

"300" the Movie, Battle of Thermopylae - Facts & Fictions!

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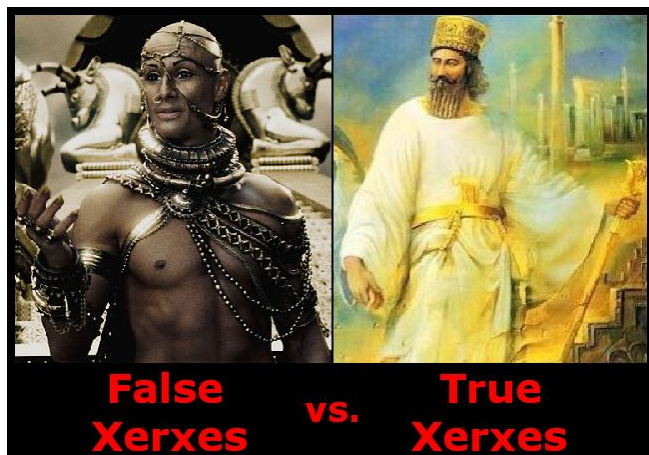
Originily appeared in: <http://www.irandefence.net/showthread.php?t=30287>

At first, please make this thread sticky because it's important theme, and because I spent lot of time for making it.

I believe this important thread is missing on this Iranian forum, and as defense-forum we must audibly preserve truth about Iranian history during Greek-Persian wars. During last 2500 years, Battle of Thermopylae become one of the largest historical turn-overs; from devastating and shameful Greek defeat, to so-called "heroic" defeat and "valuable" last-stand. I won't occupy myself by common-type movie mistakes, I'll use historical facts and logic to reconstruct this battle and for explain all usual misapprehension about Battle of Thermopylae and Greek-Persian wars presented in the movie "300" and in other popular culture based on Greek sources.

FIRST, I'll start with main misinterpretations about Persian look.

1) Xerxes look:



Note: True Xerxes's look is drawn according sculptured reliefs on Persepolis palace.

This historical-falsification movie shows Xerxes as bald and fully naked only wearing a thong, boots and a cape. Xerxes has chains hanging all over his head, chest and body (representing his tyrannical and sadistic nature). Xerxes also has multiple piercing, needles, clips, ear rings, nose rings and chains hanging all over his face. They even gave Xerxes long and sharp black nails to make him look more like a beast, while make-up shows him as homosexual. Real Xerxes's look based on sculptured reliefs shows Xerxes had long, lush and crispy hair and beard.

2) Persian look:



Note: True Persian look is drawn according sculptured reliefs on Persepolis palace.

Although showed mainly as blacks in the movie, Persians are actually white people of Indo-European origin. The name Iran (Modern name for "Persia") is a cognate of Aryan and literally means "Land of the Aryans", which shows illiterate Hollywood morons do not have a shred of racial and anthropological knowledge. In 300 movie, Persian clothing is completely covered (perhaps movie-director wanted to show them as ***** suicide-bombers), but Persians had never wear rags on their heads.

3) Immortal look:



Note: True Immortal's look is drawn according sculptured reliefs on Persepolis palace.

Here is another example of demonized the Persians; Persian Immortals didn't wear like ninjas, and they didn't wear masks. Considering that big mouths and wide noses on masks, it's obviously that movie-director took inspiration by African or Polynesian masks or totems, which are not even similar to Persian culture. Uber Immortal (very tall, muscular, strong, beast-like Immortal) is some kind of abomination or genetically engineered human-beast. Perhaps point is that Persian Empire experimented with genetic engineering to create kind of "Master Race" of Uber Immortals? Persians are simply portrayed as Nazis.

4) Spartan look:



Note: True Spartan look is drawn according ancient Greek statues and vase drawings.

Although far more realistic than Persians, even Spartan look is misinterpreted. Film Spartans are almost naked, but real Spartans had wear heavy armor. Their armor was a wraparound of reinforced quilts with wide shoulder flaps; its lower part was a skirt of loose strips, or pteryges. A cuirass, or thorax, of hammered bronze plates realistically embossed to portray the muscles of a naked torso was also worn to protect chest and back.

SECOND, I'll clear some fictions about Battle of Thermopylae.

1) Fiction: Spartans numbered 300 troops.

