The greco-persian wars

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Sources

Main article: Herodotus

The main source for the Greco-Persian Wars is the Greek historian Herodotus. Herodotus, who has been called the ‘ Father of History’, was born in 484 BC in Halicarnassus, Asia Minor (then under Persian overlordship). He wrote his ‘ Enquiries’ (Greek-Historia; English-(The) Histories) around 440-420 BC, trying to trace the origins of the Greco-Persian Wars, which would still have been relatively recent history (the wars finally ending in 450 BC). Herodotus’s approach was entirely novel, and at least in Western society, he does seem to have invented ‘ history’ as we know it. As Holland has it: “ For the first time, a chronicler set himself to trace the origins of a conflict not to a past so remote so as to be utterly fabulous, nor to the whims and wishes of some god, nor to a people’s claim to manifest destiny, but rather explanations he could verify personally.

Some subsequent ancient historians, despite following in his footsteps, criticised Herodotus, starting with Thucydides. Nevertheless, Thucydides chose to begin his history where Herodotus left off (at the Siege of Sestos), and therefore evidently felt that Herodotus’s history was accurate enough not to need re-writing or correcting. Plutarch criticised Herodotus in his essay “ On The Malignity of Herodotus”, describing Herodotus as “ Philobarbaros” (barbarian-lover), for not being pro-Greek enough, which suggests that Herodotus might actually have done a reasonable job of being even-handed. A negative view of Herodotus was passed on to Renaissance Europe, though he remained well read. However, since the 19th century his reputation has

been dramatically rehabilitated by archaeological finds which have repeatedly confirmed his version of events. The prevailing modern view is that Herodotus generally did a remarkable job in his Historia, but that some of his specific details (particularly troop numbers and dates) should be viewed with skepticism. Nevertheless, there are still some historians who believe Herodotus made up much of his story.

The Sicilian historian Diodorus Siculus, writing in the 1st century BC in his Bibliotheca Historica, also provides an account of the Greco-Persian wars, partially derived from the earlier Greek historian Ephorus. This account is fairly consistent with Herodotus's. The Greco-Persian wars are also described in less detail by a number of other ancient historians including Plutarch, Ctesias of Cnidus, and are referred to by other authors, such as the playwright Aeschylus. Archaeological evidence, such as the Serpent Column, also supports some of Herodotus's specific claims.

Background

Main articles: Greco-Persian Wars and Second Persian invasion of Greece

The Greek city-states of Athens and Eretria had supported the unsuccessful Ionian Revolt against the Persian Empire of Darius I in 499-494 BC. The Persian Empire was still relatively young, and prone to revolts amongst its subject peoples. Moreover, Darius was an usurper, and had spent considerable time extinguishing revolts against his rule. The Ionian revolt threatened the integrity of his empire, and Darius thus vowed to punish those involved (especially those not already part of the empire). Darius also saw the opportunity to expand his empire into the fractious world of Ancient

Greece. A preliminary expedition under Mardonius in 492 BC, to secure the land approaches to Greece, re-conquered Thrace, and forced Macedon to become a client kingdom of Persia.

In 491 BC, Darius sent emissaries to all the Greek city-states, asking for a gift of ‘ earth and water’ in token of their submission to him. Having had a demonstration of his power the previous year, the majority of Greek cities duly obliged. In Athens, however, the ambassadors were put on trial and then executed by throwing them in a pit; in Sparta, they were simply thrown down a well. This meant that Sparta was also effectively at war with Persia.

Darius thus put together an amphibious task force under Datis and Artaphernes in 490 BC, which attacked Naxos, before receiving the submission of the other Cycladic Islands. The task force then moved on Eretria, which it besieged and destroyed. Finally, it moved to attack Athens, landing at the bay of Marathon, where it was met by a heavily outnumbered Athenian army. At the ensuing Battle of Marathon, the Athenians won a remarkable victory, which resulted in the withdrawal of the Persian army to Asia.

A map showing the Greek world at the time of the battle

The Athenians had also been preparing for war with the Persians since the mid-480s BC, and in 482 BC the decision was taken, under the guidance of the Athenian politician Themistocles, to build a massive fleet of triremes that would be necessary for the Greeks to fight the Persians. However, the Athenians did not have the manpower to fight on land and sea; and therefore combating the Persians would require an alliance of Greek city states. In 481

BC, Xerxes sent ambassadors around Greece asking for earth and water, but making the very deliberate omission of Athens and Sparta. Support thus began to coalesce around these two leading states. A congress of city states met at Corinth in late autumn of 481 BC, and a confederate alliance of Greek city-states was formed. It had the power to send envoys asking for assistance and to dispatch troops from the member states to defensive points after joint consultation. This was remarkable for the disjointed Greek world, especially since many of the city-states in attendance were still technically at war with each other.

