

Essential Background Reading for Soldier Series

The Urth list — 13 messages, 8 voices, 30 Nov 2006

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Michael Straight — 30 Nov 2006, 22:17

On 11/30/06, thalassocrat at nym.hush.com <thalassocrat at nym.hush.com> wrote:
Theseus was supposed to have kidnapped an Amazon & taken her as his wife. When the Amazons invaded Attica seeking revenge, Theseus defeated them.

Holy essential background reading, Batman! I wish I'd known that ten years ago.

Now I'm wondering what else I need to have read.

Essential:

1. Story of Spartans slaughtering their slaves under pretext of making them citizens (I defy you to figure that one out just from Wolfe's text.)

2. Story of 300 Spartans at Thermopylae.

Less important, but helpful:

3. Sisyphus.

4. Demeter and Persephone.

5. Cupid and Psyche.

(Lots more I'm forgetting)

What else? Is there anything I'm going to definitely need to make sense of Soldier of Sidon?

Rostrum

don doggett — 30 Nov 2006, 22:49 · in reply to Michael Straight

--- Michael Straight <mfstraight at gmail.com> wrote:
What else? Is there anything I'm going to definitely need to make sense of Soldier of Sidon?

Rostrum

The Illiad, Odyssey, Herodotus' histories, a good general history of Rome that covers the etruscans and the early Republic, a good book on Greek mythology (I like Graves' Greek Myths because it offers alternate versions) Frank Miller's 300 (just kidding - it is entertaining as hell, though). That's all I can think

of off the top of my head.

Don

Transient — 01 Dec 2006, 02:28 · in reply to Michael Straight

On Nov 30, 2006, at 5:17 PM, Michael Straight wrote:
Essential:

1. Story of Spartans slaughtering their slaves under pretext of making them citizens (I defy you to figure that one out just from Wolfe's text.)

Does anybody have any leads on this? I can't find mention of it in Herodotus (doesn't mean it isn't in there, though) and I'd really like to find a source to corroborate this.

It will make for interesting conversations when the 300 movie comes out.

thalassocrat at nym.hush.com — 01 Dec 2006, 02:41 · follows Transient

On Fri, 01 Dec 2006 09:17:31 +1100 Michael Straight
<mfstraight at gmail.com> wrote:

Holy essential background reading, Batman! I wish I'd known that ten years ago.

Now I'm wondering what else I need to have read.

I think knowing something about what happened afterwards is useful.

Pausanias was supposed to have conspired with the Persians with the intent of taking over one of the Spartan king positions. He was also supposed to have plotted to arm & free the helots in supports of this coup (or something like that; can't remember exact details). He was betrayed, and the ephors/"judges" locked him up in a temple & starved him to death.

Apart from the color this sheds on the Gaea/Artemis stuff, I think it also helps to make sense of the oracle spoken by Cleomenes at Acheron. "Seek peace" is obvious. "Don't drink from Lethe's cup" = don't rely on Leto the forgetful as a talisman of victory. "Ask who will make the defenders of Sestos yield" = "Hunger", a warning about his eventual fate.

Themistocles was dogged by accusations of arrogance and corruption. Interestingly, one example of the former was supposed to have been his building a temple to Artemis next to his house (or something like that). He was exiled & then hounded out of Greece, also accused of Persian plots by the later Spartan leadership. He did in fact "defect", and ended up as an aristocratic subject of the Great King in charge of <somewhere>.

One thing I don't quite understand is Gaea's alternative plan for the helots: if she doesn't succeed with her Pausanias as helot- liberating king play, she will nevertheless use them to destroy Sparta via an uprising. There was some kind of uprising in the next decade, after an earthquake, but the Spartans suppressed it fairly quickly. After that I don't know of any real revolt until the helots were "freed" a few centuries later by some of the later kings. Is it just that Gaea in this part of the world is too old & feeble to make her plans work?

Alan Lewis — 01 Dec 2006, 03:00 · in reply to don doggett

What else? Is there anything I'm going to definitely need to make sense of Soldier of Sidon?

Rostrum

The Illiad, Odyssey, Herodotus' histories, a good general history of Rome that covers the etruscans and the early Republic, a good book on Greek mythology (I like Graves' Greek Myths because it offers alternate versions) Frank Miller's 300 (just kidding - it is entertaining as hell, though). That's all I can think of off the top of my head.

Don

One vote of respectful disagreement for all of the above. As far as I can tell, there is no required reading to make sense of Soldier of Sidon. It's not without its mysterious passages, but its far more of a straight read than Arete. That said,

[potential slight spoilers to follow]

passing knowledge of some basic Egyptian mythology and geography would be of use, also throw in the Egyptian Book of the Dead, add a dash of King Solomon's Mines, along with knowledge of the search for the source of the Nile a la Burton/Speke.

Alan

Michael Straight — 01 Dec 2006, 05:20 · in reply to thalassocrat at nym.hush.com

On 11/30/06, thalassocrat at nym.hush.com <thalassocrat at nym.hush.com> wrote:

[Stuff about the fates of Pausanius and Themistocles deleted]

Wow, Thalassocrat! You just made my head explode for the second time in 24 hours.

