

ANCIENT HISTORY

Using primary and secondary sources and your own knowledge, assess Xerxes' ability as a leader.

Xerxes the Great was leader of the Persian Empire from 485 to 465 BC, a reign which, according to Herodotus, may have only occurred 'because of the immense power of Atossa' the daughter of Cyrus 'an Archmaenid'. Even though Xerxes was not in line for the throne 'there was not a man who, for stature and noble bearing, was more worthy than Xerxes to wield so vast a power'. During his reign Xerxes achieved many feats as a leader; quashing major revolts, leading the Persian Empire in the war against Greece and completing many engineering feats. Xerxes is well known for these military sanctions due to the little effect the Greek Wars had on his Empire but Xerxes leadership is also unobjectionable in other areas of leadership including the Palace of Persepolis, religious, administrative, economic, foreign policy, domestic policy and consolidation of the Persian Empire, however most sources a from the Persian Enemy of Greece Through his administration Xerxes leadership can be depicted as tolerant, accepting of each satrapies cultures and traditions, however there is also evidence, such as the Daeva Inscription, that contrasts this assessment of Xerxes' leadership. Other conspiracies such as the Harem Intrigue as well as the final years of his reign bring to light the negative aspects of Xerxes leadership such as gullibility and naivety among other characteristics.

Xerxes kingdom had strong domestic policy in the name of satrapies, the civil & military power divide as well as taxes, which made for an Empire that resided almost peacefully for many years. Xerxes domestic policy is the main piece of evidence that suggests Xerxes was a tolerant leader due to the ambiguity of religions, culture and traditions between satrapies. At the beginning of his reign Xerxes was faced with revolts from two regions of the Persian Empire, Egypt (486 BC) and Babylon (484 and 482 BC), which he aborted swiftly but equitably. The leadership style of Xerxes becomes evident from the beginning of his reign when he was immediately faced with these revolts. His intelligence is almost unfaultable as the more local the revolt was to the centre of the Empire the more harshly it was dealt with. Thus, Xerxes dropped the title of Pharaoh and the King of Babylon from his list of official titles and appointed his brother Achaemenes as Satrap of Egypt. In Babylon Xerxes appointed the general Megabyxus to lead the suppression and some temples and fortifications were destroyed. As well as this Xerxes may have stolen the great golden statue of Bel-Marduk and melted it down. Although this occurrence has not been proved, Xerxes leadership seems just and fair until this incident. However, this pandemonium was most likely tolerated because of the placement of satraps who were the 'protectors of the realm', some of whom were Xerxes family members or Persian nobles. This suggests that the King had 'ears and eyes' throughout the Empire consistently reporting on provincial affairs. Furthermore Xerxes separated the civil and military power between Satraps, resulting in a system where the military power could not restrain excessive civil power and vice versa thus preventing revolts. Furthering this, all Satraps and Garrisons reported directly to Xerxes himself. This equitable division of power was an intelligent instigation by Xerxes, revealing his wealth of knowledge regarding not only the management of the Empire but his functioning of his peoples. By placing Satraps throughout the Empire Xerxes may seem less liberal as he was persistently examining every move of most regions in the Empire, particularly Lydia, Egypt and Babylon. So, it arises that conceivably Xerxes 'tolerance' is only due to the security of his Satraps in every corner of his Empire but they did prove affective, an administrative positive in the name of his leadership. Logistically, Xerxes Satraps were also responsible for collecting taxes, raising military levies and administering justice. This system resulted in a long testing scheme for satrapies, that is, maintenance of culture may have depended on consistent contribution to the Empire. Tribute was the main way Persian Kings reinforced loyalty in the empire, reliefs in the Palace of Persepolis depicting men in a variety of costumes coming from all of over the empire. Thus, this clever and affective leadership in the area of administration allowed for Xerxes to have the largest and wealthiest Empire of ancient times and remain in his palace attending to greater matters, including foreign policy, i.e. the Greek Wars.