The ‘ congress’ met again in the spring of 480 BC. A Thessalian delegation suggested that the allies could muster in the narrow Vale of Tempe, on the borders of Thessaly, and thereby block Xerxes’s advance. A force of 10, 000 hoplites was dispatched to the vale of Tempe, through which they believed the Persian army would have to pass. However, once there, they were warned by Alexander I of Macedon that the vale could be bypassed through the Sarantoporo Pass, and that the army of Xerxes was overwhelming, the Greeks retreated. Shortly afterwards, they received the news that Xerxes had crossed the Hellespont.

A second strategy was therefore suggested by Themistocles to the allies. The route to southern Greece (Boeotia, Attica and the Peloponnesus) would require the army of Xerxes to travel through the very narrow pass of Thermopylae. This could easily be blocked by the Greek hoplites, despite the overwhelming numbers of Persians. Furthermore, to prevent the Persians bypassing Thermopylae by sea, the Athenian and allied navies could block the straits of Artemisium. This dual strategy was adopted by the congress.

However, the Peloponnesian cities made fall-back plans to defend the Isthmus of Corinth should it come to it, whilst the women and children of Athens had been evacuated en masse to the Peloponnesian city of Troezen.

Prelude

Map showing Greek & Persian advances to Thermopylae and Artemisium

The Persian army seems to have made rather leisurely progress through Thrace and Macedon, but finally, in August, news of the imminent Persian approach reached Greece. At this time of year the Spartans, de facto military leaders of the alliance, were celebrating the festival of Carneia. During the Carneia, military activity was forbidden by Spartan law; the Spartans had arrived too late at the Battle of Marathon because of this requirement. It was also the time of the Olympic Games, and therefore the Olympic truce, and thus it would have been doubly sacrilegious for the whole Spartan army to march to war. On this occasion, the ephors decided the urgency was sufficiently great to justify an advance expedition to block the pass, under one of its kings, Leonidas I. Leonidas took with him the 300 men of the royal bodyguard, the Hippeis, and a larger number of support troops drawn from other parts of Lacedaemon (including helots). This expedition was to try and gather as many other allied troops along the way as possible, and to await the arrival of the main Spartan army.

The legend of Thermopylae, as told by Herodotus, has it that the Spartans consulted the Oracle at Delphi earlier in the year. The Oracle is said to have made the following prophecy:

O ye men who dwell in the streets of broad Lacedaemon!

Either your glorious town shall be sacked by the children of Perseus,

Or, in exchange, must all through the whole Laconian country

Mourn for the loss of a king, descendant of great Heracles.

Herodotus tells us that Leonidas, in line with the prophecy, was convinced he was going to certain death since his forces were not adequate for a victory, and so he selected only Spartans with living sons.

En route to Thermopylae, the Spartan force was reinforced by contingents from various cities and numbered more than 5, 000 by the time it arrived at the pass. Leonidas chose to camp at, and defend the ‘ middle gate’, the narrowest part of the pass of Thermopylae, where the Phocians had built a defensive wall some time before. News also reached Leonidas, from the nearby city of Trachis, that there was a mountain track which could be used to outflank the pass of Thermopylae; in response, Leonidas stationed 1, 000 Phocians on the heights to prevent such a maneuver.

Finally, in mid-August, the Persian army was sighted across the Gulf of Malis, approaching Thermopylae. With the Persian army’s arrival at Thermopylae, the Allies held a council of war. Some Peloponnesians suggested withdrawal to the Isthmus of Corinth and blocking the passage to Peloponnesus. The Phocians and Locrians, whose states were located nearby, became indignant and advised defending Thermopylae and sending for more help. Leonidas calmed the panic and agreed to defend Thermopylae.

A Persian emissary was sent by Xerxes to negotiate with Leonidas; the allies were offered their freedom and the title " Friends of the Persian People," moreover they would be re-settled on better land than they currently possessed. When these terms were refused by Leonidas, the ambassador asked him more forcefully to lay down his weapons; Leonidas's famous response was for the Persians to " Come and get them". With the Persian embassy returning empty-handed, battle became inevitable. However, Xerxes delayed attacking for four days, waiting for the Allies to disperse, before sending troops to attack them.

