setting out for Greece. You laughed at me then, and found my ideas about what would happen in this war absurd, just because I take pride in nothing so much as in trying to be honest to you, my lord. But listen to me now. These men have come to fight us for the pass and they are getting ready to do just that. It is their custom to do their hair when they are about to risk their lives. But you can rest assured that if you defeat these men and the force that awaits you in Sparta, there is no other race on earth which will take up arms and stand up to you, my lord, because you are now up against the noblest and most royal city in Greece, and the bravest men.'

Xerxes found what he was saying completely unbelievable and asked him again how such a small body of men was going to resist his army. 'My lord,' Demaratus replied, 'if things do not turn out as I say, you can treat me as you would any other liar.'

[210] Xerxes still did not believe him. He let four days go by, because he expected the Greeks to run away at any moment, but they did no such thing. What seemed to him to be their stupid impudence in staying stung him to anger, and on the fifth day he sent his Median and Cissian troops against them, with orders to bring some prisoners back alive to him. The Medes rushed the Greek position and died in large numbers, but more men pressed forward, and despite the heavy losses the attack was not driven back. They made it plain to everyone, however, and above all to the king himself, that although he had plenty of troops, he did not have many men. And so the battle continued all day.

[211] After a while the Median troops were withdrawn, badly mauled, and their place was taken by the Immortals, as Xerxes called them—the Persian battalion commanded by Hydarnes. It was expected that they would easily finish the job, but when they came to engage the Greeks, they were no more successful than the Medes had been. The result was no different, because the factors were the same: they were fighting in a restricted area, using spears which were shorter than those wielded by the Greeks, and could not take advantage of their numerical superiority. The Lacedaemonians fought a memorable battle; they made it quite clear that they were the experts, and that they were fighting against amateurs. This was particularly evident every time they turned tail and pretended to run away *en masse*; the Persians raised a great cry of triumph at the sight of the retreat and pressed forward after them, but the Lacedaemonians let them catch up and then suddenly

turned and faced them—and cut the Persians down in untold numbers. However, a few Spartiates would be lost as well during this manoeuvre. Once their attempt on the pass had proved a complete failure and they had not gained the slightest foothold in it, whether they sent in regiment after regiment or whatever tactics they used for their attack, the Persians withdrew.

[212] During this phase of the battle, as he watched his men attacking the Greek positions, it is said that fear for his army made the king leap up from his seat three times. The next day, after the first day of fighting had passed as described, the conflict went no better for the Persians. They went into battle in the expectation that the Greeks would no longer be capable of fighting back, given that there were so few of them and that they had already taken so many casualties. But the Greeks formed themselves into units based on nationality which took turns to fight, except for the Phocians who were posted on the heights above to guard the path. On finding that things had not changed from their experiences of the previous day, the Persians pulled back.

[213] Xerxes did not know how to cope with the situation, but then a Malian called Ephialtes the son of Eurydemus arranged a meeting with him, with information for which he hoped the king would pay him handsomely. Ephialtes told him about the mountain path to Thermopylae, and so caused the deaths of the Greeks who had taken their stand there. Later, he went into exile in Thessaly because he became afraid of reprisals from the Lacedaemonians, and while he was there the Amphictyons met at Pylaea and the Pylagori had him proclaimed a wanted criminal, with a price on his head. Later still, he was killed by a man from Trachis called Athenades—at some point he had returned from Thessaly and was living in Anticyra—and although Athenades' reasons for killing him, which I will explain later, had nothing to do with the battle of Thermopylae, the Lacedaemonians still honoured him for it. In any case, Ephialtes did die later.

[214] There is another story according to which Onetas the son of Phanagoras of Carystus and Corydallus of Anticyra were the ones who gave the king this information and showed the Persians the way around the mountain, but personally I do not believe it. In the first place, one must bear in mind that the Pylagori, representing the Greeks, did not put a price on the heads of Onetas and Corydallus, but on Ephialtes of Trachis, and they had presumably

carried out a thorough investigation of the facts. In the second place, we know that this was the reason for Ephialtes' exile. It is true that even though Onetas was not from Malis he could have known about this path, if he had often visited that part of the country, but in fact it was Ephialtes who showed the Persians the way around the mountain along the path, and I hereby record his guilt.

