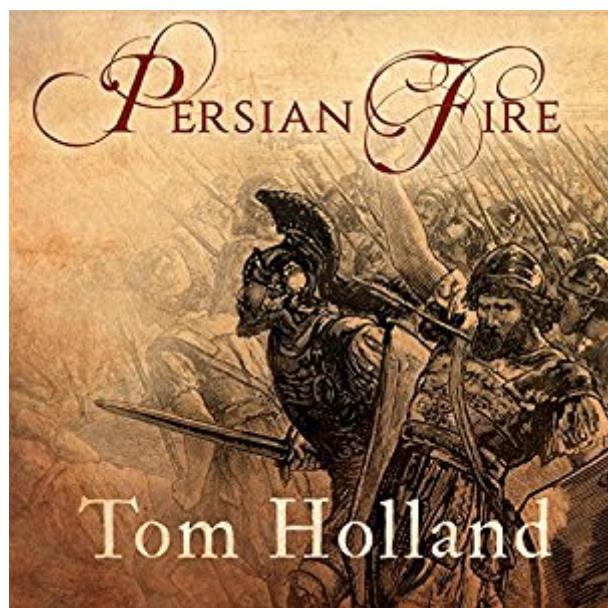


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Persian Fire: The First World Empire And The Battle For The West



Synopsis

In the fifth century BC, a global superpower was determined to bring truth and order to what it regarded as two terrorist states. The superpower was Persia, incomparably rich in ambition, gold, and men. The terrorist states were Athens and Sparta, eccentric cities in a poor and mountainous backwater: Greece. The story of how their citizens took on the Great King of Persia, and thereby saved not only themselves, but Western civilization as well, is as heart-stopping and fateful as any episode in history. Tom Holland's brilliant study of these critical Persian Wars skillfully examines a conflict of critical importance to both ancient and modern history.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Like all of Holland's books, this is a great read and stuffed with fascinating facts, but the focus on Persia gets lost when Darius and then Xerxes turn to Greece and from then on it's all about Greece.

It's a familiar story that Herodotus gave to us 2500 years ago: the Persian Wars, Sparta, Athens, Marathon, Thermopylae. It's an awesome cast of characters: Darius, Xerxes, Leonidas. Given all this, you would think it would be an easy task to write a spellbinding page-turner. And yet it must not be so easy...because Tom Holland doesn't exactly pull it off. This book is just "okay." Admittedly, for anyone interested in the Persian Wars, this is a must-read. On the positive side, there are a lot of rich details here, the maps are helpful and the early chapters on Sparta and Persia are excellent. However, the writing style is a bit stumbling and convoluted rather than direct and to the point, which

slows down the pace of a story that would otherwise be captivating. When it comes to the political intrigue and the battle intricacies, the details and chain of events tend to become somewhat muddled. It's a better book than his "Rubicon," but there are better narrative histories out there.

I picked up this novel after reading Holland's Rubicon, due partly to my preference for the author's narrative style of presenting history, and partly due to the intriguing subject matter. Much has been written of the Greco-Persian War, but almost exclusively from the Greek perspective. While this may be partially due to a pro-Western bias, it is at least partly due to the fact that there are virtually no Persian sources from the period. Almost everything we know of the early Persians comes from the writings of their enemies, most especially Greek historian Herodotus. Imagine the Nazis winning World War II and writing its history. The Allies might not come off looking so good. In any event, Holland has tried to write a more balanced history, while still being hamstrung by the lack of primary sources. He has probably done as good a job as could be expected, though there comes a point where educated opinion devolves into mere conjecture. To his credit, Holland does a good job pointing out where many of these instances occur. The history begins with a brief recap of Mesopotamian empires, beginning with Sargon, through Akkad, the Assyrians and into the brief ascendancy of the Medes. The Persians are then identified as they burst onto the scene through the brilliant career of Cyrus in the sixth century B.C. Once the story turns to the Greeks, primarily Sparta and Athens, Holland enters well trodden ground. However, despite having read numerous accounts of the period and its events, Holland has a way of presenting well known history in a new and interesting light. He succeeded in doing so with respect to the end of the Roman Republic in Rubicon and he does so here when presenting the Greco-Persian conflicts. Whether you are a well read student of the era, or a newcomer, I can highly recommend Persian Fire and other historical works by this author.

Good accessible history of the rise of the Persian Empire and its wars with Greece. Holland tells the story from both the Greek and the Persian perspective - which makes for an interesting read. The prose was a little stiff at times - I found myself having to reread a few paragraphs after getting lost. Overall though, a worthwhile read for anyone interested in a popular history of very interesting events. We meet all the main characters and major battles in a concise narrative.

More of Holland's engaging, gripping writing that puts you in the mind of the participants in history, insofar as that's possible. A triumph of empathy, research, & prose.

I didn't know what to expect when I bought this, but having studied the Greeks and wanting to know more about the Persians, I took a flier. Skip the introduction. It feels dated. But as for the book... he handles the material well and really keeps the story moving in an entertaining way. Even though I read much of the source material (at least the ancient Greek texts), Holland gives you a view from the forest - a birds eye view of antiquity and events. He does a great job in telling the story of the world's first democracy.

A great history of the differences and people's of the East (Persia) and the West (Greece). It covers the period leading up to and including the Trojan War (1250BCE) through Alexander's conquest of Greece and the Persian Empire (325BCE). My favorite quote in the book could have been made by any well read individual within the last 100 years: "Why do the people's of the East and West find it so difficult to live in peace?" That it was made by Herodotus 2500 years ago gives you a measure of the scope of this book. Well written and researched, carefully annotated, it is a treasure of information and insight to that ancient world. And it may very well cause you to reconsider perceptions concerning that area of the world today, and where it could be headed tomorrow.

Tom Holland manages the unlikely feat of making Darius and Xerxes sympathetic and understandable. Too often portrayed as sadistic megalomaniacs in this book they get a fairer deal, Holland explains the motives and beliefs of the Persian kings and their reasons for wishing to tame those pesky Greeks. As for the Greeks, well, they fairly jump off the page. None more so than the devious and brilliant Themistoceles. Founder of the Athenian navy he may have been and also the man that probably saved Greece but he was also an unprincipled and self-interested rogue. In painting these vivid portraits Holland uses frequent footnotes and what I loved about the Kindle was the ability to check the footnote and reference with a tap on the screen and then return quickly to the narrative. The most entertaining and informative book on the Persian Wars since Herodotus.

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