

HERODOTUS Book VII: Lines 175-239

~10K words (Read aloud time ~60 min + map pointing)

175. When the Hellenes had returned to the Isthmus, they deliberated, having regard to that which had been said by Alexander, where and in what regions they should set the war on foot: and the opinion which prevailed was to guard the pass at Thermopylai; for it was seen to be narrower than that leading into Thessaly, and at the same time it was single, [166](#) and nearer also to their own land; and as for the path by means of which were taken those of the Hellenes who were taken by the enemy at Thermopylai, they did not even know of its existence until they were informed by the people of Trachis after they had come to Thermopylai. This pass then they resolved to guard, and not permit the Barbarian to go by into Hellas; and they resolved that the fleet should sail to Artemision in the territory of Histiaia: for these points are near to one another, so that each division of their forces could have information of what was happening to the other. And the places are so situated as I shall describe.

176. As to Artemision first, coming out of the Thracian Sea the space is contracted from great width to that narrow channel which lies between the island of Skiathos and the mainland of Magnesia; and after the strait there follows at once in Euboea the sea-beach called Artemision, upon which there is a temple of Artemis. Then secondly the passage into Hellas by Trechis is, where it is narrowest, but fifty feet wide: it is not here however that the narrowest part of this whole region lies, but in front of Thermopylai and also behind it, consisting of a single wheel-track only [167](#) both by Alpenoi, which lies behind Thermopylai and again by the river Phoinix near the town of Anthela there is no space but a single wheel-track only: and on the West of Thermopylai there is a mountain which is impassable and precipitous, rising up to a great height and extending towards the range of Oite, while on the East of the road the sea with swampy pools succeeds at once. In this passage there are hot springs, which the natives of the place call the "Pots," [168](#) and an altar of Heracles is set up near them. Moreover a wall had once been built at this pass, and in old times there was a gate set in it; which wall was built by the Phokians, who were struck with fear because the Thessalians had come from the land of the Thesprotians to settle in the Aiolian land, the same which they now possess. Since then the Thessalians, as they supposed, were attempting to subdue them, the Phokians guarded themselves against this beforehand; and at that time they let the water of the hot springs run over the passage, that the place might be converted into a ravine, and devised every means that the Thessalians might not make invasion of their land. Now the ancient wall had been built long before, and the greater part of it was by that time in ruins from lapse of time; the Hellenes however resolved to set it up again, and at this spot to repel the Barbarian from Hellas: and very near the road there is a village called Alpenoi, from which the Hellenes counted on getting supplies.

177. These places then the Hellenes perceived to be such as their purpose required; for they considered everything beforehand and calculated that the Barbarians would not be able to take advantage either of superior numbers or of cavalry, and therefore they resolved here to receive the invader of Hellas: and when they were informed that the Persian was in Pieria, they broke

up from the Isthmus and set forth for the campaign, some going to Thermopylai by land, and others making for Artemision by sea.

178. The Hellenes, I say, were coming to the rescue with speed, having been appointed to their several places: and meanwhile the men of Delphi consulted the Oracle of the god on behalf of themselves and on behalf of Hellas, being struck with dread; and a reply was given them that they should pray to the Winds, for these would be powerful helpers of Hellas in fight. So the Delphians, having accepted the oracle, first reported the answer which had been given them to those of the Hellenes who desired to be free; and having reported this to them at a time when they were in great dread of the Barbarian, they laid up for themselves an immortal store of gratitude: then after this the men of Delphi established an altar for the Winds in Thuaia, where is the sacred enclosure of Thuaia the daughter of Kephisos, after whom moreover this place has its name; and also they approached them with sacrifices.

179. The Delphians then according to the oracle even to this day make propitiary offerings to the Winds: and meanwhile the fleet of Xerxes setting forth from the city of Therma had passed over with ten of its ships, which were those that sailed best, straight towards Skiathos, where three Hellenic ships, a Troizenian, an Eginetan and an Athenian, were keeping watch in advance. When the crews of these caught sight of the ships of the Barbarians, they set off to make their escape:

180, and the ship of Troizen, of which Prexinos was in command, was pursued and captured at once by the Barbarians; who upon that took the man who was most distinguished by beauty among the fighting-men on board of her, [169](#) and cut his throat at the prow of the ship, making a good omen for themselves of the first of the Hellenes whom they had captured who was pre-eminent for beauty. The name of this man who was sacrificed was Leon, and perhaps he had also his name to thank in some degree for what befell him.

181. The ship of Egina however, of which Asonides was master, even gave them some trouble to capture it, seeing that Pytheas the son of Ischenoös served as a fighting-man on board of her, who proved himself a most valiant man on this day; for when the ship was being taken, he held out fighting until he was hacked all to pieces: and as when he had fallen he did not die, but had still breath in him, the Persians who served as fighting-men on board the ships, because of his valour used all diligence to save his life, both applying unguents of myrrh to heal his wounds and also wrapping him up in bands of the finest linen; and when they came back to their own main body, they showed him to all the army, making a marvel of him and giving him good treatment; but the rest whom they had taken in this ship they treated as slaves.

182. Two of the three ships, I say, were captured thus; but the third, of which Phormos an Athenian was master, ran ashore in its flight at the mouth of the river Peneios; and the Barbarians got possession of the vessel but not of the crew; for so soon as the Athenians had run the ship ashore, they leapt out of her, and passing through Thessaly made their way to Athens.

183. Of these things the Hellenes who were stationed at Artemision were informed by fire-signals from Skiathos; and being informed of them and being struck with fear, they removed their place of anchorage from Atermision to Chalkis, intending to guard the Euripos, but leaving at the same time watchers by day [170](#) on the heights of Euboea. Of the ten ships of the

Barbarians three sailed up to the reef called Myrmex, [171](#) which lies between Skiathos and Magnesia; and when the Barbarians had there erected a stone pillar, which for that purpose they brought to the reef, they set forth with their main body [172](#) from Therma, the difficulties of the passage having now been cleared away, and sailed thither with all their ships, having let eleven days go by since the king set forth on his march from Therma. Now of this reef lying exactly in the middle of the fairway they were informed by Pammon of Skyros. Sailing then throughout the day the Barbarians accomplished the voyage to Sepias in Magnesia and to the sea-beach which is between the city of Casthanaia and the headland of Sepias.

