

Seminar: Read from 7.200 to the end.

7.198

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MALIS-TRACHIS

Xerxes advances
in Malis and Trachis.

7.199

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TRACHIS

Herodotus describes the
geography of the Trachis
region.

7.200

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THERMOPYLAE

Herodotus describes
the geography of the
Thermopylae region.

enter it, he was not permitted to go out again until it was time for him to be sacrificed. The guides also said that many who had been about to be sacrificed had run off in fear and escaped to another country. But if one who had done so were to return after time had passed and was caught entering the Prytaneion, then he was thickly wrapped in garlands, led out in procession, and sacrificed. [3] The reason the descendants of Kytissoros, a son of Phrixos, suffer this treatment is that when the Achaeans had made Athamas son of Aiolos a scapegoat of the country on the advice of a prophecy and were about to sacrifice him, Kytissoros came from Aia in Colchis^a and saved him, but thus cast upon his progeny the wrath of the god. [4] After hearing this account, when Xerxes came to the grove, he refrained from entering it and commanded his whole army to do the same, out of reverence for the house of the descendants of Athamas as well as for the god's precinct.

That, then, is what happened in Thessaly and Achaea. From these countries, Xerxes went into Malis^a along the gulf of the sea, where the tide rises and falls every day. The land around this gulf is flat, in some parts wide but in others quite narrow; it is bordered inland by high, impassable mountains which enclose all of Malian territory and are called the Trachinian Rocks.^b [2] The first city one comes to on this gulf as one travels from Achaea is Antikyra,^a and beside this city flows the Spercheios River,^b which rises out of the territory of the Ainianes^c and empties into the sea. A little more than two miles^d farther on there is another river by the name of Dyras,^c which, as the story goes, helped Herakles against the fire that was consuming him;^f a bit more than two miles^e farther on from this river is yet another one called the Black River.^b

The city of Trachis^a lies about a half a mile^b away from the Black River. It was built on land which has the widest expanse of the entire region from the mountains to the sea, for the plain here covers some 5,500 acres.^e To the north of Trachis, cutting through the foothills of the mountain enclosing Trachinian territory, is a ravine in which the Asopos River^d flows.

There is another river to the south of the Asopos—the Phoinix^a—which is not very big; it flows out of the mountains and empties into the Asopos. Right here at the Phoinix is the narrowest part of the region, where a path has been built up just wide enough for a single wagon. From the Phoinix

- 7.197.3a Aia: site unknown. Colchis: Map 7.186, locator.
 7.198.1a Malis: Map 7.197, inset.
 7.198.1b Trachinian Rocks: Map 7.213, inset.
 7.198.2a Antikyra, possible location: Map 7.197, inset.
 7.198.2b Spercheios River: Map 7.197, inset; Map 7.213, inset.
 7.198.2c Ainis (territory of the Ainianes): Map 7.197, inset. As at 7.132, Herodotus uses the Ionic Enienes.
 7.198.2d Herodotus writes "20 stades." See Appendix J, §6, 19.
 7.198.2e Dyras River: Map 7.213, inset.
 7.198.2f Herakles had thrown himself onto a pyre; see Sophocles' *Trachiniai*.
 7.198.2g Herodotus writes that this distance was

- also "20 stades." See Appendix J, §6, 19.
 7.198.2h Black River: site unknown. This river is spelled the same as the one mentioned in 7.58.3, but it is not the same one.
 7.199.1a Trachis: Map 7.197, inset.
 7.199.1b Herodotus describes this distance as "5 stades." See Appendix J, §6, 19.
 7.199.1c Herodotus writes that the plain covers "22,000 plethra." Assuming he means square plethra, a unit of surface area equal to about 100 square Attic feet, or one quarter of an acre, this plain would measure 5,500 acres. See Appendix J, §5–6, 19.
 7.199.1d Asopos River: Map 7.197, inset.
 7.200.1a Phoinix River, possible location: Map 7.197, inset; Map 7.213, inset.

River it is a little less than one and three-quarter miles^b to Thermopylae,^c [2] and between the Phoinix River and Thermopylae lies a village by the name of Anthela.^d The Asopos flows beside this village and from there continues on until it empties into the sea. The plain around Anthela is broader, and on it stands the sanctuary of Demeter^b Amphiktyonis. Here are the seats of the Amphiktyones^e and the sanctuary of Amphiktyon himself.^f

Now King Xerxes made his base in the Trachinian part of Malis, while the Hellenes were camped at the pass. Most of the Hellenes call this place Thermopylae, but the inhabitants dwelling here called it Pylae.^a So that is where each army made its camp, one controlling everything toward the north down to Trachis, the other in control of the regions toward the south on that side of the Greek mainland.

The Hellenes who were waiting for the Persian in this region were 300 Spartan hoplites, 1,000 men from Tegea^a and Mantinea^b (each providing 500), 120 from Orchomenos in Arcadia,^c and 1,000 from the rest of Arcadia. These were all the troops that came from Arcadia. From Corinth^d there were 400 hoplites, from Phleious^e 200; and there were also 80 Mycenaeans.^f Those, then, were the troops that had come from the Peloponese.^g From Boeotia^h there were 700 Thespiansⁱ and 400 Thebans.^j

In addition to these, both the Opuntian Locrians,^k who had come in full force, and 1,000 Phocians^l had responded to the Greek call for assistance. For the Hellenes had sent messengers to summon their help, saying to them that those who had come to Thermopylae were merely an advance guard of the rest of the allies who were expected to arrive any day now; moreover, they said, the sea was being guarded by the Athenians,^c Aeginetans,^d and those others who had been assigned to the fleet, so that they had nothing to fear; [2] for it was not a god but a human being who was invading Hellas, and no mortal existed now, nor would ever exist, who did not have a mixture of adversity in his life from the moment of his birth; indeed the greatest men encountered the greatest adversities. Therefore it was

7.200.1b Herodotus writes this distance as "15 stades." See Appendix I, §6, 19.

7.200.1c Thermopylae: Map 7.197, inset; Map 7.213.

