

Herodotus: Historian, Proto-Feminist, and Proto-Biographer

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Abstract

Claims that Herodotus reveals himself as a proto-biographer are not yet widely accepted. To advance this claim, I have selected three women and four men from one side or the other of the Helleno-Persian Wars whose activities are recounted in his *Histories*. It is to a near contemporary, Heraclitus, to whom we attribute the maxim—character is human destiny. It is the truth of his maxim—which implies effective human agency—that makes Herodotus’ creation of historical narrative possible.

Herodotus is often read for his off-topic vignettes, which colour-in the character of the individuals depicted without necessarily advancing his narrative. By hop scotching through the nine books of his *Histories*, we can assemble a largely continuous narrative for these seven remarkable individuals. This permits us to attribute both credit and moral responsibility for their actions. Arguably this implied causation demonstrates that Herodotus’ writings include much that amounts to proto-biography.

Keywords: character; destiny; defining moment; proto-biographer; proto-feminist; agency

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Preface

My interest in Herodotus as an historian and as a storyteller stems from a Humanities course I enrolled in several years ago. Entitled “The Golden Age of Greece” the foundational texts were Herodotus and Thucydides, and like many students who have studied these authors either in Greek or in translation my favourite is Herodotus. We all love story—it is part of the human condition—and it matters little what our age or in what age.¹ When we read Herodotus’ *Histories* where he begins:

Herodotus of Halicarnassus here presents his research so that human events do not fade with time. May the great and wonderful deeds—some brought forth by the Hellenes, others by the Barbarians—not go unsung; as well as the causes that led them to make war on each other (Hdt. *Proem*).

We, too, know that we are in for a story. But we are also aware that stories *improve* with the telling and if there is anything worse than a *lost tale* it is a story never set down in writing and subsequently mangled beyond recognition with creative but unskilled re-telling. Nonetheless, we still read Herodotus for story, even if we have to suspend disbelief from time to time. After all, truth is often stranger than fiction, and that potentially offers a credibility challenge to both historians and biographers.

It is to Herodotus’ near-contemporary, Heraclitus, to whom we attribute the maxim (ἦθος ἀνθρώπων δαίμων) “*êthos anthropôî daimôn*” translations for which include the commonplace “character is destiny.”² However, neither *êthos* nor *daimôn* are easily

¹ When young Jim Hawkins—for those who know, an echo of the distinguished Elizabethan adventurer, Admiral Sir John Hawkins—hears Cap’n Billy Bones singing:

Fifteen men on the dead man’s chest—
Yo–ho–ho, and a bottle of rum!
Drink and the devil have done for the rest—

Jim knows that he is in for a story; and of course, thanks to Robert Louis Stevenson, so do we.

translated, and, as above, *anthropôî* is often ignored. But the maxim is senseless if any part of it depends on powers outside of the individual. It is the truth of this maxim—which presupposes effective human agency—that makes the creation of historical narrative, rather than divine myth or heroic epic, even possible. Hesiod, Homer, and to a certain extent Plutarch many centuries later, want argue that it is primarily ancestry or pedigree that will determine destiny. Undeniably in the fifth century the well-born will often have greater autonomy, authority, and agency.

Claims that Herodotus reveals himself as a proto-biographer let alone a proto-feminist are not yet widely accepted.³ To advance both of these claims, and recognising that Herodotian scholars rarely study the contributions of exceptional women, I have selected three women and four men who participate on one side or the other of the Helleno-Persian Wars: none of whom are to be found among those notables recognised by Plutarch in his *Parallel Lives*. By hopscotching through seven of the nine books of Herodotus' *Histories*, even if the entries fall short of a cradle to grave depiction, we can assemble a reasonably continuous narrative for these individuals, and thus through their exploits, gauge their character against the epic heroines and heroes described by Homer.

