

John P. Nordin
425-273-0615
jpn@jpnordin.com

THE BRIGHT FOUNDATION OF LIBERTY
by John P. Nordin

Chapter I

I took my place with some nervousness, anxious about the many obstacles of courtesy and honor I would be required to navigate. I should have been thinking about the shoals and contrary winds of a voyage of ideas.

Though it happened decades ago, I clearly remember that symposium at the house of Euphorion, that worthy son of a famous father, Aeschylus. We had assembled in the windowless men's room where such dinners were held, ushered to our couches by our host's unnecessary apologies for the poverty of the food, the roughness of our seating and other imaginary defects. He, in the flower of early manhood, had not held many of these dinners.

My journey across Athens had put me in an irritated mood, and hoped I was not the only one who, while pleased at the rebuilding of Persian-destroyed ruins these years after the war, was agonized that the credit for this was not going to the one who deserved it, my hero Themistocles, but to the son of his rival. The fire-blackened ruins atop the Acropolis brooded ominously upon this injustice, or so I felt.

After we ate, the tables were cleared away, we were entertained by four flute girls and the first libation poured, as is custom. The girls sang for us and recited poetry. The room held only

seven couches, there were but simple mosaics on the floor and two walls were bare of adornment. Euphorion's father was well known, but this author of drama had not become wealthy.

Euphorion saw to the preparation of the wine in the great krator, announcing that he had mixed it one part wine to three parts water. He also proposed that we venture to consume four krator of wine this evening, one more than the number thought to be properly sober, yet well under the number that would, it was assumed, lead to riot. We were mostly, but not entirely, younger and exuberant men that reclined around the room that evening, but we were also desirous of respectability.

There was some discussion of this plan, and congratulation of our host for choosing to mix the wine a little weaker than thought best but consume a little more than thought best. A proper balance, all thought. Continuing as master of ceremonies, he announced "I hope we all agree to forgo the games this evening."

"I agree," one guest called as others murmured, we were determined to be serious students of knowledge and had not come out for debauchery. I found the game of flicking wine at targets or at each other to be tiresome in any case but especially irritating when reflecting upon the grim fate of Themistocles. I was also pleased that our host had selected the flute girls for their accomplishments in the muses of music and poetry and that they appeared to be here willingly.

Euphorion turned to the man reclining on the couch of honor. "Pardocas. You are the eldest among us. Would you propose a topic for our conversation this evening?"

Pardocas was not that elderly, but conducted himself as if he was. He shifted heavily on the couch, put a serious expression on his face and cleared his throat.

“I propose,” he said, “that, as word has just come to us of the death of King Xerxes of Persia, that we should discuss the cause of the enmity between our two peoples.”

There was a murmur of agreement which I did not participate in. This was a topic of the past, and not reflective of my anger and loss. There was, however, no way Euphorion could refuse this proposal. Pardocas again adjusted his position on the couch and again cleared his throat. “I believe that their enmity to our city was due to the nature of the Persian people and the nature of their king, who embodied that character most intently, as befits a ruler who is considered the very embodiment of his dominion. And what was their nature? First we must consider their hubris: by their desire to conquer the whole world they overreached what the gods have deemed appropriate.”

He spoke without pause or hesitation. I wondered if someone had written this for him. He continued, his voice rising a bit.

“This hubris is itself only an example of their unconstrained passions, their inability to limit themselves to what is proper. They are barbarians and as such lusted after the superior culture of Athens.” He sat back, looked around the room, and then took a sip of wine.

“If I may start our discussion, ah, I am afraid, my dear friend, despite the honor due you, I cannot entirely agree,” our host shook his head. “The Persians showed themselves brave in battle – and did so many times. They showed honor. They gave hospitality to guests and were respectful of our battle-dead – the same as they treated their own. And there was dishonor on our side: remember the treachery of the tyrants of Naxos – and remember how those of Samos

abandoned the Ionians at the time of struggle. Pure cowardice. And some who speak our language even fought for the Persians at Salamis! It's sad, but pride and lust after power – it affects everyone.”

“Your opinion does credit to you in that you echo your worthy father,” Pardocas replied, referring to how Aeschylus had presented the Persians in his drama. Despite the passage of three years, there were many in Athens still upset at what had seen and at the author who caused them to see it.

“I thank you,” said Euphorion, “but that it is the opinion of my father does not make it less my opinion -- nor less true for that.”

Did I hear a sharp tone to those words? His father had been criticized strongly for his drama for it spoke well of the Persians, and shown sympathy for their suffering.

“Well, you know that I have experienced the Persians first hand,” Pardocas said. Yes, I thought, and you remind us of that often.

“Indeed,” another quickly interjected, I had forgotten his name. “You are a man of Marathon, and no one here would question your courage. But the Persians – they displayed courage also.”

“I cannot see that,” Pardocas replied, his face firmly set. “Their army faced death if they did not fight and only fought because of that. Our army was fighting for the freedom of all and did so willingly.”

“My father also was a man of Marathon, as you know,” Euphorion said, “and he told me many times that courage and honor are not qualities exhibited only by Athens.”

“No general of Athens brought great wealth with them to the field of battle, as did Xerxes and Darius. They came with riches of all kinds, servants, slave girls – some of the women were their relatives!”

“That they may have committed incest, well, that I cannot dispute,” Euphorion said, “but that was the king and his court and people like that never limit what they do. But it’s not just to accuse all of the Persians of this behavior.”

“And did not our army face death from slavery if they did not fight?” I added, venturing into this argument for the first time.

“Why anyone of our city would wish to defend those who attack and threatened to enslave us, I cannot understand,” said Pardocas, fixing our host and me each in turn with a firm stare, “but to each his own; I will not be inhospitable to our generous host by pressing what I believe to be the truth.” Pardocas raised his cup to Euphorion and I wondered if our host would take this to be a gracious comment or a veiled insult. Pardocas is admitting defeat, I thought, but I was wise enough not to say. Euphorion stirred himself to reply, but I saw his neighbor at the next couch place a hand gently upon him and he said nothing.

“Have some wine, this argument makes me thirsty,” that person said, and for a time we busied ourselves with draining the krator.

“We could discuss Themistocles,” I said and only then realized that I had been rude to try to change the topic. This dinner had occurred fully two years after Themistocles, my only powerful friend, had been cruelly ostracized by a city that should have honored him. It had happened when I was a young man desperately dependent on the favors of others.

“We all know your personal affection for Themistocles,” Pardocus said, emphasizing personal.

“Oh, I’ve always wanted to ask you,” a voice at the far end said, “what was it like to be bugged by that man, a hero and all that, but not very attractive.”

“I was never that to him!” I said loudly.

“Well, I’ve heard that often,” the voice said.

“And it would have been no dishonor,” our host said gently, “you were a beardless youth at the time, indeed, it would be a mark of favor. He was your patron. No one would think less of you.” There were nods all around at this entirely reasonable point.

