

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS



Simonides, Ephorus, and Herodotus on the Battle of Thermopylae

Author(s): Michael A. Flower

Source: *The Classical Quarterly*, New Series, Vol. 48, No. 2 (1998), pp. 365-379

Published by: [Cambridge University Press](#) on behalf of [The Classical Association](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/639828>

Accessed: 06/09/2010 12:41

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=cup>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Cambridge University Press and The Classical Association are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Classical Quarterly*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

SIMONIDES, EPHORUS, AND HERODOTUS ON THE BATTLE OF THERMOPYLAE

In adapting the story of the Great War to the taste of his own age Ephorus, himself a pupil of Isokrates and a professional historian, was led astray by the combined influences of rhetoric and rationalism; as neither the rationalism nor the rhetoric was of the best quality, the intrusion of both at this stage could have inflicted irreparable damage on the tradition of the war if the text of Herodotus had not survived to refute the inventions grafted on the authentic record by Ephorus.

So wrote C. Hignett about the fourth-century B.C. historian, Ephorus of Cyme.¹ But can Ephorus, the author of a universal history in thirty books, be so easily and curtly dismissed?² Modern scholarship is generally biased against Ephorus for two reasons: because our familiarity with his narrative is chiefly mediated through the much abbreviated account of Diodorus Siculus, and because of his alleged intellectual subservience to his reputed master Isocrates. As for the former, any carelessness or confusion on Diodorus' part should not be held against his sources.³ And as for the later, I have already tried to demonstrate at length that the tradition linking Ephorus with the rhetorical school of Isocrates was an invention of some Hellenistic literary biographer (Hermippus of Smyrna is a likely candidate) and then elaborated with colourful anecdotes over succeeding centuries.⁴

I. EPHORUS AND HIS SOURCES

Although most modern historians of the Persian Wars dismiss it with a sentence or two as Ephorus at his worst, Diodorus (11.8.4–11.10.4) gives a fundamentally different version of the final struggle at Thermopylae from that found in Herodotus. It is generally agreed that Ephorus was Diodorus' source for Books 11–16 of his *Bibliothēke*,⁵ the invasion of Xerxes being narrated within the first thirty-seven chapters of Book 11. Although Diodorus was no mere compiler, but rewrote his sources in his own style and sometimes added his own thoughts,⁶ nevertheless, we have evidence that he often reproduced Ephorus very closely.⁷ Ephorus, for his part,

¹ *Xerxes' Invasion of Greece* (Oxford, 1963), p. 15.

² As C. W. Fornara, *The Nature of History in Ancient Greece and Rome* (Berkeley, 1983), p. 42, n. 63 points out: 'No ancient writer could withstand the combined assaults of Wilamowitz, Schwartz, and Jacoby, who made Ephorus the incarnation of all that was objectionable in Greek historiography.' One could add the oft-quoted judgment of R. W. Macan, *Herodotus. The Seventh, Eighth, & Ninth Books*, vol. II (London, 1908), pp. 27–8. The only book length study of Ephorus is G. L. Barber, *The Historian Ephorus* (Cambridge, 1935), but it is considerably out of date.

³ On mistakes in Diodorus, see, for example, A. Andrewes, 'Diodoros and Ephoros: one source of misunderstanding', in J. W. Eadie and J. Ober (edd.), *The Craft of the Ancient Historian: Essays in Honor of Chester G. Starr* (Lanham, 1985), pp. 189–97.

⁴ *Theopompus of Chios. History and Rhetoric in the Fourth Century B.C.* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 42–62.

⁵ C. A. Volquardsen, *Untersuchungen über die Quellen der griechischen und sizilischen Geschichte bei Diodor XI bis XVI* (Kiel, 1868); E. Schwartz, 'Diodoros', *RE* V, I (1907), col. 679; and, more recently, S. Hornblower (ed.), *Greek Historiography* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 36–8.

⁶ See K. S. Sacks, *Diodorus Siculus and the First Century* (Princeton, 1990); but with the qualifications of P. J. Stylianou, *BMC R* 2.6 (1991), 388–95.

⁷ Compare *FGrH* 70, Ephorus F 191 (papyrus fragments) with Diodorus 11.56–62. Ephorus F

probably made some use of Herodotus for his own account of the Persian Wars, but he differs from him in many important details, not least in his account of Thermopylae.⁸ Other differences aside, there is one major and irreconcilable respect in which Ephorus and Herodotus differ. According to Diodorus (11.8.5), Leonidas was warned by a Cymaean named Tyrhastidas (a man 'honourable and upright in character'), who deserted from the Persian camp, that an enemy force was soon to appear in his rear. Leonidas then led a valiant night attack on the Persian camp and even came close to killing Xerxes himself in the royal tent. Indeed, if Xerxes had been found in his tent, 'the whole war would have reached a speedy conclusion' (11.10.3).

This account, nearly all would agree, derives from Ephorus (himself a Cymaean), but where did he find it? The *communis opinio* is that Ephorus simply made up the night attack whole cloth.⁹ Only one scholar, Peter Green, has conceded that it may contain 'a substratum of truth', and suggests that Leonidas might have sent a determined group of men to attempt the assassination of the Great King.¹⁰ It is easy enough to imagine why Ephorus would have wanted to give a different account than did Herodotus; in order to make his own account authoritative he needed to say something that was new, and not just stylistically more modern. He may also have desired to outdo Thucydides' description (7.43–45) of the night battle at Epipolae in 413.¹¹ Since the Spartans were all killed in the end, Ephorus might have felt that it made no difference to the outcome precisely how they died.

And yet if Ephorus had simply fabricated a novel version of one of the most famous battles in Greek history without citing a plausible source, would his audience have taken him seriously?¹² Even Ctesias cited Persian oral tradition and royal records,

191 is either Ephorus undiluted or an epitome of Ephorus. The skepticism of T. W. Africa, 'Ephorus and the Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 1610', *AJP* 83 (1962), 86–9 is excessive: see C. Rubincam, 'A note on Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 1610', *Phoenix* 30 (1976), 357–66.

⁸ For similarities, see A. Bauer, *Die Benutzung Herodots durch Ephoros bei Diodor* (Leipzig, 1879); for differences, E. Schwartz, 'Ephoros', *RE* VI, I (1907), col. 15 (repr. in *Griechische Geschichtsschreiber* [Leipzig, 1959], pp. 3–26) and Macan, op. cit. (n. 2), pp. 66–77.

⁹ For example, G. Busolt, *Griechische Geschichte bis zur Schlacht bei Chaeroneia*², vol. II (Gotha, 1895), p. 685, n. 4 calls it 'ein Hauptstück seiner Phantasie'; R. W. Macan, *Herodotus. The Seventh, Eighth, & Ninth Books*, vol. I, part 1 (London, 1908), p. 323, remarks: 'The night-engagement looks like pure fiction'; E. Obst, 'Der Feldzug des Xerxes', *Klio, Beiheft* xii (1913), p. 112, who generally has a high opinion of Ephorus' value, also considers it a 'Phantasie'; A. R. Burn, *Persia and the Greeks: The Defence of the West 548–478 B.C.* (London, 1962; 2nd edn 1984), pp. 416–17 speaks of 'Ephoros at his worst'; Hignett, op. cit. (n. 1), pp. 15–16, labels it an 'absurd fiction'; J. F. Lazenby, *The Defence of Greece 490–479 B.C.* (Warminster, 1993), pp. 7, 142 dismisses it as an 'absurd story'; N. G. L. Hammond, *Historia* 45 (1996), 8, who follows Obst in thinking that Diodorus provides a valuable corrective to Herodotus, asserts that 'the night-attack was a fantasy'. The most recent book on the Persian Wars, J. M. Balcer, *The Persian Conquest of the Greeks 545–450 B.C.* (Constance, 1995), does not even mention Ephorus' version.

