

## “Holy Marathon”

-- Philip H. Young, Ph.D.

Despite the increasingly multicultural world in which we live, a reference to “the glory that was Greece and the splendor that was Rome” still connects with educated Americans and Europeans for reasons that are varied but which center on self recognition. In the exquisite lines of the Parthenon or the soaring arches of the Colosseum we can clearly trace the ancestry of the U.S. Capital Building or of the Parisian *Arc de Triomphe*, and in their scientific, political, and philosophical meanings we can see the workings of the same minds which in the twentieth century harnessed the power of the atom and landed a man on the moon. Sometimes, it seems like we live at a time in which it is popular to vilify our leaders and heroes, past and present, and along with them patriotism itself and ~~the uplifting~~ exemplars of excellence, both individual and cultural. In this paper I would like to counter that trend of cynicism by examining the uplifting lessons and long lasting effect of an event from the history of ancient Greece which took place some twenty-five hundred years ago – the Battle of Marathon.

For centuries, writers have amused themselves by listing and studying important turning points in human history, and in that tradition I want to suggest that the Battle of Marathon in 490 B.C. was one of these preeminent events, in fact, one of the most critical of all from today’s perspective because it led directly to the creation of the Classical World and its successor, Western Civilization as we know it. In addition to studying its historical significance, I would like to point out the positive lessons to be taken from the events at Marathon which stand in contrast to the many historical events which are simply the result of random chance or minimal intentionality, such as the direction of the wind which foiled the Spanish Armada’s attack on England in 1588 or the dangling chads which recently cost Al Gore the U.S. presidency. When the events of a turning point in history did not happen randomly but were the result of intentional, and I would say “heroic,” efforts on the part of people who in Winston Churchill’s famous words gave their “blood, toil, tears, and sweat,” and when such turning points were for the good of humanity, I maintain that we, the benefactors of these efforts, should proactively salute our forefathers with praise and gratitude! Just as the outcome of World War II changed the course of Western Civilization through the efforts of Tom Brokaw’s “greatest generation,” so I will argue that at the Battle of Marathon, the remarkable effort of the Athenian foot soldiers fighting for the noblest of causes against seemingly insurmountable obstacles made possible the general defeat of the interests of the powerful Persian Empire to swallow up the land of Greece and gave the critical nourishment of freedom and self-confidence to a people who, then, freed from fear of annihilation created the foundations of Western Civilization.

Let me take you back to September 17<sup>th</sup> in the year 490 B.C. where, only twenty-six miles north of Athens, nine thousand Athenian infantry soldiers (known as “hoplites”) gazed in morbid fascination north across the broad plain of Marathon bounded on the east by the shoreline of a shallow bay and on the west by a range of low hills. The focus of the hoplites’ gaze was a vast Persian invasion host of 35,000 soldiers, cavalry, and retainers encamped along the far end of the beach with their 600 ships bobbing at anchor

just offshore. The Athenian hoplites well knew that they were staring at the same army that had conquered all the great civilizations of the Near East and, in fact, nine-tenths of the known world! When news about the Persian invasion host's landfall had reached Athens, there had been a lively debate in the citizen Assembly of the newly invented democratic government about whether to order the army to march out of the city to meet the invaders at Marathon or to have it remain nearby and resist the anticipated siege there. The leading politician and military strategist, named Miltiades, had been able to convince his peers that a bold move to Marathon would be the preferable policy because it would enhance citizen morale to see that action was being taken and because it might provide the opportunity to block the Persians before they could reach the city and its neighboring lands. And so the Athenian government had ordered its army to march north to Marathon. Before arriving at the plain, scouts reported that the Persians had landed at the northern end of the beach where their ships were protected by a large headland called Cape Kynosoura and where, next to a large swamp, there was a lake which provided water for the Persian cavalry horses.

