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MARATHON AND THERMOPYLAE IN THE *MÉMOIRE COLLECTIVE*[1]

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Various catalogues of "great battles that saved the world" (read: the Western world) enjoy great popularity, especially on the Internet. It would be unkind to deny the fans of such catalogues the pleasure of compiling them. But the scholars… ay, there's the rub. They, after all, need to weigh their opinions carefully. Surely a scholar cannot assume that a battle he is currently researching is the most important one ever (or, worse still, that it is the most important one ever because *he* is researching it). Yet a worrying trend emerges. To give just a few of the more recent examples concerning ancient Greece: Richard Billows has published a book entitled *Marathon. The Battle that Changed Western Civilization* (2010), Paul Cartledge – one entitled *Thermopylae. The Battle that Changed the World* (2006), whereas Barry Strauss – *The Battle of Salamis. The Naval Encounter that Saved Greece and Western Civilization* (2005).

Certainly quite a few battles did indeed change the world, and saved the "Western civilisation" to boot, and this does deserve a thorough analysis. The reasons for those battles' presence in our collective memory deserves analysis too; and to that analysis, in reference to the Battles of Marathon and of Thermopylae, this essay is devoted.

Of the four great battles that occurred in the course of the Greek-Persian wars, three – at Marathon, in the pass of Thermopylae, and at Plataeae – were fought on land, and one, at Salamis, was a sea battle. It may be considered a paradox that the two greater and more important encounters, those at Salamis and Plataeae, remain

[1] The text translated by Klaudyna Michałowicz.

in the shadow of the two smaller ones. The Battle of Marathon, although won by the Greeks, had a limited significance from the military point of view. From the technical point of view, in turn, the Battle of Thermopylae was nothing else but a total defeat, paid for with an annihilation of the Greek defenders, and, in addition, one which from the very start was overwhelmingly easy to predict.

Marathon

Fought on 12th September 490 by the Athenians against the invading Persian army commanded by Datis and Artaphernes, the Battle of Marathon has long been an object of interest for scholars as much as for the wide circle of history lovers.[2] Ostensibly everything about it is clear; but look closer, and all that remains is doubts. As A. Trevor Hodge rightly observed, there are few elements in the Marathon campaign that can be considered certain beyond discussion; the majority still remains a subject of constant debates.[3] Those debates concern even the September (or perhaps, after all, the August?) date of the battle. The topography of the battlefield is a most complicated issue.[4] The strength of the Persian army is also unknown. Various sources give widely differing numbers: from 80,000 to as much as 600,000 and, additionally, six hundred triremes (as well as transport vessels). Usually, scholars assume the numbers to have been 18,000 to 24,000 foot soldiers and 1,000, perhaps 2,000 cavalry, but no agreement has been reached. We are not even certain what goals have been set for the Persian commanders. There is a worrying discrepancy between the Persians' plan mentioned by Herodotus: to subjugate Eretria and Athens, enslave their residents and take them before the throne of King Darius (Hdt. 6. 94), and the expected outcome of the campaign against Athens evident from the presence in the Persian army of the aged Athenian ex-tyrant, Hippias, who probably came not only as a guide, but also as the future puppet ruler of Athens (or even, as some scholars maintain, a satrap of Greece).

The horizon of events broadens with time, incidentally. In Herodotus, it is local, limited to Eretria and Athens, but in Plutarch it is already global: the aim of the Persian expedition is no longer to punish the Athenians for burning Sardis, but to subjugate all Greece as well.

Herodotus's account provokes many other questions. For instance, he recounts how the *strategoi* had sent a runner to Sparta, asking for immediate aid.

[2] Sources for the history of the battle: Hdt. 5. 102–119; Plut. *Arist*.; Paus. 7. 15–17; Corn. Nepos, *Miltiades*; Iust. 2. 9; Literature: Busolt 1895, 578–593; Meyer 1944, 305–316; Hammond 1988, 491–517; Balcer 1995, 207–224; Doenges 1998, 1–17; Kulesza 2005; Sekunda 2002; Krentz 2010.

[3] Trevor Hodge 1975, 155.

[4] See Pritchett 1969; Sekunda 2002, 46–50.

That man was Philippides,[5] a professional messenger (*hemerodromos*), who was able to run for a whole day without stopping (Hdt. 6. 105–106). By the following day he was already in Sparta. The Spartans, who were in the process of celebrating the Carneian festival, promised to come as soon as allowed by their law and religion, i.e. at the coming full moon. Philippides immediately set out on the return journey.

Since even today there are men who are able to run the ca. 250 km distance from Athens to Sparta in thirty five hours[6], scholars do not question Philippides' feat; they are more interested in the honesty of the Spartans' intentions.[7] Yet they ought to wonder also about the very mission of the messenger. After all, it would not be very wise to leave the fate of the whole city in the hands (or rather legs) of one man. One is tempted to say that never has so much depended on the stamina of a single runner. What if he had not reached Sparta, or afterwards, Athens? If he had sustained an injury on the way, had a stroke, had been killed?[8] After all,

[5] In the English-language literature he is continuously referred to as Pheidippides, which finds no corroboration whatsoever in the sources. What is more, the fact that in Aristophanes' *Clouds* one Pheidippides appears in the role of a *sui generis* villain (and a victim of the sophists at the same time), is also an argument against the runner bearing that name: is seems hardly probable that Aristophanes of all writers would use the name of a revered Marathon hero for a negative character.

[6] It cannot be said exactly how many kilometres the Athenian *hemerodromos* had run – this depends on his route, the details of which are not known, but it must have been minimum 220 km, maximum 250 km each way. Greek runners were able to cover huge distances. For instance, Euchidas ran the 190 km from Plataeae to Delphi in one day, to report the victory over the Persians and bring the sacred fire from Delphi to Plataeae (479), while Ageos ran 100 km from Olympia to Argos in one day, to bring the news of his own victory in the long-distance race (ca. 5 km) during the Olympiad (328) (see also other examples – Lucas 1976, 120–138, ancient and modern long-distance runners p. 127–131; Słapek 2010, 416–419). For the last twenty-nine years Spartathlon, a race on the Athens-Sparta route, has been run every year in September.

[7] This rather quickly began to arouse doubts, since in the fourth century Plato (*Nomoi* 698E, 692D) characteristically "rationalised" the religious reasons, perceiving a rebellion of helots as the cause for the delay (one is tempted to say, in all malice, that this rebellion would have been quenched very fast indeed, since in a few days the Spartans did arrive on the scene), while Isocrates (see also Plut. *De malignitate Herodoti* 26) maintained that they did not delay at all, but set out immediately. Clearly, and perhaps not surprisingly, they found it hard to keep up with Philippides, since they did not take part in the battle.

[8] The information that while running through Arcadia, Philippides heard the voice of Pan, who "bade him ask the Athenians why they paid him no attention, though he was of goodwill to the Athenians, had often been of service to them, and would be in the future" (Hdt. 6. 105. This and the following quotations from Herodotus were translated by A. D. Godley [translator's note]) is ascribed by some scholars to hallucinations resulting from the runner's extreme exhaustion. Incidentally, Herodotus places that spiritual experience on the road *to* Sparta, while the scholars arbitrarily, if perhaps reasonably (and maybe correctly – but how is that to be ascertained?), move it to the run *from* Sparta – after all, Philippides' exhaustion must have been greater on the way back.

the Argeans favoured the Persians. Since the joint Athenian-Spartan action had been agreed upon earlier, why had there been no signals arranged, or a relay of messengers, why no more runners or riders were sent out, just in case? I have not found these questions in any study with which I am acquainted. The sources also keep silent on that topic (which may actually explain the silence of the scholars). They mention, however, the arrival of some hundreds – perhaps 600, maybe even a thousand – hoplites from Plataeae. The troop set camp in the temple of Heracles, about 6 kilometres from the invading Persians.

Further on, Herodotus has much to say about the difference of opinion within the college of ten Athenian *strategoi*, among whom the votes for and against pitched battle were divided equally. The "father of history" considers the *strategos* Miltiades to have been the author of the Marathon victory. Apparently Miltiades persuaded the polemarch Callimachus, who was supposed to vote as the eleventh, to adopt his view. Herodotus even quotes the putative speech of Miltiades to Callimachus (Hdt. 6. 109); yet that speech is obviously directed to the posterity far more than to the polemarch, because it refers mainly to issues of which Callimachus was very well aware (and also to some issues which were entirely unknown to either of the interlocutors). And so, Callimachus learns from Miltiades that there is no accord among the *strategoi* as to the need for a pitched battle; that it is clear how Athens would suffer if the tyrant Hippias, who is now with the Persians, was allowed to return from exile, into which he had been sent nearly twenty years earlier (although earlier Herodotus wrote that the Eretreans and Athenians were to be deported to Persia!); that if the battle does not break out soon, the Athenians may begin to feel *stasis* and may start to switch sides and support the Persians. The speech is quite prophetic, too. Miltiades promised Callimachus something of which he could not have been aware – a wish which came true only in the lifetime of the Athenians contemporary to Herodotus: that if Callimachus gives his support to Miltiades, Athens shall be free and become "the first polis of Hellas" (*polis prote ton en te Helladi*). Not one word about the fact that this may only come about if the battle is won – the author of the speech knew that Callimachus' accord is tantamount to victory, because he knew the course of later events and was aware that after the Persian wars the Athenians would build their small empire.

Anyway, according to Herodotus it is due to Callimachus' stance that the war council, consisting of ten *strategoi* and the archont-polemarch, decided in favour of a pitched battle. Each of the *strategoi* was to hold command for one day (perhaps chosen by lot? – whatever the case, it was an experiment in democratic rule most impractical in the current dramatic situation). When the turn to command came to those *strategoi* who supported Miltiades, they resigned in his favour. According to Herodotus, "he accepted the office but did not make an attack until it was his own

day to preside" (Hdt. 6. 110). Why? Again, this is not very clear. We might assume he had some deeper reason than the desire to have the battle precisely on "his", not someone else's day; there can be no certainty about that, however, the more so that we have no clear information even about the structure of command. The council of *strategoi* was established only in 501; earlier, it was the polemarch alone who held command, later – the *strategoi* alone. If Herodotus is correct, at Marathon some transitional system was in force. Still, it is difficult to believe in Miltiades' motivation as given by Herodotus, especially that it does not put him in the best of lights. The Athenians were probably waiting for the Persians to move; perhaps also hoping for the arrival of the Spartans.