“It didn’t happen.” I felt tears coming close to my eyes. It hadn’t happened, but everyone thought it did. It wouldn’t have been a dishonor, but I valued the honor of his conversation and friendship even more – but no one wanted to hear of that.

The earlier reference to the play of Aeschylus led me to think back to the last time I had been with Themistocles, three years before the symposium. I had been frustrated.

“But it was all about the Persians!” I had said to him.

“The Persians being defeated by us.”

“It didn’t talk about how we won!”

“There’s no agreement on that.”

The two of us were walking west below the south slope of the Acropolis, returning to our homes after having attended the drama authored by Aeschylus. It was the spring of the year; a year just a few after the endless winter of the wars with Persia. Around us was the drama of the city, surging with all manner of people who had come in from the countryside for the annual

festival to Dionysus. Each was playing their role, be it citizen or slave; city dweller, resident of the hills or of the shore; young and assertive, middle-aged and calculating, old and careful. More than a few women, respectable and not, were out as well, acting with care their subtle roles. There were a few pairs of men and women, a drama that is so often comedy when acted by your neighbor, but tragedy when you are forced to take the stage.

An older man approached us. His tunic was stained and worn, his hands callused, his beard uneven. He had recognized my companion, judging by how his rough, weather-beaten face lit up with a large smile as he rushed forward.

“Themistocles! It is you. Oh, thank you, I pulled oars on a ship next to yours. We are all so grateful for all you’ve done. Thank you. It’s just.... Thank you. It’s a great honor to be able to talk to you.” He had grabbed Themistocles by the hand and was not letting go. Themistocles looked intently into the man’s eyes as he acknowledged the words of praise.

The man was giving praise to one he freely regarded as his better and as a leader of the city. But the wealthy passing by would have only seen that Themistocles was the shortest of the three of us, that his wide flat face could not be regarded as beautiful and that his cloak, while of the finest cloth, was worn in an untidy manner. What they would have made of the thin young man standing silently to one side in threadbare clothes, I have no idea.

He and I were forced to play this scene on almost every one of the occasions when I was able to accompany Themistocles and so I knew the lines before they were spoken. Themistocles would ask about the man’s family, where he came from and so on.

“Now, so you are of the deme of Ancyle. Do you know”

I sighed inwardly. This could go on for some time. And I knew what would come after this.

The man noticed me. “And you, are you the son of this great man?”

“No,” I said through clenched teeth, “I am not.”

Unlike the actors in the theater, I did not wear a mask, yet one was always placed on me.

Themistocles eventually extracted himself and we went on walking. The Acropolis rising above our right shoulder held only fire-blackened ruins and would not be crowned with the glory of the Parthenon for some years. The shrine to the healing power of Asklepios that you now encounter on the slope next to the theater was only built years after the horrible plague and also was not there to meet our gaze. For that matter, the Odeon of Pericles that is now to the east of the theater had not been built at this time either. The whole area was unformed and empty. And at this time my life was also unformed and I had no desire to write this narrative.

“He didn’t mention you. In the drama, I mean.”

Themistocles smiled and put his arm on my shoulder. Inclining his head toward mine and speaking quietly, he said, “but he mentioned what I did.” He straightened up, laughed and threw his arms wide. “All this evil, some avenger or bad god made appear from some unknown place.” It was a line from the drama, the Persians, of course, regarding our unexpected victory at Salamis as a great evil.

“Many of my opponents have called me evil before, why not the Persians? At least they compared me to a god.” His smile was wide.

“But it is not the real story of what happened! The whole drama was about the Persians! Their grief, their loss! What about us? Our struggle? What about you?” I had raised my voice, but Themistocles remained in control of his passions.

“You underestimate Aeschylus’ accomplishment of presenting our enemies in a sympathetic manner. And, isn’t it praise of Athens to show how we caused such grief for such a larger enemy? Clever, very clever. And consider this – what we saw today was only the second drama – the second! - that was about our lives rather than the lives of gods and heroes.”

“So you think it was just fine?”

Themistocles again put his arm on my shoulder. “No, he left something out, something more important than which ship went where and who died and who did not. Do you know what it was?”

I didn’t. I suppose it could be Marathon that Themistocles was referring to but he’d implied it was not a battle. “I don’t know.”

“How did all those ships at that battle come to work so effectively?”

“You taught them how to maneuver.”

“No, no,” he waived his hand and shook his head.

“My father taught them.” That is what I should have said.

His voice grew soft. “No, my young friend. No, not even that.” His grip on my shoulder became hard and painful for a second. Releasing me he balled his fist and tapped it lightly on me. “What are we going to pass by just ahead here?”

I looked up at the hill that was on the left side of the road as it curled to the right ahead of us. “The Assembly.”

“Ah yes, the Assembly.” He stopped and looked towards the place where thousands of citizens gathered and issues were debated. “This is where I did my teaching, all the citizens were my charges. I was a teacher even to those who did not know they were attending school.” He said nothing more for a second, continuing to gaze at the site.

“Who is their shepherd, the commander of them all?” I quoted from the drama, a line given to the Persian king, asking about our city.

He recited the next line, “No man calls them his slave, they are not subjects.”

He looked again at the hill of the Assembly. I suddenly remembered the next line, but changed it to the past tense.

“How then did they resist the invading foe?”

“How indeed. How indeed. It was not because of some farmers at Marathon. Perhaps someone will write the story of what happened.” He turned to me and a smile came across his face. “Perhaps it will be you. You are always so concerned with what is true and what is false, a dangerous and rare affliction. You can tell how we really obtained our freedom.”

I was embarrassed that I had not immediately known of what he spoke. We had talked about this more than once. I knew he was proud of what he had done and angry at his lack of honor from those of power in the city. I didn’t believe for an instant that he had no care for his omission from the drama.

Soon afterwards my fate was to have his friendship ripped away from me by the scheming of those same wealthy connivers.

I returned to awareness of the dinner party to hear Aganus speaking. He was sitting on a middle couch, but was in fact the second oldest of those present. “I believe we cannot just

consider the actions of Darius and Xerxes. After all, the truth is we've been fighting the Persians for many weary years. Think how it was the theft of a woman which began this whole affair long ago at Troy."

I had to admit in justice that he was right to this extent: the theft by Paris, son of Priam, of the lady Helen, did lead to war at Troy between the cities of Hellas and the mainland of the East, a war so far back in time that little can be recalled that occurred before it, a war whose stories have come down to us through the immortal Homer and form the education of every child.

"Yes," Pardocas said, "that we should consider women to be the source of this evil is not an unworthy idea. Such our myths teach in the story of Pandora. Perhaps this enmity between Persia and ourselves is but one more example of how the gods have punished us by sending women to snare us."

