

# PAUSANIAS ON THERMOPYLAI

*Chris Carey*

**Summary:** This paper explores the complex relationship between author, history and historiography in Pausanias' account of the battle at Thermopylai fought by the Greeks against the invading Celts/Gauls/Galatians in 279 BCE. His account has often been met with scepticism. The paper argues that there is a firm substrate of fact to Pausanias' narrative. At the same time, the account is visibly coloured and shaped (as has long been recognized) by reminiscences of Herodotos' account of the more famous battle of Thermopylai against the Persians in 480. Pausanias' aim is to invite the reader to compare the two battles and argue that the battle of 279 is both a larger, more significant and more successful engagement, and simultaneously pay homage to and compete with his predecessor.

When we think of Thermopylai, we inevitably think of 480 BCE and the abortive attempt to stop the Persian advance into central Greece. But that was not the first action in the pass. And it was not the last. The pass saw standoffs between Athens and Macedonia at least twice in the fourth century BCE and pitched battles in 279 and 191 BCE, in 539 AD and earlier at an uncertain date in the third century, known only recently from the discovery of a palimpsest of the *Scythica* of Dexippos. There were further actions in the pass in the twelfth century, then during the Greek War of Independence, and in the Second World War. And we can bet that there were as many more. But the battle of 480 towers over them all. And not just the battle but its earliest chronicler Herodotos. Commanders fighting in the pass always feel the cold breath of Leonidas on the back of their necks, and their historians often gesture directly or indirectly toward Herodotos. This paper is about one such gesture, Pausanias' account of the battle in the pass during the invasion of Brennos.

Scholars have long noted the resemblances between Pausanias and Herodotos.<sup>1</sup> The resemblances permeate the whole work. Both authors travelled extensively, even if in both cases doubts have been expressed

1 For recent discussions see Dorati 2005: 315-21; Hawes 2016; Kirkland 2022: ch. 8.

about the extent of the travels and the degree of autopsy. The structuring principle is similar, in that both deploy a linear progression punctuated by narrative digressions which allow them to expand the focus of the work. Like Herodotos Pausanias is prone to intervene in his account to justify inclusion or exclusion, speech or silence, and sometimes on similar grounds. But beyond the generic resemblances there are moments when Herodotos is a more prominent presence. The narrative of the battle of 279 is one. That Herodotos stands visibly behind Pausanias' narrative has never been doubted.<sup>2</sup> But Pausanias' engagement with his exemplar is anything but straightforward; this paper explores the complex relationship between author, history and historiography.

The invasion fascinated Pausanias, who tells the story twice, first in his description of the monuments of Athens (1.4) in relation to the commander of the Athenian contingent in the campaign, Kallippos, then at much greater length in his account of the offerings at the oracular shrine of Apollo at Delphi (10.19-23). The double narration is itself unusual.<sup>3</sup> Both positions are highly significant. In Pausanias Athens plays the leading role in the campaign. So too, in all accounts of the invasion, did Delphi, which was both the high water mark and the turning point of the onward advance of the invaders. The second account receives a more elaborate introduction, as Pausanias signals his intention to provide a fuller narrative. His rationale itself invites us to expect a purple passage. This was, he says (10.19.5), "the greatest of all Greek exploits against the barbarians" (ἔργων τῶν ἐπὶ τοὺς βαρβάρους τὰ μέγιστα Ἕλλησιν ἐνταῦθα ἦν). This explicitly sets the invasion above that of 480-479 and even above Alexander's conquest of the east. His response to the challenge is the longest excursus in his work.<sup>4</sup>

First a quick sketch of the campaign. The Celts, *Keltoi/Celti* or *Gallatai/Galli*, had by the fifth century BCE established themselves across Europe from East Anglia in Britain to modern Hungary and Poland.<sup>5</sup> In the

2 For the most obvious points of resemblance see Segre 1927: 26-27; Nachtergaele 1977: 147-48; Bearzot 1992: 108.

3 Ameling 1994: 146: "Eine Dublette vergleichbaren Umfangs gibt es im Werk des Pausanias sonst nicht."

4 Cf. Pritchett 1998: 69. See further p. 513 below.

5 For a brief treatment see Cunliffe 2003.

fourth century BCE they pressed south into the Italian peninsula, advancing as far as Rome in 390 BCE. In the third century they were on the move further east, pressing south through the Balkans. According to Pausanias the invasion of 279 was the third. The first had been a small-scale affair which advanced no further than Thrace. The second in 280 was more substantial. The invaders penetrated as far as Macedonia, where they were opposed by the Macedonian king Ptolemy 'Keraunos'. The Macedonians suffered heavy losses, including the death of their king, but again the Celts withdrew. The invasion of 279 was much bigger. The Celts were divided into three groups,<sup>6</sup> one division moving across Thrace in the north, another to attack Macedonia and then move into Illyria in northwest Greece, and the third under Brennos moving due south through southern Macedonia and Thessaly. It was this group which the Greeks, according to Pausanias, tried to stop at Thermopylai.

The Greek logic was the same as in 480. They were outnumbered and the narrow pass neutralized the numerical advantage of the Celts. It also neutralized the cavalry, in which both invading forces had an overwhelming advantage. And as in 480 it had the effect, initially, of stopping the invaders in their tracks. The Celts were successfully repulsed. Finally Greeks from the region alerted Brennos to the route through the hills around the Greek position. He led a force along this route to outflank the Greek position. But the Greek army was able to extract itself with the aid of the Athenian fleet. Thermopylai was however as far south as the Celts got. After the battle Brennos turned west toward Delphi. He failed to take the temple (or if he took it he failed to hold it) and the Celts straggled north, harried first through Phokis and then on their march north.