¹⁰ P. Green, *Xerxes at Salamis* (New York, 1970), p. 139 (repr. as *The Greco-Persian Wars* [Berkeley, 1996]).

¹¹ Just as the general confusion caused the Athenians to end up fighting with each other, so too the Persians killed one another in ignorance. Compare Thuc. 7.44.7 with Diod. 11.10.2 and note the verbal similarities. Thuc: ὥστε τέλος ξυμπεσόντες αὐτοῖς κατὰ πολλὰ τοῦ στρατοπέδου, ἐπεὶ ἀπαξ ἐταράχθησαν, φίλοι τε φίλοις καὶ πολῖται πολῖταις, οὐ μόνον ἐς φόβον κατέστησαν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐς χεῖρας ἀλλήλοις ἐλθόντες μόλις ἀπελύοντο. Diod: διὸ καὶ πολλοὶ μὲν ὑπὸ τῶν περὶ τὸν Λεωνίδην ἀνηρούντο, πλείους δὲ ὑπὸ τῶν ἰδίων ὡς ὑπὸ πολεμίων διὰ τὴν ἀγνοίαν ἀπόλωντο. ἦ τε γὰρ νύξ ἀφηρείτο τὴν ἀληθινὴν ἐπίγνωσιν, ἣ τε παραχθὴ καθ' ὅλην οὖσα τὴν στρατοπεδείαν εὐλόγως πολὺν ἐποίει φόνον.

¹² See in general J. Marincola, *Authority and Tradition in Ancient Historiography* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 95–117 and 258–66.

however speciously, when challenging Herodotus.¹³ Moreover, it has never been conclusively demonstrated that Ephorus engaged in wholesale invention of events which never took place.¹⁴ Indeed, Porphyry later claimed that Ephorus sometimes transposed verbatim 3,000 entire lines from the works of Daimachus, Callisthenes, and Anaximenes.¹⁵ Although we should not necessarily take 'verbatim' (*αὐταῖς λέξεσιν*) literally, this demonstrates that Ephorus stuck close to his authorities and did not aim at a fabricated novelty in his treatment of past events. Thus it is reasonable to look for possible sources for his Thermopylae narrative. If, then, Ephorus had a source for the night attack, who might it have been? It could not have come from Ctesias; since to judge from Photius' paraphrase, Ctesias placed the 300 Spartans at Plataea, not at Thermopylae.¹⁶ The once popular theory that Ephorus relied on an early authoritative fifth-century account of the Persian Wars by Dionysius of Miletus, who is little more than a name to us, has been thoroughly discredited.¹⁷ Who else is Ephorus likely to have consulted?

First of all, it is important to point out that there are at least two features of Diodorus' account which some modern scholars have accepted over Herodotus. This suggests that Ephorus was not relying strictly on his own imagination. One feature concerns the allegiance of the Thebans who fought on the Greek side (discussed later in this paper). The other has to do with the number of Lacedaemonians who fought at Thermopylae. Herodotus only mentions the 300 Spartiates chosen by Leonidas (7.205.2) and gives a total of 3,100 Peloponnesian hoplites (7.202); but he later quotes an epitaph (7.228.1) to the effect that 4,000 men from the Peloponnese fought at Thermopylae. Diodorus (11.4.5) seems to say that there were 1,000 Lacedaemonians in addition to the 300 Spartiates ('of the Lacedaemonians there were 1,000 and with them 300 Spartiates').¹⁸ What he actually means, however, is that there were 1,000 in

¹³ *FGrH* 688, T 8 (= Phot. *Bibl.* 72, 36a) and F 5 (= Diod. 2.32.4). On Ctesias' sources, see R. Drews, *The Greek Accounts of Eastern History* (Washington, DC, 1973), pp. 103–17 and H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, *Achaemenid History I: Sources, Structures, Synthesis* (Leiden, 1987), pp. 33–45. His reliability as a source of authentic information is succinctly demolished by Burn, op. cit. (n. 9), pp. 11–12 and more fully by J. M. Bigwood, 'Ctesias as historian of the Persian Wars', *Phoenix* 32 (1978), 19–41.

¹⁴ I have already attempted to defend Ephorus' contemporary, Theopompus of Chios, on this score: Flower, op. cit. (n. 4), pp. 184–210; and postscript to the 1997 paper edition. On Ephorus' motives and methods, see Fornara, op. cit. (n. 2), pp. 43 and 109–12; and Marincola, op. cit. (n. 12), pp. 95–8, 103.

¹⁵ *FGrH* 70 Ephorus, T 17.

¹⁶ *FGrH* 688, F 13.28. Although Photius' epitome of Ctesias' highly idiosyncratic account of the Persian Wars is extremely jejune, other significant differences are apparent. Ctesias (F 13.27) claimed that Xerxes sent 40,000 soldiers by the mountain path and that they were guided by the two leading men of Trachis, whereas Diodorus (11.8.4–5) implies that the path was revealed by a local Trachinian peasant ('a certain one of the natives who was familiar with the mountainous area') and puts the Persian force at 20,000. On the other hand, Photius' bald statement that the Lacedaemonians 'having been surrounded, all died fighting bravely' (*καὶ κυκλωθέντες ἀπέθανον μαχόμενοι ἀνδρείως ἅπαντες*), is too vague to rule out a night attack.

¹⁷ This was last championed by Obst, op. cit. (n. 9), pp. 27–30, who also argues that Herodotus used Dionysius (*FrGH* 687). The postulated importance of Dionysius is decisively refuted by Hignett, op. cit. (n. 1), p. 13, who doubts that he even lived in the fifth century.

¹⁸ J. A. R. Munro, *JHS* 22 (1902), 307, n. 22 (tentatively) and W. W. How and J. Wells, *A Commentary on Herodotus*, vol. II (Oxford, 1928), p. 222, accept Diodorus' figure of 1,000 perioeci. Munro, however, leaves open the possibility that the number of 1,000 was merely inferred from Demaratus' advice to Xerxes at Hdt. 7.102. Lazenby, op. cit. (n. 9), pp. 134–5, suggests that it is the epitaph which is wrong. Hammond, op. cit., (n. 9), p. 7, accepts Diodorus, but believes that 4,000 is a round number.

all (700 Lacedaemonians and 300 Spartiates); for he also says that Leonidas decided to take only 1,000 Lacedaemonians (11.4.2) and that he marched out to Thermopylae with a force of 4,000 men, including 3,000 other Greeks (11.4.5–6). Thus Diodorus agrees with the epitaph. The most likely explanation is that Herodotus neglected to mention the 700 Lacedaemonians (who were perioeci) because they did not stay to perish with the 300 Spartiates (actually, 298).¹⁹ This is indeed the most likely explanation because it is confirmed by Isocrates, who mentions a thousand Lacedaemonians in all.²⁰ For as soon as one discounts the intellectual subservience of Ephorus to his reputed teacher as a modern invention, it then becomes clear that Diodorus and Isocrates are giving independent testimony and corroborate each other.

If Ephorus was right about the number of Lacedaemonians, might there be other aspects of his account which deserve consideration? It has been claimed that Ephorus changed sources when he came to narrate the night attack because the style of Diodorus 11.9.2–11.10.4 is ‘bombastic and rhetorical’; but this is a completely arbitrary judgement.²¹ The style and tone of this section differs in no respect from that of the previous narrative. Leaving aside the question of how many different sources he may have used, I can think of several possibilities of where Ephorus might have obtained his information about the night attack. He may be recording a genuine oral tradition which is independent of Herodotus, perhaps a tradition preserved in his native Cymae by the family of Tyrrhastidas, the deserter who informed Leonidas.²² Or he may be preserving a popular story which reflects the growing panhellenist sentiment of the later fifth and early to mid-fourth centuries. Or it is possible that Ephorus has taken his account from some now lost fifth- or fourth-century prose author other than Ctesias, such as Charon of Lampsacus or Damastes of Sigeum.²³

¹⁹ *Contra* Hammond, op. cit. (n. 9), p. 12, who asserts: ‘The best explanation is that during the transmission of Herodotus’ text 1,000 Lacedaemonians have been lost.’ Positing lacunae to account for omissions of detail in our sources is not sound method and there is no grammatical indication that words have dropped out of Herodotus’ text at this point.

