

Bulgarian Historical Review

Издание на Института за исторически изследвания при БАН

Bulgarian Historical Review XLII (2014) 3-4, 164-175
ISSN 0204-8906

Zhivko Zhekov

Thermopylae – 480 BC – a Defeat Turned into Victory

(Abstract)

The article deals with the Battle of Thermopylae in 480 BC – the first clash between the armies of the Corinthian League and the Persians during the great invasion of Hellas in 480–479 BC led by the Achaemenid ruler Xerxes. The recapitulation of the battle shows that its outcome had been pre-ordained. Leonidas and Spartan ephors knew in advance that the operation at Thermopylae was doomed, but they decided to carry it out and ordered Leonidas to defend the pass to the end, to show the other Hellenes the determination of Sparta to fight. In this context, Leonidas's behavior was understandable – instead of leaving the position he could no longer safeguard, he ordered the majority of the Hellenic contingents to withdraw, and remained in the pass with the Spartans, Thebans and Thespians only. This deliberate sacrifice of basileus Leonidas and the elite of the Spartan aristocracy showed again Sparta's readiness and determination to fight the Persians to the end at all costs.