

Lesson 2

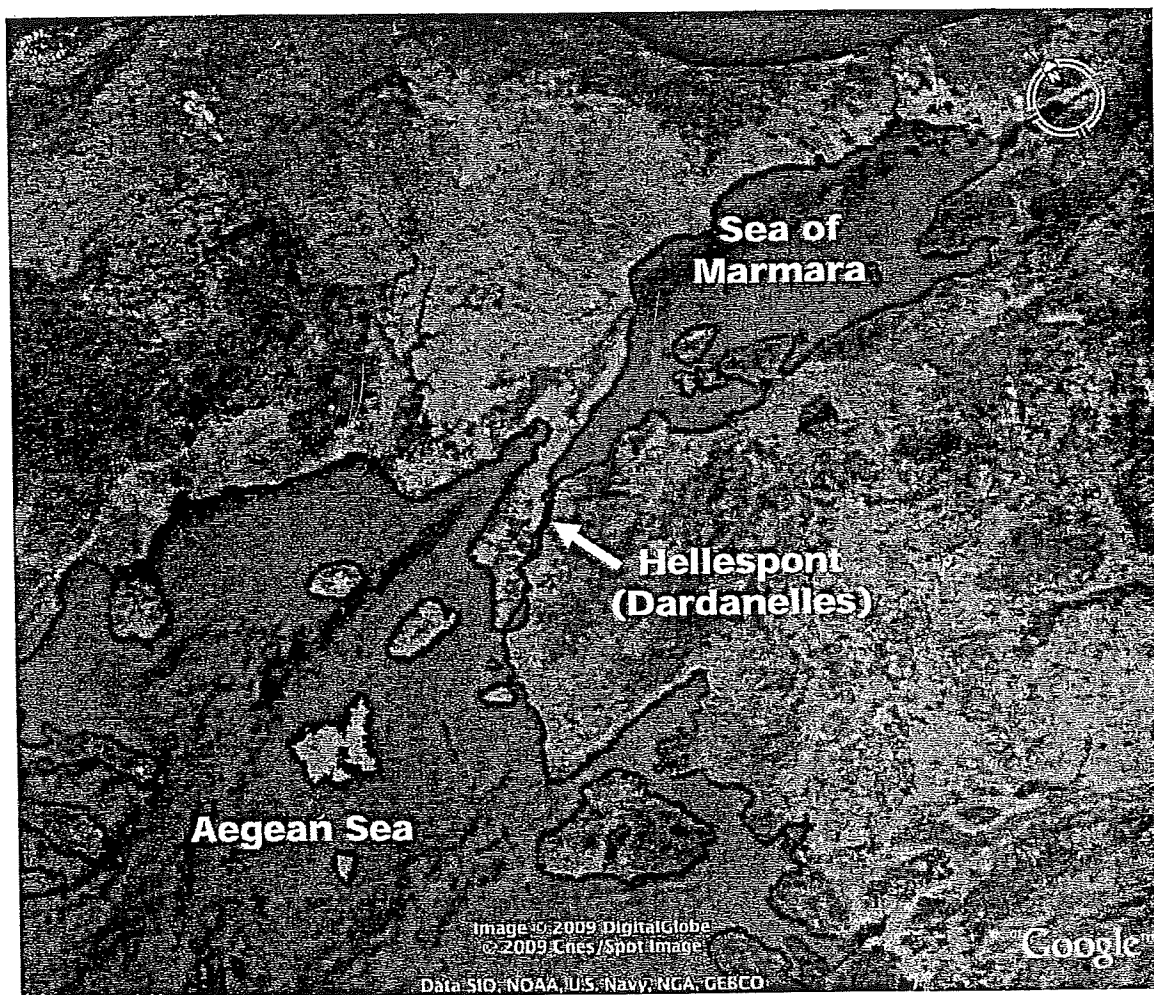
Student Handout 2.2—Crossing the Hellespont

