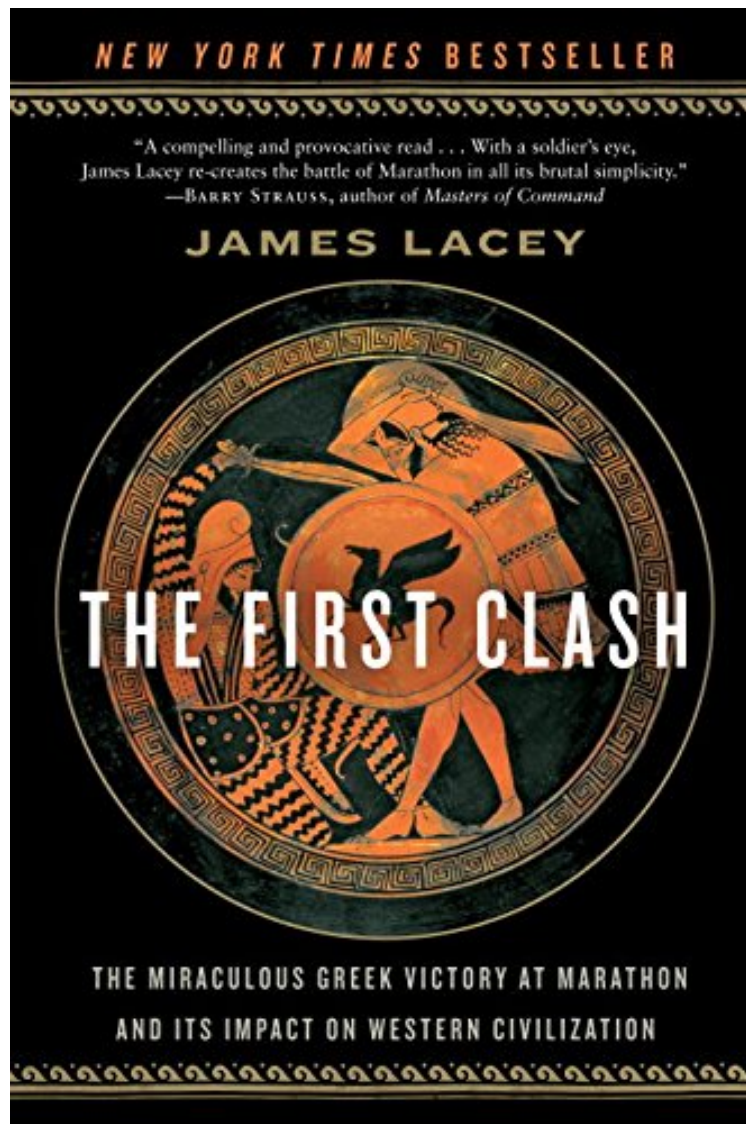


(Ebook free) The First Clash: The Miraculous Greek Victory at Marathon and Its Impact on Western Civilization

