



Thermopylae: The Battle That Changed the World

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In 480 BC, a huge Persian army, led by the inimitable King Xerxes, entered the mountain pass of Thermopylae as it marched on Greece, intending to conquer the land with little difficulty. But the Greeks—led by King Leonidas and a small army of Spartans—took the battle to the Persians at Thermopylae, and halted their advance—almost.

It is one of history's most acclaimed battles, one of civilization's greatest last stands. And in Thermopylae, renowned classical historian Paul Cartledge looks anew this history-altering moment and, most impressively, shows how its repercussions have bearing on us even today. The invasion of Europe by Xerxes and his army redefined culture, kingdom, and class. The valiant efforts of a few thousand Greek warriors, facing a huge onrushing Persian army at the narrow pass at Thermopylae, changed the way generations to come would think about combat, courage, and death.

Thermopylae: The Battle That Changed the World Details

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From Reader Review Thermopylae: The Battle That Changed the World for online ebook

Lyn says

Great book for fans of 300 or just a history buff.

I liked it so much I felt compelled to order a Greek salad for lunch.

Héctor Rafael says

Una excelente lectura para una persona, como yo, que quiere adentrarse en la temática de las Guerras Médicas. Cartledge nos acerca a los hechos de la perspectiva de Heródoto [principal referencia histórica en el tema] pero también nos explica el contexto sociocultural del mismo Heródoto, dando así consistencia al relato bélico. Lectura que desmitifica el "greco-centrismo" pero que también nos entusiasma a los amantes de la cultura helénica.

También gusta leer las reflexiones del autor, que no solo describe hechos, sino los explica y opina al respecto.

Christina Baehr says

Not rating this because I didn't read it properly, just mined it for information. I wanted to understand the cultural importance of Thermopylae, as I'm teaching my daughters ancient history this year, going into classical history next year, and this was an IMPORTANT BATTLE.

To be honest with you, I'm not sure I totally understand the significance that is placed on it. I get the appeal of a tragic, courageous stand of a small city-state against a massive empire, really I do. But given the choice, and going on the information I have thus far, I would really rather live in the Persian Empire than in Sparta.

This was quite surprising to me, as I had assumed more of a good guy/bad guy set-up from the big crush that the British had on the Spartans.

However, the Spartans really were the pits, in my opinion. Yes, a lot of ancient civilisations practiced infant exposure, but not to the bureaucratic-statist-eugenicist extreme to which the Spartans carried it. Also, freedom was really not an ideal in their civilisation - perhaps freedom from foreign (Persian) control, but the concept of Freedom as a person living today (in a world shaped by Christianity) would understand it would have been loathsome to them.

Also, as a woman, give me the Persians any day of the week. For instance, Persian men dined with Persian women, the king took his close female relations on campaign with him. They valued women's work and influence. The Spartans despised craftsmanship/domesticity/nurturing of any kind and forbade their women to participate in it -- one reason that they had to enslave an entire under-class to do all that stuff for them.

Well, I guess if the women weren't allowed to get to know their kids then they wouldn't care so much when the head bureaucrat threw some of them into the handy nearby ravine. Probably made the whole warrior-schoolboy pederasty thing a lot easier, too.

The whole Hitler-Sparta connection is starting to make more sense.

...Am I being too harsh?

Olethros says

-Sobre las culturas y políticas implicadas, aunque también sobre la batalla.-

Género. Ensayo.

Lo que nos cuenta. El libro Termópilas (publicación original: Thermopylae. The Battle That Changed the World, 2006), con el subtítulo La batalla que cambió el mundo, es una aproximación a Lacedemonia (Esparta, para que nos entendamos mejor, seguro...) y al Imperio aqueménida, a las Guerras Médicas que enfrentaron a los persas con las ciudades-estado de la Antigua Grecia y a la batalla de las Termópilas en concreto.

¿Quiere saber más de este libro, sin spoilers? Visite:

<http://librosdeolethros.blogspot.com....>

Bernardo says

Two books in one.

What begins as historical journalism with enviable depth and analysis, slowly shifts into an analysis on modern day politics. This, in itself, isn't a bad deal if the analysis were to be adequate. But the shift is so abrupt that the book becomes unreadable for those who aren't interested in said battle.

Such a break in its own discourse leads this book astray and it doesn't manage to recover. Which is, sadly, a pity.

Kate Irwin-smiler says

After seeing 300 last spring I read Stephen Pressfield's Gates of Fire, and now I'm on the non-fiction version. This is a professional historian's view of not just the Battle of Thermopylae itself, but the context of the Greek and Persian worlds it fit into. The text is slow-going and tedious in moments, and very little of the book is devoted to the battle (one 10 page chapter, among 200+ pages). That said, it's great background on the political maneuverings between the Greek city states and Graeco-Persian relations as a whole. If you want the real story, this is not a bad place to go. Just don't expect a gripping read.

