

Five men and women in Ancient Greece are set on a dangerous journey of self-discovery during the bitter conflict of the Peloponnesian War. 50 years after Spartan king Leonidas and his brave 300 fought to the death against Xerxes' Persian hordes at Thermopylae, a long and bloody conflict erupted between the militant regime and democratic Athens.

GIFTS OF THE GODS: IRON AND BRONZE

Second Edition

by Thomas J. Berry

Order the complete book from the publisher [Booklocker.com](https://www.booklocker.com)

<https://www.booklocker.com/p/books/10086.html?s=pdf>

or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.

VOLUME 1

GIFTS OF THE GODS

IRON AND BRONZE



THOMAS J. BERRY

Copyright © 2018 Thomas J. Berry

ISBN: 978-1-64438-306-3

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., Bradenton, Florida.

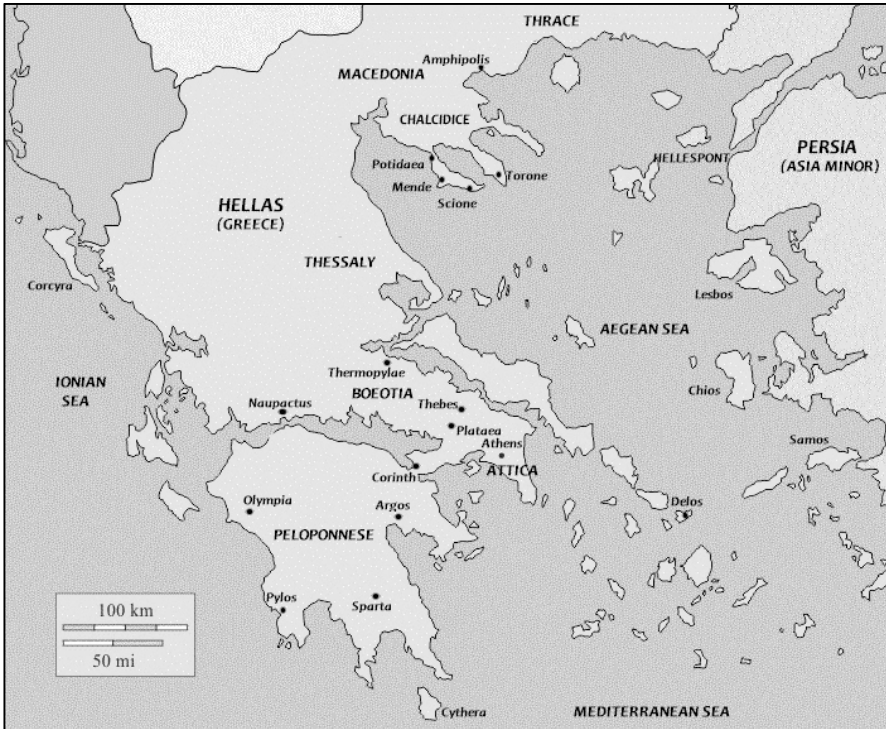
This is a work of historical fiction, based on actual persons and events. The author has taken creative liberty with many details to enhance the reader's experience.

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper.

Booklocker.com, Inc.
2018

First Edition

Ancient World 480 B.C.



Chapter 1

Thermopylae pass
Boeotia

The 13th day of Metageitnion
August 18, 480BC

≈ Ankyra ≈

The young man was up before the sun, grinding a small amount of barley in a broken clay bowl. Darkness covered the mountain camp, hiding the rivers of blood and the heaps of mangled, rotting corpses.

Not even the small amount of moonlight could soften the images left behind. Instead, it magnified the grotesque spectacle of the accursed. Men cried out for relief in death, their moans echoing into every crevice. There was no escaping it and the lad had tried everything. He looked across the broken, rocky cliff and out over the sea. The dead were the lucky ones. Only the damned remained.

His master would be awake soon if he was not already. The lad mixed the barley with some hot water from the fabled springs and added ground flour and a touch of garlic. He cooked it over a small flame until it formed into a small hard biscuit. The water was sulfuric, but it was all they had.

On some mornings, the water flowed cold and clear while on others it became hot and acidic. Much like the goddess, Persephone, who blessed these waters, the alternating currents reminded the boy of a divided, polarizing world. The young goddess spent half the year above the earth with her mother, Demeter, who gave life to all living things, and the other half deep in the underworld with Hades.

It wouldn't matter anyway. Before the sun set again, their bodies would be added to the rotting piles before him. Such was the choice he had made. It was too late to back out now.

An hour later the first rays of the sun began to creep over the sea cliffs in the west and the full effect of yesterday's battle began to come into focus. Most of the camp had already risen, preparing a meal they knew would be their last. It was a freeing thought, the lad mused. He could focus on the here and now and not worry about tomorrow. The pain would be short-lived, the last moments fleeting. How would one be remembered this

day? With honor, hopefully. He wanted their deaths to mean something. Would it be worth the sacrifice?

As the morning sun rose, it illuminated the towering heights of Mt. Kallidromo on their left. Standing 1,400 feet tall, it was an imposing structure and served as a necessary device in the king's plans. This would be their last battlefield. This narrow opening between the mountain and the sea cliffs, dropping 200 feet into the swirling, rocky Gulf of Malis on the Aegean Sea, represented the narrow opening Leonidas plugged with his 4,000 soldiers from the Peloponnese.