184. So far as this place and so far as Thermopylai the army was exempt from calamity; and the number was then still, as I find by computation, this:—Of the ships which came from Asia, which were one thousand two hundred and seven, the original number of the crews supplied by the several nations I find to have been twenty-four myriads and also in addition to them one thousand four hundred, [173](#) if one reckons at the rate of two hundred men to each ship: and on board of each of these ships there served as fighting-men, [174](#) besides the fighting-men belonging to its own nation in each case, thirty men who were Persians, Medes, or Sacans; and this amounts to three myriads six thousand two hundred and ten [175](#) in addition to the others. I will add also to this and to the former number the crews of the fifty-oared galleys, assuming that there were eighty men, more or less, [176](#) in each one. Of these vessels there were gathered together, as was before said, three thousand: it would follow therefore that there were in them four-and-twenty myriads [177](#) of men. This was the naval force which came from Asia, amounting in all to fifty-one myriads and also seven thousand six hundred and ten in addition. [178](#) Then of the footmen there had been found to be a hundred and seventy myriads, [179](#) and of the horsemen eight myriads: [180](#) and I will add also to these the Arabian camel-drivers and the Libyan drivers of chariots, assuming them to amount to twenty thousand men. The result is then that the number of the ships' crews combined with that of the land-army amounts to two hundred and thirty-one myriads and also in addition seven thousand six hundred and ten. [181](#) This is the statement of the Army which was brought up out of Asia itself, without counting the attendants which accompanied it or the corn-transporters and the men who sailed in these.

185. There is still to be reckoned, in addition to all this which has been summed up, the force which was being led from Europe; and of this we must give a probable estimate. [182](#) The Hellenes of Thrace and of the islands which lie off the coast of Thrace supplied a hundred and twenty ships; from which ships there results a sum of twenty-four thousand men: and as regards the land-force which was supplied by the Thracians, Paionians, Eordians, Bottiaians, the race which inhabits Chalkidike, the Brygians, Pierians, Macedonians, Perraibians, Enianians, [183](#) Dolopians, Magnesians, Achaians, and all those who dwell in the coast-region of Thrace, of these various nations I estimate that there were thirty myriads. [184](#) These myriads then added to those from Asia make a total sum of two hundred and sixty-four myriads of fighting men and in addition to these sixteen hundred and ten. [185](#)

186. Such being the number of this body of fighting-men, [186](#) the attendants who went with these and the men who were in the small vessels [187](#) which carried corn, and again in the other vessels which sailed with the army, these I suppose were not less in number but more than the fighting men. I assume them to be equal in number with these, and neither at all more nor less;

and so, being supposed equal in number with the fighting body, they make up the same number of myriads as they. Thus five hundred and twenty-eight myriads three thousand two hundred and twenty [188](#) was the number of men whom Xerxes son of Dareios led as far as Sepias and Thermopylai.

187. This is the number of the whole army of Xerxes; but of the women who made bread for it, and of the concubines and eunuchs no man can state any exact number, nor again of the draught-animals and other beasts of burden or of the Indian hounds, which accompanied it, could any one state the number by reason of their multitude: so that it does not occur to me to wonder that the streams of some rivers should have failed them, but I wonder rather how the provisions were sufficient to feed so many myriads; for I find on computation that if each man received a quart [189](#) of wheat every day and nothing more, there would be expended every day eleven myriads of *medimnoi* [190](#) and three hundred and forty *medimnoi* besides: and here I am not reckoning anything for the women, eunuchs, baggage-animals, or dogs. Of all these men, amounting to so many myriads, not one was for beauty and stature more worthy than Xerxes himself to possess this power.

188. The fleet, I say, set forth and sailed: and when it had put in to land in the region of Magnesia at the beach which is between the city of Casthanaia and the headland of Sepias, the first of the ships which came lay moored by the land and the others rode at anchor behind them; for, as the beach was not large in extent, they lay at anchor with prows projecting [191](#) towards the sea in an order which was eight ships deep. For that night they lay thus; but at early dawn, after clear sky and windless calm, the sea began to be violently agitated and a great storm fell upon them with a strong East [192](#) Wind, that wind which they who dwell about those parts call Hellespontias. Now as many of them as perceived that the wind was rising and who were so moored that it was possible for them to do so, drew up their ships on land before the storm came, and both they and their ships escaped; but as for those of the ships which it caught out at sea, some it cast away at the place called Ianoi [193](#) in Pelion and others on the beach, while some were wrecked on the headland of Sepias itself, others at the city of Meliboia, and others were thrown up on shore [194](#) at Casthanaia: and the violence of the storm could not be resisted.

189. There is a story reported that the Athenians had called upon Boreas to aid them, by suggestion of an oracle, because there had come to them another utterance of the god bidding them call upon their brother by marriage to be their helper. Now according to the story of the Hellenes Boreas has a wife who is of Attica, Oreithuia the daughter of Erechththeus. By reason of this affinity, I say, the Athenians, according to the tale which has gone abroad, conjectured that their "brother by marriage" was Boreas, and when they perceived the wind rising, as they lay with their ships at Chalkis in Euboea, or even before that, they offered sacrifices and called upon Boreas and Oreithuia to assist them and to destroy the ships of the Barbarians, as they had done before round about mount Athos. Whether it was for this reason that the wind Boreas fell upon the Barbarians while they lay at anchor, I am not able to say; but however that may be, the Athenians report that Boreas had come to their help in former times, and that at this time he accomplished those things for them of which I speak; and when they had returned home they set up a temple dedicated to Boreas by the river Ilissos.