For the invasion as a whole, Pausanias is our most extensive surviving source. We know that Diodoros dealt with it and we have a couple of fragments of his account. It also featured in the history of Pompeius Trogus, now represented by the epitome of Justin.<sup>7</sup> Behind them all lies a source in a narrative in a Hellenistic historian, though there is enough divergence in focus to suggest either that they are each operating selectively or that there is more than one source in play. There is no agreement about the identity of the main source. Timaios has been named, as have

6 Paus. 10.19.7

7 For a table comparing the surviving accounts see Pierozzi 2023: 10-11.

Demochares, Hieronymos of Kardia, Nymphis of Heraclea and Psaon of Plataea and others.<sup>8</sup> Most recently Pierozzi has made a sustained case for Phylarchos.<sup>9</sup> Pausanias' narrative is often used as the basis for the reconstruction of his source. He may for instance (as is often suggested) have had an interest in shocking and extreme events, represented by his account of the atrocities at Kallion committed by the Celts.<sup>10</sup> He may belong to the class of writers such as Phylarchos criticized by Polybios for writing of 'tragic history'.<sup>11</sup> But this is to place a lot of weight on a single passage in a single derivative account. Polybios singles out Phylarchos' detailed account of the brutal treatment of Mantinea by Antigonos Doson in 223 as typical of this kind of narrative. But we cannot say whether the description of events at Kallion was typical of Pausanias' source.<sup>12</sup> There was nothing new about the vivid accounts of atrocities. Shocking descriptions such as this already feature in fifth century historiography. The atrocities at Kallion have a good antecedent in Thucydides' account of the Thracian mercenaries at Mykalessos at 7.29, and in Herodotos' account of the atrocities of the Persian invaders of 480 in Phokis at 8.33 (καὶ γυναῖκάς τινας διέφθειραν μισγόμενοι ὑπὸ πλῆθεος). Again the leanings of his source have been found in the critical treatment of Macedonia and the positive presentation of Athens. These and other features have been used to identify or exclude potential claimants to be the Hellenistic original. This could well be right. Certainly Macedonia emerges badly, as the cause of the depressed condition of Greece and an impediment to effective resistance (1.4.2), and Athens extremely well. But again some caution is needed before we use this to identify the original. Pausanias may be using more than one source. We also have to leave room for Pausanias

8 See e.g. Fraser 1913: 341-42; Bearzot 1992: 110-14.

9 Pierozzi 2023: 23-36.

10 10.22.3-4.

11 So e.g. Ameling 1994: 151, and more recently Pierozzi 2018: 25, who offers a detailed case for Phylarchos. Marincola 2013 has shown that Polybios' critique of the style of writing represented by Phylarchos is more complicated than is often supposed. But though he is right to note that "Phylarchus' scenes are faulted ... in the first place because they are *invented*" (cf. 2.56.11), Polybios also appears to object to his delight in the spectacular (2.56.10) and his excessive use of emotional effects (2.56.7).

12 The problem is noted by Hau 2016b: 128 in the context of reconstructions of Hellenistic historiography more generally.

himself.<sup>13</sup> He is critical enough of the historians he had read to suggest that he was capable of using his sources selectively. Pausanias travelled. He spoke to people, he viewed artefacts and monuments and he copied down inscriptions. He visited Delphi, which allowed him both to see the dedications and get some background information from local tradition. Most importantly, he also visited Athens, where he saw the depiction of the Athenian general Kallippos in the *bouleuterion* (1.3.5) and heard of the dedication of the shield of Kydias from the battle at Thermopylai in the Stoa of Zeus Eleutherios (10.21.5). Clearly within Athens itself the exploit was trumpeted as a great achievement; the events of 279 seem to have had an important place in the collective memory as a recovery of a glorious past,<sup>14</sup> and Pausanias' unambiguous admiration for the Athenian role at Thermopylai probably shows the influence of the Athenian tradition.<sup>15</sup> This has implications for any attempt to reconstruct the lost source. The Thermopylai campaign certainly figured in the historiographical tradition, whether we suppose that our surviving sources are drawing selectively on a single original or Pausanias is using one or more additional sources; his precise figures for the Greek forces appear to be derived from a written source, as Ameling notes.<sup>16</sup> And the role of Thermopylai in the campaign may be reflected (as Pierozzi notes<sup>17</sup>) in Justin's mention (22.9.3) of the return of the invaders via Thermopylai using the same road (διὰ τῆς αὐτῆς ὁδοῦ). But the cursory nature of Justin's mention and the absence of Thermopylai from what survives of Diodoros suggests that it did not figure prominently and that the main emphasis was on the attempt to capture Delphi and the invasion of Aitolia. On the (admittedly limited) evidence available only Pausanias chose to narrate the battle at length and give Athens a starring role. So some of this is likely to be Pausanias' own response to the oral traditions and the monuments, regardless of any literary source or sources.

13 Cf. Buttrighini & Torelli 2017: 379–80.

14 Cf. Luraghi 2018: 35–36.

15 For Pausanias' use of oral sources see Pretzler 2005, and for a potential parallel for the use of local Athenian tradition to supplement the information from the historians see 1.23.2 (cited by Pretzler 2005: 235).