7.200.2a Anthela: Map 7.197, inset; Map 7.213, inset.

7.200.2b Demeter, the goddess who governs the fruits of the earth, in particular grains for bread. She was worshiped all over the Greek world, with local variations. The most famous rites in her honor were the Great Mysteries of Eleusis, secret ceremonies celebrated in the early autumn. Worshipers were initiated into the cult and swore never to reveal the ritual to the uninitiated. Herodotus appears to have been an initiate.

7.200.2c Amphiktyones: a league of neighbors to an important sanctuary, in this case that of Demeter at Anthela, called the sanctuary of Demeter Amphiktyonis. This league later became associated with the

sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi. It administered the temple and its property and managed the Pythian games.

7.201.1a Pylae in Greek means "gates," and the place was called Thermopylae because hot springs were located there, and because although it was a narrow pass, it was the best entrance into Hellas from the north.

Tegea: Map 7.197.

Mantinea: Map 7.197.

Orchomenos, Arcadia: Map 7.197.

Corinth: Map 7.213, BY.

Phleious: Map 7.213, BX.

Mycenae: Map 7.213, BY.

Peloponnes: Map 7.213, BX.

Boeotia: Map 7.213, AY.

Thespian: Map 7.213, AY.

Thebes: Map 7.213, AY.

Locris (Opuntian): Map 7.213, AY.

Phocis: Map 7.213, AX.

Athens: Map 7.213, BY.

Aegina: Map 7.213, BY.

7.201

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THERMOPYLAE

The situation of the two armies encamped near Thermopylae.

7.202

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THERMOPYLAE

The origins and numbers of the Hellenes waiting at Thermopylae.

7.203

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THERMOPYLAE

The Opuntian Locrians and the Phocians also send troops to Trachis to join the Hellenic forces.

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THERMOPYLAE

The most admired leader of the Hellenes was the Spartan king Leonidas, who became king unexpectedly.

7.205

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THERMOPYLAE

Leonidas became king after his two older brothers died. He now leads his picked force of 300 Spartans to Thermopylae. He also brought the Thebans with him because they were accused of medizing.

7.206

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THERMOPYLAE

Leonidas was sent out to show other Hellenes that Sparta would be there, although their main force was delayed by the Karneia.

bound to happen that the one who was marching against them, since he was mortal, would fail in his glorious expectations. When they heard this, the Locrians and Phocians hurried to Trachis^a to help.

Each contingent of these troops was under the command of generals assigned by their individual cities, but the most admired and the leader of the whole army was a Lacedaemonian: Leonidas son of Anaxandridas, the son of Leon son of Eurykratides, the son of Anaxandros son of Eurykrates, the son of Polydoros son of Alkamenes, the son of Teleklos son of Archelaos, the son of Hrgesilaos son of Doryssos, the son of Leobotas son of Echestratos, the son of Agis son of Eurysthenes, the son of Aristodemos son of Aristomachos, the son of Kleodaios son of Hyllus, who was the son of Herakles. Leonidas had become a king of Sparta unexpectedly.

For since he had two older brothers, Kleomenes and Dorieus, he had long before cleared his mind of any thoughts that he might become king. But then Kleomenes died without a male heir, and Dorieus, who had met his end in Sicily,^b was no longer in the picture either. Since Leonidas was older than Kleombrotos, the youngest son of Anaxandridas, and, moreover, because he had married the daughter of Kleomenes, the kingship came to devolve upon him. [2] So Leonidas arrived at Thermopylae^c with his assigned force of 300 men, whom he had selected from those who had sons living at the time. He took with him also the Thebans I mentioned when I listed the number of Greek troops; they were under the command of Leontiades son of Eurymachos. [3] Leonidas had made a special effort to bring the Thebans from among all of the Hellenes, because they had been strongly accused of medizing. So he had summoned them to come to war with him, wanting to find out whether they would send men to go with him or whether they would publicly refuse to endorse the alliance of the Hellenes. And though their hearts were not in it, they did send men.

The Spartans sent Leonidas with his men first so that their allies would see them and join in the war, since if they learned that the Spartans were delaying, they too might medize. The rest of the Spartans were held back to celebrate the festival of the Karneia,^d but they intended to go as soon as they had concluded it. They planned to leave some men behind to guard Sparta, but for the rest of them to march out immediately afterward with all speed and in full force. [2] The rest of the allies had similar intentions for themselves, since the Olympic festival^e also coincided with these events. And as they did not expect that the battle at Thermopylae would be decided so swiftly, they sent only their advance guards.

7.203.2a Trachis: Map 7.213, inset.

7.205.1a Sicily: Map 7.213, locator. For the story of Dorieus, see 5.42–48.

7.205.2a Thermopylae: Map 7.213, inset.

7.206.1a The Karneia was the Doric festival in honor of Apollo, held in September. A whole month was named for this festival in most Doric calendars, and the entire month was considered holy. The Spartans

had delayed coming to the assistance of the Athenians at Marathon ten years earlier because of the requirement to celebrate the Karneia (6.106.3).

7.206.2a The Olympic festival was the great quadrennial festival conducted in honor of Zeus at Olympia: Map 7.213, BX. See Appendix I, Classical Greek Religious Festivals, for more on the role of such festivals.

That, then, was what the allies intended, but the Hellenes at Thermopylae became terrified when the Persian drew near the pass, and began to discuss whether or not they should leave. The rest of the Peloponnesians thought it best to return to the Peloponnese to protect the isthmus,^a but this proposal infuriated the Phocians^b and Locrians,^c and Leonidas voted to remain where they were and to dispatch messengers to the cities asking them to send help because their numbers were too few to repel the army of the Medes by themselves.

As they deliberated, Xerxes sent a mounted scout to see how many of them there were and what they were doing. While still in Thessaly,^d the King had heard that a small army was gathered here, and that its leaders were the Lacedaemonians and Leonidas, who traced his lineage to Herakles. [2] When the scout rode up to the camp, he looked around and watched, but could not see the whole army, since some men were posted within the wall that they had rebuilt^e and were now guarding it, so that it was impossible for the spy to see them. But he did see those outside, whose arms were lying in front of the wall, and it just so happened that at the moment, the Lacedaemonians were the ones posted outside. [2] The scout saw some of these men exercising and others combing their hair, which astonished him. After he had ascertained their number and every other detail, he rode back undisturbed, for no one pursued him; in fact he was practically ignored. When he returned, he reported all that he had seen to Xerxes.