190. In this disaster the number of the ships which were lost was not less than four hundred, according to the report of those who state the number which is lowest, with men innumerable and an immense quantity of valuable things; insomuch that to Ameinocles the son of Cretines, a Magnesian who held lands about Sepias, this shipwreck proved very gainful; for he picked up many cups of gold which were thrown up afterwards on the shore, and many also of silver, and found treasure-chests [195](#) which had belonged to the Persians, and made acquisition of other things of gold [196](#) more than can be described. This man however, though he became very wealthy by the things which he found, yet in other respects was not fortunate; for he too suffered misfortune, being troubled by the slaying of a child. [197](#)

191. Of the corn-transports and other vessels which perished there was no numbering made; and so great was the loss that the commanders of the fleet, being struck with fear lest the Thessalians should attack them now that they had been brought into an evil plight, threw round their camp a lofty palisade built of the fragments of wreck. For the storm continued during three days; but at last the Magians, making sacrifice of victims and singing incantations to appease the Wind by enchantments, [198](#) and in addition to this, offering to Thetis and the Nereïds, caused it to cease on the fourth day, or else for some other reason it abated of its own will. Now they offered sacrifice to Thetis, being informed by the Ionians of the story that she was carried off from the place by Peleus, and that the whole headland of Sepias belonged to her and to the other Nereïds.

192. The storm then had ceased on the fourth day; and meanwhile the day-watchers had run down from the heights of Euboea on the day after the first storm began, and were keeping the Hellenes informed of all that had happened as regards the shipwreck. They then, being informed of it, prayed first to Poseidon the Saviour and poured libations, and then they hastened to go back to Artemision, expecting that there would be but a very few ships of the enemy left to come against them.

193. They, I say, came for the second time and lay with their ships about Artemision: and from that time even to this they preserve the use of the surname "Saviour" for Poseidon. Meanwhile the Barbarians, when the wind had ceased and the swell of the sea had calmed down, drew their ships into the sea and sailed on along the shore of the mainland, and having rounded the extremity of Magnesia they sailed straight into the gulf which leads towards Pagasai. In this gulf of Magnesia there is a place where it is said that Heracles was left behind by Jason and his comrades, having been sent from the Argo to fetch water, at the time when they were sailing for the fleece to Aia in the land of Colchis: for from that place they designed, when they had taken in water, to loose [199](#) their ship into the open sea; and from this the place has come to have the name Aphetai. Here then the fleet of Xerxes took up its moorings.

194. Now it chanced that fifteen of these ships put out to sea a good deal later than the rest, and they happened to catch sight of the ships of the Hellenes at Artemision. These ships the Barbarians supposed to be their own, and they sailed thither accordingly and fell among the enemy. Of these the commander was Sandokes the son of Thamasios, the governor of Kyme in Aiolia, whom before this time king Dareios had taken and crucified (he being one of the Royal Judges) for this reason, [19901](#) namely that Sandokes had pronounced judgment unjustly for money. So then after he was hung up, Dareios reckoned and found that more good services

had been done by him to the royal house than were equal to his offences; and having found this, and perceived that he had himself acted with more haste than wisdom, he let him go. Thus he escaped from king Dareios, and did not perish but survived; now, however, when he sailed in toward the Hellenes, he was destined not to escape the second time; for when the Hellenes saw them sailing up, perceiving the mistake which was being made they put out against them and captured them without difficulty.

195. Sailing in one of these ships Aridolis was captured, the despot of Alabanda in Caria, and in another the Paphian commander Penthylus son of Demonoös, who brought twelve ships from Paphos, but had lost eleven of them in the storm which had come on by Sepias, and now was captured sailing in towards Artemision with the one which had escaped. These men the Hellenes sent away in bonds to the Isthmus of the Corinthians, after having inquired of them that which they desired to learn of the army of Xerxes.

196. The fleet of the Barbarians then, except the fifteen ships of which I said that Sandokes was in command, had arrived at Aphetai; and Xerxes meanwhile with the land-army, having marched through Thessalia and Achaia, had already entered the land of the Malians two days before, [200](#) after having held in Thessaly a contest for his own horses, making trial also of the Thessalian cavalry, because he was informed that it was the best of all among the Hellenes; and in this trial the horses of Hellas were far surpassed by the others. Now of the rivers in Thessalia the Onochonos alone failed to suffice by its stream for the drinking of the army; but of the rivers which flow in Achaia even that which is the largest of them, namely Epidanos, even this, I say, held out but barely.

197. When Xerxes had reached Alos of Achaia, the guides who gave him information of the way, wishing to inform him fully of everything, reported to him a legend of the place, the things, namely, which have to do with the temple of Zeus Laphystios; [201](#) how Athamas the son of Aiolos contrived death for Phrixos, having taken counsel with Ino, and after this how by command of an oracle the Achaians propose to his descendants the following tasks to be performed:—whosoever is the eldest of this race, on him they lay an injunction that he is forbidden to enter the City Hall, [202](#) and they themselves keep watch; now the City Hall is called by the Achaians the "Hall of the People"; [203](#) and if he enter it, it may not be that he shall come forth until he is about to be sacrificed. They related moreover in addition to this, that many of these who were about to be sacrificed had before now run away and departed to another land, because they were afraid; and if afterwards in course of time they returned to their own land and were caught, they were placed [204](#) in the City Hall: and they told how the man is sacrificed all thickly covered with wreaths, and with what form of procession he is brought forth to the sacrifice. This is done to the descendants of Kytissoros the son of Phrixos, because, when the Achaians were making of Athamas the son of Aiolos a victim to purge the sins of the land according to the command of an oracle, and were just about to sacrifice him, this Kytissoros coming from Aia of the Colchians rescued him; and having done so he brought the wrath of the gods upon his own descendants. Having heard these things, Xerxes, when he came to the sacred grove, both abstained from entering it himself, and gave the command to his whole army to do so likewise; and he paid reverence both to the house and to the sacred enclosure of the descendants of Athamas.