In biographical writing we often look for that *one character-defining moment*—a literary device Plutarch will perfect some six hundred years later. Herodotus provides contemporary context to the character-defining vignettes he scatters throughout his *Histories* to bring these seven individuals more into life—and so demonstrates that during the mid-fifth century biography and history are not yet separate genres. Herodotus regards himself as a contemporary Homer, not just with the ability to identify what must remain myth, but also to assign credit and with it moral responsibility to women and men; and, arguably this endeavour amounts to proto-biography.

² Sometimes misattributed as the originator, this English translation variant of the maxim (which also omits *anthropôî*) is found in book six, chapter six of George Eliot's 1860 Victorian triple-decker *The Mill on the Floss*

³ By proto-feminist I am making the narrow observation that within these strictly patriarchal societies Herodotus recounts incidents in the lives of exceptional, albeit privileged and aristocratic, women who assume sufficient autonomy, authority, and autonomy to influence the outcomes of selected events—thereby attracting responsibility and with such proportionate credit or blame.

Herodotus: Proto-Biographer

INTRODUCTION

Herodotus has long been recognised as the first Western historian, but his *Histories* are also read for his lively biographic anecdotes and character vignettes. He selects short, seemingly off-topic *stories* about the deeds and conduct of his heroines and heroes that eloquently reveal much about their character, but which seemingly without judgement often also provides what might become a *defining moment* for each individual. In this way his heroines and heroes become real individuals, not just long-dead Greek or Persian political or military leaders with now strange-sounding names. Just as Homer and Hesiod stand at a crossroads where oral myth is set down in writing, Herodotus stands at another crossroads a few hundred years later where selected stories about great heroines, heroes, and scurrilous hounds— together with their accomplishments and most notable failures—and one individual indeed may be both and have both—are taken out of the oral tradition and set down in writing. Albeit writing prose rather than epic poetry, Herodotus regards himself as a contemporary Homer, but a writer with the ability not only to identify what must and must not be myth, but also to assign credit and with it, moral responsibility.¹ But like Homer he is a storyteller. Whether fact or fiction— another way to describe the literary crossroads that Herodotus’ encounters—several common elements must be fulfilled by the author.

HERACLITUS AND DESTINY

What, when, and where tend to be uninteresting without by whom, how, or with what, and the why. And the why, coupled with how or with what, is often inseparable from by whom. Over time, Heraclitus’ three-word maxim quoted above has accumulated

¹ Re-discovered in 1994 on the harbour wall of Halicarnassus, the modern Aegean resort of Bodrum in Turkey, the *Salmakis Inscription*, possibly early second century, describes Herodotus as (Ἡρόδοτον τὸν πεζὸν ἐν ἱστορίαισιν Ὅμηρον ἤροσεν,) *Hērōdoton ton pezon en historiasin Homêron êrosen*, “[Halicarnassus] engendered Herodotus, the prose Homer of history” (Isager 7–8; Lloyd-Jones 2-3; and, Priestley 187).

a number of potentially misleading translations.² *Êthos* is not easily translated; but here it implies the individual's character with moral qualities, as surely Heraclitus' maxim would be senseless if *êthos* were to depend on some power outside of the individual.³ Exhaustive exploration of what might have been made of *daimôn* by Heraclitus' near-contemporaries is beyond the scope of the present thesis, if not a murky Presocratic *black hole* to boot.⁴ Nevertheless, it is important not to conjure Heraclitus' *daimôn* as something external—a guardian angel or some lesser god—hence the translation *destiny*, in lieu of some noble or malevolent spirit influencing an individual's choices. And here we must note that Heraclitus and with him, Herodotus, make a significant departure from Hesiod and Homer; and this approach will be vigorously rejected by Euripides during the fifth century and by Socrates a century later.⁵

HUMAN AGENCY

Arguably it is the truth of Heraclitus' maxim—which implies effective human agency for good or evil—that makes the creation of historical narrative, as opposed to divine myth or heroic epic, at all possible. If indeed this maxim influences Herodotus' approach to his inquiries at all, we should be able to work backward, from these destinies or great events and the sketchy biographical details Herodotus gives about the principal individuals involved, to say something about their real character. Although the Greeks in the mid to late fifth century no longer believe that the Olympian gods descend from the

² Heraclitus of Ephesus, a near contemporary of Herodotus, and one of the Presocratic philosophers whose works only survive in fragments, was active in the late sixth- and early fifth-centuries shortly before Herodotus was born. We have no evidence either way about Herodotus' familiarity with Heraclitus' works, but their notions of human causality or agency concur.