Xerxes listened but could not understand: that the Lacedaemonians were really preparing to kill or be killed, to fight as much as was in their power, seemed to him to be the height of folly, the action of fools. So he sent for Demaratos^f son of Ariston, who was in the camp, and [2] when Demaratos arrived, Xerxes questioned him about everything he had been told, trying to understand the meaning behind what the Lacedaemonians were doing. Demaratos answered, "You heard what I said about these men before, when we were just setting out against Hellas,^g and you made me a laughingstock when you heard my view of how these matters would turn out. But it is my greatest goal to tell the truth in your presence, [3] so hear me now once again. These men have come to fight us for control of the road, and that is really what they are preparing to do. For it is their tradition that they groom their hair whenever they are about to put their lives in danger. [4] Now know this: if you subjugate these men and those who have remained behind in Sparta, there is no other race of human beings that will be left to raise their hands against you. For you are now attacking the most noble kingdom

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THERMOPYLAE

As the Persians approach Thermopylae, the Hellenes deliberate about whether to retire.

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THERMOPYLAE

When Xerxes learns of the Greek forces at Thermopylae, he sends a scout to spy on them.

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THERMOPYLAE

Amazed at the small size of the army opposing him, Xerxes asks the Spartan Demaratos what they are about, and cannot believe it when told that they are preparing to hold the pass and fight the Persians for it.

7.207.1a Isthmus of Corinth: Map 7.213, BY.

7.207.1b Phocis: Map 7.213, AX.

7.207.1c Locris (Opuntian): Map 7.213, AY.

7.208.1a Thessaly: Map 7.197.

7.208.2a For the wall thus rebuilt, see 7.176.

7.209.1a Demaratos, the exiled king of Sparta,

appeared last at 7.3. For an account of how his enemies obtained his exile, see 6.63–70.

7.209.2a For the conversation Demaratos refers to here, see 7.101–104.

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THERMOPYLAE

After waiting four days for the Hellenes to withdraw, Xerxes orders his army to attack.

of all the Hellenes, and the best of men.” [5] What Demaratos said seemed quite incredible to Xerxes, and he asked for the second time how they could possibly intend to fight his whole army, since there were so few of them. Demaratos replied, “Sire, if things do not turn out just as I claim they will, treat me like a liar.” But even by saying this he did not convince Xerxes.

Xerxes let four whole days elapse, all the while expecting that the Hellenes would run away. But when, on the fifth day, they had still not gone away but were instead holding their positions in what seemed to him a display of reckless impudence, he lost his temper and ordered the Medes^a and the Kissians^b out against them, with instructions to bring them back alive and to conduct them into his presence. [2] The Medes charged headlong into the Hellenes, and great numbers of them fell. Although others rushed forth to replace them, even they could not drive the Hellenes away, though they, too, suffered great losses in the attempt. Indeed, the Hellenes made it clear to everyone, and especially to the King himself, that although there were many in his army, there were few real men. The fighting went on all day.

Since the Medes were suffering extremely rough treatment, they now withdrew, and the Persians under the command of Hydarnes, whom the King called the Immortals,^c came forth to take their place. There was every expectation that they, at least, would easily prevail, [2] but when they joined battle with the Hellenes, they fared no better than the Medes, and indeed they suffered the very same setbacks. The fighting continued to take place in a confined space, with the Persians using shorter spears than those of the Hellenes and unable to derive any advantage from their superior numbers. [3] The Lacedaemonians fought remarkably well, proving that they were experts in battle who were fighting among men who were not, especially whenever they would turn their backs and feign flight all together, and the barbarians, seeing this, would pursue them with much clatter and shouting; the Lacedaemonians would allow the barbarians to catch up with them and then suddenly turn around to face them, at which point they would slay countless numbers of them. Of the Spartans themselves, however, only a few fell there! Finally the Persians retreated, since despite all their efforts to attack by regiments or by any other means, they could not gain any ground in the pass.

It is said that during these assaults, the King, who was watching, leapt up from his throne three times in fear for his army. Thus ended the contest that day, and on the next, the barbarians did no better. They attacked with the expectation that such a small number of Hellenes would be covered with wounds and unable to lift a hand against them. [2] But the Hellenes had formed ranks in their national contingents, and each group fought in its turn except for the Phocians, who had been posted to guard the path on the mountain. When the Persians found that nothing had changed from what they had seen the day before, they retreated again.

7.210.1a Media: Map 7.186, locator.

7.210.1b Kissians, possible location of territory: Map 7.186, locator.

7.211.1a The Immortals were an elite corps of Persian troops in Xerxes' army. See 7.83 and Appendix O, §3.

7.211

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THERMOPYLAE

The Persians continue the assault the next day but withdraw after failing to move the Hellenes.



FIGURE 7.211. A SMALL BRONZE STATUETTE OF A SPARTAN WARRIOR (LEFT) WHICH DISPLAYS THE LONG HAIR SPARTAN SOLDIERS FREQUENTLY COMBED BEFORE BATTLE, A SIGHT WHICH ASTONISHED THE PERSIAN SCOUT AT THERMOPYLAE. THE WARRIOR IS WRAPPED IN HIS RED CLOAK, FOR WHICH THE SPARTAN HOPLITES WERE FAMOUS; THE UNUSUAL TRANSVERSE HELMET CREST MAY SUGGEST THAT HE IS MEANT TO BE A GENERAL OR PERHAPS EVEN A KING. BELOW, A SMALL BRONZE STATUETTE DEPICTS THE COSTUME OF A CLASSICAL HOPLITE: SHIELD, HELMET WITH CREST, BRONZE CUIRASS, GREAVES, AND (MISSING) SPEAR.



