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The battle of Marathon and European identity

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Chapter 3

The Battle of Marathon and European Identity[1]

Athena Leoussi

These days, when we hear the word 'Marathon', we reach for our trainers, but this was not always the case: in the summer of 490 BCE, in Athens, 'Marathon' was a call to arms. It made Athenians reach for their full hoplite armour and march to the plain of Marathon to repel the invading Persian army. They were successful. The Persians were pushed back and returned home. (Fig 3.1)

The jury is still out on many great events in human history. For example, when the President of the USA Richard Nixon asked, in 1972, during his historic visit to China, the Chinese Prime Minister, Zhou Enlai, what he thought had been the impact of the French revolution of 1789 (almost 200 years before) on Western civilisation Zhou, who was himself an avid student of French history, replied: 'too soon to tell.'[2]

Unlike the French Revolution, the verdict of history regarding the impact of Marathon on Western civilisation is clear and unequivocal especially within history's slow and long unfolding of consequences. Marathon had a profound and immediate significance for the Greek world that fought it and as the modern world embraced the ancient Greek world, and came to see itself as Greek, Marathon acquired a wider and more enduring significance – it became a battle in *European* history.

The profound and enduring significance that the Battle of Marathon has had both for the Greek world of antiquity and the modern Western world, was emphatically reaffirmed in 2010. In that year, scholars across Europe and America marked 2,500 years since the Battle of Marathon with conferences, colloquia and workshops (even though the celebrations should probably have been held in 2011, since there was no year 0).[3]

As the organisers of one of these conferences put it, their aim was to 'celebrate what was on any reckoning a key moment not just in

Greek but in European history'.[4] The aim of this essay is to explore what Marathon meant, not only to its contemporaries, but also to later generations. Why is Marathon such a 'key moment' in Greek and European history?

Marathon acquired many layers of significance. These layers of significance can be divided into military, political and cultural. I shall look at each one in turn.

First, I shall look at the battle itself, and its military significance. The key ancient source for the Battle of Marathon is Herodotus' book, the *Histories*. This was written in 445 BCE some fifty years after the event. As Herodotus wrote in his introduction to the *Histories*:

> These are the researches of Herodotus [sic] of Halicarnassus, which he publishes, in the hope of thereby preserving from decay the remembrance of what men have done, and of preventing the great and wonderful actions of the Greeks *and* the Barbarians from losing their due meed of glory; and withal to put on record what were their grounds of feuds (my emphasis).[5]

So, with Herodotus, the 'Father of History', History emerges as a new field of study - the study of 'feuds' – the study of battles. History was Military History. And History begins with the Battle of Marathon. Marathon is the first fully recorded historical battle, not counting the Trojan Wars or the battles against the Amazons and those between Centaurs and Lapiths which stood between reality and imagination.

Let us now look at the grounds of the feud between Athenians and Persians. Why did the Persians set out to invade Athens? It must be made clear from the outset that there was no woman involved – there was no *cherchez la femme*. The Battle of Marathon was not a battle for the return of a Helen, an Io, a Medea or a Europa. In any case, as Herodotus remarked, the Asiatics were 'men of sense': they would not 'make a stir' about the carrying off of their women. But the Asiatics were different from the Greeks. To quote Herodotus, concerning the Trojan War,

> Now as for the carrying off of women, it is the deed, they say, of a rogue: but to make a stir about such as are carried off, argues a man a fool. Men of sense care nothing for such women, since it is plain that without their own consent they would never be forced away. The Asiatics, when the Greeks ran off with their women,

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never troubled themselves about the matter…[6]

By contrast, '…the Greeks, for the sake of a single Lacedaemonian girl, collected a vast armament, invaded Asia, and destroyed the kingdom of Priam.'[7]

So, why did the Persians invade mainland Greece in 490 BCE? What drove them was revenge for Athenian assault on the Persian Empire. In the summer of 490 BCE, the Persian king Darius sent an Expeditionary Force across the Aegean to punish the Athenians and Eretrians for helping the Greek cities of Ionia, on the Western edge of his mighty empire, in present-day Turkey, revolt against him and his satraps, his local rulers. The Ionian Revolt was a failure, but it had to be punished.

Darius did not lead this expedition. Its commanders were Datis the Mede and Artaphernes, son of the Artaphernes who was satrap at Sardis.[8] The Persian fleet first raised Eretria to the ground, then sailed to the plain of Marathon and started disembarking. The choice of Marathon for the landing of the Persian fleet was strategic. Marathon was a part of Athenian territory, in Attica, and opposite Eretria. The Persians were led to Marathon by Hippias, whom the Athenians had exiled for his tyrannical rule. Exiled Hippias had taken refuge in Darius' court. As Herodotus informs us, Marathon was a good place for horses, and thus a good place for the Persian cavalry. Horses could be easily manoeuvred on the large plain.[9] Also, Hippias had family connections at Marathon so that the locals were expected not to make a fuss over a Persian landing.

Why did the Athenians make a fuss and resist the Persians? Neither Athenian resistance nor the location of Athenian military engagement with the Persians were inevitable. Marathon was a choice. In fact, the Athenians were faced with a number of choices upon learning the news of the Persian destruction of Eretria and disembarkation at Marathon:

First, not to resist the Persians and save their lives and homes – they could thus 'medize' (i.e., collaborate with the Persians). The Athenians would not be the first Greek city-state to accept Persian rule – the Thebans, the Parians had done it (see also Chapter 4 on Thermopylai in this volume). Indeed, as Paul Cartledge has noted, not only were the Greeks perpetually divided, but also, more Greeks aided the Persians than resisted them.[10] Second, to fight. Here, two options were open to them: a) to stand siege behind their city walls, in Athens; and b) to go to Marathon and confront the Persians there. At Marathon they would also able to block the narrow

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exits of the plain that would enable the Persians to advance to Athens.