Fact: As you can see, even the title of movie is historical false. During Battle of Thermopylae, there were about 8000 Greeks, not 300. According to historian Diodorus Siculus, here is the list of Greek forces:

2200 Spartans (1300 hoplites and 900 healots)

3000 other Peloponnesians (including Mantineans, Tegeans, Arcadians, Corinthians, Phlians and Mycenaeans)

3100 other Greeks (including Thespians, Melians, Thebans, Phocians and Opuntian Locrians)

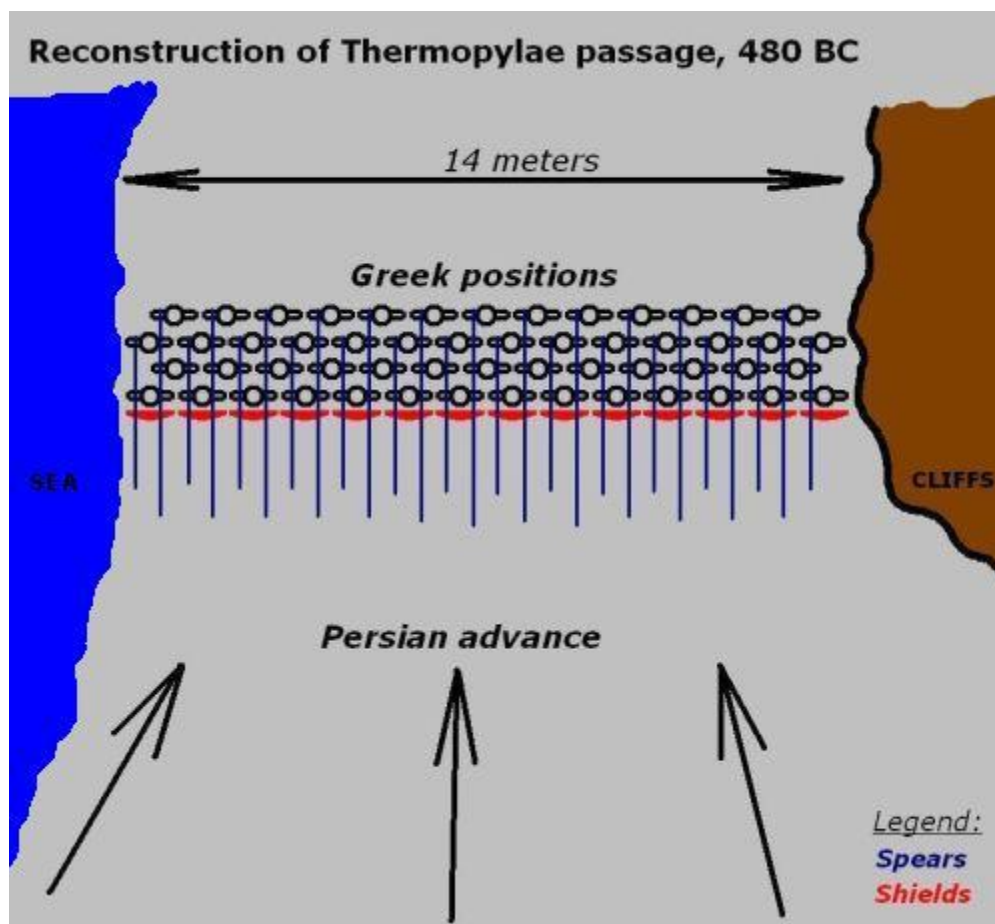
2) Fiction: Persians numbered million(s) troops.

Fact: The greatest historian-liar Herodotus gave number of more than 5.2 million Persian troops during battle which is obviously impossible so that number is rejected by all historians today. In comparison, the largest Roman army ever fielded in ancient times was 200 000 at the Battle of Philippi. Modern scholars have proposed different numbers for the invasion force, estimations based on knowledge of

the Persian military systems, their logistical capabilities, the Greek countryside, and supplies available along the army's route. According to numerous historians (like John A. Scott, Robert Cohen, W. W. Tarn, Ernst Obst, Eduard Meyer, De Sanctis, Helmut Berve, Ulrich Wilcken, Jerry Bentley, Herbert Ziegler, Heather Streets, etc.) estimate Persian troops under 100 000, while historian Hans Delbrueck claim that the Persian fighting forces may have been as small as 15,000 to 20,000 soldiers. So, comparing ancient Greek with modern sources shows Greeks exaggerated number of their enemy by - 350 times!