198. These then are the things which happened in Thessalia and in Achaia; and from these regions he proceeded to the Malian land, going along by a gulf of the sea, in which there is an ebb and flow of the tide every day. Round about this gulf there is a level space, which in parts is broad but in other parts very narrow; and mountains lofty and inaccessible surrounding this place enclose the whole land of Malis and are called the rocks of Trachis. The first city upon this gulf as one goes from Achaia is Antikyra, by which the river Spercheios flowing from the land of the Enianians [205](#) runs out into the sea. At a distance of twenty furlongs [206](#) or thereabouts from this river there is another, of which the name is Dyras; this is said to have appeared that it might bring assistance to Heracles when he was burning: then again at a distance of twenty furlongs from this there is another river called Melas.

199. From this river Melas the city of Trachis is distant five furlongs; and here, in the parts where Trachis is situated, is even the widest portion of all this district, as regards the space from the mountains to the sea; for the plain has an extent of twenty-two thousand *plethra*. [207](#) In the mountain-range which encloses the land of Trachis there is a cleft to the South of Trachis itself; and through this cleft the river Asopos flows, and runs along by the foot of the mountain.

200. There is also another river called Phoinix, to the South of the Asopos, of no great size, which flowing from these mountains runs out into the Asopos; and at the river Phoinix is the narrowest place, for here has been constructed a road with a single wheel-track only. Then from the river Phoinix it is a distance of fifteen furlongs to Thermopylai; and in the space between the river Phoinix and Thermopylai there is a village called Anthela, by which the river Asopos flows, and so runs out into the sea; and about this village there is a wide space in which is set up a temple dedicated to Demeter of the Amphictyons, and there are seats for the Amphictyonic councillors and a temple dedicated to Amphictyon himself.

201. King Xerxes, I say, was encamped within the region of Trachis in the land of the Malians, and the Hellenes within the pass. This place is called by the Hellenes in general Thermopylai, but by the natives of the place and those who dwell in the country round it is called Pylai. Both sides then were encamped hereabout, and the one had command of all that lies beyond Trachis [208](#) in the direction of the North Wind, and the others of that which tends towards the South Wind and the mid-day on this side of the continent. [209](#)

202. These were the Hellenes who awaited the attack of the Persian in this place:—of the Spartans three hundred hoplites; of the men of Tegea and Mantinea a thousand, half from each place, from Orchomenos in Arcadia a hundred and twenty, and from the rest of Arcadia a thousand,—of the Arcadians so many; from Corinth four hundred, from Phlius two hundred, and of the men of Mykene eighty: these were they who came from the Peloponnese; and from the Boeotians seven hundred of the Thespians, and of the Thebans four hundred.

203. In addition to these the Locrians of Opus had been summoned to come in their full force, and of the Phokians a thousand: for the Hellenes had of themselves sent a summons to them, saying by messengers that they had come as forerunners of the others, that the rest of the allies were to be expected every day, that their sea was safely guarded, being watched by the Athenians and the Eginetans and by those who had been appointed to serve in the fleet, and that they need fear nothing: for he was not a god, they said, who was coming to attack Hellas, but a man; and there was no mortal, nor would be any, with those fortunes evil had not been

mingled at his very birth, and the greatest evils for the greatest men; therefore he also who was marching against them, being mortal, would be destined to fail of his expectation. They accordingly, hearing this, came to the assistance of the others at Trachis.

204. Of these troops, although there were other commanders also according to the State to which each belonged, yet he who was most held in regard and who was leader of the whole army was the Lacedemonian Leonidas son of Anaxandrides, son of Leon, son of Eurycratides, son of Anaxander, son of Eurycrates, son of Polydoros, son of Alcamenes, son of Teleclos, son of Archelaos, son of Hegesilaos, son of Doryssos, son of Leobotes, son of Echestratos, son of Agis, son of Eurysthenes, son of Aristodemos, son of Aristomachos, son of Cleodaios, son of Hyllos, son of Heracles; who had obtained the kingdom of Sparta contrary to expectation.

205. For as he had two brothers each older than himself, namely Cleomenes and Dorieos, he had been far removed from the thought of becoming king. Since however Cleomenes had died without male child, and Dorieos was then no longer alive, but he also had brought his life to an end in Sicily, [210](#) thus the kingdom came to Leonidas, both because was of elder birth than Cleombrotos (for Cleombrotos was the youngest of the sons of Anaxandrides) and also because he had in marriage the daughter of Cleomenes. He then at this time went to Thermopylai, having chosen the three hundred who were appointed by law [211](#) and men who chanced to have sons; and he took with him besides, before he arrived, those Thebans whom I mentioned when I reckoned them in the number of the troops, of whom the commander was Leontiades the son of Eurymachos: and for this reason Leonidas was anxious to take up these with him of all the Hellenes, namely because accusations had been strongly brought against them that they were taking the side of the Medes; therefore he summoned them to the war, desiring to know whether they would send troops with them or whether they would openly renounce the alliance of the Hellenes; and they sent men, having other thoughts in their mind the while.

206. These with Leonidas the Spartans had sent out first, in order that seeing them the other allies might join in the campaign, and for fear that they also might take the side of the Medes, if they heard that the Spartans were putting off their action. Afterwards, however, when they had kept the festival, (for the festival of the Carneia stood in their way), they intended then to leave a garrison in Sparta and to come to help in full force with speed: and just so also the rest of the allies had thought of doing themselves; for it chanced that the Olympic festival fell at the same time as these events. Accordingly, since they did not suppose that the fighting in Thermopylai would so soon be decided, they sent only the forerunners of their force.

207. These, I say, had intended to do thus: and meanwhile the Hellenes at Thermopylai, when the Persian had come near to the pass, were in dread, and deliberated about making retreat from their position. To the rest of the Peloponnesians then it seemed best that they should go to the Peloponnese and hold the Isthmus in guard; but Leonidas, when the Phokians and Locrians were indignant at this opinion, gave his vote for remaining there, and for sending at the same time messengers to the several States bidding them to come up to help them, since they were but few to repel the army of the Medes.