16 Ameling 1994: 153.

17 Pierozzi 2018: 18.

Serious questions have been raised about the reliability of Pausanias' narrative.<sup>18</sup> Some scepticism is inescapable, not just about Pausanias but about the tradition more generally. For the invaders he gives a figure of 152,000 foot and 20,400 horsemen (to which he adds at 10.19.9 another 40,800 reserve riders). Despite divergences there are enough agreements with our other sources to allow us to push the numbers back to one or more shared source. But since the Celts left no literary record, the ultimate source for the Celtic (as distinct from the Greek) numbers must be Greek estimates; and estimating numbers is both difficult and often partisan. We can be sure that the numbers were alarmingly large for the Greeks to turn out in force.<sup>19</sup> But the figures look wildly exaggerated. The withdrawal after the attack on Delphi make little sense if the Celts had such overwhelming numbers at their disposal. The complete failure to take Delphi presented by our sources too has been doubted. The miraculous interventions which rescue Delphi again can be dismissed, though contemporary Greeks took this very seriously, as we know not only from the historians but also from an inscription from Kos dated to the year after the battle and what looks like a reference to intervention by Apollo at Delphi in Kallimachos.<sup>20</sup> In any narrative of survival, divine intervention was the natural way to make sense of events, especially when a major shrine was concerned.<sup>21</sup> All of our surviving sources maintain that in

18 See for instance Bearzot 1992: 108; Segre 1927: 26; Nachtergaele 1977: 143-44; Habicht 1997: 133; Worthington 2021: 112-13; and especially Campbell 2009: 214-30, esp. 229, who dismisses the need for any attack on Thermopylai by Brennos, and accordingly for any defence at all there by the Greeks. He is influenced by the discussion of Szemler et al. 1996, who demonstrated that the hillside at Thermopylai descended steeply to the sea at this date; they concluded that the route was impassable in antiquity and that the main route south from Thessaly ran through the so-called 'Isthmus corridor', i.e. through the Dhema Pass, Phokis and then Boiotia. The data are fine but the conclusion is not. It ignores the fact that for centuries before Brennos both invaders and defenders treated Thermopylai as though it was the main route through central Greece, and discounts the possibility that the road ascended inland before rejoining the coast. For discussion see e.g. Pritchett 1985: 190-216, 1991: 190-205; McInerney 1999: Appendix 2; Rapp 2013; Sánchez Moreno 2013: 287-91.

19 Cf. Callim. *Hymn* 4.171-76.

20 *Syll.*<sup>3</sup> 398; Callim. *Hymn* 4.171-85.

21 See further pp. 511-12 below.

one way or another the invaders are wiped out on the retreat. Not a single one of them returned home.<sup>22</sup> This too must come from a common source. Though not inconceivable, the completeness of the destruction looks less like accurate detail than the imposition of a moralizing template on to the facts of history.<sup>23</sup>

But the scepticism goes further. Pausanias puts the Athenians in over-all charge of the expedition. In his account the general commanding the Athenian forces was also the generalissimo of the whole allied army. The Aitolians probably sent the biggest force and they were at this stage politically the most powerful member of the alliance and the natural leader of the coalition forces. So many scholars have been minded to see this as pro-Athenian bias by Pausanias or his source. That his account is highly favourable to Athens is inescapable. But there is good reason to take him seriously on this point. The composition of the Greek army was very different from 480. In 480 the Peloponnesians made up almost half of the army. In 279 the largest contingents came from those with a strong immediate interest in the defence of the pass. The Boeotians, who lay in the path of the Celts once Thermopylai was breached, sent 10,000 hoplites and 500 cavalry. Northwest Greece had not been involved in the battle of 480. But by 279 the influence of the Aitolian League extended into Thessaly, which gave them a strong motive to counter the threat from the Celts. Sparta was absent. Sparta had been at war with the Aitolians just two years before and they may not have been unhappy to see the Aitolians suffer. The Spartans had been pursuing an expansionist policy and may even have felt that a weakened central Greece offered opportunities for Sparta to extend its influence northwards, when the Celts withdrew. But the Peloponnese in general remained aloof. The immediate danger was to northern and central Greece. If the invaders succeeded in advancing further south, the Isthmus of Corinth offered a good pinch-point to mount a defence. And since the Celts had no ships, they could not bypass the Isthmus by sea.<sup>24</sup> This had been a danger in 480, when the Persians had a large fleet. The alliance from central Greece may have felt that Sparta was more likely to swing behind a cause led by Athens, either

22 Diod. 22.9.3; Justin 24.8.16; Paus. 10.23.13.

23 Cf. p. 513 below.

24 Cf. Paus. 7.6.7.

from sentiment or from the old rivalry, than by their recent enemies the Aitolians. If that was the plan, it failed; but it does give the Aitolians a reason to pass the lead to Athens. And even in central Greece people may have preferred Athens as less suspect (because militarily weaker) than the Aitolians.<sup>25</sup> There was considerable jockeying for power in 480, and interstate rivalries had prevented some players from participating (or offered a plausible excuse for non-participation); there is no reason to suppose that the situation in 279 was different. Pausanias (10.20.5) claims that the Athenians held the supreme command “because of their ancient reputation” (κατ’ ἀξίωμα ... τὸ ἀρχαῖον), that is, because of their crucial role in the Persian Wars. This may reflect the arguments deployed at the time in favour of Athenian leadership. If so (and we have no way of knowing), this was not just empty rhetoric; the argument from Athens’ role in the Persian Wars would carry some weight in a culture which set great store by omens. Even so, Pausanias clearly oversimplifies in ignoring the political motives and the regional rivalries behind the arguments.