²⁰ *Panegyricus* 90; *Archidamus* 99. It should be noted, however, that Isocrates implies that all 1,000 were annihilated and that this suits his rhetorical purpose in both passages.

²¹ Hammond, op. cit. (n. 9), p. 8, following Obst, op. cit. (n. 9); cf. n. 23 below.

²² As Burn, op. cit. (n. 9), pp. 416–17 suggests: ‘Diodoros names one of these deserters, or rather courageous escapers (all no doubt Greeks); Tyrrhastidas of Kyme. This is probably historical, the proud memory of the Man who Warned Leonidas being handed down in his family for a century, to reach Ephoros, also of Kyme, Diodoros’ source.’ See also D. H. Samuel, ‘Cyme and the veracity of Ephorus’, *TAPA* 99 (1968), 375–88, esp. 381–2, who calls it a local tradition. Neither, however, attributes the night attack to this same local source. Rather, Burn continues, ‘But Diodoros’ account of the rest of the operation represents Ephoros at his worst.’

²³ Barber, op. cit. (n. 2), pp. 121–2 speculates that Ephorus made frequent use of fourth-century *Persica* and *Atticides*. Hammond, op. cit. (n. 9), pp. 8–10, contends that Ephorus used an excellent early fifth-century source for his account of Thermopylae, and suggests someone like Damastes, Charon, or Aristophanes of Boeotia. But he also argues that Ephorus abandoned this source for his account of the night attack (Diod. 11.9.2–11.10.4): ‘Instead, he took up an imaginative and flamboyant account with all the features of self-glorification which are characteristic of many a freedom-fighter’s ballad.’ In any case, it is doubtful whether any fifth-century historical writer either published before Herodotus or gave a detailed narrative of the Persian Wars: *contra* R. L. Fowler, ‘Herodotus and his contemporaries’, *JHS* 116 (1996), 62–87, who maintains, against Jacoby, that some of the so-called ‘local’ historians were known to Herodotus, among whom he includes Charon (but not Damastes). For the standard view that all such historians were later than Herodotus, see F. Jacoby, *Abhandlungen zur griechischen Geschichtsschreibung*, H. Bloch (ed.), (Leiden, 1956), pp. 16–64; and note S. Hornblower, *Thucydides* (Baltimore, 1987), p. 19, n. 14.

II. SIMONIDES ON THERMOPYLAE

Why, however, should one postulate an unknown source (whether written or oral), when Ephorus himself named an earlier authority? At the end of his account of the battle, Diodorus (11.11.6) quotes nine lines from an otherwise unknown lyric poem by Simonides of Ceos; and the way in which he introduces these lines indicates that he is only quoting part of the whole.²⁴ That whole was surely a long choral song:

διόπερ οὐχ οἱ τῶν ἱστοριῶν συγγραφεῖς μόνον, ἀλλὰ πολλοὶ καὶ τῶν ποιητῶν καθύμνησαν αὐτῶν τὰς ἀνδραγαθίας· ὧν γέγονε καὶ Σιμωνίδης, ὁ μελοποιός, ἄξιον τῆς ἀρετῆς αὐτῶν ποιήσας ἐγκώμιον, ἐν ᾧ λέγει·

τῶν ἐν Θερμοπύλαις θανόντων
 εὐκλεῆς μὲν ἂ τύχα, καλὸς δ' ὁ πότμος,
 βωμὸς δ' ὁ τάφος, πρὸ γόων δὲ μνάστις, ὁ δ' οἶκτος ἔπαινος·
 ἐντάφιον δὲ τοιοῦτον εὐρῶς
 οὔθ' ὁ πανδαμάτωρ ἀμαυρῶσει χρόνος.
 ἀνδρῶν ἀγαθῶν ὅδε σηκὸς οἰκέταν εὐδοξίαν
 Ἑλλάδος εἴλετο. μαρτυρεῖ δὲ καὶ Λεωνίδας,
 Σπάρτας βασιλεὺς, ἀρετᾶς μέγαν λελοιπῶς
 κόσμον ἀέναόν τε κλέος.

Therefore not only the writers of histories, but also many of the poets have celebrated their brave deeds. One of these is Simonides the lyric poet, who composed a eulogy worthy of their valour, in which he says: Of those who died at Thermopylae glorious is the fortune, fair is the fate; their grave is an altar, instead of lamentation they have remembrance, for pity they have praise. Such a shroud (or 'funeral gift') neither mould nor all-subduing time shall make obscure. This shrine of noble men chose the good reputation of Greece as its inhabitant. Leonidas also bears witness, king of Sparta, who left behind a great adornment of valour and everflowing fame.

The place and occasion for the first performance of this poem have been much debated. It most likely was sung on a public occasion at a shrine (σηκός) dedicated to the Thermopylae dead, either at Sparta or at Thermopylae itself.²⁵ However that may be, it is beyond reasonable doubt that Diodorus found these lines in Ephorus. Similarly, when Diodorus quotes lines from Eupolis and from Aristophanes when discussing the causes of the Peloponnesian War (12.40.6), he surely found those verses quoted by Ephorus.²⁶ If Ephorus corrected and supplemented Thucydides with comic verses, it would not be surprising if he used lyric to correct and supplement Herodotus. The newly published fragments of Simonides' long elegiac poem on the battle of Plataea give a good indication of how much detail such works might contain.²⁷

²⁴ = D. L. Page, *Poetae Melici Graeci* (Oxford, 1962), 26/531, whose text is here reproduced.

²⁵ For various interpretations, see C. M. Bowra, *Greek Lyric Poetry?* (Oxford, 1961), pp. 344–9; A. J. Podlecki, *Historia* 17 (1968), 258–62; E. Degani and G. Burzacchini, *Lirici Greci. Antologia* (Florence, 1977), pp. 316–22; and J. H. Molyneux, *Simonides. A Historical Study* (Wauconda, IL, 1992), pp. 185–7 (who gives further bibliography).

²⁶ Diodorus quotes seven lines of Aristophanes' *Peace* (603–6, 609–11), two lines from his *Acharnians* (531–2), and three lines from a play of Eupolis. Diodorus explicitly cites Ephorus as his source for the causes of the Peloponnesian War at 12.41.1. For a non-Diodoran example of Ephorus quoting a poetic text, see Strabo 6.3.3. In the middle of his summary of Ephorus' account of the foundation of Tarentum, Strabo quotes five lines of Tyrtaeus (which it is reasonable to assume that he is also reproducing from Ephorus).

²⁷ See, M. L. West, *Iambi et Elegi Graeci?*, vol. II (Oxford, 1992), pp. 118–22 and 'Simonides Redivivus', *ZPE* 98 (1993), 1–14; D. Boedeker, 'Simonides on Plataea: narrative elegy, mythic history', *ZPE* 107 (1995), 217–29; and D. Boedeker and D. Sider (edd.), *The New Simonides, Arcthusa* 29 (1996). The poem was probably several hundred lines long: see West, 'Simonides Redivivus', 4.

Simonides' poem on Plataea was a narrative elegy on an historical subject and we know of other such elegies which dealt with historical themes, such as Mimmermus' *Smyrneis* and Semonides' *Archaiologia*.²⁸ Simonides himself wrote poems about all of the major battles of the Persian Wars: apparently both an elegiac and a lyric poem about Artemisium, a lyric (or possibly elegiac) poem about Salamis, the Plataea elegy, and perhaps an elegy on Marathon.²⁹ These poems would have been a prime source for any later writer who wished to challenge the Herodotean version of events. Indeed, Plutarch in his polemical essay *On the Malice of Herodotus* (872b–e) cites six lines from the Plataea elegy as part of his attempt to undermine Herodotus' veracity.

