Sonya Nevin, "Entry on: The Battle of Marathon. The Decisive End of the First Greco-Persian War by Delphine Dumont", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Elizabeth Hale. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2019). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/880. Entry version as of November 05, 2026.

Delphine Dumont

The Battle of Marathon. The Decisive End of the First Greco-Persian War

France (2013)

TAGS: Ares Athens Divination Gods Graeco-Persian Wars Greek History





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

General information	
Title of the work	The Battle of Marathon. The Decisive End of the First Greco-Persian War
Country of the First Edition	France
Country/countries of popularity	France, United Kingdom
Original Language	French
First Edition Date	2013
First Edition Details	Delphine Dumont, *La bataille de Marathon: L'épisode mythique de la fin de la première guerre médique*. 50 Minutes: Grandes Batailles 22. 50Minutes.fr, 2013, 72 pp. Delphine Dumont, *The Battle of Marathon. The Decisive End of the First Greco-Persian War*. 50Minutes.com, 2016, 38 pp.
ISBN	9782806273055
Genre	Historical fiction, Instructional and educational works, Textbooks
Target Audience	Crossover (teens, young adults, adults)
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Creators



Delphine Dumont (Author)

Delphine Dumont is a French writer for the 50Minutes series (50Minutes.com). The series was established to give students and other interested parties access to concise information on a range of topics. The volumes are available in hard or electronic format and readers are encouraged to take out a subscription in order to read widely.

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Additional information

Summary

This short educational book uses a combination of short text sections and inset text boxes to communicate the events and context of the Battle of Marathon to teenagers and young adults. The publisher asserts that this style makes the information easier to absorb and remember, serving as a sort of short course in the subject. The sections included are as follows:

The Battle of Marathon: Key Information.

Political and Social Context:

- Expansion of the Persian Empire
- The Ionian Revolt
- The Aegean Strategy of Darius I

Commanders and Leaders:

- Miltiades, Athenian general
- Callimachus of Aphidna, Athenian polemarch
- Datis the Mede, Persian admiral
- Artaphernes, Persian general

Analysis of the Battle:

- Choosing Marathon
- Athens: a military democracy
- The forces present
- The Greek advantage in weaponry and the lack of Persian horsemen
- The strategy
- The development of the battle
- A legendary race

Repercussions of the Battle:

- The victory of Athenian democracy over tyranny
- The founding of the Delian League
- The second Greco-Persian War
- The origin of democratic discourse

Summary.

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Analysis

Physically *The Battle of Marathon* is very small (c.8x12cm) and suited to carrying in a pocket, yet it manages to contain a great deal of information. The other ancient topics in the series are: *The Eruption of Vesuvius*, *The Battle of Actium*, *The Battle of Thermopylae*, *The Trojan War* and *Tutankhamun*.

The book opens by framing the campaign as a result of as Persian expansion and desire for revenge for the Ionian Revolt, and it opens up the idea of the legacy of the battle with reference to the Athenian mythologizing of the event after the battle and to two major sources, Herodotus and Diodorus. That mythologizing is not explored to any great extent later on, nor is the particular influence of each author on the shaping of the tradition, yet this is still a helpful introduction as it introduces the idea of cultural influence on the way an event is remembered.

The use of sub-sections and *Good to Know* text-boxes helps break-down complex information. There is information, for example, on the wider context of empire, such as the goods and influence that come with imperial activity and the system of taxation. An overview of the Ionian Revolt provides further context. The 'Choosing Marathon' section adds local background information regarding the Pisistratid influence (although here, 'Pisistratides' (p. 16), which sounds wrong in English) in the area as well as the geographical advantages of the site, all of which help to explain the location of the battle. There is some background on social structure in Athens – property classes, military service, vote needed to call-up army – which adds to the picture of who is fighting and what sort of community they came from. The Plataean contribution is also discussed. There is less cultural information on the Persian army, but there is some discussion of it as a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual army, with some attention to potential logistical controls. Given the amount of information on combatants and the discussion of ethnicity it is a little surprising that there is no mention of the fact that many Greeks fought on the Persian side.

A section on people prioritises Miltiades. There is detail on his background, which helps to explain why he was so significant within the campaign. The polemarch, Callimachus, is given shorter shrift; he is discussed in reaction to Miltiades and there is a reference to how he 'appears... important' because Miltiades invites Callimachus to make a decision (a reference to Herodotus, 6.109–110). His death is

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mentioned, but not the many traditions around it. While it is understandable that Miltiades was prioritised, it is a little harder to see why Callimachus is so downplayed. Two Persian nobles also feature, Datis and Artaphernes. They are discussed more briefly and only in terms of their participation in the Persian Wars, however it is well-balanced to discuss two leaders from each side.