208. As they were thus deliberating, Xerxes sent a scout on horseback to see how many they were in number and what they were doing; for he had heard while he was yet in Thessaly that

there had been assembled in this place a small force, and that the leaders of it were Lacedemonians together with Leonidas, who was of the race of Heracles. And when the horseman had ridden up towards their camp, he looked upon them and had a view not indeed of the whole of their army, for of those which were posted within the wall, which they had repaired and were keeping a guard, it was not possible to have a view, but he observed those who were outside, whose station was in front of the wall; and it chanced at that time that the Lacedemonians were they who were posted outside. So then he saw some of the men practising athletic exercises and some combing their long hair: and as he looked upon these things he marvelled, and at the same time he observed their number: and when he had observed all exactly, he rode back unmolested, for no one attempted to pursue him and he found himself treated with much indifference. And when he returned he reported to Xerxes all that which he had seen.

209. Hearing this Xerxes was not able to conjecture the truth about the matter, namely that they were preparing themselves to die and to deal death to the enemy so far as they might; but it seemed to him that they were acting in a manner merely ridiculous; and therefore he sent for Demaratos the son of Ariston, who was in his camp, and when he came, Xerxes asked him of these things severally, desiring to discover what this was which the Lacedemonians were doing: and he said: "Thou didst hear from my mouth at a former time, when we were setting forth to go against Hellas, the things concerning these men; and having heard them thou madest me an object of laughter, because I told thee of these things which I perceived would come to pass; for to me it is the greatest of all ends to speak the truth continually before thee, O king. Hear then now also: these men have come to fight with us for the passage, and this is it that they are preparing to do; for they have a custom which is as follows;—whenever they are about to put their lives in peril, then they attend to the arrangement of their hair. Be assured however, that if thou shalt subdue these and the rest of them which remain behind in Sparta, there is no other race of men which will await thy onset, O king, or will raise hands against thee: for now thou art about to fight against the noblest kingdom and city of those which are among the Hellenes, and the best men." To Xerxes that which was said seemed to be utterly incredible, and he asked again a second time in what manner being so few they would fight with his host. He said; "O king, deal with me as with a liar, if thou find not that these things come to pass as I say."

210. Thus saying he did not convince Xerxes, who let four days go by, expecting always that they would take to flight; but on the fifth day, when they did not depart but remained, being obstinate, as he thought, in impudence and folly, he was enraged and sent against them the Medes and the Kissians, charging them to take the men alive and bring them into his presence. Then when the Medes moved forward and attacked the Hellenes, there fell many of them, and others kept coming up continually, and they were not driven back, though suffering great loss: and they made it evident to every man, and to the king himself not least of all, that human beings are many but men are few. This combat went on throughout the day:

211, and when the Medes were being roughly handled, then these retired from the battle, and the Persians, those namely whom the king called "Immortals," of whom Hydarnes was commander, took their place and came to the attack, supposing that they at least would easily overcome the enemy. When however these also engaged in combat with the Hellenes, they

gained no more success than the Median troops but the same as they, seeing that they were fighting in a place with a narrow passage, using shorter spears than the Hellenes, and not being able to take advantage of their superior numbers. The Lacedemonians meanwhile were fighting in a memorable fashion, and besides other things of which they made display, being men perfectly skilled in fighting opposed to men who were unskilled, they would turn their backs to the enemy and make a pretence of taking to flight; and the Barbarians, seeing them thus taking a flight, would follow after them with shouting and clashing of arms: then the Lacedemonians, when they were being caught up, turned and faced the Barbarians; and thus turning round they would slay innumerable multitudes of the Persians; and there fell also at these times a few of the Spartans themselves. So, as the Persians were not able to obtain any success by making trial of the entrance and attacking it by divisions and every way, they retired back.

212. And during these onsets it is said that the king, looking on, three times leapt up from his seat, struck with fear for his army. Thus they contended then: and on the following day the Barbarians strove with no better success; for because the men opposed to them were few in number, they engaged in battle with the expectation that they would be found to be disabled and would not be capable any longer of raising their hands against them in fight. The Hellenes however were ordered by companies as well as by nations, and they fought successively each in turn, excepting the Phokians, for these were posted upon the mountain to guard the path. So the Persians, finding nothing different from that which they had seen on the former day, retired back from the fight.

213. Then when the king was in a strait as to what he should do in the matter before him, Epialtes the son of Eurydemos, a Malian, came to speech with him, supposing that he would win a very great reward from the king; and this man told him of the path which leads over the mountain to Thermopylai, and brought about the destruction of those Hellenes who remained in that place. Afterwards from fear of the Lacedemonians he fled to Thessaly, and when he had fled, a price was proclaimed for his life by the Deputies, [212](#) when the Amphictyons met for their assembly at Pylai. [213](#) Then some time afterwards having returned to Antikyra he was slain by Athenades a man of Trachis. Now this Athenades killed Epialtes for another cause, which I shall set forth in the following part of the history, [214](#) but he was honoured for it none the less by the Lacedemonians.

214. Thus Epialtes after these events was slain: there is however another tale told, that Onetes the son of Phanagoras, a man of Carystos, and Corydallos of Antikyra were those who showed the Persians the way round the mountain; but this I can by no means accept: for first we must judge by this fact, namely that the Deputies of the Hellenes did not proclaim a price for the lives of Onetes and Corydallos, but for that of Epialtes the Trachinian, having surely obtained the most exact information of the matter; and secondly we know that Epialtes was an exile from his country to avoid this charge. True it is indeed that Onetes might know of this path, even though he were not a Malian, if he had had much intercourse with the country; but Epialtes it was who led them round the mountain by the path, and him therefore I write down as the guilty man.

