CHAPTER SEVEN

MOUNTAIN PASSES IN EPICNEMIDIAN LOCRI

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It seems very clear that the Fontana and Vasilika passes, rarely mentioned in the classical literature of the twentieth century carried the brunt of the traffic between Locris and Phocis in ancient times

—Pritchett 1982: 75

Mountain passes are a structural element in the Locrian landscape and at the same time the scene of famous chapters in history. At various points in this monograph it has been commented that the rugged profile of this region, added to the limitations imposed by the northern seaboard, make the irregular longitudinal valleys, the high plateaus to the south of the Cnemis and manifestly the Callidromus passes the great vectors of communication. The latter are abundant in Epicnemidia, having been used since remote times as gateways to other territories through which to enter and depart. With differing altitudes and settings, from the celebrated “Hot Gates” to other anonymous yet equally strategic, narrowings, gorges, ravines and mountain passes are the great protagonists of the Locrian itineraries.

Before looking at the most distinguished of these in more detail, we wish to note that the ancient writers referred to these natural corridors using

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2 See especially chapters 1 and 6 in this volume.
3 We will deal concretely with the Kleisoura, Fontana (Derveni) and Vasilika passes, over the central sector of the Callidromus, and the Thermopylae gorge, over the ancient coastline. These are the most significant from a communication perspective. But there are many other passes in the area of ancient Epicnemidia which served local traffic not to be taken for granted. Some have already been detailed in relation to other routes. Such would be the case of the notorious Steni pass (to the south of the Cnemis massif, on the Plisorema gorge; see route C.2 in chapter 6), the Trano Livadi gorge (on the Karya to Velona trail; see route C.3 in chapter 6), the Kleisoura gorge (between Mendenitsa and Tithroni, near the pass of the
different terms. Therefore, the most commonly used are *stenopos* (στενωπός) or *stena* (στενά), understood as a more or less winding mountain pass, *pyla* (πύλα), as “gateway” or bottlenecking in a gorge, or *diodos* (διόδος), which alludes to a canyon or path in a not necessarily elevated position (Lolos 1998: 280–281). To which we must add *exodos* (ἐξοδος), with the meaning of exit or closure of a pass.

1. Thermopylae (A)

Along with Mount Parnassus or Olympus, if in Hellas there is a terrain notorious for its ruggedness it is the Thermopylae. This is due to various reasons. Not only owing to its historiographical echo given its role in the Greek-Persian conflict of 480, but also owing to its projection in works of fiction, patriotic discourse, painting or cinema as an epic setting. It is a dramatic landscape which modelled a heroic deed (the sacrifice of Leonidas and his three hundred men to slow the advance of invading forces) or a chapter in military history written as the geography dictates (a passage between the sea and the mountains which was to be passed and protected at any one time), whichever is preferred.

As our sources make clear, the place owes its name to the thermal hot springs which originated alongside the “gates”. But what made the Ther-


4 On the fame of the Thermopylae and its modern-day representation, see the suggestive overviews of Macgregor Morris 2000; Cartledge 2006: 153–213 and Bridges et alii 2007. Without being able to go into detail, an example of the changes in perception of the episode will suffice. (With a good dose of anachronism, some now understand it as the prelude to the East-West conflict). And thus, attending the pictorial representation, how far is the heroic nineteenth-century neoclassicism view (J.-L. David: “Leonides à les Thermòpiles”, 1814) from that of the atrocious expressionism of the Europe of the Cold War (O. Kokoscha: “Die Thermopylen”, 1954) (Weidinger 1998). Of course, film (“300”, and earlier “The 300 Spartans”; Levene 2007) and the historical novel (Pressfield 1998; cf. Bridges 2007) are responsible for its popularisation in our time.

5 “In this pass are warm springs for bathing, called by the people of the country The