The reasons for the Persian's immobility are unknown. They were obviously holding back. Why? Maybe they were hoping for some difference of opinion among the Athenians. It would not be without reason, as demonstrated by the earlier fate of Eretria, which fell betrayed by two of its outstanding citizens, and by the vacillation of the Athenian council of *strategoi*. Trusting in their greater numbers, they may have also been hoping for aid from the supporters of Hippias or counting on the weakening of the Athenians' morale.

The answer to the question why the battle had finally started is found only in a tenth-century Byzantine source known as the Book of Souda (s.v. *choris hippeis*). Miltiades gave the order for battle when the Ionians who were a part of the Persian army had climbed trees and informed the Athenians that there was no cavalry in the Persian camp. This remark arouses much doubt. What trees would that be? How could the Ionians give signals to the Athenians (and during the night, too, which implies using fire) that would have passed unnoticed by the Persians? Yet it is also of fundamental significance for today's reconstructions of the course of that battle.

We do not know what happened to the Persian cavalry. Did it sail away to attack someplace else? Were the horses sent to pasture to Eretria, or led away to graze overnight in the meadows near Marathon? Or perhaps Datis, preparing for an attack on Athens, ordered a part of the army and the cavalry to embark on ships? But in what way would the mounted troops be helpful in that case? Riders are not very suitable for attacking cities, after all. What is more, some clues seem to indicate that the cavalry did participate in the battle. Perhaps the Persians had at their disposal only light cavalry, which did not influence the outcome of the battle? Events could have unfolded in a still different way: Miltiades began the battle when he heard there was no cavalry, but the riders came back when the combat was already in progress. There are many questions and few answers here.

At dawn – of 12th September, let us say, although we know that there is not much certainty when it comes to the exact date – Miltiades arranged his army for battle (Hdt. 6. 112). Somehow, unnoticed by Herodotus, the distance between the

troops has grown smaller. First it was 6.5 kilometres, when the Greeks have set a defensive camp in the temple of Heracles; by the day of the battle that distance was just 1.5 kilometres. Despite our doubts, let us accept the surmise of the modern scholars that each night the Greeks moved a little forward.

Let us also hope that Herodotus and his modern-day interpreters have correctly read the meaning of the events that occurred on the day of the battle. Those were as follows: Miltiades, arranging a shallow centre and concentrating the main forces on the wings, was counting on crushing the Persian flanks and drawing the best forces of the enemy, consisting of the Persians and the Sacae, deeper. The heaviest fighting took place in the centre. On the right and left wing the Greeks triumphed. Then, not pursuing the fleeing enemy, they turned both wings inwards and fell upon the Persians fighting in the centre of the field. The Persian soldiers found themselves trapped.

This is all; yet this is very much. Who would have been able to give a credible account of the battle? No-one was observing it from the sidelines; at least the sources do not mention it. Thus, we would expect a report of the commander (or commanders), and accounts of particularly memorable scenes related by the participants of the battle. In this case, this is practically only the closing scene.

The last phase of the struggle is a truly Homeric battle at the ships. Herodotus recounts how the Greeks "followed the fleeing Persians and struck them down. When they reached the sea they demanded fire and laid hold of the Persian ships" (Hdt. 6. 113). From whom, however, could they have "demanded fire" – and in the light of the effects, to what end could that fire be useful? It does not seem, after all, that the Persian ships were torched. The Greeks obviously could not demand fire from the Persians, and it is improbable they would have sent for it to the camp 6 kilometres away; so it seems that they demanded fire from themselves. Surely something is awry in this account.

The Greeks certainly attempted to prevent the Persian evacuation and to take possession of the ships. The combat was certainly brutal. Some were fighting for their lives, others – elated with victory. The valour of Cynegirus, the brother of the great tragedian Aeschylus, became legendary. He caught hold of the ship's stern and fell only when his hand was chopped off with an axe (Hdt. 6. 114)[9]. The Athenians took seven Persian ships (Hdt. 6. 115). Seven of six hundred! A modest outcome for such a heroic struggle. And not a word about burning any ships. It seems that the Persians carried out an orderly evacuation by sea and won the battle at the ships.

[9] With time, Cynegirus' feat passed the limits of heroism. According to Justin, when his right hand was chopped off, he grabbed the ship with his left, and when that was chopped off too, he firmly held on to the ship with his teeth, fighting all the while (although it is not very clear with what) (Iust. 2. 9).

The Persian ships sailed away from Marathon and having surrounded Cape Sounion took course on Athens, trying to get to the city before the Athenian hoplites. Later there was a rumour among the Athenians that the Persians "devised this by a plan of the Alcmaeonidae, who were said to have arranged to hold up a shield as a signal once the Persians were in their ships" (Hdt. 6. 115). This is another riddle of history. Herodotus is much outraged that the Alcmaeonidae, who so distinguished themselves in fighting tyranny and introducing democracy (from this family came Cleisthenes), could be accused of treason; yet he does not question the fact that someone gave signals with a sun-reflecting shield (probably from the Pentelicus), indicating to the Persians they should sail for the defenceless Athens (Hdt. 6. 121, 124). What ever for? Datis was perfectly aware that the hoplites were away from the city: he had just seen them on the plains of Marathon!

It would be as difficult to disregard the information given by the "father of history", as to wonder why those Athenian traitors did not suffer any consequences. Thus, while some traitorous Athenians were supposedly giving signals to the Persians with a shield, the *strategoi* sent a messenger to the city in order to inform the citizens of the triumph and probably to warn them against the coming enemy.

Herodotus does not mention that, incidentally. Perhaps the point was too obvious to mention. Somebody must have been sent. Men of the later eras showed much more interest in that messenger than his contemporaries did, pointing out the messengers they found in earlier sources. Lucian (2nd century A.D.) assumed the news had been brought by Philippides, who in the presence of the archonts said: *Chairete, nikomen* ("Rejoice, we have won"), and then, exhausted, gave up the ghost (Lucian, *Pro lapsu* 3). Lucian is the first known author to ascribe this feat to the same Philippides who, as has already been mentioned, carried a message to Sparta and back.

Plutarch recorded other names: following Heracleides, he mentioned Thersippus, with the note that the majority of authors consider the message to have been brought by Eucles (Plut. *Moralia* 347c) – which, incidentally, would have been a name particularly appropriate (suspiciously so!) for one who had gained such great fame. In connection with Herodotus' silence on the subject of the messenger, radical opinions have been voiced: that no-one had been sent from Marathon to Athens at all; but let us rationally assume that someone was sent and *cum grano salis* observe that if Philippides did not fall dead after running some 540 to 580 kilometres in the course of a few days, his colleague's death after a mere 40 kilometres is less plausible. In any case, I think that (consistently with the Greek custom in such cases) someone was indeed sent to Athens to carry the most important and eagerly awaited news of the day. With time, this runner –

whatever his name was, and whether he did or did not fall dead (I am inclined to believe in his death, because making such story up would have been pointless) – became more famous than Marathon itself.

Miltiades' army allegedly reached the grove of Heracles in the suburbs of Athens mere moments before the first Persian ships appeared in the vicinity of the city. Again, there emerge questions to which our sources give no answers, especially concerning the route taken by those ships. It must have taken the Greeks a while to pick themselves up after the battle and begin the march back to Athens. Even if the Persians were not in a hurry (and they should have been), the equal speed of the overland and sea journeys seems odd.

The losses at Marathon were unequal: perished ca. 6400 Persians, 192 Athenians (Hdt. 6. 117) and 11 Plataeans.[10] This also raises doubts. Why did the Greeks, who were the attacking side, incur such small losses in contrast to the Persians, who were defending themselves? If we compare the initial size of the Persian (ca. 20,000), Athenian (9,000) and Plataean (600 or 900) armies, we will be forced to accept that the Persian losses equalled ca. 30% of the entire force, the Athenian – ca. 2%, the Plataean ca. 2 or even 1%. Something must be wrong here. We may guess that after the battle, each hair on an Athenian head was counted and truly just 192 Athenians died (no matter where they were buried afterwards). Why, however, did so many Persians fall, if the Greeks did not use machine guns? A subtle scholar will probably consider the question naïve and point to the advantage of the heavily armed Greek hoplites over the Persian infantry; still, those doubts will continue to nag until the place of the Persians' eternal rest is discovered (which may actually never happen). The destructive force of a hoplite at Marathon seems extraordinary.

The meanings ascribed to the battle by the Persians and the Greeks certainly differed. To the former, it was a defeat; to the latter, as further events would show, it was the first victory, on which the later ones were based – a "founding victory", so to speak. In the long run, Marathon did not stop the Persians – they attacked again ten years later. On the other hand, they did not reach the assumed goals (although some might say that they reached two-thirds of their goals, as they (1) did not meet active resistance in the Aegean islands, (2) conquered Ere-

[10] A tomb near the village of Vrana, where the remains of 9 men aged 20–30, a man aged 30–40 and a 10-year-old boy were found, was identified by Spyridon Marinatos as the burial place of the Plataeans. According to Marinatos, the men were soldiers, the older man was their officer, and the boy – a runner. The identification is controversial, since the tomb is located farther from the battlefield than indicated by the literary sources. Apart from that, the Plataean losses seem extraordinarily small (11 from 600 or 1,000 men). Recently there appeared doubts even as to the assumption that the Marathon tumulus (*Soros*) is the burial place of the fallen Athenians. See Mersch 1995, 55–64.

tria, (3) failed to defeat Athens. The moral significance of Marathon was huge. For the first time ever the Greeks defeated the Persians and they proved their military superiority. In the broader categories, it is certainly a breakthrough; it is beyond doubt that had the Athenians been defeated, or had the events run the same way as in Eretria, the course of Greeks history would have been entirely different.