In 481 BCE, Xerxes called for soldiers from Bactria, a region at the northeastern edge of the Persian empire. The Bactrian soldiers used the silk road to march to Susa, where Xerxes, who had come from his palace in Persepolis, met them. Then, they all marched for three months along the Royal Road to Sardis. During the winter of 482 BCE, Xerxes and the Persian army reached the Hellespont on the way to Greece. The Hellespont is a narrow **strait**, called in modern times the Dardanelles, that extends from southwest to northeast and connects the Aegean Sea with the Sea of Marmara. In the traditional geography of continents, the Hellespont is part of the dividing line between Europe and Asia. Today, the strait lies within the Republic of Turkey.

To reach Greece, Xerxes had a choice either to march his troops all the way around the Black Sea, a journey that could take months, or use ships to cross the Hellespont from Anatolia (the Asian side of modern Turkey) into Greece, which would take only days. He ordered men to build a bridge across the strait, but a winter storm destroyed it. When the news of its destruction reached Xerxes, he became furious. He ordered the construction **engineers** to be beheaded, and then he ordered the sea to be whipped! While the sea was being **reprimanded**, the punisher reportedly had to yell, "Bitter water! This is your punishment for wronging your master when he did no wrong to you!" Once the punishments had been administered, Xerxes hired new engineers to build two stronger bridges. These builders procured the strongest ships and anchored them down in a row from one shore to the other. Then, they made cables to stretch across the tops of the ships. The end of each cable was fastened to a spike on either shore. Once the cables were in place, they needed to be secured. Workmen tied **cordage** around the cables and attached them to the deck of the ships. Then, across the cables, they placed tree trunks to make a flat surface. The cracks were filled with dirt to make the bridges more level, like a road. A fence was also built on either side of the bridges so that the water below would not frighten the horses as they carried the soldiers and supplies across the strait.

When the bridges were complete, Xerxes readied himself to march into Greece. As the army was moving to the bridges, however, an **eclipse** of the sun occurred. Xerxes became worried that this might be a bad **omen**. He consulted with his **magi**, who told him that the eclipse was a bad sign for the Greeks, not the Persians, since one of their main gods was the sun god Apollo. With his mind at ease, Xerxes went with his army to the plains of Troy in western Anatolia. It was traditional that soldiers stop and pay homage at Troy in acknowledgment of the great battles fought in the past against Priam, the king of Troy. Xerxes honored this tradition. He and his army camped there for the night, but to his detriment. In those days, the majority of the army was made up of slaves who had little food or clothing and little desire to fight battles that would bring no advantage to them. During the night, a storm ravaged his poorly-equipped slave troops, and there was not enough water on the plains of Troy to water all the horses and other animals. Thousands died that night, the men from exposure and the animals from thirst. The next day, Xerxes poured a wine offering into the sea and began his march across the Hellespont. The whole army crossed on the first day, and Xerxes and his sacred horses and chariots came the second day. For five more days, the procession continued until the whole Persian army had crossed the Hellespont on the bridges, accomplishing a feat that had been thought impossible.

Source: Herodotus, The Histories, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998), passim.



