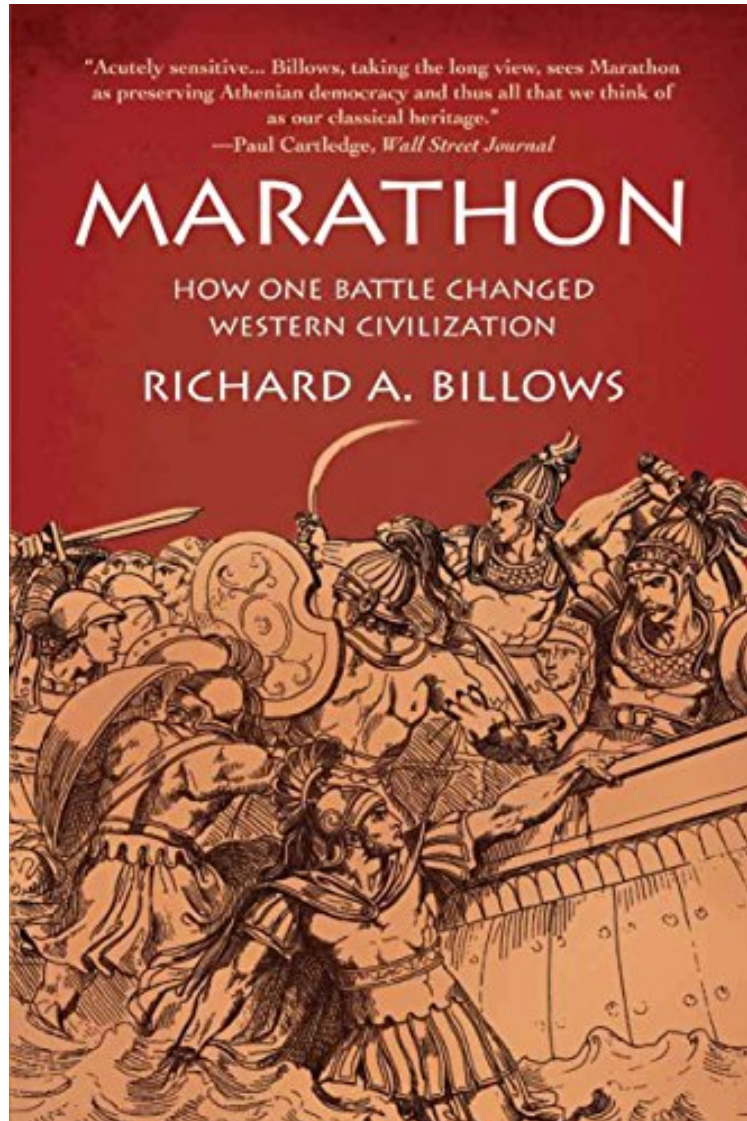


(Download) Marathon: How One Battle Changed Western Civilization

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Richard A. Billows

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Richard A. Billows : Marathon: How One Battle Changed Western Civilization before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Marathon: How One Battle Changed Western Civilization:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. How Victory at Marathon Stemmed from Fledgling Athenian Democracy By JBH Culturally, politically, and economically the United States owes its status as greatest nation the world has ever seen to Western Civilization. Or at least vies for that status with the British Empire from which the American succeeded. Western Civilization sprang from Classical. Classical Civilization was first Greece then Rome.