But Diodorus quotes from a lyric, not an elegiac, poem. Is that a significant difference? Could Simonides have narrated the battle of Thermopylae with the same degree of detail as he apparently treated Plataea? A lyric poem can provide a narrative just as well as an elegiac one. Indeed, Dionysius of Halicarnassus implies that lyric can tell a story just as effectively as prose; and he demonstrates the resemblance between lyric and fine prose by quoting 26 lines from a poem by Simonides in which Danae, the mother of Perseus, is being carried across the sea and lamenting her fate.³⁰ Among extant works, Pindar's *Pythian 4* is a good example of a complex story told in a lyric ode of considerable length. So if Simonides wanted to describe the course of the fighting at Thermopylae in lyric verses, there was no generic restriction on his doing so.

Although it is not always noticed, Diodorus is not our only source to mention the night attack. The same account (with minor variations) is given both by Justin (2.11.12–18) and by Plutarch (*On the Malice of Herodotus* 866a). Plutarch emphatically claims that this is the true version:³¹

‘Ο δ’ Ἡρόδοτος ἐν τῇ διηγῆσει τῆς μάχης καὶ τοῦ Λεωνίδου τὴν μεγίστην ἡμαύρωκε πράξιν, αὐτοῦ πεσεῖν πάντας εἰπὼν ἐν τοῖς στενοῖς περὶ τὸν κολωνόν· ἐπράχθη δ’ ἄλλως. ἐπεὶ γὰρ ἐπύθοντο νύκτωρ τὴν περίοδον τῶν πολεμίων, ἀναστάντες ἐβάδιζον ἐπὶ τὸ στρατόπεδον καὶ τὴν σκηνὴν [ὀλίγου δεῖν] βασιλέως, ὡς ἐκείνους αὐτὸν ἀποκτενοῦντες καὶ περὶ ἐκείνῳ τεθηξόμενοι· μέχρι μὲν οὖν τῆς σκηνῆς αἰεὶ τὸν ἐμποδὼν φονεοῦντες, τοὺς δ’ ἄλλους τρεπόμενοι προήλθον· ἐπεὶ δ’ οὐχ ἠύρισκετο Ξέρξης, ζητοῦντες ἐν μεγάλῳ καὶ ἀχανεῖ στρατεύματι καὶ πλανώμενοι μόλις ὑπὸ τῶν βαρβάρων πανταχόθεν περιχυθέντων διεφθάρσαν.

Herodotus in his narration of the battle has made obscure the greatest deed of Leonidas, when he said that all of them fell in the narrow area by the hill. It happened otherwise. For when they learned during the night about the outflanking movement of the enemy, they arose and marched to the camp and tent of the king, intending to kill him and willing to die in the attempt. They proceeded right up to the tent, killing anyone in their way and routing the rest. When Xerxes was not to be found, while seeking him in the vast and sprawling camp and wandering about, they were with difficulty destroyed by the barbarians who pressed upon them from every side.

Unfortunately, Plutarch does not name his source, but it could have been either Ephorus or Simonides. In *On the Malice of Herodotus*, Plutarch cites three different poems of Simonides: two epigrams (869c and 871b) and six lines (872d–e) from Simonides' poem on Plataea. He also cites Ephorus twice (855e–f and 869a).

²⁸ For these poems see E. L. Bowie, 'Early Greek elegy, symposium and public festival', *JHS* 1986 (106), 13–35.

²⁹ For discussion of the testimonia, see Boedeker, 'Simonides on Plataea', op. cit. (n. 27), 218–19, 223; and I. Rutherford, 'The New Simonides: towards a commentary', in D. Boedeker and D. Sider (edd.), op. cit. (n. 27), pp. 169–73.

³⁰ *On Literary Composition* 26 = Page, *PMG* 38/543.

³¹ The peculiar nature of Plutarch's essay *On the Malice of Herodotus* is well discussed by J. M. Marincola, 'Plutarch's refutation of Herodotus', *The Ancient World* 25.2 (1994), 191–203.

Although Justin's source (Pompeius Trogus) was surely using Ephorus (although perhaps indirectly through Timagenes of Alexandria),³² we cannot be sure whether Plutarch found the night attack in Ephorus or Simonides, or quite possibly in both. In any case, it is very likely that Plutarch knew the part of Simonides' poem which Diodorus quotes, since his statement that Herodotus 'has obscured (ἡμαύρωκε) Leonidas' greatest deed' is a play on Simonides' statement that 'neither mould nor all-subduing time shall make obscure (ἀμαυρώσει) such a shroud'.³³ In other words, Plutarch is saying that Herodotus managed to accomplish what neither mould nor the passage of time should have been able to effect.

Apart from the night attack itself, there are several peculiar details in Diodorus' account of the battle which are explicable in terms of a poetic source. First of all, it is noteworthy that whereas in Herodotus (7.205, 222, 233), the Thebans were forced by Leonidas to fight against their will, Diodorus (11.4.7) clearly implies that the 400 Thebans who went to Thermopylae went of their own accord. He says that 'there were about 400 Thebans from the other party; for the inhabitants of Thebes were divided against each other concerning the alliance with the Persians'. One could make an argument that Diodorus' version is the right one and that Herodotus merely reflects anti-Theban sentiments,³⁴ but there is another way of viewing the difference in their accounts. The account of Plataea by Simonides is encomiastic and ethnocentric. He included an explicit comparison with the Trojan War, including a description of the death of Achilles, and every participating Greek city seems to have been given an important role in the battle. Herodotus, by contrast, does not give equal praise to everyone. The Corinthians, for instance, disobey Pausanias' orders (9.52) and miss the battle altogether (9.69), whereas in the Plataea elegy (fr. 15–16 West) they are given a prominent role in the battle.³⁵ So too the Thebans at Thermopylae are accorded an honourable role.

If, however, Simonides wished to make the Thebans look good, how did he deal with the allegation that they surrendered after Leonidas had been killed and that Xerxes then had them branded 'with royal marks' (Hdt. 7.233)? Let us begin with the

³² For Trogus' use of Ephorus, see J. C. Yardley (trans.) and W. Heckel (ed.), *Justin, Epitome of the Philippic History of Pompeius Trogus, Books 11–12: Alexander the Great* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 30–4. The accounts of Thermopylae by Diodorus, Trogus, and Plutarch are compared in detail by Hammond, *op. cit.* (n. 9), who concludes that all three drew on Ephorus.

³³ The verb ἀμαυρώω, however, appears elsewhere in Plutarch. Note especially *Pelopidas* 25.11.

³⁴ As does, for example, Burn, *op. cit.* (n. 9), pp. 417–19; Green, *op. cit.* (n. 10), p. 140; Lazenby, *op. cit.* (n. 9), p. 144; and A. Keaveney, 'Persian behaviour and misbehaviour: some Herodotean examples', *Athenaeum* 84 (1996), 38–48. Hammond, *op. cit.*, (n. 9), p. 3, on the other hand, attributes this detail to a pro-Theban bias on the part of Ephorus on the grounds that 'Ephorus was the author who took the most favourable view of the Thebans during their supremacy in the fourth century.' But Ephorus was candid about Theban shortcomings even during the period of her hegemony (cf. Strabo 9.2.2 = *FGH* 70, Ephorus F 119) and he did not conceal the extent of Theban medizing in 479 (cf. Diod. 11.32.2; 11.33.4).