Herodotus tells us of the decisive part that Miltiades, one of the ten generals who led the Athenian army, played in the events that followed Persian disembarkation at Marathon. First, Miltiades persuaded the Athenian Assembly to fight at Marathon. Second, Miltiades convinced Callimachus, who was the 'Polemarchos', the overall military Commander, that the Greek army should fight, and that they should do so sooner, rather than later. Indeed, once at Marathon, and after five days of stalemate, the ten generals of the Greek army became divided about what to do. It was decided that a vote should resolve the matter. Five generals voted '…not to risk a battle, because they were too few to engage such a host as that of the Medes'. Miltiades, however, was with the other four. Callimachus' vote thus became crucial. And Callimachus sided with Miltiades. And third, Miltiades devised a military strategy which, although risky, secured Athenian victory.

Herodotus gives us the arguments with which Miltiades persuaded Callimachus to fight: 'For if you agree with me that we should fight, you make your country free and your city the best in all Greece. But if you choose not to fight, we will lose it all.'[11]

It is worth quoting the entire text of Miltiades' arguments to Callimachus, as presented to us by Herodotus:

> With thee it rests, Callimachus, either to bring Athens to slavery, or, by securing her freedom, to leave behind thee to all future generations a memory beyond even Harmodius and Aristogeiton. 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 Medes, the woes which they will have to suffer when given into the power of Hippias are already determined on; if, on the other hand, they fight and overcome, Athens may rise to be the very first city in Greece. How it comes to pass that these things are likely to happen, and how the determining of them in some sort rests with thee, I will now proceed to make clear. 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 show itself among our citizens, let the gods but give us fair play, and we are well

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> able to overcome the enemy. On thee therefore we depend in this matter, which lies wholly in thine own power. Thou hast only to add thy vote to my side and thy country will be free, and not free only, but the first state in Greece. Or, if thou preferrest to give thy vote to them who would decline the combat, then the reverse will follow.[12]

So, Miltiades gave two main reasons why the Athenians should fight: first, for freedom and second for the glory of Athens. And the Athenians set out to fight. As noted above, Miltiades was the architect of Athenian victory. This was not a simple matter. Miltiades' forces were limited and much inferior in size to those of the Persians. The Persian force has been estimated at 300,000 men as against approximately 10,000 men in Miltiades' camp. The Athenian number of soldiers was just 9,000 men; nearby Plataea had sent 1,000 hoplites. There were no Spartans: Athens had sent Pheidippides (or Pheilipides), a good runner, to Sparta to ask for help. But the Spartans told Pheidippides that they could not send reinforcements immediately because of a religious law which forbade military operations until the full moon. And the full moon was six days ahead.

Miltiades decided not to wait for the Spartans. He devised a military strategy which was new and which led to Athenian victory.[13] Miltiades organised his hoplites into phalanxes. The hoplite phalanxes were close-order formations of hoplites advancing in step. The hoplites were an infantry force of well-trained, heavily armed men, wearing a bronze helmet, armour, breastplate, and greaves and carrying a large round shield, a sword and a roughly two-meter long spear. No stone throwers or any other kinds of light infantry were used.

Miltiades's strategy was to reinforce the wings of his battle line and make the middle thinner. Having fought with the Persians in the past, he knew that 'Persian practice' was to place 'the commander with his best troops in the centre of the battle line'. Miltiades hoped to strike the centre hard on both its flanks avoiding a 'frontal assault'.[14]

The Persian force consisted mainly of lightly-armoured archers. But the Persian archers were famous for their lethal skill. It is not certain how many horses, if any, the Persians had on the day of the battle. Herodotus informs us that the Persian army was *khoris hippeis* (without cavalry) on that day. It is likely that most of the Persian horses were back on the ships.

It is not certain who attacked first, on the day of the Battle of Marathon. But when the Athenians and Plataeans did engage, they did so, at first with

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a marching step. And only when they came within bow-shot of the Persian archers, they broke into a run, shouting, *Eleleu! Eleleu*! the Greek battle cry.[15]

According to Herodotus:

> The Persians saw them [the hoplites] charging at a run and prepared to receive the charge, thinking that the Athenians were completely crazy, seeing how few they were and how they were charging at a run without their cavalry or archers.[16]

But the strong wings of the Greek army broke the Persian centre from its flanks and chased the Persians 'all the way to the shore'.[17] The Persians suffered heavy losses, re-embarked on their ships and sailed off around Sounion, to Phaleron, at the southern coast of Attica, to sack Athens from there. They thought that it would be easy to sack Athens since only women, children and the elderly had been left. However, the Greek army ran back the 26 miles from Marathon to Athens to defend their city and when the Persians saw them, Herodotus writes, 'they departed and sailed away to Asia'.[18] Herodotus also gives us the number of casualties on each side: 'There fell in this battle of Marathon, on the side of the barbarians, about six thousand and four hundred men; on that of the Athenians, one hundred and ninety-two'.[19]

Let us now look at the significance of Marathon as a military event for each of the two warring factions - the Persians and the Athenians. What did the Persians and Athenians think and say about Marathon? In the Persian version of the event, Marathon was of no significance, as far as the Persian Empire was concerned. It was an 'insignificant skirmish on the beach'.[20] For the Iranian historian, Abdollah Razi, writing in 1982, the importance of Marathon had been exaggerated by the Greeks.[21] For another modern Iranian historian, A.H.Zarinkoub, the Persians were not even defeated at Marathon; they were just forced to withdraw. And although many of them died, none of them was taken prisoner.[22] Robert Graves, the great classicist and poetic critic of the First World War, and especially of what he saw as the lies that were told by governments to both British and German publics about the purpose of that 'Great War', shared the Persian/Iranian view of Marathon. In his famous poem, 'The Persian Version', which he wrote around the time of the Second World War, from the point of view of the Persians, Graves criticised the Athenian version of Marathon, as follows:

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Truth-loving Persians do not dwell upon
The trivial skirmish fought near Marathon.
As for the Greek theatrical tradition
Which represents that summer's expedition
Not as a mere reconnaisance in force
By three brigades of foot and one of horse
(Their left flank covered by some obsolete
Light craft detached from the main Persian fleet)
But as a grandiose, ill-starred attempt
To conquer Greece - they treat it with contempt;
And only incidentally refute
Major Greek claims, by stressing what repute
The Persian monarch and the Persian nation
Won by this salutary demonstration:
Despite a strong defence and adverse weather
All arms combined magnificently together.[23]

As 'the Persian version' suggests, for the Athenians, Marathon meant more – much more. As Miltiades had predicted, it became the foundation stone, first, of the freedom and second, the glory of Athens: it made Athens 'the best in all Greece'.

This was so for a number of reasons. First, Athenian victory was clear: it turned the Persians away. At the same time, Marathon was not an end, but a beginning. The Persians returned, ten years later, led by Xerxes, to avenge Marathon (if we accept Aeschylus' account in the *Persians*). So, Marathon was the first of a series of struggles of free Greek city-states, led by Athens and Sparta, against a number of Persian invasions, known as the Greco-Persian Wars. These ended with the final victory of Greece at Plataea in 479 BCE.[24]

Second, the Athenians at Marathon not only defeated the Persians, but - and as importantly - conquered the *fear* of the Persians. Nobody had defeated the Persians before. At Marathon the Athenians proved that 'the Persian power was not invincible'.[25] Marathon was a strategic triumph devised by one man and this man was an *Athenian* general - Miltiades. With Miltiades, Marathon was the first battle that a Greek army fought exclusively with hoplites: heavily armoured foot soldiers – there were neither horsemen nor archers. Furthermore, and as Evans has noted, 'The charge of the hoplite phalanx was another innovation'.[26] Athenian recognition of Miltiades' crucial role at Marathon was expressed in words and deeds. As I shall

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discuss below, Miltiades was honoured with great works of public art: for example, in both Delphi and Athens statues and paintings that recount and memorialise his victory, becoming *lieux de mémoire* of his as well as his city's achievement.

And third, Marathon was a superhuman achievement in the famous and brave advance at a run.[27] There was a dramatic disproportion in the powers in play and also a matching disparity in the casualties of the two sides. As noted above, Herodotos had reported that there were 192 dead on the Greek side, as opposed to around 6,400 on the Persian side, even though modern historians are rather sceptical about the actual numbers.[28] The Athenian decision to bury the Athenians who died in that battle at the site of the battle, instead of the usual place, the *Kerameikos*, the public cemetery of Athens, expressed the special status that the victory at Marathon and its site held in Athenian consciousness.

Marathon was of great political significance for Athens: Firstly, it contributed to the invention of the myth of Athens. Athenian interpretations of and propaganda about their victory had far-reaching political consequences both for Athens and Greece. Athens claimed Marathon as an exclusively Athenian victory, despite the admittedly small, Plataean reinforcements. As Herodotus noted, the Athenians claimed to have defeated, 'all alone', 'forty-six nations' at Marathon - the multi-ethnic Persian army.[29] Furthermore, with Marathon, the Athenians claimed to be not only the saviours of their own city, but also the saviours of 'the whole of Greece'.[30] They had risked their lives for the whole of Greece.

Secondly, Marathon became embedded in Athenian consciousness of itself as a great military power, able and entitled to be the leader of Greece. Combined with Athenian-led victory at Salamis, in 480 BCE, Marathon justified Athenian claims to hegemony over other Greek city-states. In 478 BCE, the hegemonic position of Athens was unequivocally established through the formation of the Delian League, a confederacy of Greek city-states, under Athenian leadership.

Thirdly, The Athenians made Marathon a lesson in 'patriotism'. As Plato noted in his Socratic dialogue, *Menexenus*, the Athenians became *thithaskaloi* (teachers) of the whole of Greece.[31] The Athenians made patriotism – the fight for the freedom of one's country - an Athenian virtue, and a lesson for later generations of Athenians and Greeks to imitate.[32] We find this exemplary status of Marathon in the writings of Lysias (his *epitaphios*, or funeral oration), Demosthenes, and, as noted above, Plato.[33] Athens did not medize and, unlike the Eretrians, won the battle.

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Furthermore, and as Herodotus noted, Marathon showed the superiority of Greece over the Barbarians. Fourthly, and as importantly, Marathon was a hoplite triumph in a political sense: the Athenian army was an army of free men. It was a citizen-army - every citizen a soldier.[34] This was seen as, and it was, a very different kind of army to that of the Persians, whose soldiers were subjugated peoples forced to fight for their despot.