The firestorm on the opposite side of the narrow opening was the hordes of Persian invaders led by their own king, Xerxes. Rumors put their numbers at a million, but the real figures were probably closer to a quarter of that. Over the past two days, the Hellenic forces had cut into that number by the thousands, spilling their blood on the rocky terrain or pushing them over the sheer cliff face into the merciless sea far below.

The price for these two days had been steep. Leonidas led a collection of defenders from a variety of towns across the Peloponnese, the large westernmost peninsula of the territory of Hellas on the European side of the Aegean Sea. Made up of a collection of large city-states and small villages, these communities were often in conflict with each other over land, politics, and resources. The invasion of Xerxes's tremendous army had been the catalyst that finally brought them together in a common cause.

The king's forces were spearheaded by his own 300 elite warriors from Sparta. Their success to date had been accomplished by limiting the number of Persians through the pass, where only 12 men could walk abreast. Leonidas had the Peloponnesians rebuild and fortify an ancient wall located 160 feet behind the Narrows, effectively creating a triangle of death where they could limit the hordes flooding in and cut them down efficiently. He had stopped the wall four feet from the sea edge to allow access for his small force to traverse from their camp behind it to the battlefield in front.

Xerxes, however, had an unlimited number of barbarian tribes to throw against them. The days grew long, injuries mounted, and bodies weakened. Victory was not the ultimate goal. No amount of effort from Leonidas could withstand the steady onslaught. Their purpose at the Hot Gates was more intangible. They needed to demonstrate to the rest of the Hellenic world that organized resistance was possible, even with the numbers Xerxes had at his disposal.

"Ankyra!" a wounded man growled, struggling to rise. A three-inch bloody gash ran across his forehead, ending in a red welt where his left eye

should have been. He covered his one good eye with his hand and rubbed out some dried blood, not all of it his. The man rolled over on the hard ground beneath him, his sweat and blood mixing with dirt and small pebbles as he slowly rose to his feet. He reached out with a trembling hand against the hard rock to steady himself, but his right leg buckled under his weight and he fell to his knee.

The boy walked over to his Spartan master carrying the large, battered hoplite shield across his back. The shield did not belong to him. His had been pounded and broken before the first evening was finished. This one was the sturdiest the lad could find among the collection of broken bodies and weapons strewn about the bloody landscape.

Ankyra was a strong lad, almost 16 years old, and built like the anchor his master named him for. Eurytus could barely stand anymore and the shield would provide a crutch for now. His right thigh had been skewered by a Persian arrow yesterday but the lad who had accompanied him on this one-way journey to the underworld had simply broken it off at the shaft and let it remain. Pulling it out would have caused more damage and might require possible amputation. His master had only to last one more day. That's all Leonidas had asked of them. One more day.

"Here, sir! Use this to hold your weight. Keep it with you. You don't know the appointed time the enemy will be upon us."

Eurytus looked at him with his one good eye and laughed heartily. "It won't matter the time, lad. I can't see worth a damn, anyway. Just point me in their general direction, put a sword in my hand, my back to this damn rock, and I'll make them pay ten to one for every injury they've caused me. Today is for Leonidas. Today is for redemption."

A bugle sounded not far in the distance and a dozen heads turned in unison. A meeting was being called, the first of the day. Possibly the last one on this earth. Ankyra helped his master make his way to the large wall that rose higher than two fully grown men. It would serve as their last defense, their final battleground, their eternal resting place.

A crowd had gathered. It was the most wretched looking assortment of men Ankyra had ever seen in his life, yet the sight caused him to swell with pride. These were the ones who yet lived. These were the ones who had battled and survived to arrive on this unholy dawn. Hundreds had already given their lives and thousands more would surely be sacrificed before Xerxes and his millions had finished his ambitious plan to take over the western coast of the Aegean.

GIFTS OF THE GODS

A man rose upon a large boulder, a few feet from the wall. Like the rest of the warriors who stood before him, his black beard was full and fierce. He wore his years well, the lad thought, with only a few grey strands finding their way through the tangled mess of long hair he had carefully braided on each side of his shoulders. King Leonidas of Sparta stood before the remnants of his small army, hobbled himself by a nagging leg injury and a left forearm that had taken the full impact of an iron club. His own manservant had splint the arm but it would never hold a shield again. Not today. Not ever.

Leonidas was not a tall man and he carried himself with quiet humbleness. He shunned ostentatiousness and walked among his men, treating them as equals. He left the golden crowns and silk robes to Xerxes. What need had he of them? He commanded a city where money and material goods counted for nothing, where the rich were shunned, and service to the greater good provided a man all the glory he desired.

“All hail Leonidas! All hail the king!” A cry erupted at the sight of their leader.

His face betrayed nothing as he surveyed the five hundred men who represented the last, futile stand to keep the invaders out of their homeland. They stood in a large section of the pass, the last battleground. The Hot Gates, so named for the sulfur spring located nearby, narrowed in the north about a hundred yards distant. At this juncture only 12 men could stand abreast between the towering cliffs of Kallidromo to the west and the sheer drop into the pounding surf below. This narrow opening in the mountains represented the only avenue into Hellas from the east, the only way the Persian horde of Xerxes army could advance overland. As long as the Spartans held this narrow pass, the multitude of Persians counted for nothing.

Leonidas raised his right hand to speak. He was a man of few words, keeping to the traditional brevity of his culture. The sun was rising steadily in the sky, however, and the Persians would be marching on them soon. They were advancing even now, he thought, if his scouts along the goat pass were to be trusted.

