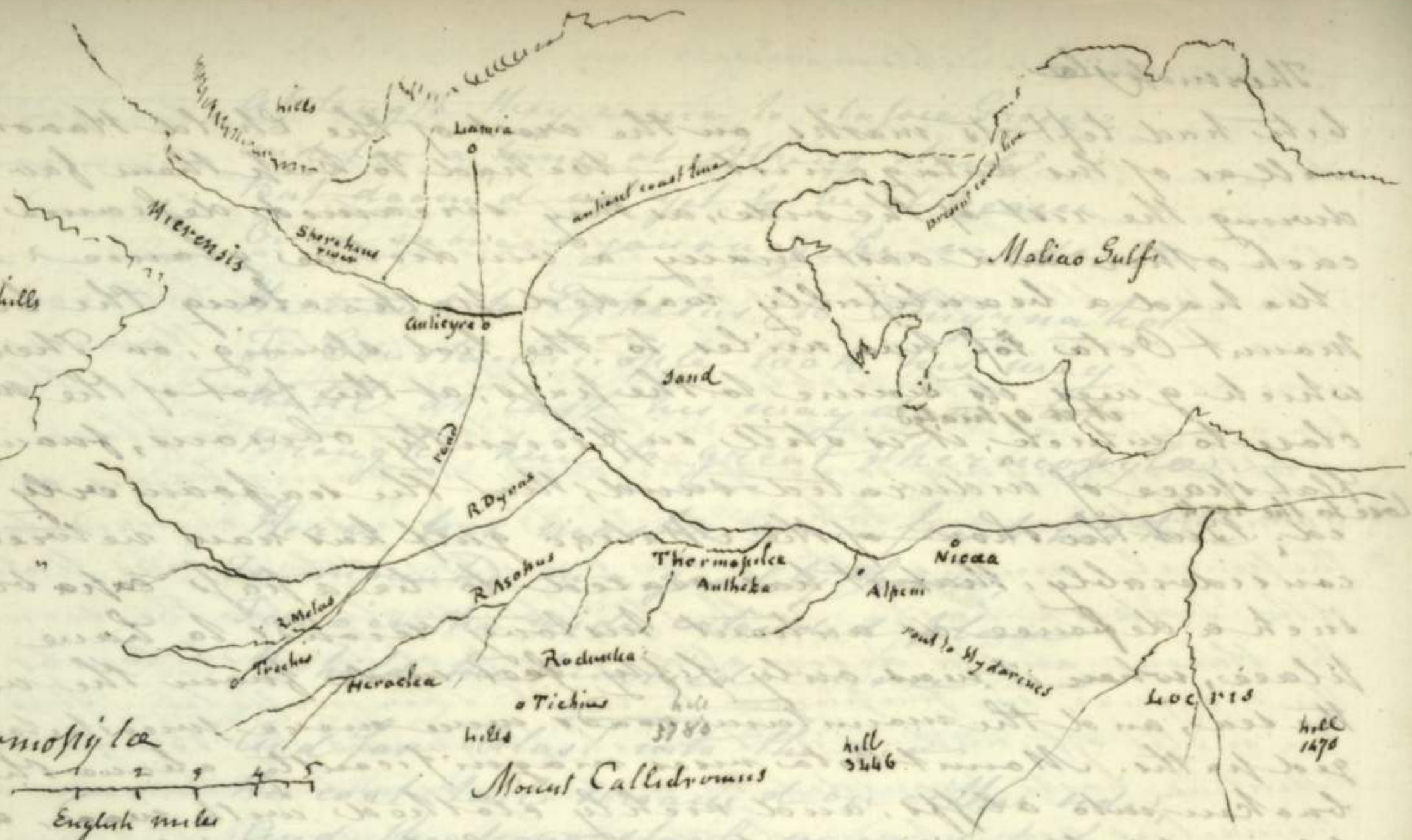
Ακαδημία Αθηνών / Academy of Athens



On the approach of Xerxes with his immense army of Eastern nations through Macedonia & Thessaly to the expected conquest of Greece & especially of Athens the rockey barrier of the mountain pass of Thermopile was manned by 300 Spartans under Leonidas & their king where from its contracted width the vast numbers of the invaders would be little available, any more than their numerous cavalry. There were besides bands of Greeks from other states stationed in the rear of the Lacedemonians. Spies were sent by Xerxes to ascertain the state of matters at Thermopile the first attack was made by a body of Medes, who were driven back, and many slain. Then came on the corps of Persians called the Immortals whose bold onset also met a total defeat. The narrowness of the pass impeding formation, and the long spears of the Spartans giving them great advantage Day after the assault was renewed but without success. Xerxes was in despair, till informed of a path way by the mountain between Œta and mount Trachis 10.000 immortals were accordingly appointed to penetrate by this path by night, they reached the summit by sun rise where 1000 Phocians were stationed, the Persians however pushed on, passing down to Thermopile, suddenly attacked the Spartans under Leonidas only 300 against 10000 maintained a desperate contest in which Leonidas and his 300 were all slain. with the exception of two of the men who had been sent elsewhere with dispatches, and upon returning to Sparta, as the only living exception to the gallant band, although not themselves to blame in not having shared the fate of their commander & comerades, were so ungraciously looked upon by their countrymen that they both committed suicide.
Herodotus reports that Xerxes on finding the body of Leonidas among the slain, had the baseness to order it to be beheaded, and the body ignominiously treated.—