Katerina Volioti, "Entry on: Leonidas and the Battle at Thermopylae [Ο Λεωνίδας (Ο Leōnídas)] by Natalia Kapatsoulia, Filippos Mandilaras ", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Lisa Maurice. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2019). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/654. Entry version as of November 05, 2026.

Natalia Kapatsoulia , Filippos Mandilaras

Leonidas and the Battle at Thermopylae [Ο Λεωνίδας (Ο Leōnídas)]

Greece (2010)

TAGS: Anaxandridas Ephialtes Leonidas Persians Sparta Thermopylae Xerxes



Courtesy of the Publisher. Retrieved from epbooks.gr (accessed: July 5, 2022).

General information	
Title of the work	Leonidas and the Battle at Thermopylae [Ο Λεωνίδας (Ο Leōnídas)]
Country of the First Edition	Greece
Country/countries of popularity	Greece, United Kingdom, Germany, France
Original Language	Greek
First Edition Date	2010
First Edition Details	Philippos Mandilaras, *Ο Λεωνίδας* [O Leōnídas], My First History [Η Πρώτη μου Ιστορία (Ī prṓtī mou Istoría)]. Athens: Papadopoulos Publishing, 2010, 36 pp.
ISBN	9789604841585
Available Onllne	Demo of 9 pages available at epbooks.gr (accessed: October 13, 2021).
Genre	Illustrated works
Target Audience	Children (4+)
Author of the Entry	Katerina Volioti, University of Roehampton, Katerina.Volioti@roehampton.ac.uk

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

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Creators



Natalia Kapatsoulia (Illustrator)

Natalia Kapatsoulia studied French Literature in Athens, and she worked as a language tutor before embarking on a career as a full-time illustrator of children's books. Kapatsoulia has authored one picture book *Η Μαμά πετάει* [Mom Wants to Fly], which has been translated into Spanish *Mamá quiere volar*. Kapatsoulia, who now lives on the island of Kefalonia, Greece, has collaborated with Filippos Mandilaras on multiple book projects.

Sources:

Official website (accessed: July 2, 2018).

Profile at the epbooks.gr (accessed: July 2, 2018).

Bio prepared by Katerina Volioti, University of Roehampton, Katerina.Volioti@roehampton.ac.uk



Filippos Mandilaras , b. 1965 (Author)

Filippos Mandilaras is a prolific and well-known writer of children's illustrated books and of young adults' novels. Mandilaras studied French Literature in Sorbonne, Paris. His latest novel, which was published in May 2016, is entitled *Υπέροχος Κόσμος* [Wonderful World], and it recounts the story of teenage life in a deprived Athenian district. With his illustrated books, Mandilaras aims to encourage parents and teachers to improvise by adding words when reading stories to children. Mandilaras is interested in the anthropology of

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extraordinary creatures and his forthcoming work is about Modern Greek Mythologies.

Sources:

In Greek:

Profile on EP Books' website (accessed: June 27, 2018).

i-read.i-teen.gr (accessed: June 27, 2018).

Public Blog, published 15 September 2015 (accessed: June 27, 2018).

Press Publica, published 28 January 2017 (accessed: June 27, 2018).

Linkedin.com, published published 6 May 2016 (accessed: February 6, 2019).

In English:

Amazon.com (accessed: June 27, 2018).

On Mandoulides' website, published 7 March 2017 (accessed: June 27, 2018).

In German:

literaturfestival.com (accessed: June 27, 2018).

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Additional information

Translation

English: *Leonidas and the battle at Thermopylae*, trans. Alison Falkonakis, Athens: Papadopoulos Publishing, 2017, 24 pp.

German: *Leonidas an den Thermopylen*, trans. Georgios Kotelidis, Athens: Papadopoulos Publishing, 2017, 24 pp.

French: *Léonidas et la bataille des Thermopyles*, trans. Irini Pirpassou, Athens: Editions Papadopoulos, 2017, 24 pp.

Summary

As we read in the opening page, this book is about a person who left his mark on Greek history. We learn about his family background. Leonidas' father, Anaxandridas, was king of Sparta. Leonidas, like other Spartan boys, received military training. When he became king, he had to take action against the Persians who invaded Greece. Leonidas consulted an oracle about what to do, and gathered together leaders from other Greek city-states to discuss whether or not to surrender to the Persians. The Persian army was huge and already making its way through mainland Greece. Leonidas spoke to the Greeks and convinced them to fight back, and to confront the Persians at Thermopylae.

The book relates how the site was a narrow gorge, with mountains on one side and the sea on the other side. Six thousand Greek soldiers awaited the Persians in that narrow strip of land. When the Persians arrived, their King, Xerxes, thought that his massive army would scare the Greeks away. Xerxes became impatient with the Greeks' refusal to surrender. The Greeks answered back to him that they were not afraid that the Persian archers' arrows could hide the sunlight. Xerxes promised the Greeks riches if they put down their weapons, only to receive Leonidas' defiant response *molon labe* ("come and get them", i.e., the weapons).

Xerxes started sending small detachments of his army to fight the Greeks, but the Greeks successfully repelled the Persians. Xerxes despaired that "a handful of men" ruined his plans to progress further south and capture the Greek city-states. One evening, a man called Ephialtes offered to help Xerxes out by guiding his army through a secret mountain path. The traitor received a massive payment for his services. So, half of the Persian army crossed the mountain, reaching

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behind the line of the Greek army. Leonidas was surrounded by Persians from all sides. Leonidas asked other Greek leaders and their armies to leave. He would stay behind with three hundred dedicated Spartans. They were killed by the Persians, but their act of bravery was remembered forever. The book closes with the epigram that reads: “Stranger, tell the others that here we lie faithful to the laws of our country”.

