

# Aristagoras of Miletus essay



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Everyone makes mistakes by saying hurtful things without considering the possible reaction of the other person or resulting consequences if the criticism reaches that individual. In most cases, the prudent thing to do is to remain quiet, keeping personal thoughts private unless the comments are well thought out. In the worst case, open criticisms can ruin friendships or cause deep seated anger, though it can usually be resolved.

However, in the case of Aristocrat, a Persian satrap in the beginning of the 5th century BCC, it shaped the world as we know it.

The ancient world at that time was organized much differently than it is today, and Persia was a dominant empire. While local conflicts were common and border skirmishes were an ongoing problem as different cultures tried to expand their holdings, these did not involve significant parts of the population; there were no major wars between empires targeted at bringing down an entire people. How the actions of Aristocrat changed this and how the series of conflicts that followed influenced the course of history are not often explored, but their effect is unmistakable.

A few critical remarks started a chain of events that ultimately is why delegates to the United Nations wear suits and ties instead of turbans (Facet 1). In the Mediterranean world in 499 BCC the main power was the Persian Empire.

Persia was a very large domain consisting of twenty provinces called satrapies which were ruled by a governor, or satrap. The satrap was appointed by the king, who at that time was Darius I. The satrap's duties

included taxing the people, acting as a judge, and making important decisions for the satrapy.

The farther the satrapy was from the capital, the more autonomous it was.

As a result, the satraps on the far reaches of the Persian Empire acted as kings of their own satrapies and could, in general, do as they pleased while still benefiting from being part of a larger culture, as long as they stayed loyal to the king. This describes Aristocrat and his satrapy Miletus, located in the southwest corner of the empire. While the rule of the different satrapies varied based on their location, they were all united with a uniform system of laws and judges.

They shared abundant resources, and order was sustained.

They were also all connected by a well-maintained road network. This existed in sharp contrast to the Greeks, who were divided into hundreds of independent entities, called polis, ruled by tyrants. Though bound together by language, religion, and lifestyle, they were a resource-poor region. As a result, each polis was fiercely jealous of independence and suspicious of their neighbors, with frequent conflicts erupting. While, collectively, they occupied a large area, they were not a dominant world force at that time.

All this changed after the Persians declared war, and the major polis came together and formed an alliance to counteract the Persian threat. While it is difficult to fully document the intricacies that spurred the major events of such an early civilization, the work of the ancient historian Herodotus has

provided significant detail that could not be learned through archaeological studies alone.

Herodotus is known as the “Father of History” because he was the first person to not just record history but to interpret it as well.

He traveled to many places of the world, including Greece and Persia, to gather information to accurately record the events that occurred in writing his nine books called the Histories. Also, what is extremely remarkable is the fact that his accounts are considered by most historians as accurate and relatively objective. Herodotus’ book is the only primary source on the Ionian Revolt, and it is because of his early work that a more complete understanding of the causes of the Persian Wars can be obtained.

The story of the Persian Wars begins with Aristocrat, an Ionian Greek.

Aristocrat was the satrap of Miletus on the edge of the Persian Empire. He was placed into power by his father-in-law Histories, the prior satrap of Miletus, when Histories was promoted to serve in the court of the Persian Emperor Darius I (Souza 17). As Herodotus reported, when the nearby island of Naxos rebelled against the Persian Empire, Aristocrat seized the opportunity to take it back in order to get a promotion to a better position from Darius.

At the very least, even if it did not lead to advancement, he could add Naxos to his growing state and get money from the taxes on its citizens. Since Naxos was an island, Aristocrat needed a fleet to conquer it, so he elicited the assistance of Earthquake, the satrap of Lydia and Darius’ brother, in

exchange for a share of the plunder. Earthiness provided Aristocrat access to his navy, along with his skilled and clever naval admiral, Megabytes.