The other area of doubt is the role of the Athenian fleet. Pausanias (10.20.5) tells us that the Athenians sent all the seaworthy ships they had (τριήρεις τε αἱ πλώϊμοι πᾶσαι) and he claims that the ships subsequently played a crucial role in harassing the enemy and rescuing the troops in the pass (1.4.3, 10.21.4, 22.12). Two key objections have been made to the account. The first is that an Athenian inscription recording the Athenian contribution to the defence of Greece against the Celts makes no mention of Thermopylai or the fleet.<sup>26</sup> The second is that with the Macedonians in control of the Peiraeus the Athenians were not in a position to have a fleet of any significance. If the objections are correct, the whole of the account of the role played by Athens is fantasy by Pausanias, his literary source or his informants in Athens. But we have inscriptional evidence for the existence of a fleet during the Macedonian occupation of the Peiraeus and archaeological evidence for other harbours in Attica.<sup>27</sup> So

25 Cf. Luraghi 2018: 36, who notes also that the Aetolians would have been equally reluctant to serve under a Boiotian commander.

26 *IG II*<sup>3</sup>.1 1005; the inscription speaks only of the sending of “the select troops and the cavalry” (τοὺς τε ἐπιλέκτους καὶ τοὺς ἵππεῖς).

27 So Bayliss 2011: 201–2. Cf. Green 2003: 2; Thomsen 2024: 74–76.

there is no reason to dismiss the fleet as a phantom. Its size is unknowable. But it was probably much smaller than the fleet available before the defeat in the Lamian War, and Pausanias or his source may exaggerate the scale of the naval commitment.<sup>28</sup> It is doubtful that the fleet was anything like big enough to rescue over 20,000 foot soldiers. But they may not have needed to evacuate the whole army by sea, just a rearguard. The advance warning of the Celtic encirclement from the Phokians meant that most of the Greeks would have time to clear the pass. And since everyone knew of the existence of the routes through the hills, they will have been constantly aware of the possible need to fall back. Since the Celts had no navy, the Greek ships could move in and out unmolested; so even a small naval force could evacuate a substantial number of troops. The fact that naval intervention was possible does not in itself justify us in taking seriously Pausanias' account of the role played by the fleet in the battle. We still have the problem with the inscription. But context is important here. The inscription relates to the reorganization of the *Soteria* at Delphi, as with the Koan inscription. It relates solely and specifically to the protection of Delphi.<sup>29</sup> It is not a narrative of the invasion as a whole. The battle at Thermopylai had no impact on the fate of Delphi, apart from holding up part of the invading force. And militarily it was a defeat. Pausanias presents the rescue as a great success, much as the British could view the evacuation of the retreating army by sea at Dunkirk in 1940 as a great success, despite the failure which necessitated it; but like Dunkirk it averted annihilation rather than turn defeat into victory. It was a success only in the sense that the Greeks were not slaughtered. So the silence may be intelligible without assuming wholesale invention by Pausanias or his source.<sup>30</sup>

But even if we accept that there is a substrate of fact to Pausanias' account, the uncanny similarities to Herodotos' account invite a degree of

28 Campbell 2009: 224-25 estimates a naval force of just 25 ships; this is however based on the assumption that the sole role was to transport the small Athenian contingent to the north. If we allow that the Greeks anticipated the need to move troops rapidly and even perhaps to evacuate troops urgently (cf. Bayliss 2011: 205), which after 480 required no clairvoyance, the presence of a larger fleet makes sense.

29 Bayliss 2011: 203-5.

30 Cf. Luraghi 2018: 35.

suspicion about the details. Thus for instance Pausanias emphasizes the Greek order and experience in the face of a disorderly enemy attack.<sup>31</sup> Herodotos too makes much of the contrast between Greek skill and discipline and Persian inexperience in hoplite fighting (Hdt. 7.211). Again, his statement that the Celts were trampled by their own side (10.21.4) looks suspiciously like the fate of Herodotos' Persians (Hdt. 7.223). His comparison between the limited protection provided by the Celtic shields and the heavy armed Greek hoplites (10.21.2) is again reminiscent of Herodotos' Persians of 480-479 BCE (Hdt. 9.63.2; cf. 5.49.3), as is the drowning of some of the invaders in the marshy shallows, when they slip off the road (10.21.4; cf. Hdt. 7.223.3). The statements are all in themselves feasible. The Greeks were experienced in set piece fighting in a line and they were more heavily armed. The hill fell precipitously to the sea and the water, though shallow enough to cause a risk of grounding for ships which came too close to shore, was deep enough to drown a non-swimmer; so the prospect of falling in and drowning was real. And in mass fighting at close quarters in a narrow pass men will be trampled. But taken as a whole the narrative suggests that this is not history but historiography repeating itself. The same applies to the encounter of the Phokians with the Celts attempting to encircle the Greeks by way of the path through the hills. Pausanias' claim that the Celts were upon them before they knew it because of a thick mist on the mountain (10.22.11) looks suspiciously like a re-run of the night march of Herodotos' Persians, when the Phokians were caught off guard and only alerted to the enemy approach by the rustling of fallen leaves (Hdt. 7.218).