"If Helen was compelled against her will to go to Troy by a man, how is that the fault of Helen or of women?" I said. I was conscious that three flute-girls were sitting in the door to the room at this time and were undoubtedly listening to our words.

"You will not command the respect of women, dear young Philodemos, by surrendering to them," a guest said from the far corner.

I did not like the use of the word 'young' addressed to me for I took it as an insult and a rebuke.

"Because, my friend," Pardocas said, looking at me, "Helen used her beauty to entrap men and bend them to her will, giving free reign to the unrestrained lusts which are characteristic of her gender. Contrast her to the chaste Penelope who resisted all attempts on her virtue, patiently waiting -- as a good wife should -- until Odysseus was able to return home."

We had consumed some quantity of wine by this time, and I could feel my face getting hot. I looked out of the corner of my eye at one of the flute girls, one I had been drawn to. Her hair was glistening, her laugh fresh and delightful as were the glimpses of the lines of her limber form that would occasionally be revealed against her robe as she would move. Was my feeling of desire her fault for being so created, her fault for being here, her fault for how she dressed and moved? Or was the desire mine, existing only in my mind? Perhaps the blame should attach to the wine, but I was the one who had consumed so much of it. The girl, did she choose to be here? If she didn't choose to be here, is it her fault for dressing provocatively? Or is the provocation in my mind alone? I just knew that my eyes kept returning to her.

In any case, Penelope had to actively fight to retain her virtue, scheming endlessly to trick a rude band of suitors who had camped at her doorstep and helped themselves to her food. If she had succumbed to weariness after years of resistance, whose fault would that be? I wanted to insult Pardocas by observing that Odysseus killed the suitors and their fate was richly deserved. But I was young; I kept silent.

As an old man, were I again in the same situation, I might be inclined to observe that Odysseus had not been chaste on his epic journey home. I have come to enjoy the blank incomprehension such statements receive.

I returned to awareness of the conversation to hear Pittheus speaking. "I cannot agree to this. It can't be the cause of the strife. This woman-stealing is a small thing. A small thing! A small thing can't start a great affair! Now Helen was said to have been remarkable! I admit that. Everyone says so! A remarkable woman." He'd sat up on the couch, both hands fluttering in front of him, his words coming in bursts.

“But, even so, a petty theft for a petty reason – that’s not fitting for the beginning. Not for beginning a great war – a great war between great peoples. And it can’t explain the ending – that Athens won.”

Some of those laughed when Pittheus said, “remarkable quality,” and one had murmured, “remarkable beauty.”

The argument attributing the conflict to the theft of Helen would be advocated by Herodotus in his history, some thirty years later. Though I salute Herodotus, who justly earned the title father of history, and is the one who blazed the path I follow less well in my history, and I would come to count him a friend, I cannot agree that this is the reason.

Pittheus interrupted the chatter, his voice rising in tone. “Things done well are in proper proportion. A balance – they have balance. A theft of a woman -- not a fit balance. It’s a light thing. Not right, not right for the greatness of our city. And as we become greater -- this reason becomes smaller. It’s not fitting.”

“I will admit,” Pardocas replied, sounding as if he was a philosopher pronouncing a solution to a difficult problem, “that such a great thing such as this great clash, should have a great beginning, but it is also true that some great events come from small beginnings. This is my judgment.”

So things either have a great beginning, or they do not? I wondered how many years of philosophical labor it had taken for him to squeeze out that pearl of wisdom.

Euphorion put his cup down with such force that the wine spilled. “The theft was a fiction! Just a cloak to preserve the honor of a woman who had done a dishonorable thing! She threw over ties of family, love and country! And why? Just to surrender to the passion that

makes fools of us all.” Pardocas admitted that this was a point some weight and Pittheus seized on it as well, saying that this was further proof that the reason could not be the correct one.

I was not taken with this line of discourse, there was something about it that did not seem fit, but I could not name it. That uncertainty and my youth and my reclining on the couch that had the lowest status led me to put my question most hesitantly.

“May I ask you a question,” I began, “I know that all of you have studied this matter for some time.” Pittheus and Pardocas nodded their acknowledgment of the compliment and I saw Pittheus reach for the large bowl to refill his cup before taking another drink of wine to refresh his voice.

“By all means speak, Philodemos,” our host cried out with heartiness, “it is not right that one of the guests speak less than the others!”

I blushed that my quietness had been noticed. I spoke to Pardocas. “If you would agree that the theft of Helen caused the enmity which caused the war, then, what caused the theft?”

“Love, passion or revenge would be the cause of most such thefts,” Pardocas said.

“Then, wouldn’t you agree that if the theft caused the enmity, and that passion caused the theft, that therefore, passion caused the enmity?”

“I suppose you could say that,” Pardocas said, with no real agreement.

“Then, if passion caused the theft that caused the enmity that caused the war, what would you say caused the passion?”

“I don’t know,” Pittheus interjected, “some would say the gods.”

“Then would you say,” I said, “that the gods caused the Persians to come to Marathon?”

“How is saying the gods did it saying anything different than saying that we don’t know?”

Euphorion said. Everyone was quiet but I saw some stir and look at each other.

“Perhaps the cause is the nature of people,” I said.

“How is that different from saying ‘we don’t know’” someone else asked. Euphorion nodded at him and some laughed, this time at me.

“I don’t know. But it seems to me that something in the nature of being a king and being a free city led to this clash.”

“Battle is constant, all cities fight with each other, this is known to all,” said Euphorion.

“Indeed,” I said, “war seems as common as the desire between two people, but not all such desire produces great consequences.”

“I congratulate you, my young friend,” Pardocas said, “that was a well formed proverb. And all the more evidence that my position is correct. The nature of Persia led to this.”

I had been complimented, but I found myself irritated that one I had come not to respect agreed with me. The room had beamed at me, but I felt like a child congratulated by indulgent adults for some trick. More proof, were any needed, that the gods enjoy the tangled affairs of humans. But as to the reason for the enmity, now, with time to reflect I think I can say more clearly what I should have said at the symposium.

I do not think there was any specific cause to this enmity. Rather, it was inevitable, given the nature of humans. Wise we are who speak Hellenic in one thing, for in having always a multiplicity of gods, we see the divisions within each person, for each of us is Dionysus and Apollo, Ares and Aphrodite. We war, and weary of it, we lust and laugh at the foolishness of it, we seek our freedom and we find it lonely. This is the fate of humans: to do things we do not

want to do, to seek things that are not good for us, to want more than we need and then not to admit that these things happen.

But all I said was “It doesn’t matter why this happened, only why it was different.”

“Different how?”

“He just wants to talk about Themistocles.”

There was laughter and I took another drink of wine.

“The cause of this enmity is important.” I nodded at Pardocas. “But it is important, isn’t it, because a free city defeated a tyranny?”

Pardocas sniffed. “It is important because of the greatness of Athens and the brute might of Persia. Barbarians will always succumb to a civilization.”