³ See Markovich 202.

⁴ See André Laks, and Glenn W. Most. *Early Ionian Thinkers* D111 (B119) Stobaeus, *Anthology* 4.40.23, 195; or Diels-Kranz *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* B119; also see Kirk, Raven, and Schofield 210–212, and Marcovich 500–504 for a brief discussion of what this enigmatic phrase with its syntactic ambiguity might have meant to Herodotus and his contemporaries in the middle of the fifth century. Does *anthropôi* attach to *êthos* or to *daimôn*? Do we write, “For the character of man is the destiny of man” (Curd and Graham 179)—or is *anthropôi* redundant?

⁵ See Plato, *Apology* 31 C and D.

heavens to participate in these battles, their favour and influence is still considered essential. Adopting an approach that we might regard as identical to Pascal's Wager such guidance is sought from one or more of the oracles on matters great and small. Impiety is treated as a capital offense and (ὕβρις) *hybris*—any display of excessive pride—is punished in this world, not the next. Whether this punishment, often in the form of outrageous misfortune, is meted out through direct divine influence is neither here nor there—most offenders deservedly come to an end. Clearly Heraclitus takes a dramatically different view about personal responsibility than the Homeric one where in a crisis the gods will often directly intervene to obtain their desired outcome and where an individual's behavioural lapses are blamed on the gods and sometimes mitigated by them.

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Accordingly a case can be made that Herodotus should not just be read as Thucydides suggests for his popular story-like style—perhaps defending his own “absence of romance” with his derogatory, if not envious comment about writing to win “the applause of the moment” (Thuc. 1.22.4). Unlike Thucydides, Herodotus reveals himself as a proto-biographer with an emphasis on what he believes are the key roles that great individuals and their life stories have in determining historical events.

Although Herodotus says that he is interested in the cause of the Greeks and Persians warring against each other this study focuses on how biographical details in the lives of particular individuals play roles within Herodotus' overall conception of historical causation. This very point is emphasised by Arnaldo Momigliano who writes:

No history, however bent on emphasising collective decisions, can manage to get rid of the disturbing presence of individuals: they are simply there. Indeed the Greek historians never denied that individuals affected military and political events. The very practice of democracy implied trust in leaders and created the climate for

⁶ Famously in book 1 of the *Iliad* it is Athena who, unseen and unheard, urges Achilles to sheath his sword, stopping him from killing Agamemnon on the spot (*Il.* 1.256–259); whereas it is Helen who in book 3 accuses Aphrodite of “lusting to lure me to my ruin again.” In this latter instance, Homer's readers are left to determine whether Helen is entirely a helpless “plaything of the gods” or whether there is something in her character which readily leads toward wilful acquiescence, if not enthusiastic participation, in her earlier abduction and the blatant theft from Menelaus' treasury by Paris (*Il.* 3.460–465).

schools for leaders—as the sophists’ schools were. Military leadership was recognised as a specific ability. The Athenian strategoi were elected, not chosen by lot like judges and councillors (Momigliano, 40).⁷

History focuses on events, whereas biography focuses more on the actions of individuals and hence their role or significant influence in some particular event.⁸ In short—this is causation. Although the focus of this study will be Herodotus, the *éminence grise* Plutarch, who often uses material from the *Histories* without acknowledgement, cannot be ignored either as a critic or as a biographer. The other *éminence grise* not to be ignored is Homer. Arguably Herodotus sees himself as a contemporary Homer. Just as Homer writes of an earlier East-West conflict, Herodotus writes of another East-West conflict, not quite a continuation, but not wholly independent either.