Given the fragmentary state of Diodoros' version and Justin's truncated summary of Pompeius Trogus we cannot be absolutely sure who introduced these details into the account. But the consensus that the detailed parallels reflect Pausanias' own intervention, not something taken from a Hellenistic source, is probably correct. Not only is Herodotos an important influence for Pausanias' work as a whole, he is also the dominant intertext in the immediate context. In his narrative of the engagement at Thermopylai Pausanias is making an overt partisan gesture within the historiographic tradition. Herodotos was not the only source available for events of 480. Others had told the tale of Thermopylai after

31 10.21.1; 10.21.

him and the fourth century historian Ephoros seems to have been particularly influential in the later tradition. But only Herodotos receives a mention, and the narrative of the earlier battle draws heavily on Herodotos' account. This is most obvious in the numbers he gives. There were different figures on offer for the Greek numbers at Thermopylai in 480. The inscription for the Peloponnesians in the pass gave a figure of 4,000 (Hdt. 7.228). Herodotos gives 3,100, including 300 Spartans. Diodoros (11.4.5) gives a figure of 1,000 Spartan and 3,000 from the rest of the Peloponnese, ending up with a total of 4,000 Peloponnesians in line with the inscription. A figure of 1,000 Spartans is given twice by Isokrates (4.90, 6.99). So Diodoros may be working with this strand of the tradition. The fact that Justin (2.11) again gives 4,000 suggests that the arithmetic has a common source (probably Ephoros). Pausanias however (10.20.2) explicitly opts for Herodotos' figures. He also implicitly indicates his awareness of alternative numbers. Diodoros has 1,000 Spartans. Pausanias' emphatic statement that there were 300 Spartans "and no more" (οὐ πλείονες (10.20.1)) looks like a glance at and implicit rejection of this version. Pausanias also tacitly ignores a non-Herodotean version of the finale of the earlier battle which seems to have become canonical in the Hellenistic period. Diodoros, Pompeius Trogus and Plutarch tell a story (with differing degrees of elaboration) in which the Greeks raid the Persian camp by night, inflicting great casualties and coming close to killing the king, before the Persians realize how few they are, turn on them and kill them.<sup>32</sup> In contrast Pausanias' narrative follows Herodotos' less melodramatic account in which the Greeks sit tight until surrounded, whereupon the majority withdraw, leaving a rearguard which is ultimately massacred (10.20.2).

The preference for Herodotos is also visible in the larger narrative of the invasion. The failure of the Celts to penetrate central Greece was a paradoxical rescue from what was seen as an existential threat. This and especially their failure to pillage Delphi inevitably invited a superhuman explanation in Greek belief. This was the way Herodotos and the actors

32 Diod. 11.10.4; Justin 2.11.12-18; Plut. *De malign. Her.* 866a-b; [Plut.] *Minor Parallels* 306d. As well as firmly aligning his account with that of Herodotos, Pausanias' version also avoids aggrandizing the earlier expedition to a point where it undermines the salience he gives to 279.

in his *History* viewed the success against Persia. Hence the miraculous element. The wonders are already present in the inscription from Kos from the year after the defeat of the invaders.<sup>33</sup> But the tradition diverged on the nature of the intervention and so do our sources. The inscription from Kos speaks of an epiphany by Apollo during the fighting. This is the tradition followed by Pompeius Trogus as epitomized by Justin (24.8), possibly also Diodoros (22.9). But in Pausanias it is the local heroes who appear (10.23.2; cf. 1.4.4); the antecedent here is in Herodotos (8.37-38).

If we accept that it was Pausanias who introduced the Herodotean echoes into the text in his account of the fighting in the pass, it follows that his textual source for the battle offered little narrative detail. Pausanias appears to be using a blend of surmise (the terrain had not changed, with the same implications for defenders and attackers, especially given the numerical disparity) and literary reminiscence to flesh out his account and to underscore the similarity with 480. At the same time the density of Herodotean reminiscence invites the reader to compare the two accounts. I return to this below.

Pausanias may have enhanced the comparison with 480 for his own narrative purposes, but he did not invent it. It was always there, even before the battle. This is not just about retrospect. The Greeks collectively had the battle of 480 in mind in their strategic thinking. They had learned the lessons from Leonidas' failure. The infantry force was almost four times the size. With it were at least 1,000 cavalry, unlike 480, when Leonidas had none. The cavalry on both sides was useless in the narrow pass in 279. But the presence of the Greek cavalry meant that they had the means to cover their retreat east of the pass, if the Celts forced a way through or the position was turned. And it did allow the Greeks to raid forward instead of playing a purely reactive role as Leonidas had. The shadow of 480 probably explains the use of the Phokians again to defend the path through the hills. Nobody was unaware that the Phokians had been dislodged in 480. And their failure either to put up a firm resistance or to warn the Greeks in the pass below had contributed to the final massacre of the rear guard. But the nature of Greek interstate rivalries must

33 See above p. 506.

have meant that for some people the whiff of failure, perhaps even betrayal,<sup>34</sup> hung around Phokis and they may have volunteered for the task in the hope of expunging the taint of having failed the great Panhellenic cause.

And in the aftermath the participants looked to the Persian Wars to validate their achievement. The Aitolians pointedly set up the shields taken from the Celts close to those taken from the Persians at Marathon by the Athenians (Paus. 10.19.4). As always in Greek sanctuaries not just the dedication itself but the location and juxtaposition represented a competitive gesture and here the effect was to raise the Celtic invasion to the legendary status of the Persian Wars. And to claim for the Aitolian League the role of saviour of Greece which tradition gave to Athens. It also began the process of claiming for Aitolia the role of saviours of Delphi from the Phokians which we find reflected in the historiographical tradition.

So everyone viewed 279 as to some degree a re-run of 480 before, during and after the fighting.<sup>35</sup> But the narrators of the invasion still had room to choose within the tradition. Though the battle featured in the historiographic tradition, it was the attempt on the Panhellenic shrine and the opportunity to tell a familiar moral tale of *theomachia*, excess and divine punishment that attracted most interest.<sup>36</sup> This also mattered for Pausanias, as the overlaps between his narrative and those of Diodoros and Pompeius Trogus/Justin demonstrate; but so did the fighting at Thermopylai; hence the fact that in his fuller account in book 10 Pausanias devotes roughly equal space to the fighting at Thermopylai and to events in Phokis. This inevitably invites a more extensive comparison with 480 and it is clearly a strategic choice. With it came the opportunity to emulate the classic narrator of the Persian Wars.