## The First Clash: The Miraculous Greek Victory at Marathon and Its Impact on Western Civilization

James Lacey

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**James Lacey : The First Clash: The Miraculous Greek Victory at Marathon and Its Impact on Western Civilization** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The First Clash: The Miraculous Greek Victory at Marathon and Its Impact on Western Civilization:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. The Battle of Marathon: Interesting Recreation By Steven Peterson There is not a great deal known about the battle of Marathon, in which the Athenians and some others held back the horde of Persians, who were invading Greece. It is high testimony to the author's skills that he, nonetheless, has authored a fine book on the subject. Much of the book is background. Why did the Persians invade Greece? Why did Athens take on this vast military machine? Lacey does a good job on this background work, freely acknowledging what is his speculation and what is the best we can reconstruct from fragmentary historical evidence. The lead up to the battle itself is described starting with Chapter 17. Since little is known about the specifics of the actual battle, there is not much detail. Chapter 21 addresses some of the questions about Marathon: Where was the Persian cavalry? Why didn't the Athenians wait for the arrival of Spartan reinforcements? Who actually commanded the Greek forces? Sometimes, the writing is less than felicitous, but, overall, a nice volume for those wishing to learn more about the battle of Marathon and its implications. . . . 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. They were more fun, but I am glad to have read this ... By old guy Jim Lacey doesn't try to be too authoritative about things we know little about. That makes his tale of the Battle of Marathon a first rate pleasure to read. It begins with a rundown of the growth of Persian power and the putdown of the Ionian rebellion, which helped pave the way for further expansion out of the Levant and onto Mediterranean lands. First in line was Thrace, then Greek's city states. This was before the days of Athenian empire but not the day of the hoplite. Lacey makes it clear that different historians have different ideas about all these happenings. Perhaps lacking bona fides himself, he is almost humble in choosing his belief in who was the actual Athenian in charge of the victors. The author doesn't attack anyone's beliefs, he just admits that we don't know for sure. He also admits to not knowing why the Athenians attacked the Persian force without waiting for Spartan support, which was on the way. He does explain his reasons for the side he takes. The book has footnotes, but it is clearly written for public release. I read fictional accounts about this battle, which was billed as the savior of Western civilization, when I was a kid. They were more fun, but I am glad to have read this account if only because Lacey, though with doubt in his heart, takes the side of Victor Davis Hanson, popular Classical historical writer in California, who is under attack for believing that Western armies are generally superior to all others. Even though I am an ex-Marine I won't get into that other than to state there is good evidence the Greeks had the East where it hurts, at least until the Ottoman Turks showed up. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Good read from a great author By Kay Excellent historical account of the battle of Marathon. Well researched. Author teaches military history at the Marine War College - and he travelled several hours from his home in Virginia to the Army War College in PA with an armload of books to meet my teenaged son, who was competing in the PA state finals for the National History Day Competition. His trip was inspired by an email my son sent asking Dr. Lacey about his book and about certain aspects of the battle. What a nice guy. If you like military history, I highly recommend his other books - they are all well researched and very well written. My son read *The First Clash* in a single sitting - he could not put it down.

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER A compelling and provocative read . . . With a soldier's eye, Jim Lacey re-creates the battle of Marathon in all its brutal simplicity. Barry Strauss, author of *Masters of Command* Marathon one of history's most pivotal battles. Its name evokes images of almost superhuman courage, endurance, and fighting spirit. In this eye-opening book, military analyst James Lacey takes a fresh look at Marathon and reveals why the battle happened, how it was fought, and whether, in fact, it saved Western civilization. Lacey brilliantly reconstructs the world of the fifth century B.C. leading up to the astonishing military defeat of the Persian Empire by the vastly undermanned Greek defenders. With the kind of vivid detail that characterizes the best modern war reportage, he shows how the heavily armed Persian army was shocked and demoralized by the relentless assault of the Athenian phalanx. He reveals the fascinating aftermath of Marathon, how its fighters became the equivalent of our Greatest Generation, and challenges the legacy and lessons that have often been misunderstood perhaps, now more than ever, at our own peril. Immediate, visceral, and full of new analyses that defy decades of conventional wisdom, *The First Clash* is a superb interpretation of a conflict that indeed made the world safe for Aristotle, Plato, and our own modern democracy. With a fresh eye to tactics, strategy, and military organization, and with his text grounded in direct experience of the troops on the battlefield, James Lacey gives us not only new understanding of how the Athenians managed to win but also a greater appreciation of the beginning of a long tradition of Western military dynamism that we take for granted today. Victor Davis Hanson, author of *Carnage and Culture* Lacey's swords-and-shields approach will absorb readers ever fascinated by the famous battles of antiquity. Booklist A lively and rewarding read. Charleston Post and Courier Exemplary . . . Lacey, a veteran of the 82nd and 101st Airborne divisions and a professor at the Marine War College, brings to the tale of Marathon the practical experiences of the combat soldier and an intellectual sensibility. *The New Criterion*

"On the occasion of the 2500th anniversary of the battle of Marathon, defense analyst James Lacey has not only offered a fresh appraisal of the battle, but in a larger sense demonstrated how the Athenian victory established a precedent of Western military advantage for subsequent millennia. With a fresh eye to tactics, strategy, and military organization, grounded with direct experience with troops on the battlefield, the result is not only new understanding

of how the Athenians managed to win, but also a greater appreciation of the beginning of a long tradition of Western military dynamism that we take for granted today." Victor Davis Hanson, author of *Carnage and Culture* and *The Western Way of War* With a soldier's eye, Jim Lacey recreates the Battle of Marathon in all its brutal simplicity. This compelling and provocative read makes a potent contribution to an enduring debate. Barry Strauss, author of *The Battle of Salamis* and Professor of History, Cornell University A lively and readable account of the battle of Marathon and its significance. Jim Lacey's experience as a professional soldier gives it an added dimension, especially his ability to see the military situation from both sides. Donald Kagan, author of *The Peloponnesian War* About the Author Jim Lacey was an active-duty military officer for twelve years in the 82nd Airborne Division and the 101st Airborne Division. Lacey is currently a professor of strategy, war, and policy at the Marine War College, and an adjunct professor in the Johns Hopkins National Security Program. He also works as a consultant on a number of projects for the United States military. Lacey has written for several publications, including the *New York Post* and *The New York Sun*, appears regularly in *Military History* magazine, and was an embedded journalist for *Time* magazine during the invasion of Iraq. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.