Marathon entered Greek cultural memory not only through the written word, but also through great works of public art. These were designed to ensure that Marathon would be known and remembered by future generations not only of Athenians, but also of other Greeks – that it would become a pan-Hellenic *lieu de mémoire*. Marathon was memorialised in Athens, Marathon, and in Panhellenic and international Greek sites, such as Delphi and Olympia, immediately after the battle and in the years that followed it. At Marathon, on the site of the battle the Athenians constructed a memorial column and a burial mound for the 192 Athenians who had died, there (Fig. 3.2). Pausanias, the Greek traveller and geographer of the second century CE, whose *Periegesis Hellados* (*Description of Greece*) is an invaluable guide to ancient ruins, gives us an account of the ways in which the site of the Battle of Marathon was transformed into a memorial site – a site marking Athenian victorious resistance to the Persians. He writes, in Book I, Chapter 32:

> The tomb of the Athenians is in the plain and on it stand stelai bearing the names, listed by tribes, of those who fell. There is another tomb for the Plataeans of Boeotia and for the slaves; for slaves fought then for the first time. There is also a separate monument for an individual, Miltiades, son of Kimon.... There is also a trophy of white marble. The Athenians say that they buried the Medes, and indeed it is a sacred duty to cover a human corpse with soil, but I was unable to find a tomb, nor was there any mound or other visible sign, but they brought them and threw them haphazard into a trench.[35]

At Delphi, Athens, and most probably Miltiades' son, Kimon, with the approval of either the Assembly or the *Boule* of Athens, commissioned a Marathon monument, now lost, but also mentioned and described by Pausanias. Kimon dominated Athenian politics in the 470s and 460s BCE. Kimon's Marathon monument must therefore date either from the 460s BCE or the 450s. It was an expensive monument in bronze, consisting of an

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inscribed base carrying, originally, thirteen statues. These included Athena, Apollo and Miltiades. It was probably made by Pheidias.[36]

At Delphi was also found a thanks-giving inscription to Apollo referring to Marathon, carved on a rectangular limestone base, dating, according to Davison, either from the 480s or 460s BCE.[37] It reads, in translation, 'The Athenians to Apollo, after their victory over the Medes as first fruits of the booty of the Battle of Marathon'. Whether this inscription belongs to the Kimonian Marathon monument or not, is a hotly contested matter among classical archaeologists. According to Neer, this inscription has been confirmed, following recent archaeological evidence, as being part of the great Athenian Treasury in Delphi, a building that was made of gleaming white Parian marble, and thus not the base of Kimon's monument.[38] According to Neer, this discovery proves Pausanias' claim that the building of the Athenian Treasury was a thank-offering for the Battle of Marathon.[39] Neer thinks the Kimonian base is lost.[40]

In any case, these and other extraterritorial memorialisations of Marathon at Panhellenic shrines, such as Delphi, as well as Olympia, were significant not only as manifestations of Greek religious practices (dedications of individuals or poleis to the gods who had assisted them in victories in battle), but also for creating and propagating narratives or 'myths' of both personal and civic power – of the power and achievements of both Miltiades and the city-state of Athens.[41]

In Athens, the *Stoa Poikili*, also commissioned by Kimon, included a depiction, now lost, of the Battle of Marathon. However, above all, the greatest memorial to the battle, the *lieu de mémoire par excellence*, stood on the Athenian Acropolis (Fig. 3.3).[42] The temple of Athena Parthenos and other buildings that adorned the Acropolis of Athens, the lower town and the Athenian countryside, were built after the end of the Persian wars, during the 440s and 430s, by Pericles.[43] Pericles' building programme which brought about a renaissance in the arts, affirmed the power, glory and prosperity of Athens that began with Marathon. It also included a monument to the Polemarch Callimachus, who was killed in the Battle of Marathon - the Nike of Callimachus.

The legend of Marathon did not stay within the confines of Greek culture; neither was it lost with the end of the ancient world. What is fascinating about Marathon as a 'famous battle', is its long and illustrious after-life, and especially its diffusion across and survival into the modern Western world. Indeed, Marathon would acquire a crucial significance for the modern Western world, especially from the eighteenth century

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onwards. Marathon assumed huge proportions as it came to be seen by modern Western thinkers as a European foundation myth.

This identification of Europe with Greece owes much to Herodotus himself: 'For Asia, with all the various tribes of barbarians that inhabit it, is regarded by the Persians as their own; but Europe and the Greek race they look on as distinct and separate.'[44] European opinion has not changed much in this respect. For Marathon is believed to have helped preserve the cultural division between Asia and Europe.

In modern Western thought, Marathon has been regarded as significant not only for protecting what Athens had achieved until then, but also, and more importantly, for what it enabled to come: and what was to come was the rise of Periclean Athens. Marathon has been integrated in a narrative that begins with that battle on the beach and culminates in the 'golden age' of Pericles, Pheidias, Plato, Aristotle and the great dramatists. In this age of political, artistic, literary and philosophical creativity, Western thinkers have seen the roots of their own, European civilisation. For example, Eduard Meyer, the great late-nineteenth-century German ancient historian and author of the monumental *Geschichte des Altertums (History of Antiquity)* of 1884-1902 (with a third edition in 1913) emphasised the world- historical significance of the Persian Wars if not as cause, at least as 'pre-condition' for the development of western culture. Max Weber, a contemporary of Meyer, who also engaged with the problem of the sources of modern Western culture and published a critical essay on Meyer, summarised Meyer's argument as follows: for Meyer, the outcome of that 'meagre' contest at Marathon, was 'the indispensable "precondition" of the development of the war of liberation, the salvation of the independence of Hellenic culture, the positive stimulus of the beginnings of the specifically western historiography, the full development of the drama and all that unique life of the mind which took place in this – by purely quantitative standards – miniature theatre of world history'.[45] Weber did not doubt 'the "significance" which the culture of classical antiquity has had for our own spiritual and intellectual discipline'.[46] However, he objected to Meyer's narrow approach to the history of antiquity which sought to eradicate from this history 'that which is no longer historically "effective" in the contemporary world' – anything that does not explain the contemporary world.[47]

Had the outcome of the Battle of Marathon been different, which was also possible, a different cultural development would have taken place. For Meyer, Persian victory would have led to 'the development of a theocratic-religious culture, the beginnings of which lay in the mysteries

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and oracles, under the aegis of the Persian protectorate, which wherever possible utilized, as for example among the Jews, the national religion as an instrument of domination'.[48] But this did not happen. As Weber remarked, agreeing with Meyer, with Greek victory, first at Marathon and finally at Plataea, there was 'the triumph of the free Hellenic circle of ideas, oriented towards this world, which gave us those cultural values from which we still draw our sustenance'.[49] Finally, Weber admitted that the continuing vitality and appreciation of these Hellenic 'irreplaceable values' by modern Europeans, who are not Athenians, makes the Battle of Marathon an object of more serious historical analysis than does 'a scuffle between two tribes of Kaffirs or Indians'.[50] However, for Weber, this was not the *only* reason for studying ancient history.