34 For the possibility that the Phokians did not just panic but deliberately abandoned their post see Rop 2019.

35 Cf. *PHamb.* inv. 38, where the rapprochement of the Celtic invasions with 480 recurs, though precise reference is uncertain (see Barigazzi 1974; Bearzot 1992: 119 n. 50; Lloyd-Jones & Parsons 1983: 460; Ameling 1994: 150 n. 160).

36 For the more overt and more pervasive moralizing (in comparison with the classical period) favoured by a number of Hellenistic historians cf. Hau 2016a: 244–45, and the more extensive treatment in Hau 2016b: ch. 1–3 and pp. 272–77.

But Pausanias is careful to avoid merely repackaging his primary influence. He also at some points visibly distances himself from Herodotos, pointedly supplementing and correcting his model. Herodotos, as Pausanias points out, gave no figure for the Lokrians. Pausanias in a very Herodotean manner<sup>37</sup> calculates the number at 6,000 to make good the deficit (10.20.2), thus in a single gesture both deferring to and correcting his exemplar. He also explicitly has the Mycenaeans stay for the last stand with the Spartans and the Thespians. His precise repetition of Herodotos' numbers for the forces with Leonidas suggest that he has a text of Herodotos to hand; at the very least, it rules out a lapse of memory. He does not give a source for the additional detail. It does not appear in his brief mention of the Mycenaeans at Thermopylai at 2.16.5. But in the absence of any trace of the detail in the sparse remains of the historiographical tradition the most obvious (if ultimately unprovable) origin would seem to be oral sources at Mycenae. At the same time, without comment he omits the Thebans from the forces who remained in the pass with Leonidas. In this he aligns himself with what seems to have been the standard post-Herodotean version, probably beginning with Ephoros. The effect is to correct tacitly Herodotos' narrative of the Theban surrender in the final phase of the fighting.

So what we have is a complex engagement both with the earlier war and with its narrators, with Herodotos his main but not his only source. The most striking gesture perhaps is the attempt to outdo his primary model. Though scholars have long noted the links with Herodotos, not enough emphasis is placed on the visible element of competition. This is already signalled in Pausanias' introduction to the account in 10.19.5. In explaining why he has returned to the subject of the invasion he says his reason is "because the greatest of the Greek confrontations with the barbarians took place there" (ὅτι ἔργων τῶν ἐπὶ τοὺς βαρβάρους τὰ μέγιστα Ἑλλήσιν ἐνταῦθα ἦν). Not 'the greatest after the Persian invasion' but 'the greatest' without qualification. This kind of gesture is almost a reflex action with ancient historians, starting with Herodotos himself (Hdt. 7.20).<sup>38</sup> The subject of the author's narrative is regularly the greatest or

37 Cf. Herodotos' calculation of the figures for the Persian naval forces at 7.84-87 in the immediate context of the Thermopylai narrative.

38 See Carey 2025 *ad loc.* and for a fuller treatment Marincola 1997: 34-43.

most significant of its kind. Pausanias' statement implicitly corrects Herodotos' claim that the invasion of 480 was the greatest episode ever in the conflict between east and west, and he goes out of his way to indicate that the Celtic assault was the greater threat. The Greeks "saw that the struggle before them would not be for freedom, as with the Persians in the past, and that giving water and earth would not bring them safety. ... So every man and all the cities collectively were convinced that they must die or prevail" (10.19.12).<sup>39</sup> To some degree he is right. The aim of the Persian invasion of 480 was to conquer Greece and absorb it into the highly organized Persian empire. Conquest for the Persians did not necessarily involve fighting. It was in the interest of the empire to avoid both unnecessary losses in the field and unnecessary destruction in the newly acquired territory. As Pausanias rightly notes, it was enough for the invaders of 480 if Greek states were prepared to submit by giving earth and water. The Celts in contrast had less incentive to clemency.<sup>40</sup> The sense of the Celtic invasion as an unparalleled threat is also present in the brutal diversionary move by the Celts designed to draw the Aitolians away from the pass and reduce the number of defenders (10.22.2-7). A large force (40,000 foot and 800 horse according to Pausanias) turned west through Thessaly and invaded Aitolia, where the Celts systematically ravaged the city of Kallion/Kallipolis. The Aitolians responded by withdrawing from Thermopylai to protect their territory. Together with the population left behind (including not just those of military age but old men and women incensed at the atrocities committed by the Celts), they were eventually able to trap the invaders and inflict enormous casualties. But the Celts had succeeded in weakening the force opposing them in the pass. The brute nature of the invaders is also emphasized in the

39 The resolve to 'vanquish or die' (ἀπολωλέναι ... ἢ ἐπικρατεστέρους εἶναι) itself generalizes Damaratos' description of the Spartans in Herodotos 7.104.5 (ἐπικρατέειν ἢ ἀπόλλυσθαι) and applies it to the Greeks as a whole.

