

The Battle For Western Civilisation

August 20, 480 AD — One of the greatest battles in history was being fought on this day. It was, according to one respected historian, no less than a fight for the defence of Western civilisation.

The Battle of Thermopylae, fought over several days in 480 BC, was also one of the most famous last stands in the history of warfare.

It took place when a massive army from the Persian Empire, led by their king, Xerxes, invaded Greece from the north with the goal of capturing all of the country.

According to writer and Greek historian Philip Chrysopoulos: “The great Battle of Thermopylae and the valiant fight of 300 fearless Spartans under the command of warrior King Leonidas against ten thousand elite Persian soldiers is one of the most brilliant moments in Ancient Greek history. In retrospect, it proved to be no less than a fight for the defence of Western Civilization itself [because] although the battle itself was lost, the war was won.”

This was the second Persian invasion of Greece that year but several Greek city-states, led by Sparta, joined forces to fight the Persian invaders. The plan was to stop the enemy in its tracks at Thermopylae which formed a narrow pass between the mountains and the sea.

The Spartan king Leonidas and his 300 Spartan warriors were joined by a Greek coalition of about 7,000 fighting men. They took a defensive position behind a wall at the pass and waited for the huge Persian force.

According to the writer Plutarch, when the Persians sent a messenger ordering the Greeks to hand over their weapons Leonidas replied: ‘molon labe’ – ‘come and get them’ – words now engraved on the base of his statues at Thermopylae and Sparta.

The Persians made several attacks but wave after wave was repelled. Then the Greeks were betrayed. Hoping for a rich reward, a Greek traitor showed the Persians a mountain path around the narrow beach area, allowing the invaders to come up behind the Greeks – and they did so in force.

Most of the Greek warriors then retreated. It is not known if Leonidas ordered them to do so (so that they may fight another day) but what followed was one of the greatest demonstrations of bravery in the history of warfare.

The remaining Spartans and Greek warriors fought to the last man. It is said that when their weapons broke, they fought with their hands and teeth. Defeat finally came with a storm of arrows from the Persian archers.

Although they lost, the bravery of the Greek warriors in the Battle of Thermopylae inspired the Greek people and eventually helped them repel the Persian invasion – and ultimately save Western civilisation.