Marathon as a model of modern nationalism

Apart from classical studies and early sociology, Marathon inspired modern European nationalism: the armed resistance to foreign rule for the preservation or acquisition of national freedom. Marathon became the blueprint on which some of the leading European nations modelled their own foundation myths. 'Freedom or Death' became the battle-cry of all those Wars of Independence which began in the nineteenth century and continue to the present day. The Greek War of Independence was one of them, and, as William St Clair and others have shown, it was inspired by Marathon.[51]

But even before the Greek War of Independence, in 1791, the French Revolutionaries, caught up in the heat of Enlightenment classicism and Austrian invasion to restore the absolute rule of the French King, Louis XVI, identified with the Greeks of the Persian Wars. As they declared, 'The invading Austrian hosts resemble the liberticide hordes of despotic Xerxes', while 'The French armies are lionhearted Romans and Athenians, ready to die at Thermopylai or to conquer at Marathon'.[52] During the same revolutionary period, the French town of Ris changed its name to Marathon: 'Marathon is the name we have taken; this sacred name recalls to us the Athenian plain which became the tomb of a 100,000 satellites, but it recalls to us with still greater sweetness the memory of the Friend of the People, Marat…'[53] In addition, Marathon inspired the French *levée en masse*: the citizen-army that fought both the defensive wars against Austria, but also the imperial wars of Napoleon.

Marathon also became as foundational for the modern English nation. In nineteenth-century England, we find national identification with the

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young Greek men who fought at Marathon – the *Marathonomachoi*. The acquisition from Lord Elgin by the British Parliament, in 1816, of major sculptures from the Parthenon for the 'nation' played a major part in this process. British educated opinion saw in these sculptures from that great temple of Athena Parthenos which, as we saw, was the apogee of Pericles' building programme of commemoration of Greek victory in the Persian Wars, and especially of that first, Athenian victory at Marathon, the supreme expression and confirmation of their own values - those of personal and national freedom. As symbols of freedom as well as artistic beauty, the British Museum's Parthenon sculptures became British national symbols. Writing in 1890, Jane Ellen Harrison, the great nineteenth-century classicist and feminist, hailed the Parthenon sculptures in the British Museum as 'our national pride' – for they spoke the language of freedom.[54]

English or British identification with the horsemen of the Parthenon frieze is most striking (Fig. 3.4). It is possible that they represent the *Marathonomachoi*.[55] Of course, at Marathon, the Athenians had no cavalry. These are the horses of the Panathenaic festival which included horse and chariot races. But their riders were emblematic of those freedom fighters, those Athenian citizens who fought and won at Marathon. And these Athenian heroes, that 'handful of free men [who] had withstood a horde of barbarian slaves', as Harrison described them, became the national symbol of the English. The Parthenon horsemen inspired the image of St George, patron saint of England, that appeared, as a new motif, on the reverse of the new gold sovereign of the late summer of 1817 - two years after Waterloo, which was seen as a specifically British victory against Napoleon, and one year after the acquisition of the Parthenon sculptures (see the chapter on Waterloo in the second volume). The new design for the gold sovereign shows St George not, as might have been expected, in the form of an armoured mediaeval knight, but as an Athenian hero from the Battle of Marathon (Fig. 3.5). He is muscular and naked, except for a billowing cape, and mounted on his horse, killing the dragon, below him. St George *Marathonomachos*, as we might describe this new image of St George, remains, with only slight modifications, the flagship coin of the Royal Mint. It was designed by the Italian gem engraver, Benedetto Pistrucci, a devout classicist. Pistrucci had come to London in 1815 and, by all accounts, it was he who suggested St George and the Dragon as a suitable subject for the proposed new sovereign. The Royal Mint gives the following account of the visual sources of Pistrucci's design:

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> Pistrucci's approach to the design represented a refreshing departure from previous gold coins whose style had been traditionally heraldic. It seems he may have found inspiration in the magnificent Elgin Marbles, the beautiful marble carvings that Thomas Bruce, the 7th Earl of Elgin, brought to England in the early 1800s… Pistrucci's St George is strongly reminiscent of these marble relief sculptures, his horse adopting an aggressive attitude towards the wounded dragon yet effortlessly kept in check by his master. His design of a naked Greek horseman mounted on a Parthenon-style horse is, indeed, one of great classic beauty... To the delight of collectors, artists and historians, it continues on the gold sovereign to this very day.[56]

Marathon and modern democracy

Marathon saved Athens not only from the tyranny of foreign rule, but also from Athenian tyrants. As resistance to the tyranny of Hippias, Marathon enabled the further growth of the spirit and institutions of democracy that had been set in motion by Cleisthenes's reforms of 508-7 BCE. This growth culminated in Pericles' own democratic reforms of 462 BCE. These secured the government of Athens, through the Assembly and the Courts, by the average Athenian and not by the aristocracy.[57]