Unfortunately, Aristocrat biblically insulted Megabytes over the discipline of his Ionian captain Skylark, which led Megabytes to warn the people of Naxos of the impending invasion (Souza 12). The resulting offensive failed because the people of Naxos were prepared and Aristocrat was defeated. The problem that arose was that Aristocrat promised Earthiness a portion of his booty and, since he now had none, Earthiness would undoubtedly take revenge. At the very least Aristocrat would be exiled, but most likely Earthiness would kill him, easily within his power since he was the brother of the king (Facet 3).

Neighboring Greek polis. Unsuccessful in his attempt to obtain military support from Sparta, he was able to convince the Athenians and the Ephesians because they felt a sense of kinship toward the Ionian Greeks in their conflict with the Persians in Naxos, overlooking Aristocrat's part in that initial engagement and instead focusing on his heritage as an Ionian Greek. With a sizable army raised, Aristocrat marched to Sardis, the capital of Lydia, and burnt it to the ground while Earthiness hid in the citadel (Billows 156).

However, when Darius I heard what happened, he immediately led his troops to Sardis and quickly defeated all of the rebels except for the Athenians, who escaped by ship. Aristocrat fled to Thrace, where he was later killed in battle, but the legacy he left behind would be felt for generations to come (Redwood's 352). Darius never forgot what the Greeks did, and he vowed to get vengeance for their actions.

Diaries' first priority was to crush the rebels in his Ionian Provinces that helped in the revolt.

He destroyed the provinces and enslaved their populations as a message that this would happen to any other colony that took up arms against Persia. From there, the Persians decided to take over mainland Greece and punish them for taking part in the revolt, marking the beginning of the Greece Persian Wars. In planning his attack, Diaries enlisted the help of Hippias, the ex-tyrant of Athens who was ousted with the help of the Spartans and exiled to Sauris.

He advised Diaries to land at the Plain of Marathon, an area he knew well, because it was close to Athens and was not well fortified (Billows 204).

What Hippias did not count on was the network of spies that the Greeks had in place monitoring their borders. When the Greek generals were informed of Diaries' arrival, they decided to set up a defensive position along the southern edge of the Argeton's-Pentane Pass leading to the Plain of Marathon. While they had a strategic plan for engagement to optimize their effectiveness, they were significantly outnumbered.

The Greeks and the Persians proceeded to a standoff at Marathon for several days.

During this time, the Persians covertly redirected a significant portion of their troops to sail directly to Athens to attack it from the sea. They left a small contingent of men behind to keep the Greeks from going back to Athens to protect the city (Kerned 137). This move did not go unnoticed, and the

Greeks responded with a plan to attack the Persians. If they won, they would be able to return to Athens to defend it. Early in the morning, the Greeks lined up and thinned their ranks so that they would not be outflanked by the Persians (Kerned 154).

About a mile apart, the Greeks began their charge. The two armies fought and, at first, the Persians pushed the center of the Greeks back, but the Greek wings collapsed the Persian wings causing the battle was not over; the Greek forces still had to march back to Athens to defend. Returning just in time, when the Persians arrived, they found the Greeks lined up in battle positions, ready to take them on. Encountering this, the Persians decided to retreat to avoid further loss of life, so they turned around and sailed back to Asia Minor, never to return to Greece in Darius' lifetime.

For the immediate future, a rebellion in Egypt had erupted that threatened the Persians more than the Greeks. So the First Persian War ended with the Greeks victorious, though they knew this conflict was not over, and their success only bought them time to prepare for future engagements. Darius died, he left the Persian Empire to his son Xerxes, who launched the Second Persian War.

In his attempt to subjugate Greece, he launched an invasion to attack the Greeks at Thermopyles, a narrow strip of land between Thessaly and central Greece.

The geography of the region was mountainous and very rugged, with three main "gates" allowing passage. The Greeks concentrated their defense at the Middle Gate because it provided the most direct route to Athens. Leonidas,  
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one of the two kings of Sparta, was responsible for the defense with a force of 8,000 men, of which he diverted 1,000 to a smaller trail through the mountains called the Myopia Pass to protect his back. The Persian plan for Thermopyles was divided into two phases: an assault at sea followed by a land battle.