Greece was anchored by the city-states of Sparta in the Peloponnesus and Athens some 140 miles away through the isthmus of Corinth in Attica. In the sixth century BC, the great Persian Empire dominated the lands of all the earliest civilizations outside China, sweeping from the eastern shore of the Mediterranean from modern day Bulgaria on the north down through Turkey, Lebanon, and Egypt, and far to the east through Afghanistan to the fringes of India. The Ionian Greeks who lived on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean and in the nearby small island states of the Aegean including modern day Cyprus were ruled by Persia, and in 599 BC they revolted in an attempt to free themselves from the Persian yoke. Empires tend to expand and when expansion halts eventually go into terminal decline. And so the Persian Empire kept pressure on its Western provinces. Yet prior to the Ionian Greek revolt Persia did not even recognize the existence of tiny Sparta and Athens so far west and around the corner of the southern European landmass were they. The Athenians along with other minor Greek city states, having cultural and trading relations with the Ionian Greeks, came to their support in the rebellion. The formidable Persians under King Darius eventually put down the revolt in Asia Minor. So it was that the Persians recognized the western boundary of their empire would not be safe without extending their control throughout the entire Greek mainland and the Aegean sea. Starting from the reforms of Solon nearly two centuries before, Athens had in the decade just prior to 599 BC adopted a form of governance the world had never seen before. Kleisthenes the Alkmaionid, over the course of years filled with intrigue between various factions in Attica and the Spartan-dominated Peloponnesus, devised and saw the Athenian demos (people) give birth to the first democracy. Kleisthenes' conception elegantly wove together the citizen as political participant and the citizen as warrior into a fabric that unified all of Attica and its inhabitants into the Athenian city-state. This greatest legacy of the ancient Greeks to the modern world is the foundation for all other Greek gifts in the many fields that in the next century flourished in that atmosphere of democracy. The Athenian citizen's right to a roughly equal participation and voice under the new constitution cemented a sense of mutual cooperation and sense of unity out of which the Athenian military fighting unit of the phalanx was much strengthened. Democracy had just been born when Darius decided to conquer Greece and punish those who had supported the Ionian revolt. Had the Athenians not defeated the Persian expeditionary force at Marathon, that fledgling first democracy would have been stillborn. And given the constant thumb of tyranny under which nearly all civilization has been suppressed the past 7000 years, there is no certainty democracy (rule by the people) would ever have come into being elsewhere. Richard Billows softly, lucidly and brilliantly in marvelous granular detail with all the pager-turning zest of a great novel foreshadows the battle of Marathon with 200 pages of such background on this ancient world. The climax of the battle itself, along with aftermath and consequences, fill the final 60 pages. After conquering various Greek isle city-states as it swept across the Aegean from the shores of Asia Minor, the Persian fleet carrying archers and cavalry landed on the edge of the broad bay of Marathon 26 miles NE of Athens. After much discussion whether to stay within the walls of the city or meet the Persians on open ground, the Athenian force marched from Athens and was waiting. In the face of grave risk, the Athenians encamped at Marathon on high ground as the Persian force twice or more its size debarked onto land. After some days, the Athenians realized the Persian ships with the bulk of the cavalry were going to do an end run down and around the peninsula and up the other side to attack the city of Athens from its close-by western port with only youth and elderly left there to defend it. The Spartans had promised support, but it wouldn't come until after the Spartan religious ceremonies linked to the phase of the moon were over. Billows tells how in the midst of all these moving pieces the brilliant Athenian general and leader Miltiades shaped the Athenians' actions: from months of prior training, to the democratic council decision to meet the Persians in the open at Marathon, to conceptualizing a new strategy never before tested in battle by a hoplite phalanx fighting force, to the decision to leave the safety of high ground, march forward and form a mile wide line and then engage the Persian force on that August morning, defying convention by rushing the final 150 meters on the run with heavy bronze armor, helmet, and shield so as to mitigate the damage of Persian arrows from overhead, needing victory before noon that day so the Athenian hoplites could then after an exhausting battle, the outcome of which was always in doubt in advance, force march the 26 miles back to Athens strung along two routes across mountain passes, and get there before the Persian fleet which had about a twelve-hour journey starting at dawn that morning could land and attack the defenseless city. This wonderful book is about far more than the world-changing battle of Marathon. One of the many pieces of wisdom that crackles down to present day with brutal truth is having an engaged citizenry with rotating representation drawn by lots and limited in term of office because the wisdom congealed and proffered by Kleisthenes and taken to heart by the Athenians knew that selection of representatives by any other means would lead to the wealthy and aristocratic gaining power. That is, to the kind of corruption that has for eighty years now infested America and is leading to its accelerating decline. This is history rich with lessons all of us as schoolchildren should have learned. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. overview of Greek and Persian civilizations By Ron Braithwaite Although the Battle of Marathon is the central theme of this book, the bulk of this book is information about the histories of Greek and Western Asian civilizations. I found this informative, especially as to the sequential clashes of the various empires from Anatolia to Egypt and Libya ultimately producing the enormous and wealthy Persian Empire of Darius. We also learn of the complexities--and duplicities--of the various Greek city states in their efforts to deal with the growing Persian threat. Perhaps not surprisingly, and in contradiction to modern myth, most Greek states either cooperated with or were subjugated by the