7.213

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THERMOPYLAE

Xerxes is baffled until a Hellen named Ephialtes reveals a path over the mountain by which the Persians can outflank the Hellenes. How Ephialtes was later killed.

7.214

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THERMOPYLAE

Herodotus describes an alternate story of the betrayal but denies it, asserting that Ephialtes was the true villain.

7.215

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THERMOPYLAE

Xerxes orders the Persians to take the path over the mountain that evening.

The King was at a loss about how to deal with this impasse, but just then Ephialtes of Malis,^a son of Eurydemos, came to speak with him, expecting to win some great reward for telling the King of the path that led through the mountain to Thermopylae.^b By so doing, he caused the destruction of the Hellenes stationed there. [2] This man later fled to Thessaly^c in fear of the Lacedaemonians, and during his exile a price was set on his head by the Pylagoroi during a meeting of the Amphiktyones^b at Pylaia. After a while he went back to Antikyra,^c where he died at the hands of Athenades, a man of Trachis.^d [3] This Athenades killed Ephialtes for another reason, which I shall explain in a later section of my story;^a but Athenades was honored nonetheless by the Lacedaemonians. That is how Ephialtes was later killed.

Another version of these events is that Onetes of Karystos,^a son of Phanagoras, and Korydallos of Antikyra were the ones who gave this information to the King and who guided the Persians around the mountain, but I find this version to be completely inconceivable. [2] For on balance, the weight of consideration should be given to the fact that the Hellenes, that is the Pylagoroi, set a price of silver on the head of Ephialtes of Trachis, not on Onetes and Korydallos, and they would certainly have done so only after finding out exactly what had happened. Moreover, we know that it was for this reason that Ephialtes went into exile. [3] Now Onetes could indeed have known about this path, even though he was not a Malian, since he may have been familiar with this area anyway, but in fact it was Ephialtes who guided the Persians around the mountain along the path, and so I am recording in writing that he is the guilty one.

Xerxes was pleased and exhilarated by what Ephialtes promised to accomplish, and he at once sent off Hydarnes and those under his command,^a who set out from camp at the time the lamps were being lit. This path^b had been discovered by the local Malians, who had led the Thessalians along it against the Phocians^c at the time when the Phocians had

7.213.1a Malis: Map 7.213, inset. Ephialtes is the more common current spelling of the name Herodotus wrote as Epiāltes. There may well have been a traitor named Ephialtes who told the Persians about the path, but there is no mention of the great rewards that Xerxes would normally give to someone who provided such crucial assistance. The reason is not difficult to find. The Thessalians, who were allied to Persia and actively helping them, had used that path years earlier in one of their wars with Phocis; see 7.215.

7.213.1b Thermopylae: Map 7.213, inset.

7.213.2a Thessaly: Map 7.197.

7.213.2b The Pylagoroi were the delegates of the member states of the Amphiktyony, who met at the Pylaia, originally in the area of Thermopylae and later at Delphi. The Amphiktyones were a league

of state who originally were neighbors to an important sanctuary, in this case that of Demeter at Anthela. This league later became associated with the sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi. It administered the temple and its property and managed the Pythian games.

7.213.2c Antikyra, possible location: Map 7.213, inset.

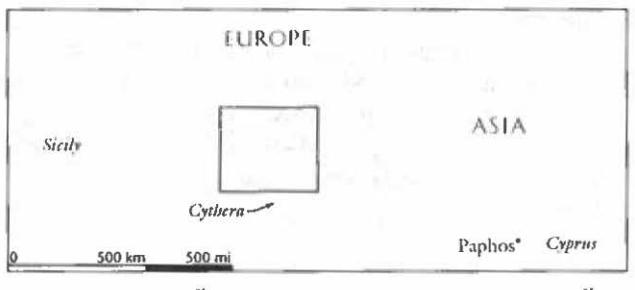
7.213.2d Trachis: Map 7.213, inset. Herodotus never does explain the other reason why Athenades killed Ephialtes.

7.213.3a Karystos: Map 7.213, BY.

7.214.1a Hydarnes commanded the regiment of Persian Immortals. See 7.211.1.

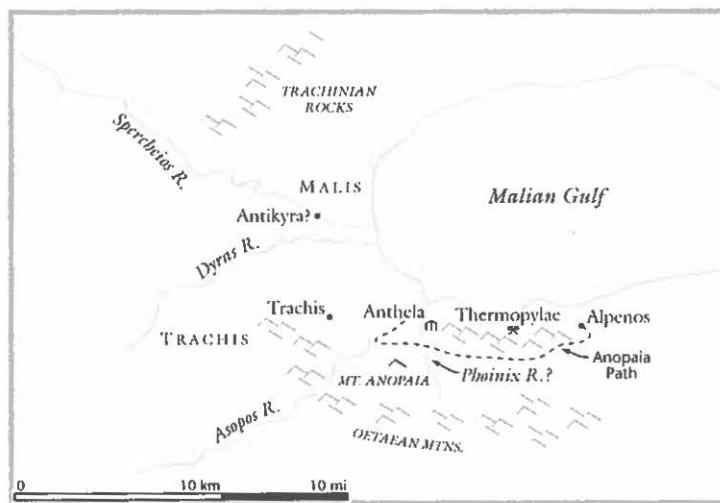
7.215.1a A likely location of the Anopaiā Path (so called because it crosses a mountain named Anopaiā; see 7.216) is shown on Map 7.213, inset.

7.215.1b Phocis: Map 7.213, AX.



The Anopaias Path

This inset is actually a diagram in map form of Herodotus' description of the topography of the area. It was necessary to represent it this way because, over the past 2,500 years, the sea has receded a great deal, the rivers have altered their course significantly, and towns and other features have disappeared. Scholars have walked the ground and made many attempts to reconstruct the landscape and locate the features he describes, but all their maps are quite speculative, as is this one. Moreover, there is the possibility that Herodotus' account may not be accurate in some or many respects; his list of inscriptions on the monuments erected on the site, however, would indicate that he visited the site himself.



MAP 7.213

7.216

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THERMOPYLAE

The nature of the Anopaiā Path is described.