In regards to foreign policy, Xerxes main initiative was the Greek Wars in order to revenge Athens for the Ionian Revolt (499 – 493 BC) in addition to the secondary aim of sustaining the Persian tradition of expansion of the Empire. In paradox to his intended aims 'Xerxes at first was not at all interested in invading Greece but Mardonius was present in court and had more influence with Xerxes than anyone else in the country.' It was this persuasion that led the Persians into the War. 'There was not a nation in Asia that he did not take with him against Greece' and Xerxes cleverly put this to use, his preparations for the Greek Wars remaining unquestionable. The resources used for the campaign were sourced from different satrapies; some contributing cavalry while others contributed triremes, among other equipment. These resources as well as supply depots that were established from Thrace to Macedonia were utilized to best serve Xerxes in his campaign to destroy Athens. Supply depots, in conjunction with the navy to army support are just some examples of Xerxes venerable leadership and organisation skills. Aside from the logistical preparation of supplies and communications the engineering preparations to ensure the safest route to Greece were masterpieces of construction. The canal behind Mount Athos was built to avoid the dangers associated with the Chalcidice peninsula. It may have just been 'mere ostentation that made Xerxes have the canal dug...he wanted to show his power and to leave something to be remembered by' but this was not the only engineering feat which displays Xerxes power as a leader. Xerxes constructed two boat bridges across the Hellespont; the first was destroyed by a storm the latter surviving to be over 1500 metres long. When the first bridge was destroyed Xerxes proclaimed that 'the sea should receive 300 lashes with whips' for destroying his work. In contrast to the image of the tolerant King painted in the home land of Persia during the revolts and pre-Greek Wars, the Xerxes depicted during his foreign campaign may be seen as selfish, grandiose and arrogant.

During the Greek Wars Xerxes appeared at the Battles of Thermopylae, Artemisium and Salamis before he retreated, leaving Mardonius in command. The Battle of Thermopylae was a win for the Persians but Xerxes may not have won the battle honourably. From this position it was the desecration of Leonidas, the King of Sparta's body, that ostensibly portrays Xerxes as grandiose and arrogant in his leadership. Xerxes ordered for 'his head to be cut off and fixed on a stake'. Herodotus continues to state that 'In my opinion...the King Xerxes...would have never committed this outrage upon his own body,' which leads to the notion that perhaps Xerxes may not have been as tolerant as originally stipulated by his domestic policy. According to Herodotus the naval Battle of Artemisium was fought over the same three days as Thermopylae. The Battle was indecisive although the use of the *kyklos* on the Greek side did prove effective but the Persian numbers were still superior. 'Xerxes watched the course of the battle from the base of Mt Aegaleos' while his men were slaughtered, again depicting an arrogant leader and 'Xerxes was gone' by the end of this battle. When Xerxes left the Greek Wars and left Mardonius in charge the effectiveness of his leadership becoming evident. The Greek Wars did not affect his empire financially, as indicated by the Persepolis building program, or in terms of population due to the sheer size of the empire. Xerxes had successfully sustained the empire he inherited. By choosing to leave the wars at this time, Xerxes lucratively maintained foreign policy through Mardonius while attending to more diplomatic matters. Although the Battle of Plataea was lost once

Mardonius was killed, proving the end of the Persian campaign in the Greek Wars, the Persian Empire was still the largest and wealthiest Empire. Xerxes leadership again proves unobjectionable, as his Empire was still strong after the campaign, in all political and social notions. This suggests that Xerxes was a successful leader and his foreign policy at this time proved to be fruitful. In terms of the Greek Wars, as Persia decimated Athens twice it cannot necessarily be seen that the Persians lost the war and they do not record the war as a loss. As a leader Xerxes successfully planned and performed the tasks to carry out revenge upon Athens as well as provided strong leadership for his people. In contrast to the positive assessment of Xerxes leadership, AT Olmstead calls the Persian advance into Greece a 'military failure' but it appears from the preparations and the battles that the Persian campaign was not a failure. The Persian campaign was just surpassed by the Greek campaign due to their knowledge of geography and their close-combat weaponry.

Post Greek Wars, Xerxes foreign policy continued despite ideas that he may have become slightly introverted and focused on his building plan at Persepolis but Xerxes leadership skills appear sound