Persians. In a sense, this makes the Marathon story all the more remarkable. Despite the fact that most Greek states in Ionia, the Aegean islands and in northern and central Greece had bowed before the mighty Persians, Athens in Attica and Sparta with her Peloponnesian League decided to resist. It was a close thing at that. In both Athens and Sparta there were powerful parties that wished to do otherwise. Also, there was the eternal enmity between Sparta and Athens and many other Greek City States. Only the threat of total destruction could cause them to pull together and, even then, only barely. Citing religious observances, the Spartans weren't even present when the day of battle arrived. They sent a force, to be certain, but not before the Athenians with 600 allied troops had slaughtered the larger Persian force at Marathon. The spear-bearing Spartans must have been humiliated. This humiliation may have goaded Leonidas to take his stand at Thermopylae years later. Despite the detail of Billows's work, there are many unanswered questions many of which revolve around the forced march back to Athens from the Plain of Marathon. It seems that each hoplite was encumbered by something like 60 lbs of armor--and it was August. In order to save their city of Athens, most of these soldiers had to leave the field of their victory [I'm guessing it wouldn't be possible to do so until 12:00 PM] and quick-march it back to Athens inside of 7 hours before the Persians had the opportunity to land an invasion force close to Athens. The distance is well over 20 miles and the soldiers have to do this at an average rate [over rough ground] of better than 3 mph...and it was a hot August day....and each soldier was carrying/wearing 60 lbs of armor. Granted that the average Athenian soldier was probably fit...but...if Billows is correct in believing that more than half Athenian males faced off against the Persians, there are bound to have been quite a few older men...probably even very old men. Also...this was 2,500 years ago, long before modern medicine. It is quite probable that even some/many of the younger men weren't Olympic Medal material. Something is wrong with the story. Billows believes that the Athenian army must have been accompanied by thousands of light infantry and slaves. He doesn't mention these folks in the race towards Athens. I think it most likely that the hoplites handed much of their armor over to slaves and more lightly armored infantry, thereby subdividing the problem of one man having to bear the weight of so much armor. This isn't to diminish the feat. It just makes it a little more understandable. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Opened my eyes to the character and social accomplishments of ancient Greece. By WJR Nicely written for the lay person, describing Greek and non-Greek society and politics that led to the battle, the battle itself, and then (somewhat briefly) its aftermath. The author takes pains to articulate degrees of certainty with regard to historical "facts," thereby gaining my trust in his insights. My only criticism is the maps provided did not record all sites referenced in the text, so I found myself referencing other sources to better understand the geography. Few books do I choose to read a 2nd time immediately because I want to remember well its content - this is one of those few.

Published to coincide with Marathon's 2500th anniversary, a riveting history of the historic battle The Battle of Marathon in 490 B.C. is not only understood as the most decisive event in the struggle between the Greeks and the Persians, but can also be seen as perhaps the most significant moment in our collective history. 10,000 Athenian citizens faced a Persian military force of more than 25,000. Greek victory appeared impossible, but the men of Athens were tenacious and the Persians were defeated. Following the battle, the Athenian hoplite army ran 26.5 miles from Marathon to Athens to defend their port from the Persian navy. Although they had just run the great distance in heavy armor, the Athenians won the battle and drove the Persian forces from Attica. Greek freedom ensued and the achievements of the culture became much of the basis for Western civilization. In this comprehensive and engrossing treatment, Richard Billows captures the drama of that day 2500 years ago and the ramifications it has had throughout Western history.

From Booklist Although focused on the 490 BCE Battle of Marathon between ancient Athens and the Persian Empire, Billows scope widens to the stakes for the Athenians. They were prosperous, Kleisthenes had recently instituted their democracy, and the cultural efflorescence evocative of ancient Athens had only just begun. Billows backgrounds these developments with coruscating clarity, summarizing decades of Greek history prior to Marathon in terms of economics, politics, and cultural values. After also recounting the rise of the Persian Empire, Billows proceeds to events that precipitated the Persian invasions of Greece and culminates in an astute narrative of Marathon, in which the Athenian soldiers dramatist Aeschylus among them were heavily outnumbered. Their victory, explainable as the result of a risky battle plan, the combat tactics of the phalanx, and the courage of citizens with everything on the line, soon acquired significance for the ancients, in the nature of admiration for Athenian martial excellence. Marathon's reputation as a historical salvation of the cradle of Western civilization developed in modern times; under scholastic challenge, it is a status Billows stoutly defends in this stirring history. --Gilbert Taylor "Billows conceptualizes the fateful one-day battle between Persian Empire and the Albanian city-state with an engrossing narrative" -- Foreword Magazine About the Author Richard A. Billows is a professor at Columbia University specializing in Ancient Greek and Roman epigraphy. He is the author of *Marathon: How One Battle Changed Western Civilization*, as well as *Antigonos the One-Eyed and the Creation of the Hellenistic State*, *Kings and Colonists: Aspects of Macedonian Imperialism*, and *Julius Caesar: The Colossus of Rome*. He lives in New York City.