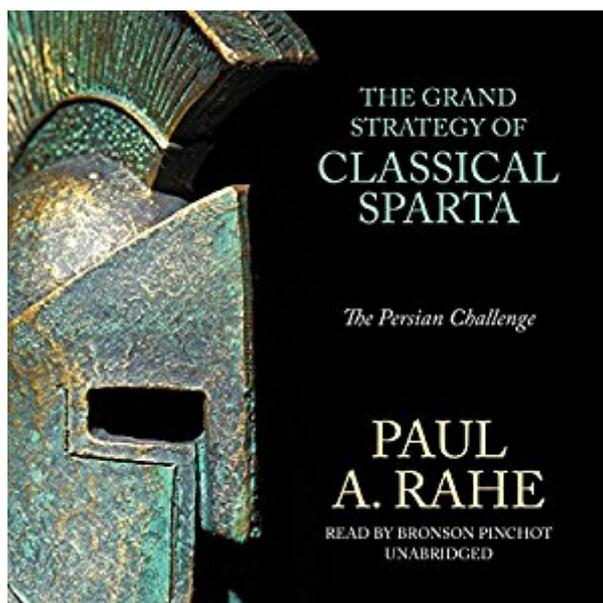


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The Grand Strategy Of Classical Sparta: The Persian Challenge



Synopsis

More than 2,500 years ago, a confederation of small Greek city-states defeated the invading armies of Persia, the most powerful empire in the world. In this meticulously researched study, historian Paul Rahe argues that Sparta was responsible for the initial establishment of the Hellenic defensive coalition and was, in fact, the most essential player in its ultimate victory. Drawing from an impressive range of ancient sources, including Herodotus and Plutarch, the author veers from the traditional Athenocentric view of the Greco-Persian Wars to examine from a Spartan perspective the grand strategy that halted the Persian juggernaut. Rahe provides a fascinating, detailed picture of life in Sparta circa 480 BC, revealing how the Spartans' form of government and the regimen to which they subjected themselves instilled within them the pride, confidence, discipline, and discernment necessary to forge an alliance that would stand firm against a great empire, driven by religious fervor, that held sway over two-fifths of the human race.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

My other option was to give this brief book 3 stars to warn off general readers (which would have been fair to those readers who like their history well written but draw a line about, for want of a better word, background). Mr. Rahe is a real scholar who can write very well, and even write movingly. He wants to explain why and how moves were made by the Persians, the Spartans, and the Athenians. To do that, and do it honestly requires time because he has to deal with not with two, but three very different cultures. Without that long ramp up, which pop-military-history buffs

apparently don't enjoy very much, readers can't begin to understand moves made by any of those three cultures without knowing how the double kings came about. Nor can they understand how Themistocles in Athens maneuvered the political minefields as he did dealing with Sparta and other city-states, in order to build a fleet essentially from scratch, and also learned how to use a fleet a on the fly. The Persian culture is respected and he gives the reader an understanding of how Darius and Xerxes operated, and probably how they felt about Greek cultures. So the military narration itself is comparatively brief. But it became exciting even to me who certainly knew the basics of what was going to happen before I began to read it. I recommend it to people who know very little about the Persian wars because Mr Rahe writes very clearly, with some humor and a taste for irony. He is a master of strategy, both military and political, and he is level-headed to boot.

Twenty-five-hundred years ago the full military might the Persian Empire marched upon the weak and disunited city-states of Greece. Despite the humiliation suffered by Persian arms at Marathon, only a decade before, the world was not holding its breath in anticipation of the result. That the Persian forces was irresistible was clear to all, and the outcome therefore was undoubted. In fact, when Greek spies were caught observing the Persian encampments, Xerxes, Persia's Great King, ordered them shown around his camps and sent back to Greece so as to spread word of the vast multitudes preparing to march. How the Greek city-states defeated and turned back the Persian menace remains one of the most incredible stories in the history of Western Civilization. Even today the battle narratives of Marathon, Thermopylae, Salamis, and Plataea are told and retold not just by historians, but remain staples of our popular culture. There are few teenagers who are unfamiliar with the refrain: "This is Sparta!" This is the story Professor Rahe undertakes to tell and he succeeds brilliantly. Rahe's work is, simply put, the most comprehensive and best written history of the Greco-Persian wars in at least a generation. Any historian writing about this period by necessity has to rely to a large extent upon Herodotus. But the father of history has since Plutarch renamed him also been known as the "father of lies." Rahe, a scholar deeply immersed in the period, also relies on Herodotus for the framework of his narrative, but he does so in a measured and judicious way. By employing the narratives of other ancient historians, playwrights, archeological findings, along with a large amount of common sense (often missing in historical analysis), Rahe unfolds a reconstruction of events that is certain to become the dominant interpretation of the period. As one can deduce from the book's title Rahe also does something attempted by few if any previous historians; he eschews the Athenian-centric

view of the Greco-Persian Wars to more closely examine this set of conflicts from the Spartan point of view. As such, even readers who believe they have a thorough knowledge of this great confrontation will benefit from Rahe's unique viewpoint. The Grand Strategy of Classical Sparta, is the first of three volumes on the subject. In total, and assuming the next two volumes reach the same impressive level of scholarship and storytelling as the first, we will soon have a corpus of work that will stand beside the greatest historians of the classical period.

Excellent description of the Spartan culture.

Great book. Very well done. A must for anyone who studies ancient history.

Love this book! History classes in school never gave such background so that the forward story makes sense. Professor Rahe has done an amazing job!! Hillsdale College has a goldmine in him.

Excellent book written by an obvious expert on the subject. If you are interested on acquiring truthful and accurate knowledge on the ancient city state of Sparta, this book will allow you to do it. Dr. Rahe knows what he is talking about.

Drawing on sources like Herodotus and others the author details a real page turner on Greece's war against the mighty Persian Empire from the view of Sparta on the scale of the coverage of Rome's epic war with Carthage by Polybius.

I enjoy Ancient Greek history, so I had to read this by Professor Rahe. His point was to show how important the Spartan side of the history dealing with the Ancient Greek wars with Persia. Still, I disagree with Professor Rahe in that I still think the Athenians were more important in the wars with the Persian empire. But this book exposes the circumstance that the Spartans dealt with.

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