

Document A: Herodotus

Herodotus was an ancient Greek historian who lived in the 5th century BCE. He was a young boy during the Persian War, and interviewed Greek veterans of the Persian War to get the information he needed for his history. The following is an excerpt from his book The Histories that describes the Persian army at the Battle of Thermopylae.

Until they reached Thermopylae, Xerxes armament was free from misfortune. The king's sea forces amounted to 517,610 men. The number of foot soldiers was 1,700,000; that of the horsemen 80,000; to which must be added Arabs who rode on camels and the Libyans who fought in chariots, whom I reckon at 20,000. The whole number, therefore, of the land and sea forces added together amounts to 2,317,610 fighting men brought by Xerxes, the son of Darius, as far as Thermopylae.

Source: *From the book The Histories, written by Herodotus in the 450s-420s BCE.*

Document B: Ctesias of Cnidus

Ctesias was an ancient Greek physician and historian from the 5th century BCE who worked for the king of Persia. Ctesias claims to have had access to the official Persian archives, which he used to write his own history of the Persian War in 398 BCE. The following is an excerpt about the Persian army at the Battle of Thermopylae.

Xerxes decided to make war upon Greece . . . having collected a Persian army, 800,000 men and 1,000 **triremes** set out against Greece. His general Artapanus, with 10,000 men, fought an engagement with Leonidas, the Spartan general, at Thermopylae. The Persian host was cut to pieces, while only two or three of the Spartans were slain.

Source: *From Ctesias of Cnidus's book Persica written in 398 BCE. This excerpt was included in a book by the scholar Photius in the 9th century.*

Vocabulary

triremes: Greek warships

Document C: Ernle Bradford

Ernle Bradford is an English historian specializing in the ancient Mediterranean world. The following is an excerpt from his book The Year of Thermopylae, published in 1980.

Although it is true that Herodotus . . . had access to all the records available, it is impossible to accept the figures that he gives for the size of the Persian army and of the fleet. . . .

General Sir Frederick Maurice, who had the opportunity of covering the area of the march of the Great King not long after the First World War, came up with the conclusion that the total of the Persian army was about 210,000. Unlike most desk-bound scholars he [Maurice] had the opportunity to travel the whole area, and had excellent military and logistical knowledge of the terrain. He based his conclusion particularly on his observation of the water supplies available. . . . It seems that there is no possibility of the army of Xerxes having exceeded 250,000 men. Even this number . . . would have been sufficient to exhaust the water resources at a number of places along their route.

Source: *Ernle Bradford, The Year of Thermopylae, 1980, p. 34.*

Document D: Rupert Matthews

Rupert Matthews is an English author and politician. He has written over 200 books on history. The following is an excerpt from his book The Battle of Thermopylae: A Campaign in Context, published in 2006.

No aspect of the Thermopylae campaign has given rise to greater controversy than the size and composition of the army led by Xerxes into Greece. . . .

. . . Herodotus puts the strength of Xerxes' army at around two million men and says that they drank the rivers dry as they advanced. . . . As usual, Herodotus does not tell us where he got this information from, but it does bear all the hallmarks of being an official document. . . . Whatever the source of information given by Herodotus, it is quite clear that the list is not an accurate record of the army Xerxes led into Greece. It would have been physically impossible to march that many men along the roads available to them and keep them supplied.

We know that Xerxes sent an advance guard of laborers and engineers forward to prepare the route for his invasion. . . . While it is not recorded exactly what these men did, it is clear that they were undertaking construction work that would aid the army. If streams were dammed to create reservoirs of water, Xerxes would have been able to move an army considerably larger than the 210,000 men that General Maurice [see *Document C*] thought the land could support. Even so, it is unlikely that the increase could have been more than around 50%, say a total of 300,000 to 350,000.

Source: *Rupert Matthews, The Battle of Thermopylae: A Campaign in Context, 2006, p. 10-15.*

Final Claim

*After reading all four documents, how many Persians do you think there were at the Battle of Thermopylae? Make sure to use **historical evidence** to support your argument. What other types of evidence might you consult to further investigate this question?*

Historian	Who is the historian? When was the account written?	How many Persian soldiers were at the Battle of Thermopylae?	What evidence does the historian use to back this claim?	Do you find this evidence reliable and convincing? Why or why not?
Herodotus				
Ctesias				
Bradford				
Matthews				