Gerry says

Strength in effort if not in numbers. A coalition based not on politics or political co-operation but of an alliance for mutual defense – sworn in by oaths in the name of witnessing gods. The importance here being that this pact is religious and a breach would be sacrilegious to include a sectarian transgression. More than 31 Greek cities formed this alliance – the leaders of this forthcoming battle of the time would be the Lacedaemonians or better known collectively as the Spartans. Leonidas and Xerxes; both leaders being respected by their lands and abilities. Leonidas is the one however that gets recalled to history more (seemingly) than Xerxes. Leonidas is not remembered for the “win” of the battle; but, for the “loss” of the same and the bravery to which he and the “300” fought to the death. The famous “300” (though the correct number is 298) as two survived; one commits suicide (Pantites) and the other (Aristodamus) is shamed for a year that leads up to the Battle of Plataea. As Aristodamus ends up fighting with a suicidal fury (his black mark had been removed before this battle began) he was looking to avenge his Spartan failure in Thermopylae and ends up being cut down in Plataea. He is awarded no special honors for this effort as he fought beyond the constraints of the disciplined manner that Spartans were known for at the time.

This book is highly academic in my opinion. It was a pleasure to read as it makes other books of other wars and battles by other authors that much easier to get through. My favorite phrase in this book is attributed to Socrates “the unexamined life is not worth living for a human being”. Professor Cartledge certainly has a passion for this topic within these pages, the review of current day photos of various artifacts now in several museums around the globe was nothing less than outstanding – this photos in my opinion brought the story to life for a very real time frame to History and Military History specifically. Where would we be today without the recorded history of Herodotus? His accounts were instrumental in this book and for the history of the Spartan “300”. We learn of many cultural norms of the BCE era to which this book covers; however, we also see a link to us here now through the ages. This is the first account and record of an Alliance ever established and something the Romans and all nations going forward would employ.

Simply a terrific wonderful book that every person who is interested History and Battles and Wars should pick up and read.

Martin Hernandez says

Si me animé a comprar este libro fue porque quería saber más sobre los hechos históricos comprobados, más allá de la dramática versión de los cómics de **Frank MILLER**, y en la contratapa de esta versión dice:

"La descripción que hace CARTLEDGE de la batalla tiene una especial intensidad y fuerza.
Una excepcional recreación de uno de los acontecimientos seminales de la historia del mundo"

...bueno, ya terminé de leerlo, ¡y sigo sin encontrar dicha descripción!, lo que me enseña una vez más que no debería creer todo lo que dicen las contratapas de los libros :(

En realidad, **Paul CARTLEDGE**, un historiador profesional que se ha especializado en la cultura helénica, se concentra en analizar el contexto de la batalla, desde los antecedentes culturales 100 años antes de la

misma, la situación política entre el Imperio Persa y la liga de naciones que conformaba lo que ahora conocemos como Grecia, hasta el impacto que ha tenido en el mundo moderno. A la batalla en sí se le dedica un capítulo (el 7) que abarca escasas 16 páginas de las 345 del libro.

El texto, escrito en el estilo académico, riguroso y saturado de referencias a otras fuentes bibliográficas, propio de los investigadores universitarios, resulta tedioso, y hace difícil la lectura. Yo me aburrí enormemente y sin pena confieso que me saltaba párrafos y párrafos de reflexiones sobre las sutilezas políticas que hacían que cierta ciudad griega apoyara o no a los persas, o a sus compatriotas...

En resumen, si lo que quieras es un relato emocionante, pero apegado a los hechos comprobados, de la mítica Batalla de las Termópilas, éste no es el libro. Para entender el vasto contexto cultural y tener una opinión educada de la política greco-persa, el contexto y las consecuencias de la batalla, ¡éste es tu libro!.

Steven Peterson says

This is an interesting book to read--and a pretty quick read, too. It is the story of Thermopylae, where King Leonidas and the Spartan 300 stood against Xerxes' mighty host at a narrow pass. Ultimately, they were betrayed by another Greek, and Xerxes sent troops by a narrow pathway to outflank the Spartan position. In the end, the Spartans died and the massive army--and accompanying naval force--moved toward Athens and defeat at Salamis to the naval forces of the allied Greek city-states. Cartledge identifies the Persian-Greek War as critical in the development of western civilization. He notes that this was (page xii): ". . . a clash between Freedom and Slavery. . . . In fact, the conflict has been plausibly described as the very axis of world history." I am not sure how convincingly that the case is actually made, but it indicates the importance of the battle in Cartledge's mind.

First, there are some very useful maps that help one understand the geography of the battle, as well as the pathway taken by Xerxes in his invasion of Greece.

Second, the book begins by looking at the world scene before the battle even began. He outlines the ancient world at about 500 BC, including the development of the Persian Empire (and the Achaemenidean dynasty, featuring kings such as Cyrus the Great, the unfortunate Cambyses, Darius, and Xerxes). He also describes the dynamic and unsettled nature of the Greek city-states and the colonies that they planted throughout the Mediterranean. A considerable emphasis, of course, is placed on the culture and polity of Sparta, explaining, in part, why the 300 were ready to die. The book argues that Leonidas and the soldiers under him knew that they were to die. He likens them to others who fought, knowing that death was inevitable (e.g., kamikaze pilots).