Lesson 2

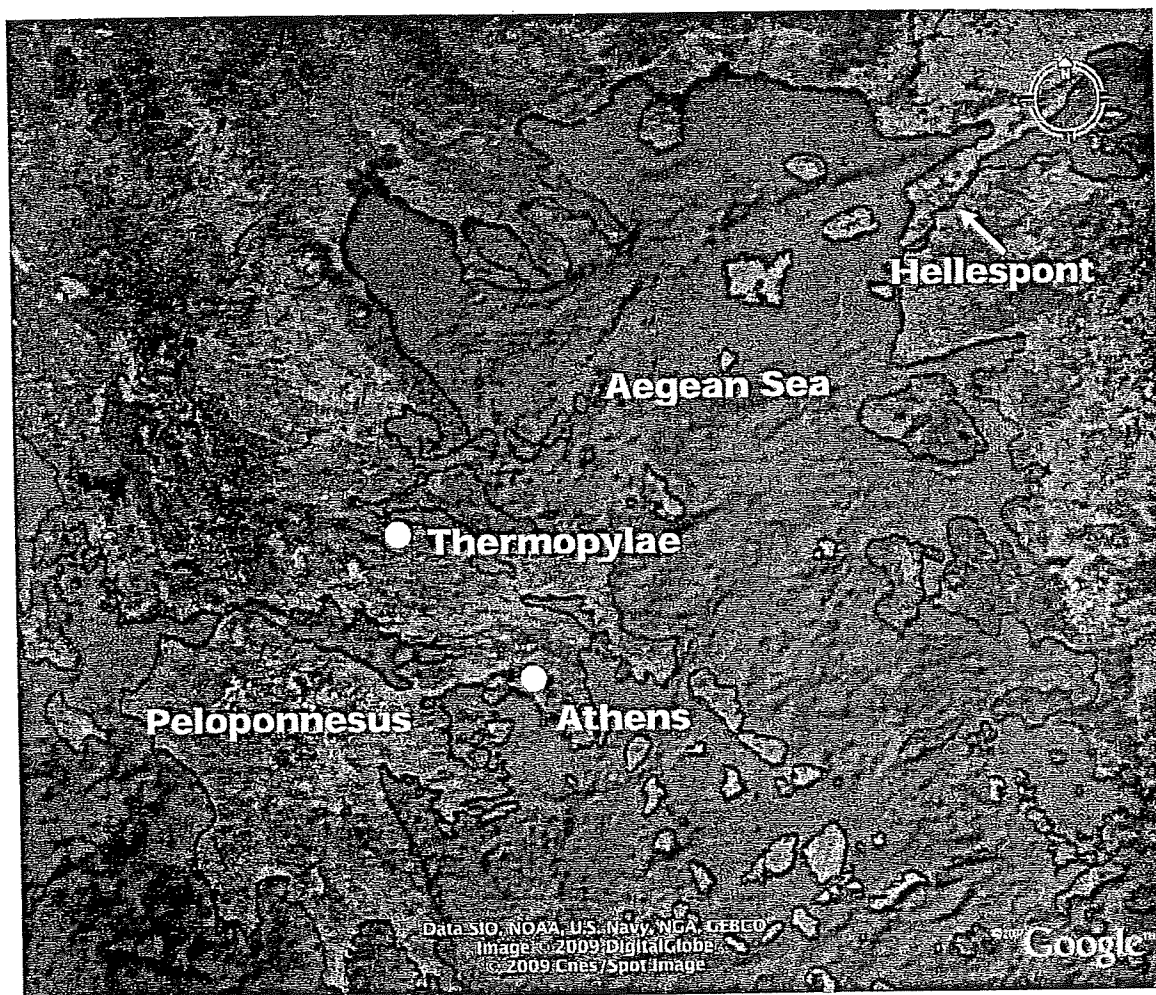
Student Handout 2.3—The Battle of Thermopylae

The pass at Thermopylae was a narrow passage with steep mountains on one side and a cliff on the other. Some three to four thousand Greeks put aside their differences and stationed themselves at Thermopylae, where they chose Leonidas from the city-state of Sparta as their leader. With him were 300 Spartan soldiers, whom he had personally selected. The Greeks waited at Thermopylae for **reinforcements** from the Peloponnesus. While they waited, news reached Leonidas that one million Persians were quickly moving towards Thermopylae. Many of the Greeks favored retreating; others, however, feared that their cities would be at the mercy of the enemy. After some debate, the Greeks decided to stay, and Leonidas and his 300 stood at the front. The rest of the Greeks were stationed behind Leonidas along the path, except one **corps**, the soldiers from Phocis. Phocis was the city closest to Thermopylae, and its soldiers were stationed on a mountain pass above the 300.