HOMER AND THE HELLENES

Homer refers to the expeditionary force at Troy as Achaeans (Ἀχαιοί), Argives (Ἀργεῖοι), or Danaans (Δαναοί), never as Greeks. Homer uses his three terms above interchangeably as to meaning: they are altogether equivalent in what they signify, which is the army from mainland Greece—including but not limited to Achaea and Argos—and neighbouring islands including Crete. But Homer does not—and could not—use the three terms interchangeably as to meter, because they are not metrically equivalent.

The Greeks (Ἕλληνες) have been identified by many ethnonyms.⁹ The most common native ethnonym is *Hellen* (Ἕλλην), or perhaps *Hellenes* (Ἕλληνες). The name Greeks—from the Latin *Graeci*—was used by the Romans and gradually entered the European languages through its use in Latin and is thus an exonym. The mythological

⁷ Miltiades the Elder and Miltiades the Younger come to mind, but the Persian monarchs did not hesitate to relieve unsuccessful commanders and appoint others presumably in the belief that a change in leadership will result in a different outcome.

⁸ Herodotus’ expression “μήτε῔ργα μεγάλα τε καὶ θωμαστά” is translated in the proem as “great and wonderful deeds” alternatives include “marvelous exploits”—neither word signals any degree of disbelief; but irrespective of whether these are deeds or exploits we still infer human agency.

⁹ Perhaps reinforcing just how important this concept is to the Hellenes an ethnonym is the name applied to a particular ethnic group and comes from the Greek nouns: ἔθνος, *éthnos*, usually translated as nation and ὄνομα, *ónoma*, usually translated as name.

patriarch *Hellen* is the progenitor of the Hellenic peoples; his descendants the Aeolians, Dorians, Achaeans, and Ionians correspond to the main Greek tribes and to the main dialects spoken in Greece and Anatolia.¹⁰

The term *Achaeans* (Ἀχαιοί) is used 598 times in Homer's *Iliad*. The other common names are *Danaans* (Δαναοί) used 138 times in the *Iliad*, and *Argives* (Ἀργεῖοι) used 182 times in the *Iliad*; while for *Pan-Hellenes* (Πανέλληνες) and *Hellenes* (Ἕλληνες) each appears only once; all of the aforementioned terms were used synonymously to denote a common Greek civilizational identity. In the archaic period, the *Achaeans* were the inhabitants of Achaea, a region in the north-central part of the Peloponnese. The city-states of this region later formed a confederation known as the Achaean League, which was influential during much of the first millennium. In stark contrast, Herodotus' mid-fifth-century use of the term *Hellenes* is ubiquitous.¹¹ The point is that Homer's epics became an integral part of a Pan-Hellenic movement that did not even exist when he was writing and Herodotus will use any Homeric echoes he can find.

EARLY BIOGRAPHICAL WORKS

The claim that Herodotus reveals himself as, at least, a proto-biographer is not new. In an article lamenting the darkness which shrouds the emergence of Greek biographical writings is shrouded in such darkness—with a huge gap between Herodotus and Xenophon—Helene Homeyer goes further almost making a claim that Herodotus is also the father of biography (Homeyer 75, 81).¹² Although Herodotus writes history, many of his anecdotes do not extend his historical narrative at all, and when not an

¹⁰ In Greek mythology Hellen is the king of Phthia. As the eldest son of Deucalion and Pyrrha and a grandson of the Titan Prometheus, he becomes the eponymous ancestor of all true Greeks, called Hellenes in his honour. Among his descendants are also mentioned the *Graeci* and the *Makedones*.

¹¹ This ubiquity is often masked in modern translations into English where the Anglicisation of the Latin term *Graeci* is as convenient as it is potentially misleading.