The Athenians set up their camp at the south end of the beach where the low western hills came down to the bay and created a rather narrow defile through which the main road to Athens lay. Their position caused a temporary stalemate because any Persian move to march directly south to Athens would require meeting the Athenians in the narrow defile instead of on the wide plain where the mobile Persian cavalry could be utilized to deadly effect against the slow-moving Athenian infantry. For several days, each side debated its best course of action while watching the other to see who would blink first. A majority of the Greek leaders were in favor of continuing their delaying tactic to see what the Persians would do because they knew that attacking them outright would result in the open plain battle desired by the Persians for making the best use of their army which outnumbered the Athenians three times over as well as giving a broad field for the enemy cavalry. However, Miltiades and others of the Athenian leaders, while realizing that the delay was temporarily keeping the Persians away from Athens, worried about the risk that Persian agents might slip around the army and into the city and be able to convince pro-Persian elements to surrender the city prematurely. And there was another issue weighing on the Athenian decision to delay or to fight. When the army had been sent to Marathon, the city had simultaneously dispatched its best long-distance runner, Philippides, south to Sparta with a request for military assistance, knowing that the Spartans would realize that a fallen Athens would inevitably bring the Persians to their own doorstep. Unfortunately, a Spartan religious festival was preventing their army from leaving its homeland of Lacedaemonia until the next full moon. And so it happened that, except for a small reinforcement of 1,000 hoplites sent from the neighboring village of Plataea, the Athenians would have to face the mighty Persian army alone.

The Athenian division leaders (including Miltiades) were headed up by an official known as the "Polemarch," a capable man named Kallimachos, while the Persian host was led by two men -- Datis, a general, and Artaphernes, a nephew of the Persian king Darius. In addition, they were counseled by the Athenian traitor Hippias who had formerly held tyrannical control over the city before being exiled when the democracy

had been created. For five or six days, the two sides watched one another. Finally, Miltiades, a man of action, was able to convince Kallimachos and the other Athenian leaders that a direct, bold assault on the Persians was preferable to further delay. The strategic reason behind this change of tactic is unclear, but the outcome attests its wisdom. It seems likely that some element of the situation had changed, and many historians have suggested that the Persians had decided that there was no hope of luring the Athenians into an open-field battle and, instead, to embark their cavalry on the ships in order to move the army, or at least part of it, to attack Athens directly from the sea; such a move would explain why when the battle came, there is no mention of cavalry participation. Perhaps, the Persians had also received word that the religiously required delay of the Spartan reinforcement army was coming to an end. For whatever reason, Kallimachos, Miltiades, and the other Athenian leaders, having decided that the time to act had come, issued orders for the Athenian phalanx to form up and begin moving north across the mile wide plain of Marathon towards the Persians, the last short distance before engagement to be covered at an all-out run to minimize the damage of the expected Persian arrows. The Athenians had gambled everything on their own military ability and on using decisive action at the critical moment rather than waiting for circumstances to play out and simply reacting to them. As the Athenian hoplites moved forward, their bronze armor clanking and the ground rumbling from their footsteps, they could not have known that their actions over the next few hours would have a major impact on the course of history!

What factors had led up to that day when the armies of these two diverse civilizations found themselves facing one another on the battlefield at Marathon? By the end of the sixth century, Persia had become the imperial master of the Middle East, the heir to the riches and cultures of such previous empires as the Sumerians, Babylonians, Hittites, Assyrians, and Lydians. The empire stretched from India, to Egypt, through Mesopotamia and Palestine and to the Mediterranean Sea. The administrative center of the Persian Empire which was at a city named Susa located in modern Iran at the feet of the Zagros Mountains was probably the most cosmopolitan place on earth at that time, the major highways of the human race bringing to it craftsmen, artists, luxury goods, exotic fruits and other foods, and workers. The leader of the Persian Empire who was termed "Great King" was the supreme ruler of this vast territory, a man resplendent in his tiara and purple robe who ruled his world from a golden couch through a system of territorial units called "satrapies" controlled by a complex system of administrators. Reports from all over the empire were carried along a vast system of roads by messengers about whom in our time the description of them by the ancient historian Herodotus has been adopted as the motto of the U.S. Postal Service: "Neither snow, nor rain, nor heat, nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds."

The Persians actually knew very little about the Greeks on the western horizon of their world. The Persian king Cyrus had been greatly amused when he learned that the Greeks typically congregated in public places for open discussion to debate the issues of the day and that each city-state governed itself, vulgar argument and popular ignorance in his opinion being inferior to having a despotic ruler. As the Romans were to discover