As the Persian king, Xerxes, approached Thermopylae, he sent a horseman ahead to survey the area. The horseman came to the section of the pass where the Spartans were preparing for battle. He could only see the 300 because the other Greeks were around a bend. The 300 appeared to be preparing for battle by practicing gymnastics and **beautifying** themselves. The horseman rode back to Xerxes and reported his findings. The emperor was delighted because he felt that these Greeks, who seemed more interested in looking handsome than in fighting, would not put up **resistance**. Xerxes marched his army to the entrance of the pass and waited for the 300 to retreat. After five days, however, Xerxes saw that the Spartans would not move and so decided to act. He sent some troops to fight the Spartans. A few hours afterwards, a messenger came back to ask for reinforcements. Xerxes sent more men, only to have many killed and others return wounded. He then ordered his Immortals, or expert soldiers, to attack. The Spartans lined up side by side in a row, their shields covering them from knees to chin. Because the Thermopylae pass was narrow, the Persians could not attack from either left or right. Some time later, the Immortals returned to Xerxes, defeated.

This fighting lasted one or two days until a Greek spy approached Xerxes. The spy told the emperor about a secret pass that would lead the Persian troops behind the Spartans. Xerxes was delighted with the news, and that night the Persian army set out. The soldiers advanced along the pass and then waited for Xerxes' orders. Meanwhile, Leonidas, having found out that the Persians had the advantage, ordered the rest of the Greeks to retreat, leaving him with his 300. When morning dawned, Leonidas moved along the pass to wait for the Persian army. Finally, the two groups met in a battle that left Leonidas and all 300 Spartans dead. When Xerxes identified Leonidas' body, he **decapitated** it and nailed the torso to a cross. Leonidas and his 300, however, gave Athens time to prepare. Due to their bravery, the Athenians were able to evacuate Athens. This city-state therefore kept its independence.

Source: Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998), *passim*.



Lesson 2

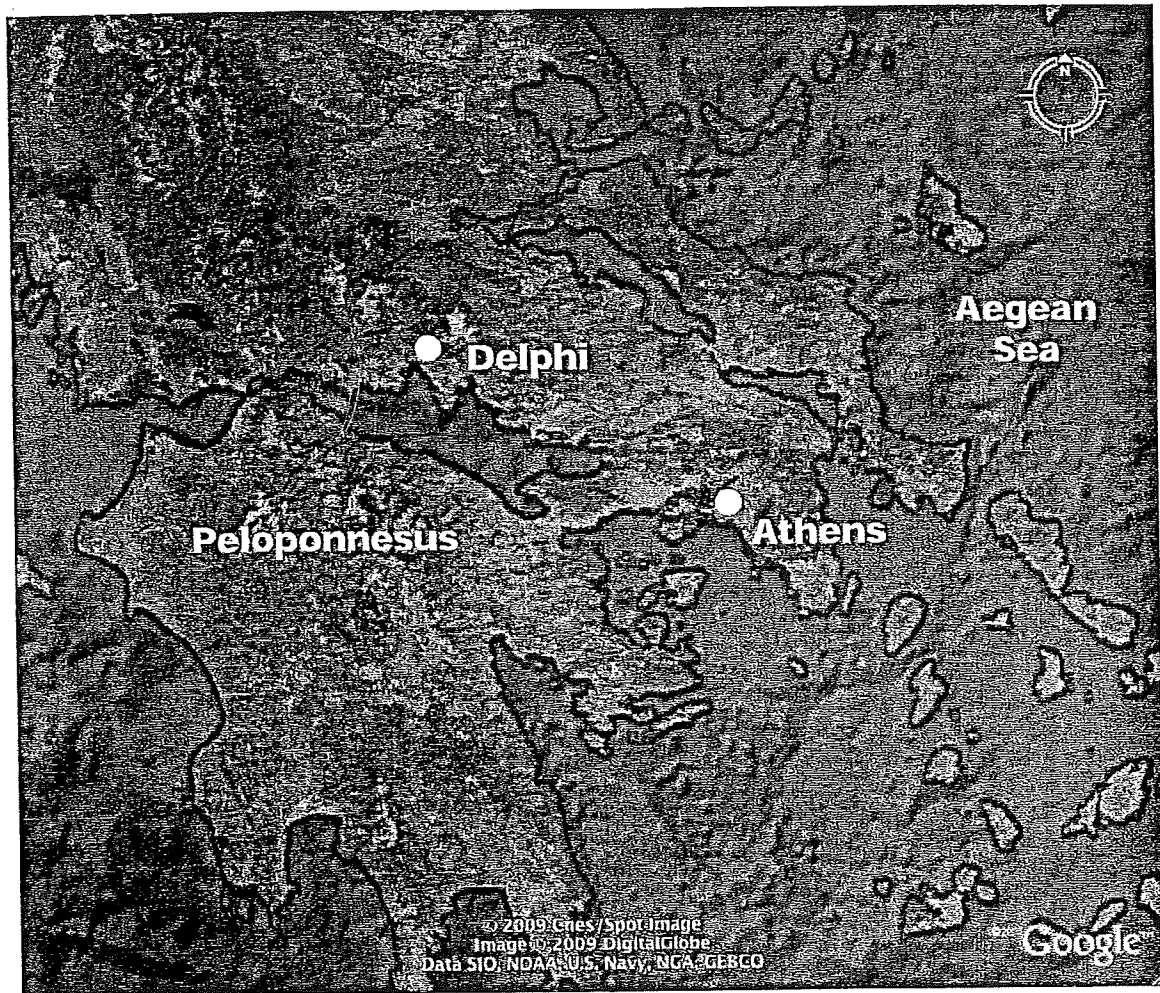
Student Handout 2.4—The Burning of Athens