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ANOPAIĀ

The Persians march to the summit, where they are detected by the Phocians sent by Leonidas to guard the path.

7.218

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ANOPAIĀ

The Persians encounter the Phocians as they climb the mountain and, brushing them aside, continue their advance.

7.219

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THERMOPYLAE

The Hellenes at Thermopylae learn that they have been outflanked and will soon be surrounded.

barricaded the main pass with a wall to protect themselves from invasion.^a So long ago the Malians had found that this path could be put to ill use.

The path begins from the Asopos River^a where it flows through the ravine; both the path and the mountain it crosses have the same name: Anopaiā.^b This Anopaiā Path extends along the ridge of the mountain and ends both at Alpenos^c (the first Locrian^d city one arrives at when coming from Malian^e territory) and at the rock called Melampygos and the seats of the Kerkopes; this is the narrowest part of the path.

So this was the path that the Persians took after crossing the Asopos; they marched all night long, keeping the mountains of Oeta^a on their right and those of Trachis^b on their left, and arrived at the summit of the mountain just as dawn was breaking. [2] As I mentioned earlier,^a there were 1,000 Phocian hoplites guarding this part of the mountain to protect their own country as well as to defend the path here. For while the pass below^b was being guarded by those I listed before, the Phocians had volunteered to guard this mountain path,^c holding themselves responsible to Leonidas for this task.

This is how the Phocians became aware that the Persians had reached the summit. They had not noticed them ascending the mountain because it was entirely covered with oak trees. But then, as no wind was blowing, they heard the loud sound of leaves being trampled under many feet, and at that point, the Phocians jumped up and began to arm themselves, but then, all of a sudden, the barbarians were right there in front of them.

[2] The barbarians were amazed to see men arming themselves, since they had not expected to encounter any opposition at all, but now they found themselves in the presence of an army. Hydarnes feared that these troops were Lacedaemonians. He asked exactly what country this army was from, and when he learned that they were Phocians, he formed up the Persians for battle. [3] The Phocians were at once hit with a dense hail of arrows, and, thinking that the Persians had originally set out to attack them, they fled to the peak of the mountain and prepared to die. That was what they thought, but the Persians with Ephialtes and Hydarnes were now paying no attention to the Phocians; they were descending the mountain as fast as they could go.

As for the Hellenes at Thermopylae, the first news of the enemy's approach came from the prophet Megistias; he had inspected the sacrificial victims and now predicted that they would face death at dawn. After that,

7.215.1d The construction of a wall by the Phocians in the past is also mentioned in 7.176.3–4.

mopylae at 7.203.1. At 7.212, he says the Phocians had been sent to guard the path on the mountain.

7.216.1a Asopos River: Map 7.213, inset.

7.217.2b "The pass below": the one by Thermopylae and the sea.

7.216.1b Mount Anopaiā: Map 7.213, inset.

7.217.2c At 7.175.2 Herodotus writes that the Greeks did not know about the path before they arrived. Yet the Phocians, who were allied with the Greeks, must have known about it, having fought the Thessalians who used it in years past; see 7.215.

7.216.1c Alpenos: Map 7.213, inset.

7.216.1d Locris (Opuntian): Map 7.213, AY.

7.216.1e Malis: Map 7.213, inset.

7.217.1a Oetaean Mountains: Map 7.213, inset.

7.217.1b Trachinian Rocks (mountains): Map 7.213, inset.

7.217.2a Herodotus mentioned that 1,000 Phocians joined the Greek forces at Ther-

deserters came while it was still dark and reported that the Persians were making their way around the mountain toward them. And finally, as day dawned, their lookouts ran down from the heights and told them the same news. [2] At that point the Hellenes discussed what to do and found that they were divided in their opinions: some advised against deserting their post, while others argued the opposite course. After these deliberations they split up: some departed and scattered to their several cities, while the rest prepared to remain there with Leonidas.

It is also said, however, that Leonidas himself sent most of them away as he was worried that all of them might otherwise be killed. But he felt that for himself and the Spartans with him, it would not be decent to leave the post that they had originally come to guard. [2] I myself am most inclined to this opinion and think that when Leonidas perceived the allies' lack of zeal and their reluctance to share with him in the danger ahead, he ordered them to leave. He perceived that it would be ignoble for him to leave the pass, and that if he were to remain, he would secure lasting glory and assure that the prosperity of Sparta would not be obliterated. [3] For the Spartans had consulted the oracle about the war at its very outset, and the Pythia had told them that either Lacedaemon would be depopulated by the barbarians or their king would die. She answered them in these hexameter verses:

[4] As for you who dwell in the vast land of Sparta,
 Either your city of glory will perish, sacked by the Perseids,^a
 Or else the boundaries of Lacedaemon will grieve for the death of
 a king born of Herakles,
 Since neither bulls nor lions have enough might
 to oppose him, for the power of Zeus is his possession.
 And he, I declare, will not be restrained until one or the other
 is torn apart.

Bearing in mind this oracle, and wanting to gain future glory for the Spartans alone, Leonidas sent the allies away, rather than have them leave. That is why they left, rather than because of a difference of opinion.

One of the most significant proofs that I can assert in order to support this claim has to do with Megistias of Acarnania,^a who is said to have been descended from Melampus.^b He was the prophet accompanying this army and had predicted what was going to happen from his inspection of the sacrificial victims. It is clear that Leonidas tried to send him away to prevent him from being killed with those who remained. But though Megistias was dismissed, he refused to leave, and instead sent away his son, who was serving in the army and was his only child.

7.220

480

THERMOPYLAE

Leonidas tells his allies to depart, but he decides to remain with his Spartans, spurred by the prospect of fame and by an oracle predicting that Sparta would be saved if a Spartan king were to die.

7.221

480

THERMOPYLAE

Leonidas sends away the seer Megistias, but he will not leave.

7.220.4a There is a pun here in the Greek between "perish" and "Perseids," the descendants of Perseus.

7.221.1a Acarnania: Map 7.213, AX.

7.221.1b This Melampus was mentioned by Herodotus in 2.49.