³⁵ See the discussion by D. Boedeker, 'Heroic historiography: Simonides and Herodotus on Plataea', in D. Boedeker and D. Sider (edd.), *op. cit.* (n. 27), pp. 235–6 and 239. It is unclear whether fr. 15, which begins with the ambiguous words μέσσοι δ' οἶ τ', refers to the Corinthians merely being stationed in the middle of the battle line or actually fighting in that position. For the former interpretation, see W. Luppe, 'Die Korinther in der Schlacht von Plataiai bei Simonides nach Plutarch', *APh* 40 (1994), 21–4. The latter interpretation, however, is supported by Plutarch, who quotes these lines, since he claims (872b–e) that they refute Herodotus' negative portrayal of the Corinthian contribution in the battle: 'But as for the Corinthians and the position in which they fought the barbarians (τάξιω ἣν ἐμάχοντο τοῖς βαρβάροις) and the consequence which the battle of Plataea had for them, it is possible to learn this from Simonides.'

role of the Thebans in Ephorus, and then work back to Ephorus' source. Diodorus (11.9.2) says that Leonidas retained only the 200 Thespians from among the allies; Justin (2.11.11–15) says that only the Lacedaemonians remained (but gives their total at 600, which must include the Thespians); Herodotus, of course, reports (7.202, 222) that Leonidas kept 700 Thespians and 400 Thebans with him when he dismissed the allies. The discrepancy in the number of Thespians is not significant; what is noteworthy is the absence of the Thebans in both Diodorus and Justin. This cannot be coincidental in the sense that each of them overly compressed their source. The logical inference is that Ephorus (the ultimate common source of both accounts) did not mention them as remaining with Leonidas.³⁶ What about Simonides? Plutarch gives us a hint as to what Simonides did not say (*On the Malice of Herodotus*, 867a): 'Nor does anyone before Herodotus know that the Thebans were branded by Xerxes' (it is more emphatic in Greek: οὔτε γιννώσκει τις ἀνθρώπων πρὸ Ἡροδότου). At a minimum this indicates that Simonides did not mention the branding. I would suggest that he also omitted any reference to the Theban presence with Leonidas after the other allies had escaped, and that Ephorus followed his authority on this point as well.

As for the other peculiar features, Herodotus and Diodorus agree that on the first day of the battle the Medes attacked first, followed by the Persian Immortals. But Herodotus (7.212) does not say which nationalities among Xerxes' forces fought the Greeks on the second day of the battle. Diodorus (11.8.1), however, has Xerxes 'choose from every nation the men who seemed to excel in courage and boldness'. This 'picked' force was also easily defeated, thus demonstrating the martial superiority of the Greeks.

Lastly, both Diodorus (11.4.2–4) and Plutarch (866b–d; cf. 225a–e) record anecdotes (although not the same ones) to the effect that Leonidas knew that he was marching out to his death when he left Sparta. That is not what we find in Herodotus (7.206), who emphasizes that his force was a mere advance guard. Was Simonides ultimately responsible for this other tradition? Although the anecdotes themselves are unlikely to be his, he might well have compared the short but glorious life of Leonidas to that of Achilles (whose death seems to have figured in fr. 10–11 of the Plataea elegy). Achilles knew that he would not return home from Troy (*Il.* 1.352, 416–18; 9.410–16; 18.94–101) and Leonidas might seem more heroic if he had similar foreknowledge. To be sure, both Achilles and Leonidas could have chosen to return home, and it is worth noting that the motives for their decision to stay and die are also broadly similar: it was unseemly to leave and glory winning to stay (cf. *Il.* 18.96–126 with *Hdt.* 7.220 and *Diod.* 11.9.1–2). By deciding to remain at Thermopylae, Leonidas, like Achilles, bought himself a short life but immortal glory. Homer (*Il.* 9.413) speaks of Achilles' κλέος ἄφθιτον and Simonides of Leonidas' ἀνάων κλέος.

III. WHOM SHOULD WE BELIEVE: EPHORUS, HERODOTUS, OR NEITHER?

None of the possible sources mentioned above, including Simonides, would prove that Ephorus' version is the true version or that he was not influenced by some of the motifs in Thucydides' account of Epipolae (such as soldiers mistakenly killing their own men); it only means that he did not invent the night attack whole cloth. But if Ephorus did indeed find the night attack in Simonides, could this be the 'true' account of what happened? In order for Ephorus to obtain a fair hearing, we would

³⁶ *Contra* Hammond, op. cit. (n. 9), p. 9, who thinks that Diodorus has made a careless mistake.

need to read his narrative in his own words; for as G. B. Grote aptly observed: 'The rhetoric of Diodorus is not calculated to strengthen the evidence in its favour.'³⁷ Ephorus verbatim could only be more credible and coherent than Ephorus as summarized, edited, and adapted by Diodorus. None the less, a night attack is not as improbable as modern historians claim.³⁸ Many of Leonidas' picked 300 Spartiates may have gone through the *krypteia*, a rite of passage whereby select young men were sent out into the countryside, armed with only a dagger, hid by day, and by night killed as many helots as they could find.³⁹ If so, a night-time offensive in a hopeless struggle may not have seemed such a rash gamble. In fact, we are told that Parmenio later advised Alexander the Great to attack Darius' army at Gaugamela at night, precisely because Alexander's army was so badly outnumbered.⁴⁰

It must also be worth something that Pompeius Trogus and Plutarch, regardless of what rhetorical incentives they may have had, accepted Ephorus' account. And Plutarch, as argued above, may well have known the entire text of Simonides' poem on Thermopylae as well as being familiar with Ephorus. This raises an important question. It is also very likely that Herodotus knew this poem of Simonides; but even if he did not, he surely would have known of the night attack tradition had it been as old as Simonides. Why, then, did he choose to ignore it? It may be because he rejected it as unhistorical, or it may be that he omitted it for literary reasons. Nor are these mutually exclusive propositions.

First of all, it is necessary to recognize that what we know about the history of the Persian Wars represents only a fraction of the traditions that were current in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. It has plausibly been argued by A. B. Bosworth that the fourth-century philosopher Heraclides of Pontus preserves a factual anecdote about the family history of the notorious spendthrift Callias, son of Hipponicus, which requires that a Persian landing was made on the island of Euboea in 499 B.C.⁴¹ One would never guess that such an attack occurred from Herodotus' account of the Ionian Revolt, because Herodotus does not exclusively preserve all of the traditions, either oral or poetic, about the Persian Wars which had survived into the mid-fifth century and beyond.

Secondly, we must consider the literary and artistic concerns which influence the presentation and selection of material in any historical narrative. In Diodorus' narrative of the final struggle, all of the significant action takes place at night (11.9–10). The Greeks learn about the betrayal of the pass 'about the middle of the night' (*περὶ μέσας νύκτας*). They attack the Persian camp 'by night' (*νυκτός*). Many of the Persians were slain by the troops of Leonidas (300 Spartans and 200 Thespians) and many more by their own comrades who mistakenly took them for the enemy; 'for

³⁷ *History of Greece*, vol. IV (London, 1884), p. 439, n. 1.

³⁸ Lazenby, *op. cit.* (n. 9), p. 142, rejecting Green, *op. cit.* (n. 10), says that 'Greek hoplites were not commandos, and such an attack would be quite unparalleled.' But this ignores not only the *krypteia*, but also the night battle at Epipolae.

³⁹ Plato, *Laws* 633b; Plut., *Lyc.* 28; with E. Lévy, 'La krypteia et ses contradictions', *Ktema* 13 (1988), 245–52; N. M. Kennell, *The Gymnasium of Virtue. Education and Culture in Ancient Sparta* (Chapel Hill, 1995), pp. 131–2; and L. Thommen, *Lakedaimonion Politeia. Die Entstehung der spartanischen Verfassung* (Stuttgart, 1996), pp. 128–9, who argues that the killing of helots was an innovation of the mid fifth century (but that cannot be proved).