I said no more, fearful I had said too much for politeness. But something important was here, drifting below the surface, something critical.

And so the conversation went on and we drunk more and our room seemed to dip and roll like a ship on the wine-dark sea, carrying us deeper into reflection on this as we chased reasons and causes as elusive as a clever enemy. The third krator was emptied and our host saw to the fourth being presented to us to fill our cups.

When we had begun this final vessel Euphorion voiced words we’d been afraid to say earlier without the encouragement of the wine. “Was this war so important? Or do we think it important just because it happened to us? After all, how can a city be great that expels someone like Themistocles? I know this dark thought has brought me to despair.” His language was elegant, but he was slurring syllables. Either the wine had affected his tongue or my ears.

“Agreed!” “Yes!” people called out “After all he did to save the city!”

“It is sig – significant because Athens is the greatest city in the world!” The man at the far end held his cup in air. “Or at least that is what I’ve been told.” And he threw it down on the floor, spilling wine everywhere. He burped, others laughed.

Well, there was that, make fun of everything. I myself was torn by Euphorion’s comment for it mirrored my own confusion and distress over my future and the future of our city. We reclined in that pleasant room, some eleven years after Salamis, some twenty one after Marathon, and yet felt no confidence that the fate the gods had in store for our city would be a prosperous one.

The symposia showed signs of coming to an end. I had little awaiting me at home but did not have the standing among our guests to be one that the hired flute girls would favor with their attentions. Our host had been hospitable to invite me, but he had not yet the wealth to provide girls for all the guests. It would be wise for me to leave before my lack of rank on this matter would become exposed to the other guests, or to the flute girls.

We had all drunk deeply from four krators and were filled with its particular forms of ignorance and wisdom that Dionysius imparts when we worship him by consuming several times his special libation. I stared at the surface of the dark wine in my cup, watching it move, savoring the texture still on my tongue. I felt I could lean forward, fall into the cup and swim in the infinite truths contained there.

This feeling gave me boldness to venture a question to one I was more fearful of a rejection from than even Pardocas. I had noticed that one of the flute girls, the one I had been drawn to, was still huddled in the corner. “And so,” I said, calling out to her, “what do you think was the reason that King Darius tried to conquer us and King Xerxes tried a second time?”

The men began to snigger, for they supposed that I was making fun of the girl by asking her to comment. But why not ask? She attended as many symposia as any of the men, and had listened to the wise speak their views as often as anyone else. And it was clear that when the girls had entertained us with song and the declaiming of poetry that she had been the leader and the one who had taught the other girls. So why should not this laborer in Aphrodite's guild have an opinion on the passions that motivated men, even the passions of a theft of a woman?

She stirred; I imagined that her pride had been pricked by the laughter. "It is in the nature of men to want to conquer," she said.

"And it is in the nature of flute girls to sing!" one of the younger guests said, as he got up to stagger over to this girl and attempt to embrace her.

"But why does it matter? That is the real question." I said this, but no one heard me above the laughter of the girl and the slurred speech of the guests as she made a feeble attempt to evade the attentions of the man. I thought she looked at me, but I may have imagined it.

I got up, somewhat unsteadily, to take my leave, and gave my complements to the host for his hospitality, as that was all I had to give, not being as yet able to reciprocate with hospitality of my own. But I left with a desire to think of this topic more and, I admit, a desire to speak to this girl again.

Outside the air was cold and it hit my face, stinging me to alertness. I did not have any lamp to light my way on the dark, narrow, muddy paths between the lines of houses. I could easily walk in a circle, lost amid the houses and lanes that all look alike in the dark. I found, I thought, the correct path to take and I also eventually realized that many questions were tangled together.

What had actually happened? Too much attention was paid to Marathon and Salamis, and not enough to why those battles occurred. A close study of how it all began would be important. How did Darius and his men and animals and ships and weapons and supplies and baggage and baggage carriers come to rest upon the plain of Marathon no more than a long day's march north of Athens? And how did his army, so much larger than ours with the weight of an empire behind it, bearing down upon the tiny cities of Athens and Plataea with a force that no one could imagine would be thwarted – how was it thwarted?

“It started at Naxos,” I said to the unresponsive night. The right starting point was not Salamis, not Marathon ten years before Salamis, but Naxos, ten years before Marathon.

That much was clear, for reasons I will explain. But one would have to do more than sing of brave heroes and their noble speech and their large banquets. There was the question about why this set of battles was more important than the ones Homer sang about and we all learned. Why did that war bring only death and songs of heroes but this war bring freedom? A king and a city trying to be free -clashed. That could never be forgotten. The story means nothing without describing the ground and shape of the world that led one people to settle here, another there, that led one people to send out colonies and another to resent them, that led one people enclosed in narrow hills to develop cities and a spirit of independence and another on a broad plain to be shaped into a large mass.

Staggering for a second I caught myself with a hand on the cool roughness of a house wall. I felt the light breeze, saw the looming hills around Athens, could smell the ocean. All this was important also. All this came to work their will in this land, fertile and warm surrounded by the sea, wine-dark, compelling and deadly, illuminated by the light that shines on all. It is this

illumination that must be cast upon the Hellespont, and Salamis, the plain of Marathon, and narrow Thermopylae, triremes and spears, breastplate and pontoons. And, most painfully, it must also be cast upon Artemisium, place of my own deep grief.

But Aeschylus was also right. It was not just that the Persians were evil and we were good. At the time of the symposium I was grieved for the evil decision that had cost me one friend. Now, as an old man, I see that our city has turned away from greatness, and this grieves me more. So this too can never be forgotten.

But, I cannot begin this story with my youthful memory of standing in a muddy lane, after consuming wine at a dinner party. At the time of that party not enough events had occurred for me to know why this story was different and why you should care about it. But now I am an old man and I have seen more and I do know. So let me return to the present, and return to the beginning and start my history in a formal way so not to offend the gods, and so you may know why I wrote and what I intend to prove.

Chapter II

Our Assembly secured our freedom, not our warriors,
and freedom birthed greatness because it bred ideas not conquest,
and since these ideas were not our possession but our discovery,
it is therefore fitting and worthy
for you to study how our Assembly accomplished this
so that your city may accept this gift of ideas,
a gift we have now rejected.

In this day, eighty six years after Marathon, seventy six after Salamis, when my city below Athena's temple is surrounded by armies whose leaders claim we were only a brutal empire that took what it desired, this narrative will show you how we created democracy and sought truth in all things, teaching cities how they may be free and inspiring those who love wisdom to seek truths beyond our imagining. And now, when those who always despised the rule of the people have convinced many that democracy is not the best way of defending a city from attack, this narrative will show you how it was that contentious unfettered debate proved our strongest weapon against the unified Persian host. And in future days, when much has been forgotten, then I pray this narrative, by one who lived these years from democracy's birth through the flowering of great ideas to Hubris' attack to final destruction, will inspire those who sacrifice at freedom's temple to understand the truth.