Once the Persians had defeated the Greeks at Thermopylae, they marched north towards Athens. They attacked every city they encountered. They **plundered** the towns, and took everything they could from the inhabitants. Whatever they could not take, they destroyed. Not only were objects of value taken by the Persians, they also sought revenge by taking prisoners, enslaving them, and making them follow behind the army. After destroying several cities, the army split up, some soldiers continuing to Athens, the rest advancing on Delphi, a sacred town where the famous shrine with the **oracle** was located.

The Greeks believed that the **deity** Apollo often came to this mountain town and that it was under his special protection. Delphi was **renowned** throughout the ancient world for its beautiful architecture. It was especially famous because of the oracle, which could be consulted to learn about the future. It was believed that Apollo gave his prophecy, or oracle, speaking through the Pythia, a priestess. Ancient sources tell us that the Persians entered this marvelous city, but historians believe that much of the following account is legend. When the Persians neared the town, they thought to take its gold and silver and give the treasures to their king. Upon hearing that the Persians were near, the Delphians went to the temple and asked the deity through the Pythia if they should remove and hide the shrine's treasures. The oracle told them not to take the treasures and to protect themselves and their families. Consequently, the Delphians moved their families south and left only a military force to protect the city. When the Persians approached Delphi, a lightning bolt flashed from the sky, knocking boulders loose. The boulders rolled down the mountain, causing great confusion in the Persian ranks. The Delphian army was able to take advantage of the situation and, along with the ghosts of two Greek heroes, defeat the Persians. The Persians, in turn, retreated to rejoin Xerxes.