215. Xerxes accordingly, being pleased by that which Epialtes engaged to accomplish, at once with great joy proceeded to send Hydarnes and the men of whom Hydarnes was

commander; [215](#) and they set forth from the camp about the time when the lamps are lit. This path of which we speak had been discovered by the Malians who dwell in that land, and having discovered it they led the Thessalians by it against the Phokians, at the time when the Phokians had fenced the pass with a wall and thus were sheltered from the attacks upon them: so long ago as this had the pass been proved by the Malians to be of no value. [216](#) And this path lies as follows:—it begins from the river Asopos, which flows through the cleft, and the name of this mountain and of the path is the same, namely Anopaia; and this Anopaia stretches over the ridge of the mountain and ends by the town of Alpenos, which is the first town of the Locrians towards Malis, and by the stone called Black Buttocks [217](#) and the seats of the Kercopes, where is the very narrowest part.

217. By this path thus situated the Persians after crossing over the Asopos proceeded all through the night, having on their right hand the mountains of the Oitaians and on the left those of the Trachinians: and when dawn appeared, they had reached the summit of the mountain. In this part of the mountain there were, as I have before shown, a thousand hoplites of the Phokians keeping guard, to protect their own country and to keep the path: for while the pass below was guarded by those whom I have mentioned, the path over the mountain was guarded by the Phokians, who had undertaken the business for Leonidas by their own offer.

218. While the Persians were ascending they were concealed from these, since all the mountain was covered with oak-trees; and the Phokians became aware of them after they had made the ascent as follows:—the day was calm, and not a little noise was made by the Persians, as was likely when leaves were lying spread upon the ground under their feet; upon which the Phokians started up and began to put on their arms, and by this time the Barbarians were close upon them. These, when they saw men arming themselves, fell into wonder, for they were expecting that no one would appear to oppose them, and instead of that they had met with an armed force. Then Hydarnes, seized with fear lest the Phokians should be Lacedaemonians, asked Epialtes of what people the force was; and being accurately informed he set the Persians in order for battle. The Phokians however, when they were hit by the arrows of the enemy, which flew thickly, fled and got away at once to the topmost peak of the mountain, fully assured that it was against them that the enemy had designed to come, [218](#) and here they were ready to meet death. These, I say, were in this mind; but the Persians meanwhile with Epialtes and Hydarnes made no account of the Phokians, but descended the mountain with all speed.

219. To the Hellenes who were in Thermopylai first the soothsayer Megistias, after looking into the victims which were sacrificed, declared the death which was to come to them at dawn of day; and afterwards deserters brought the report [219](#) of the Persians having gone round. These signified it to them while it was yet night, and thirdly came the day-watchers, who had run down from the heights when day was already dawning. Then the Hellenes deliberated, and their opinions were divided; for some urged that they should not desert their post, while others opposed this counsel. After this they departed from their assembly, [220](#) and some went away and dispersed each to their several cities, while others of them were ready to remain there together with Leonidas.

220. However it is reported also that Leonidas himself sent them away, having a care that they might not perish, but thinking that it was not seemly for himself and for the Spartans who

were present to leave the post to which they had come at first to keep guard there. I am inclined rather to be of this latter opinion, [221](#) namely that because Leonidas perceived that the allies were out of heart and did not desire to face the danger with him to the end, he ordered them to depart, but held that for himself to go away was not honourable, whereas if he remained, a great fame of him would be left behind, and the prosperity of Sparta would not be blotted out: for an oracle had been given by the Pythian prophetess to the Spartans, when they consulted about this war at the time when it was being first set on foot, to the effect that either Lacedemon must be destroyed by the Barbarians, or their king must lose his life. This reply the prophetess gave them in hexameter verses, and it ran thus:

*"But as for you, ye men who in wide-spaced Sparta inhabit,
Either your glorious city is sacked by the children of Perses,
Or, if it be not so, then a king of the stock Heracleian
Dead shall be mourned for by all in the boundaries of broad Lacedemon.
Him [222](#) nor the might of bulls nor the raging of lions shall hinder;
For he hath might as of Zeus; and I say he shall not be restrained,
Till one of the other of these he have utterly torn and divided." [223](#)*

I am of opinion that Leonidas considering these things and desiring to lay up for himself glory above all the other Spartans, [224](#) dismissed the allies, rather than that those who departed did so in such disorderly fashion, because they were divided in opinion.

221. Of this the following has been to my mind a proof as convincing as any other, namely that Leonidas is known to have endeavoured to dismiss the soothsayer also who accompanied this army, Megistias the Acarnanian, who was said to be descended from Melampus, that he might not perish with them after he had declared from the victims that which was about to come to pass for them. He however when he was bidden to go would not himself depart, but sent away his son who was with him in the army, besides whom he had no other child.

222. The allies then who were dismissed departed and went away, obeying the word of Leonidas, and only the Thespians and the Thebans remained behind with the Lacedemonians. Of these the Thebans stayed against their will and not because they desired it, for Leonidas kept them, counting them as hostages; but the Thespians very willingly, for they said that they would not depart and leave Leonidas and those with him, but they stayed behind and died with them. The commander of these was Demophilos the son of Diadromes.

223. Xerxes meanwhile, having made libations at sunrise, stayed for some time, until about the hour when the market falls, and then made an advance upon them; for thus it had been enjoined by Epialtes, seeing that the descent of the mountain is shorter and the space to be passed over much less than the going round and the ascent. The Barbarians accordingly with Xerxes were advancing to the attack; and the Hellenes with Leonidas, feeling that they were going forth to death, now advanced out much further than at first into the broader part of the defile; for when the fence of the wall was being guarded, [225](#) they on the former days fought retiring before the enemy into the narrow part of the pass; but now they engaged with them outside the narrows, and very many of the Barbarians fell: for behind them the leaders of the divisions with scourges in their hands were striking each man, ever urging them on to the front. Many of them then were driven into the sea and perished, and many more still were trodden

down while yet alive by one another, and there was no reckoning of the number that perished: for knowing the death which was about to come upon them by reason of those who were going round the mountain, they [226](#) displayed upon the Barbarians all the strength which they had, to its greatest extent, disregarding danger and acting as if possessed by a spirit of recklessness.