Opposing forces

Persian army

For a full discussion of the size of the Persian invasion force, see Second Persian invasion of Greece

The numbers of troops which Xerxes mustered for the second invasion of Greece have been the subject of endless dispute, because the numbers given in ancient sources are very large indeed. Herodotus claimed that there were, in total, 2. 5 million military personnel, accompanied by an equivalent number of support personnel. The poet Simonides, who was a near-contemporary, talks of four million; Ctesias gave 800, 000 as the total number of the army that was assembled by Xerxes.

Modern scholars tend to reject the figures given by Herodotus and other ancient sources as completely unrealistic, and as a result of miscalculations or exaggerations on the part of the victors. The topic has been hotly debated

but the modern consensus revolves around the figure of 200-250, 000. Whatever the real numbers were, however, it is clear that Xerxes was anxious to ensure a successful expedition by mustering an overwhelming numerical superiority by land and by sea.

The number of Persian troops present at Thermopylae is therefore as uncertain as the number for the total invasion force. For instance, it is unclear whether the whole Persian army marched as far as Thermopylae, or whether Xerxes left garrisons in Macedon and Thessaly. The force at Thermopylae probably consisted of the majority of the invasion force, and therefore around 200, 000 men (by modern consensus). The only ancient source to comment on this, Ctesias, suggests that 80, 000 Persians fought at Thermopylae, but his account is only fragmentary, and otherwise somewhat garbled, for instance claiming that the Battle of Plataea took place before the Battle of Salamis.

Greek army

- The number of Peloponnesians
- Diodorus suggests that there were 1, 000 Lacedemonians and 3, 000 other Peloponnesians, for a total of 4, 000. Herodotus agrees with this figure in one passage, quoting an inscription by Simonides saying there were 4, 000 Peloponnesians. However, elsewhere, in the passage summarized by the above table, Herodotus tallies 3, 100 Peloponnesians at Thermopylae before the battle Herodotus also reports that at Xerxes' public showing of the dead, " helots were also there for them to see", but he does not say how many or in what

capacity they served. Thus, the difference between his two figures can be squared by supposing (without proof) that there were 900 helots (three per Spartan) present at the battle. If helots were present at the battle, there is no reason to doubt that they served in their traditional role as armed retainers to individual Spartans. Alternatively, Herodotus's ‘ missing’ 900 troops might have been Perioeci, and could therefore correspond to Diodorus's 1, 000 Lacedemonians.

- The number of Lacedemonians
- Further confusing the issue is Diodorus's ambiguity about whether his 1, 000 Lacedemonians include the 300 Spartans. At one point he says: “ Leonidas, when he received the appointment, announced that only one thousand men should follow him on the campaign”. However, he then says that: “ There were, then, of the Lacedaemonians one thousand, and with them three hundred Spartiates”. It is therefore impossible to be clearer on this point.

Pausanias' account agrees with that of Herodotus (whom he probably read) except that he gives the number of Locrians, which Herodotus declined to estimate. Residing in the direct path of the Persian advance, they gave all the fighting men they had; according to Pausanias 6, 000 men, which added to Herodotus' 5, 200 would have given a force of 11, 200.

Many modern historians, who usually consider Herodotus more reliable, add the 1, 000 Lacedaemonians and the 900 Helots to Herodotus' 5, 200 to obtain 7, 100 or about 7, 000 men as a standard number, neglecting Diodorus' Melians and Pausanias' Locrians.

However, this is only one approach, and many other combinations are plausible. Furthermore, the numbers changed later on in the battle when most of the army retreated and only approximately 3, 000 men remained (300 Spartans, 700 Thespians, 400 Thebans, probably 900 helots and 1, 000 Phocians stationed above the pass; less the casualties sustained in the previous days).

Strategic and tactical considerations

From a strategic point of view, by defending Thermopylae, the Allies were making the best possible use of their forces. As long as they could prevent further Persian advance into Greece, they had no requirement to seek a decisive battle, and could thus remain on the defensive. Moreover, by defending two constricted passages (Thermopylae and Artemisium), the Allies' inferior numbers became less problematic. Conversely, for the Persians the problem of supplying such a large army meant that the Persians could not remain in the same place for too long. The Persians must therefore retreat or advance; and advancing required the pass of Thermopylae to be forced.