“Spartans, the day of reckoning is upon us. Your time is here and you will carry yourself with the dignity of your race. My words are not for you but for the Thespaians who, alone of all the assembled Hellenes, desired to remain with us today and fight alongside the best warriors the world has ever known. May you die with pride and forgo dishonor. Never retreat. Never surrender. We will see you in Hades!”

“Huzzah! Huzzah!” The Spartan battle cry rose as one voice.

“Take some time, you Spartans. Dress your hair and prepare your armor. You will meet your gods today. It is a good time to die.”

Only 500 men remained out of the original 4,000 Peloponnesians. Of the 300 Spartans who led the defenders, fewer than 100 could still stand. Last night, after Leonidas had heard the Persians had discovered a goat path through the mountains that led them behind the Spartan line, he released the last remaining citizen-soldiers to return home. His Spartans would remain to hold out as long as possible and give them time to make their escape. It was essential they leave under the cover of darkness before the Persians cut off their rear guard. Leonidas magnanimously released all helots and servants of the Spartans as well. To his surprise, many remained, including Ankyra, who preferred to die with honor.

Another man rose beside the Spartan king. The servant boy recognized him as Dienekes, one of the few captains remaining and Leonidas’ chief advisor. Dienekes had fought with incredible fortitude yesterday, killing scores of enemies while saving the life of his own master, Eurytus. Ankyra has witnessed the action first hand, thick in the fire of it as he was.

Each warrior had his own attendant, a helot boy from Sparta whom he trusted. It was one of Ankyra’s main duties to carry spare weapons for his master and hand him an extra spear or sword should he have need of it. By the afternoon of the first day’s battle, Ankyra had been thrust into battle himself, unprotected by the bronze armor afforded his Spartan master.

“Men,” Dienekes called out. “Come forward for your new assignments. With so many dead and gone, we need to reform companies under experienced commanders. This is our last stand. We fight with the wall at our backs and use it as a shield. They will come at us hard and fast, looking to overwhelm us. We will hold them as long as we can.”

“What happens when all goes to hell?” someone called out unceremoniously.

Leonidas smiled grimly. “Hell is already here. We welcome it with open arms and will look to bring as many prized Persians with us as we can carry.”

“Our fallback position will be that little hill about a thousand yards back,” Dienekes explained. “At the appointed signal, when there is nothing left to accomplish, the remaining men will rush the narrows of the wall behind us and make our last stand there. The wall will buy us time but not much. We will have a cache of arms here at the wall, another halfway back, and the last close to the hill. Let’s show them the courage of free men!”

GIFTS OF THE GODS

The Persians waited until midday to approach for parlay, by which time Leonidas had confirmation of the serious threat to their rear. Xerxes's own elite warriors called the Immortals had crossed the goat path through the mountains and emerged six miles to their rear. They numbered 10,000 hand-picked men, the best the vast Persian Empire had to offer. They were princes of their realm, prized champions all. These warriors had fought the Peloponnesians on the evening of the first day and lost 1,000 men to the Spartan swords and spears. Xerxes would let them have their revenge today.

Thousands of Persians were already pouring through the narrow pass to the front of Leonidas' depleted ranks. They encompassed tribes from the far reaches of Babylon, Armenia, Lydia, Ethiopia, and dozens more. Many stood apart from the rest with distinctive silken clothing and pantaloons, while others were dressed in common woven fabrics. Few possessed the stout wooden shields of the Spartans, opting instead for tall wicker ones which confounded slicing swords. Their commanders kept them back from the Spartan defenders for now, waiting on instructions from their king. Standing tall in front of them were two rows of archers, 500 men across, their deadly projectiles notched and ready to deliver the initial blow.

Two tall Egyptians approached on horseback, royal guards of the great Xerxes himself. They wore helmets of gold and red ornamental sashes signifying their regiment. Leonidas climbed to the top of the Phokian Wall, escorted by several of his captains. He was stoic, but upright, showing none of the injuries Ankyra knew he suffered from. He was the leader of this last band of Hellenic soldiers. He was not just Sparta today...he represented all freemen who stood before tyranny.

The Spartans had fortified the ancient wall in the last week, adding three towers that rose six feet high. Each tower had been decorated with a stout wooden palisade covered in ox hides, where three platoons of armed men could release small boulders on the enemy. Leonidas has placed a handful of men in each tower this afternoon in a last-ditch effort to keep the hordes from overrunning the men below. The sides curved upwards from the bottom to prevent a defender from being trapped against it. It was thick through the middle, measuring almost 16 feet.

Ankyra stood beside his master near the base carrying a small sword and what was left of a shafted spear. He would direct the impaired Eurytus in the fight to come, calling out directions as best he could in the coming slaughter. He had assisted his master with getting his bronze chest armor buckled over his linen corselet, allowing the leather apron to hang low to

protect the more vital areas. He knelt down and adjusted the metal shin greaves around his legs. Mobility was not in the cards today, not with the arrow shaft still protruding from his thigh, but it might afford him a few more seconds. The bright scarlet cape came next, signifying his status as a *Spartiate*, the elite warrior of his legendary city. Finally, the lad placed a felt cawl on his head and covered it with a heavy bronze helmet. He looked upon the red plume line of horsehair that ran front to rear. It made the warrior look taller and more menacing, he supposed. The lad thought it looked almost royal.