¹² Xenophon of Athens (430–354) from a wealthy Attic family, a contemporary of Plato, and likewise a student of Socrates, was a soldier, mercenary, historian, and philosopher.

outright digression often colour-in something of the character and values of selected notable individuals.¹³

Examples abound, but one concerning Cimon son of Stesagoras, the step-brother of Miltiades the Elder will suffice. His unflattering nickname Cimon Colemos—*Κοάλεμος*, meaning *booby*—speaks volumes. According to Herodotus, Cimon insisted that he be buried at the entrance to the city opposite the already interred mares that had won the four-horse chariot races at three consecutive Olympiads for him (Hdt. 6.103.3). His bizarre if not altogether Thracian burial rites and very prestigious burial site appear more important in Herodotus' narrative than Cimon's murder at the hands of the Peisistratids—the two sons of the late Athenian tyrant Peisistratos. In terms of genre, this burial anecdote must rank as non-fiction and is barely relevant historically. It is nevertheless an important consideration when evaluating the Philaids' place and their values among members of the sixth- and early fifth-century Athenian aristocracy.

If we find errors in Herodotus we should first ask whether these really are deliberate deceptions on his part. Perhaps he is unwittingly or mischievously misinformed by many, yet less than objective, sources? More likely he is often a victim of self-censorship, being more than aware of how ungrateful a people the Athenians are (Hdt 5.91.2). This censorship does not stop him having fun at his readers' expense. His discussion on the source of the Nile and the meteorological causes behind the annual flooding are a case in point. At that time, everyone was wrong, but at least the wind played no part in it (Hdt. 2.20–27). Does Herodotus really believe that a species of giant ant in India brings gold to the surface, or is this just a good story for the most gullible and greedy in his audience (Hdt. 3.102.2–3.105.1)? My interpretation is perhaps this is simply a veiled reference to the slaves who toil in the Laurion silver mines south-east of Athens (Hdt. 7.144.1). Plutarch, in the introduction to his *Life of Alexander*, writes:

¹³ See “Zu den Anfängen der griechischen Biographie.” Helen Homeyer writes, So ist Herodot nicht nur der Vater der Geschichte, sondern zugleich auch der Schöpfer eines Zweiges der biographischen Darstellungsweise geworden, die bis zu Plutarch reicht. This can be roughly translated as “So Herodotus is not only the father of history, but also the creator of a branch of biographical representation which extends up to Plutarch” (Homeyer 81).

It must be borne in mind that my design is not to write histories, but lives. And the most glorious exploits do not always furnish us with the clearest discoveries of virtue or vice in men; sometimes a matter of less moment, an expression or jest, informs us better of their characters and inclinations, than the most famous sieges, the greatest armaments, or the bloodiest battles whatsoever (Plu., *Alex* 1.2).

The focus of this study is on the biographical sub-narratives that Herodotus weaves into his historical narrative, particularly where he discusses the Greco-Persian wars. He is much more than just a fifth-century Homer in prose. When separating fact from fiction, and history from myth he transfers effective agency from the gods and goddesses to identifiable individuals—men and women. He also gives substance to a new collective identity—Hellenes—not just a reference to the particular peoples, Achaeans, Danaans, Myrmidons and so on among which they hail.

HERODOTUS' INTERESTS AND SELECTION

This study of Herodotus' *Histories* explores the character and inclinations of seven of the individuals who repeatedly appear in his narrative. Several of the individuals mentioned by Herodotus are picked up later by Plutarch as subjects worthy of study: others, such as Cleomenes I, the late sixth-century king of Sparta, are completely ignored. Herodotus also includes a number of women, characters about whom Plutarch notably has little or nothing to say. It is also evident that the two writers hold widely differing views both on what makes an individual worthy of study and on what to include or suppress in such a character study.¹⁴ The magnificent seven—individual men and women—listed below, five of whom were certainly “shot at without result,” participate on one side or the other during the first and second Helleno-Persian Wars. Sarah Pomeroy makes the sobering comment that:

¹⁴ Pomeroy is not necessarily making the Hobbesian argument that the lives of so many lesser mortals are necessarily solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short; but historically in terms of agency they may not be very significant—one hoplite is much like another as will be their widows and orphans—and biographically if their agency is limited they may well be less interesting.

Ancient history, to a considerable degree, has been basically the study of the ruling classes. The women who are known to us from the formal literature of antiquity are mainly those who belonged to or associated with the wealthy or intellectually elite groups of society. It must also be recognised that there is more information available on women who were famous—whether for good or evil (*Goddesses, Whores* xi).