7.222

480

THERMOPYLAE

Leonidas keeps the Thebans there as hostages. The Thespians remain gladly.

Now those allies who had been dismissed left in obedience to Leonidas, and only the Thespians^a and the Thebans^b stayed behind with the Lacedaemonians. The Thebans did not want to be there, but Leonidas held them back, treating them as hostages and keeping them there against their will. The Thespians, however, were quite willing to stay; they refused to go away and to abandon Leonidas and his men; instead, they remained there to die with them. Their commander was Demophilus son of Diadromes.

7.223

480

THERMOPYLAE

Battle is joined again at midmorning. The Hellenes fight recklessly and desperately, knowing they are to die, and inflict high casualties on the enemy.

At sunrise, Xerxes poured libations and then waited until about the time of peak market hour to make his attack. That is what Ephialtes had told him to do, since the way down the mountain was quicker and the ground they had to cover much shorter than the climb up and around the mountain. [2] Xerxes' men advanced, but so did the Hellenes with Leonidas, and since the latter were marching to their death, they now ventured much farther than they had at first onto the wider part of the strip of land, for on the preceding days they had been guarding the defensive wall^c and had kept back to fight at the narrower part. [3] Now, however, they joined battle beyond that sector. Many of the barbarians fell, for the leaders of the regiments were behind them with whips, flogging each and every man and urging them ever forward. Many fell into the sea and died, but even more were trampled alive by one another. There was no counting the number of the dead. [4] The Hellenes knew they were about to face death at the hands of the men who had come around the mountain, and so they exerted their utmost strength against the barbarians, with reckless desperation and no regard for their own lives.

7.224

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THERMOPYLAE

Finally Leonidas and many famous Spartans fall there (Herodotus has learned all their names), and many eminent Persians.

By this time most of their spears had broken, so they were slaying the Persians with their swords. And it was during this struggle that Leonidas fell, the man who had proved himself the most valiant of all, and with him those other famous Spartans whose names I have learned because I think they also proved themselves to be worthy men; indeed, I have learned the names of all 300 of them.^a [2] Many Persians fell there, too, including some famous ones; in particular, two sons of Darius, Abrokomes and Hyperanthes, who had been born to Darius by Phratagoune daughter of Artanes. This Artanes was the brother of King Darius and the son of Hystaspes son of Arsames. After giving his daughter in marriage to Darius, he had given him also his whole estate, since she was his only child.

Two brothers of Xerxes also fell there, while they were fighting in the mêlée over the body of Leonidas, for the Persians and Lacedaemonians

7.225

480

THERMOPYLAE

The Hellenes rout the Persians four times and retire to the narrow pass for a last stand when the men with Ephialtes arrive.

7.222.1a Thespiai: Map 7.213, AY.

7.222.1b Thebes: Map 7.213, AY.

7.223.2a How had the Hellenes used the wall? As a base from which to deploy? As shelter against Persian arrows? Herodotus does not say, although he mentions the wall three times (7.176.3–5, 7.208.2,

7.215). See Appendix N, §10.

7.224.1a Leonidas' body was brought to Sparta and buried there in 440; a column bearing the names of the 300 was erected on his grave, which was probably seen by Herodotus. (Godley)

engaged in a violent struggle over the corpse until the Hellenes, after routing their opponents four times, managed with great valor to drag it out and away from the crowd. The fighting continued until the forces with Ephialtes arrived. [2] When the Hellenes learned that they had come, the contest took a different turn, as they retreated back to the narrow part of the road, and after passing the wall, all of them except for the Thebans stationed themselves together upon the hill that is located at the place on the road where the stone lion in honor of Leonidas now stands. [3] On this spot they tried to defend themselves with their daggers if they still had them, or if not, with their hands and their teeth. The barbarians pelted them with missiles, some running up to face the Hellenes directly and demolishing the defensive wall, and others coming to surround them on all sides.

Though the Lacedaemonians and the Thespians alike proved themselves to be brave in this battle, it is said that the Spartan Dienekes proved himself to be the most valiant man of all. It is reported that before the Hellenes engaged the Medes in battle, one of the Trachinians said that there were so many barbarians that whenever they shot their arrows, the sun was blocked by their number. [2] Dienekes was not alarmed to hear this but rather, in total disregard for the vast numbers of Medes, said that what his Trachinian friend had reported was in fact good news, since it meant that while the Medes were blocking the sun, they would fight them in the shade.^a This saying and others like it have been left as memorials of Dienekes the Lacedaemonian.

After Dienekes, the most outstanding men in this battle are said to be two Lacedaemonian brothers, Alpheos and Maron, sons of Orsiphantos. Of the Thespians, the man who earned the highest distinction was named Dithyrambos son of Harmatides.

They were buried just where they had fallen, and for these men as well as for those who had met their end before Leonidas could send them away, an inscription was erected which says:

Three million foes were once fought right here
By four thousand men from the Peloponnese.

[2] That inscription applied to them all, but the Spartans have one of their own:

Tell this, passerby, to the Lacedaemonians:
It is here that we lie, their commands we obey.

7.226.2a Perhaps this anecdote reveals something about the Persian method of con-

fronting the Greek hoplite phalanx. See Appendix O, §4–7.

7.226

480

THERMOPYLAE

The anecdote of Dienekes, who, hearing that the huge number of enemy missiles would darken the sun, said that he would prefer to fight in the shade.

7.227

480

THERMOPYLAE

Other Hellenes who gained renown.

7.228

480

THERMOPYLAE

Herodotus recounts some epitaphs that were later inscribed at Thermopylae over the graves of Hellenes who fell there to memorialize them and the battle.

[3] That inscription is for the Lacedaemonians, and this one, for the prophet:

This is the monument of the famous Megistias,
Slain by the Medes when they crossed the Sperchias.
A prophet knowing for certain that Doom was approaching,
Yet he could not endure to forsake Sparta's leaders.