And the truth is, that though our warriors have been justly celebrated for their honor and their great victories at Marathon and Salamis, it was not our citizens as warriors who won

freedom from the Persians and their many allies, but our citizens in Assembly near the Acropolis, because it was in these Assembly debates where all citizens could speak and preside and vote that freedom was practiced and experienced and the course set for all our city would dare.

In these Assemblies, two divine ideas struggled to come into the world, the first of these is *isonomia* and the second *isogoria*. The first declares that laws should be the same for all and the second that all should have a right to speak and be heard. Together, these two, in friendship, grew strong and in time were able to call forth into this world for the first time a city's most divine idea of all: *democracy*. This divine idea, that the people should rule, is the only idea that brings freedom to all, for a tyrant is free, but not the people ruled, a victorious army is free, but not the city destroyed. The Persians were thought free to conquer, but the soldiers in its immense army were not free, nor would we have been, had they succeeded.

Our freedom enabled us to become great, but our greatness would not have been consistent with the manner of our freedom had it only consisted of power great enough to hurl more people, marble and gold across the world than others could. Even tyrants can claim this sort of greatness. The greatness of Athens lies not in early victories, won against heavy odds and victories later won in power, nor in achievement with wood, marble and words, nor in rare leaders or artisans who rose above the common level. Nor even is it that the great run of citizens approved those things, chose those leaders and nurtured those artisans. Our greatness lies in the great ideas that are embodied in our buildings, our art, our drama, our philosophy and in our politics, and even in the wars that secured our freedom. These ideas are a few words: truth and the pursuit of it, balance and proportion, debate, democracy, liberty, the future, the citizen. Yet, what worth treasuring of being human does not flow from these?

An idea is immortal to the extent it embodies the perfect, unchanging, divine, and there are no ideas greater than these. For the great act of bringing these ideas into the daily life of a city we can justly claim immortality for our city, though a time will come when the memory of our lives and the incidents of our history are forgotten, our writings lost and the beautifully shaped marble decayed to dust.

Some great achievements produce admiration or envy, some a feeling of unworthiness in comparison, but the achievements of Athens were not our possessions, but our discovery of what human life could be. Thus we cannot be the possessive owners of these, they are your possessions as much as they were ours, and so it is worthy for wise citizens of every city to diligently make deep and penetrating inquiry into the truth of how this new thing arose, and what makes it strong and what threatens it.

It is threatened by many false ideas. Many think this freedom came not from our disorderly debates but from everyone obediently following some great man. And so many would say we should seek the origin of our greatness in the visionary and selfless act of Solon in turning away from power he could have held with the agreement of all, and how he thus set in motion all that followed. Solon should be remembered, remembered for his laws and for his refusal to be a tyrant, and for his refusal to be a tyrant of interpretation. Solon should be honored and Perisistratus and Cleisthenes and Themistocles and Pericles and others before and after. But they were men of skill and ability, and these often, but not always, rise to prominence. It is not a great and new thing for the wise to have a stage upon which to exercise their wisdom.

Nor did this greatness come from small murders done by small-minded people for small reasons, despite who you see honored in our Agora.

No, it is not that a few gave us freedom, or killed for our freedom, or told us how to be free or ordered us to be free. It is not that war won freedom or defended freedom. The shield of our soldiers at narrow Thermopylae, the keel of our triremes shattering the Persian host at Salamis, the load bearing base of the Acropolis walls was this: we held our Assemblies, and not just in Athens but on the peninsula, ashore at Artemisium, before Salamis and every time a decision of consequence had to be made. And the force propelling the spears, pulling the oars and holding up the stones was that in those assemblies it would often happen that a citizen whose name we do not remember and who some in the assembly did not know, rose and spoke words and put forward an argument while Miltiades or Themistocles listened, and those men of ordinary greatness had to answer this unknown citizen with argument and persuasion and not with bribe and violence. That is divine, immortal, greatness. And that this happened not once, but often, and was thought not a special favor granted to the ordinary by the great, but normal and required: that is greatness upon greatness, for then the great ideas became real in the world and something had changed beyond all anyone could imagine.

My words about these Assemblies and this greatness will be mocked, if they are read only in this year when our victories have ended, our prominent citizens display no greatness, our ordinary citizens sell their votes for amusement, the skills of playwrights and sculptors are used for crass things and our buildings lie defenseless to the invader and to the sky. And even our ideas may be mocked by those who point to those things that were part of our society in its time of power, those things mean, unjust, and in contradiction to our ideals. Even more will those mock who observe how we came to use our power not to create more greatness but in quest of more power, and not power to free others from tyranny but simply power for ourselves.

But, they who mock only know of the distance between what we dreamed and what we were because we gave them the dream, they only know to discern the darkness that clouded our dazzling light because we opened their eyes, for without our greatness they would have never known we turned back from greatness.

We are judged more harshly for lesser failings that others committed more energetically, and the judgment placed on us cannot be dismissed by enumerating the greatness we did achieve or the meanness others failed to rise above. For all our greatness, for all that we saw so clearly, it is nonetheless true that we failed to follow where our clear sight led us. Those who are blind may be forgiven if they do not attempt a journey into unknown territory as they may be justly admired for what small journeys they do accomplish. Those with clear sight, good clothes and ample leisure are not forgiven for turning their back on what they could so easily reach. Even those with such advantages, who journey farther than anyone else, may be reproved for not going still farther when they so easily could have done so.

Still, there is the greatness, those ideas living forever, and those Assemblies.

I, Philodemos, son of Phillamos, husband of Corinna, father of Iophon, lived these years from invasion to victory to greatness to decline to defeat, and have set this narrative down in order, beginning from the antecedents of these Assemblies and extending to the utter failures of which I spoke, that you, oh excellent reader, might see clearly what you owe to us and might treasure the immortal ideas that are now yours. Hear and judge, then, the greatness and the failure, the events and the people, the causes and the consequences.

Chapter III

Naxos, ten years before Marathon is a fitting place and time to begin to explain how I came to be adrift, why I cared about Themistocles, how Themistocles came to be adrift, why the city should have cared for him, how freedom came to Athens and why you should care about that. Or, I thought it was fitting when I was young. Now that I am old I see that I must journey farther back in time and write of more. But I would try your patience to do that now. So let us start with Naxos, ten years before Marathon.

The people of sturdy Naxos, balanced mid way between Athens and the coast of the Persian dominion, demanded to be free and expelled those who had been tyrants over them and these tyrants went, and went agreeably, to appeal to another tyrant who held sway at Miletus, away east on the coast of the Ionian mainland. Situated at the mouth of the river Maeander, Miletus was a city sacred to Apollo and the cradle of Thales, Anaximander and Anaximenes, who were the first to be called lovers of wisdom and among the first who did not need the gods to explain how the cosmos came to be. This city's tyrant was Aristagoras.