Tactically, the pass at Thermopylae was ideally suited to the Greek style of warfare. A hoplite phalanx would be able to block the narrow pass with ease, with no risk of being outflanked by cavalry. In the pass, the phalanx would have been very difficult to assault for the more lightly armed Persian infantry. The major weak point for the Allies was the mountain track which led across the highland parallel to Thermopylae, and which would allow their position to be outflanked.

Although probably unsuitable for cavalry, this path could easily be traversed by the Persian infantry (many of whom were versed in mountain warfare). Leonidas was made aware of this path by local people from Trachis, and he positioned a detachment of Phocian troops there in order to block this route.

Topography of the battlefield

Map of Thermopylae area with modern shoreline and reconstructed shoreline of 480 BC

At the time, the pass of Thermopylae consisted of a track along the shore of the Gulf of Malis so narrow that only one chariot could pass through at a time. On the southern side of the track stood the cliffs that overlooked the pass, and on the north side was the gulf of Malea. Along the path itself was a series of three constrictions, or " gates" (pylai), and at the center gate a short wall that had been erected by the Phocians in the previous century to aid in their defense against Thessalian invasions. The name " Hot Gates" comes from the hot springs that were located there.

Today, the pass is not near the sea but is several miles inland because of sedimentation in the Gulf of Malis. The old track appears at the foot of hills around the plain, flanked by a modern road. Recent core samples indicate that the pass was only 100 meters wide and the waters came up to the gates; " Little do the visitors realize that the battle took place across the road from the monument." The pass still is a natural defensive position to modern armies, and British

Commonwealth forces in World War II made a defense in 1941 against the Nazi invasion meters from the original battle field.

- Maps of the region:
- Image of the battlefield, from the east:

Battle

First day

Greek phalanx based on sources from The Perseus Project.

On the fifth day after the Persian arrival at Thermopylae (which would become the first day of the battle), Xerxes finally resolved to attack the Allies. First of all he sent Medes and Cissians against the Allies, to take them prisoner and bring them before him. They soon found themselves launching a frontal assault on the Greek position. The Allies fought in front of the Phocian wall, at the narrowest part of the pass. Details of the tactics are scant; Diodorus says " the men stood shoulder to shoulder" and the Greeks were " superior in valor and in the great size of their shields." This is probably describing the standard Greek phalanx, in which the men formed a wall of overlapping shields and layered spear points, which would have been highly effective as long as it spanned the width of the pass. The wicker shields and shorter spears of the Persians prevented them from effectively engaging the Greek hoplites. Herodotus says that the units for each city were kept together; units were rotated in and out of the battle to prevent fatigue, which implies the Greeks had more men than necessary to block the pass. The Greeks killed so many Medes that Xerxes is said to have

started up off the seat from which he was watching the battle three times. According to Ctesias, the first wave was “ cut to ribbons” with only two or three Spartans dead.

According to Herodotus and Diodorus, the king, having taken the measure of the enemy, threw his best troops into a second assault the same day: the Immortals, an elite corps of 10, 000 men. However, the Immortals fared no better than the Medes had, failing to make headway against the Allies. The Spartans apparently used a tactic of feigning retreat, and then turning on, and killing the enemy troops when they ran after the Spartans.

Second day

Depiction of Persian warriors, probably the Immortals.

On the second day, Xerxes again sent in the infantry to attack the pass, “ supposing that their enemies, being so few, were now disabled by wounds and could no longer resist.” However, the Persians fared no better on the second day than on the first. Xerxes at last stopped the assault and withdrew to his camp, totally perplexed.

Late on the second day of battle, however, as the Persian king was pondering what to do next, he received a windfall; a Trachinian traitor named Ephialtes informed him of the mountain path around Thermopylae and offered to guide the Persian army. Ephialtes was motivated by the desire of a reward. For this act, the name of Ephialtes received a lasting stigma, his name coming to mean “ nightmare” and becoming the archetypal term for a “ traitor” in Greek.

Herodotus reports that Xerxes sent his commander Hydarnes that evening, with the men under his command, the Immortals, to encircle the Allies via the path. However, he does not say who those men are. The Immortals had been bloodied on the first day, so it is possible that Hydarnes may have been given overall command of an enhanced force including what was left of the Immortals, and indeed, according to Diodorus, Hydarnes had a force of 20, 000 for the mission. The path led from east of the Persian camp along the ridge of Mt. Anopaea behind the cliffs that flanked the pass. It branched with one path leading to Phocis and the other down to the Gulf of Malis at Alpenus, first town of Locris.

Third Day

Leonidas at Thermopylae, by Jacques Louis David, 1814. This is a juxtaposition of various historical and legendary elements from the Battle of Thermopylae.