The obvious point Pomeroy is making is that Herodotus' study is focused on exceptional individuals and when it comes to opportunities to exercise significant agency we must be careful not to generalise on how broad, or more likely how restricted, these opportunities might be for others. It would be naïve to argue that the well-born will not always have an advantage when it comes to gaining any measures of authority, autonomy, and agency. Another scholar, Alexandre Tourraix, writing at about the same time as Pomeroy makes the claim that there are over fifty passages in the *Histories* where one woman in particular, women in general, or femininity play a decisive role in the outcome.¹⁵

Although we may be obliged to play hopscotch through two or more books, we are often able to piece together a reasonably continuous narrative and thus their exploits and displays of bravery, leadership, intelligence, good fortune, and cunning, together with their personal shortcomings are easily measured against those of the heroes and heroines described by Homer in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

- Alexander I of Macedon: A hereditary monarch who in 498 succeeds Amyntas I, his father, and rules Macedon until his own death in 454. His northern Aegean kingdom lies in the path of Xerxes' advance toward Attica in 480 and he reluctantly accepts the Persian dominance initiated during his father's reign. Yet at the conclusion of the Helleno-Persian wars he is able to avoid any stain of mediocrity and remains in power (Hdt. 4.123, Hdt. 5.17.1–2, 5.19–21, 5.22.2, Hdt. 7.172.1, Hdt. 8.139, and Hdt. 9.44.1–45.3).
- Miltiades son of Kypselos: An Athenian aristocrat from a wealthy and influential family. In the mid-sixth century he is selected by the Thracian Chersonese nobles to be their tyrant, an appointment that was favoured by the oracle at Delphi (Hdt. 6.35.1, 6.35.3, 6.34–36, 6.36.2, 6.37, 6.38–39).

¹⁵ See Alexandre Tourraix, "La femme et le pouvoir chez Herodote, 369, 385–386.

- Miltiades son of Cimon: The nephew of Miltiades son of Kypselos and his brother's successor as tyrant of the Thracian Chersonese. After the failure of the Ionian revolt he takes refuge in Athens where he is tried for tyranny. Acquitted he remains in Athens, is elected general and is credited with several strategic decisions before and during the battle of Marathon (Hdt. 4.137.1, and Hdt. 6.39–40, 6.41, 6.103, 6.104, 6.109–110, 6.132–134, 6.136, 6.137–140, 6.134.2, 6.136.2–3).
- Cleomenes I of Sparta: He is the Agiad king of Sparta from 519 until his assassination or suicide in 491 / 489. He is responsible for Sparta becoming the dominant power in the Peloponnese. He struggles with his Eurypontid dyarch Demaratus whom he eventually successfully deposes and exiles (Hdt. 3.148.2, Hdt. 5.39.1, 5.40.2, 5.41.1–3, 5.42.2, 5.42.1, 5.48, 5.49–51, 5.64–65, 5.70, 5.72, 5.74–75, 5.75, 5.90–99, Hdt. 6.50, 6.51–60, 6.64–65, 6.68–69, 6.73, 6.74–75, 6.78–80, 6.82, 6.75, 6.84, 6.75.3, and Hdt. 7.204).
- Atossa, daughter of Cyrus and queen of three kings: She is a powerful figure in the Achaemenid Persian court and exercises considerable influence on the line of succession and empire building (Hdt. 3.88.2, 3.133–134, Hdt. 7.2.1–3, and 7.3.4).
- Artemisia of Halicarnassus: She acts as regent for her under-age son and is therefore the Persian-appointed tyrant or governor of this Anatolian port. She becomes one of Xerxes' more successful admirals and trusted advisors (Hdt. 5.49–50, 5.51.2–3, Hdt. 7.99, 7.239.3–4, Hdt. 8.68–69, 8.87–88, 8.93, and 8.101–103).
- Gorgo of Sparta: She is Cleomenes' only child. A Spartan princess, she marries her uncle who on her father's death becomes the Agiad dyarch Leonidas I—the Spartan commander killed at Thermopylae—and the mother of Pleistarchus, Agiad dyarch of Sparta from 479 to his death in 458 (Hdt. 5.51.2–3, and Hdt. 7.239.2–4).

