

READING

Cornélius Nepos (ca. 100–ca. 25 BCE) wrote a book of short biographies about famous Greeks, and some Romans, entitled *Dē virīs illūstribus* (“About famous men”). Nepos’s style is simple, and his open-minded attitude is apparent in the preface to *Dē virīs illūstribus*, in which he refuses to condemn certain Greek customs that were not approved of by the Romans.

Here is a passage adapted from Nepos’s life of Themistocles, the Athenian leader whose cunning strategy not only helped to advance Athens to leadership in the Greek world in the fifth century BCE, but also helped the united forces of the Greek cities to defeat the immense invasion of Greece by the Persian king Xerxes in 480 BCE. Xerxes had come to Greece with so many soldiers that legend says they drank the rivers dry . . .

THEMISTOCLĒS GRAECŌS SERVAT

- 1 Themistoclēs est Athēniēnsium dux et homō valdē callidus. Xerxēs rēx
Persārum contrā Graecōs bellum cum magnā industriā parāre dīcitur.
Xerxēs multōs mīlitēs et multās nāvēs habet et cum multīs virīs armātīs
ad Graeciam nāvīgat. Athēniēnsēs bellum timent et ōrācula Pŷthiae
5 petere dēcernunt. Pŷthia Delphīs habitat et cōnsilia Apollinis
hominibus dat. Pŷthia haec verba Athēniēnsibus in templō Delphicō
dīcit: “Athēniēnsēs mūrīs ligneīs servārī possunt.” Sōlus Themistoclēs
sē cōnsilium Apollinis intellegere putat. Mūrōs ligneōs esse nāvēs dīcit.
Athēniēnsēs verba Themistoclis esse bona putant. Ā terrā suā fugiunt,
10 sed multās nāvēs aedificant. Tunc nāvēs Persārum magnā fortitūdine
oppugnant et Persās vincunt. Athēniēnsēs timōre liberantur.

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