Thermopylae

Legends were quick to surround the second symbolic battle of the Greeks with the Persians – the one which took place in the gorge of Thermopylae on 17th–19th August 480 B.C.[11] Here, too, it is very difficult to separate myths from reality. The account of Herodotus, who also in this case is our main source, was fittingly pronounced by A. R. Burn as being 'somewhere between sober history and the *Chanson de Roland'*.[12] Almost everything about this battle is to a greater or lesser extent doubtful.

First, the goal of the expedition seems obvious: to punish and subjugate Greece. Again there is a Greek in the circle close to the command; this time it is Demaratus, the ex-king of Sparta, who like Hippias at Marathon serves as a guide and counsellor. Did Xerxes see him as the future satrap of Greece (and a puppet king of Sparta)? Probably yes, but in view of the later course of events we must consider such considerations as *ungeshene Geschichte*.

The report of the over two, or perhaps even five million soldiers and 1200 ships of Xerxes' army may be put among other high tales of Herodotus (although ships are easier to count than men, so we are inclined to believe that information more than the other). We have even more faith in the Greeks' knowledge of their own forces: ca. 7,000 men were said to have been in the "gorge" of Thermopylae, of which 300 were Spartiates led by King Leonidas.

The Greeks occupied a narrow pass between the mountains and the sea at Thermopylae. It was said to have been the only route from the northern to southern Greece. Recently, however, even this dictum has been questioned[13],

[11] Sources: Hdt. 7. 201–239; 8. 24–25; Isocr. *Paneg*. 25; Diod. 11. 5–13; Paus. 3. 4. 7–8; Marcellinus, *Vita Thuc.* 54. Literature (selection): Beloch 1931, 91–105; Meyer 1944, 352–361; Dascalakis 1962; Hignett 1963; Evans 1964, 231–237; Hammond 1988, 546–563; Balcer 225–256; Fields 2007; Cartledge 2006; De Souza 2003.

[12] Burn 1984, 407: 'Herodotus' story of the battle (VII. 210–226) lies in point of literary form, somewhere between sober history and the *Chanson de Roland*; nearer to history, admittedly, in that the principal facts are probably accurate; but 'fictionalized', not only in the accounts of the enemy's losses, but in the picture of the enemy, a cruder and more childish picture than given elsewhere.'

[13] Szemler, Cherf, Kraft 1996.

not to mention the well-known fact that Thermopylae look quite different today than in 480 because of the changes of the shoreline. Assuming, however, that the only route to southern Greece did indeed lead through Thermopylae, several questions arise concerning the sense of the Greeks' action.

It is commonly known that for two days they were bravely resisting the enemy attacks. The defenders' situation changed for the worse only when Ephialtes of Malis showed the Persians a path through the mountains called the Anopaea, along which the elite troop of the Immortals walked beyond the Greek positions during the night. Leonidas had placed 1000 Phocian hoplites there, but they failed to engage the enemy. Hearing of Xerxes' soldiers advance on the Anopaea, Leonidas dismissed the majority of his force, leaving only 300 Spartans, 700 Thespians and 400 Tebans at his side.

It is curious why some have gone and the others stayed. By then, the latter must have been fully aware that their mission was totally suicidal. The Thespians allegedly expressed a wish to stay. The pro-Persian attitude of Thebes at that time, the sources' silence concerning the intentions of the Thebans present at Thermopylae, as well the fact that they surrendered in the last phase of the battle have tempted some scholars to assume, more or (probably) less correctly, that they were hostages of a kind.

Perhaps Leonidas' troop was supposed to delay the progress of the main Persian force. On the other hand, its meagre size excluded the possibility of a longer defence. Perhaps it was to provide cover to the withdrawing army; or perhaps the troops that were sent away were supposed to attack the Immortals. The ancient authors neither pose those questions nor provide any material that would help to answer them. The ancients were happy with locating all those events within the divine plan. The Delphic oracle prophesied that either the Spartan king would die or Sparta would perish (Hdt. 7. 220, 4); aware of this condition for the survival of his *polis*, Leonidas voluntarily sacrificed his life. Even today there are those who are ready to believe that such was his motivation; yet it seems that this prophecy was only a *vaticinium post eventum*, a prediction which explained the sense of what has already happened.

The description of the three-day fighting leaves much to be desired, too. The most dramatic third day is shown by Herodotus in the Homeric manner. The central point is the death of Leonidas and the *par excellence* heroic struggle over his body, again and again covered by waves of opponents. Finally, the Spartan survivors gathered on the hill of Colonus, where they fell to the last man under the Persian arrows. Xerxes ordered the body of Leonidas found; his severed head was carried in triumph round the Persian camp. All the Thespians perished. The Thebans surrendered.

Who told the story if they all fell? All but one, a Spartiate named Aristodemus, to whom, as Herodotus informs us, no-one in Sparta wanted to speak for contempt (Hdt. 7. 231). If he was considered a coward (*tresas*) and treated this way, he is rather out of the question as the source of information. Besides, being ill, he did not take part in the battle itself. There remain the Thebans, who surrendered. But who would believe them? From the ships of the fleet at Artemision it would probably be impossible to see all the details of the Thermopylae encounter. We cannot forget also the *perioikoi* and helots, excluded from sharing in the Thermopylae glory, and those who evacuated from Thermopylae before the last clash, and the Greeks in the Persian army. All questions about the potential (internal?) observer who would be the source of Herodotus' account are as essential as, despite all the scholarly manoeuvring, they are rhetorical.

Apart from that, what was the sense of the whole enterprise? The Greeks held Thermopylae with a force more than meagre in contrast to Xerxes' army. What for? It could not be for their deed to "go down in history"; and it is impossible that they believed that they could firmly block the Persian army there. The Persians could march south by this or any other route. Both sides must have been aware of that.

It remains for us to perceive Thermopylae as an attempt to delay the Persians' great march (even though that march was relatively slow and the delay of a day or two could not have any great significance), or as delaying tactics aimed at gaining some time (three days!) in order to attain other goals (evacuation of cities, mobilisation of the army, constructing fortifications at the Isthmus etc.). Unfortunately, nothing withstands a rational analysis here. For reasons of their own, the Spartans decided to make Thermopylae their first line of defence (I do not consider serious the interpretation that this was to be a proof of their concern with the cause).

Reasons: unknown. What about the outcome, irrespective of the goals? According to Paul Cartledge[14] and many others, the death of the defenders at Thermopylae raised the Greek morale. A long time ago, the Austrian scholar F. Miltner wrote: "Leonidas war vielleicht der einzige Grieche, der mit Wissen sich, und seine Leute, geopfert hat, nicht für die eine Polis, sondern für des gesamte Vaterland".[15] The Greek scholar A. Dascalakis considered Thermopylae to have been a sacrifice "pour tout les peuples de la terre, des sacrifices pour la cause de la liberté".[16] It is certain that Thermopylae opened the way to Greek victories over the Persians at Salamis and Plataeae.

[14] Cartledge 2006, 198.

[15] Miltner 1935, 240–241.

[16] Dascalakis 1962, 13.

"Marathon" and "Thermopylae" in the ancient *mémoire collective*

Both battles are viewed by us only from the perspective of the Greek sources, and some lacunas are obvious even in those. It is also clear that in both cases the events were quickly mythologized. In the case of Marathon, this process could be accompanied by an argument about merits. There could be no doubt as to the collective hero: the victorious Athenians. Yet we are aware that not all the commanders were in favour of the battle. Did the Athenians believe, like we do, that the victory should be credited to Miltiades' genius?

There are reasons to believe that it was not so. One archaeological find may constitute a corroboration that an argument about merits did indeed occur: a fragment of a large memorial, which after the battle was erected by the Athenians in honour of the polemarch Callimachus, who fell at Marathon.[17] In the same year, 489, when the stele of Callimachus was placed on the Acropolis to be visible from afar, Miltiades sat shackled in the Athenian prison, where he was soon to die.[18] It ought to be remembered that in his time, Miltiades may have been a controversial figure – a fact too easily forgotten by those who are swift to make connections between Marathon and democracy. He had spent many years away from Athens, as a tyrant of Chersonese and a loyal subject of Persia. When he returned to Athens in 493, he was accused of treason. The lawsuit against Miltiades in 489 demonstrates that he did not have any less enemies then. It is quite possible that not all the Athenians were convinced they owed their salvation mainly to Miltiades. Fifty year later, the argument was settled forever when Herodotus made Miltiades the chief hero of Marathon.

In Athens, generally, Marathon almost immediately grew into a symbol of the Greeks' struggle with the barbarians (as seen from *The Persians* by Aeschylus, dated 472).[19] The first epitomised love of freedom, the latter – enslavement. Marathon became the object of pride for the Athenians, who were the first among the Greeks to oppose the invasion of the eastern barbarians. A feast in honour of those who gave their life "for the cause of freedom" was celebrated every year (*IG* II, 1, 471, 26).

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[17] *IG* I^2 609; Sekunda 2002, 10–11.

[18] In connection with the failure of the expedition to Paros, he was accused of „leading the people into error" (*apate to demou*), imprisoned and sentenced to pay the fine of 50 talents. He died in prison from a wound received during that campaign (Hdt. 6. 136; Corn. Nep. *Milt*. 7; *Cim*. 1; Iust. 2. 15. 19; Dem. 26. 6; Plut. *Cim*. 4, 3; Plato, *Gorg*. 516D-E; Ps. Plato, *Axiochos* 368D; Diod. 10. 29). See Kulesza 1994, 55–58; Kulesza 1995, 88–89.

[19] Crucial information on the "reception" of Marathon in the antiquity is collected by Gehrke 2007, 96–104.