### Chapter 1 An Empire Rises

In 547 BC, Croesus, the king of Lydia, had reason to feel satisfied. To his west, where the Greek cities of Ionia dotted the Aegean coastline, a long, costly war had finally ended. These often troublesome Greeks were presently awed by Lydian power and were now paying him annual tribute. To the north, from which the terrifying Scythian horsemen in previous generations had swept down in devastating raids, it had been quiet since his father, Alyattes II, broke the back of Cimmerian power decades before.<sup>1</sup> To the south, Babylonia remained a strong and dependable ally, a state of affairs that was unlikely to change as long as mighty Babylon felt threatened by the power of the Medes, who occupied the lands east of both Lydia and Babylon. Since the crushing of the Cimmerians and the demise of the dreaded Assyrian Empire in 613 BC, the Medes had been Lydia's most serious threat. For five bloody years, during the reign of Alyattes II, Lydia fought an exhausting war to halt Median expansion. Herodotus reports that the war ended only when in the midst of a great battle both sides withdrew in terror as a solar eclipse darkened the field.<sup>2</sup> Whatever the influence of the eclipse, the truth is that the war so exhausted both sides, they willingly allowed Babylon to arbitrate an end to the fighting. The Peace of the Eclipse lasted a generation. In that time, Lydia, the first state to create a standardized coinage, grew rich. So rich, in fact, that even today Croesus's name is synonymous with vast wealth and riches. However, the Medes, while not as rich as Lydia, had also grown powerful and ever more threatening. So it was with a certain amount of contentment that Croesus had watched the Medes spend the recent years engaged in a bloody civil war with their cousins the Persians. But by 547, that war had ended and a new Persian-Median king, Cyrus, was solidifying his hold on power. For Croesus this was a troubling development, as the combined power of the Medes and Persians was a dire threat and the youthful Cyrus appeared restless. To forestall a Persian invasion of Lydia, Croesus determined to wage a preemptive war before Cyrus could complete his consolidation of power. But first he had to determine if the gods would bless his enterprise. According to Herodotus, prior to starting his war with the Persians, Croesus sent envoys to determine the accuracy of each of the major oracles used by the Greeks to foretell the future. After putting each to the test, Croesus decided that the oracle of Delphi was the most accurate. He sent envoys bearing rich gifts to inquire as to the outcome of a war between the Lydians and the Persians. He was much cheered by the Delphic oracles' promise that if the Lydian army marched against the Persians, a great empire would be destroyed. Unfortunately for Croesus, it did not occur to him to ask another important question: Which great empire would be destroyed? He interpreted the oracles' words as it best suited his desires and forwarded immense gifts to Delphi, and to several other temples, to secure the full support of the gods. When the threat Cyrus presented first arose, Croesus also began a period of active diplomacy in an attempt to assemble allies for the coming fight. This resulted in promises of support from Babylonia, Egypt, and even Sparta. If only he had waited for these forces to gather at his capital, the Persian state might well have died in infancy. But believing immediate action was necessary and buoyed by Delphi's promise of success, Croesus determined to strike out with only his own forces on hand. Beyond the promises of Delphi, Croesus's confidence rested on the fact that Lydia possessed what was probably the most formidable army in the Near East. It consisted of heavy armored infantry (much of it from the Greek cities along the Aegean) and a formidable host of local levies. However, the mainstay of the Lydian army was its elite heavy cavalry, universally feared for its expert use of lances from horseback. With the gods propitiated by numerous gifts of gold, the Lydian army launched itself against King Cyrus. In 547 BC, the Lydians marched into Cappadocia, which had been under Median lordship since Assyria's collapse. After crossing the Halys River, which had been set as the Median-Lydian boundary by the Peace of the Eclipse, Croesus captured the supposedly strongly fortified city of Pteria and devastated the surrounding country, while waiting to see how Cyrus would react to the provocation. He did not have long to wait. Cyrus, apparently forewarned of the attack, was ready to move immediately after receiving information as to the direction of the Lydian offensive. Moving rapidly from his new capital at Ecbatana, Cyrus gathered further recruits along his line of march, and in what must have been a matter of a couple of weeks, the Persians pitched their camp within striking distance of the Lydian army. Herodotus indicates that the battle that took place was fierce and that many fell on both sides. However, when the fighting ended, at the onset of darkness, there was still no victor. Croesus, who must have been shocked by the speed and strength of Cyrus's response, blamed his lack of success on the Persians' greater numbers and determined to fall back on his