While his army fought at Delphi, Xerxes approached Athens. Meanwhile, the Athenians had also asked Apollo what to do about the Persians, and the oracle was, "While all else that lies within the borders of [Greece] is falling to the enemy, far-seeing Zeus gives you ... a wall of wood. Only this will stand intact and help you and your children." The Athenians returned to Athens to decode the meaning of the oracle. Themistocles, one of their generals, told the people to make their way to the sea coast, where they boarded ships. He was convinced that the oracle meant the wooden walls of a ship would protect them, while others believed the walls of the **citadel** would. As a result, some people stayed within the wooden walls of the citadel in the Acropolis (the high fortress on a hill) in Athens. When Xerxes arrived, he had no trouble taking over the city, which was deserted, except for the people who had locked themselves in the citadel. Xerxes and his army burned the city and then positioned themselves on a hill across from the citadel. They dipped the points of their arrows in **pitch** and set them on fire. The arrows flew towards the wooden walls, which were soon consumed by flames. Xerxes and his army waited until the walls turned to ash and then entered the citadel. They killed the Athenians within, took the treasures, and burned the rest of the fortress. Xerxes was **exuberant** and immediately sent messengers to Susa to tell the good news. He had finally taken revenge on the Athenians for rebelling against Darius, his father.

Source: Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998), *passim*.



Lesson 2

Student Handout 2.5—The Battle at Salamis

The Greek navy had been pushed back to the island of Salamis to get supplies. Xerxes, king of Persia, was **anxious** to defeat the Athenian fleet, and he felt he had them trapped. He called a meeting of his officers to receive advice. All of Xerxes' commanders agreed with their leader and told him that the Persian navy should attack the Greeks and destroy them. However, Artemisia, one of his commanders and a woman, advised him against this action. She felt that the Greek ships were superior to the Persian navy and that the Persians should wait until land reinforcements could come. King Xerxes did not listen to Artemisia. Instead, he decided to follow the advice of his other commanders.

Meanwhile, the Greek navy under the command of Themistocles stayed in a small, enclosed harbor. One day in September 480 BCE, Themistocles decided to send a messenger to Xerxes. The messenger told Xerxes that Themistocles wished to switch sides and give control of his navy to Persia. Xerxes had used Greek spies before and thought this might prove to be a great offer. He felt that with the Athenians on his side, he would be able to defeat the rest of the Greek navy. He sent his navy back to the Bay at Salamis to meet with the Athenians. He set his throne on a cliff overlooking the Bay of Salamis to watch as his navy encountered the Athenians. When the Persian ships sailed into the bay to meet the Athenians, however, the Greeks attacked them. The Greek warships, called triremes, were larger than the Persian vessels. The Persians were unable to get around the Greek navy and became trapped. They were rammed by the triremes, and their smaller ships were tossed about by a strong wind that swept across the bay. The Greek warships also trapped Artemisia's ship. Quickly, she developed a battle plan. She knew the only way she could escape with her crew would be to pretend she had switched sides. She ordered her ship to ram a fellow Persian ship in an attempt to flee the bay. Thinking she was an **ally**, the Greeks did not chase her. She was able to escape and save the lives of her crew. The rest of the Persian **admirals** fled the bay but were pursued by the Greeks who, in the end, destroyed half the Persian fleet.