The developing myth of Marathon carried certain internal meanings, especially in the 460's, when the influence of Cimon, son of Miltiades, on the political life of Athens was evident. Herodotus's final diagnosis is probably connected with that. It was then that Athens, in gratitude for the Marathon victory, founded in Delphi a memorial featuring statues of ten eponymous heroes, patrons of the Attic phylae, as well as statues of Codrus and Theseus, mythical rulers of Athens, the protoplast of Miltiades' family Philaeus, Athena and Apollo, and Miltiades himself (Paus. 10. 1. 1).

Ca. 460 BC upon the initiative of Cimon's brother-in-law Peisianax, the Stoa Poikile was built in Athens; it contained paintings depicting the fight of the Athenians with Amazons, the Trojan war, and the Battle of Marathon. One of the scenes featured Miltiades (Paus. 1. 15. 2). The monumental statue of Athena Promachos by Phidias, placed on the Acropolis, was also meant to remind the Athenians, and other Greeks, of Marathon (Paus. 1. 28. 2; *IG* I^3 435; Dem. 19. 272) As Athena fought in the first line (*promachos*), so the Athenians, residents of her city, stood at the head of all Hellenes (*promachountes Hellenon*) – a perfect justification for their aspirations to leadership in Greece.

Yet Marathon had also an internal social dimension. The victors of Marathon (*Marathonomachai*) were rivals to the victors of Salamis. The first were hoplites, members of the middle class; the latter were sailors, less affluent citizens, who could not afford the accoutrements of a hoplite. The victory over the Persians in the Battle of Salamis was in a great part due to them.

"Marathon" against "Thermopylae"?

The majority of Greeks remembered the battles of Marathon, Thermopylae, Salamis and Plataeae; but the future was to belong not to the pan-Hellenic Salamis or Plataeae, but to the Marathon, appropriated by the Athenians, and Thermopylae, which the Spartans made their own. All "others" were expunged: the Plataeans from Marathon, the Thespians and Thebans from Thermopylae. As A. R. Burn wrote, "Only the Spartans shine"[20] in Thermopylae. Is it possible, then, that the triumph of propaganda over the history of the Greco-Persian wars took place already in the antiquity? In the name of their own interests, the Athenians and Spartans took good care of "their" victories. The fallen Athenians were buried in an impressive tumulus on the plain of Marathon. In Thermopylae, a stone lion and the famous epitaph by Simonides

[20] Burn 1984, 407.

commemorated the death of the Spartans. Perhaps it is only there that lies the source of the general, and not entirely correct, conviction that a Spartiate could only be victorious or die, *tertium don datur*. A burial as appropriate as possible, as soon as possible, was granted to all others; but not all were later present in the "collective memory".

The Spartans, incidentally, yielded not to the Persian might; the chief villain (besides Xerxes) of Herodotus' account is that Ephialtes of Malis who told the enemy about the path through the mountains[21]. By this, he took the burden of responsibility from all the others, the combatants as much as the remaining Greeks[22]. That "Greek Judas" purged the Greek conscience, and there is something symbolic in the fact that to the Hellenes, the word "ephialtis" still means "a nightmare".

With the passage of time, both battles gained in importance with respect to politics. In the rivalry of Athens and Sparta over the hegemony, especially in the 440's, justifications for leading the whole Hellas included those linked to the past. Only then did the Spartans sent to Thermopylae a delegation which was to bring the remains of Leonidas to the home polis. Somehow the Spartans identified their hero, although over the intervening decades he must have changed considerably. More or less at the same time Herodotus announced to the world a message much pleasing to an Athenian ear: it is the Athenians who are the saviours of Greece. Because of Marathon.

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[21] As reasonably noted by Eduard Meyer (1944, IV, 1, p. 356 note 1), the Persians would have found that path even without a guide. On the other hand, it would have taken them some time. It was, however, a Greek who showed it to them – whatever his name was. The Greeks themselves (in spite of doubts, which today we are unable to clear) considered Ephialtes to have been the culprit. Maybe there were more, but this image is better: just one Greek arriving before Xerxes, not a whole delegation.

[22] See the poem by K. Kavafis (1903) entitled *Thermopylae*:

Honor to those who in their lives
have defined and guard their Thermopylae.
never stirring from duty;
just and upright in all their deeds,
yet with pity and compassion too;
generous when they are rich, and when
they are poor, again a little generous,
again helping as much as they can;
always speaking the truth,
yet without hatred for those who lie.
And more honor is due to them
when they foresee (and many do foresee)
that Ephialtes will finally appear,
and that the Medes in the end will go through

"Marathon" and "Thermopylae" in the later *mémoire collective*

Marathon has long been an element of the European *mémoire collective*. John Stuart Mill in his review of the first volume of George Grote's *History of Greece* (1846) wrote: *The battle of Marathon, even as an event in English history, is more important than the Battle of Hastings. If the issue of that day had been different, perhaps the Britons and the Saxons would still be wandering in the woods*.[23]

In what way is it more important? Because it determined the history of England – or perhaps because it occupies more space in the English awareness than the Battle of Hastings? Of course this does not implicate only the English, who, just like Marathon, gain a symbolic sense here. It is certain that Marathon belongs to a matrix of symbols that today are clear to, and needed by, everyone – not only the Europeans; symbols that epitomise the contrast between the world of freedom and the world of enslavement.

It is a fact that it was used to various ends in the past. Yet in all the examples I have selected it is the symbol of freedom. For instance, when the revolutionary France fell in love with the Antiquity, and towns with "royalist" or "superstitious" appellations attempted to changes them to names more in keeping with the spirit of the times, one of them, Saint-Maximin in le Var, expressed the wish to become Marathon, in honour of the heroic Athenians and… citizen Marat.[24] Marathon serves the purpose of the moment here, but retains its primary meaning. It is a *nom sacré* which symbolises the love of freedom. Yet the star of Marathon rose fully in the 19th century, when it became an inspiration for poets (e.g. Elizabeth Barrett Browning and George Byron) and the symbol of the Greek war of independence.

It was, of course, present also in the history of Poland. It is a well-known fact that in the 19th century Polish artists and men of letters often referred to Greek symbolism, because it was clear to the readers and difficult for the censors to suppress, since in all the partitioned lands of Poland education was based on the knowledge of the Antiquity. After the November Uprising (1830–1831), the

[23] Mill 1978, 273.

[24] The petition of Societe Populair of Saint-Maximin in le Var, dated 25th brumaire of the 2nd year, reads: *Représentants, Vous avez décrété que les villes qui portent des noms supersitieux doivent en changer. Les sans-culottes de Saint-Maximin ont toujours soisi avec avidité tout ce qui peut contribuer a la ruine des préjugés religieux et royalists… Marathon est le nom que nous avons pris: ce nom sacré nous rappelled la plaine athénienne qui devint le tombaeau de cent mille satellites; mais il nous rappelled avec encore plus de douceur la mémoire de l'ami du people. Marat est tombé victime des federalists et des intriguants. Puisse le nom que nous prenons contribuer a éterniser ses vertus et son civisme* (quoted after Mossé 1989, 133–134).

Battle of Grochów was compared to Marathon by Bruno Kiciński (1797–1844) in his poem *Trzeci maj* [*The 3rd of May*]:

As Marathon in the Greek history,
So shines Grochów in ours[25]

In my opinion, the beautiful poem by Kornel Ujejski (1823–1897) entitled *Maraton* (1845) perfectly renders the atmosphere in Athens of the year 490:

Athens are empty. Women, the blind and the old,
Only they remained within the city walls.
Whoever able, gazed in fearful distress
In the direction where the battle raged.
Nothing to be seen; the sun goes down,
Then the stars… Shush… shush… A yell nearby.
Someone hastens swiftly – cobblestones resound,
Someone shouts: "Out of breath! Cannot speak. Greece… alive!
Glory! Glory!… Miltiades!... One breath… Victory's ours!"
Women went out of the houses, bearing torches overhead.
Up the street ran a Greek with a laurel bough,
He fell shouting: "Victory!" – He was dead.

Yet there is more to its meaning, since Ujejski wrote about ancient Greece and concurrently about Poland of his own time. In the speech of Miltiades he brilliantly contrasted the attitudes of struggle and submission:

Whoever will be a servant, let him live, let him go,
Round his own neck let him wind a stout rope,
Let him pledge his will forever in thrall:
The master is nearby, he should to him crawl!
There, first fondly patted, then spurned in spite,
Let him bow his head low and kneel at the door,
Let him forever grovel and, like a hungry dog, crawl
To his master's leg that would only smite!
But we – we shall stay…

We who are free men, because

Everything – everything incites us to war:
Every inch of our soil, alive with grave-dust,
All clouds that bear, up in the bright sky,

[25] All translations from Polish poetry have been made for the purpose of the current essay (translator's note).

Shades of the fallen we see with soul's eye,
And the times of yore – all the ages of our past
That in their bosom conceal so much glory

Yet, in the course of the 19th century, not everywhere and not always was Marathon glorified. According to William Sewell (1804–1874), "the Greek at Marathon fought only for his country" and therefore "the Persian far surpassed him [sic! – R.K.], because he fought for his king".[26] This example clearly shows that in the monarchist Europe of the 19th century, abstract freedom was not a value in itself.

The change in symbolism: 1896

Currently the fame of the battle has been eclipsed by the Marathon race – the battle became no more than an addition to it, if a splendid one, giving the sports competition a magnificent pedigree. The Marathon runner, as has already been said, was never mentioned by any of his contemporaries; in essence, this figure belongs to the realm of legends.

In the film *The Giant of Marathon*[27] (1959) the main hero, Philippides (Steve Reeves), bears a message from Marathon to Athens, ordered to do so by Miltiades. He does not die, however – the film was, after all, made in America; he proceeds to a well-deserved date with his sweetheart, appropriately named Andromeda.[28] Thus, in our times it is not Miltiades, but that runner who is made the true hero of Marathon.