3) Fiction: "Few stood against many".

Fact: I made this simple cartoon to show you historical reality...



As you can see; passage was 14-meters wide, and Greeks phalanx consisted of 3 or 4 ranks of soldiers, while their spears were max. 2.7 meters long. According that facts, **only about 50 soldiers were able to fight on each side!**

Can you imagine millions, thousands, or even hundreds of Persian soldiers engaged in fight here?! **It's physical impossible!**

Ever been to stadiums? You know it needs about 30 minutes to empty all stadium thru 20 exits, now imagine how much time would it need for fully supplied army numbered hundreds of thousands soldiers

to pass thru one 14-meters wide passage?! Probably few days! So it's most probably Persians spent more time passing thru Thermopylae then fighting those Greek enemies.

4) Fiction: Persian soldiers were slaves.

Fact: Persia was never a slave country, and slavery was forbidden in all Persian lands. Simultaneously, slavery was practiced in all Greek city-states, even in so-called "democracies". The founder of the Persian Achaemenid Empire, Cyrus the Great, was the world's first world emperor to openly declare and guarantee the sanctity of human rights and individual freedom. His document, a famous Cyrus Cylinder is the first human rights charter in history. Persian soldiers were professionals, noted as one of the best soldiers of all time because they conquered the largest territory in ancient ages. Persian Immortals were elite Royal Guards, trained from their birth and chosen only from Persian origin. On other side, Sparta was a slave state! Sparta had many slaves, more then 50% of their population were slaves, known as helots. During movie, you can hear words "Free Greeks" dozens times. Ironical, isn't it?

5) Fiction: Spartans hold Persians for 10 days.

Fact: Spartans actually hold Persians for 5 days, but not with spears or swords; it's because Xerxes gave Greeks 5-day-ultimatum to retreat. After ultimatum was over - Persians defeated the Greeks.

6) Fiction: "Brave" Leonidas decided to stay and face larger army.

Fact: After Persians encircled the Greeks, Leonidas actually ordered - retreat. It was Thespian general Demophilus and his 700 Thespians who refused to leave the battlefield. Finally, perhaps all of Greek forces wanted to escape but they **couldn't** because they were surrounded! It's just a guess, but it's guess as much as Herodotus's statement that "Spartans decided to stay and die"!

7) Fiction: "Brave" Greeks tried to kill shah Xerxes.

Fact: This movie-stupidity about desperate attempt of killing enemy leader is very common in Hollywood, and it happens in many movies: Braveheart, Gladiator, Alexander. Based on simply logic - it's nonsense. Ancient army leaders like Xerxes commanded their armies far beyond first-line of battlefield because they needed to be protected as head of the army, and they needed to have clear preview on battlefield. To be safe from enemy frontal assault and especially from their arrows, it's most probably Persian leader was few hundred meters away from his first lines. So, in attempt to killing Xerxes, Greeks actually had to leave phalanx formation, attack Persian lines, survive Persian arrow assault, and break true few hundred meters of numerous Persian soldiers and Immortals. Sound possible? Of course not.

8) Fiction: "Brave" Greeks tried to save Leonidas body.

Fact: There is a old practice in all ancient armies; soldiers must defend life of their leader to the end, so it's most probably Leonidas died among last few Greeks. Think logical; they were surrounded, few Greeks left alive - so who could try to save him? Where would they take his body? Obviously it's just another Herodotus's attempt to show this Greek defeat the glorious as possible.

9) Fiction: Persians failed to kill Greeks so they finished them with arrows.

Fact: Another unlogical nonsense. At first, Greeks were protected in 14-meters wide passage by high

cliffs and heavy armor, so logical it's impossible Persians killed Greeks only with their arrows. Second, arrow attacks are usual at first stages of battle because they rarefy enemy troops, not usual for final stages. Why did Xerxes send numerous infantry on Greek lines if he could defeat them with arrow attacks? And finally, third thing: How can anyone explain "extremely disproportionate" Persian losses if Persians killed Greeks only with arrows (from distance)?

1) Fiction: Persians outnumbered Greeks by 3:1 at Battle of Platea.

