



- 0. SPARTA - Story Preface
- 1. REVENGING MARATHON
- 2. SPARTA**
- 3. LIFE IN SPARTA
- 4. LEONIDAS
- 5. GORGO
- 6. XERXES and the IMMORTALS
- 7. THERMOPYLAE
- 8. BATTLE at the HOT GATES
- 9. EPHIALTES - THE TRAITOR
- 10. THEMISTOCLES against XERXES
- 11. GREEKS DEFEAT the PERSIANS

This image, depicting a Spartan warrior, appears on an ancient Greek vase which is dated circa 480 BC. That is about ten years after the Athenians battled the Persians at the Battle of Marathon. Image online, via [Encyclopedia Britannica](#). Click on the image for a much-better view.

For centuries before - and after - the first Persian invasion at Marathon, [ancient Greece](#) was not a united country. [Cities were states](#) unto themselves, each with their own government. Sometimes the cities helped each other; sometimes they fought each other.

To avenge [his father's](#) loss at Marathon, Xerxes [formed an army](#) with men from many different countries. All part of his empire, the united invasion force even included subjected Greeks. One Greek - Demaratus - was formerly a king of Sparta. He would play a key role as Xerxes' advisor.

[Where](#) was ancient Sparta? What was life like there? Why would her former king advise the enemy? Located on the Peloponnesian Peninsula, [the city](#) - and its people - have an interesting history.

At the time of our story, Sparta was [known as Lacedaemon](#). Both names are rooted in Greek mythology. Lacedaemon, son of the chief god [Zeus](#), was married to Sparta. Naming the country he ruled after himself, Lacedaemon called his capital city Sparta, after his wife.

[Mountains](#) - including [Mt. Taygetus](#) - protect Sparta on three sides. Nearly thirty miles from [Gythion](#) - its port - ancient Sparta was not easy to blockade.

Unique among the [Greek city-states](#), Sparta had her own standing army. It commanded [authority over](#) nearly 4,000 square miles. To signify they were [Lacedaemonians](#), Spartans used the [Greek letter lambda](#) - Λ - on [their shields](#). Spartans believed their kings - they had two who ruled together - were direct descendants of the great hero [Herakles](#) (later known, by Romans, as [Hercules](#)).

Sparta's education system focused on physical ability and military prowess. Even girls took part in physical activities. A surviving bronze sculpture, likely created in (or near) Sparta, depicts a [young girl running](#).

Paul Cartledge, in *Thermopylae: The Battle That Changed the World*, describes Sparta's unique society and culture at the time Xerxes was amassing his army:

*Professionals in a world of amateurs, the Spartans alone of Greek cities maintained a standing army. But they were not militaristic in the sense that they enjoyed war for its own sake. That unique army was invented and maintained, first and often foremost, to dominate and suppress the Helots [the Spartan slaves]. In fact, their whole society was organized as a kind of standing army. It was kept ever on the alert against the enemy within, as well as against any Greek or non-Greek enemies from without.* (Cartledge, page 65.)

It was from such a place that Leonidas - one of Sparta's kings - would soon [inspire his men](#) to stand firm, and fearless, against Xerxes and the Persian army.

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/SPARTA-300-Battle-of-Thermopylae>

See [Learning Tasks for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/SPARTA-300-Battle-of-Thermopylae>

## Questions 2 Ponder

### What Does It Mean to Have an "Enemy Within?"

What does it mean to have an "enemy within?"

Could an individual have an "enemy within" himself or herself—or—does that concept only apply to a group of people (such as a city or country)? If the concept also applies to individuals, what are examples of "enemies within?"

### Is Fearlessness a Quality One Can Learn?

Leonidas—a Spartan leader—inspired his warriors to be "fearless."

Is "fearless" a quality which can be learned—or—is it a quality that one either has (or doesn't have)—like brown eyes, for example?

## Media Stream



#### Darius the Great - Father of Xerxes

First quoted passage, from the Behistun Inscription.

Second quoted passage, from *The Antiquities of Ancient Egypt*, by Diodorus Siculus, page 42 - see, especially, footnote 71.

Image online, courtesy [Livius](#).

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Darius-the-Great-Father-of-Xerxes>



#### Ancient Sparta - Map Depicting Location

Map online, courtesy Perry-Castañeda Library [Map Collection](#), University of Texas at Austin.

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Ancient-Sparta-Map-Depicting-Location>



#### Ancient Sparta - Ruins of the City-State

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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### Lacedaemon - Name for Ancient Sparta

Map online, courtesy Perry-Castañeda Library [Map Collection](#), University of Texas at Austin.  
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View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Lacedaemon-Name-for-Ancient-Sparta>



### Mountains of Sparta - Taygetos

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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### Gythium (Gythion) - Port of Ancient Sparta

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### Mount Taygetus - Near the Greek City-State of Sparta

Image, described above, online courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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### Spartan War Shield

Image online via Wikimedia Commons.

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### Hercules - Fighting the Nemean Lion

Image, described above, online courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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### Herakles - Greek Hero

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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### Ancient Sparta - Young Female Athlete

Image of bronze statue online, courtesy the British Museum.

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Ancient-Sparta-Young-Female-Athlete>



### SPARTA

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