⁴⁰ Plut. *Alex.* 31.5–7; Arr. 3.10; Curt. 4.13.1–10. Although one may doubt whether Parmenio himself ever gave this advice, the anecdote at least shows that a large-scale night attack was a conceivable strategy.

⁴¹ 'Heraclides of Pontus and the past: fact or fiction', in I. Worthington (ed.), *Ventures into Greek History* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 15–27.

the night (ἡ τε γὰρ νύξ) took away understanding of the true state of affairs'. So long as it was night (τῆς δὲ νυκτὸς καθεστῶσης) the Greeks, having failed to find the king in his tent, wandered throughout the camp seeking Xerxes. But when day came (ἡμέρας δὲ γενομένης) and the Persians realized the paucity of their opponents, they surrounded the Greeks and shot them down with arrows and javelins. In short, night favours the Greeks and daylight the Persians.

In Herodotus the order is partially reversed. Although the Greeks received their first warnings while it was still night, first from the seer Megistias and then from deserters, Herodotus implies that they took no action. When at dawn (ἡδη διαφαινούσης ἡμέρης) the day-scouts (ἡμεροσκόποι) brought news of the Persian advance over the pass, the Greeks then met in council (7.219). Xerxes waited 'for the time when the agora is just about full' (7.223.1), which would be about nine or ten o'clock in the morning, and then attacked. The Greeks advanced beyond the narrowest part of the pass to meet the Persians and there was a fierce struggle over the body of Leonidas 'until the Greeks by their valour dragged the body away and drove back the enemy four times' (7.225.1). After retrieving the body, they retreated to a hillock where they were surrounded and shot down.

What is the significance of this temporal difference in Diodorus and Herodotus? As Christopher Pelling has recently pointed out in an important article on Aeschylus' *Persae*, 'dusk is the appropriate time for dark and dusty deeds of derring-do'.⁴² In the *Persae*, as he demonstrates: 'Day and light tend to be reserved for Greek actions, and to suggest hope and victory: the Persians move in the dark. This combines with a second, very natural contrast, whereby the dark is connected with furtiveness and deception, the light with openness.' Herodotus, however, in his narrative of Salamis does not develop this contrast in quite the same way; rather, for him, night is the time not only for deception, but for Greek irresolution as well.⁴³ Unfortunately, there are no indications of time in Diodorus' account of Salamis, so we cannot know how Ephorus handled this (although he may well have used Aeschylus' *Persae* as a source).⁴⁴

This contrast between day and night is also central to the account of Thermopylae which we find in Diodorus and Herodotus. The Greeks of Diodorus act like Diomedes and Odysseus in Book 10 of the *Iliad*, where during the night Diomedes slays the Thracian king Rhesus and twelve of his men in their sleep. Herodotus is also influenced by Homer, but is using a different episode as his model. At 7.225.1 he writes: *Ἐέρξεώ τε δὴ δύο ἀδελφοὶ ἐνθαῦτα πίπτουσι μαχόμενοι, <καὶ> ὑπὲρ τοῦ νεκροῦ τοῦ Λεωνίδεω Περσέων τε καὶ Λακεδαιμονίων ὤθισμός ἐγένετο πολλός, ἐς ὃ τοῦτόν τε ἀρετῇ οἱ Ἕλληνες ὑπεξείρυσαν καὶ ἐτρέψαντο τοὺς ἐναντίους τετράκις.* ('Thus two brothers of Xerxes fell there while fighting, and over the body of Leonidas there arose a great pushing between the Persians and Lacedaemonians until the Greeks by their valour dragged the body away and drove back the enemy four times.')

⁴² 'Aeschylus' *Persae* and history', in C. Pelling (ed.), *Greek Tragedy and the Historian* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 1–19. Cf. P. Vidal-Naquet, *The Black Hunter*, trans. A. Szegedy-Maszak (Baltimore, 1986), ch. 5, esp. p. 118.

⁴³ Pelling, op. cit. (n. 42), pp. 2–3, and p. 5, n. 16.

⁴⁴ As first suggested by G. Busolt, *RhM* 38 (1883), 628. See further, Munro, op. cit. (n. 18), 329–30 and Hignett, op. cit. (n. 1), pp. 221–2, who argue that Ephorus' version of Salamis does not rest on independent evidence no longer extant, but is a critical reconstruction of Herodotus based on deductions from Aeschylus. But might Ephorus also have consulted Simonides' lyric poem on Salamis? The differences between the accounts of Diodorus and Herodotus are discussed by Hignett, op. cit. (n. 1), pp. 220–2, and Lazenby, op. cit. (n. 9), pp. 184–5 (who gives additional bibliography).

This fight over the body of Leonidas is clearly meant to recall that of the Trojans and Greeks over Patroclus in Book 17 of the *Iliad*.⁴⁵ The epic effect is heightened by the mention of Xerxes' brothers, whose names and genealogy had been given in the previous section. In *Iliad* 17, after a long and bitter struggle, the Achaeans fled to their ships with the body while the Trojans pressed hard upon them. Then in Book 18 Hector 'three times' tried to drag away the body of Patroclus and 'three times the two Ajaxes, clad in impetuous valour, beat him from the corpse' (lines 155–8: *τρὶς μὲν μιν μετόπισθε ποδῶν λάβε φαίδιμος Ἴκτωρ ἐλκόμενοι μεμαῶς, μέγα δὲ Τρώεσσιν ὁμόκλα· τρὶς δὲ δῦ' Αἰάντες, θούριον ἐπιειμένοι ἀλκῆν, νεκροῦ ἀπεστυφέλιξαν*). Perhaps the 'four times' that the Spartans repulsed the Persians is meant to signal that, despite their defeat, they had surpassed in valour the Achaean heroes who had fought at Troy; the *ἀρετῆ* of the Lacedaemonians was greater than the *ἀλκῆ* of the two Ajaxes. And perhaps we are meant to recall that Hector would eventually have dragged away the body, if Achilles had not intervened (cf. lines 158–238); yet the Spartans, in the absence of Leonidas himself, had no Achilles to help them. In any case, it is striking how a single sentence in Herodotus can invoke in the mind of the reader a whole range of passages in Homer; we need not look for specific verbal parallels in order to appreciate the effect.⁴⁶

Since both Ephorus and Herodotus are moulding their narrative according to a Homeric pattern, can we choose between their accounts as easily as most, if not all, modern historians have so confidently done? It is, of course, easier to believe an author who survives over one who does not, and an earlier over a later source. There is also Polybius' oft-quoted assertion that Ephorus had some knowledge of naval warfare, but was 'completely without experience of battles on land'.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, given that those Greeks who could have given the most authoritative account of the final struggle were all killed and that fifth- and fourth-century writers, such as Herodotus and Ephorus, viewed the events of the Persian Wars through the lens of Homeric epic, any attempt to reconstruct 'what actually happened' is inherently problematic.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ As noted by H. Immerwahr, *Form and Thought in Herodotus* (Cleveland, 1966), p. 263. For the influence of Homer on Herodotus in general, see L. Hüber, 'Herodots Homerverständnis', in H. Flashar and K. Gaiser (edd.), *Synusia: Festgabe für W. Schadewaldt* (Pfullingen, 1965), pp. 29–52; H. Strasburger, 'Homer und die Geschichtsschreibung, in *Studien zur Alten Geschichte*, vol. II (Hildesheim and New York, 1982), pp. 1057–97; M. Lang, *Herodotean Narrative and Discourse* (Cambridge, MA, 1984), pp. 37–51; G. L. Huxley, *Herodotus and the Epic* (Athens, 1989); H. Erbse, *Studien zum Verständnis Herodots* (Berlin, 1992), pp. 122–32; Hornblower, *Greek Historiography*, op. cit. (n. 5), pp. 65–7; and J. M. Marincola, 'Odysseus and the historians', *Histos* 1 (October, 1996).