This happened partially by accident. Michel Breal, a scholar and lover of the Antiquity, suggested to Baron Pierre de Coubertin that Marathon ought to be

[26] Franciszek Kasparek (*Prawo polityczne ogólne z uwzględnieniem austryjackiego* [*General Political Law, Including the Austrian Law*], vol. 1, Cracow 1877, p. 678), who quotes the view of William Sewell (*Christian Politics*, London 1848, p. 146).

[27] This seems to be the only film about the Battle of Marathon. Other "Marathon" films apply loose, but not random, associations with Marathon. To this category belong *Marathon Man* (1976), directed by John Schlesinger and starring Dustin Hoffman; *Marathon* (2002), where a neurotic New York woman frenetically solves crossword puzzles; the South-Korean *Marathon* (2005) about an autistic marathon runner. There are also the more sport-oriented films: the documentary *Marathon* of 1965 (directed by Robert Gardner, Joyce Chopra); a Spanish film about the Barcelona Olympics, *Marathon* (1992); a film about eight runners competing in the London marathon (2008). The film *Maraton polski* (*Polish Marathon*, 1927) directed by Wiktor Biegański was, according to my knowledge (unfortunately, I have not been able to access the film itself; it is possible that it did not survive) a story about a march along the route taken by Józef Piłsudski's Cadre Company (Cracow – Kielce), with added scenes of fights for Polish independence, from the January Uprising in 1863 until the outbreak of the 1st World War in 1914.

[28] Solomon 2001, 39.

honoured by introducing the so-called Marathon race into the program of the modern-day Olympic Games in 1896.[29] It is true that no such competition was known in the Antiquity. It is true that the mythical dimension of the "loneliness of the long-distance runner", epitomised by the Marathon messenger, belongs not to the Antiquity, but to our times. It is also true that various competitions that take a long time are now called marathons. Various marathon races (as well as half-, quarter- and super-marathons) are organised throughout the world: in Boston, Warsaw, Berlin, New York etc. We also have film marathons; literary, poetic, sailing, biblical, horse, cycling marathons; even fishing, motoring and roller-skating ones.[30]

Does this mean that "the story ends in trivialization", as said by the German historian Hans-Joachim Gehrke[31]? I do not think so. Marathon belongs to the European, and currently to the world's *mémoire collective*. Everyone associates it with individual overcoming of one's weakness (the Marathon race), and many associate it with the fight for freedom, where the weak pitch themselves against the strong (the Battle of Marathon). Apart from that, it would be wrong to say that "the story ends" *at all* – the myth of Marathon is still alive.[32] The association of Marathon with running, however, remains the most important, and all-familiar;[33] it is a generally known symbol.

Education does a good job in keeping the good ol' thing alive. Recently, an occasion for celebrations was provided by the anniversary of the Battle of Mara-

[29] Lucas 1976, 132–134; Krämer, Zobel, Irro 2004.

[30] Although one may harbour doubts as to some of those; for instance when we hear of the "Internet Creativity Marathon", or the "Polish Horror Marathon" (which actually took place in Kijów Cinema in 2010), the "International Marathon of Ecology", the "Letter-Writing Marathon" (organised by Amnesty International), the "Guitar Marathon", the "Tango Marathon" (additionally advertised as an enterprise that guarantees "ten hours of passion"), or the "Marathon of Tough Men, with Polish Championships in Crawling along a Beach" (Kamień Pomorski 2010). Everything that takes a long time is customarily called a "marathon", from Greek (and not e.g. "macaroni", from Italian) – certainly because Marathon is a good address, a name that elevates the whole enterprise.

[31] Gehrke 2007, 106.

[32] In the USA there are several locations named Marat(h)on (as well as Athens, Sparta, Thermopylae). Recently, in 1999, a new town named Marathon was established in Florida. This small town (little over 10,000 residents) owes its name to a railway station created during the construction of the Florida East Coast Railway in 1907. When, sparing no costs, it was attempted to finish the enterprise, it was said it was "a true Marathon", and the station gained a name. Today, there is the American Marathon in Florida, where literally everything is Marathon, including the Marathon Church of God.

[33] The first-ever "Robot Marathon" (422 rounds x 100 metres) took place in 2011 in Osaka. I do not know who was the victor, but I see the very fact that this race was organised as the most important; the Japanese have obviously joined the growing circle of heirs of the Greek Marathon's tradition.

thon. Scholarly conferences were held.[34] Books were published.[35] The government of Greece organized exhibitions and occasional lectures in many countries.[36] On 8th December 2010, the House of Representatives of the United States Congress accepted[37] the Resolution no. 1704, pronouncing the Battle of Marathon one of the most important battles in the history of humanity and honouring the heroic Athenians as creators of democracy whose precepts were later accepted by the United States. John Stuart Mill would have been pleased. In a manner convenient to all concerned, a bridge connecting democracy – Greece – Marathon – United States of America was constructed.

In contrast to "Marathon", "Thermopylae" have retained their primary, warlike nature. Also, while "Marathon" has gained a rather general image, becoming simply a Greek victory, "Thermopylae" still have their collective hero: the Spartans, and the individual one: Leonidas.[38]

We know of kings of Sparta who were greater than he. Little is known about Leonidas himself, because his "Life" by Plutarch was lost, and perhaps also because the brighter shone the star of Thermopylae, the less seemly it was to write ill of him. There may have been little of which to write well; the circumstances in which he ascended the throne are less than clear. In any case, Leonidas is today the only Spartan with whose name the broader audience is familiar.

Even Origenes counted him, in a sense, as "one of ours", pointing out that the example of Leonidas (and Socrates) may help Christians understand the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The heroic defenders of Thermopylae are mentioned by very many later authors, e.g. Charles Montesquieu (1580) or Richard Glover (1737), who in his poem *Leonidas* criticised the Spartan king for choosing to die for his homeland rather than live for it, but above all pictured him as an embodiment of patriotism and a model for an 18th-century monarch.

The true renaissance of "Marathon" and "Thermopylae" started in the period of the French Revolution, when both battles began to be perceived a symbols of

[34] E.g. the conference *The Importance of Marathon Battle to Civilization*, held on 7th–10th October 2010 at the University of the Peloponnese in Kalamata.

[35] E.g. Billows 2010. In Poland, the *Polityka* magazine issued a large-edition collective work *Maraton*.

[36] Upon the initiative of Gabriel Copsidis, Ambassador of Greece in Poland, on 23rd November 2010 an exhibition entitled *Maraton – dawniej i dziś*, celebrating the 2500th anniversary of the battle, was opened at the University of Warsaw, preceded by addresses by Ambassador Copsidis and Prof. Włodzimierz Lengauer, Vice-Rector of the University and an outstanding expert on the Antiquity, as well as a lecture by the author of this essay.

[37] Put forward by Democrat James McGovern, passed by a great majority: 359 votes for with 44 against.

[38] For a classic study of the modern reception of the legend of Sparta in Europe, see Rawson 1969. Elisabeth Rawson focuses on England, France, Germany and Italy.

patriotism worthy of imitation.[39] In an outpouring of patriotic sentiment, not only the already-mentioned Saint-Maximin was renamed Marathon: the residents of Saint-Marcellin in Isere renamed their town Thermopyles, while Saint-Eusebe in Saone-et-Loire became Sparte! Greek and Roman authorities were generally cited; theatres staged dramas with such evocative titles as *Miltiade a Marathon*, *Combat de Thermophyles* or *Les Choeurs de Marathon*. Among the innocent victims of *anticomanie* were children, who were given names of ancient heroes (although the name Leonidas seems to have been less popular).

In the 19th century the run of good luck continued, especially when it comes to Thermopylae. The battle and its hero, Leonidas, remained a source of inspiration to French authors.[40] The oeuvre of George Byron merits a special mention, as well as the song *Nation Once Again* by Thomas Davis (1814–1845), so crucial to the Irish independence movement, recalling the commonly understood motif of the Three Hundred (Spartans).

It is not surprising that the Spartan motifs: Leonidas, "the valiant hero" according to Kotowski[41], and the Battle of Thermopylae, were popular in Poland as well. Bruno Kiciński (1797–1844) in his *Wiersz do pułku czwartego piechoty liniowej* [*Verses to the 4th Regiment of Line Infantry*] wrote: "The fields of Grochów you have transformed into Thermopylae"; a similar metaphor was used by Konstanty Gaszyński (1809–1866) in his poem *Olszyna Grochowska* [*The Alder Grove of Grochów*]: "Hail, the grove of Grochów, the Polish Thermopylae!".

In Juliusz Słowacki's recollections from his visit in Greece we find both the ancient Hellas and Poland of his own day. He associates Greek Chaeronea with Polish Maciejowice. The Spartans' death in Thermopylae prompts a reflection: they died to the last man – while the Poles in the Uprising? "How many of you were there?".[42]

Sparta gained special respect in Germany due to its patriotism, but Thermopylae were evaluated variously.[43] Hans Delbrück (1848–1929), an expert in ancient warfare, perceived Thermopylae as *ein Fehler, eine Halbheit.*[44] Karl Julius Beloch (1854–1929) expressed his doubts as to the Spartans' effectiveness. In his opinion, "the Thermopylae catastrophe had only one advantage – it

[39] See Parker 1937; Mossé 1988.

[40] According to Elisabeth Rawson (*op. cit.*) e.g. *Leonidas* by Michel Pichat (1825), J. Barbey's *Aux heros de Thermopyles* (1825), C. Gouverne's *Leonidas aux Thermopyles* (1827), Elisa Mercoeur's *Le Songe ou les Thermopyles* (1827), Victor Hugo's *Les Trois Cents* (1873).

[41] Kotowski 1818, 169.

[42] Sinko 1933, 15.

[43] An overview of issues connected with the image of Sparta in Germany (and elsewhere) is found in Karl Christ 1986, 1–72 (esp. from p. 8).