40 Pausanias does however share the tendency of other Greek sources to exaggerate the brutality of the invaders. There is no good reason to doubt the ruthlessness of the invading force or the fact of atrocities, even large-scale atrocities, but the bestial savagery ("The more plump of these ... babies the Galatai killed, and drank their blood and ate their flesh" (10.22.3)) has little basis in fact and is at odds with the military practice of the Celts as attested in inscriptions; see Mitchell 2003: 282-83 and cf. n. 41.

fighting in the pass. Though details both of the armament and the actual fighting remind us of Herodotos' Persians, the account of the fighting tactics underscores the blind, almost bestial, fighting techniques of the Celts (he actually says (10.21.3) "like beasts" – *theria*) and ties in with the claim that this is about survival, not just liberty.<sup>41</sup>

This combination of genuflection and competition reappears in his account of the Celtic forces. Each rider has two potential mounted surrogates ready to replace him. In a very Herodotean gesture Pausanias expresses the belief that the Celts learned this from the Persian elite corps of Immortals (10.19.11). The source here has to be Herodotos' explanation of the name of the corps at 7.83.1;<sup>42</sup> there was a body of replacements ready to replace each casualty, so that the number was always maintained at 10,000. Pausanias points out that the Celts go one further in that the surrogates are ready to replace the fallen during the military action rather than to make up the complement afterwards. But there is already an implicit outdoing of Herodotos in the numbers, in that there are two surrogates for each of the Celtic riders, where Herodotos speaks only of a man being replaced by another.

Pausanias also goes out of his way to contrast the Greek response in terms of scale. The contrast is explicit in his introduction to the narrative (10.20.1), where he contrasts the Greek numbers of 480 and 279.<sup>43</sup> He gives a final figure of about 11,000 for the Greek army of 480. His figure may be too big. But in contrast in 279 the Boeotians alone provide 10,000 infantry. The total force was in excess of 23,000 infantry, with 1,000 or more cavalry (10.20.3-5). Herodotos gives us to understand that the force at Thermopylai in 480 is an advance guard; but support never comes. Pausanias' Greeks turn out in force. As in Herodotos (7.207) the Greeks are overcome with fear. But they rise to the occasion (10.19.12). There is no suggestion in his account of any readiness to withdraw from the pass,

41 There is in all of this an unresolved paradox, in that sometimes the invaders appear as a highly organized army and astute if brutal strategists, sometimes as simply wild. Mitchell 2003: 288 notes that the Celts "far from being a tumultuous horde, were disciplined warrior bands with responsible and effective leaders."

42 Cf. Ameling 1994: 148.

43 For the rhetorical role played by numbers in ancient Greek historiography in general see Rubincam 2021: *passim*.

a constant theme in Herodotos. And Pausanias points out in his account of the numbers that in 480 part of the force withdrew on the third day, leaving just the Spartans and Thespians (and for him the Mycenaeans). As he puts it (10.20.2), “they left before the end of the battle” (προαπέλιπον τὸ πέρας τῆς μάχης). This sense of a greater Greek cohesiveness in the later action may explain the way Pausanias treats Brennos’ discovery of the path through the hills. He deals generously with the betrayal, unlike Herodotos’ treatment of Ephialtes, the man who according to tradition guided the Persians through the mountains. Herodotos does not explicitly condemn Ephialtes. But he does not exonerate him and he deals at length with the question of the identity of the guilty party without ever advancing any mitigating circumstances. Pausanias in contrast claims (plausibly enough) that it was not from any ill-will toward the Greek cause (οὐ κακονοίᾳ τῇ ἐς τὸ Ἑλληνικόν); they simply wanted to be rid of the Celts, who were plundering the territory (10.22.9). The same is probably true of 480 BCE. But not for Herodotos. In contrast to Herodotos’ unrelenting tale of Greek disunity, for Pausanias this is a story of Greek solidarity. There were in fact other ways of telling the story. Whereas for Pausanias the Aenianes reveal the path just to be rid of the barbarians, in Justin (24.7.2) the Aenianes and Thessalians (or at least some of them) actually join the barbarians in their search for booty in Phokis. There was a good antecedent for this way of telling the story in Herodotos’ account of the Thessalians persuading Xerxes to invade Phokis (8.31). But Pausanias offers us an account of a united Greece which rises collectively to the challenge, at least as far as central Greece is concerned.

The desire to present 279 as in some respects a bigger and better Thermopylai may explain the absence of a detail which Pausanias offers elsewhere. Pausanias opens his account of Sparta in book 3 with a long background narrative on Spartan history. Thermopylai 480 is treated briefly in an account of the late sixth and early fifth century which draws heavily on Herodotos. There he heaps generous praise on Leonidas (3.4.7). Like Achilles at Troy or Miltiades at Marathon he is the single figure on whom events turned at Thermopylai. No surprise there; that was already the view in the fifth century. More striking however is his comment that Leonidas’ achievement surpassed all that happened afterwards and all

that happened still earlier (3.4.7). For a historical figure to be viewed as a greater warrior than Achilles is a virtually if not actually unique praise. He even claims that Leonidas would have kept Xerxes out of Greece but for the betrayal by Ephialtes. None of this is inconsistent with his account in book 10. But the omission of any such mention in the detailed narrative of the Celtic invasion is interesting as an indication of the editing process which allows him to represent the Celts as a greater threat than the Persians of 480.

The attempt to outdo can be seen in other features of the narrative. Pausanias has Brennos lead a detachment of forty thousand through the hills (10.22.10). Herodotos never actually says how many Persians went on the march which outflanked the Greeks in 480. But he does say that they were Hydarnes' troops. And elsewhere he tells us that Hydarnes led the 10,000 strong Immortals. So he may have imagined them as 10,000; we simply do not know. Pausanias' figure looks wildly inflated for the size of the path and grossly disproportionate to the numbers required to outflank a vastly outnumbered Greek force. But the key point again is the scaling up.