In his famous Funeral Oration, which Thucydides has reported in his *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Pericles, alluding to Marathon, made a direct connection between the democratic freedoms, prosperity and beauty of Athens and Athenian independence. He also upheld Athens and its way of life as a model for the rest of Hellas - 'the School of Hellas'. On these grounds, he urged Athenians to continue to fight the Spartans, '…believing that to be happy is to be free and to be free is to be brave, do not think lightly of the perils of war'.[58] Pericles' funeral oration became the touchstone of Western liberalism from Abraham Lincoln to Winston Churchill, and beyond. As Sir Edward Creasy put it, writing in 1851: '[Marathon] secured for mankind the intellectual treasures of Athens, the growth of free institutions, the liberal enlightenment of the Western world, and the gradual ascendancy for many ages of the great principles of European civilisation'.[59] Unveiling the 4.68 m high, restored Nike of the Callimachus Monument in the new Acropolis Museum, in 2010, as part of the celebrations of the 2,500 years since the Battle of Marathon, the Greek minister of Culture and Tourism, Pavlos Geroulanos, noted that democracy

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was also integral to the decision to fight the Persians: as the ten generals were equally divided, it was the Polemarch's eleventh vote that tilted the balance and decided the course of action. As the minister stressed, 'Today we are not unveiling the monument of just another general but a monument to a democratic process that changed the course of history."[60]

It is often overlooked that Marathon enabled a *double* political legacy of Athens: on the one hand the Periclean idea of the rule of the demos, and, on the other, the Platonic idea of the rule of oligarchy and the philosopher-king. In this latter idea, the philosopher attaches his *own* vision of the world to the state, making this vision compulsory and killing millions in the process, in the belief that the end justifies the means. Both of these Athenian political legacies found adherents in modern Europe dividing the continent between totalitarian Platonists (Hitler, Lenin, Stalin) and Periclean democrats, who would found and defend 'open societies'.

However, while democracy prevailed in Athens, it enabled the growth of free thought. This meant 'fearless questioning' - the scepticism and critical approach which began most consistently with Socrates and gave birth to modern science. This questioning even of the most sacred, religious belief, this openness to metaphysical criticism, which, admittedly, came gradually and at the cost of Socrates' own life, is humorously exemplified in Aristophanes' comedy, *The Clouds*, in an exchange between Socrates and Strepsiades:

> Socrates: '...there is no Zeus: don't you be so obtuse.
>
> Strepsiades: No Zeus up above in the sky? Then you first must explain, who it is sends the rain; or I really must think you are wrong.
>
> Socr. Well then, be it known, these send it alone: I can prove it by argument strong. Was there ever a shower seen to fall in an hour when the sky was all cloudless and blue? Yet on a fine day, when the clouds are away, he might send one, according to you.[61]

This new and more liberal view of religion that came after Marathon, was also embodied in Pheidias' conception of the Parthenon. As Harrison noted, 'Pheidias and Perikles were the friends rather of philosophers than priests.' Therefore, 'the Pheidian conception of the gods' was an 'even, temperate balance between faith and freedom, a certain fearless questioning as far removed from irreverence on the one hand, as on the other from ignorant dogmatism'.[62]

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Marathon entered modern European popular culture in 1896.[63] When the French Baron Pierre de Coubertin revived the Olympic Games of Greece, in Athens, he included in them the Marathon run. Recent scholarship adds weight to the view that the Marathon run was a run from Marathon to Athens, not of the runner Pheidippides, as legend had it, but of the entire Athenian army, running to Athens after the Persian re-embarkation at Marathon, to stop the Persians from disembarking at Phaleron and marching on Athens (Fig. 3.1). The first Marathon run at the 1896 Olympic Games retraced that historic route.[64]

Marathon remains a part of popular culture having expanded into a global Marathonomania in the twenty-first century, with over 500 Marathons being run every year as independent events by ordinary people across the globe.[65] It is worth ending this survey of the myths surrounding the Battle of Marathon, with John Stuart Mill's famous words of 1846:

> The interest of Grecian history is unexhausted and inexhaustible. As a mere story, hardly any other portion of authentic history can compete with it. Its characters, its situations, the very march of its incidents, are epic. It is an heroic poem, of which the personages are peoples. It is also, of all histories of which we know so much, the most abounding in consequences to us who now live. The true ancestors of the European nations (it has been well said) are not those from whose blood they are sprung, but those from whom they derive the richest portion of their inheritance. The battle of Marathon, even as an event in English history, is more important than the battle of Hastings. If the issue of that day had been different, the Britons and the Saxons might still have been wandering in the woods.[66]

Mill's judgment about that battle which took place some two and a half millennia ago, is still valid today. We find it quoted repeatedly and with approval by different contributors to the book, *Marathon – 2,500 Years*, published in 2013, and based on a conference held in 2010 to mark the 2,500th anniversary of Marathon. As the editors of that book, Chris Carey and Mike Edwards observed, Mill's view of Marathon is quoted with approval by four of their contributors. In this way they recognised the embeddedness of that battle on the beach in the modern 'collective European consciousness'.[67]

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Press, 2004). See too Trevor Bryce: *The Trojans and their Neighbours* (London & New York: Routledge, 2006).

48. See for example Eric Cline: "Introduction: The Ahhiyawa Problem" in G.M. Beckman, T. Bryce and E.H. Cline (eds): *The Ahhiyawa Texts* (Atlanta: Society for Biblical Literature, 2011), p.3: 'Ahhiyawa must, essentially by default, be a reference to the Mycenaeans' vs. Sherratt: "The Trojan War", p.11: 'there is nothing (apart from wishful thinking) to link the land of Ahhiyawa and its successive kings in the Hittite texts with anywhere on the Greek mainland let alone with any Mycenaean palace yet known to us.'
49. Beckman, Bryce and Cline: *The Ahhiyawa Texts,* pp.101-122. For brief discussion of the linguistic arguments identifying Ilion and the Achaeans with Wilusa and the Ahhiyawans, see Latacz: *Troy and Homer,* pp.73-100, 120-136.
50. UNESCO: "UNESCO World Heritage Committee Adds 30 Sites to World Heritage List" Press Release (2 Dec. 1998) http://whc.unesco.org/en/news/64 [accessed 23 June 2016]
51. Sherratt: "The Trojan War", pp.17-18.