He had gathered as much armor as he could salvage from the corpses of his fellow warriors. Earlier, he put on the bronze chest plate of the mighty Tenok and the battered helmet of the Olympic wrestler, Kagememnon. He hefted the heavy sword of Dionysus in his right hand, a brave warrior who had perished from his wounds during the long night. He had been schoolmates of his master not a few years back. The broken shield with the scarlet lambda symbol, characterized by an upside-down 'V' emblazoned across the front, had been hacked by a Persian axe but still held strength. Ankyra would see just how much give it had left.

The rest of the men were as ready as they would ever be. Spartan capes dotted the field as small groups of men armed themselves with broken swords and spears. They all carried strong wooden shields, most of them hand-picked from the pile of bodies stacked against the cliff. Survival was not the order of the day. Honor and glory were all that remained.

"The great king, Xerxes, will allow you and your men to live if you simply lay down your arms and supplicate yourself before him," the Egyptian called out across the plain. His large white horse was agitated, and it took a tug on the reins before he settled down. The rancid smell of rotting bodies so close in proximity was almost overwhelming.

Leonidas looked around at the haggard faces of his men. They had stood beside him through the terrible fighting, never questioning his orders, never backing down from insurmountable odds. His own life had been forfeited long ago. Maybe their deaths today would spark the city-states to come together and fight the war he had started. To die on the field of battle in service to Sparta was the highest honor any *Spartiate* could hope to achieve. He would give them that honor today. "Tell King Xerxes that the Hellas will remain free as long as there are men left to defend it. Tell him that soon he will join us in Hades...and we will be waiting for him!"

Chapter 6

Olympia

The 28th day of Hekatombaion
August 12, 432BC

15 years later

≈ Kallipateira ≈

Kalli opened the flap of her small tent staked out in the flat river basin just north of the Alfios and looked out upon the large marble buildings of Olympia. They always seemed to take her breath away no matter how many times she gazed upon them.

There were thousands of people from all corners of the Aegean milling around the sacred grounds, attending various competitions and training exercises, or viewing the tall statues of past victors that lined the corridor of the Zanes leading to the vaulted track stadium.

The ancient Olympic grounds were nestled in the foothills of Mount Kronos in the narrow river basin only ten miles east of the Ionian Sea. In the extreme heat of the summer, the two rivers were now bone dry, offering no source of drinking water or opportunities to bathe for any of the thousands who came to watch the festival. The foul stench of dirty and sweaty bodies cramped in the small living space was almost surreal.

She tried to put that behind her though and sought out the competing aromas from food vendors hawking their recent dishes and listened for the harmonies of musicians playing the flute and strings for small gatherings of onlookers. Philosophers and poets alike used the large crowds to loudly espouse their opinions on everything from political views and civic complaints to the latest gossip and crude sexual jokes.

Men of all shapes and sizes carted around large rickety wagons selling a wide assortment of the latest must-have items for the weary traveler. Performers from Persia and the Black Sea swallowed long iron swords and breathed fire to a delighted audience for a few obols while flirtatious tramps attempted to lure another prospect into their tents. A good prostitute could make as much money in a few days around the Olympic grounds as she might in a year back home. Raucous laughter and boisterous voices filled

the air all the way to the far end of the racing stadium across the hallowed grounds.

Kallipateira was a striking woman of 34, petite in stature but with a surprising strength that came through years of toiling on a hardscrabble farm. Her short hair was covered in a shawl to ward off the fierce summer heat and her simple white *chiton* had seen more mud and dirt lately than she got digging up vegetables in her garden back home. Her late husband, Jycos, would have loved it here, she thought with amusement. He was a beast of a man who enjoyed the outdoors as much as the animals who lived out in the wild.

A tall man approached her and she smiled at him kindly. He was thin but possessed a strong, wiry frame underneath his white robe. His face was just starting to grow a beard. It would help cover the scars that crisscrossed his right cheek and ran down along his jawline and below his ear. In a few years the facial hair would come in quite nicely, she thought.

She took his arm and allowed the man to guide her through the maze of spectators and up onto the road leading past the large square building that housed the hotel for the wealthy patrons of the Games. It was named after the Spartan General, Leonidas, who bravely sacrificed himself and his men fighting the Persians almost 50 years ago. Tall white marble columns were spaced every eight feet, allowing access to large rooms within. Kalli had never stepped foot inside but she often wondered what it might be like. Was it similar her old house in Rhodes?

As the pair crossed in front of the grand hotel, they saw the magnificent temple of Zeus rising several stories in the air. He was the sacred god at Olympia, the most important spiritual deity the Hellenes honored and the basis of all the other various incarnations that existed across the free world. The entire grounds of Olympia were consecrated to him. The temple itself ran over 70 feet long with dozens of smaller statues erected along the perimeter. The beautiful columns were adorned with Doric flourishes.

“I’m anxious to see the new statue in the temple, Peisirodos. I heard it was made by the famed sculptor, Pheidias, and is over 40 feet tall! The gold robe itself is so valuable that I’m sure it could feed an entire city for a year.”

Her son simply smiled and patted her hand warmly. He was 17 and here to complete a journey over a decade in the making. He would enter the boxing arena in two days and compete for the celebrated olive wreath and the glory that came with it. He had a lot to live up to as he attempted to follow in the footsteps of his esteemed family. His father had boxed well in

his time, but it was his mother's side of the family for whom Olympic statues had been erected along the entranceway of Echo Hall on the far side of the temple grounds.