depicted by the Battle of Mycale until his death. The Battle of Mycale began the Delian League as Cimon established himself as a naval commander. Sestos was the first Greek state forced into the Delian League and the League reestablished control on the Ionian coast through the Battle on the Eurymedon River (469 BC). This battle not only ended Persian control on the Ionian coast but also in the entire Aegean. Although Xerxes had lost influence in the Aegean they were still perceived as a threat in the area, otherwise the Delian League would not have existed. Xerxes strong leadership in preserving his Empire provides one of the main reasons behind the Delian League, the Persian Empire was so well led that it was a threat despite all their losses. Furthering this, Xerxes can be seen as politically intelligent as he utilized the knowledge of Greek exiles such as Pausanias and Themistocles as his own inexperience towards Greek tactics and Greek geography was seen as his greatest military weakness. M.A. Dandamaev states that from this time on 'Xerxes found his attention taken by imperial events' as his brother Masistes led a revolt in Bactria but again Xerxes treated with this revolt swiftly and justly, exhibiting his strength as a tolerant leader. Plus, Xerxes did not abstain from tradition. Late in his reign Xerxes expanded his Empire as he is said to have conquered the Saka people near the Caspian Sea as well as a region called the Akaufaka locates in modern Afghanistan. Thus in the areas of leadership including administrative, political and military it appears that Xerxes was a sound leader as his empire was maintained and consolidated.

Despite the effective and strong leadership of Xerxes, as evident in his domestic policy, foreign policy and administration, the religious aspect of the Persian Empire is under speculation as no single religious denomination can be named for the Empire. The image of Xerxes as a tolerant leader is undone due to a stone tablet, formally known as the Daeva Inscription. The tablet was found naming a 'Sanctuary of Demons', which Historians such as Kent name as an alternate local religion in the Persian Empire. Thus Xerxes states at Persepolis "I destroyed the Sanctuary of the Demons and I made proclamation, 'the demons shall not be worshipped!'" This leads to the notion that Xerxes was trying to impose the worship Ahura Mazda as a national religion therefore unifying the Empire. In terms of leadership a national religion may enhance the unity of the empire, particularly considering the size of the empire. However, in contradiction to this a national religion is not tolerant of all the satrapies in the empire, which could lead to revolt. At Persepolis, many reliefs picture men in all costumes, from all corners of the empire paying tribute to the Great King. Disturbing this peace may have been detrimental to his reign. The Place of Persepolis further instigates the power Xerxes had over his people, the best piece of propaganda the King had. The Palace intimates that the Achaemenids need not prove themselves to anyone. Xerxes added his own palace, the central building, the hall of 100 columns and completed the Apadana which was started by his father, all of which would have cost an immeasurable amount. Tablets at Persepolis name the wine and gold given to the imported specialists. The sheer size is the main attribute to the power of the building program instigated by King Xerxes, but the reliefs within show the power that Xerxes leadership skills had in his empire. The bas-relief that appears most often in Persepolis is 'the king followed by attendants with parasol and king whisk'. This indicates the constant attention that the King had plus Persepolis was only a summer palace but even so, tents frequented around the palace, Xerxes followers were a steady tribute to his leadership, loyalty and power. But, as with any leader there is always a level of court conspiracy within the Palace. It appears that Xerxes was no stranger to such deception. Herodotus describes the 'harem intrigue' in which Xerxes' wife Amestris cut the 'breasts, nose, ears and lips' of Xerxes' brother's wife when she suspected her of setting up her daughter with the King. Xerxes knew that Amestris would act so irrationally and stood by, cowardly doing nothing. This naivety continues when subsequent conspiracies developed with Artabanos, the chief chamberlain and Megabyxos. This of course led to this demise when Artabanos, Megabyxos and Artaxerxes combined to murder Xerxes, Artaxerxes eventually taking the throne. These foolish acts, although vaguely recorded depict a King who appears gullible and again naïve by allowing himself to become encapsulated in court scandal. This however, did not affect the empire as a whole, apart from Masistes threatening to lead a revolt in Bactria, which was quashed by Xerxes, again demonstrating his sound military skills.

In the words of AT Olmstead Xerxes 'was no worse than any other of the ancients', which summarises the leadership of Xerxes as there were both positive and negative aspects to his reign. He led Persia through the Greek Wars from Thermopylae onwards and administered a successful

Empire during his reign, his military, administration and political skills proving sound. However, his arrogance in the Greek Wars is present in Herodotus *The Histories* but his domestic policy seems to suggest that he was humble in his treatment of his own people. Modern historians present Xerxes as a weak, cowardly and naïve leader who knew little of military leadership. The ambiguity in his leadership and personality is evident through his policy on religion and his actions in court conspiracies, which subsequently led to his demise. Still, Xerxes fortified an empire, which successfully achieved revenge upon Athens and existed calmly for the twenty-one years of his reign despite his faults in leadership, court politics, religious policy and some aspects of military leadership.