[4] The first two of these inscriptions and pillars were set up in honor of these men by the Amphiktyones. Simonides son of Leoprepes had the monument to the prophet Megistias inscribed for the sake of friendship.^a

It is said that two of the 300 men, Eurytos and Aristodemos, had the opportunity to return safely to Sparta^a if only they had come to an agreement, since they had been released from the camp by Leonidas and were laid up in Alpenos^b with the most serious cases of eye disease. Or, if they had not wanted to return home, they could die together with the others. Though it was possible for both of them to take either of these courses of action, they made different decisions about what to do. When Eurytos learned of the Persian advance around the mountain, he asked for his arms, put them on, and ordered his helot^c to lead him to those who were fighting. After leading him to the fighting, the helot fled and disappeared from sight, while Eurytos charged into the raging battle and was killed. But Aristodemos was left behind, faint and feeble. [2] Now if it had been only Aristodemos who became ill and returned to Sparta, or if both of them alike had taken the journey home together, I do not think the Spartans would have been provoked to any wrath at all against them. When, however, one of them was slain and the other had the same excuse but was unwilling to die, it became inevitable that the Spartans would be stirred to great wrath against Aristodemos.

While some say that Aristodemos returned safely to Sparta and report the illness as his excuse, others say that he had been sent from the camp as a messenger; and that although he could have come back in time for the battle, he was unwilling to do so and instead lagged behind on his journey and thus survived, while his fellow messenger came back for the battle and died in it.

So after returning to Lacedaemon, Aristodemos met with disgrace and dishonor. The dishonor he suffered was that not a single Spartan would give him fire or speak to him, and his disgrace was that he was called "Aristodemos the Trembler." But at the battle of Plataea^a he acquitted himself of all blame that had been cast upon him.

7.228.4a Simonides son of Leoprepes, from Keos (556-468). Simonides is supposed to have composed all three inscriptions, but the epitaph of Megistias was the only one which he made at his own expense.

7.229.1a Sparta: Map 7.213, BX.

7.229.1b Alpenos: Map 7.213, inset.

7.229.1c Spartiate hoplites were normally accompanied to war by helot servants. See Appendix B, §8.

7.231.1a Plataea: Map 7.213, AY.

7.229

480

THERMOPYLAE

Two Spartans who were suffering from ophthalmia were ordered to leave. One, Eurytos, refused and died fighting blindly. The other, Aristodemos, went home and was received angrily by the Spartans.

7.230

480

THERMOPYLAE

Another version of the story of the two Spartans.

7.231

480

SPARTA

How Aristodemos was punished, and how he redeemed himself.

It is also said that another of these 300 men was sent away as a messenger to Thessaly and that he survived as well; his name was Pantites, and when he returned to Sparta, he suffered such dishonor that he hanged himself.

Now the Thebans, whose commander was Leontiades, fought alongside the Hellenes against the army of the King for a while, since they were being compelled to do so. But when they saw the Persian side prevailing and the Hellenes with Leonidas hurrying to the hill, the Thebans broke away and approached the barbarians with their hands outstretched, saying most truthfully that they had medized and had been among the first to give earth and water to the King, but had been compelled to come to Thermopylae, and were guiltless of inflicting any damages on the King. [2] By saying all this they survived, since they had the Thessalians as witnesses to their claims; they were not entirely fortunate, however. Some of them were seized and killed by the barbarians as they approached, and Xerxes ordered that a majority of the rest be branded with the royal marks, beginning with the commander Leontiades. The son of this Leontiades, Eurymachos, was murdered long after this by the Plataeans after he had taken the city of Plataea with 400 Thebans under his command.

That, then, is how the Hellenes fought at Thermopylae. Now Xerxes summoned Demaratos and questioned him, beginning, "Demaratos, you are a good man. My evidence for this is your past truthfulness, for everything has turned out just as you said it would. But now tell me how many Lacedaemonians are left, and how many of them are warriors like these men were, or are they all like this?" [2] Demaratos replied, "Sire, the total number of Lacedaemonians is quite large, and they have many cities. But I will tell you now what you really want to know. In Lacedaemon there is a city called Sparta, with about 8,000 men living in it,^a and these men are all the equals of those who fought here, while the other Lacedaemonians are not, though they are good men." [3] Xerxes responded, asking, "Demaratos, what would be the easiest way for us to conquer these men? Come now, give me your expert advice, for you know the details of how they plan their strategies, since you were once their king."

Demaratos replied, "Sire, if you really are seeking my advice in earnest, it is only right that I should give you the best counsel that I can. Suppose you were to send 300 ships from your fleet to Laconian territory. [2] Well, lying off the coast of that land is an island by the name of Cythera.^a And Chilon,^b the wisest man among our people, once said that the Spartans could profit

7.234.2a For the significance of this number of men and the precipitous decline in Spartan manpower after 480, see Appendix B, §17.

7.235.2a Cythera: Map 7.213, locator.

7.235.2b Chilon was almost certainly the ephor of 556/55 regarded in antiquity as one of the seven wise men, who were accorded divine honors in Sparta. (Paus-

sianas 3.16.4) This remark about Cythera was astonishingly prophetic, for one could hardly suppose that the island was a source of danger to Sparta in the mid-sixth century. Perhaps Herodotus wrote it down after the Athenians siezed the island in 424 in the Archidamian War (431–421). (*Thucydides* 4.53)

7.232

480

SPARTA

Another Spartan who survived dishonored.

7.233

480

THERMOPYLAE

The Thebans surrendered when they could, saying they had been forced to fight against the Persians. Some were killed, and many of the rest were branded by the Persians.

7.234

480

THERMOPYLAE

Xerxes questions Demaratos, admitting that what he had said had proved true, asking him for advice on how to overcome the Spartans at least cost to the Persians.

7.235

480

THERMOPYLAE

Demaratos advises Xerxes to send a naval force to occupy Cythera and to carry the war from there directly against Sparta to embroil the Spartans at home. He predicts that if the Persians do not do this, they will face harder and more costly battles than Thermopylae at the Isthmus of Corinth.

more if this island would sink into the sea than they could if it continued to remain above water. He said this because he always expected that something like what I am now advising you to do would happen someday. He, of course, had no advance knowledge of your expedition, but he feared any and all such expeditions conducted by men. [3] My advice is that you should use this island as your base to frighten the Lacedaemonians. If they have a war of their own at home, you will then be able to conquer the rest of Hellas with your land army and not have to fear that they will come to the assistance of the other Hellenes. Then, when the rest of Hellas has been enslaved, Laconia will be the only land left to oppose you, and it will be a weakened one at that.