To capture and destroy the entire Greek navy, they would first engage in a battle at sea, blocking the only escape route with 200 Persian ships that would be diverted from the rest of the armada to go around Beebe. When the two fleets met in open water, however, the Greeks initially stayed in a circular formation, repelling attack. They then broke rank and went on the offensive, ramming the Persian ships. Their maneuvers were successful, and 30 Persian ships were captured (Bradford 125). The next day the Greek vessels were able to escape since the 200 diverted ships were wrecked in a storm overnight.

In the land battle, two Persian divisions of 20,000 men were initially sent to the Middle Gate but were repelled by the Greeks (Bradford 127). Then Hydrates and his "Immortals," the elite Persian force, were dispatched. Initially repelled due to the nature of hoplite warfare, they took the Myopia Pass to try to attack the Greeks from the rear (Bradford because the Greek forces retreated after an initial engagement. Hearing of the Persian advance, Leonidas sent away all of his troops except for himself and 300 Spartans to allow time for the Athenians to evacuate.



His small force fought to the death, but the battle cost Darius 20,000 men. Nevertheless, the Persians then proceeded to Athens, causing the Athenians to flee to Salamis.

After the Athenians evacuated Athens, the Greek fleet of 300 vessels sailed to Salamis to offer protection. The Persians followed, reaching the Strait of Salamis with 700 ships, again diverting 200 to block escape and force a confrontation (Souza 55). The Greeks quickly charged the main force of 500 ships before they were able to organize, sinking 200 while only losing 40 of their own vessels (Curtis 238).

With the Persians approaching, direct confrontations ceased.

Xerxes departed to concentrate on other revolts within the empire, such as the Babylonian, and the troops in Greece were left under command of Mardonius. After the winter, Mardonius attempted to persuade the Athenians to accept peace by offering to rebuild their city and obtain more land for them, albeit at the expense of other Greek city-states. The Athenians refused and called on Sparta to protect the Attica peninsula. Because reinforcements could not respond quickly enough, the Athenians again abandoned Athens and went to Salamis to seek refuge.

Fortunately for the Greeks, the rest of their army emerged from the Isthmus, and 30,000 troops lined up on the northern slope of a mountain, waiting for the Persians to make the first move. The Persians used their cavalry to disrupt the Greek supply lines, and they eventually captured the Greek water supply, forcing them to attack the Persians on the Plain of Marathon (Cassini-Scott 19).

The Persians engaged the Greeks even though the odds were against them; the Greeks were better equipped for close quarters combat.

Because of this, the Greeks killed Marooning causing the Persians to go into panic and retreat (Allen 56). The Persians left Greece, never to return, ending the Persian Wars. Although Greece continued as an independent collection of city-states after they defeated the Persians, they were eventually brought together under the rule of Philip of Macedon. Expansion of the Greek Empire continued under his son Alexander the Great, as the Greek way of life spread throughout much of the Mediterranean area and into southwest Asia, forming the foundation of western culture.

Further, Alexander conquered the Persian Empire, which at that time had the power to influence the rest of the world. After he died, his immense empire split, but the three new empires of Ptolemy, Seleucid, and Antioch were still able to continue the spread of Greek culture. Later, the Romans conquered the Greeks, but because they greatly admired their culture, they incorporated it into their own way of life so that the basic Greek culture continued to spread throughout the even larger conquests of the Romans.

After the Roman Empire fell, the dark ages began, and it appeared as if the Greek culture was fading.

However, with the emergence of the Renaissance has been mostly Hellenized. Had Aristotle not spoken those few terse words and been successful in taking over the East, the growth of the Western world may have proceeded down a very different path. Expansion of the Persian Empire may very well have

overtaken the less organized and annulled Greek city-states and become the prominent world force, directing the course of history.

While Herodotus' accounts have provided many of the details that may have otherwise been lost, gaining him the title of "Father of History," Aristocrat could, by some accounts, be given the title "Father of Western Civilization" (Holland 154).

While that may be a bit of a stretch, it is not too much to say that Western civilization owes its identity in large part to Aristocrat's mistake.

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