capital, Sardis, and await the arrival of his allies. If his army was still in good condition and he had the city of Pteria as a base, and presumably had access to Sinope on the Black Sea, then there was no reason Croesus could not have wintered his army in Cappadocia and awaited his allies. Therefore it is likely that his army, though not vanquished, received a severe battering. Furthermore, his previous policy of ruining the surrounding country had probably left the countryside denuded of supplies. Croesus was now paying for his policy of systematic devastation, which had greatly shortened the time he could linger in Cappadocia; even under the best of circumstances, an army could remain stationary only a short time before it consumed all of the areas available resources. After failing to win a decisive victory against the Persians, he did not have the choice of staying. Circumstances compelled him to retreat or starve. Still worse lay ahead of him, for Croesus had neglected to stock his capital at Sardis with sufficient provisions to sustain his army through the winter. So upon his arrival at the capital, he was forced to disband all of his army, except for his elite cavalry, and ordered it to reassemble in the spring. At the same time, he sent envoys to Egypt, Babylonia, and Sparta and requested them to bring their armies to Sardis in three months, whereupon their combined might would see Cyrus off. Cyrus was now left in an unenviable position. The same reason that had compelled Croesus to abandon Cappadocia was now acting on him: A devastated country would not supply his army through the winter. In such circumstances, all precedent called for Cyrus to fall back to Ecbatana, where he could refurbish his army for the next seasons campaign. Realizing that his enemies would gather in vast numbers against him in the spring, Cyrus knew that the prudent course only delayed his doom. Therefore he launched his army into an unheard-of winner-take-all winter campaign and followed Croesus's retreating army into Lydia. Surprised at his foes audacity, Croesus weighed his options. Most of his army had left for their homes, and it would be months before any of his allies would appear to assist him. Still, the walls of Sardis were considered impregnable, and most leaders would have considered holing up inside of them until the winter frost decimated the Persian army or until his allies would eventually come to the rescue. Instead, Croesus opted to give battle with the much-reduced forces available to him. Historians have often commented on the folly of his choice, but under the circumstances it was probably the best available. While it is true the Sardis region had not been devastated like Cappadocia, it still could not have had much food left on hand. It had been the mustering point for the Lydian invasion, and as such the Lydian army would have consumed much of the reserve food stores before marching into Cappadocia. Furthermore, the army would have packed much of what was left on wagons and mules to supplement whatever it collected on the march. By early winter, the reserve food stores must have been very low, if they existed at all. Given these circumstances, the idea of a siege of many months must have filled Croesus's head with visions of famine. As Croesus had not taken the precaution of restocking his magazines within the city, what food stores did exist were probably still stored in the countryside, left for Cyrus to use. As long as Cyrus was not averse to seeing the rural population starve (and it is a safe guess that he would find this acceptable), then his food situation was probably markedly better than what Croesus faced in the city, where he had to feed both his own population and his army. Moreover, as is frequently the case, military commanders tend to magnify their own difficulties while discounting those faced by their opponents. In the final analysis, Croesus probably saw no option except to risk all on a final decisive battle. If he lost, he could still in the last resort retreat behind the protection of Sardis walls. Despite dismissing the bulk of his army, Croesus still possessed the Lydian cavalry, a formidable force, while the plains in front of Sardis afforded perfect terrain for their operations. For Cyrus part, he had to consider carefully how to engage such a dangerous foe. Taking the advice of Harpagos, his most trusted general, Cyrus had the baggage camels unloaded and placed at the front of his lines to act as cavalry. As the Lydians did not use camels in their operations, Cyrus hoped that the sight and foul odors of these strange beasts would panic the Lydian horses. This is precisely what happened. Unable to control their horses, the Lydian cavalymen dismounted and prepared to stand and fight as infantry against the Persian assault. It was a doomed struggle. Stripped of their mobility and lacking heavy armor, the Lydians were easy prey for the Persians massed archers, who always made up the bulk of the Persian infantry forces. Once the archers had done their work, Cyrus unleashed his own cavalry into the disordered Lydian masses. Although there was some fierce fighting at points, the Lydians were soon routed and the survivors streamed back into the city. While Herodotus says that the Persians settled down for a siege, he also states that Cyrus offered a large reward to any of his soldiers who fought their way to the top of Sardis walls. This probably reflects the fact that food was short, winter was fast approaching, and Cyrus would find himself in a bad situation if he was still conducting a siege when the armies of Babylonia and Egypt arrived. With those factors in mind, he launched a major assault on the walls, but it failed. As he lacked a siege train, Cyrus determined to starve the city into submission in the hope that it would soon give up. Herodotus tells a remarkable story of a Persian soldier watching a Lydian climb down from the Acropolis along crags in the cliffside to retrieve a helmet that had fallen from the walls. The soldier then returned by the same route, all the time watched by the alert Persian sentry. This section of the walls was poorly guarded because the cliff was so steep that the Lydians considered it unscalable. However, now a Lydian guard had shown the way, and the next day a specially selected force of Persians ascended the heights by the same route. The attacking Persians surprised the Lydians. By daybreak, the Acropolis was in Persian hands and the city gates opened. Persians swarmed into the impregnable fortress, and Cyrus gave the city over to sack.<sup>3</sup> Is Herodotus's version of the story true? At almost the precise point that such an attempt would have occurred, archaeologists have discovered the remains of a soldier in