Chapter 3. Marathon 490 BCE and European Identity

1. This essay is based on a public lecture that I delivered at the British Museum, in London, on 7 October 2016. I should like to dedicate it to my brother, Paul Leoussis, without whose amazing knowledge of universal history, the essay would have been all the poorer.
2. According to the Chinese archives, the conversation was with Henry Kissinger. See, Richard McGregor 'Zhou's cryptic caution, lost in translation', *Financial Times*, June 10, 2011, https://www.ft.com/content/74916db6-938d-11e0-922e-00144feab49a, Accessed 14 April 2017.
3. As noted by Christopher Carey and Michael Edwards, editors of *Marathon – 2,500 Years*, a book based on a colloquium held at the University of Peloponnese, Kalamata on 7-10 October 2010 (London: Institute of Classical Studies, 2013), p.1.
4. Carey and Edwards: *Marathon*, p.1.
5. Herodutus, *Histories*, Book 1, http://classics.mit.edu/Herodotus/history.1.i.html, Accessed 14 April 2017.
6. Herodotus, *Histories*, Book 1.
7. Herodotus, *Histories*, Book 1.
8. Richard A. Billows: *Marathon: How One Battle Changed Western Civilization* (New York:Overlook Press, 2010, Uncorrected Proofs edition) p.191. I am very grateful to Professor Andrew Lambert, who has also contributed the chapter on

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the Armada to the second volume of our *Famous Battles,* for recommending to me Professor Richard Billows' book on Marathon.

9. J. A. S. Evans: 'Herodotus and the Battle of Marathon', *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* Bd. 42, H. 3 (3rd Qtr., 1993), p. 282.
10. Paul Cartledge: *After Thermopylae: The Oath of Plataea and the End of the Graeco-Persian Wars* (Emblems of Antiquity Series. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p.87. See also Nikolaus Overtoom: Review of Cartledge, Paul, *After Thermopylae: The Oath of Plataea and the End of the Graeco-Persian Wars*. H-War, H-Net Reviews. February, 2014. URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=39780. Accessed 20 April 2017.
11. Herodotus, *Histories*, Book 6.
12. Herodotus, *Histories*, Book 6.
13. Peter Krentz: *The Battle of Marathon* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2010). See also, 'Marathon and the development of the exclusive hoplite phalanx', in Christopher Carey and Michael Edwards (eds.), *Marathon*, pp.35-45.
14. J. A. S. Evans: 'Herodotus and the Battle of Marathon', *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte.*

Bd. 42, H. 3 (3rd Qtr., 1993), p.285.

15. Billows, *Marathon*, p.214.
16. Herodotus, quoted in Krentz, 'Marathon and the development of the exclusive hoplite phalanx', p.42.
17. Herodotus, *Histories*, Book 6.
18. Herodotus, *Histories*, Book 6.
19. Herodotus, *Histories*, Book 6.
20. Michael Jung: 'Marathon and the construction of the Persian wars in Antiquity and modern times', in Carey and Edwards (eds.), *Marathon*, p.266.
21. Houchang Nahavandi and Yves Bomati: *Les Grandes Figures de l'Iran* (Paris, Perrin: 2015), p.79.
22. Nahavandi and Bomati: *Les Grandes Figures de l'Iran*, p.78.
23. Alistair G. G. Gibson: *Robert Graves and the Classical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p.244.
24. Cartledge: *After Thermopylae.*
25. Herodotus, *Histories*, Book 6; Eleni Volonaki: 'The Battle of Marathon in Funeral Speeches', in Carey and Edwards (eds.): *Marathon*, p.175.
26. Evans: 'Herodotus and the Battle of Marathon', p.307.
27. Carey and Edwards: 'Marathon – 2,500 Years: Introductory Note', in Carey and Edwards (eds.), *Marathon*, p.1.

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28. See Evans for one of the many scholarly discussions about the actual numbers of forces involved, although there is general agreement that the Persian force was disproportionately bigger than the Greek, in Evans: 'Herodotus and the Battle of Marathon', p.287.
29. See, for example, Evans: 'Herodotus and the Battle of Marathon', p.284.
30. See, for example, Volonaki's analysis of Lysias' *epitaphios*, written in 395-87BCE, in Volonaki: 'The Battle of Marathon in Funeral Speeches', p.170.
31. Haskins, Ekaterina V. "Philosophy, Rhetoric, and Cultural Memory: Rereading Plato's 'Menexenus' and Isocrates' 'Panegyricus.'" *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, vol. 35, no. 1, 2005, pp.25-45.
32. Volonaki: 'The Battle of Marathon in Funeral Speeches', p.173.
33. On Plato see also Volonaki: 'The Battle of Marathon in Funeral Speeches', pp.165-79.
34. Evans: 'Herodotus and the Battle of Marathon', p.287.
35. Eugene Vanderpool: 'A Monument to the Battle of Marathon', *Hesperia*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (Apr. - Jun., 1966), p.101.
36. Claire Cullen Davison: 'Pheidias: The Sculptures & Ancient Sources', *Bulletin of The Institute of Classical Studies*, Volume 56, Issue S105P1, May 2013, pp.303–318.
37. Davison: 'Pheidias', p.307.
38. Neer, Richard. 'The Athenian Treasury at Delphi and the Material of Politics.' *Classical Antiquity*, vol. 23, no. 1, 2004, p.83.
39. Neer: 'The Athenian Treasury', p.67.
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41. Neer: 'The Athenian Treasury', pp.63-93.
42. Ian Jenkins: *The Parthenon Frieze* (London: The British Museum Press, 2009 [1994]), p.14.
43. Jenkins, *Parthenon Frieze*, p.14.
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45. Max Weber: 'Critical Studies in the Logic of the Cultural Sciences: A Critique of Eduard Meyer's Methodological Views', in *The Methodology of the Social* Sciences, (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1949), p.172.
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47. Weber: 'The Logic of the Cultural Sciences', p.163.
48. Weber: 'The Logic of the Cultural Sciences', p.171. Here, reference is most probably made to the charter of 444 BCE that was granted to the priest Ezra, who was intent on enforcing the regimen of the Torah, by the Persian king Artaxerxes I. It made the Torah the imperial law for the Jews.
49. Weber: 'The Logic of the Cultural Sciences', p.171.
50. Weber: 'The Logic of the Cultural Sciences', p.172.