224. Now by this time the spears of the greater number of them were broken, so it chanced, in this combat, and they were slaying the Persians with their swords; and in this fighting fell Leonidas, having proved himself a very good man, and others also of the Spartans with him, men of note, of whose names I was informed as of men who had proved themselves worthy, and indeed I was told also the names of all the three hundred. Moreover of the Persians there fell here, besides many others of note, especially two sons of Dareios, Abrocomes and Hyperanthes, born to Dareios of Phratagune the daughter of Artanes: now Artanes was the brother of king Dareios and the son of Hystaspes, the son of Arsames; and he in giving his daughter in marriage to Dareios gave also with her all his substance, because she was his only child.

225. Two brothers of Xerxes, I say, fell here fighting; and meanwhile over the body of Leonidas there arose a great struggle between the Persians and the Lacedemonians, until the Hellenes by valour dragged this away from the enemy and turned their opponents to flight four times. This conflict continued until those who had gone with Epialtes came up; and when the Hellenes learnt that these had come, from that moment the nature of the combat was changed; for they retired backwards to the narrow part of the way, and having passed by the wall they went and placed themselves upon the hillock, [227](#) all in a body together except only the Thebans: now this hillock is in the entrance, where now the stone lion is placed for Leonidas. On this spot while defending themselves with daggers, that is those who still had them left, and also with hands and with teeth, they were overwhelmed by the missiles of the Barbarians, some of these having followed directly after them and destroyed the fence of the wall, while others had come round and stood about them on all sides.

226. Such were the proofs of valour given by the Lacedemonians and Thespians; yet the Spartan Dienekes is said to have proved himself the best man of all, the same who, as they report, uttered this saying before they engaged battle with the Medes:—being informed by one of the men of Trachis that when the Barbarians discharged their arrows they obscured the light of the sun by the multitude of the arrows, so great was the number of their host, he was not dismayed by this, but making small account of the number of the Medes, he said that their guest from Trachis brought them very good news, for if the Medes obscured the light of the sun, the battle against them would be in the shade and not in the sun.

227. This and other sayings of this kind they report that Dienekes the Lacedemonian left as memorials of himself; and after him the bravest they say of the Lacedemonians were two brothers Alpheos and Maron, sons of Orsiphantos. Of the Thespians the man who gained most honour was named Dithyrambos son of Harmatides.

228. The men were buried were they fell; and for these, as well as for those who were slain before being sent away [228](#) by Leonidas, there is an inscription which runs thus:

*"Here once, facing in fight three hundred myriads of foemen,
Thousands four did contend, men of the Peloponnese."*

This is the inscription for the whole body; and for the Spartans separately there is this:

*"Stranger, report this word, we pray, to the Spartans, that lying
Here in this spot we remain, faithfully keeping their laws." 229*

This, I say, for the Lacedemonians; and for the soothsayer as follows:

*"This is the tomb of Megistias renowned, whom the Median foemen,
Where Sperchios doth flow, slew when they forded the stream;
Soothsayer he, who then knowing clearly the fates that were coming,
Did not endure in the fray Sparta's good leaders to leave."*

The Amphictyons it was who honoured them with inscriptions and memorial pillars, excepting only in the case of the inscription to the soothsayer; but that of the soothsayer Megistias was inscribed by Simonides the son of Leoprepes on account of guest-friendship.

229. Two of these three hundred, it is said, namely Eurystos and Aristodemos, who, if they had made agreement with one another, might either have come safe home to Sparta together (seeing that they had been dismissed from the camp by Leonidas and were lying at Alpenoi with disease of the eyes, suffering extremely), or again, if they had not wished to return home, they might have been slain together with the rest,—when they might, I say, have done either one of these two things, would not agree together; but the two being divided in opinion, Eurystos, it is said, when he was informed that the Persians had gone round, asked for his arms and having put them on ordered his Helot to lead him to those who were fighting; and after he had led him thither, the man who had led him ran away and departed, but Eurystos plunged into the thick of the fighting, and so lost his life: but Aristodemos was left behind fainting. 230 Now if either Aristodemos had been ill 231 alone, and so had returned home to Sparta, or the men had both of them come back together, I do not suppose that the Spartans would have displayed any anger against them; but in this case, as the one of them had lost his life and the other, clinging to an excuse which the first also might have used, 232 had not been willing to die, it necessarily happened that the Spartans had great indignation against Aristodemos.

230. Some say that Aristodemos came safe to Sparta in this manner, and on a pretext such as I have said; but others, that he had been sent as a messenger from the camp, and when he might have come up in time to find the battle going on, was not willing to do so, but stayed upon the road and so saved his life, while his fellow-messenger reached the battle and was slain.

231. When Aristodemos, I say, had returned home to Lacedemon, he had reproach and dishonour; 233 and that which he suffered by way of dishonour was this,—no one of the Spartans would either give him light for a fire or speak with him, and he had reproach in that he was called Aristodemos the coward. 234

232. He however in the battle at Plataia repaired all the guilt that was charged against him: but it is reported that another man also survived of these three hundred, whose name was

Pantites, having been sent as a messenger to Thessaly, and this man, when he returned back to Sparta and found himself dishonoured, is said to have strangled himself.

233. The Thebans however, of whom the commander was Leontiades, being with the Hellenes had continued for some time to fight against the king's army, constrained by necessity; but when they saw that the fortunes of the Persians were prevailing, then and not before, while the Hellenes with Leonidas were making their way with speed to the hillock, they separated from these and holding out their hands came near to the Barbarians, saying at the same time that which was most true, namely that they were on the side of the Medes and that they had been among the first to give earth and water to the king; and moreover that they had come to Thermopylai constrained by necessity, and were blameless for the loss which had been inflicted upon the king: so that thus saying they preserved their lives, for they had also the Thessalians to bear witness to these words. However, they did not altogether meet with good fortune, for some had even been slain as they had been approaching, and when they had come and the Barbarians had them in their power, the greater number of them were branded by command of Xerxes with the royal marks, beginning with their leader Leontiades, the same whose son Eurymachos was afterwards slain by the Plataians, when he had been made commander of four hundred Thebans and had seized the city of the Plataians. [235](#)

234. Thus did the Hellenes at Thermopylai contend in fight; and Xerxes summoned Demaratos and inquired of him, having first said this: "Demaratos, thou art a good man; and this I conclude by the truth of thy words, for all that thou saidest turned out so as thou didst say. Now, however, tell me how many in number are the remaining Lacedemonians, and of them how many are like these in matters of war; or are they so even all of them?" He said: "O king, the number of all the Lacedemonians is great and their cities are many, but that which thou desirest to learn, thou shalt know. There is in Lacedemon the city of Sparta, having about eight thousand men; and these are all equal to those who fought here: the other Lacedemonians are not equal to these, but they are good men too." To this Xerxes said: "Demaratos, in what manner shall we with least labour get the better of these men? Come set forth to us this; for thou knowest the courses of their counsels, [236](#) seeing that thou wert once their king."

