

# SOLDIER-History

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Alice Turner — 02 Oct 1997, 09:11

## PERSIAN WAR

In Wolf's other books, we have to puzzle things out for ourselves, but in the Soldier books we have plenty of help. I recommend the last chapter of Herodotus's HISTORY (though you will want to browse through earlier chapters), the admirably succinct backgrounder (about 5 pages) on Pausanias and Themistocles in the first chapter of Thucydides's THE PELOPONESIAN WARS, and Plutarch's lively Life of Themistocles. Military historians love this conflict, and you will find analyses everywhere, including most encyclopedias, though Britannica is best (look under Graeco-Persian War).

Here, I give you a brief SOLDIER companion in three parts: first, a simplistic history; in Part 2 a look at the theological situation; in Part 3 place-names. I suggest printing Part 3 to slip into your book—it could prevent considerable aggravation.

At the beginning of the fifth century BC, Persia was by far and away the greatest power in the world; the empire reached east to India, north to Russia, across supra-Saharan Africa (though not as far down as the black man's Ethiopia), and westward into Macedonia, holding half of Thrace. Darius the Great (-522-485) had done a spectacular job not only of conquering territories but of organizing them as colonies. The army was vast, the navy the wonder of the world. The next step was obviously to swoop into the peninsula of Hellas and take it over. This looked to be easy. Each of the little city-states there, Athens, Corinth, Thebes, Argos, Sparta, etc. was usually more at less at war with the others, and their alliances short-lived and distrustful.

In -492 (after quite a lot of preliminaries which I leave out, as does Wolfe) Darius sent messengers to all the little city-states and the Greek islands asking for a token tribute of earth and water. Quite a few of them gave it, causing consternation among the others and causing just what Darius did not bargain for, a newly alert alliance among rivals and promises of mutual support. Darius landed forces at Marathon (Fennel Field) in -490, and in a battle already legendary by the time of our books, the Greeks, led by Miltiades of Athens (Cimon's father), defeated them, leading to an absolute orgy of self-congratulation and euphoria among the Hellenes, supported by Persia's 10-year retreat. During that time, Darius died, and his son Xerxes (whom history would never call "the Great") took over.

In -480, the year before our story begins, the Persians returned in force, led by their redoubtable general, Mardonius. They won the first skirmish, the Battle of Thermopylae (Hot Gates) against the Spartans, led by King Leonides who died there, his army vastly outnumbered, leaving Pausanias as regent (with Queen Gorgo) for the boy-king Pleistoanax. Lato was in this battle. Meanwhile, in Athens (Thought), the remarkable Themistocles managed to convince the city to gamble on two risky courses of action that seem in retrospect almost uncanny. You must remember that this was a small democracy. A vein of silver had been a few years earlier discovered nearby, and the profits from mining this would ordinarily have been

distributed among the citizens—Themistocles managed to persuade the senate to instead put all the money generated into building a fleet. Second, at the point when the Persian fleet was at the attack, he persuaded the citizens to abandon Athens altogether, sending the women, children and old men south, and co-opting every able-bodied man and boy in the city for his navy. Unbelievably, it worked. The Persians tore down the walls of a deserted city, then were trounced afloat, and their ships sunk, at the Battle of Salamis (Peace), by a navy that knew the coastline far better than they. Themistocles is considered, both by his contemporaries and ours, to be history's first naval genius.

The next famous event of the war, in -479, is where we come in, the Battle of Plataea (Clay), a village near Thebes (Hill). The Greeks, united under Pausanias of Sparta (Rope), won this battle, notorious for the fact that the near-by Thebans did not join them. (The three important cities of the series to date are Thought, Rope and Hill—remember their grudges.) On the same day, the Persians suffered a second naval defeat at Mycale, the Greek fleet being led by Leotychides, the second Spartan king. Hegesistratus was at this battle, though ordinarily he was attached to Mardonius. Though I don't think Wolfe mentions it, Herodotus makes note of the fact that at both Plataea and Mycale, a temple of Demeter (the Great Mother) was hard by the battlefield.

At Plataea-Clay, two important things happen: Mardonius, the seasoned Persian general dies—he is succeeded by Artabazus—and Latro, the Italian mercenary, is bonked on the head and then captured, together with his fellow mercenary, the Ethiopian Seven Lions. When they are taken to Hill, remember that the Thebans are in disgrace; it is wise of little Io to cling to whoever looks strong enough to save her; the Theban poet Pindaros, from an aristocratic and political family, is in a far better position.

MIST takes place in -479, ARETE in -478, as the walls of Athens are being rebuilt and the harbor at Piraeus (Tieup) fortified. Athens is just beginning its time of glory. Young Cimon has a formidable career ahead. What happens to Pausanias and Themistocles is...interesting. But that you must find out for yourselves, O Best Beloved.