his mid-twenties who appears to have been thrown from the walls of Sardis Acropolis. Forensic archaeologists found that the man was in remarkably good health until he suffered a stab wound through his seventh rib. Interestingly, the soldier's arm was broken in two spots consistent with what one would expect from a surprised man desperately warding off sword blows. Finally, in his hand was a stone—perhaps he was a slinger meant to be used in a final act of desperation. Just a few feet from the soldier's body was found the only helmet retrieved in the Sardis excavations, which was dated to the period when Cyrus attacked. Is this the soldier who climbed down the cliff and inadvertently showed the Persians a route to take the fortifications? Is this the very helmet that soldier tried to retrieve? The truth will never be known, but it is tantalizing evidence that tempts historians to use it to fill the gap in our knowledge. It should be noted that the rest of the archaeological record unearthed during these excavations is entirely consistent with Herodotus's account. Diverse traditions present varying fates for Croesus, ranging from one suggestion that he had himself immolated as the Persian army swept into Sardis to another where he was spared by Cyrus and elevated to a place of trust and honor. This latter version is what Herodotus offers, but Babylonian records contradict the historians. While most Greek traditions have the god Apollo saving Croesus at the last minute, it should be noted that the Greeks had to create this conclusion no matter what the true facts were. For them, Croesus had to survive, as their religion would not let them accept or conceive that Apollo would allow him to die. After all, Croesus had presented Apollo, through his oracle at Delphi, rich gifts in return for a victory. It would have been beyond the pale for the god to both deny him the victory and allow him to die. At the moment, the best that history can offer is that Croesus's fate is unknown, with a prejudice toward his being allowed to live, as Cyrus appears to have made this a standard policy through most of his conquests.<sup>4</sup> What is positively known is that an upstart Persian king had vanquished the once powerful Lydian Empire and made its capital, Sardis, a mere provincial city in the growing Persian Empire. A generation later, a small Athenian force would burn Sardis to the ground before scurrying back to Greece and safety. In doing so, Athens would gain the undying hatred of Persia and history was set on the course that eventually led to Marathon. But who was this Cyrus who suddenly springs into the pages of history? What is known about the man whose conquests would grant him the appellation the Great and make him the founder of the world's greatest empire until the advent of Rome? Cyrus's story begins soon after the Peace of the Eclipse years before, when the Medes had turned their attention to securing the loyalty (or failing that, the subjugation) of the numerous seminomadic tribes within their domain. By 585 BC, when Astyages took the throne, they had formed a true polyglot empire of Iranian-speaking tribes, including the Persians. With a secure border on his Lydian frontier and the Babylonians cringing behind what they called the Median Wall, Astyages was able to concentrate his energies on securing his eastern border and further consolidating his kingdom.<sup>5</sup> As many of the region's tribes gave up their nomadic ways in favor of permanent settlements, they adopted new government structures. Many, including the Anshan tribe of Persian heritage, saw their tribal chiefs elevated to petty kings. Although these kings continued paying tribute to the Medes, like powerful medieval barons they ruled their own territories with little interference from the Median king. When Astyages eventually realized the danger that these independent power bases represented to his own hold on power, it was too late, as one of these petty kings, Cyrus, was already preparing for war.