



Beyond the Gates of Fire: New Perspectives on the Battle of Thermopylae

Christopher Matthew, Matthew Trundel

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The Battle of Thermopylae in 480 BC is one of the most famous battles in history. The heroism of the 300 Spartans who opted to remain behind to face the full might of the Persian host while their Greek allies made good their escape has become the stuff of legend. The story still inspires novelists and film-makers today (Frank Miller's fanciful 300 was a huge hit in 2007 and the film rights to Steven Pressfield's more historical novel Gates of Fire were bought by George Clooney, the film expected to finally surface in 2011 or 2012). But what is the truth behind the legends and why was this bloody defeat immediately accorded a halo of glory that has endured for nearly two-and-a-half millennia?

Beyond the Gates of Fire brings together experts on the classical period from Australia, New Zealand and the United States to take a fresh look at various aspects of the battle. A substantial introductory section by the editors outlines the background to the conflict as well as the arms, armor and fighting styles of the opposing sides. The following chapters (9 of them) then discuss such questions as whether the defense of the pass really was a suicide mission; the exact topography of the battlefield itself in 480 BC, using the latest geological research and core samples; the impact of the battle on the Greek psyche; commemoration of the war dead; the impact of the original battle on the conduct of later battles in the pass, right up to the German invasion of 1941. For the classical scholar or the general reader whose interest has been piqued by the popular books and films, this book is sure to shed refreshing new light on the most famous last stand in history.

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