centuries later, the main way to keep the boundaries of a massive empire secure is to keep expanding, a principle that we describe as “the best defense is a good offense!” In the year 546 BC, Cyrus conquered the kingdom of Lydia (in present Turkey) ruled by the famous king Croesus and brought more directly to the Persians’ attention the Greek cities along the Aegean coast, an area called Ionia, and also, across the Hellespont and Bosphorus, the lands of Thrace and Macedonia just north of Greece itself. As the Persians’ unstoppable engine of conquest rolled on, these areas were incorporated into the empire, the Ionian Greek cities being given over to local rulers reporting to the area’s satrap who, then, reported to the Great King. In 499 BC, the still independently minded Ionian Greeks revolted from Persia by throwing out their figurehead rulers and by requesting aid from the mainland Greek cities. In a story showing how distant Persia still seemed to the mainland Greeks Herodotus tells us that Aristagoras of Miletus, leader of the Ionian Revolt, traveled to Sparta to try to interest the Spartans in attacking Persia directly. However, when the Spartan king Kleomenes innocently asked him how far it was to the Persian capital of Susa from Ionia (which must have already seemed a great distance from Sparta) and learned that it was a three month march, the overture was immediately rejected. Only the Greek cities of Athens and Eretria agreed to assist the revolutionaries. Their soldiers took part in a number of skirmishes but, most importantly, in the burning of the city of Sardis, Persia’s western administrative center. Eventually, the Ionians and their mainland allies were defeated, and the Athenians and Eretrians returned home assuming that their scrap with the Persians was over. However, the pride of the Persian king Darius had been pricked! He asked who had burned Sardis and, being told that it had been the Ionians and the Athenians, he dismissed the former, easily reconquering them in 494 B.C; because the latter was more distant he ordered a servant to whisper into his ear three times at every dinner the words, “Master, remember the Athenians.”

The history of the Greeks up to the Battle of Marathon could hardly differ more from that of the Persians. Their Bronze Age civilization called “Mycenaean” collapsed around 1000 BC which threw the Greeks back into a primitive culture of localized farming and grazing without any significant art, architecture, or social organization. However, by the eighth century local territories were coming together to create small city-states, called poleis [singular polis], consisting of a central city and government supported by the lands around it. In the seventh and sixth centuries the Greek spirit of inquiry and creativity was at work at a feverish pitch, as they invented Doric and Ionic architecture, beautiful Geometric and, then, black and red figured pottery, representational sculpture, epic literature, and the foundations of scientific study. As the populations of their poleis grew, they sent out colonies to locate available territories both east and west in which to establish new cities, the original cities retaining the name “metropolis” or “mother city.” With expansion came a broadening knowledge of the world around the Greek peninsula and interaction with other cultures from which they borrowed and adapted artistic styles, political ideas, and even the alphabet. By the beginning of the fifth century, the Greeks were on the verge of an explosion of elements of an advanced civilization, including the invention of democracy, the concept of a world based on reason, the study of the physical and philosophical worlds, the proliferation of literary forms, etc. – the world of Classical Greece. If ever there were a time period in

human history pregnant with possibility, this was it! But, suddenly, before it had had a chance to mature and thrive, the emerging Greek cultural miracle was threatened by invasion from the largest and most powerful empire in the world – that of the Persians.

In 492 BC, King Darius sent his son-in-law, Mardonius, to reconquer Thrace and Macedonia which had briefly been under Persian control before the Ionian Revolt and to march south into Greece to punish the cities of Eretria and Athens which had sent aid to the rebels. Fortunately for the two target cities, a storm off the promontory of Mount Athos in the northern Aegean wrecked much of Mardonius' fleet so that he had to break off his invasion, but Darius resolved that Eretria and Athens should not be left without retribution. The Athenians had only established their democracy a few years earlier in 510 BC when they threw out the tyrant Hippias whose family called the "Peisistratids" had seized power over the city. Hippias had fled to the Persian court at Susa and was now urging Darius to punish Athens and to return himself to power as a Persian figurehead ruler there. The Great King ordered that a new fleet of warships and transports for cavalry be assembled which would attack Athens directly by sailing straight across the Aegean to avoid the treacherous northern route taken by Mardonius. Thus it was that in the late summer of 490 BC, the Persian fleet sailed from island to island across the Aegean, destroying and overtaking them one by one, until it reached the large island of Euboea just off the Greek mainland where the city of Eretria was located. After a siege of only seven days, the Persians took the city and burned it to the ground while enslaving all surviving inhabitants. With half of their revenge for the burning of Sardis completed, the Persians sailed across the strait and, probably on the advice of Hippias who was with them, landed on the broad beach at Marathon to organize their army with its famous complements of archers and cavalry for the short march to Athens itself. Only the small Athenian army at Marathon stood between the Persians and their goal.