[4] "If you do not follow this advice, however, this is what you should expect. There is, at the entrance to the Peloponnese, a narrow isthmus⁴ where all the Peloponnesians who will form a solemn league against you will join forces. There you may expect to face more difficult battles than those that have been fought so far. But if you do as I say, this isthmus and the cities will surrender to you without a fight."

7.236

480

THERMOPYLAE

Achaimenes advises Xerxes not to follow Demaratos' advice. He asserts that all Hellenes hate power and are jealous of success. He advises that the Persians keep their forces concentrated as they advance, and predicts that Sparta will not recover from recent losses.

After these words of Demaratos, Achaimenes, a brother of Xerxes and a commander of the fleet, spoke up. He had happened to be present and was afraid that Xerxes would be persuaded to take Demaratos' advice. "Sire," he said, "I can see that you approve of the words of this man who envies your success or perhaps is even acting treacherously against you and your interests. For these are exactly the sorts of things that Hellenes delight in doing. They envy prosperity and hate whoever is better and stronger than themselves. [2] Now in our present situation, having lost 400 ships wrecked in the storm, if you were to send 300 more ships from our fleet to sail around the Peloponnese, your adversary's fleet will certainly be a match for you in battle. But if our fleet stays concentrated, it will be very difficult for them to deal with it, and they will be no match for you at all. By keeping your entire fleet together, it can then assist your army, and the army can travel with the support of your fleet. But if you divide your fleet, you will not be able to help the separated forces, nor will they be able to help you. [3] So decide on a course that well serves your own interests instead of concerning yourself with your enemies: where they will take a stand to fight you, or what they will do, or how many of them there are. For they are quite capable of thinking for themselves, just as we are for ourselves. And even if the Lacedaemonians do advance against the Persians for battle, they will in no way be able to heal the injuries they have now suffered."

7.235.4a Isthmus of Corinth: Map 7.213, BY.

Xerxes replied, "Achaimenes, I think that you have given good advice, and I shall certainly follow it. Although Demaratos advised me to do what he thinks would be the best plan for me, his judgment has proved inferior to yours. [2] But I do not accept at all your assertion that he is antagonistic to my interests when I weigh what he said before, as well as the fact that a citizen normally envies another citizen who is successful and shows his hostility by his silence; he refuses to give good advice when consulted by someone from his own community unless he has attained a high degree of virtue—but men like this are rare. [3] And a guest-friend^a is the most benevolent of all toward his guest-friend when the latter succeeds, and will give him the best advice when consulted; so since Demaratos is my guest-friend, I forbid anyone to utter any slander against him ever again."

After having said this, Xerxes made his way among the corpses, including that of Leonidas. Having heard that Leonidas was a king and the commander of the Lacedaemonians, he ordered that his head be cut off and impaled on a stake. [2] For me this is the clearest of many proofs that King Xerxes felt greater animosity for Leonidas while he was still alive than he felt for any other man. Otherwise he would not have treated the corpse so outrageously, since of all the peoples I know of, the Persians especially honor men who are good at waging war. So now, those to whom he had given these orders duly carried them out.

I shall now go back to a detail of my account that I left unexplained before. The Lacedaemonians had been the first to learn that the King would lead an expedition against Hellas, and so had sent to consult the oracle at Delphi,^b to which they received the response I quoted a little earlier.^b But the way in which they received this news is quite extraordinary. [2] When Demaratos son of Ariston was in exile among the Medes, I do not believe—and here reason is my ally—that he had goodwill toward the Lacedaemonians, though one may conjecture whether he acted out of benevolence or out of spiteful satisfaction. For when Xerxes resolved to lead an expedition against Hellas, Demaratos was in Susa,^c and upon learning Xerxes' plans, immediately wanted to communicate this information to the Lacedaemonians. [3] There was a risk that he would be caught, so there was no other way he could inform them except by the following scheme. Taking a double writing tablet, he scraped off the wax and inscribed the plan of the King onto the wood of the tablet. After doing this, he melted some wax back over what he had written, so that the tablet would be apparently blank and thus cause no trouble from the guards as it was conveyed to

7.237.3a Guest-friendship (*xenia*): a bond of ritualized friendship, usually between aristocrats or prominent men of different cities. It was passed down through generations and required hereditary privileges and obligations such as reciprocal hospitality and assistance. See Appendix T, §3.

7.239.1a Delphi: Map 7.213, AX.

7.239.1b Herodotus refers here to 7.220, where he mentioned that the Spartans received early

intelligence of Xerxes' plans against Hellas. Only now does he tell us that the warning came from the exiled Spartan king Demaratos, whose hidden message was perceived by Kleomenes' daughter Gorgo. As a child she warned her father against the corrupting bribery of Aristagoras (5.51.3); as an adult, she became the wife of King Leonidas. See Appendix B, §24.

Susa: Map 7.186, locator.

7.237

480

THERMOPYLAE

Xerxes decides to follow Achaimenes' advice, but praises Demaratos as a friend and trustworthy adviser.

7.238

480

THERMOPYLAE

Xerxes orders that the head of Leonidas should be cut off and impaled.

7.239

485?

SUSA

How Demaratos used a clever trick to send a message of warning to the Spartans of the aggressive plans of the Persians, and how Gorgo, Kleomenes' daughter, discovered the message.

its destination. [4] When it arrived at Lacedaemon, the Lacedaemonians could not understand what it meant until, according to what I have heard, Gorgo the daughter of Klomenes^a and wife of Leonidas deduced the answer herself. She ordered them to scrape off the wax, and said that they would then discover a message written on the wood. When they followed her advice, they did discover the message and, after reading it, dispatched the news to the rest of the Hellenes. That, then, is how this is said to have happened.