Elements of strategy and tactics are explored. There is reference to the different arms used. It is suggested that while the plain appeared good for horses it was not and Datis realised that – this is a bit of a stretch but it offers an explanation for the non-use of cavalry. It is explained that the Greeks were attempting to prevent the Persians from coming inland while waiting in the hope that the Spartans would arrive. When it is clear that the Spartans will not come then the Greeks are keen to fight because of their superior weapons and because their 'fighting technique, called Phalanx, was daunting' (p. 22). This is a little misleading and is followed by a rather out-of-date account of hoplite fighting, but it at least conveys the basic premise. The explanation of the Greeks' desire to fight is then countered by an offer of three possibilities for why they fought then: because the cavalry had been seen to depart; because the Persians prepared to attack; because of a desire to return and defend the Athenian port, Phalerum. This offers some welcome ambiguity about what happened and why, although the account is a little confusing to follow. The battle is then described with reference to walking then running in to attack, the Greeks making their wings stronger than their centre, and the pursuit of those who were defeated and fled towards the ships. This does not convey much sense of the function of the wings, but a diagram helps to some extent (p. 23).

There is some exploration of the aftermath and follow-up to the battle which helps the reader to understand its significance. In relation to the modern world there is reference to Michel Bréal creating the modern marathon: 'to commemorate this feat: the marathon (42.195 km run), which is the longest athletics event in the Olympic Games' (p. 25). There is no mention of de Coubertin and no explicit mention of Bréal's influence on getting the marathon into the modern Olympics, so this is a little confusing, however any reference to the modern marathon gives readers a prompt to explore that subject more elsewhere if they choose to. In relation to the ancient world, it is a little surprising to see it said that the Persians' decision to refrain from attacking Athens 'casts doubt' on importance of the campaign (p. 26). The following section then refers to Darius' plan to reinvade and

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to Xerxes' invasion, so the reader may find themself unsure whether the book is arguing for or against the Persian commitment to the invasion. The battles of Thermopylae, Salamis, and Plataea are all briefly outlined. Some balance is added with discussion of the Athenians' use of their success in the war to justify hegemony over the other Greeks. There is then a brief account of the ancient Macedonians making use of the Persian Wars as part of their rhetorical arsenal and there is reference to the revolutionaries of France and America making similar use of Marathon as a rallying cry.

There are some slips in the work. Cyrus *II* is erroneously named as the pre-Greco-Persian War empire builder – a reference to Cyrus I. Cyrus is also referred to as 'king', when 'Great King' would be more usual (elsewhere Darius is 'emperor', p. 26) and it is a little surprising that there is no mention of him as the founder (rather than expander) of the Empire. 'Asia Minor' is referred to as 'Minor Asia' throughout (pp. 4–5 and beyond); this conveys the main sense but a translation error of this sort would leave readers with a faulty impression. Darius I is referred to as Cyrus' 'successor', when Cyrus was succeeded by his son, Cambyses (p. 4). The Greek term 'isonomia' is translated as 'equal citizenship', which communicates a rough premise but would more accurately be described as equality before the law. It is a little misleading to refer to Athens and Sparta rejecting Persia's heralds and refusing to give earth and water, the symbols of submission, without referring to the Athenians having given earth and water at an earlier stage (p. 8). The island of Euboea is referred to throughout as 'Evia' (e.g. p. 9) following modern Greek pronunciation, which may prove confusing for any readers following up on this subject further. Dating is typically done 'BC/AD', although 'av. JC' (abbreviating 'avant Jésus Christ') appears via translation error.

The work offers a lot of information about the campaign and even its inclusion within the series suggests to young readers and adult non-specialists the cultural importance of the battle. That the ancient titles focus largely on battles (Marathon, Actium, Thermopylae, and the Trojan War) perpetuates a rather traditional view of ancient history as a progression of military events, and of antiquity as a violent and unstable environment. Nonetheless, there is no doubt that these events (mythical or otherwise) have had a lasting impact on culture and in that sense it is positive to have them included in a series which aims to broaden people's understanding; titles on ancient philosophy or drama, for example, may follow in time. That there is some attempt to include social context of warfare adds to the depth of the

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	information offered.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Ares Athens Divination Gods Graeco-Persian Wars Greek History
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adventure Adversity Conflict Death Freedom Heroism Historical figures History Nation Violence War

Further Reading

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Addenda

Translator: Carly Probert.

Advisor: Nicholas Cartelet.

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