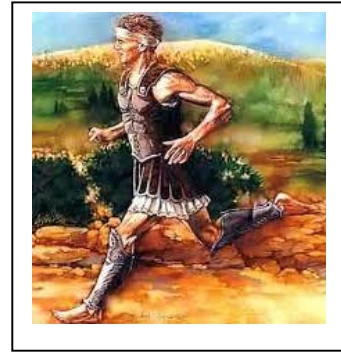


The Battle of Marathon

The Persians landed at Marathon in the autumn of 490 BC. When the Athenians heard that the Persians had landed, the citizens (the free men) met in their assembly to decide what to do. Many Athenians were frightened of the Persians, and some thought they should just surrender before the Persians killed them all. Other Athenians thought they should give up having a democracy. But when they voted, the Athenian men decided to keep their democracy, and to fight back against the Persians. Bravely, they marched their army out to meet the Persians.

The Athenians took up a strong position in the hills around Marathon and sent a runner, who was a man called Pheidippides (fie-DIP-ih-dees), to Sparta to ask for help. Sparta had the best army in Greece, and they were enemies of the Persians too. Pheidippides arrived two days later in Sparta; having run 150 miles in two days. However, the Spartans decided that for religious reasons they could not send help until the moon was full, several days later.



The two sides faced each other directly, waiting for the fight to start. The Athenians stalled for days, anticipating reinforcements promised by Sparta. The Persians, expecting an easy victory, were in no hurry. Pheidippides had to run all the way back to Marathon to deliver the news that the Spartans were not coming.

On the morning of September 17, 490 BC, some 10,000 Athenians stood assembled at Marathon, preparing to fight to the last man. Behind them lay everything they held dear: their city, their homes, their families. There were only 10,000 Athenian Hoplites versus 20,000 Persians.

Greek General, Miltiades (mill-TIE-ah-dees), divided his men into three parts, the centre, the left wing, and the right wing. Miltiades arranged for the centre to pretend to fall back, and the Persian army charged after them. Then the two Greek wings, on either side, rushed in and attacked the Persians from the sides. An estimated 6,400 Persians were slaughtered while only 192 Greeks were killed. Soon the Persians ran back to their ships and sailed away.



After helping to defeat the Persians, Pheidippides was told to run the 26 miles to Athens and tell the people about the victory. He ran all the way but died of exhaustion after delivering his news. The modern marathon race is over the same distance as his epic run from Marathon to Athens.