Analysis

This book appears to be more about a brave and influential figure than a battle of great historical significance. The probable date of the battle is August 480 BCE, but no date is mentioned in this book. Also omitted are details in the Herodotean account (Hdt. 7.201—33), and no mention is made of the lyric poet Simonides, who is credited with the epigram at the end of the book (fr. 531).* The text is simple and generic, addressing an international audience of readers who may or may not have knowledge of Greek history. Leonidas, perhaps like a mythical hero, comes to the fore as the protagonist of the action. Leonidas’ portrayal may also be compared to that in modern film, such as Rudolph Maté’s *The 300 Spartans* (1962).**

Leonidas is not presented only as a good soldier, which is typical for someone of a Spartan background. Rather, Leonidas emerges also as someone who influences others, Greeks and non-Greeks alike, with what he has to say. Evidently, it is not just his war tactics that earn him a place in history, but mostly his words, especially the legendary *molon labe*. To some extent at least, Leonidas may remind readers who are knowledgeable about Classical Athens of rhetoricians, and, of course, of Athens’ prime statesman, Pericles, and his famous Funeral Speech.

There appears to be a subtle moralistic message in the book, namely, about the effect of acts (and words) of bravery, and how these are commemorated. Leonidas, then, may serve as a role-model of a leader who is faithful to the laws of his country. His bravery entails sacrifice, as well as the loss of another three-hundred Spartans, but, appropriately for a book for young children, sadness is nuanced, if not downplayed.

The theme of death seems to be prevalent in at least three instances in the book. First, the pass of Thermopylae is described as “a bleak place”, without any living organisms. Poignantly, the illustration

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includes a depiction of a fish skeleton. Second, the traitor Ephialtes, approaches the Persians at night. The background in the illustration is blue-black, and Ephialtes is shown wearing a cloth over his head, even though no one would see him at night. The pictorial narrative seems to warn readers that Ephialtes' betrayal will bring about the demise of the Greek army. Third, the closing page features a barren landscape, again with connotations of death. A lizard, a creature that survives in arid conditions, reaches out to the epigram, which is inscribed on a rather plain tombstone. There is little vegetation, and no signs of life. At the bottom left corner, however, there are three gold coins, and these signal the cause of the soldiers' death. The coins might remind (adult) readers of Judas' thirty pieces of silver. In any case, the message is that had Ephialtes not betrayed the Greeks, the soldiers would not have fallen.

In addition to Leonidas, the book appears to highlight the importance of Thermopylae. On the one hand, Thermopylae is portrayed as a unique geographical location. The place is in central Greece, connecting northern with southern territories. According to Herodotus (Hdt. 7.201) the narrow pass is also known as gates, *pylai* (Πύλαι).*** The book, of course, does not explicitly reference ancient sources. Perhaps remarkably, Leonidas is prepared to die in a location quite far away from his home town. Being a great leader, Leonidas does not think locally, with reference only to a small Spartan world, but has a vision about defending Greece. On the other hand, Thermopylae emerges as an intangible entity that symbolises acts of extreme heroism. Young children will learn the word 'Thermopylae'. Greek children, in particular, will engage again with Thermopylae in their schooling. At high school in Greece, students can study a poem by the world-famous poet Constantine Cavafy that is entitled *Thermopylae*.**** The first two verses read as follows:

Honor to those who in the life they lead

define and guard a Thermopylae

translation Edmund Keeley/Philip Sherrard

Kapatsoulia's illustrations, which include depictions of the Persians

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wearing long robes and pointed hats, resemble those in her and Mandilaras' book 'The Battle of Marathon'.***** At Thermopylae, however, the King's servants hold a large and elaborate parasol to protect Xerxes from the sun. While this anachronism aims to instill fun in the story, it may also recall Medieval, Renaissance, and post-Renaissance paintings where parasols encapsulate ideas about nobility and power relations (also within a colonial context). The drawing style is aligned with that of comics, and does not take any cues from Snyder's *300*, a much-discussed Hollywood movie from 2006 featuring characters with excessive piercings and accessories.******

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* https://www.loebclassics.com/view/simonides-fragments/1991/pb_LCL476.425.xml

and also see (accessed January 22, 2019).

** See Konstantinos Nikoloutsos, "Reviving the Past: Cinematic History and Popular Memory in "The 300 Spartans" (1962)", *The Classical World* 106 (2013): 261–283.

***See (accessed January 22, 2019).

**** See (accessed January 22, 2019).

***** See (accessed January 22, 2019).

****** For a review see (accessed January 22, 2019).

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Anaxandridas Ephialtes Leonidas Persians Sparta Thermopylae Xerxes
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant	Character traits Death Good deeds Heroism History Integrity Knowledge Memory Past Resilience Success and failure Values War

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Further Reading

Information about the book:

https://www.epbooks.gr/product.asp?catid=101506&title= (accessed February 12, 2019).

Addenda

Entry based on:

Philippos Mandilaras, *Leonidas and the Battle at Thermopylae,* transl. by Alison Falkonakis, Athens: Papadopoulos Publishing, 2017, 24 pp., ISBN: 978-960-569-569-9

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