Let us imagine ourselves as being among those Athenian hoplites sprinting the last few hundred yards across the Marathonian plain towards the Persians. Our hoplite panoply of armor consists of a breastplate of leather with attached plates of bronze, a bronze helmet with closed front except for narrow eye and mouth slots, and a pair of bronze shin protectors called "greaves." We are armed with a thrusting spear, a short sword sheathed and slung around our neck, and a large, round shield called a "hoplon," painted with mythological images or geometric designs, the piece of equipment for which we are given our name "hoplite." Thus, our view of the overall action is restricted to only what is happening right around us as we struggle to run forward under the weight of our bronze equipment and heavy shield. We are part of a phalanx formation consisting of a series of eight parallel rows of soldiers standing close enough to one another so that each man's shield held on the left arm covers the exposed right, spear arm of our fellow. The spears of our foremost ranks are held parallel to the ground, while those of the back rows are kept high in the air. The goal of a dense, hoplite phalanx is to crash into its opponent's army with the full weight of the heavily armed soldiers and to break it or push it backwards, using its spears to thrust and stab and not as throwing javelins. If men in the forward ranks are wounded, ones from the back must step up into the gaps, and if spears get broken in the melee, short swords can be unsheathed to continue fighting. And

so we struggle forward, viewing only our fellows about us, and across the field the stationary line of the enemy prepares to receive us with weapons of death at the ready.

The Persian army waiting in anticipation includes fighting men from a variety of cultures subject to the Great King, such as Medes, Syrians, Cilicians, Cypriotes and Levantines, in addition to the crack Persian troops themselves. In general, they have lighter armor than we Greeks have, some soldiers with clothing covered with metal scales and some with little protection at all, and they carry a variety of spears, swords, knives, axes, and other small arms, as well as light, wicker shields. Their army is built for mobility and victory through numbers, and great reliance is placed on their soldiers' bows and arrows intended to wreak havoc from a distance and their cavalry whose mobility gives them the advantage of swift movement of forces and the ability to outflank lines of heavy infantry.

As our Athenian hoplite phalanx charges the final distance before engaging the Persians, we work to fit in behind our neighbor's shield on our right and hold up ours to provide cover for the man on our left, all the while trying not to trip and fall in the unfamiliar terrain. We try to make a great war cry, but each one of us can only hear a muffled roar from the others because our heads are packed inside our bronze helmets. Later, the famous playwright Aeschylus who actually participated in the battle as a citizen soldier would write that the Athenians shouted to one another the words: "On, sons of Greece! Strike for the freedom of your land! Strike for the liberty of your children and of your wives; for the shrines of the ancestral gods and the tombs of your fathers! All are staked on the contest." However, our shouts are closer to ones of terror as we crash into the vast ranks of the enemy with its alien armor and weapons, an enemy who had sailed from a far-off land with the specific intent of destroying our known world.

Due to their smaller number of troops, Kallimachos and Miltiades had had to stretch out the Greek line making it thinner in the center but deeper on the wings to minimize the chance that they might fail and the phalanx be folded in upon itself and be surrounded. When the Persians saw the Athenian advance, Datis and Artaphernes considered the Athenians to be committing suicidal madness but arranged their troops in an east-west line perpendicular to the beach to meet the onslaught coming from the south, putting their best Persian soldiers in the center of the line. As the Athenians approached the Persians, the latter sent off the expected barrage of arrows from its many allied archers, and the Greeks used their sprinting tactic for the last few hundred yards or so to minimize their time under the barrage. The two armies crashed together with the result that the strongest part of both sides was successful – the crack Persian troops in the center of the line drove the thinned down Athenian center back, but the Athenians and Plataeans on the flanks were triumphant and pushed the Persian forces there back towards the Persian camp and into the large marshy area nearby. The elite Persian troops who had been successful in the center saw their danger of getting trapped between the enemy flanks that were moving inwards and also began retreating towards their camp. By now, both lines had broken into confusion, and the Persian troops who could escape the deadly marsh where their compatriots were being cut down completely broke ranks and fled toward their ships which were trying to cast off to make for the safety of the open sea. In

his description of these last moments Herodotus waxes almost Homeric as he tells of Athenian hands being chopped off as they tried to grip the sterns of the ships amidst heroic calls for fire to burn the vessels. Finally, the Persian ships pulled free and made haste out into the bay.