Before, we pass too quickly on, we should give honor to Naxos for demanding not another tyrant who would abuse them a little less, but something more, a reaching out toward isogoria and isonomia, a desire those of wealth and arbitrary power always find upsetting.

It is fitting that Naxos be this place. Here, our myths tell us that Ariadne was abandoned by Theseus after she had risked all by giving him a thread of wool to guide his dangerous journey through the labyrinth to freedom, but then was rescued by Dionysus who took her in marriage on this island. The citizens of Naxos risked everything, and more than once, as we shall see, to find

their way out of the labyrinth of tyranny and they have been abandoned as cruelly as any rejected lover.

As for the fitness of the time, it was also in that tenth year before Marathon that clear-sighted Pythagoras died and Pericles the resolute was born, marking in their joint transition of life the end of the age when all knowledge was one and the beginning of the age of democracy. In our age, we describe Pythagoras as a teacher of geometry, philosophy and music, three things, but in his age these things were all one thing. And it is also true that back in the age of Pythagoras, Pericles would have been thought of as a tyrant or a king, descended as he was from wealthy Xanthippus and so long our leader, but in our age of isonomia we know that Pericles did not command a nation but persuaded an Assembly of free citizens that his ideas were the best. The idea of oneness unfolding into many ideas and the idea of the one with authority over all becoming one among the many citizens, in this tenth year before Marathon, this is how the world changed.

The beginning of this matter does not immediately seem to be different. If there was a tyrant -- there have always been tyrants, and if there was revolt -- there have always been revolts, and if this revolt pricked the pride of a king, and his dominion over the cities pricked the pride of the cities -- then pride is the passion that always moves those who have power. This is no different, just another wave coming ashore, like all the waves that had come across the ocean of fate since the beginning of time, each full of its own energy, yet like all the waves before.

However, this particular wave, this one special ebb and surge of human fortune, flowed into the life of a city with an Assembly so that pride and the desire to be free now led and directed us to all that the gods have given humans to be capable of. Or so I shall argue to you.

The expelled tyrants appealed to Aristagoras and he read the wind and sky, taking careful measure of the dark clouds of Persian domination boiling up from the mainland, spreading west and overreaching the coastal cities of Ionia. Likewise he also assessed the hot wind of anger from those expelled rulers, newly deprived of what they had stolen. It seemed to him a good and likely thing that if he assisted the tyrants to return to power in Naxos he could please Persia, enrich himself, and be in a secure place when the Persian storm consumed all the Aegean as he thought it soon would. So with Persian agreement he assembled his forces and obtained the use of warships - some 200 swift triremes of the Persians. Now Naxos is west of Miletus but this force rowed north as if to cross the mouth of the Hellespont and then sail along the Thracian coast, a path the Persians had gone once before. A devious mission well deserves a devious path, and so desiring to lull the Naxians into inattention, the fleet lingered at Chios until a favorable wind appeared for their swoop down upon the island of Naxos.

But the Naxians had ample warning of the true plan, 200 triremes not being something easily hid, and prepared a solid defense as befits an island known for hard marble and for its rugged eastern side. For four brave months they held out against the battering force of the Persian host, not fearing the implied might of an empire that stood behind this host as they defended their homes and future. No matter to these Naxians that Persia had twenty men for each one of them. So well did they defend their island that the Persians grew tired of the game, no easy conquest appearing, and withdrew despite the pleas of Aristagoras to persist a little longer.

Desperately he made this appeal, for he had invested his wealth in this adventure on hope of great gain. Soon he returned to Miletus with no money, no hope of conquest, no hope of doing a favor for the Persians and nothing but despair to keep him company. How should a person react at having their unworthy plan come to naught? To fail at noble causes is worthy, to repent of accomplished evil can redeem, but what of failed mischief? Perhaps the best would be to slink away and grow old and then, in time, to reflect on one's good fortune not to have succeeded at doing wrong.

Aristagoras did none of these; having done badly a bad thing for mean reasons he now did as well he could a good thing for reasons of necessity. He became the very advocate of equal laws he had previously sworn to destroy: he proclaimed isonomia at Miletus and declared his own city in revolt from Persian domination. Gladly the citizens of this city took him at his word and rose in rebellion against the Persians.

As he had seen the strength of Persia as a valuable ally now he saw it as foretelling doom for his own city and so sought help. Because of his recent attempt to enslave them, he could not appeal to Naxos even though her citizens would have been natural and willing allies of the newly freed citizens of Miletus since that worthy island now both understood the price of freedom and had experience fighting for it. Instead, Aristagoras went to distant Sparta, west and south of Athens, deep in the rugged enfolding mountains and asked that land-locked city for aid.

Here he betrayed his true interests, arguing to that noble warrior race not that they should fight for pride or freedom or for the honor of doing a just thing for no personal gain, instead he described the plunder to be made by not merely defending his own city but from plundering the

array of regions lying one next to the other, inland from the coast all the way to Susa where the king of Persia hoarded his massive stock of gold.

The Spartans turned him down, claiming it was too long a march, mocking his selfish request by pretending to be equally selfish. And so Aristagoras went to Athens and came to the first of these Athenian assemblies that shall, one after the other, shape our narrative.

And here before a crowd, the assembly, the citizens gathered, he began to appeal for their assistance. He claimed the Persians were weak soldiers, he claimed again there was ample plunder to be had, he appealed to the tie of blood between Athens who had given settlers to found his own city of Miletus. And swayed by his manifold appeals, the assembly voted to send twenty ships against the Persian horde, a fleet of twenty to be commanded by Melanthius of distinguished reputation. And among those who were a captain of a trireme in this fleet, not last in rank, was my father, Phillamos.

I was not born when my father's ship rowed out of the Piraeus and set course southeast, but as a child, I did ask him about it. I even laboriously wrote down some of what he said, and he was kind enough not to laugh at my childish handwriting. Later, I supplemented those notes with careful memory. And I believe this is an accurate account of what he said about that ill-omened voyage.

“Well, we did row past that hill you love so much, and I did have the helmsmen swing us in close to shore, but it was not your mother who was waving to me. No, I hadn't met your mother then. That was later when I saw her serving in one of the temples.” He laughed. “Even though I was fourteen years older than her, I still thought she was the goddess Athena herself, she had such grace about her. But you're asking me about the voyage.

“Yes, we did own the farm back then, and it was my parents who stood on the hill that you so like. They waved to me, and I waved back. And you know, it wasn’t just me, on our way out of the Pireaus, I knew that some of the officers and rowers had family in that area to the south of the city, so I had us hug the shore for them as well.

“You should always remember that, my son, that it is all very well to go off to war and be the hero, but there are people waiting behind and they hurt deeply for those who have gone. And it wasn’t easy for me, because I thought of my responsibility to the farm and to my parents.”

