

2007

300

Drew Brasfield

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.library.uab.edu/vulcan>



Part of the [History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Brasfield, Drew (2007) "300," *Vulcan Historical Review*: Vol. 11, Article 16.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.library.uab.edu/vulcan/vol11/iss2007/16>

This content has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator of the UAB Digital Commons, and is provided as a free open access item. All inquiries regarding this item or the UAB Digital Commons should be directed to the [UAB Libraries Office of Scholarly Communication](#).

300, Snyder, Zach. Warner Bros. 2006

Drew Brasfield

In the 5th Century B.C., Xerxes I inherited the Persian throne as king from his father, Darius I. Along with becoming King of Persia, Xerxes also inherited some unfinished business: the conquest of Greece. Darius was unsuccessful in his invasion of Greece, which ended with a Greek victory at the Battle of Marathon in 490 B.C. Shortly after the first Persian War, Darius died and Xerxes began preparing his own invasion of Greece to avenge the failure of his father. This sets the stage for the events in the movie *300*, where a small group of brave Spartan hoplite warriors, assisted by other Greeks, held off a vastly larger Persian army at Thermopylae in northern Greece. Although the small group eventually perished, the act is significant since by delaying the Persian army, the Spartans and their allies were able to give the rest of mainland Greece the opportunity to prepare for war. Subsequently, the Greeks were able to win at the Battle of Salamis a month later and finally at the Battle of Platea in 479 B.C.; ending the Greco-Persian wars. Furthermore this event is significant since if the Persians had conquered Greece, Greek civilization would likely have been wiped out and its influence on western civilization would have been non-existent. Although largely speculative, the western world as we know it may have developed very differently without the sacrifice of the Spartans, and subsequently, Greek victory over the Persians. Imagine today's world without democracy, Greek architecture and mythology, or the modern Olympic games. These are only a few contributions from ancient Greek civilization. The significance of the three hundred Spartans is that without their stand at Thermopylae, these contributions might not have lived on into the modern world.

The film *300* largely focuses on the Spartans themselves and the theme of their bravery in battle and refusal to surrender, despite certain death. The film begins when the Spartans learn about the impending Persian invasion and set out for Thermopylae. The site of Thermopylae is important historically and in the film, since the site is a narrow passage and the only path to mainland Greece. Any invading force would have to travel this path, but unfortunately for the Persians, its size and terrain make it easy for a small force to defend. The Greeks were aware of this and knew it would be the ideal place to hold the Persians long enough for other Greek city-states to prepare for battle. Despite certain doom, King Leonidas and his three hundred Spartans were determined to stand

against the Persians until their last breath. This act is a fascinating reflection of Spartan culture, where military defeat was not an option. To Spartans, it was preferable to die on the battlefield than return home a failure. This is where the legend of King Leonidas and the three hundred Spartans began and also what inspired movies like *300*.

While the film's basic plot is largely historically accurate, some aspects of Greek culture and history were unfortunately sacrificed for the sake of Hollywood storytelling. While the tough and militaristic nature of the Spartans was given due, it was actually very overdone. Rather than being portrayed as stoic and authoritarian, the Spartans were painted as a bunch of grunting Hollywood muscle men. More specifically throughout the film, Spartans talk about "freedom" and "liberty" as their reasons for fighting the Persians. This is misleading since the Spartans were extremely totalitarian and personal freedom was highly restricted in ancient Sparta. Furthermore, Spartan society was extensively supported by a massive population of slaves, known as "helots." The Spartans may have been fighting for the autonomy of their own city-state, but they were definitely not fighting for freedom and liberty as the film *300* portrays. The most absurd distortion of history in this film is when King Leonidas makes a macho snide remark about Athenian philosophers and refers to them as "boy lovers." While some Athenians, like many other Greeks, did engage in homosexuality and pedophilia, the Spartans were no exception. In fact, homosexuality and pedophilia were institutionalized in the Spartan army and training camp, the Agoge. The various historical inaccuracies in the film, which range from irrelevant to ridiculous, may be explained by that the film is based on a graphic novel, or comic book, which depicts the same story. So rather than the film being directly inspired by history itself, one could say it is a distortion of another distortion of history. This unfortunately leaves many opportunities for historical fact to fly out the window in favor of better entertainment.

300 is indeed entertaining since it depicts an important event in the history of western civilization as well as the legendary bravery of King Leonidas and the three hundred Spartans. If you like watching ancient armies slaughter each other supported by dazzling visual effects, you might like this film. If you are expecting a historically accurate depiction of the Spartans and the values that made them unique, honorable, and ferocious; you will probably be disappointed. The film is large on cliché Hollywood story-telling, but small on historical accuracy. *300* seeks to honor the courage of King Leonidas and his three hundred Spartans but fails to do them proper justice for their contribution to history.