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Baby Professor Series

Greeks and Persians Go to War: War Book Bestsellers: Children's Ancient History

United States of America (2017)

TAGS: Ancient Slavery Ancient Warfare Architecture Athens Graeco-Persian Wars Greek History

We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	Greeks and Persians Go to War: War Book Bestsellers: Children's Ancient History
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Target Audience	Children (c. 8+)
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Creators

Baby Professor Series (Author, Illustrator)

The *Baby Professor* series is an imprint of general interest trade publisher Speedy Publishing. The *Baby Professor* series specialises in fun educational works for children. It covers many subjects including science and history (with works on topics such as the human body and the Great Depression), the natural world, space and geography. The emphasis is on creating visually attractive books that will entice the young readers.The historical books in the series include: *Empress Wu: Breaking and Expanding China*; *The History of the Inca Empire*; and *Everything you Need to Know about the Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire in One Fat Book*; *What Happened to Pompeii*; and *Athena: The Goddess with Grey Eyes*.

Source:

Profile at amazon.com (accessed: January 20, 2020)

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Additional information

Summary

Greeks and Persians Go to War opens with a conundrum: how did the Greeks win the Persian Wars when Persia was so much bigger and wealthier? The following pages combine text and large images – particularly maps – to explain the answer.

Fifty Years of War. The first section explains that Persia was a "huge empire centred on what is now Iran", while the Greeks lived on mainland Greece and in colonies around the Mediterranean. A modern map of Greece and Asia Minor either side of the Aegean accompanies the text. A vintage map of Turkey accompanies the information that Persia started to conquer Greek city-states there, "The whole Greek world had to try to unite to face this threat." Karl Spruner's mid-nineteenth-century map of Greece accompanies the information that the wars were fought between "500–449 BCE".

The Growth of Persian Power. Section Two continues the description of Persian expansion. The Ionian Revolt is then narrated, although not by name. It is mentioned that the Athenians assisted the revolt and that Darius I attempted a first invasion of Greece in 492 in an attempt to "get rid of this threat to his border" (p. 10); storms sank the fleet and the invasion was called off. A close-up of Darius III's head, taken from the Alexander mosaic in Pompeii accompanies.

Marathon. A nineteenth-century image of the plain of Marathon and its tumulus illustrates the text, which declares that the Persians were back in 490, conquering Thrace and Macedon and landing an army at Marathon near Athens. The narrative continues with the news that the Spartans did not arrive in time for the battle, so the Athenians faced the invaders with their 10,000 men. The Greeks attacked when they realised that the Persian cavalry was absent. They won the battle by a large margin and the Persians abandoned their invasion. A late-Victorian image of a sea-battle accompanies the text. A double-page image of a uniformed phalanx then features with a caption describing how the phalanx worked and that Persians struggled against it as they were unfamiliar with that formation. A double-page water-colour of the Marathon plain and tumulus (perhaps by Edward Lear) accompanies the information that the victory boosted the Greeks' confidence and "ushered in a 'golden age' of innovation, political advances, and creativity" in Athens.

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Thermopylae. This section addresses the 480 campaign led by "King Xerxes". The Greeks organise a common defence; Sparta leads the army, Athens the navy. A photo of modern Thermopylae accompanies a description of ancient Thermopylae and the decision to defend the narrow pass. The Persian fleet is wrecked at sea while the Greeks wait in harbour. The Persians attack Thermopylae with huge loss of life but no success. They finally defeat the Greeks when the Phocians, who have been left on guard, run away having heard a rumour that their city was under attack. "The rumor was untrue". A photo of the ruins of Egyptian Thebes accompanies the information that the "Spartan commander" at Thermopylae sent most of the army away, leaving only 300 Spartans, 1000 Thespians, and 400 Thebans.

History and Movies takes issue with the 2007 film *300*. It is noted that the film misleadingly implies that only the Spartans stayed to the end at Thermopylae. It also notes that the film is "inaccurate" in showing "the Greeks as honest and heroic while the Persians are nasty and cruel", when in fact Cyrus the Great bestowed human rights, while the Greeks were slave-owners and could be cruel despite founding democracy. Images of a 300 cos-player and of Cyrus' tomb accompany the text.

A single page *After the Battle* section explains that when the Greek fleet withdrew, the Persians and Phoenicians discovered that they could win a battle but lose a war. A renaissance painting of an ancient sea-battle (Artemisium or Salamis perhaps) accompanies. *Salamis* refers to the destruction of Athens, followed by a description of the Greek trireme. The text explains that Themistocles brought the Greek fleet into a strait where the Persian fleet would not be able to manoeuvre. A captioned Victorian image of Themistocles over-seeing a human sacrifice accompanies. An account of the battle and the Persian defeat follows. The narrator then explains that the Persians changed their plans and began expanding their empire in a different direction and that if the Persians had won in Greece the "course of European and Near Eastern history might have been very different."

Plataea and Mycale. A photo of the Athenian acropolis accompanies the information that while Xerxes exited Greece, he left his general, Mardonius, with 300,000 troops to continue the conquest. The battle of Plataea is described, including the death of Mardonius leading to a rout of his army. "It is said" that the Battle of Mycale was fought on the same day; the Persians brought their ships ashore to avoid fighting at sea only to be beaten on land.

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Thirty More Years of War explains that the Persians gave up trying to conquer Greece, while the Greeks tried and failed to free the Greek cities of Asia Minor. The Greeks could not defeat the numerically superior Persians and a peace treaty was agreed in 449 BCE. A nineteenth-century map of the Caspian Sea labelled "Map of Persia" accompanies.