At daybreak on the third day, the Phocians guarding the path above Thermopylae became aware of the outflanking Persian column by the rustling of oak leaves. Herodotus says that they jumped up and were greatly amazed. Hydarnes was perhaps just as amazed to see them hastily arming themselves as they were to see him and the Persian forces. He feared that they were Spartans but was informed by Ephialtes that they were not. The Phocians retreated to a nearby hill to make their stand (assuming that the Persians had come to attack them). However, not wishing to be delayed, the Persians gave them a

volley of arrows, before passing by to continue with their encirclement of the main Allied force.

Learning from a runner that the Phocians had not held the path, Leonidas called a council of war at dawn. Some of the Allies argued for withdrawal, but Leonidas resolved to stay at the pass with the Spartans. Many of the Allied contingents then either choose to withdraw (without orders), or were ordered to leave by Leonidas (Herodotus admits that there is some doubt about which actually happened). The contingent of 700 Thespians, led by their general Demophilus, refused to leave with the other Greeks but committed themselves to the fight. Also present were the 400 Thebans, and probably the helots that had accompanied the Spartans.

Leonidas's actions have been the subject of much discussion. It is commonly stated that the Spartans were obeying the laws of Sparta by not retreating, but it seems it was actually the failure to retreat from Thermopylae that gave rise to the notion that Spartans never retreated. It is also possible that recalling the words of the Oracle, Leonidas was committed to sacrifice his life in order to save Sparta. However, since the prophecy was specific to him, this seems a poor reason to commit c. 1, 500 other men to a fight to the death. The most likely theory is that Leonidas chose to form a rearguard so that the other Allied contingents could get away. If all the troops had retreated, the open ground beyond the pass would have allowed the Persian cavalry to run the Greeks down. If they had all remained at the pass, they would have been encircled and would eventually have all been

killed. By covering the retreat, and continuing to block the pass, Leonidas could save more than 3, 000 men, who would be able to fight at some later point. The Thebans have also been the subject of some discussion. Herodotus suggests that they were brought to the battle as hostages to ensure the good behaviour of Thebes. However, as Plutarch long ago pointed out, if they were hostages, why not send them away with the rest of the Allies? The likelihood is that these were the Theban ‘ loyalists’, who unlike the majority of the fellow citizens, objected to Persian domination. They thus probably came to Thermopylae of their own free will, and stayed at the end because they could not return to Thebes if the Persians conquered Boeotia. The Thespians, resolved as they were not to submit to Xerxes, faced their destruction of their city if the Persians took Boeotia. However, this alone does not explain the fact that they remained; the remainder of Thespiae was successfully evacuated before the Persians arrived there. It seems that the Thespians volunteered to remain as a simple act of self-sacrifice, all the more amazing since their contingent represented every single hoplite the city could muster. This seems to have been a particularly Thespian trait – on at least two other occasions in later history, a Thespian force would commit itself to a fight to the death.

At dawn Xerxes made libations, pausing to allow the Immortals sufficient time to descend the mountain, and then began his advance. The Allies this time sallied forth from the wall to meet the Persians in the wider part of the pass in an attempt to slaughter as many Persians as they could. They fought with spears until every spear was shattered

and then switched to xiphe (short swords). In this struggle, Herodotus states that two brothers of Xerxes fell: Abrocomes and Hyperanthes. Leonidas also died in the assault, and the two sides fought over his body, the Greeks taking possession. As the Immortals approached, the Allies withdrew and took a stand on a hill behind the wall. The Thebans " moved away from their companions, and with hands upraised, advanced toward the barbarians…" (Rawlinson translation), but a few were slain before their surrender was accepted. The king later had the Theban prisoners branded with the royal mark. Of the remaining defenders, Herodotus says:

" Here they defended themselves to the last, those who still had swords using them, and the others resisting with their hands and teeth."

Tearing down part of the wall, Xerxes ordered the hill surrounded, and the Persians rained down arrows until every last Greek was dead. In 1939, archaeologist Spyridon Marinatos, excavating at Thermopylae, found large numbers of Persian bronze arrowheads on Kolonos Hill, changing the identification of the hill on which the Allies died from a smaller one nearer the wall.

