated in the Ionian revolt and exacted a high price for the defeat at Marathon. What makes this position somewhat hard to maintain is the extraordinarily fast and effective recovery of Athens over the next fifty years: a large naval empire, buildings that still rank among the finest ever built, and a cultural florescence against which most societies are still judged today. Against all the odds; how did this happen? A single answer is unlikely to emerge, given the generally contentious character of most scholars, but in theory it cannot hurt to consider some of the factors which may have been relevant in the Athenian success and recovery.

Wealth and plunder may well have played a role. The figures are hard to arrive at but it is worth remembering that the Athenians played a major role in all the victories over the Persians and the size of their contingents and their valor assured that they got a substantial share of the rewards. In imagining the amounts available, we have little evidence and at that, mostly indirect. Nonetheless, it is worth noting the following.

After Salamis the Greeks sent up a tithe to Delphi large enough to erect a bronze statue 12 cubits (18 feet) high (Hdt. 8.121): “they divided the spoil and sent the first-fruits (τὰ ἀκροθίνια) of it to Delphi; whereof was made a man’s image 12 cubits high, holding in his hand the figure-head of a ship.” After Plataia, in the Persian camp the Greeks “found tents adorned with gold and silver, and couches gilded and silver-plated, and golden bowls, and cups and other drinking-vessels; and sacks they found on wagons. Wherein were seen cauldrons (*lebes*) of gold and silver; and they stripped from the dead that lay there their armlets and torques, and daggers of gold; as for many-colored fabric it was regarded as nothing (. . .) much they stole and sold to the Aeginetans; insomuch that the Aeginetans thereby laid the foundation of their great fortunes, by buying gold from the helots as though it were bronze (. . .) Having brought all the stuff together they set apart a tithe for the god at Delphi, whereof was made and dedicated that tripod that rests upon the bronze three-headed serpent nearest to the altar” (Hdt. 9.80–83). In addition to the tripod at Delphi, the victorious Greeks could also afford to dedicate a bronze Zeus at Olympia 10 cubits high, and a Poseidon at the Isthmos 7 cubits high (Hdt. 9.81), and (according to Plutarch, *Arist.* 20.3) they spent an additional 80 talents to rebuild the temple of Athena at Plataia. In short, the Greeks and the Athenians were not impoverished, given their access to what they won on the battlefield and what the Persians abandoned in their hasty retreat.²⁵

²⁵ For an extensive discussion of all aspects of booty in Greek warfare, see Pritchett 1991, especially pp. 505–541 for a table of examples from the ancient sources.

A third source of booty came from the largely ignored battle of Mykale, said by Herodotos to have involved a Persian army of 60,000 (9.96) and a Greek fleet of 110 ships, the Athenian contingent under the command of Xanthippos, son of Arrhiphron (8.131). The Athenian contingent is also said to have comprised close to half the Greek forces and to have displayed exceptional bravery (9.105). Once the battle was won the Greeks “set fire to the Persian ships and to the entire stronghold – but not before they had brought the booty out onto the beach and discovered some caches of money” (9.105–106). There are no actual figures for the value of the booty, or the Athenian share, from Salamis, Plataia, and Mykale, but it seems likely the Athenians were not destitute. Thucydides (2.13.3–9) gives an account attributed to Perikles and dated in 432/431 B.C. of the resources the Athenians had available for war. Among other things, he lists 600 talents annually from tribute, 6,000 talents in coined silver on the Acropolis which he claims was once 9,700 (10,000 minus 300: τὰ γὰρ πλεῖστα τριακοσίων ἀποδέοντα μύρια ἐγένετο), uncoined silver and gold dedications worth at least 500 talents which included Persian booty (σκῦλα Μηδικὰ), and treasures belonging to other gods.²⁶

It is also perhaps worth noting that the Athenian decision not to rebuild their temples immediately will have left more funds to be invested in other aspects of their recovery. Estimating the total cost of the temples which were built in the second half of the fifth century on the motion of Perikles is an exercise in futility, but with no fewer than ten monuments to replace in marble, the cost must have been considerable. The decision may indeed have been made on religious or commemorative grounds at the time, but it also had the practical effect of allowing Athenian financial resources to be directed elsewhere for a generation and will presumably have been a significant factor in the speed and success of the Athenian recovery. Any homeowner who needs a new car or has a child to educate understands the concept of deferred maintenance.

Population must have been a considerable factor also. The fact that it was preserved by sending the women and children and others to Salamis or the Peloponnese, while thousands of men took to the triremes, means that casualties in Athens itself were kept to an absolute minimum. That available manpower was surely an essential element in the Athenian ability to build a new and larger circuit wall.

In this connection, it is hard not to attribute much of the Athenian success to the quality of Athenian leadership, particularly that of Themistokles, with his overarching vision of Athens as a naval power, which led to the fortification of the Peiraieus and the investment of the silver from the mines at Laurion in the

²⁶ The authors of the *ATL* (III, pp. 118–132) devote a chapter (V) to the text(s) of this passage and the amounts involved, including also versions by Diodoros 12.38–40 (citing Ephoros) and Isokrates (8.126). See also *ATL* III, pp. 326–345; and for a different view: Pritchett 1971, pp. 101–104. Kimon, of course, continued to amass Persian booty for Athens (Plut. *Cim.* 13).

construction of a fleet of 200 triremes. Built nominally to oppose Aegina, since the Persians were far away and not an obvious or immediate threat to Athens, the ships were available and actually used at Salamis (Hdt. 7.144, Plut. *Themistokles* 4). The long-term effect and intention were, of course, to convert Athens to a sea power, leading to an increase in democracy (*Themistokles* 4 and 19), largely opposed by Aristides and Miltiades. The success at Salamis was also in large part based on the desertion and abandonment of Athens (Plut., *Themistokles* 10), preserving the army and population at the expense of the city itself. Take away any one of these elements and possibly the whole sequence collapses, with Athenian history taking a very different course.

In short, the Athenians had wealth, a critical mass of population, and a visionary, steadfast, and not entirely trustworthy leader. The Persian destruction of Athens and its aftermath, as seen through both literature and archaeology, remains one of the inspiring stories and lessons from antiquity.

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