The Battle of Marathon was over, and it had been a great Greek victory with only 192 Athenians lost to some 6,400 Persians (although this is probably a high estimate). Of course, the invaders' losses represented only a small part of the original host of some 35,000, so the Persian leaders decided to take their remaining forces, already embarked on the ships, around Cape Sunion to attack Athens while the Athenian army was still recovering at Marathon from the battle. Seeing that the direction that the retreating ships were taking was not east towards Persia but south towards Athens, the Athenian leaders ordered that one regiment be left to guard the slain and the spoils while the rest of the weary army make a rapid, forced march back to the city. It is likely that it was this action that is the source of the legend about the Marathon runner who sprinted to Athens and died with the word "nike!" ["victory!"] on his lips. Although they must have been exhausted, the Athenian hoplites were able to beat the Persian fleet to Athens, so Datis and Artaphernes had no choice other than to give the order to reverse course and sail away, thus ending what is usually termed the First Persian War.

The day after the departure of the Persian invaders, the delayed Spartan army of 2,000 hoplites arrived to assist the Athenians. Although their effort was too late, these professional soldiers marched the twenty-six miles on north to Marathon to gaze upon the battlefield and the Persian dead, and then they departed homeward having praised the Athenians' victory. The Athenians raised a large earth tumulus or burial mound, called the "Soros," over their dead, and when archaeologists investigated it in 1890 they did, indeed, find the skeletons and armor of the brave Athenians who died at Marathon. The conical mound today remains over thirty feet high and 500 feet in circumference at its base. It was not long after the amazing victory that stories of the battle were becoming embellished, and reports circulated that supernatural, ghostly gods and heroes from antiquity had fought alongside the Athenian phalanx. The valor of Kallimachos who had been killed in the battle was celebrated with a monument erected on the Acropolis, and the fame of Miltiades who most likely had, indeed, been the tactical genius was elevated so high that he was incorrectly remembered as having been the Polemarch himself. The Battle of Marathon quickly became the stuff of legend, and all soldiers who had participated were voted free dinners for the rest of their lives by the grateful Athenian Assembly. A monument consisting of a tall, marble column was erected on the plain at Marathon north of the Soros where the height of the battle had raged, and archaeologists have discovered pieces of it built into a medieval church nearby. At the most sacred spot in ancient Greece, the Sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi, a shrine was built from the Persian spoils as a permanent reminder of the victory, and it was decorated with images of the mythological battle between the Greek gods and the Giants, a race of subhuman foreigners used as a not so subtle metaphor for the actual combatants in the battle. A quarter of a century later, a large painting of the battle was commissioned for the famous building called the Stoa Poikile or "Painted Portico" built in the Athenian Agora or marketplace to house paintings of the city's glorious past. Although nothing of it

survives today, ancient descriptions tell us that it had several scenes which showed the Athenian and Plataean advance toward the Persians, the invaders pushed in confusion into the marsh, the Greeks slaying the enemy and grabbing the prows of their ships as they tried to clamber on board, and the mythological figure of Theseus, the autochthonous hero of the Athenian territory rising out of the ground to join in the fight. The significance of the Battle of Marathon can be judged by the fact that Aeschylus considered that the fact that he had been there was more important than all his famous tragic plays and, in fact, wanted to be remembered after his death as a "Marathonomachos," that is, a "Marathon warrior," instead of as a poet. Herodotus says that "until that day the very name of the Persians struck terror in the ears of the Greeks" so it is not surprising that, even years later, the amazing Battle of Marathon was "the victory of which the Athenians were proudest."

When Xerxes came to the throne of Persia upon the death of his father Darius in 485 B.C., the task of punishing Athens for assisting in the Ionian Revolt was still not accomplished, and the land of Greece lay independent on the Persians' western edge. After putting his other affairs in order, in 480 B.C. the new king embarked upon a mission to rectify this situation. This time, instead of a naval force, a massive army of invasion numbering perhaps 300,000 marched into Greece following its amazing crossing of the Hellespont upon a huge bridge built on ships by which the king had, in effect, linked the two continents of Europe and Asia. The invading army was delayed by the heroic but suicidal stand of the three hundred Spartans led by their king Leonidas at the narrow pass of Thermopylae but, then, marched south to sack Athens which had been abandoned in the face of the threat. However, the Persian navy which was moving at sea to support the invaders was trapped and destroyed by the Athenian navy at the Battle of Artemeseion and, the following spring, a combined Greek hoplite army thoroughly defeated the Persian army at the Battle of Plataea. The Athenian refugees returned to their destroyed city with a renewed will to rebuild and improve it. Following this so-called Second Persian War, the power of Persia began to wane in the east, and never again could its leaders summon the resources to attack the independent, testy Greeks to the west whose culture was blossoming in the new light of their success. The Greeks believed that all things were assigned a natural limit and that if overweening pride or "hubris" should lead to untoward expansion beyond that limit, downfall or "nemesis" was the inevitable result to restore nature's balance. It was the expansive goal of Herodotus in writing his history of the two Persian Wars to show that by leaving their natural territory of Asia and invading Europe the Persians had been driven by hubris to disrupt the natural balance and that the Greeks had been the agent of nemesis to restore it.