Third, the battle itself. It is somewhat disconcerting to have him depend so much on Herodotus' rendering of the story. However, he weaves in much detail on the actual geography of the battle site, the cultural background, and so on.

Fourth, and an interesting effort in itself, he discusses the impact of the battle on history and culture, including a listing of movies related to the battle and the political side of some of these movies. The final chapter returns to his theme that the battle--and the entire Persian-Greek War--represents a "turning-point in world history" (the subtitle of the chapter). He concludes with a quotation from William Golding, Nobel laureate, who, after having visited the battleground, said (page 211): "A little of Leonidas lies in the fact that I can go where I like and write what I like. He contributed to set us free."

Again, I am not sure how strong that case is, since Thermopylae was a defeat; it would appear that subsequent naval combat at Salamis and a disastrous defeat of the Persians by the Greeks at Platea were more important events (and one wishes that the author had discussed even briefly that battle as well as Salamis, to understand better the totality of the war). All in all, though, a nice volume on the Greek world of its time.

Jennifer (JC-S) says

I have mixed views about this book. On one level, I thoroughly enjoyed the background information and Professor Cartledges's views about the context for and consequences of the battle. I also enjoyed reading why he considered this to be a battle that changed the world. This book does not spend much time on the battle itself - which makes sense but may well disappoint some readers.

Alas, I am not sure that I fully share his conclusions. Especially not when the events of September 11, 2001 and July 7, 2005 are referred to.

If people read this book (and it is well worth exploring) then I would urge them to question the reasoning behind the conclusions.

Ray S says

Writing doesn't get any more tedious than this. I picked up the book with great expectation of a good read about a fascinating topic, but this writer's range falls far short of "fascinating." Pedantic, contorted, clumsy, awkward --- these words only hint at the author's inability to write clear, understandable, informative passages. After a few pages I began to skip a few paragraphs at a time, then whole pages, then began skipping whole chapters, as the only way to end the misery of enduring this so-called writer's painful lack of talent. Skip it, you'll be glad you did.

Faye says

I'm so disappointed that I have to DNF this book. I have had this sitting on my bookshelf since 2007; I bought it immediately after watching the brilliant *300* at the cinema when I decided I wanted to learn more about the Spartans and that period of history. I was finally going to tick this one off the list in 2018 but actually, I'm just not interested in reading it at all any more. It's been gathering dust on my shelves for eleven years and I found myself bored after one chapter so I'm afraid it's time to let it go and donate it to a charity shop.

Chris says

If you're a nut for ancient history, or if you were wondering about how close Frank Miller got with 300, this is the book for you. But it's not for the casual reader, so be warned. There's a lot of information that comes at you quickly, all leading you towards understanding more about the famous battle of Thermopylae and why it's still significant 2500 years later.

For those of you who don't know - Thermopylae is a narrow pass that runs north-south into Greece and any invader who feels like making headway pretty much has to pass through it. These days it's pretty broad, but in the time of the Spartans, it was only about 14 meters wide. And it was here that 300 Spartans and nearly 5,000 warriors from other Greek provinces held off the much larger forces of the invading King Xerxes. While the Greeks did eventually lose the battle, their bravery and self-sacrifice has resonated through history.

But how did this happen? Cartledge does a quick round-up of all the forces in play at the time, giving brief descriptions of Spartan society, the rise of the Persian Empire, and ever-fluctuating Greek politics. He paints a much more complex picture of the events than you get from films, mainly because Cartledge is an historian and Frank Miller is a storyteller. Two very different responsibilities. He then goes on to look at how the battle has been remembered, both in ancient and modern times.

It's a really neat book, and offers a lot more layers to a story that most people don't actually know much about. The Spartans were lovers of freedom, for example, but only their own. They weren't so concerned about the Helot slaves who made their warrior lifestyle possible. And Xerxes was not a totalitarian monster who held himself as a God among men. The Persian Empire was a heterogeneous one, and while not exactly the Land of the Free, it wasn't as horrible a place as it is presented to be.

History is a tricky beast, especially once Hollywood gets its hands on it. Enjoy.

Jose Marquez says

Excelente documentación de las Termopilas. Ya había leído varias novelas que mencionan esta batalla y la verdad quería algo leer algo acerca de la historia.

Carol Vuillemenot says

If you are a student of history, this one is five stars. I gave it three stars because the book was difficult to read because it is written by a British professor. I used the glossary often. Some of the terminology and the Latin or French quotes were beyond me and I couldn't always get the meanings from the context.

However, I recommend reading the book just to learn why the Battle of Thermopylae, though a defeat, quickly became a morale victory, and why the Spartans, though taking a suicidal stand, emphasized the Spartan values of devotion to competition and a devotion to the ideal of freedom.