235. He made answer: "O king, if thou dost in very earnest take counsel with me, it is right that I declare to thee the best thing. What if thou shouldst send three hundred ships from thy fleet to attack the Laconian land? Now there is lying near it an island named Kythera, about which Chilon, who was a very wise man among us, said that it would be a greater gain for the Spartans that it should be sunk under the sea than that it should remain above it; for he always anticipated that something would happen from it of such a kind as I am now setting forth to thee: not that he knew of thy armament beforehand, but that he feared equally every armament of men. Let thy forces then set forth from this island and keep the Lacedemonians in fear; and while they have a war of their own close at their doors, there will be no fear for thee from them that when the remainder of Hellas is being conquered by the land-army, they will come to the rescue there. Then after the remainder of Hellas has been reduced to subjection, from that moment the Lacedemonian power will be left alone and therefore feeble. If however thou shalt not do this, I will tell thee what thou must look for. There is a narrow isthmus leading to the Peloponnese, and in this place thou must look that other battles will be fought more severe than

those which have taken place, seeing that all the Peloponnesians have sworn to a league against thee: but if thou shalt do the other thing of which I spoke, this isthmus and the cities within it will come over to thy side without a battle."

236. After him spoke Achaimenes, brother of Xerxes and also commander of the fleet, who chanced to have been present at this discourse and was afraid lest Xerxes should be persuaded to do this: "O king," he said, "I see that thou art admitting the speech of a man who envies thy good fortune, or is even a traitor to thy cause: for in truth the Hellenes delight in such a temper as this; they envy a man for his good luck, and they hate that which is stronger than themselves. And if, besides other misfortunes which we have upon us, seeing that four hundred of our ships [237](#) have suffered wreck, thou shalt send away another three hundred from the station of the fleet to sail round Peloponnese, then thy antagonists become a match for thee in fight; whereas while it is all assembled together our fleet is hard for them to deal with, and they will not be at all a match for thee: and moreover the whole sea-force will support the land-force and be supported by it, if they proceed onwards together; but if thou shalt divide them, neither wilt thou be of service to them nor they to thee. My determination is rather to set thy affairs in good order [238](#) and not to consider the affairs of the enemy, either where they will set on foot the war or what they will do or how many in number they are; for it is sufficient that they should themselves take thought for themselves, and we for ourselves likewise: and if the Lacedemonians come to stand against the Persians in fight, they will assuredly not heal the wound from which they are now suffering." [239](#)

237. To him Xerxes made answer as follows: "Achaimenes, I think that thou speakest well, and so will I do; but Demaratos speaks that which he believes to be best for me, though his opinion is defeated by thine: for I will not certainly admit that which thou saidest, namely that he is not well-disposed to my cause, judging both by what was said by him before this, and also by that which is the truth, namely that though one citizen envies another for his good fortune and shows enmity to him by his silence, [240](#) nor would a citizen when a fellow-citizen consulted him suggest that which seemed to him the best, unless he had attained to a great height of virtue, and such men doubtless are few; yet guest-friend to guest-friend in prosperity is well-disposed as nothing else on earth, and if his friend should consult him, he would give him the best counsel. Thus then as regards the evil-speaking against Demaratos, that is to say about one who is my guest-friend, I bid every one abstain from it in the future."

238. Having thus said Xerxes passed in review the bodies of the dead; and as for Leonidas, hearing that he had been the king and commander of the Lacedemonians he bade them cut off his head and crucify him. And it has been made plain to me by many proofs besides, but by none more strongly than by this, that king Xerxes was enraged with Leonidas while alive more than with any other man on earth; for otherwise he would never have done this outrage to his corpse; since of all the men whom I know, the Persians are accustomed most to honour those who are good men in war. They then to whom it was appointed to do these things, proceeded to do so.

239. I will return now to that point of my narrative where it remained unfinished. [241](#) The Lacedemonians had been informed before all others that the king was preparing an expedition against Hellas; and thus it happened that they sent to the Oracle at Delphi, where that reply was

given them which I reported shortly before this. And they got this information in a strange manner; for Demaratos the son of Ariston after he had fled for refuge to the Medes was not friendly to the Lacedemonians, as I am of opinion and as likelihood suggests supporting my opinion; but it is open to any man to make conjecture whether he did this thing which follows in a friendly spirit or in malicious triumph over them. When Xerxes had resolved to make a campaign against Hellas, Demaratos, being in Susa and having been informed of this, had a desire to report it to the Lacedemonians. Now in no other way was he able to signify it, for there was danger that he should be discovered, but he contrived thus, that is to say, he took a folding tablet and scraped off the wax which was upon it, and then he wrote the design of the king upon the wood of the tablet, and having done so he melted the wax and poured it over the writing, so that the tablet (being carried without writing upon it) might not cause any trouble to be given by the keepers of the road. Then when it had arrived at Lacedemon, the Lacedemonians were not able to make conjecture of the matter; until at last, as I am informed, Gorgo, the daughter of Cleomenes and wife of Leonidas, suggested a plan of which she had herself thought, bidding them scrape the wax and they would find writing upon the wood; and doing as she said they found the writing and read it, and after that they sent notice to the other Hellenes. These things are said to have come to pass in this manner. [242](#)