[44] Delbrück 1887, 89–90.

freed the allied army from an incompetent commander".[45] The majority of German scholars was, however, of a different opinion and similarly to Ernst Curtius (1814–1896) saw Thermopylae as an "everlasting monument to heroic civic virtue", or, as Eduard Meyer (1855–1930) put it, as "glowing example that showed the nation the path it had to take".[46]

Academic circles of the period of the Weimar Republic perceived Sparta as the model of Doric valour.[47] In the later, Fascist education the figure of Leonidas held a special place. Helmut Berve (1896–1979), *rector magnificus* of the Leipzig University, one of the enthusiasts and high officials of the régime, pointed to him as the model for the German youth. In his opinion, creating men such as Leonidas, ready to give their lives for the *Volk und Reich*, ought to have been the aim of classical education in Germany.[48] "To our young people, Leonidas and his companions will forever remain an example and object of admiration", wrote Ulrich Wilcken (1862–1944) in 1924.[49]

"The national Thermopylae"

Throughout the 19th, 20th and early 21st century, "Thermopylae" seem to have replaced "Marathon" as the symbol of a heroic fight for freedom. They are more suggestive than Marathon. In practice, they are the main ancient actualisation of Horace's well-known adage *Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori* ("It is sweet and fitting to die for one's homeland"), which, incidentally, was quite problematic in the Roman era, apart from the fact that Horace himself was, fortunately for us, very far from the thought of dying for anything.

Many battles fought in the course of history were, more or less justly, compared to Thermopylae. Usually, the comparison was founded on the issues of the

[45] *Nur einen Vorteil hat die Katastrophe an den Thermopylen der griechischen Sache gebracht; sie hat das Bundesheer von einem unfähigen Oberfeldherrn befreit und die Bahn freigemacht für den Mann, der es im folgenden Jahre bei Plataeae zum Siege führen sollte* (Beloch 1931, 105).

[46] "in glänzendem Vorbilde zeigte er der Nation den Weg, den się zu gehen hatte" (Meyer 1944, 361). We are dealing with a long tradition here. Already J. C. F. Manso, the author of the first scholarly synthesis on Sparta (1800–1805), a Prussian patriot and a *Breslauer Gymnasialprofessor*, assumed that Sparta may serve the Prusiian state as a "lehrendes und warnendes Beispiel" (see Christ 1986, 11).

[47] See Krüger, 2009.

[48] It is significant that one squadron of the Luftwaffe was named "Leonidas".

[49] "Mögen unserer Jugend Leonidas und seine Getreuen immer ein Vorbild und ein Gegestand der Verehrung bleiben!" (quoted after Christ 1986, 61 note 213). Wilcken's *Griechische Geschichte* was first published in 1924. Its 9th edition appeared in 1962. Despite protests, this sentence was not removed from any of the issues, including the most recent one, published in 1973.

struggle for freedom, heroic fight for the homeland, often a huge difference in strength, sometimes barbarity of the victors; in our times, it was occasionally no more than the desire to subscribe to the respected symbol that denoted belonging to a better world. The grounds for fame differ. In some cases, it is the way to internationalise a less known event or a battle that belonged to local history. To quote just a few examples: the "Cathar Thermopylae" is the defence of Montsegur in France; the stronghold fell on 16th March 1244 after a ten-month siege, and 400 to 500 of its defenders were burned at the stake. The name "Serbian Thermopylae" is sometimes attached to the Battle of Kosovo (1389), in which died 4,500 Turks and 10,000 Serbs and which is a milestone in the history of the Balkans. The "Prussian Thermopylae" is the Battle of Landeshut (23rd June 1760) where the Prussian army was defeated by the Austrians during the Third Silesian War. The Battle of Valmy (1792) was also compared to Thermopylae. Similar association were evoked by Cokesina in the north-eastern Serbia: on 16th April 1804, during the first Serbian uprising against the Turkish rule, 303 young *haiduk* guerillas died, literally to the last man, defending the Cokesina monastery.[50] The Battle of Somosierra (30th November 1808), where Kozietulski and his companions fought for France, are the "Spanish Thermopylae". There are also two "Austrian Thermopylaes": from 1809[51] and from the time of the 1st World War.[52]

A special place among the "Thermopylaes" is held by the American case: the defence of the Alamo in Texas (23rd February – 6th March 1836), where ca. 180 men hopelessly resisted some thousand soldiers of General Santa Anna. All but one defender died. Here, the manner of presentation is different: the Alamo is not the "American Thermopylae", it is the other way round: Thermopylae are the "Greek Alamo"![53]

The name of the "Bulgarian Thermopylae" is attached to the battle for the Shipka Pass during the Russo-Turkish War in 1877–1878. For several months 6,000 Russians and Bulgarians defended the pass against 40,000 Turks. There is

[50] Asked about the Battle of Kosovo as the "Serbian Thermopylae", Prof. Petar Bunjak from the University of Belgrade wrote to me that "the Serbian Marathon fields and the Serbian Thermopylae are countless"; at the same time he pointed out that, as a *terminus technicus* of sorts, it is Cokesina that functions as the "Serbian Thermopylae", because this is how it was called by Leopold Ranke in his *Die Serbische Revolution* (1829).

[51] Veltze 1905; Wörndle 1908; Wintersteller 1908 (*non vidi*).

[52] Frankhauser 2002 (*non vidi*).

[53] Which prompts reflection in itself. It must result from, and be indicative of, something that while the "entire" world derives satisfaction from the chance to associate events of its history with Thermopylae, Americans want to see (or must be shown) Thermopylae as the Alamo. Incidentally, two films about the "American Thermopylae" have been made: *The Alamo* (1960) directed by John Wayne, and *The Alamo* (2004) directed by John Lee Hancock.

also the defence of Tsingtao in 1914: the "Chinese Thermopylae" (or rather the German ones, because the Chinese character of that encounter lies only in the fact that it occurred on Chinese soil). The Germans, in turn, associated with Thermopylae the fighting in the region of Langemarck in Flanders in the autumn of 1914, honoured with a version of Simonides' epitaph: *When in Germany, tell them, passer-by / That we lie here, for such were the orders.*[54]

The 2nd World War brought the next set of "Thermopylae" – on both sides of the front line. It began with the "Finnish Thermopylae", that is the defensive war of Finland against the invading Soviet Union. The fighting at Isurava (New Guinea) in September 1942 are the "Australian Thermopylae". Incidentally, it was the Australians and New Zealanders who, in 1941, were destined to fight the Germans in the original, Greek Thermopylae. This time round, it was not the arrows of Persian archers, but the German bombers that put an end to the encounter.

Usually the references to Thermopylae allude to a heroic defence; yet the aggressors, too, can identify with that battle. In his famous *Thermopylenrede*, a speech broadcast by radio on 30th January 1943 r., Hermann Göring spurred on the Germans fighting at Stalingrad with a new interpretation of the famous epitaph: *When in Germany, tell them you have seen us fight at Stalingrad / For Germany, obedient to the laws of honour and war.*[55] Sparta, Thermopylae and Leonidas resurfaced during the dying moments of the Third Reich. At his birth-

[54] "Wanderer kommst Du nach Deutschland, verkundige dorten Du habest/Uns hier liegen, wie das Gesetz es befahl" (Rebenich 2002, 328).

[55] Quoted after Christ 1986 (note 190 pp. 51–52): *Meine Soldaten, die meisten von euch warden von einem ähnlichen Beispiel der großen gewaltigen Geschichte Europas gehört haben. Wenn auch damals die Zahlen klein waren, so gibt es letzten Endes doch keinen Unterschied der Tat als solcher. Vor 21/2 Jahrtausenden stand in einem kleinen Engpaß in Griechenland ein unendlich tapferer und kühner Mann mit dreihundert seiner Manner, stand Leonidas mit dreihundert Spartanern, aus einem Stamm, der wegen seiner Tapferkeit und Kühnheit bekannt war. Eine überwältigende Mehrheitgriff diese kleine Schar immer wieder aufs neue an. Der Himmel verkundelte von der Zahl der Pfeile, die abgeschossen wurden. Auch damals war es ein Ansturm von Horden, der sich hier am nordischen Menschen brach. Eine gewaltige Zahl von Kämpfern stand Xerxes zur Verfügung, aber die dreihundert Manner wichen und wankten nicht, sie kämpfen einen aussichtlosen Kampf, ausichtlos aber nicht in seiner Bedeutung. Schließlich fiel der letzte Mann. In diesem Engpass steht nun ein Satz: 'Wanderer, kommst du nach Sparta, so berichte, du habest un shier liegen sehen, wie das Gesetz es befahl!' Es waren dreihundert Manner, meine Kameraden, Jahrtausende sind vergangen, und heute gilt jener Kampf und jenes Opfer dort noch so heroisch, immer noch als Beispiel höchsten Soldatentums. Und es wird noch einmal in der Geschichte unserer Tage heißen: Kommst Du nach Deutschland, so berichte, du habest uns in Stalingrad kämpfen sehen, wie das Gesetz*, ***das Gesetz für die Sicherheit unseres Volkes es befohlen hat*** [emphasis mine – R.K.]. Karl Christ quotes after J. Wieder, *Stalingrad und die Verantwortung des Soldaten*, München 1962, p. 327 and following. Stefan Rebenich (2002, 331) cites a different ending: "…das Gesetz der Ehre und Kriegführung es für Deutschland befohlen hat".

day party, held on 20th April 1945 in Berlin, Hitler mentioned Thermopylae rejecting the idea of evacuation. "A desperate fight will always be remembered as a worthy example," he said to Martin Bormann. "Just think of Leonidas and his three hundred Spartans".[56]

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We have a considerable number of the "Polish Thermopylae", too. A certain synthesis of those was offered by Tadeusz Różewicz in his poem *Polskie Termopile*. In the Polish collective memory, four encounters, fought in different periods, were particularly famous as the "Polish Thermopylae". The first of those was the Battle of Węgrów (3rd February 1863) during the January Uprising.[57] It was compared to the Spartan resistance by the French poet Auguste Barbier (1805–1882) in a poem *La Charge de Wengrow*, which in the 19th century was famous throughout Europe. Barbier wrote:

[…] like in the days of old Leonidas,
Two hundred youths sacrifice themselves
To save the army, and expire
Devoured by the cannons' fiery mouths.[58]

The event was celebrated also by Maria Konopnicka (1842–1910) in her poem *Bój pod Węgrowem* [*The Fighting at Węgrów*] from 1904, in which she alluded to Barbier:

When a foreign poet extolled
That valour and that strength,
He called the Battle of Węgrów
"Polish Thermopylae".