The pass at Thermopylae was thus opened to the Persian army. According to Herodotus, at the cost to the Persians of up to 20, 000 fatalities. The Allied rearguard meanwhile, was annihilated, with a probable loss of 2, 000 men, including those killed on the first two days of battle. Herodotus says at one point that 4, 000 Allies died, but assuming that the Phocians guarding the track were not killed during

the battle (as Herodotus implies), this would be almost every Allied soldier present (by Herodotus’s own estimates), and this number is probably too high.

Aftermath

Main article: Second Persian invasion of Greece

When the body of Leonidas was recovered by the Persians, Xerxes, in a rage against Leonidas, ordered that the head be cut off and the body crucified. Herodotus observes that this was very uncommon for the Persians, as they had the habit of treating “ valiant warriors” with great honor (the example of Pytheas, captured off Skiathos before the Battle of Artemisium strengthens this suggestion). However, Xerxes was known for his rage, for instance, when he had the Hellespont whipped because it would not obey him. After the Persians’ departure, the Allies collected their dead and buried them on the hill. After the Persian invasion ended, a stone lion was erected at Thermopylae to commemorate Leonidas. A full forty years after the battle, Leonidas’ bones were returned to Sparta where he was buried again with full honors; funeral games were held every year in his memory.

With Thermopylae now opened to the Persian army, the continuation of the blockade at Artemisium by the Allied fleet became irrelevant. The simultaneous naval Battle of Artemisium had been a tactical stalemate, and the Allied navy was able to retreat in good order to the Saronic Gulf where they helped to ferry the remaining Athenian citizens across to the island of Salamis.

Following Thermopylae, the Persian army proceeded to burn and sack the Boeotian cities which had not submitted to the Persians, Plataea and Thespiae; before marching on the now evacuated city of Athens. Meanwhile, the Allies (for the most part Peloponnesian) prepared to defend the Isthmus of Corinth, demolishing the single road that led through it, and building a wall across it. As at Thermopylae, to make this an effective strategy required the Allied navy to stage a simultaneous blockade, barring the passage of the Persian navy across the Saronic Gulf, so that troops could not be landed directly on the Peloponnese. However, instead of a mere blockade, Themistocles persuaded the Allies to seek a decisive victory against the Persian fleet. Luring the Persian navy into the Straits of Salamis, the Allied fleet was able to destroy much of the Persian fleet in the Battle of Salamis, which essentially ended the threat to the Peloponnese.

Fearing that the Greeks might attack the bridges across the Hellespont and trap his army in Europe, Xerxes now retreated with much of the army back to Asia. He left a hand picked force under Mardonius to complete the conquest the following year. However, under pressure from the Athenians, the Peloponnesian Allies eventually agreed to try and force Mardonius to battle, and marched on Attica. Mardonius retreated to Boeotia to lure the Greeks into open terrain and the two sides eventually met near the city of Plataea. There, at the Battle of Plataea the Greek army won a decisive victory, destroying much of the Persian army, and ending the invasion of Greece. Meanwhile, at the near-simultaneous naval Battle of Mycale they also destroyed much of

the remaining Persian fleet, thereby reducing the threat of further invasions.

Significance

Thermopylae is arguably the most famous battle in European ancient history, repeatedly referenced in ancient, recent and contemporary culture. In western culture at least, it is the Greeks who are lauded for their performance in battle.

However, within the context of the Persian invasion, Thermopylae was undoubtedly a defeat for the Allies, and one with disastrous consequences. Whatever the Allies may have intended, it was presumably not their strategy to surrender all of Boeotia and Attica to the Persians. Thus, modern portrayals of Thermopylae as a successful delaying action, which gave the Allied navy time to prepare for the Battle of Salamis, or suggestions that the Persian casualties were so severe that they lost all heart (i. e., the Persians won a Pyhrric victory), are probably not sustainable. The theory that Thermopylae bought the Allies time to prepare for Salamis ignores the fact that the Allied navy was at the same time fighting and sustaining losses at the Battle of Artemisium; moreover, compared to the probable gap between Thermopylae and Salamis, the length of time for which the Allied army held up the Persian army was not particularly significant. It seems clear that the Allied strategy was to hold off the Persians at Thermopylae and Artemisium, and that by failing to do so, they suffered a severe defeat. The Greek position at Thermopylae, despite being massively out-numbered, was near-impregnable. If the position had been held for

even slightly longer, the Persians may have had to retreat for lack of food and water. Thus, despite the heavy losses, forcing the pass was a clear Persian victory, both tactically and strategically. The successful retreat of the bulk of the Greek troops, though morale-boosting, was in no sense a victory, though it did take some of the sheen off the Persian victory.

The fame of Thermopylae is thus prin