But this is not just about scaling up. Pausanias may impose Herodotean details on his narrative. But he also pointedly notes differences. As a small force made up entirely of infantry the Greeks of 480 simply put themselves in the pass like a cork in a bottle. The possession of cavalry allowed the Greeks of 279 to move safely into the plain to the west and attempt pre-emptive measures. A squadron of the cavalry with 1,000 light-armed troops positioned themselves to prevent the enemy from crossing the Spercheios (10.20.6). Unsuccessfully, since Brennos found a way to cross downstream. Another major departure from the past is the double intervention of the Athenian fleet, made possible by the fact that the Celts unlike the Persians had no fleet. The Athenian ships pulled into the shallows and attacked the invaders from the flank with missiles (10.21.4), a move made possible by the absence of any fleet on the other side. It was however undertaken at considerable risk, since the water was shallow enough to create a risk of grounding. The Celtic forces must have been stretched along the pass, and an attack on the troops pressing forward from behind where the road climbed the side of the bay would have

caught those of the invaders who had entered the pass in a pincer movement. Even at their closest to the shore, the slingers and archers, especially the latter, must have been operating at the limit of their practical range, and the enemy must have been beyond the range of Greek javelins.<sup>44</sup> And even so, any attack would only work at the western end of the pass, on the lower slopes. But with the enemy crowded in a narrow space there was no need for accuracy; volleys would suffice. The psychological effect and the disruption caused by the need to avoid missiles must have been more significant than any physical casualties caused. But any manoeuvre which forced the Celts to take cover would increase the crowding in the pass and the pressure from behind on those who were facing the Greek hoplites. And given the shape of the pass, with a western entrance only two or three metres wide, the increased crowding would prevent reinforcements entering. The second intervention was after the encirclement. As in 480, the Phokians guarding the Anopaia were taken by surprise. But this time unlike 480 they immediately went on the attack put up a fierce resistance. When forced back, they retreated downhill, not up as they had in 480. So they were able to alert the Greeks in the pass to the encirclement, so that they could escape before the trap was sprung (10.22.11). Unlike 480 there was no need for a last stand and no massacre. To this extent the action in 279 was by comparison a success. As noted above, Pausanias probably exaggerates the role of the fleet in rescuing the army. But for him the Athenian navy saved the Greeks, just as Herodotos believed that it saved Greece in 480-479. The similarity of his comment at 10.21.5 (“on that day the Athenian contingent surpassed the other Greeks in valour” – τοὺς μὲν δὴ Ἕλληνας τὸ Ἀττικὸν

44 Javelin perhaps 20-25 metres, bow perhaps 150-200 metres, slingshot perhaps as much as 350-400 metres; see Du Plessis 2024: 27, 59, and Marshall 2023: 41 n. 41. Since there was no standardization of construction either for the bow or for the sling, any such figures can only be very rough. And since we do not know how close to shore the triremes could get without grounding, we do not know how many Celts were within range of the missiles. This will itself will have differed at different points along the pass. There was a harbour within the pass and there must have been approach channels. The javelins can only have been effective very close to shore, if at all.

ὑπερεβάλετο ἀρετῇ τὴν ἡμέραν ταύτην<sup>45</sup>) to Herodotos 7.139.5<sup>46</sup> is striking and clearly not accidental.

In evaluating Pausanias' response we should bear in mind that after Thermopylai the Celts simply turned west and invaded Phokis. Whether that was in any way due to the encounter at Thermopylai is unclear. In the absence of firm numbers and any evidence for the intentions of the invaders (beyond the occasional conjectural focalization in Pausanias), we do not know (nor, probably, did the Greeks at the time) how far south they intended to push; indeed, the Celts themselves may not have had a fixed goal. The delay at Thermopylai will have put pressure on the invading army's supplies and forced them to forage further and further afield; so after the effective resistance in the pass Brennos may have felt that Delphi offered an easier and richer target than fighting his way south into central Greece. Or it may be that Delphi was always the target; if so, Brennos may have been compelled to clear the Greeks from Thermopylai in order to invade Phokis via the pass at Hyampolis, or simply to avoid having a Greek army to his rear. Whatever the reason, Brennos advanced no further south than Thermopylai, while in 480 the Persians broke through and overran central Greece as far as the Isthmus. In military terms the engagement at Thermopylai in 279 was a defeat for the Greeks, no less than the engagement in 480. But central Greece remained untouched. For anyone disposed to make the comparison, the battle might be seen as a success. And in Pausanias' telling the Greeks achieved a unity in 279 which they had struggled to achieve in 480. The battle seems not to have been commemorated at Delphi, though it meant a great deal to the Athenians. And as we have seen, it seems that the historiographical tradition paid relatively little attention to it. But Pausanias is explicit that the Athenian feat at Thermopylai was no less impressive than the last stand of 480.<sup>47</sup> So he may be partly motivated by a desire to set the

45 Cf. 1.4.3: ἔνθα δὲ πλείστου παρέσχοντο αὐτοὺς Ἀθηναῖοι τοῖς Ἑλλήσιν ἀξίους ("Then indeed the Athenians did the greatest service to the Greeks").

46 νῦν δὲ Ἀθηναίους ἂν τις λέγων σωτῆρας γενέσθαι τῆς Ἑλλάδος οὐκ ἂν ἀμαρτάνοι τὸ ἀληθές: "As it is, if one were to say that the Athenians were the saviours of Greece, he would not be far from the truth."

47 The Athenian exploit was οὐδὲν ἄφανέστερα ἐκείνων (sc. the Spartans) τολμήματα (7.15.3).

record straight and to rescue from obscurity a campaign which he felt was unfairly overshadowed by the events two centuries earlier. He obviously felt the battle was worthy of his predecessor and it inspired his longest and arguably his most vivid narrative excursus. It gave him the opportunity to tell a story in full Herodotean mode, part homage and part attempt to outdo his great predecessor at his best.

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