The following Polish Thermopylae belong to the 20th century. On 17th August 1920 at the village of Zadwórze, 33 kilometres away from Lvov, a troop of 330 young Lvovian volunteers commanded by Captain Bolesław Zajączkowski

[56] "Ein verzweifelter Kampf behalt seinen ewigen Wert als Beispiel. Man denke an Leonidas und seine dreihundert Spartaner". According to Karl Christ (1986, 51, note 189) quoting Fest 1973, 989, Hitler uttered this sentence in February 1945.

[57] On the Battle of Węgrów, see Kołodziejczyk 1994.

[58] "[…] comme aux jours du vieux Léonidas, / Deux cents nobles enfants au salut d'une armée / Se dévouer, et tous de la gueule enflammée / Des canons dévorants recevoir le trépas"; Auguste Barbier, *La Charge de Wengrow*, in: *Silves et rimes legeres*, 1872, pp. 380–381; translated for the purpose of the current essay (translator's note).

heroically resisted the advance of the Red Army under Budyonny.[59] The aim was to delay the arrival of the Bolshevik army to Lvov. The defence was a success – Budyonny resigned from a further advance on Lvov. However, 318 of 330 Poles fell during the battle, Captain Zajączkowski and some other survivors committed suicide, while the Russians killed off the majority of the wounded.[60]

The third Polish Thermopylae is the Battle of Dytiatyn, fought on 16th September 1920.[61] The 13th Infantry Regiment "Children of Cracow" commanded by Captain Jan Gabryś was defending Hill 385 against the attack of the 8th Mounted *Red Cossack* Division of the Red Army, commanded by General Vitaliy Primakov, which included six regiments of infantry. The strengths were hugely disproportionate: ca. 600 men, six cannons and six heavy machine guns on the Polish side, some 2500 to 3000 men, twelve cannons and twenty heavy machine guns on the Russian side. Polish soldiers fought to the death. The calls: "*Polyak, zdaysya! Nye uydyosh!*" [You, Pole, give up! You shan't escape!] went unheeded – no-one surrendered. As the commander ordered.[62]

The last Polish Thermopylae is the defence of Wizna (7th to 10th September 1939).[63] The commander, Captain Władysław Raginis, had a very small troop: ca. twenty officers, 700 non-commissioned officers and private soldiers; six light cannons, twenty-four heavy machine guns, eighteen light machine guns, two anti-tank rifles. General Heinz Guderian had an overwhelming advantage in numbers (ca. 42,000 soldiers) and equipment. But the defenders of Wizna fought like lions – the last bastion fell only on 10th September. During the fighting at Captain Raginis' bunker at Góra Strękowa, the Germans threatened to kill all the prisoners if the resistance continues. After an hour of consideration, aware that the ammunition is running out and the majority of his men are wounded, Raginis ordered his soldiers to leave the bunker and blew himself up with a grenade.

[59] On the Battle of Zadwórze, see Nicieja 2000.

[60] The fallen were buried close by the battleground. Seven, including Capt. Zajączkowski, were later buried at a separate Zadwórze section of the Defenders of Lvov Cemetery. In 1925 Jadwiga Zarugiewicz, mother of one of the soldiers, the 19-year-old Konstanty, selected one of three coffins of soldiers fallen in the defence of Lvov; transported to Warsaw, on 2nd November 1925 it was ceremonially buried in the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

[61] On the Battle of Dytiatyn, see Odziemkowski 1994.

[62] *Following their commander's order: 'to stand until the last drop of blood', all of them, soldiers and officers alike, bravely stood on their positions, sacrificing their lives rather than the cannons and the honour of a Polish Soldier. […] May their valour and their inflexible courage kindle in us that great flame of the love of our Homeland; and may that flame lead us all in the footsteps of such heroes. In recognition of their valour and sacrifice, the 4th battery of the 1st Regiment of Mountain Guns has been recommended for the Virtuti Militari Cross as the "death battery"* (from the order of General Józef Haller and the commander of the 8th Infantry Regiment Colonel Burhardt-Bukacki).

[63] On the Battle of Wizna, see Bernaś, Mikulska-Bernaś 1970.

Lieutenant Stanisław Brykalski, who together with Raginis vowed never to give up the position while alive, was killed earlier.

The memorial in honour of the heroic defence of Wizna, located at Góra Strękowa, bears a telling inscription: *Passer-by, tell the Homeland that we fought to the end, fulfilling our duty*. Recently the defenders of Wizna have been brought closer to the young audience by the Swedish group *Sabaton*, who sings of the Polish soldiers – "Spartans in spirit".[64]

Sometimes associations with Thermopylae emerge also in reference to other events from Polish history (e.g. the Piotrków Thermopylae of 1939, the Warsaw Thermopylae of 1944–1945). References to the Thermopylae epitaph by Simonides are not infrequent. In the cemetery of Polish soldiers fallen at Monte Cassino during the 2nd World War there is an inscription: "Passer-by, tell Poland / That we have fallen / Faithful in her service". The Thermopylae epitaph is found also in the military section of the Rakowicki Cemetery in Cracow: "Passer-by, tell Homeland / That faithful to her laws here we lie". An inscription referring to Thermopylae is found in the Służewiec cemetery in Warsaw, commemorating the victims of the post-war Communist repressions: "Passer-by, bow your head and stay awhile. Here martyr's blood seeps from each clod of soil. This is Służewiec. These are our Thermopylae".

"The new Thermopylae"

Apart from the above, there certainly exist other "Marathons" and "Thermopylaes"; regrettably, their list will never be ultimately closed. Fresh candidates can be added already.

The contemporary poet Sandor Kanyadi (b. 1929) is the spiritual father of the "Székely Thermopylae" in honour of the Székely soldiers fighting against the Russians and Austrians in Transylvania in 1849.[65] Another poet, Petr Bezruč (1867–1958), little known in Poland or Germany due to his anti-Polish and anti-German sentiments, introduced the expression "the Czech Thermopylae"[66] in his

[64] In an interview for the Rzeczpospolita daily the leader of the group Joakim Brodén said: *Once a Polish fan sent us the info about the Battle of Wizna. When we read about the actions of Captain Władysław Raginis and his colleagues, the story seemed to us so improbable that initially we thought it could not be true. This was incredible courage, for 720 soldiers to resist 42,000 Germans! We immediately thought that this was the most fascinating battle in history, and so we wrote a song about it: 40:1* (*Rzeczpospolita*, 14th June 2008).

[65] Information about the Battle of Nyergesteto (1849) as the "Székely Thermopylae" I owe to Prof. Gabor Gango (Hungarian Academy of Sciences).

[66] Information on the "Czech Thermopylae" I owe to Prof. Maria Sobotkova (University of Olomouc).

poem *Leonidas*, where the Spartan hero is mentioned in connection with the seizure of the Teschen Silesia by Poles. In Bezruč's poem, the Czechs have been placed in the honourable role of the Greeks, while the Poles are the invading Persians.[67] The name of the "Vietnamese Thermopylae" is occasionally attached to fighting at Dien Bien Phu (1953). To an anonymous Internet author we owe the newest, "Caucasus Thermopylae". This time, the role of the Greek defenders has been assigned to the Russian soldiers of the 6th Company of the Pskov Landing Division, which from 28th February to 1st March 2000 attempted to prevent the evacuation of Chechen troops by taking possession of Hill 776 in the vicinity of Ulus-Kert.[68]

[67] Petr Bezruč, "Leonidas" (*Slezské písně*); translated for the purpose of the current essay (translator's note):

In the passes of Thermopylae, facing certain doom
– the row of barbarians advancing in a half-circle –
surprised from behind by a traitor,
Leonidas stood.
Before the battlements of Těšín, on the bank of the Olza River
stand I.
A hundred spears, a hundred swords reaches to my breast,
thousands of gaping eyes glow like torches,
blood flows from my body, blood flows from my eyes,
blood seeps from my neck, blood runs from my breast,
my feet slip in the red sea,
a red Niagara falls on my hands,
standing here in a huge field of poppies;
is it red smoke rising from earth towards the sky,
or is it the clouds that lowered a red curtain upon earth?
Everything is red. I pulled the helmet from my face,
the spears are red, the swords are red,
upon red horses five riders sit –
I know you, counts, I know you, princes, I know,
look, and Xerxes too, Xerxes in purple! –
What is it he whispers to his retinue, what are they plucking from the ground,
what is ringing, what is twanging, what is jingling in my ears?
Has God abandoned you, do you want to cross Bosphorus again?!
From behind they cut the tendons of the legs –
The Poles have remembered the Punic example –
a red angel stroked me, the shield fell from my hand to the ground,
I stand at Těšín,
with my pierced hips leaning against the Gigula,
as I have been ordered by the laws.

[68] The author does not justify why this encounter deserves the name of "Thermopylae" or why he considers the Chechens to be the attackers, i.e. the "Persians", and the Russians – the Greek defenders. Probably crucial were the positive European association, the heroic Russian defence of the hill, and the Chechens' barbarity: "Of the 6th Company's ninety soldiers defending

"The story ends in trivialization"?