My thesis that the Battle of Marathon was a significant turning point for Western Civilization with accompanying positive cultural lessons is two-fold: first, that if the battle had been lost, Greece would have been rendered an outlying province of Persia, and it is unlikely that Western Civilization as we know it today would have developed; and, second, that the victory was achieved through circumstances still lauded in Western culture, including seizing the right moment for action, fighting to protect home and family, the success of an underdog over a bully, the victory of people working together democratically against mercenaries bought or coerced by a tyrant, and the subsequent



glorification of the participants as heroes and the event as a model for future generations to emulate. Its military success was, in fact, not seminal, but its psychological impact for the Greeks and their cultural successors cannot be underestimated. Although the Persians were, for the moment, prevented from punishing Athens and from sweeping the Greek peninsula into their imperial web, ten years later they were able to mount a much more serious campaign, but one which stalled in the face of unexpected Greek resistance. It was the Battle of Marathon that made the Greeks astonishingly aware that they could, indeed, defeat the Persians in battle, and it was surely this psychological knowledge that led them to their eventual victory.

Although the Greeks were a people with a general sense of self-identification because they spoke the same language, worshipped the same deities, and shared the same material culture, they rarely worked together with one another politically. However, the military successes at Marathon and ten years later in the Second Persian War had a psychological impact for all the Greeks that cannot be underestimated. The Athenians' victory at Marathon, while only a temporary defeat of the Persians, opened Greek eyes to the possibility of further victories which were, in fact, achieved ten years later. The psychological bond among the fiercely independent Greeks was greatly strengthened by these battles. Their feeling of "Greekness" was heightened to become a source of great pride such that they now began to feel equal to or superior to other races, a fact underscored by their use of the invented word "barbaroi" which literally means someone who says "bar, bar" (i.e. speaks unintelligibly) which also took on the pejorative meaning of "barbarians" which remains in English. It seems to me that a civilization or culture must achieve a powerful self-confidence before it can achieve its best, and, following the Persian Wars, the Greeks stood ready to invent Western Civilization.

A more specific revelation for all Greeks was the realization that the radical democratic government of Athens had succeeded, first in fielding a citizen army that had won at Marathon and, second, in managing a temporary retreat from their city in the Second Persian War until their navy could destroy the Persian fleet and the allied Greek army that of the Persians. The victory had been gained by an army of citizen warriors fighting for a communal ideal, that of a young, politically conscious society whose members had come to enjoy equality and liberty under laws of their own choice and who had staked everything for their freedom. At Marathon, both Athens the polis and Athens the democracy won enormous prestige among the other Greek poleis and gained a self-confidence and sense of historical and cultural importance that surely spurred them in the coming decades to create what we today call "Classical Greece." To be sure, not all Greek poleis adopted democratic governments, but the core idea of citizen rule had been born. It was Greek civilization that was, in the fourth century, spread throughout the Near East by Alexander the Great who, interestingly, cited retribution for the historical attacks on Greece as one of the reasons for his invasion and conquest of the great Persian Empire. It was a Hellenized Near East that was so influential in setting the style of the Roman Empire, thus preserving Greek culture to be rediscovered in the Renaissance and passed to us in the present.

If you are ever so blessed as to be able to visit modern Athens, a city of industry and government but also of ancient ruins, go with the crowds of adoring sightseers to see the magnificent Parthenon on the city's Acropolis, the Agora below it where Socrates button-holed its citizens into discussing philosophy, and the National Museum with its galleries of treasures from the country's past. But, in addition, I encourage you to stray for a few hours from the usual tourist destinations and rent a car to drive twenty-six miles north to the area still called Marathon where today houses, crops, and olive groves cover the ancient battlefield. Stand for a few moments in front of the Soros, that manmade hill rising out of the level plain in which are still buried the remains of 192 Athenian hoplites whose dying at this spot 2,500 years ago laid the foundations upon which Western Civilization was built. Cast your gaze around from the hills where the Athenian leaders waited for the right moment to order the historic charge of their citizen hoplites who defeated the mighty Persians to the northern beach where they laid heroic hands on the sterns of the retreating ships of the invaders. And shed a silent tear of gratitude for "holy Marathon."