Fact: Modern estimates shows Greeks actually outnumbered Persians by 3:2. Herodot, known for exaggerate proportions between Greeks and Persians, estimate 110 000 Greeks participated in this battle. Note; after destroying Athens, Xerxes and main part of his army, including his personal guard Immortals - gone home. If we consider modern estimates of original number of Persian troops, Persians numbered less then 70 000 troops. Greece was controlled by Persian satrap Mardonius, and his army consisted mostly of Greeks and Asian allies. So facts are; real Persians didn't even participated in this battle, while battle was actually fought among Greeks themselves.

THIRD, I'll correct some wrong conclusions:

1) "Battle was evidence of Greek bravery":

Out of 8000 Greek troops:

- 1 (Ephialtes) collaborated
- 400 (Thebans) surrendered
- 1900 (Spartans, helots and Thespians) killed-in-action
- 6000 (all others) escaped

Is this sounds as "bravery" or "glorious" to you? Not to me.

When small force faces large force in open field, that's bravery, because larger army have numerical advance: there is a physical possibility that 8000 men can face about 30 000 enemy troops (rate 1:4). But when small force faces large force in 14-meters wide passage, that's not bravery because larger force don't have any advantage: 50 men can face 50 men, there is also no any advantage of changing fresh troops in reserves, too.

2) "War started because Persia invided Greece", "Persia failed to conquer Greece" or "Greeks defeated Persia at the end":

Greek fairy tales masters as Herodot says Persia tried to conquer Greece, which is historical incorrectly. Persia attacked Greece because Athens and Eretria supported revolts in Ionia and Egypt, and because they destroyed temple in Sardis. When Persians defeated Greeks; razed Athens and Eretria, Xerxes, Immortals and most of Persian army simply gone home and they left small part of army (mostly their Greek and Asian allies) to control Greek mainland, which is later defeated by united Greek forces at Platea. Seen as "the great victory" by Greeks, it was remembered as kind of peasant revolt thru Persian eyes. Officially, war ended by the Peace of Callias (449 BC). All this facts clearly shows Persian goal was not conquest of all Greece, but only punishing Athens for their attacks on Persian cities. Later, Persia

played with Greek states during Peloponnesian and Corinthian wars; first they helped Spartans to win against Athenians, later they helped Athenians to win against Spartans and to level balance of power in Greece.

3) "Spartans were the greatest warriors ever":

The easiest way to check fact about Spartan military efficacy is statistic about wins and losses.

Now I'll show you **ALL** Spartan wars and battles:

War-1. Persian War (3-0-2 victories-indecisive-defeats):

- 1 * Thermopylae (480 BC) DEFEAT
- 2 * Artemisium (480 BC) DEFEAT
- 3 * Salamis (480 BC) Victory
- 4 * Plataea (479 BC) Victory
- 5 * Mycale (479 BC) Victory

War-2. Peloponnesian War (6-2-13):

- 1 * Battle of Sybota (433 BC) Indecisive
- 2 * Battle of Potidaea (432 BC) DEFEAT
- 3 * Battle of Chalcis (429 BC) Victory
- 4 * Battle of Rhium (429 BC) DEFEAT
- 5 * Battle of Naupactus (429 BC) DEFEAT
- 6 * Battle of Mytilene (427 BC) DEFEAT
- 7 * Battle of Tanagra (426 BC) DEFEAT
- 8 * Battle of Olpae (426 BC) DEFEAT
- 9 * Battle of Pylos (425 BC) DEFEAT
- 10 * Battle of Sphacteria (425 BC) DEFEAT
- 11 * Battle of Amphipolis (422 BC) Victory
- 12 * Battle of Mantinea (418 BC) Victory
- 13 * Battle of Mantinea (418 BC) DEFEAT
- 14 * Battle of Syme (411 BC) Indecisive
- 15 * Battle of Cynossema (411 BC) DEFEAT
- 16 * Battle of Abydos (410 BC) DEFEAT
- 17 * Battle of Cyzicus (410 BC) DEFEAT
- 18 * Battle of Notium (406 BC) Victory
- 19 * Battle of Mytilene (406 BC) Victory
- 20 * Battle of Arginusae (406 BC) DEFEAT
- 21 * Battle of Aegospotami (404 BC) Victory (final)

War-3. Corinthian War (2-0-3):