[215] Xerxes was delighted with Ephialtes' offer, which was just what he needed. He lost no time in sending Hydarnes and his men on this mission. They set off from the Persian camp at dusk. It was the local Malians who discovered this path. They once guided the Thessalians along it to attack the Phocians (this was the occasion when the Phocians built the defensive wall across the pass to guard against military incursion); in other words, the pernicious use of this discovery of theirs has been known to the Malians for a long time.

[216] Here is a description of the path. It begins where the River Asopus flows through the gorge, proceeds along the ridge of the mountain—the Anopaea, which is also what the path is called—and ends at Alpeni (which is the first settlement in Locris after the border with Malis), at the rock called the Melampygus, where the seats of the Cercopes are and the pass is at its narrowest point.

[217] So this is what the path is like. The Persians crossed the Asopus and made their way along the path throughout the night, with the heights of Oeta on their right and those of Trachis on their left. By daybreak they had reached the peak of the ridge where, as I said earlier, a thousand Phocian hoplites were on guard, with the job of protecting their own country and defending the path. Down below, the pass was being held by the Greeks already mentioned, but the path across the mountain was being guarded by Phocian volunteers who had put themselves forward to Leonidas for the job.

[218] The Phocians did not notice the Persians as they were on their way up, because an oak forest entirely covers the slopes of the mountain. However, they perceived their presence once they were at the top because it was quiet and calm and the Persians naturally could not avoid making a great deal of noise by stepping on the leaves under their feet. The Phocians had only just got to their feet and were still arming themselves when the Persians reached them—and were astonished at the sight, because they had not

expected to meet any opposition, and here were men arming themselves for battle. Hydarnes asked Ephialtes what country the enemy force was from, because he was worried in case the Phocians might be Lacedaemonians. Ephialtes put him right, and then Hydarnes got his men into battle formation. The Phocians came under fire from a hail of arrows and retreated up to the top of the mountain; they were convinced that the attack was aimed exclusively at them, so they prepared to fight to the death. It was this conviction that prompted their retreat, but Ephialtes, Hydarnes, and the Persians just ignored them and quickly got on with climbing down the mountain.

[219] The first warning the Greeks in Thermopylae got was when the diviner Megistias inspected the entrails of his sacrificial victims and declared that death would come to them at dawn; secondly, and also while it was still dark, some deserters told them that the Persians were circling around behind them. Thirdly, after daybreak, the look-outs ran down from the heights to warn them. The Greeks discussed what they should do, but there was no unanimity: some argued for not abandoning their post, others put the opposite case. Subsequently, after the meeting had broken up, some of the Greeks began to trickle away back to their various home towns all over Greece, while others prepared to stay where they were with Leonidas.

[220] One also hears it said that Leonidas himself told them to leave because he wanted to spare their lives, but believed that it would be wrong for him and the Spartiates who were there to desert the post they had originally been sent to hold. On this version of events, which I myself strongly incline towards, when Leonidas saw that his allies were demoralized, and unhappy about facing the coming danger with him, he told them that they could go, but that it would not be right for him to leave. Staying there would, he felt, win great renown, and would also preserve Sparta in its prosperity. For in the very early days of the war the Spartiates had consulted the oracle at Delphi about the coming conflict, and the Pythia had predicted that either Lacedaemon would be laid waste by the Persians or their king would die. The prediction, in hexameters, went as follows:

> Here is your fate, inhabitants of spacious Sparta:
> Either your great and glorious city will be destroyed
> By men descended from Perseus, or that will not be,

But the borders of Lacedaemon will mourn the death
Of a king descended from Heracles. For neither the might
Of bulls nor yet that of lions will check the foe head on,
Since he has the might of Zeus. Nor, I declare, will he
Be checked until one of the two has been thoroughly rent asunder.

So I think it was reflection on this prophecy, combined with his desire to lay up a store of fame for the Spartiates alone, that prompted Leonidas to let the allied personnel go. I prefer this to the view that those who left went in disarray after a difference of opinion.

[221] I have a telling piece of evidence to support this view too, which is that Leonidas made no attempt to hide the fact that his reason for sending Megistias away was so that he might avoid sharing their fate. Megistias of Acarnania (who is said to trace his ancestry back to Melampus) was the diviner who was attached to this Greek force; it was he who foretold what was going to happen by inspecting the entrails of his sacrificial victims. However, although he had permission to go, he stayed, but sent away his only child, a son, who had come along on the expedition.