A hesitant beginning, this voyage. There were other hesitant beginnings that year. It was also in this year that Aeschylus, the father of tragedy, presented his first play in that theater lying south of the sacred Acropolis and a gentle walk from where the crowd had gathered to decide how we would or would not cast our lot with freedom or fear. Aeschylus, of noble birth, would later, much later, have occasion to present movingly the next to final act in the story I am telling you here, in that drama of the Persians that I was privileged to see with Themistocles. In this first play he only hinted at the greatness to follow. Aeschylus struggled to allow more characters to speak in his plays to allow the full play of events to be described with justice, so I, in my own way, aim to show how all these actors, the assembly, the soldiers, the ships and the ship of my father, the land and the sea came to shape our lives and yours.

My father continued.

“Oh it took a lot of rowing. And of course, the men work in shifts on a long voyage like that so we can keep going. Can’t go as fast, but going fast makes everyone tired. Our route? Well, of course, we went around Sounion’s cape and we gave prayers to Poseidon. Then we

went down Andros, staying away from the rocks, across Naxos, pretty close to some island south of Samos, and then into Ephesus.

“We hadn’t seen a city like Ephesus before. Such buildings! Especially that temple to Artemis. That made us think that maybe Athens wasn’t such a great large place, I tell you. You should try to travel there some day.

“But, I am getting ahead of myself. I always remember that voyage across. I had some hot-heads on my crew, they were men, but still boys really. Such talk! They were going to defeat the entire Persian army all by themselves.

“Not all of us felt that way. The rowing master, he was an old man, he’d been to war. No illusions that one. No, not Theagenes, he came later. Iphis, that was his name. No, he and the bow officer and I were concerned. We were going to fight with allies we’d never met or trained with. We were going to attack a much larger foe on their land and away from ours. We were not eager to come to blows, I tell you, and we kept counseling caution and that we find out what was going on first before we charged ahead. But the young, ah, you can’t tell them anything.

“So we arrived in Ephesus and met our allies. And here is the problem, we sent twenty ships, right? And twenty crews that were trained to fight on ships. But our enemy was inland at Sardis. So we had just become a navy, and then we had to become an army and an army with people we’d never met. So yes, we spent days talking about what to do. And it is hard to be careful when you have people confusing care with cowardice. Everyone wanted just to charge ahead. I wish I had been more eloquent, I might have made a difference.

“You must remember son....”

But what I remember is that he stopped here and did not tell me what to remember. Now, of course, I know he was thinking of comrades lost, buried far from home in graves no one would ever visit.

Sardis. Sardis, rich in gold, said to be the birthplace of Dionysus, and home of the descendents of Hercules. Here, before the Tmolus Mountains and above the Hermus River, Croesus reigned and produced coins of gold and silver mixed together. And here too, Cyrus overthrew and sacked the city and thus it became a capital of the Persians and attractive to Aristagoras in his guise as friend of the people.

“And then, once we got to Sardis, all our plans just fell apart! Everybody got excited, went off in all directions. No, son, I don’t know how the city caught fire. We hadn’t planned that. Not even those who thought they were tougher than Spartans. Why burn a city? Not even that fool Aristagoras wanted to do that.

“I guess I haven’t mentioned him. He was our leader, but that was mostly making speeches. I don’t think he had any idea how to be a general.

“And no, I still don’t know whose idea it was to burn the temple of Artemis Cybele. This Aristagoras, he wants to make money? My officers, they want glory? Well, burning a temple to the Great Mother doesn’t make for profit or honor. Son, don’t let anyone tell you otherwise. It was useless for our war and it was a sacrilege.

“So, we no sooner get done burning everything in sight when the word comes that the Persians are coming. And just like that everyone turns and starts running for the coast. I remember saying to someone, ‘isn’t that why we came? to fight the Persians’ But, you know, I

was glad we didn't stay and fight. We would have lost, all of us. I probably would have been killed. And I'd have never married your mother and you wouldn't have been born.

“Ahh, so we set off to the coast like a bunch of rabbits, you've never seen anything like it. Everyone is throwing their shields aside – yes, yes, you want to quote that bit by Archilocus about ‘I'll get another one just as good’, but he ... I'm sorry, but you have to fight for what you believe in.

“This was a rout, a panic, everyone elbowing each other, trying to pass, shouting, a total disaster.

“We get to the coast, just ahead of the Persians, and now it becomes clear to all the military geniuses, that we are going to have to fight and those shields would have been handy. So I and some others try to get a line organized, but I'm not an expert on that. Fortunately, some of my men from the ship had stayed close to me and they followed orders and we got a little resistance going.

“But we were routed again. Thank the gods that night came and the Persians had to withdraw. So the Athenians took a quick assembly – you like assemblies but you wouldn't have liked this one, more like a bunch of bandits it was.

“We decided to pull out and leave everyone else to the mercies of Persia. And we did. Loaded up the ships and took off at first light the next day. Left everyone else sitting there. I will never forget their curses and fright at seeing us leave.

“Look son, you should never fight unless you have to. But if you fight, then you have to be a man and fight. Leaving them was one of the most shameful things I have ever been a part of. I think it was the most shameful.

“And we took it out on the hot-heads on the way home. I had nothing much to say on the way out, but I and the rowing master and the bow officer and the shipwright also, we had plenty to say on the way back. I think I scared some of them so much they were about to jump overboard.

“But the whole thing was a mess, a disaster.”

And my father would not go on after that.

Yet this action, as suited for a comedy as for a tragedy, would be judged a poor effort in either style of drama, yet it was not without effect, for in short order, other revolts occurred. The Ionians did not abandon their dream of freedom even though Athens, later to be the very dream of freedom, had abandoned them. These isolated and small cities dared to oppose the mighty power of Persia because they felt they had no choice. Persia had been gnawing at them for twenty years, pushing ever westward into Thrace and the Aegean, taking goods and land, imposing tolls and taxes, pinching trade and always exerting more control over the cities. And so the revolt spread north to Byzantium, and south to Caria. Soon the green isle of Cyprus also threw off the Persian yoke. For a time, it looked as if they would succeed.

And so the days came and went until winter's bitter winds came again. Then, in the next spring, seven years before the Persians trod arrogantly at Marathon, it was revealed that the Persian high command had not been sleeping. A large Persian army was assembled and then divided into three parts under three obedient sons-in-law of King Darius. Caria then rose in more general rebellion and the Persians had to change their plans and send soldiers south to counter the Carians.

Many and bitter were the battles that ensued, and the Ionians did not always fare poorly against the might of Persia. But in a year Cyprus was subdued and the Carians were defeated. Seeing that fate had twice worked to frustrate his ambitions, Aristagoras abandoned Miletus and took flight. As the winter closed in he was killed while in Myrcinus of the Edonians in Thrace. Thus he became neither the savior of the Ionians nor a tyrant mighty enough to be remembered but rather a warning that those with divided purposes achieve neither.

