

The ionian revolt essay sample

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Significance of the Ionian revolt as a result of the Persian wars.

The Ionian Revolt which began in 499BC was the beginning of a chain of events that changed the ancient world, and constituted the first major conflict between Greece and the Persian Empire. It was primarily of significance as the causative agent of the Greco-Persian Wars, which included the two invasions of Greece and the famous battles of Marathon, Thermopylae and Salamis.

Ionian cities revolted to gain independence from both suppressing systems, the Persian Empire and tyranny, however, the revolt ended in failure, and substantial losses, both material and economic. However, Miletus aside, they recovered relatively quickly and prospered under Persian rule for the next forty years. For the Persians, the revolt was significant in drawing them into an extended conflict with the states of Greece which would last for fifty years, over which time they would sustain considerable losses.

Ionia was the name of a region in Asia Minor in which many Greek colonies had been founded and the Greek culture established. Croesus, King of Lydia conquered Ionia only to be overthrown by the Persian king, Cyrus in 547BC. Under the rule of the Persians, the Ionian Greeks had to pay annual tributes and participate in Persian military campaigns. Local tyrants appointed by the Persians were set up as rulers of the Ionian cities. Aristagoras, the tyrant of Miletus, eager to increase his wealth and power and to ingratiate himself with the Persians, convinced the Persians that they should attack Naxos.

Aristagoras sided with the aristocrats from Naxos who were keen to regain control over the island. The Persians were interested in being involved in this

campaign because Naxos had a high strategic value in their expansions plans. The failure of the Naxian expedition, and the quarrelling between Aristagoras and the Persian general put him in a dangerous position. The only way to save his position was to start a revolt. The want to ascertain power, glory and the control over states may be the catalyst for warfare to break loose. It was Aristagoras' personal will and power that started the revolt but also the Ionian desire of freedom, political reforms and economic prosperity which continued it for six years. The Ionians called for help from mainland Greece but only Athens and Eretria responded.

Athens sent twenty ships and Eretria sent four. Sparta was reluctant to make commitments far from home. The aid from mainland Greece was not enough as the several cities and islands of Ionia had to fight against endless resources of the Persian Empire, however the Ionians were eventually suppressed in 494BC. Another reason for the failure of the Ionians was their lack of organisation and discipline where they fought not as a common unity but as a group of states all with their individual interests.

Darius, the king of Persia now wanted vengeance. His aim was to recapture lost Ionian cities and re-establish Persian supremacy. This task he entrusted to Mardonius (his son in law), who assembled a large fleet and army in 492BC and sailed along Ionian coast to Hellespont. He deposed Ionian tyrants and replaced them with democracies. When Darius was told that the Athenians had helped the Ionians to burn Sardis, capital on one part of the Empire in 496BC, he supposedly said, " Who are they?" and had a slave tell him three times a day " Remember the Athenians."

After the failed attempt to reconquer Thrace and Macedon in preparation for an attack on Athens, in 490BC, the Persians reached Euboea and Eretria was the first to be attacked. The city was sacked and burned. Herodotus states that the temples were burnt in revenge for the burnt temples of Sardis, and inhabitants were carried off as prisoners. Hippias (former tyrant of Athens) suggested their next stop be Marathon, in which this proved Athenians were a significant military force in the Aegean and on the Greek mainland.

The Battle of Marathon 490BC showed a significant clash of the East against the West and demonstrated the vulnerability of the Persian Empire. The Persian defeat unified the Greeks against the Persians and thus, giving them confidence; receiving much honour and glory for their defeat of ‘the barbarian’. The Athenians attacked with strong wings and a comparatively weak centre succeeding in taking the enemy by surprise and resulting in victory. Marathon loomed large in the Athenian psyche, which men were regarded as heroes.

A war memorial consisting of 2 burial mounds was established at site of battle, 1 for 192 Athenians and 1 for fallen Plataeans Thucydides says this was a most unusual practice. Normally those who died in war were given a public funeral “except those at Marathon as they judged their valour to be outstanding they made their tomb on the spot”. This victory earned the Athenians prestige in the Greek world and boosted the reputation of the democracy.

The Greek victory of Battle of Marathon indicated there would be more conflict in the future, given the aggressive nature of the Persian Empire. The

Persians had not given up and further campaigns to conquer Greece had been failures; as the Battle of Salamis and Plataea were to result in further victories for the Greeks. These results was a turning point in war as the Persian fleet was largely destroyed; their strategy of combined land and sea operation was impossible as Persia's supply line was broken.

The loyalty of Ionian Greeks was weakened as without a navy, the Persians could not maintain control of Ionia. However, even though the Greeks had suffered losses, at the battle of Thermopylae the Greek troops made a final heroic stand and showed remarkable self-sacrifice in delaying the Persians. Systematically, it is difficult to draw too many conclusions from the Ionian Revolt, save for what the Greeks and Persians may (or may not) have learnt about each other. Certainly, the Athenians, and Greeks in general, seem to have been impressed by the power of Persian cavalry, with the Greek armies displaying considerable caution during the following campaigns when confronted by the Persian cavalry.

Conversely, the Persians seem not to have realised or noticed the potential of the Greek hoplites as heavy infantry. At the Battle of Marathon, in 490 BC, the Persians took little heed of a primarily hoplitic army, resulting in their defeat. Furthermore, despite the possibility of recruiting heavy infantry from their domains, the Persians began the second invasion of Greece without doing so, and again encountered major problems in the face of Greek armies. It is possible that, given the ease of their victories over the Greeks at Ephesus, and similarly armed forces at the battles of the Marsyas River and Labraunda, the Persians simply disregarded the military value of the hoplite phalanx — to their cost.