- 1 * Battle of Haliartus (395 BC) DEFEAT
- 2 * Battle of Nemea (394 BC) Victory
- 3 * Battle of Cnidus (394 BC) DEFEAT
- 4 * Battle of Coronea (394 BC) Victory
- 5 * Battle of Lechaeum (391 BC) DEFEAT

War-4. Theban War (0-0-2):

- 1 * Battle of Leuctra (371 BC) DEFEAT
- 2 * Battle of Mantinea (362 BC) DEFEAT

War-5. Cleomenean War (3-0-1):

- 1 * Battle of Mount Lycaenum (227 BC) Victory
- 2 * Battle of Ladoceia (227 BC) Victory
- 3 * Battle of Dyme (226 BC) Victory
- 4 * Battle of Sellasia (222 BC) DEFEAT (final)

Other wars battles involving Sparta (3-0-5):

- 1 * Battle of Sepeia (494 BC) Victory
- 2 * Battle of Tanagra (457 BC) Victory
- 3 * Battle of Phyle (403 or 404 BC) DEFEAT
- 4 * Battle of Munychia (403 or 404 BC) DEFEAT
- 5 * Battle of Piraeus (403 BC) Victory
- 6 * Battle of Tegira (375 BC) DEFEAT
- 7 * Battle of Megalopolis (331 BC) DEFEAT
- 8 * Battle of Gythium (195 BC) DEFEAT

FINAL STATISTIC:

Battles:

17 victories

2 indecisive

26 defeats

So, historical fact is that Spartans lost 60% their battles. They won only one war; Peloponnesian War, just because after serial of defeats against Athenians, Persia significantly helped Sparta with ships and supplies. Spartans are noted for their strict training and militaristic life, so they become synonym for great warriors in Greek and Western civilization, but their military success in history isn't even comparable to the best ancient warriors; Persians and Assyrians.

4) "Spartans never retreated, Spartans never surrendered":

Typical Greek fairy tale. As you can see in my previous pamphlet, Spartans were defeated in 26 battles. After every lost battle; hundreds of Spartans - survived! How did thousands of Spartans survive 26 lost battles, if they "never retreat or surrender"?! Simply unlogic and - untrue.

5) "Greek success was holding Persians while other Greeks were assembling":

Again - historical nonsense. Facts:

- Greeks hold Persians for 5 days (because of ultimatum), battle lasted few hours.
- Battle of Thermopylae happened in 480 BC.
- Persians razed Athens also in 480 BC.
- Persians gone home also in 480 BC.
- Battle of Plataea (when Greek armies united) happened following spring - 479 BC!

6) "Greeks who had allied Persians were traitors":

During Greek-Persian conflict, every Greek state allied Persia except Athens and Sparta. Those Greek

states include Thessaly, Boeotia, Thebes and Macedon (homeland of Alexander the Great, later conqueror of Persia). Later, during Peloponnesian war, even Sparta allied Persia! After Sparta defeated Athens with Persian help, Persians lately allied Athens against Spartans during Corinthian war. As you can see, ALL Greek states allied Persia during their ancient history.

7) "Greek-Persian War was clash between Western and Eastern civilization":

Spartans didn't fight for Greece or Western civilization, they fought for their domination over Greek territory, proofs for that you can find in mutual wars between Greek city-states, before and after Persian attack. Also, more than 50% Greeks allied Persia during their campaign, so "clash between civilizations" is absurdity.

8) Persians ("the East") stands for "Mysticism":

Persian religion during Achaemenid period was Zoroastrianism, one of the world's oldest monotheistic religions. Zoroaster taught that good and evil resides in all members of humanity, regardless of racial origin, ethnic membership or religious affiliation. Each person is given the choice between good and evil – it is up to us to choose between them. Zoroaster taught that there is no such thing as a "bad race" or "bad religion". The only divide is that between good and bad people, both within one's own community and those outside of one's community. Zoroastrians often referred to ancient Iran as "the land of the Free/Freedom". It's important to mention that Zoroastrianism exist even today and it's practiced by thousands of modern Iranians, but Greek polytheistic mythology is survived only in children fairy-tales. Something interesting: Greek mythology says Spartans are descendants from hero Heracles, but it also says Persians are descendants from hero Perseus. Unlike angry, selfish and drunkard Heracles, Perseus is famous as only mythological hero without any defect. This two descriptions very colorful describe Spartan and Persian nature.