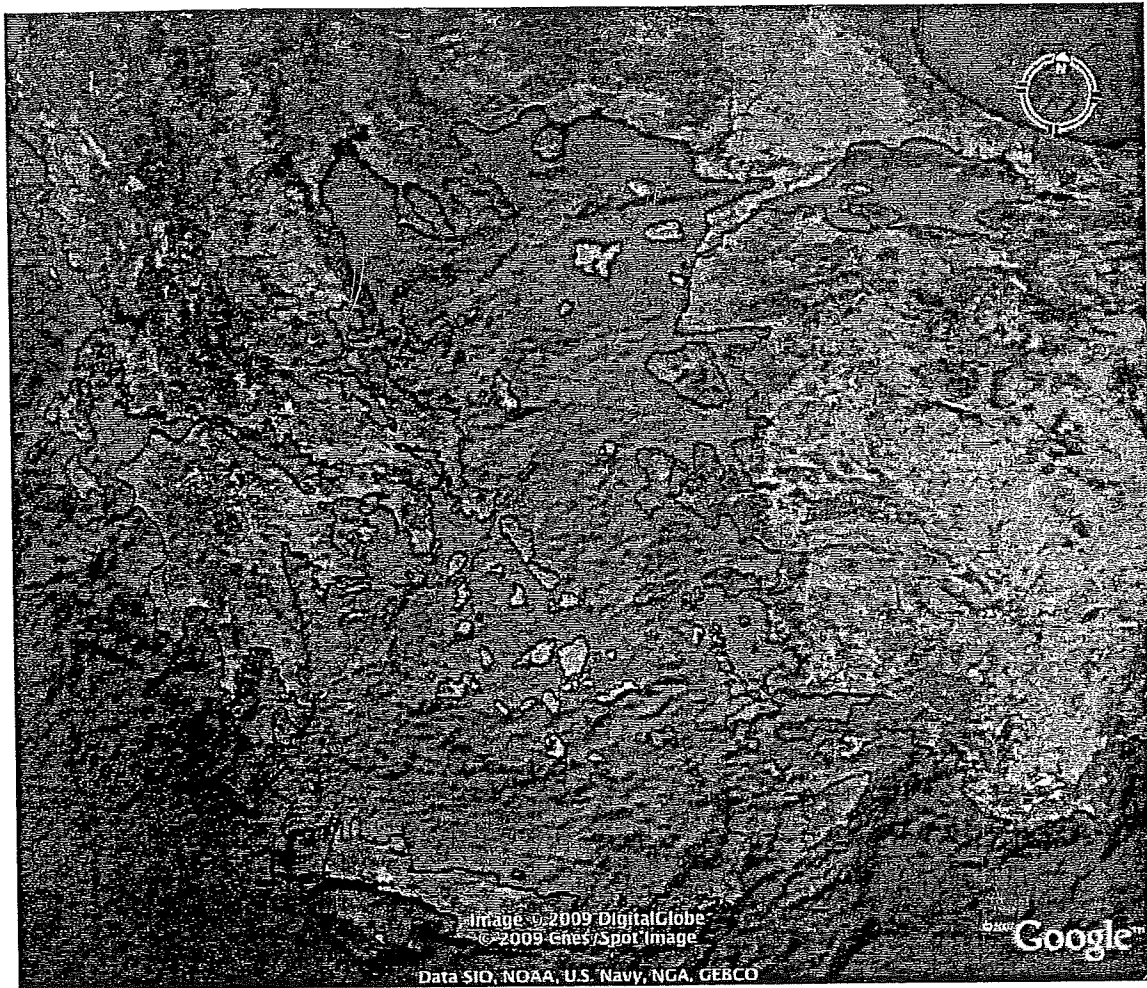
After this battle, Xerxes realized that the Greeks were going to be a difficult people to defeat. He called another meeting of his commanders to ask for advice. Mardonius, one of his most powerful commanders, urged Xerxes to continue fighting the Greeks or be judged a coward. After listening to all his male commanders, he specifically asked Artemisia for suggestions. She advised Xerxes to leave Greece. He had come to Greece, she argued, to **avenge** the defeat of his father, king Darius, at Marathon. Xerxes got his revenge by burning Athens and, she continued, he could now leave with justice done. If he feared being called a coward, he could leave Mardonius in Greece to continue fighting. If Mardonius lost, it would not matter because Xerxes had already avenged Darius. If Mardonius won, his victory would be credited to Xerxes, and Persia would gain control of Greece. Xerxes thought Artemisia's advice was brilliant and decided to leave the Persian forces under Mardonius and return to Persepolis. Mardonius was eventually defeated at Plataea. Although the Athenians had united with the Spartans during the Persian Wars, they went back to their old rivalries afterward. Eventually, they fought each other in the Peloponnesian War.

Source: Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998), *passim*.



Lesson 3

Student Handout 3.1—Map of the Aegean Sea Region



Lesson 3

Student Handout 3.2—Location and History

Location	Location diagram	Advantages for Persia	Disadvantages for Persia	Individuals involved	Strategies	Outcomes
Hellespont						
Thermopylae						
Athens						
Salamis						