Again, it seems not, even if the increasing banality and commercialisation of a symbol is also a phenomenon with a future. Chocolates of the Belgian company "Leonidas" refer to associations with Sparta and its king even though, if tasty, they are utterly non-Spartan (also due to their delicious taste). It is curious, by the by, that Leonidas survives in the popular awareness while Miltiades has entirely disappeared, suffocated by the fame of that first "Marathon runner".[69]

Sparta, Thermopylae, Leonidas are today elements of popular culture. Some films with a Spartan theme are easily remembered, like *The 300 Spartans* (1962) by Rudolph Maté and Zack Snyder's *300* (2006). There are also others, however, for instance the American political thriller *Spartan* (2004) written and directed by David Mamet, the entire "Spartan" character of which is limited to the title. There is also the odd "comedy" by Jason Friedberg and Aaron Seltzer *Meet the Spartans* (2008), which has as much in common with Sparta as Zack Snyder's film, but fortunately (in contrast to the latter) could not reinforce various historical clichés, because it made fun of them.

The title of the film *Go Tell the Spartans* (1978)[70] also indicated a connection with Sparta. It is a Vietnam War story set in 1964. In a Vietnamese village, over the gate to a cemetery where 302 Frenchmen fallen in combat were buried, there is an inscription: *Etranger, dites aux Spartiates que nous demeurons ici par obeissance a leur lois*. A corporal with a French-sounding name Courcey trans-

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the hill, eighty-four heroes fell. Only six – wounded, bleeding and stunned – went unnoticed by the Chechens and were not killed off".

[69] It is difficult to formulate any definite conclusions on that basis, but the popularity of the names of the two heroes: Miltiades in the Greek and Romance world, and Leonidas in Russia and Ukraine, is interesting in itself. Miltiades's namesakes are found in France (Miltiades), Rumunia (Meltiade), Italy (Milziade) and, of course, Greece (Miltiadis); the most famous of those is probably St. Miltiades (Melchiades), the bishop of Rome in 311–313. The name Leonidas occurs in other parts of the world (for instance, the Brazilian football player Leonidas da Silva), but it seems especially popular in Russia and Ukraine. There, the list of famous men bearing the name Leonid(as) is long indeed, including e.g. the economist Leonid Hurwicz (1917–2008), the Greek-Catholic Blessed Leonida Fiodorov (d. 1935), the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Leonid Brezhnev (1906–1982), the outstanding mathematician Leonid Kantorovich (1912–1986), General-Major of the NKVD active in the Katyń affair Leonid Bashtakov (1900–1970), the 1970's Russian athlete Leonid Litvinyenko, the tallest man in the world (253 cm) Leonid Stadnyk, the heroic doctor Leonid Rogozov, who in 1961 performed an appendectomy on himself, and two presidents of Ukraine: Leonid Kravchuk and Leonid Kutschma. The only well-known Leonidas in Poland was Leonid Teliga, who single-handedly circumnavigated the globe on his yacht *Opty*.

[70] Based on a novel by Daniel Ford, directed by Ted Post, starring Burt Lancaster.

lates those words to an American lieutenant, who comments: "Brave men, corporal. They fought the battle and lost. But we won't lose. Cause we're Americans".[71] In view of the later history of the Vietnam War, well known to the audience, it certainly was the film-makers' intention to imbue those words with a special significance.

In the above films, we recognise the issues of the Cold War, the Vietnam War, and the conflicts of the late 20th and early 21st century concealed in the Spartan guise. This is not, of course, a new phenomenon – using great events as symbols and imbuing them with new meanings, convenient to the creators of the message, is a well-known process, which has long been an element of the broadly-understood Spartan legend.

In the most recent publications with which I am familiar, devoted to Thermopylae and their reception, I have noticed entirely new tendencies. Many authors, including Paul Cartledge, Emma Clough and Michael Clarke,[72] go with the spirit of our times by emphasising that Thermopylae (and the Greco-Persian wars in general) belong to the *imaginaire* and ideology of "aggressive nationalism", which feeds on the conviction that "from the graves of patriot men and women spring living nations".[73] Due to all the issues symbolised by the trauma of the 9/11, and generally by the phenomenon of the so-called "terrorism", Leonidas and his men have found themselves on the wrong side.[74] Death as a sacrifice for any cause has now become *demodé*.

In the atmosphere of a general revision of all the earlier views, Michael Clarke proposed even a new reading of Simonides' famous epigram, finding there a note of accusation: "Stranger, go tell the Lakedaimonioi that this is why

[71] Winkler 2009, 189–190.

[72] Cartledge 2006, 129–130; Clough 2004, 378; Clarke 2002, 63 and following.

[73] A funeral speech of 1915 quoted by Michael Clarke (2002, 64).

[74] Through no fault of their own, let it be stressed. As usual, it is modernity looking at itself in the mirror of history. Brutal aggressors find it convenient to identify with the heroes of the Thermopylae. Those who otherwise have nothing in common with the Greek warriors of Marathon and Thermopylae, set themselves (or are set by their adversaries, or both) on the Greek side. Reactions to Zack Snyder's film are an example of that confusion of roles. In a review published in *Turkish Daily News* (24th March 2007) Mustafa Akyol wrote: *The message that the film is designed to give us is all too obvious: Western civilization (which is free, rational and beautiful) has always defended itself against the barbaric East (which is tyrannical, irrational and ugly)… However… if the idea of a weak and outnumbered group of dedicated warriors standing against the world's superpower is to be seen as a prelude for today's 'clash of civilisations'… then the out-coming message has to be quite the opposite… in case you haven't noticed, the United States is the world's superpower today, and terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda see themselves as the few who will conquer the many* (I quote a text found in the review of Cartledge's books *Spartans* and *Thermopylae – Bryn Mawr Classical Review* 2008.07.40).

we died – because we obeyed their precepts".[75] Certainly there is much exaggeration here (at least because that text was not designed by the fallen men themselves); but we sense the same exaggeration in John Stuart Mill's famous phrase about Marathon, as well as in the thought of William Golding (1911–1993), the future laureate of the Nobel Prize in literature, who upon visiting Thermopylae in 1965 said: "A little of Leonidas lies in the fact that I can go where I like and write what I like. He contributed to set us free".

At the same time, underscoring that "a little", we may agree with the assumption that those battles, although not at all the greatest from the military point of view, did have a considerable influence on the further course of history of ancient Greece, and today they constitute an ever-growing element of the global *mémoire collective*. Certainly they are, to use Pierre Nora's concept, *lieux de mémoire* of the collective memory common to all of us (that is to whoever wishes to join it *bona fide*, due to the values inherent in the symbol). It is easy to interpret the history of those battles in the categories of "intentional history", "invention of tradition", or "Gründungsmythen". I do not think, however, that Hans Joachim Gehrke is correct in saying that "myth, understood as real history, becomes here [in the case of Marathon – R.K.] a symbol for exclusion or integration by means of segregation".[76] It would be more (if still not totally) justified to propose this in the case of the Thermopylae legend. But even there I do not think that the scholarly *Neue Mode* is anything more than a noble example of the scholars' sensitivity to the challenges of our times, and in its essence, just a transitory illustration of the contemporary world.

To an increasing number of people – not only in Europe, but throughout the world – "Marathon" and "Thermopylae" are *lieux de mémoire*, a confirmation of belonging to a system of values for which the Greeks fought (consciously or not, but that is another story) in the early fifth century B.C.[77]

[75] Clarke 2002, 76–77.

[76] Gehrke 2007, 108. The multi-function "Spartan" penknives (even that one which was named Thermopylae) by the Swiss company Victorinox cannot, I think, be perceived as a symbol of a dangerous militarism; the magazine *Thermopylae. Byelorussian Literary Annual* even less so.

[77] As demonstrated by the continuing popularity of topics alluding to Marathon and Thermopylae among the creators and audiences; some examples are: (1) Marathon: – the novel *Maraton* by Janusz Wojciech Rosiński (1966); *Marathon: a druhe powédki* by Ingrid Jurŝikowa (1985); *Marathon*, a volume of verse by Georg Heym (1887–1912) (published from a manuscript in 1956); the poem *Guerreros en Maraton* by Jose Maria Alvares (1994); (2) Thermopylae: the poem by Konstantinos Kavafis (1863–1933) quoted in this essay; Termopile by Stanisław Ryszard Dobrowolski (from the volume *Pożegnanie Termopil* [*Farewell to Thermopylae*], 1929); the play *Thermopylae* by the Danish dramatist H. C. Branner (1958); the novel *Wanderer, kommst du nach Sparta* by Heinrich Boell (1950 and later editions); the novel *Los cudo di Talos* (English title *The Spartan*) by Valerio Massimo Manfredi (1988); the novel *Gates of Fire* by Steven Presfield (1998).

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Abstract

The majority of Greeks remembered the battles of Marathon, Thermopylae, Salamis and Plataeae; but the future was to belong not to the pan-Hellenic Salamis or Plataeae, but to the Marathon, appropriated by the Athenians, and Thermopylae, which the Spartans made their own. The battles of Marathon and Thermopylae are viewed by us only from the perspective of the Greek sources, and some lacunas are obvious even in those. In both cases the events were quickly mythologized. In Athens Marathon almost immediately grew into a symbol of the Greeks' struggle with the barbarians (as seen from *The Persians* by Aeschylus,). The first epitomised love of freedom, the latter – enslavement. Marathon became the object of pride for the Athenians, who were the first among the Greeks to oppose the invasion of the eastern barbarians.

In Thermopylae, a stone lion and the famous epitaph by Simonides commemorated the death of the Spartans. Perhaps it is only there that lies the source of the general, and not entirely correct, conviction that a Spartiate could only be victorious or die, *tertium don datur*.

With the passage of time, both battles gained in importance with respect to politics. Marathon has long been an element of the European *mémoire collective*. Yet the star of Marathon rose fully in the 19th century, when it became an inspiration for poets (e.g. Elizabeth Barrett Browning and George Byron) and the symbol of the Greek war of independence. It was, of course, present also in the history of Poland. Throughout the 19th, 20th and early 21st century, "Thermopylae" seem to have replaced "Marathon" as the symbol of a heroic fight for freedom.

To an increasing number of people – not only in Europe, but throughout the world – "Marathon" and "Thermopylae" are *lieux de mémoire*, a confirmation of belonging to a system of values for which the Greeks fought (consciously or not, but that is another story) in the early fifth century B.C.