9) "Spartan women were free, Persian women were slaves":

The 300 movie certainly portrayed Iranian women as shallow, mindless "harem girl-objects". The portrayal of Iranian women in this movie is not only grossly inaccurate in historical terms, but also degrading, insulting to women in general. Again, this seems to be derived from a massive sense of ignorance regarding the role of Iranian women in history. The women of ancient Iran were priestesses (Temple of Anahita), warriors, leaders and guardians of learning. During Persian campaign in Greece famous woman named Artemisia was naval commander. On the other side, Greek women were oppressed, and they didn't have right to vote even in so-called Greek "democracies". The equality of women with men in enshrined in the Zoroastrian religion itself. One the Zoroastrian fables refers to a conversation between Zoroaster and his daughter Freyne highlighting the fact that it is up to women to choose their mates for courtship and marriage.

10) "Clash between Good and Evil; Greece represents liberty, while Persia represents tyranny, Xerxes called himself as 'God', etc."

It's very clear that "the Persians" are literally portrayed as "evil tyrants" in the movie. But status of Xerxes was far from "divine" or even autocratic. The reality was that Persian Empire was the first "Federal Empire" in the world. Federalism Achaemenid Style was very primitive, yet the very first

Federal Government in the globe. Internal affairs of the Persian Empire were conducted democratically and we had a federal system of government with all due respect to all Khashtaras (states) to control their own internal affairs. Persian States had absolute internal autonomy during the Achaemenid Empire. Persian Empire was ran so prosperously, which 2/3 of the Greek city-states in Anatolia (present Turkey) and Grecian Peninsula preferred to join the Empire as either states or protectorates. Economically, socially, politically and militaristically it was only logical and for their benefit to join the powerful Persian Empire rather than remain as a few scattered Greek city-states fighting amongst themselves. That was what the Greeks done for centuries: fighting amongst themselves and remaining as weak city-states! So 2/3 of the Greek city-states decided to change their fate. I do not call this action treason but I call it visionary and logical. Unlike Herodotus, I do not call the people of these city-states "Puppets" but I call them valuable and equal citizens of the Persian Empire. Aristotle used to call Persians "Barbarians", but the reality was that the remainder 1/3 of the Independent Greeks were small and inferior elements in comparison to the sophisticated and superior Persians and Persian Empire which ruled the world.

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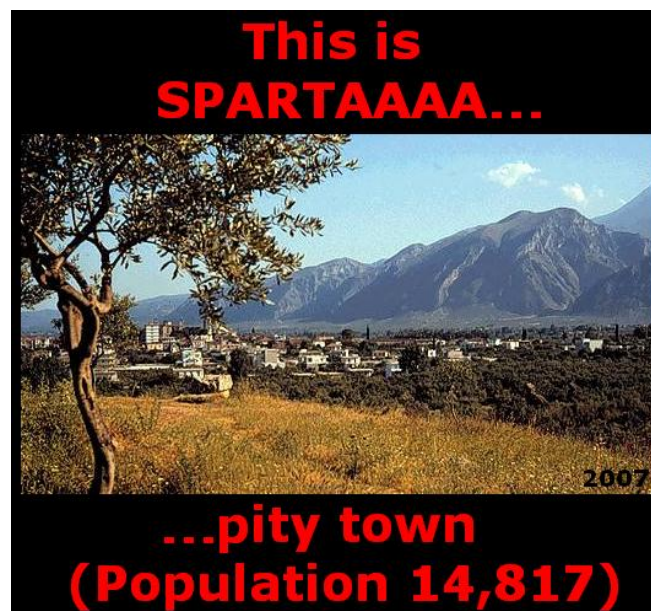
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For the end, I'll just quote Leonidas (Gerry Bulter):



... and I'll say this...

This is Persia:



**Global political,
economic, scientific
and military power.
(Population 70,472,864)**

P.S. I don't believe in any kind of Hollywood conspiracy against Iran, but how would members of other ethnic communities worldwide feel if their ancestors were being portrayed as monsters, troglodytes, degenerates, and demons? If we consider Frank Miller and Zack Snyder are Jewish, what would they say about something like this:



Maybe looks too cruel, but those cartoons are made on real historical photos.

So, next time mister Miller and Snyder - think twice!