⁴⁶ The influence of Homer on narrative patterns and contrasts in Thucydides is well discussed by C. J. Mackie, 'Homer and Thucydides: Corcyra and Sicily', *CQ* 46 (1996), 103–13, who concludes (p. 113): 'It is by means of such narrative techniques, rather than a wide proliferation of verbal echoes, that the Sicilian venture has an epic feel to it, without being too obviously "Homeric".' Mackie, however, does not discuss whether Thucydides consciously deviated from his received core of historical 'facts' for the sake of creating those patterns.

⁴⁷ *FGrH* 70, T 20 = Polyb. 12.25f. Polybius goes on to criticize Ephorus' depiction of the battles of Leuctra in 371 and of Mantinea in 362; he makes no mention of Ephorus' Persian War narrative.

⁴⁸ On the problems involved in reconstructing ancient battles, see the still fundamental article by N. Whatley (written in 1920), 'On the possibility of reconstructing Marathon and other ancient battles', *JHS* 84 (1964), 119–39. Note also A. J. Woodman, *Rhetoric in Classical Historiography* (London, 1988), pp. 15–23 and R. Osborne, *Greece in the Making, 1200–479 B.C.* (London, 1996), p. 337, who comments about the invasion of 480/79: 'Ignorance of troop

Most modern scholars, for example, accept the fight over Leonidas at face value, but its improbability was implicitly recognized long ago by Macan.⁴⁹ To be sure, the Spartans would have been eager to retrieve the body of Leonidas, since upon death Spartan kings were given extravagant funerals (Hdt. 6.58–9) and perhaps hero cult (Xen. *Lac. Pol.* 15.9).⁵⁰ Yet it is hard to believe that it all happened just the way that Herodotus has described it. In the heat of battle would someone have noticed that the Persians had been repulsed exactly ‘four times’ and then have lived to tell about it? Would the Persians (acting just like good Trojans) even have recognized Leonidas (as the Trojans recognized Patroclus), especially when Leonidas must have looked much like any other Spartan hoplite? Is it just coincidence that in the prelude to the battle of Plataea (Hdt. 9.20–3) there was a similar struggle over the body of Masistius between the Persian cavalry and a corps of 300 picked Athenians?⁵¹ At least in this case Masistius would have been easy enough to recognize, with his beautifully adorned Nisaeon charger, breastplate of golden scales, and purple cloak. Nor is Thermopylae the only battle narrative to be contaminated by Homeric borrowings; for it is highly improbable that the Athenians actually called for fire when attacking the Persian ships at Marathon or that Cynegirus was killed while grabbing a ship’s curved stern given that a nearly identical scene in almost the very same words appears in the *Iliad*.⁵²

It should at least be clear that neither we, nor our sources, have sufficient information to reconstruct what took place during the last night and day at Thermopylae with as much certainty and precision as many moderns lay claim to. Even putting aside the distorting effects of the literary artifice and cultural bias of our sources, all of the Spartans and Thespians who remained with Leonidas were killed, and the Thebans who surrendered, if they spoke of it at all, are unlikely to have given

numbers itself makes battle reconstruction futile, but in any case stories about what happened in the battles became so politically charged that no confidence can be placed in any claims about what went on. . . . The military story that can be told is therefore thin.’

⁴⁹ Macan, *op. cit.* (n. 9), p. 332. Commenting on this passage, he writes: ‘How was all this remembered? Did the Thebans report it? or Persians? or Greeks on the Persian side? Or stray local onlookers?’

⁵⁰ See P. A. Cartledge, *Agesilaos and the Crisis of Sparta* (London, 1987) pp. 331–43 and R. Parker, ‘Spartan religion’, in A. Powell (ed.), *Classical Sparta: Techniques behind her Success* (London, 1988), pp. 152–3. In the next century, the body of Agesilaos was brought home all the way from Libya; apart from the kings, Spartans were always buried in the region where they died (Plut. *Ages.* 40.4).

⁵¹ Diodorus (11.30.1–4) puts the battle at night, implies that the picked Athenians were Aristides’ personal bodyguard, and makes no mention of the fight over the corpse.

⁵² Cf. W. Aly, *Volksmärchen, Sage und Novelle bei Herodot und seinen Zeitgenossen* (Göttingen, 1921), p. 150. Herodotus writes as follows at 6.113.2–114: *φεύγουσι δὲ τοῖσι Πέρσησι εἴποντο κόπτοντες, ἔς ὃ ἐπὶ τὴν θάλασσαν ἀπικόμενοι πῦρ τε αἶτεον καὶ ἐπελαμβάνοντο τῶν νεῶν. καὶ τοῦτο μὲν ἐν τούτῳ τῷ πόνῳ ὁ πολέμαρχος [Καλλιμάχος] διαφθείρεται, ἀνὴρ γενόμενος ἀγαθός, ἀπὸ δ’ ἔθανε τῶν στρατηγῶν Σττησήλεως ὁ Θρασύλεω· τοῦτο δὲ Κυνέγειρος ὁ Εὐφορίωνος ἐνθαῦτα ἐπιλαμβανόμενος τῶν ἀφλάστων νεός, τὴν χεῖρα ἀποκοπέει πελέκει πίπτει, τοῦτο δὲ ἄλλοι Ἀθηναίων πολλοὶ τε καὶ ὀνομαστοί. Compare this with Homer, *Il.* 15.716–18: ‘Ἐκτωρ δὲ πρύμνηθεν ἐπεὶ λάβεν οὐχὶ μεθίει, / ἄφλαστον μετὰ χερσὶν ἔχων, Τρωσὶν δὲ κέλευεν / “οἴσετε πῦρ, ἅμα δ’ αὐτοὶ ἀολλέες ὄρνυτ’ αὐτήν. Note in particular that the word ἀφλαστον appears only in these two passages in all of Classical Greek literature. An army in hot pursuit of a fleeing enemy would not have called out for fire (which, I suppose, they would have had to fetch from the Persian camp), nor in the confusion would anyone have noticed exactly how Cynegirus had been killed, but the Homeric touches lend an heroic aura to these events and Herodotus’ audience would have been attuned to this literary device. In other words, Herodotus is not fabricating details as much as he is endowing events with greater dignity in a way which his contemporary audience would have both recognized and appreciated.*

an honest account.⁵³ This is not to claim that it is always impossible to reconstruct a battle within a broad outline, and at first glance archaeology appears to support Herodotus' version of the Spartans' last stand.

In 1939 extensive excavations were undertaken at Thermopylae by S. Marinatos and it is now universally accepted that he identified what he called the 'Colonos' (which is merely the Greek word for 'hill'), 'the hillock to which the remaining three hundred Spartans and seven hundred Thespians retired and died to the last man'.⁵⁴ Diodorus (11.10.4) seems to state that Leonidas and his force were eventually surrounded and shot down in the Persian camp itself. In Herodotus (7.225.2–3), by contrast, they were annihilated on a hill which was inside the Phocian wall. Marinatos's discovery of a great number of bronze and iron arrowheads of various 'oriental types' (mostly of the triangular bronze type with three sharp edges) from the slopes of a suitably located hill seemed to confirm this.⁵⁵ Nor can one easily argue that Diodorus, through compression of his source, has simply omitted the Spartan retreat to the hill, because Plutarch (866a) also claims that they were surrounded and killed in the enemy camp. It is just possible (and the narratives of Diodorus, Plutarch, and Justin do not strictly preclude this) that after a night attack a remnant of Leonidas' force found its way back to the hill specified by Herodotus and there perished, but this cannot be pressed.⁵⁶

Alternatively, it is also possible that the placing of a lion on that hill in honour of Leonidas (Hdt. 7.225.2) and the burial of the dead there (Hdt. 7.228.1) gave rise to a post-Simonidean tradition that the Spartans had made their last stand there as well. In this case the arrowheads would have to be otherwise explained. In the absence of any detailed excavation report that might be an impossibility, but here is a suggestion. In the 1820s W. M. Leake described the burial mound of the Athenian dead at Marathon as follows:

The tumulus is known by the name of Soró, (ὁ Σορός) the tomb, the word which has probably been applied to it by the people of Attica ever since its erection: it is about thirty feet high, and two hundred yards in circumference, composed of a light mould mixed with sand, amidst which I found many brazen heads of arrows, about an inch in length, of a triliteral form, and pierced at the top with a round hole for the reception of the shaft. . . . All these were probably discharged by the Persian bowmen, and, having been collected after the action, were thrown into the grave of the Athenians, as an offering to the victorious dead, who thus received the first marks of those heroic honours which were ever afterwards paid to them by the Marathonii.⁵⁷

⁵³ A similar point is made by Lazenby, *op. cit.* (n. 9), p. 143.

