

THE SECOND INVASION

King Darius I died soon after the Battle of Marathon, but memories of the Persian defeat festered in the mind of his son, King Xerxes. In 480BC, Xerxes led another invasion into Greek territory - this time overland. To cross the Hellespont, a thin stretch of water separating Europe and Asia, Xerxes had his engineers construct two huge bridges, entirely from ships.

The first confrontation took place in a narrow mountain pass called Thermopylae. At first, a small army of Greeks was able to hold back the

Persian advance. But a Greek traitor showed the Persians a secret route around the pass.

Realizing there was no way out, Leonidas, the Spartan commander, stayed on with a small force to fight and be slaughtered, allowing the rest of the Greek army to flee to safety. It was one of the greatest, and most famous, gestures of self-sacrifice in ancient history.

The Persians then marched on an undefended Athens. Excited by their victory, they ran riot in the city, and looted and set fire to the Acropolis.

This monument at Thermopylae is to Leonidas, the Spartan commander who led the Greek army in the battle there.

This is a reconstruction of one of the boat bridges built by the Persians across the Hellespont.

