**Document C: Ernle Bradford**

Other scholars and military historians have debated the size of the army — and of the navy — but the most realistic viewpoint seems to be that Herodotus confused the Persian term *myriarchs*, which meant the commander of 10,000 men, with the other named commanders who, in their lesser sphere, commanded no more than thousands or hundreds. (The Persians worked on the decimal system.) If one removes a nought from all of Herodotus’ figures one comes up with an army of 170,000 infantrymen, 8000 cavalry, 2000 camel corps and charioteers, and 30,000 Greeks and Thracians. This seems a far more likely figure in view of the populations (as far as they can be conjected) at the time. It would still make sense, in that it would nevertheless suggest to a Greek accustomed to battles involving at the most a few thousand men an almost inexhaustible flood of troops.

General Sir Frederick Maurice, who had the opportunity of covering the area of the march of the Great King not long after the First World War, came up with the conclusion that the total of the Persian army was about 210,000. Unlike most desk-bound scholars he had the opportunity to travel the whole area, and had excellent military and logistical knowledge of the terrain. He based his conclusions particularly on his observation of the water-supplies available. Maurice had also had experience of moving British military units together with animal transport, and he reckoned that such a force would probably have needed with them about 75,000 animals. Even at this, he reasons that what has sometimes been taken as an unbelievable comment by Herodotus, ‘except for the great rivers, their fighters drank the waters up’, was probably correct. A river, of course, unlike a pond or even a lake, cannot be drunk dry in one sense, for it is constantly being reinforced. One may also reasonably assume that the rivers in Asia Minor at the time were somewhat larger than they are today. Centuries of the ubiquitous goat, killing saplings, leading to deforestation, coupled with land changes in the earthquake-prone area of Turkey have certainly depleted the forests as well as interfering with natural water sources.

Nevertheless, working on whatever system one prefers, it seems that there is no possibility of the army of Xerxes having exceeded 250,000 men. Even this number, together with all their animals, baggage train and (possibly) camp followers, would have been sufficient to exhaust the water resources at a number of places along their route.

The figures which Herodotus gives for the invasion fleet of the Great King are again, like those of the army, subject to some doubt, although in this case they do bear more likelihood to reality. The Phoenicians, as was to be expected, provided the largest contingent, and it was almost certainly the most efficient. This is given as 300. The next largest contingent, 200, was that of the Egyptians, who specialised in having heavily armed parties of marines aboard their vessels. Cyprus produced 150 ships, Cilicia and Pamphylia between them 130, and Lycia and Caria 120. The Asian Greeks contributed a fighting force of 290 warships, the islands of the Cyclades 17, and in addition there were an estimated 120 triremes from the Thracian Greeks and the adjacent islands. This gives a grand total of 1327 warships, not counting the transport vessels of all and every size, which Herodotus again ‘estimates’ at about 3000.

***Source:*** *Ernle Bradford,* The Year of Thermopylae*, 1980.*