Peisirodos' grandfather was the famous Diagoras from the island of Rhodes who won glory at Olympia 32 years ago. He was also victorious at the other three Panhellenic festivals including four crowns at both Corinth and Nemea. After Olympia, his supporters at Rhodes honored him with a prize that would carry on through the ages – an ode written by the famed poet, Pindar. Peisirodos' two uncles, Damagetos and Akousilaos, both won Olympic victories in boxing as well. He hoped he might be worthy of continuing in their esteemed footsteps.

They had arrived here in the western Peloponnese a little over a month ago in preparation for the boy's competition. Their first stop was at the city of Elis whose administrators organized the Olympic festivals and arranged the judging for the athletic contests. The journey from the cultivated plains of Marathon on the eastern seaboard of Attica through the narrow Isthmus of Corinth and across the wide mountainous southern peninsula took two weeks but both mother and son were strong and fit. Peisirodos carried the small amount of supplies and a makeshift tent gifted to them by her family years before. It had spent many seasons on the hillside of Olympia before her father afforded better accommodations at the Leonidas.

The festivals at Olympia were the pinnacle of Hellenic competition, held every four years to celebrate and honor Zeus. The Games at Delphi honored the god Apollo and the contests at Corinth honored the sea-god, Poseidon. The festivals at Nemea were the only ones to break tradition by honoring the mortal Opheltes, the son of their king who had died in infancy.

All the games presented competitors with the chance to win glory for themselves at one of nine events including wrestling, boxing, and pankration, which was a combination of the two. Men could enter foot races of various distances in a large stadium or could run while weighed down with heavy armor and shield. If a man was especially gifted, he could enter the pentathlon, a series of five events which would be totaled together. These would involve sprinting, wrestling, long-jumping, and throwing both discus and javelin. Horse racing with chariots was very popular as well and was conducted over a large oval outdoor arena. Since the upkeep and maintenance of horses restricted the ownership only to the very wealthy, it was to them that the victory crown of olive branches was

presented, not the rider. This brought forth fierce competition among the prestigious families throughout the Hellenic world.

Kalli pointed over to the enormous gold and ivory statue of Zeus sitting regally on his oversized throne in the center of his temple. Hundreds of onlookers talked among themselves and pushed one another aside to touch their famous deity. Another statue of the important god stood towards the east where the bearded figure looked fierce and imposing carrying a trio of thunderbolts in one hand. The temples, as well as all the competition buildings and stadiums here, were off-limits to married women but the statue was 42 feet tall and surrounded by open walls with colonnades several stories high. There was no way she would miss out on seeing it, if only from afar.

She knew this would present a problem in two days' time but could see no other reasonable solution. Her son would be competing in the boys age group, 12 to 17, and although he had done well in local tournaments this would be his first on a Hellenic level. He would be facing off against others from all over the Hellenic world with no weight restrictions. He was not a large kid but was intelligent for a country boy.

She had trained him to be fast and quick, to make his punches count every time they landed, and to identify his opponent's weaknesses early on. He would do okay, she thought, but her fear for his safety was no less than any mother's would be. She had grown up with boxers her whole life and she knew the inherent dangers involved. Serious injury or even death was not uncommon at this level of competition.

Since her husband's death on campaign in Boeotia 14 years ago, the burden of raising her son and keeping up the farm had fallen on her shoulders. However, women in Athens and the provinces thereof could not legally own property themselves and the courts were on the verge of evicting mother and son to the streets.

She took it upon herself to find a husband who could allow her to retain her property and keep herself out of the brothels where destitute women often ended up. Having a farm already established was an added enticement for a new suitor and she was able to sweet-talk an older widower by the name of Henriq to settle for a new family. He needed a wife to cook and keep the house and the arrangement seemed to satisfy him. He was 20 years her senior and loved the bottle too much for her tastes, but her new marriage allowed her to keep the farm and raise her son as she pleased.

Her family in Rhodes had wealth, power, and influence but she was too proud to go back and her father would not permit it anyway, not with a

child and no visible means of support. He did send her a secret monthly stipend however through a trusted friend who visited Athens regularly, on the promise that she raise her son to box for the honor of her family. She had accepted his proposal and wisely kept the money hidden from her spendthrift husband who would have used the drachmas to drink himself to death. She didn't need a second dead husband, worthless as he was.

"Remember what I taught you, Pei," she said nervously as a hulking figure brushed by them on the way towards the long, vaulted stadium. The *stadion* was an enormous open court made of clay with rolling hills of grass on each side that could accommodate over 40,000 cheering spectators. It ran 200 meters long and was utilized for most of the competitions. It sat a hundred yards east of the temple and just north of the Hippodrome where the horse racing took place. All the competition venues lay outside the sacred altars erected for Zeus and his wife Hera by a five-foot high wall called the *Altius*.

As a married woman, she would not be permitted to enter the stadium and could receive harsh punishments, even death, for trying. Only unmarried women and young girls could enter as spectators, often with the intention of finding a husband among the numerous oiled up and naked competitors. As her son's trainer and advisor, she knew she had to breach the rules and be at his side...somehow. It was a dilemma she continued to wrestle with the rest of the afternoon.

They had registered at Elis a month before the first spectators began to show up, having been required to arrive early and train with the other men. This provided the competitors a chance to size up their peers and the judges to decide who would qualify to advance to the Games. The *Hellanodikai* put the men and boys through a rigorous training program, intending to weed out the weak and keep everyone on a single traditional regimen. There was no disgrace to withdraw at this point and Pei had seen a dozen grapplers and boxers in his age bracket pack up and return home, including two strong boys from nearby farms around Marathon.