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52. Harold Talbot Parker: *The Cult of Antiquity and the French Revolutionaries: A Study in the Development of the Revolutionary Spirit* (New York: Octagon Books, 1965), p.118.
53. Parker: *The Cult of Antiquity*, p.142.
54. Jane Ellen Harrison: *Introductory Studies in Greek Art* (Memphis: General Books, 2012 [1885]), p.47.
55. Glenn Richard Bugh: *The Horsemen of Athens* (Princeton University Press, 2014 [1988)], p.78.
56. Royal Mint: http://www.royalmint.com/discover/sovereigns/st-george-the-dragon-slayer. Accessed 21 April 2017.
57. Paul Cartledge: 'Democratic Politics Ancient and Modern: from Cleisthenes to Mary Robinson,' *Hermathena*, no. 166, 1999, p.6. See also, Paul Cartledge: *Democracy: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).
58. See on-line version of Thucydides' *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, 431 BCE, Book 2, Chapter VI: http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/7142/pg7142.txt, Accessed 24 April 2017.
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60. Nike Monument: http://greece.greekreporter.com/2010/10/29/nike-monument-unveiled-at-new-acropolis-museum/#sthash.qU3dH5rc.dpuf, Accessed 24 April 2017.
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63. Christina Koulouri: *Sport et société bourgeoise. Les associations sportives en Grèce 1870-1922* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000). See also, 'Athleticism and Antiquity: Symbols and Revivals in nineteenth-century Greece', *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 15 / 3 (Dec. 1998), pp.142-149. On-line access: http://panteion.academia.edu/ChristinaKoulouri.
64. Billows: *Marathon*.
65. For example, in April 2017, there was a range of full and half wheelchair Marathons held in Seoul, South Korea: http://marathons.ahotu.com/calendar/korea. Accessed 24 April 2017, p.273.
66. J.S.Mill: 'A review of the first two volumes of Grote's History of Greece' *Edinburgh Review*, October 1846. http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/mill-the-collected-works-of-john-stuart-mill-volume-xi-essays-on-philosophy-and-the-classics. Accessed 24 April 2017.

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67. Carey and Edwards (eds.), *Marathon*, p.1.

Chapter 4. Thermopylai 480 BCE: Geography and Landscape

1. ὧν τὰς ἀρετὰς τίς οὐκ ἂν θαυμάσειεν; Diodoros 11.11.1: the opening words of the author's eulogy on Leonidas and his fellow-Spartans.
2. On the composition of the painting, see S.A. Nash: 'The Compositional Evolution of David's "Leonidas at Thermopylae"', *Metropolitan Museum Journal*, Vol. 13 (1978), pp.101-112. On the political backdrop to its creation, see N. Athanassoglou: 'Under the Sign of Leonidas: The Political and Ideological Fortune of David's *Leonidas at Thermopylae* under the Restoration', *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 63 (1981), pp.633-649.
3. For a wide-ranging discussion of the battle and its legacy, see P. Cartledge: *Thermopylae: The Battle that Changed the World* (Woodstock: The Overlook Press, 2006).
4. A comprehensive treatment of the battle's significance in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Hellenism is supplied by I. Macgregor Morris: "To Make a New Thermopylae': Hellenism, Greek Liberation, and the Battle of Thermopylae', *Greece & Rome*, Vol. 47, (2000), pp.211-230.
5. E.T. Cotham Jr.: *Sabine Pass: The Confederacy's Thermopylae* (Austin TX: University of Texas Press, 2004).
6. The use of Leonidas' famous words μολὼν λαβέ by people protesting their right to bear arms is especially visible in Internet discussion. See for example an article posted on *American News Media* ('Grassroots journalism. Grassroots America.') by Janell Maria Troutt on 2 April 2013: http://anmnews.com/%CE%BC%CE%BF%CE%BB%CF%89%CE%BD-%CE%BB%CE%B1%CE%B2%CE%B5-why-i-want-my-gun-rights/ (site accessed 01.06.16 at 18:43 pm).
7. R.H. Watt: '"Wanderer, kommst du nach Sparta": History through Propaganda into Literary Commonplace', *The Modern Language Review*, Vol. 80 (1985), pp.871-883; H. Roche: "'Wanderer, kommst du nach Sparta oder nach Stalingrad?" Ancient ideals of self-sacrifice and German military propaganda', in N. Brooks and G. Thuswaldner (eds.), *Making Sacrifices – Opfer bringen: Visions of Sacrifice in European and American Cultures - Opfervorstellungen in europäischen und amerikanischen Kulturen* (Vienna: New Academic Press, 2016), pp.66-86. On the long-standing history of German intellectual and cultural engagement with ancient Sparta, see H. Roche: *Sparta's German Children: The ideal of ancient Sparta in the Royal Prussian Cadet-Corps, 1818-1920, and*

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