Ancient Empires. The final section suggests that the Greeks won a culture war as well as the military conflict. Greek culture survived and influenced Europe and the Middle East "even after the Persian Empire had collapsed."

Analysis

In Greeks and Persians Go to War, the *Baby Professor* series seeks to introduce young readers to the cause and main events of the fifth-century BCE Persian Wars. The book is aimed at children of c. 8 and above and provides much more detail than might be expected from a series title that includes the word "baby". There is information on the geography of the regions involved, the manner of fighting employed, and the after-effects in both antiquity and in modern representations of the conflict. Errors within the book and an inconsistent use of images limit the book's effectiveness and offer misleading information.

One weakness of the work is an over-reliance on copyright-free images, which appears to be the main reason for the inclusion of many of the maps. Without explanation for their diversity, the work's many maps come in a range of styles, some of which make them hard to interpret, particularly for young readers. Spruner's Map of Greece, for example, taken from his *Atlas Antiquus*, is captioned "Map of Greece, Epirus after the Persian War". This replicates the half-covered title of the original map without explaining what Epirus is or what its relevance is to the Persian Wars (a relevance mostly confined to the history of Epirus). The style of the map makes it hard to find Epirus unless you already know where it is, and hard to identify anywhere else. The opposite problem affects the very basic modern map which accompanies *The Growth of Persian Power* section. Its simplicity creates the erroneous impression that land around Babylon, Tyre, Jerusalem, and Egypt are outside the Persian Empire when the text is discussing Persian expansion reaching Greek territory "along the Mediterranean coast", meaning the coast of Asia Minor, while that coast itself is cut off the map. A nineteenth-century map of the Caspian Sea bears a modern caption describing it as a map of the Persian Empire. A child would likely require the help of

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an adult with knowledge of the geography (and perhaps history) of the area to understand how the various maps fit together while even adults may find the maps misleading.

Other sorts of images come with their own issues. The Battle of Marathon is a famous land battle, but it is coupled with an image of a sea battle that has the caption "Persian Army", and the image itself is dominated by Greeks attacking capsized non-Greeks who are in the background – a confusing combination. More egregiously, reference to the actions of the men of Thebes, in mainland Greece, is accompanied by a photograph of Thebes in Egypt – a mistake which adult non-specialists might not recognise, never-mind children, but which nonetheless gives a false impression of ancient and modern Greek Thebes. Descriptions and depictions of Greek fighting techniques (naval and land) are out-of-date to the point of being misleading while a frequently repeated image of a Greek soldier appears to have been sourced from a fantasy site and makes extensive use of anachronistic skull iconography. The Battle of Salamis is accompanied by a captioned image of Themistocles about to cut the throat of a young woman as a human sacrifice. To have included this without comment or context is misleading. It is extremely unlikely that a human sacrifice was performed. Plutarch (*Themistocles*, 13.2) is the only surviving source for this tradition, referring to the sacrifice of *three young men*, and even Plutarch cites it with the qualifying statement that this is at least what Phanias the Lesbian says. This seems to be a case of the modern picture driving the book's text, erroneously indicating that human sacrifice was a normal part of classical Greek practice.

Terminology is used inconsistently. Darius, Great King of Persia, is referred to as the "Persian emperor", while his successor, Xerxes, is "king" of Persia. Leonidas, co-king of Sparta, is referred to without his name or title, as the "Spartan commander". The book places emphasis on the Greeks as the originators of democracy and it was perhaps felt that reference to Greek kings undermined the dichotomy established between the two cultures. *History and Movies* attempts to dismantle the idea of moral contrast between Greece and Persia, stressing that the film *300* (no reference to the graphic novel that the film was based on) was misleading in contrasting good Greece and evil Persia. This draws the young reader towards a more sophisticated way of thinking about representation, yet *Greeks and Persians Go to War* perpetuates a similar idea in its own way, not least by omitting to mention that the Athenians broke their alliance with Persia and by describing the Persians as pursuing empire elsewhere after the Persian Wars without

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reference to the Athenians doing the same. This creates the impression of a greedy Persian Empire insatiable for conquest standing in contrast to the more altruistic Greeks, when even from antiquity there was recognition that Greeks could be just as voraciously expansionist. There is also something quite hostile in the way that it is stated that the Greeks doubly won the Persian Wars by going on to have cultural influence as well as winning the military victory. While the Persian Wars were undoubtedly significant, this representation downplays the Persians' enduring cultural influence and omits the Persians' lasting influence in Greece (not least their decision to switch to financial rather than military intervention). It was a less culturally loaded but still curious decision to include the tradition that the path at Thermopylae was left exposed by the Phocians because of a false rumour that their city was under attack. Most accounts simply cite them as having been overcome.

The Persian Wars are an interesting and culturally significant phenomenon that makes their inclusion in *Baby Professor*'s extensive educational range welcome. The inclusion suggests to young readers that ancient history, ancient military history, is an area that they may find interesting and enjoyable. It also provides the narrative in simplified language that makes the story accessible to children. Nonetheless, the mistakes and misrepresentations within the text may caution many from recommending this work to young people as they may well learn information that is factually incorrect and which reinforces the idea of Greek moral superiority over Persia.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Ancient Slavery Ancient Warfare Architecture Athens Graeco-Persian Wars Greek History
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adversity Conflict Freedom Historical figures History Morality Nation Sacrifice Violence War

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Further Reading

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