An enormous procession commenced on the first day as thousands of people walked from the city to the sacred grounds at Olympia, situated far in the rugged countryside. Spirits were high as both athletes and spectators looked forward to the upcoming festival.

The first morning of the competition involved religious ceremonies needed to obtain the gods' approval for the events to come. All the men competing in the Games took the Olympic Oath in front of the ten judges, or *Hellanodikai*, and the organizers from Elis. The athletes then proceeded

to a sacred olive grove before making an offering to one of their gods and reciting a prayer for victory. Afterwards, Kalli and Pei walked around the venues as wrestling, running, and boys boxing took place in the vaulted *stadion*.

This morning, a large procession took place into the Hippodrome where horse and chariot races would be run. Her father had told her about these dangerous events, as dozens of chariots would be hooked up to teams of two or four horses and be run several times around the oval circuit. The total distance would vary in length between two and eight miles. It was the most exciting and dangerous of all the contests held at Olympia. Kalli noticed many notable and wealthy members of Hellenic society in the procession proudly walking with their sponsored horses and riders, decorated with ribbons and banners of bright reds, blues, and purples.

Pei recognized the Athenian leader, Pericles, who was dressed in simple robes of blue and white while his ward, eighteen-year-old Alcibiades, had come with long robes of vivid reds and purples. The young man was accompanied by many of his wealthy friends who were hanging on his every word. He was very handsome with a tall, strong physique. Pei understood why both the men and women flocked to the young aristocrat.

This afternoon, the crowds would return to the *stadion* where they would witness competition in the five-event pentathlon. Later in the evening, the *Hellanodikai* would crown the victor of the chariot races, while the masses would take part in large celebrations, singing, and succulent feasts.

Tomorrow morning, she would be kept busy with the traditional procession around the sacred altars and the animal sacrifices of 100 oxen made by the priests who guarded the temples of the deities. An ambassador from each city would bring forth an important symbol that would denote their culture and importance while individuals would offer donations of money, valuables, and even weapons and bronze armor. Each city's offerings would be housed in separate treasury buildings erected along the wall leading into the *stadion*, just north of the various statues of the Zanes.

The boxing events were held on the fourth day, so she only had tomorrow left to figure out her next move. It would have to be quick and subtle, lest she be caught. Kalli knew her time was running short and still had no idea how she would be able to pull off a deception that could end in her very public execution.

Chapter 12

Potidaea

25th day of Hekatombaion
July 30, 431BC

≈ Theodoras ≈

How long has the fool been standing there?”
“All night, I reckon, Doro. Been like a statue since yesterday morning. Ya think he’s turned to stone or somethin’?”

“Sick in the head, most likely. Look at the spectacle he’s made of himself!”

The young men stood at the edge of the makeshift camp just south of the city of Potidaea in the Chalcidice region. A smattering of rectangular tents poked up here and there, usually close to large wagons or stone campfires around which was strewn an endless sea of supplies, beddings, kits, armor, and weapons. The camp lay on the flat grassy expanse bordering the sandy beaches to their left and the heavily forested mountains to their right. 2,000 soldiers from Athens and its allied nations called this squalid strip of land home, at least temporarily. Dirt roadways had been cordoned off through the complex, allowing food carts, merchants, vendors, and small groups of men to pass without difficulty.

Doro stepped off the pathway towards the gravel shoreline where a small group of men laughed and pointed at their inattentive comrade. These past few weeks had been monotonously boring for the soldiers at arms and this corner street philosopher was good for at least a few chuckles. He noticed two men even exchange money, most likely betting on how long he’d last out here.

Located 150 miles north of Athens, the province of Chalcidice looked like a hand with fingers jutting south into the Aegean in three distinct peninsulas, each one approximately 75 miles long and ten miles across. The heavily forested mountains were surrounded by over 1,000 square miles of coastal territory just south of the barbaric states of Macedonia and Thrace and had been inhabited by local tribes for centuries.

The lone colony on the westernmost peninsula of Pallene was Potidaea, a city on a narrow strip of land just south of the great hand. It was

originally settled by farmers from Corinth whose magistrates maintained their loyalties and collected taxes in return for protection from barbaric tribesmen coming down out of the hills. After years of political maneuvering, Potidaea came under the grip of Athenian rule but the colony chafed against it. They revolted last year, forcing Athens to send troops to suppress an uprising they feared could spread to other towns in the area.

A tall man approached, dressed not in the flowing purple robes he wore at the festival of Olympia the previous summer but in the shiny chest plate and bronze greaves of a military hoplite. Alcibiades was 19 and in his second year of compulsory military training as an *ephebe*, a probationary citizen. He carried a plain wooden shield through his left arm and gripped a handle on the far end. The shield was coated in bronze for better protection but had no decoration on it. That had yet to be earned on the battlefield.

“Is Socrates still thinking of that problem we talked about?” Alcibiades asked with a laugh. He smiled warmly as the crowd parted before him. He was the life of the party in this desolate, backwoods shithole, Doro thought, but at least he kept everyone entertained. Like his friend, Theodoras was also in training together with 50 other *ephebes*, having arrived a month ago from their previous post at Piraeus. Upon turning 18, they enlisted in the infantry and underwent basic training in drilling and use of arms.