Another year and it appeared the Persians were about to finish the crushing of all resistance when in Caria, Daurises and his other senior generals were ambushed and killed on the Pedasus road. This stroke of daring cut the head of the Persian lion and caused the Persians to withdraw. But others have said that the real reason for Persian retreat was the election in Athens of Hipparchos, a known friend of Persia, to the high position of Eponymous Archon. Those who say this believe that this gesture of peace to Persia was enough for that great empire to decide to defer its advance for a year. Sitting in the agora, at the center of the city, the center of our lives, this sounded wise, especially since it flattered our pride to think that the subtle changes in the government of our city were sufficient to make the world tremble.

However, I do not agree. At the time of the election of Hipparchos Athens was a weak city unknown to many in the Persian capital and since the plans and purposes of Persia to expand westward had been fifty years in the making they would not defer them by such a small a thing as a friend being elected to some office in a city they sought to conquer. When I would say this, I would be accused of disloyalty to my city and of attacking its importance. I do not think any one can with justice reject my view.

And so Athens was still blind to its peril.

And then there was a year of quiet, or at least quiet of the sort seen by histories.

Sophocles, the actor and author, was born in that quiet year, and so disrupted the quiet of his parent's house with the drama of life. Others were born and died, and numberless were the vocal dramas of love played that year.

So now I have come in my narrative to four years before Marathon. In this year, the Persians showed that they were determined to conquer Ionia and were willing to change plans in order to adjust their methods to the task. They decided that Miletus was the nest where all their problems had come to birth and determined to clean it out. Summoning their sea-faring allies the Phoenicians, they assembled a mighty force from land and sea and aimed it at Miletus. Miletus was the home of Aristagores whom the Persians could blame for all their troubles, but he had left Miletus and, for that matter, was dead.

Aware of the force thrusting to pierce their freedom, the representatives of Ionia held an assembly at the Panionium on the mainland north of Priene, opposite Samos. There, they debated openly as was proper, but could not decide on the unity that was necessary. They did agree to this: that their best chance lay with the choppy sea and not the dusty land. They would put their freedom in the hands of their triremes and try themselves against the Persians and their Phoenician allies. In this they were not foolish, for when the Persian commanders gazed upon the Ionian fleet it was Persia that had second thoughts due to the formidable numbers of their opponents.

When the Panionium deliberations had begun it was found that nine cities, but not Athens or Sparta, had brought their fleets together at the island of Lade so near to Miletus to offer battle for their freedom. More than 300 triremes came from the nine cities, Miletus itself, Chios,

Lesbos and Samos contributing the most with contingents smaller but no less dear from Priene, Myus, Teos, Erythrae and Phocaea of the sea faring tradition.

But this force, as awesome as it was to contemplate had a fatal weakness. The deliberations at Panionium had not settled on a commander for this fleet nor a plan for how it should be used. The Persians immediately set about attempting to prevent either a plan or unified command from forming. These cities, Miletus included, had no small stock of former tyrants the people had rejected and which Persia had easy access to. The Persian leaders immediately sent all of these homeless rulers around attempting to find one of the cities of Ionia, to be bribed away from unity of action into making a separate peace. And as we have had cause to say before, and will again, a separate arrangement with Persia for life in exchange for liberty could well seem a way of making a virtue out of what was inevitable. It is to the eternal glory of the nine Ionian cities that these attempts were, at this stage at least, a complete failure, and this should be remembered against those who for their own reasons dismiss the courage of the Ionians.

The Ionians in their assembly finally agreed to a suggestion of one Dionysius of Phocaea to grant him the leadership in battle. This claim to leadership did not rest on triremes, for Phocaea brought only three, but that his city was the first to make long voyages and had a heroic history of exploration and discovery that won admiration, a history ended when the Persians destroyed the city some 50 years before Marathon. Many felt this choice of battle commander was a way to avoid upset among the leaders of the several cities who had brought large but not predominate forces to Lade.

Dionysius began diligently an intense training of the Ionians, proving he desired not merely the honor but accepted also the heavy duties of command and aimed to bring his charges

into battle ready and with a plan to achieve victory. For a week all went well: the Ionian cities learned to work as one and learned the wise use of the power of their warships in the soon-arriving trial of battle. But unity can feel like tyranny to those in search of indulgence and so they began to grumble and to make fantastic claims that this training for freedom was worse than living as slaves. Eloquently did Dionysius appeal to them to accept some little time of discipline to achieve the longer and more glorious years of freedom for themselves and families. Slavery was their inevitable fate if they could not unite, but nonetheless, they refused his orders, instead lying about in total freedom on the beach with shallow amusements and witty talk. For this, Dionysius would have been well justified in taking his three ships and leaving the idlers to the fate of those who think freedom is the absence of purpose, but he did not abandon them. What would three ships be out of more than three hundred? His departure would not have changed the outcome of battle, but he did not abandon them. For this alone, his name should be remembered in the pantheon of those who have shown honor and have fought for freedom. I do not know if any monument remembers him, if not, let these words be his monument.

The commanders from Samos also gave close attention to the unmilitary behavior of the Ionian sailors. They decided that if the Ionians were not united in training and had no courage when the sea was calm that these traits would not appear in the storm of battle. Consequently they privately resolved to accept the offer of the Persians and await a fitting moment to act.

And so the battle came. No sooner had it started than the Persians were delighted to see the Samians host sail and depart for home, all those from Pythagoras' island save for eleven ships who had courage to endure the fate of their Ionian friends. Seeing this force depart, the Lesbians became alarmed and decided that the battle was lost and they did not wish to die for no purpose

and they also pulled away as did some from other cities. Let it be recorded, however, that the ships of Chios did not leave and fought bravely and well. The battle went against the Ionians and it was apparent that all was soon to be lost. Only then, with the fate of the battle well decided, did Dionysius and the Phocaeian ships depart. They did not return to their city on the coast so vulnerable to Persian power but bent their backs to row away west to Sicily and perhaps beyond, for it was daring sailors from Phocaea who had, centuries ago, ventured far west in their fifty-oared vessels carrying colonists to plant the city of Marseille on far distant shores.

Soon after the sea-battle, the Persians gave siege to Miletus and in due course it was taken. The Persians gave bitter lesson to all of the consequence of defying them: they burnt the city, killed every man they could find and took the women into hard slavery, violating their honor as they wished. It was only those who fled who were able to return later to rebuild these islands.

Thus ended the Ionian rebellion.

The Persian fleet spent the winter off Miletus, a sign they had not satiated their desire for conquest and would, next year, press forward towards Athens. Would we of Athens learn unity from Ionian disunity and take courage from their example, or would we make the same mistakes or different ones that would bring on our heads the same fate?