



2500 anniversary of the battle of Marathon

Dear Friends,

September 2010 marks the 2,500th anniversary of the battle of Marathon – one of the turning points of world history. The museum will be commemorating the battle with a series of events, beginning with Chris Matthew's fascinating talk on 9 September and culminating with a Marathon Family Sunday in cooperation with the Greek community on 21 November. For details on Chris' talk in the Nicholson on Thursday 9 September please read information on the right. As always do please book so that we can insure reserved seating for Friends of the Nicholson Museum



Best wishes- Michael
MICHAEL TURNER FSA † Senior Curator
The Nicholson Museum

Chris Matthew
Macquarie University

In the Sandals of the Ancients: using re-creation to understand the Battle of Marathon

Fought in 490BC, the battle of Marathon was one of the pivotal moments of history – the first great clash between the powerful Persian Empire in the east and the small Greek city-states of the west. Yet very little is known about how this important engagement was actually played out. This lecture will discuss the attempts that have been made over the last few decades to better understand the battle of Marathon by physically re-creating various elements of it. These attempts, often using numerous participants bearing replica arms and armour of the time period, have taken scholarship in directions never previously explored, have shed new light on the ancient literary accounts of the battle, and have allowed us to better understand one of the main turning points of history.

Thursday 9 September
6 for 6:30 pm

\$30 (\$20 Friends of the Nicholson Museum)
Price includes champagne and our famous pies

The Battle of Marathon, 490 BC

The battle of Marathon is one of history's most famous military engagements. It is also one of the earliest recorded battles. Their victory over the Persian invaders gave the fledgling Greek city states confidence in their ability to defend themselves and belief in their continued existence. The battle is therefore considered a defining moment in the development of European culture.

In September of 490 BC a Persian armada of 600 ships disgorged an invasion force of approximately 20,000 infantry and cavalry on Greek soil just north of Athens. Their mission was to crush the Greek states in retaliation for their support of their Ionian cousins who had revolted against Persian rule.

Undaunted by the numerical superiority of the invaders, Athens mobilized 10,000 hoplite warriors to defend their territory. The two armies met on the Plain of Marathon twenty-six miles north of Athens. The flat battlefield surrounded by hills and sea was ideal for the Persian cavalry.

Surveying the advantage that the terrain and size of their force gave to the Persians, the Greek generals hesitated.

One of the Greek generals - Miltiades - made a passionate plea for boldness and convinced his fellow generals to attack the Persians. Miltiades ordered the Greek hoplites to form a line equal in length to that of the Persians. Then - in an act that his enemy believed to be complete madness - he ordered his Greek warriors to attack the Persian line at a dead run. In the ensuing melee, the middle of the Greek line weakened and gave way, but the flanks were able to engulf and slaughter the trapped Persians. An estimated 6,400 Persians were slaughtered while only 192 Greeks were killed.

The remaining Persians escaped on their ships and made an attempt to attack what they thought was an undefended Athens. However, the Greek warriors made a forced march back to Athens and arrived in time to thwart the Persians.

"With you it rests, Callimachus" Indecision before battle

Known as the "Father of History", Herodotus wrote his description of the battle a few years after it occurred. We join his account as the Athenians arrive at the battleground and are joined by a force of approximately 1000 of their Plataean allies. The Greek military leaders split on whether they should immediately attack the invaders or wait for reinforcements:

"The Athenians were drawn up in order of battle in a sacred close belonging to Heracles, when they were joined by the Plataeans, who came in full force to their aid.

The Athenian generals were divided in their opinions. Some advised not to risk a battle, because they were too few to engage such a host as that of the Persians. Others were for fighting at once. Among these last was Miltiades. He therefore, seeing that opinions were thus divided, and that the less worthy counsel appeared likely to prevail, resolved to go to the pole-



march [an honored dignitary of Athens], and have a conference with him. For the man on whom the lot fell to be polemarch at Athens was entitled to give his vote with the ten generals, since anciently the Athenians allowed him an equal right of voting with them. The polemarch at this juncture was Callimachus of Aphidnre; to him therefore Miltiades went, and said:

'With you it rests, Callimachus, either to bring Athens to slavery, or, by securing her freedom, to be remembered by all future generations. For never since the time that the Athenians became a people were they in so great a danger as now. If they bow their necks beneath the yoke of the Persians, the woes which they will have to suffer...are already determined. If, on the other hand, they fight and overcome, Athens may rise to be the very first city in Greece.'

'We generals are ten in number, and our votes are divided: half of us wish to engage, half to avoid a combat. Now, if we do not fight, I look to see a great disturbance at Athens which will shake men's resolutions, and then I fear they will submit themselves. But, if we fight the battle before any unsoundness shows itself among our citizens...we are well able to overcome the enemy.'

'On you therefore we depend in this matter, which lies wholly in your own power. You have only to add your vote to my side and your country will be free - and not free only, but the first state in Greece. Or, if you prefer to give your vote to them who would decline the combat, then the reverse will follow.'

Miltiades by these words gained Callimachus; and the addition of the polemarch's vote caused the decision to be in favor of fighting.'