⁵⁴ S. Marinatos, *Thermopylae. An Historical and Archaeological Guide* (Athens, 1951), pp. 61–9. ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 61–5 and fig. 21. The results of his excavations were reported in *JHS* 59 (1939), 199–200 (by C. M. Robertson) and in *AJA* 43 (1939), 699–700 (by E. P. Blegen), and by Marinatos himself, 'Forschungen in Thermopylai', *Bericht über den VI Internationalen Kongress für Archäologie, Berlin 21–26 August 1939* (Berlin, 1940), pp. 333–41. These arrowheads are indisputably Persian: see Burn, *op. cit.*, (n. 9), p. 420; A. M. Snodgrass, *Arms and Armour of the Greeks* (Ithaca, 1967), pp. 98–100; and M. C. Miller, *Athens and Persia in the Fifth Century B.C.: a Study in Cultural Receptivity* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 41.

⁵⁶ Hammond, *op. cit.* (n. 9), p. 8, argues that the camp of Xerxes lay some five miles away by the then course of the Spercheus river and that the Spartans could not have fought their way back to 'the hillock' during daylight over open country. We should bear in mind, however, that the Persian encampment will have covered a very large area (Hdt. 7.201 is vague about its location), even if their army was much smaller than Herodotus thought. Green, *op. cit.* (n. 10), p. 126 suggests that 'the Persians pitched camp near Trachis, between the Spercheus and the Asopus rivers, probably occupying Anthela at the same time'; that might be close enough to make it feasible for a night attack to be followed by a dawn retreat.

⁵⁷ 'The Demi of Attica', in *Transactions of the Royal Society of Literature* 1 (London, 1829),

Leake speculated that these arrowheads had been 'collected after the action' and 'thrown into the grave of the Athenians'. N. G. L. Hammond, however, asserts that in such a scenario the arrowheads should have been placed over the layer of ash (which is three meters below the present top of the mound); he concludes that 'their presence on the top soil of the mound is due to the fact that they were lying on the earth which the Greeks brought in last when making the mound in 490 B.C.'⁵⁸

Whichever explanation is the right one, the find at Marathon has implications for Thermopylae which have gone unnoticed. Interestingly, Marinatos found evidence that identical arrowheads had once been on the top of the so-called Colonos as well. He excavated a later bastion (possibly Hellenistic) on the north side of the hill overhanging the sea. The bastion seems to have been filled in with earth (of a deep brown colour characteristic of fifth-century levels) from the summit and higher levels; this earth 'proved to be full of arrowheads belonging exclusively to the three-sided bronze type'.⁵⁹ Thus it is possible that the bronze arrowheads found at Thermopylae, which are of the same triangular three-edged type as those from Marathon, were deposited on the hill by the Greeks themselves, either purposefully as a votive or coincidentally as part of the fill placed over the graves.

Herodotus says that the slain were buried where they fell (7.228.1), but, as suggested above, that may have been a false inference; that is, they may well have been buried on the hill, but they did not necessarily fall there. Wherever they died, the Colonos was a suitable place for burial, and Roman and Byzantine graves have been excavated there.⁶⁰ It may also have been inferred that Leonidas himself must have died before the retreat to the hillock, since a Spartan king would never have ordered a retreat in the face of the enemy. Whether such 'inferences' were due to Herodotus himself or to an oral tradition which he heard, it is impossible to say.

IV. CONCLUSION

Whether we choose to believe Herodotus' or Ephorus' version of events (and it may be that neither has very accurately represented what actually happened during the final struggle),⁶¹ it is important for us to come to terms with Ephorus' historical method given how widely he was used by later authors. And one aspect of his method seems to have been not to invent whole episodes out of his own imagination, but to correct standard sources (such as Herodotus and Thucydides) by the use of poetic texts. In the case of the Peloponnesian War, he treated the cynical allegations of Old Comedy as valid historical evidence in an effort to correct Thucydides. When he narrated the Persian Wars, he likewise sought out poetic texts with which he might correct Herodotus. The *Persae* of Aeschylus and the Thermopylae poem of

172. For other bronze arrowheads found at Marathon, which may also have come from the Athenian burial mound, see E. J. Forsdyke in *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries* 32 (1919), 146ff.

⁵⁸ *Studies in Greek History* (Oxford, 1973), pp. 176–7. As Hammond points out (p. 177, n. 1), this important find by Leake was missed by W. K. Pritchett, 'Marathon', *University of California Publications in Classical Archaeology* 4 (Berkeley, 1960), pp. 137–75, who otherwise is very familiar with Leake's writings.

⁵⁹ Marinatos, *Thermopylae*, op. cit. (n. 54), pp. 65–7.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁶¹ J. L. Moles, 'Truth and untruth in Herodotus and Thucydides', in C. Gill and T. P. Wiseman (edd.), *Lies and Fiction in the Ancient World* (Exeter, 1993), pp. 88–121 concludes his essay with these words: 'the relationship of ancient historiography to external reality is shifting, ambiguous, multifaceted, messy: in those respects at least, like life itself'.

Simonides were logical choices; and he may also have consulted other of Simonides' works, such as his lyric poem on Salamis.⁶² From his point of view, it must have seemed a reasonable procedure to prefer the early fifth-century version of Thermopylae in Simonides to that of the mid-fifth-century account in Herodotus. If he was wrong to do so, as archaeology may or may not indicate, we should not attribute it to a penchant for unrestrained literary and rhetorical invention. Rather, Ephorus failed to understand the ethos and function both of Old Comedy and of archaic lyric poetry.⁶³ More generally, he did not distinguish as sharply as we do (or as did Thucydides for that matter) between 'poetic' and 'historical' truth.⁶⁴ None the less, it is to his credit that he employed so wide a variety of sources.⁶⁵

Franklin and Marshall College

MICHAEL A. FLOWER
m_flower@acad.fandm.edu

⁶² See n. 40 above.

⁶³ The observation about Old Comedy I owe to K. J. Dover, *Times Literary Supplement* (April 12, 1995), 8.

⁶⁴ Thucydides (1.10.3; 1.21.1) recognized the exaggeration and inaccuracy inherent in poetic accounts of the past: see Boedeker, 'Simonides on Plataea', *op. cit.* (n. 27), pp. 226–9. This is true despite the Homeric allusions in his narrative, for which see Mackie, *op. cit.* (n. 46). The one place where Thucydides felt the need to rely on poetry is in the Archaeologia, where he is at pains to extract conclusions from Homer. But that is not his usual method; as C. B. R. Pelling, 'Truth and fiction in Plutarch's *Lives*', in D. A. Russell (ed.), *Antonine Literature* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 30–1 points out: 'It is unthinkable, for instance, that he would use Euripides as evidence for Athenian war-weariness, or exploit Aristophanes on Cleon; with harder history, that was not his way.'

⁶⁵ I would like to thank Harriet Flower, Judith Mossman, Ann Steiner, and especially Christopher Pelling for their assistance with this paper.