Typical second years were sent to outpost garrisons to complete their training but when war with Sparta loomed heavily this spring, those posts were recalled. Following the initial conflicts at Potidaea last summer, negotiations between Athens and Sparta, representing their respective alliance of city-states, had been conducted over the course of the winter months to no avail. Doro and his friends were shipped up north to help man the fortifications at Potidaea, getting their feet wet in the harshest way possible.

“Hell if I know what the kook is thinkin’,” Doro replied with a shrug. He had no sympathy for this guy, a strange bird if ever he saw one. He knew Socrates to be middle-aged but he dressed in rags as if he had no interest in the finer things in life like Doro and his friends. The old man had a wife, he thought, and perhaps children, but he couldn’t have provided much for them standing around on street corners of Athens philosophizing with the city’s youth.

The guy did like to party though, Doro thought with a wry smile. He could hold his wine better than any of them and still be as coherent when the birds crowed at dawn as before the festivities began. Only Alcibiades could rival him in sheer volume of drink. He wore no sandals on his feet

and Doro recalled that his dress would not change, even in the dead of winter. Socrates was on another plane in life, he thought to himself. Nothing interfered with his train of thought. He cared not a whit if someone was poking fun at his expense.

“Damn, he’s gonna keel over dead if he keeps standin’ there,” Alcibiades said. “He’s been at it a full day. Ornerly goat! I’m going on patrol with the cavalry. Keep an eye on him for me, Doro, my old friend?”

“Sure thing. You know how well he listens to me!”

“I know but Little Bear or Three-Fingers would let him drown if the tide comes in.”

Doro just grunted and watched his old friend stride away. They had been school mates ever since they were very young, raised in a closely-knit group of wealthy and influential families of Athens. Doro was the son of Leandros, a fourth-generation spice merchant whose imported rare and exotic delights extending from the pyramids of Egypt to the far-eastern shores of the Black Sea. He was the youngest of three brothers and had been tutored in the great halls of the family’s estate at Psiri.

Theodoras was named after his maternal grandfather and was short for his age, standing five foot five. He made up for his lack of height with a square build and impressive strength. Doro was proud of his quickness as well, easily outrunning his friends over the fields outside Piraeus last summer dressed in the 60 pounds of bronze armor, helmet, and shield their instructor required.

He stayed on the beach watching Socrates, as people came and went. Alcohol was consumed in large quantities and more money exchanged with the passage of time. Suddenly, the street talker turned his head and relaxed his body. All conversation around him came to a complete stop as they realized their compatriot was moving for the first time in a day and a half. What had he been thinking about? What had been the cause of all this?

Socrates said not a word but simply bowed his head in supplication to Athena before walking back up the path towards his tent for the rest of the day to sleep. Whatever had kept him up had apparently been solved. He knew the only one who might get the answer was Alcibiades.

The old fool and the young buck were complete opposites in every possible way yet were very much the best of friends, he knew. Alcibiades and his younger brother, Cleinias, had been adopted by their uncle, the great Athenian leader Pericles, when their father was killed on campaign in Boeotia. Pericles had two grown sons from a previous marriage which ended in divorce and had raised his new wards with a mistress, Aspasia, a

young beauty from the island of Miletus. Athens' First Citizen, as he became known, often hosted musical events or philosophical discussions in his large estate. It was here that the street philosopher was introduced to the wealthy patrons of Athenian society.

As a youth, Alcibiades was headstrong and difficult, exasperating his tutors and leading his friends, including Doro and others, in games of chance and dangerous activities for the thrill of it. The calm and questioning measures of Socrates talking in the great house frequently settled the wayward boy. He enjoyed the mental banter with the older man whose insatiable search for knowledge often left one questioning his own beliefs. However, no sooner had the man departed than the boy would run off again, finding trouble wherever he went.

Doro walked along the dirt pathway, jumping to one side suddenly as a bulky wagon belonging to a local merchant hunkered past. A heavysset man walked in front cajoling an old and scrawny donkey to pull his load of trinkets, baubles, and knickknacks which, he proclaimed, he was giving away for just an obol. A bargain if there ever was one! Doro laughed as another thought came to his mind, this one from over a decade ago.

He had been hanging out with his friends on the streets of Athens one afternoon, playing a game of *astragaloi*, or knucklebones. They couldn't have been more than six or seven years old, he recalled. There were five boys in that group, all from wealthy families whose fathers were among the leading citizens of the city. Aged stone buildings lined the narrow dirt streets filled with curio shops, butchers, fine importers with upscale tastes, and, of course, your better dressed prostitutes who would offer a rich gentleman fine entertainment for a steep price.

Memo was there, he remembered, and Antipaton as well. In his teenage years, they called him Big Foot because he went through sandals faster than any other kid they knew. His height did catch up with him eventually but the name stuck. At this young age, he was simply Tippy. They had just finished music lessons that day and Alcibiades had convinced his aging tutor, an older slave name Zopyrus, to chaperone them for the afternoon. Doro knew poor old Zopyrus could not keep up with his young master and soon the boys had given him the slip. Each of them knew he faced punishment if they had been caught but Alcibiades had insisted. He was bold and daring, something each of the others wished they could be.

They knelt in the middle of a side street, not often used except for pedestrians. The boys had spread out the five small bones, or jacks, taking advantage of the larger area. Each bone, taken from the ankle of a sheep,

has four distinct sides which were assessed different values. One side was flat, one concave, one convex, and one sinuous. The downward side of the knucklebone contained the awarded points. The game had different variations and they had tried most of them.