I appreciate Don's suggestions to read the Illiad, Odyssey, and Herotidous -- all of them worth reading for their own sake, of course -- but I guess I was looking for something a little more specific. Thalssocrat's two bits of information in this thread (Pausanius and the stuff about the Amazons) just shed enormous amounts of light on the plot for me.

Are there other stories or facts like that in Homer or Herotidous I ought to know?

Rostrum

Nils Göransson — 01 Dec 2006, 06:30 · in reply to Michael Straight

Hi everybody!

No further enlightenment on the Soldier series, but if you enjoyed the Egyptian setting of the latest volume I urge you to seek out 'the Egyptian' by Mika Waltari, wich has some of the same mood! Very good, still not Wolfe though -wonder when he writes the next one...

Thanx for all ideas,

NissE

Bob Miller — 01 Dec 2006, 11:36 · in reply to don doggett

Needed to understand SoldierofSidon? Time, the first two Latro books and definitely some knowledge of Egyptian mythology--many available resources there, of course . And did I mention a fair amount of time?

/information: <http://www.urth.net>

don doggett — 01 Dec 2006, 21:06 · in reply to Alan Lewis

Alan Lewis <alanarc1 at optonline.net> wrote:

One vote of respectful disagreement for all of the above. As far as I can tell, there is no required reading to make sense of Soldier of Sidon.

My bad. I was a little dopey from cold meds and I read "Soldier Series" instead of Soldier of Sidon. You are correct Sir.

Don

Michael Straight — 02 Dec 2006, 15:23 · in reply to don doggett

You're both right! My first question was about background reading for the first two books. Then I asked if there was anything I ought to read before starting Sidon.

(Too late for that! Maybe I'll do some homework before the second time through.)

Rostrum

On 12/1/06, don doggett <kingwukong at yahoo.com> wrote:

My bad. I was a little dopey from cold meds and I read "Soldier Series" instead of Soldier of Sidon. You are correct Sir.

Transentient — 14 Jan 2007, 23:27 · in reply to Michael Straight

In case you didn't read Soldier of Sidon and are reading this, well, hey, what's taking you so long? It was good. Superbly done, in fact. But please delete this mail or put it away and come back to it because I don't want to spoil it for you.

One of the things that really stood out about the book was the overall narrative structure. The part of the book dealing with the voyage down the river was smooth and sequential. Then there is the scene with the council discussing whether they should look for Kames and the mines, and it is really a discussion of whether or not the narrative structure should be changed. I've always loved how Wolfe can play games with your head by changing your expectations of the story. Sure enough, chaos ensues after Latro leaves the boat. The end of the book basically "perks up" as he starts returning north.

I've got a couple of questions that I'm wondering if anybody caught answers to in their readings so far.

1) Does anybody know what the Hellenes actually call the last page? (page 302)

2) Was the bulls-head amulet of Myt-ser'eu's the one that Sehuset made for her to seal her from Sabra? Or was it the one that he told Latro would ensure her loyalty to him?

3) Anybody know what it was about Thotmaktef that Latro, upon first meeting him, thought "Perhaps I should not write of it at all/" Was it just that he first noticed Thoth, the baboon at this point? (page 48)

4) What the heck is in that scroll that he recovered from the temple beyond the last temple? I'm wondering if that is actually mentioned and I just missed it.

5) Is it too obvious, given the lion symbolism, that Mehit is the very goddess who wounded his memory in the beginning? One thing that works against this is the passage where he helps Arensnuphis hunt her, and Latro thinks he sees astonishment in her eyes in being seen by him.

6) The glossary entry on Falcata indicates that she is, in fact, a Falcata. I seem to remember a passage in the first book where it is said that Falcata was actually a kopis. I wonder if there is anything to this.

Thanks for your thoughts.

Dan Rabin — 15 Jan 2007, 01:47 · in reply to Transient

Transient <transient at gmail.com> asks:

1) Does anybody know what the Hellenes actually call the last page?
(page 302)

The best candidate I could find in an hour of online research was "colophon". This is the term used today for an account of the making of the book, such as the designer, the type selected, the paper and printing process chosen, the binder, and so forth. As in "written by Lucius on papyrus of Riverland with reed pen".

I thought this was just Wolfe being playful with the way he provides a fictional providence for the work. Lucius has a vague notion that he should be writing something like what I just suggested, only he can't remember any of the facts he should set down. Anyhow, the story isn't over just because the book is done. I think we're being set up for a sequel in Babylonia.

Of course, at the end of *Soldier of Arete* I thought we were going to have a sequel in Phoenicia, but Wolfe skipped over that and merely gave us Phoenicians.

-- Dan Rabin

Michael Straight — 16 Jan 2007, 00:28 · in reply to Transient

2) Was the bulls-head amulet of Myt-ser'eu's the one that Sehuset made for her to seal her from Sabra? Or was it the one that he told Latro would ensure her loyalty to him?

I think they are the same.

I remember Sabra claiming the amulet was Sehuset's tool for stealing Myt-ser'eu from Latro. But that was a lie designed to manipulate Latro into delivering his wife into Sabra's hands.

I don't quite remember Sehuset telling Latro about an amulet to make his wife loyal, but I would

guess that was also a fiction designed to do the opposite--get Latro to keep it safely around her neck--without having to explain everything about the danger of Sabra that Latro would have forgotten that day.

I think the item in your question #3 was what you said. Latro didn't want to mention the baboon.

-- Rostrum