[222] So off went the allied personnel Leonidas had told to leave, in obedience to his wishes. Only the Thespians and the Thebans stayed behind to support the Lacedaemonians. The Thebans did so reluctantly and unwillingly (in fact, Leonidas kept them there as hostages, as it were), but the Thespians, under the command of Demophilus the son of Diadromes, were very glad to stay; they refused to go off and leave Leonidas and his men, but stayed and died with them.

[223] At sunrise Xerxes performed libations and, about the middle of the morning, he launched his attack. Ephialtes had told him to wait only until then, because the way down the mountain is more direct and far shorter than the path he had taken up and around the mountain. So Xerxes' forces moved forward, and so did Leonidas and the Greeks; in fact they advanced far further into the broader part of the neck of land than they had at first, since they were taking to the field to meet death. On previous days, they had been trying to hold the defensive wall, and they had made sorties into the narrows of the pass, but now they engaged the enemy outside the narrows. Persian casualties were high, because their regimental commanders wielded whips and urged every single man ever onward from behind. Quite a few of them fell into the sea and died there, but even larger numbers were trampled alive underfoot by their comrades, until the dead were beyond counting. For the Greeks knew they were going to die at the hands of the Persians who had come around the mountain, and so they spared none of their strength, but fought the enemy with reckless disregard for their lives.

[224] By now most of their spears had been broken and they were using their swords to kill the Persians. Leonidas fought to the death with the utmost bravery during this mêlée; and with him fell other famous Spartiates too, whose names I was told as men who proved their worth. In fact, I learnt the names of all the three hundred. A number of eminent Persians fell there too, including two of Darius' sons, Abrocomes and Hyperanthes. They were his sons by Phratagoune, the daughter of Artanes, who was the brother of King Darius, and whose father was Hystaspes the son of Arsames. Artanes arranged his daughter's marriage to Darius and later bequeathed her his whole estate, because she was his only child.

[225] So two of Xerxes' brothers fell during the battle there. The Persians and Lacedaemonians grappled at length with one another over the corpse of Leonidas, but the Greeks fought so well and so bravely that they eventually succeeded in dragging his body away. Four times they forced the Persians back, and the contest remained close until Ephialtes and his men arrived. With their arrival, the battle changed: as soon as the Greeks realized they had come, they regrouped and all (except the Thebans) pulled back past the wall to where the road was narrow, where they took up a position on the spur—that is, the rise in the pass which is now marked by the stone lion commemorating Leonidas. Here the Greeks defended themselves with knives, if they still had them, and otherwise with their hands and teeth, while the Persians buried them in a hail of missiles, some charging at them head on and demolishing the wall, while the rest surrounded them on all sides.

[226] For all the courage of the Lacedaemonians and Thespians, a Spartiate called Dianeces is said to have proved himself the bravest. Before battle was joined, they say that someone from Trachis warned him how many Persians there were by saying that when they fired their bows, they hid the sun with the mass of arrows. Dianeces, so the story goes, was so dismissive of the Persian numbers that he calmly replied, 'All to the good, my friend from

Trachis. If the Persians hide the sun, the battle will be in shade rather than sunlight.' This is a typical example of the quips for which Dianeces of Lacedaemon is remembered.

[227] The next bravest Lacedaemonians after Dianeces are said to have been two brothers, Alpheus and Maron, sons of Orsiphantus. The most distinguished Thespian was a man called Dithyrambus the son of Harmatides.

[228] They were buried on the spot where they fell, and a memorial has been set up there to them and to those who died earlier in the battle, before Leonidas sent some of the Greeks away. The inscription on the memorial reads:

> Here once were three million of the foe
> Opposed by four thousand from the Peloponnese.

Apart from this general inscription, the Spartiates have their own separate one:

> Stranger, tell the people of Lacedaemon
> That we who lie here obeyed their commands.

And there is one for the diviner as well:

> This is the memorial of famed Megistias,
> Cut down when the Persians crossed the Spercheius,
> A seer who clearly saw the approach of his doom,
> But could not stand to leave the leader† of Sparta.

The Amphictyons commissioned these epigrams and pillars in honour of the dead, with the exception of the one for Megistias the seer, which Simonides the son of Leoprepes wrote because they were guest-friends.