Tippy tossed one of the small bones, called the *taw*, high in the air and quickly tried to pick up as many of the jacks off the ground as he could before he caught the *taw* again. He got two bones on his first turn which wasn't too bad, collecting five points. A few minutes later he dropped the *taw* and control passed to Doro. Eventually the jacks were spread out, making the task of picking them up before the *taw* came down more difficult. Alcibiades was convinced he could get the most.

Knucklebones was used in school to teach arithmetic, adding up accumulated point values as the game progressed. However, playing it on a small desk with old Zopyrus did not give Alcibiades the same satisfaction as playing on a larger scale with his friends. Doro considered himself a good player but his daring friend took competition to whole new level. At one point, Alcibiades had a streak going and was close to beating his own high score of 71. All the kids were excited, watching him toss and grab, without ever dropping the *taw*. He dumped the jacks in piles and collected points even as others broke them apart. He was going to beat the score and Doro remembered the tension in the air as they watched.

Suddenly a large wagon turned the corner and headed down their street. The wagon was carrying heavy building supplies and was pulled by two large horses. A tall man sat in the driver's seat holding the reins and showed no indication of slowing down despite the boys' presence.

"Hey, I've got a game here! Stop!" The young Alcibiades was furious at the interruption and called up to the wagon master. The lad showed no indication of leaving the road while his game was still in progress. Doro looked at his other friends and ran towards the safety of the buildings, but his headstrong companion was determined to hold his ground despite the obvious danger.

The driver continued to show indifference towards the young boy and failed to slow his horses. Doro watched in horror as his friend then laid down in the street in front of his jacks, willing the large animals to ride over his body. Zopyrus ran up in horror at the scene but was too slow to intervene in time. Suddenly the driver, in exasperation, pulled his horses up just short of Alcibiades and jumped down yelling. Zopyrus rushed over and offered to placate him with a few obols he carried for such occasions out of

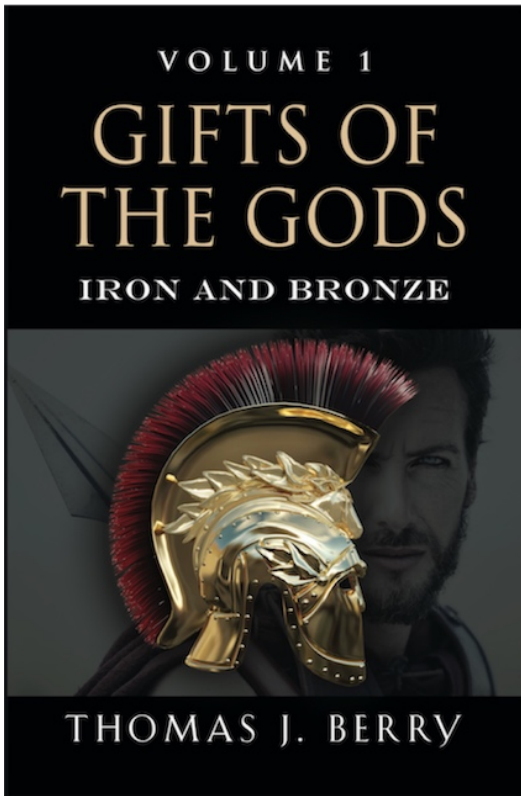
Pericles' purse. A few minutes later, Alcibiades had broken his record at 75 and the old tutor escorted the boys home once again.

Doro reached Alcibiades' large tent, situated in the center of the military camp. Two flags of deep crimson flew above the archway, indicating his status under the family of Pericles, First Citizen of Athens. His rank as *ephebe*, second year trainee, was of secondary consideration. His friend was off on patrol now but there were people still mingling around at all hours. They liked the parties he threw, the alcohol he offered, and the stories he told. Although this was his first military campaign, Alcibiades's reputation exceeded that of most veterans he camped with. Soon they would turn 20 at which time they would mature into full citizenship. They would have to spend the rest of the summer and winter here, if the blasted siege lasted that long he thought, before they could return home to their normal lives.

He frowned at the thought of what normal life back home really was anymore.

When Plataea executed the Theban soldiers in the spring, the Spartan war machine, always slow to get rolling at first, geared up to invade Attica during midsummer when the corn would be at its highest. Pericles, ever cautious in battle, readily acknowledged the message and pulled all farmers and estate holders from the countryside ahead of the advancing army. He knew his Athenian infantry was no match for the strong hoplite forces of the vaunted Spartans, and chose to protect his most valuable assets, the people.

As the Spartan army, together with their allies from the Laconian district, pillaged and razed the Attica countryside, Pericles consoled his people that this was just a temporary setback. Farms could be rebuilt and crops sown anew. He kept watch over the people now safely behind the high walls of the city proper. Pericles urged them not to give in to their anger and charge out against their enemies, but rather to have patience with his leadership. For now, Doro realized, normal life might still be years away. It was a troubling thought. He reached for a flask of wine on his friend's table and poured himself a drink.



Five men and women in Ancient Greece are set on a dangerous journey of self-discovery during the bitter conflict of the Peloponnesian War. 50 years after Spartan king Leonidas and his brave 300 fought to the death against Xerxes' Persian hordes at Thermopylae, a long and bloody conflict erupted between the militant regime and democratic Athens.

GIFTS OF THE GODS: IRON AND BRONZE

Second Edition

by Thomas J. Berry

Order the complete book from the publisher [Booklocker.com](https://www.booklocker.com)

<https://www.booklocker.com/p/books/10086.html?s=pdf>

or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.