

Name _____

Date _____

The Persian Empire

Use the text to answer each question below.

1. Zoroastrianism was the official religion of the Persian Empire. Zarathustra, the founder of Zoroastrianism, was a contemporary or near-contemporary of Cyrus the Great and Darius I. He was a prophet who had visions of a deity named Ahura Mazda, and was one of the first to propose that there was only one god. Zarathustra's philosophy was strongly based on a duality between good and evil—that the world was created for these two forces to battle and that goodness, embodied by Ahura Mazda, will ultimately triumph. Many religious scholars have noted similarities between Zoroastrianism and key Hindu scriptures, many of which were written around the same time that Zoroastrianism emerged. Today, only a small number of people in India and Iran continue to practice the faith. But its legacy lives on in holidays like Nowruz, or the Persian New Year, which marks one of the holiest days in the ancient Zoroastrian calendar.

Zoroastrianism was { }.

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| A. based on a belief in one god | B. based on the teachings of Cyrus the Great |
| C. very different from Hinduism | D. not widely practiced in the Persian Empire |

2. The First Greco-Persian War began in 490 BCE, when Persian forces landed in the coastal Athenian town of Marathon. Despite fighting a much larger army, the Greeks eventually won. The concept of a marathon—a 26.2-mile run—comes from this time, as a Greek messenger ran the 26 miles to Athens to tell the city of the victory before he collapsed and died. Most soldiers standing on their feet were no match for the Persian cavalry, or mounted warriors, who attacked not only with horses but with bows and arrows as well—the same technique that the armies of Attila the Hun and Genghis Khan would later use so devastatingly. To counter that, the Greeks developed the hoplites, a type of foot soldier. These soldiers had large shields and long spears and would group themselves very closely together in what is known as a phalanx formation. When the Persian cavalry came charging in, the hoplites would raise their weapons at an angle, creating a virtual wall of spears.

Greek hoplites were { }.

- | | |
|--|--|
| A. strong matches for Persia's cavalry | B. soldiers who fought on horseback |
| C. soldiers who fought without weapons | D. not well-trained or organized in battle |

3. The Second Persian War began 10 years later, when Darius's son Xerxes wanted revenge on the Greeks. Xerxes built up the Persian army even more. The famed Greek historian Herodotus wrote that Xerxes's army, which comprised some two million men, would drink entire rivers dry. Xerxes ordered attacks by land and sea against a coalition of Greek cities, including the Athenians, Spartans, and Corinthians. Amazingly, a scrappy group of Greek warriors was able to fight off the giant army that had conquered all of the Middle East. Most famously, a group of 300 Spartans held off thousands of Persian soldiers at Thermopylae, a narrow passage between cliffs. When one Spartan heard that the Persians were so numerous that their arrows would “blot out the sun,” he replied, “Then we will fight in the shade.” Even today, “in the shade” is the motto of a division in the Greek army.

Which of the following best describes the Greeks’ victory at Thermopylae?

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| A. An expected defeat of the Persians | B. An easy defeat of a weak enemy |
| C. Only a partial victory | D. A surprising show of bravery |