WHY THESE THREE WOMEN AND FOUR MEN?

At first sight there are two glaring omissions from this list—Cyrus the Great, who by all accounts starts it all—by all, I mean the Achaemenid Empire—and, Themistocles, who by all accounts ensures that the Persians do not finish it all by adding mainland Greece and other parts of Mediterranean Europe to their Empire. If Plutarch considers them both worthy of study and exemplary reflection, then why have this omission? A glance at the immense scholarly bibliographies of works where the influence of these two

luminaries occurs shows that any meaningful consideration of them is hopelessly far beyond the scope of this study. It is not just that many have studied these two characters from time to time; it is that over the past two and a half millennia numerous individuals have studied these two luminaries and have used Herodotus' *Histories* in translation, or in the original Greek, as their primary source. However, an aspect that these same Herodotian scholars have to some extent ignored is a study of the contributions of a handful of exceptional women.¹⁶ Accordingly, three of the seven individuals depicted in this study are women.¹⁷ With the notable exception of the 1988 article by Rosaria Munson about Artemisia contemporary Herodotian scholarship does not include any stand-alone articles about either Atossa or Gorgo.

Biography sometimes referred to as life-depiction—the Greek word for this is from late antiquity—βιογραφία—has become the most popular genre in modern non-fiction literature, more popular than history. During the Classical period Greek writers used the term (περὶ βίων) *peri vion*—*on lives*. Herodotus' word for his major work simply means learning, or knowing by inquiry—the Greek word for this is *historia* (ἱστορία) *istoria* that has given us the English word history.

Herodotus depends on his audiences' abilities to bring specific knowledge and shared values with them when they hear a recitation or read parts of his *Histories*, or even see a performance of one of Sophocles' tragedies for that matter.¹⁸ Unless you can reconstruct the contemporary context—particularly the knowledge and attitudes of the original audience—you risk missing the whole point and may drift off grossly misinformed when attempting to develop a modern interpretation of an older text based

¹⁶ See Alexandre Touraix 369 and 385–386 where he lists over fifty instances where Herodotus indicates that women have a direct impact on the outcome of critical events.

¹⁷ Parents usually chose the names of their offspring with considerable forethought and it can hardly be happenstance that two of the women mentioned by Herodotus, Gorgo and Artemisia, bear Greek theophoric names. The term from the Greek (θεόφορος) *theophoros* almost literally invokes the guidance and protection of that particular deity.

¹⁸ Plutarch jests that Herodotus' accounts of Thebes and Thebans are disparaging and adds the anecdote from Aristophanes that perhaps he was not paid for a performance of part of his works in that city (Plu. *Mor.* 864D). This suggests that Herodotus gave paid oral presentations of his *Histories* while they were still a work in progress. Furthermore he would be tempted tailor these presentations to his particular audience.

on an anachronistic and therefore faulty close reading. We might well ask; what is it that would have immediately resonated with a contemporary audience? Very topical allusions, which notoriously can fade within a decade, are easily missed by even a near contemporary audience and appear completely opaque centuries later.

And there is always the thought that many of the most interesting stories we hear or read about stem not from noble acts of great virtue or measured responses to adversity, but from spectacular lapses in good judgement momentarily engendered by *schadenfreude*. Accordingly, even to begin to understand Herodotus we must bridge the many lacunae he deliberately leaves unfilled. He uses an indirect way of characterisation through anecdote as an alternative to the cradle to grave style of biographical narrative. His audiences are from city-states across the Greek-speaking world. Although he uses the words *Hellas* and *Hellenes* frequently, at this time there is no nation or country with defined boundaries named Greece. Herodotus writes of an era when the city-states form non-binding alliances of convenience or sometimes time-limited non-aggression pacts. A citizen of Athens takes as much pride knowing that she or he is not a Spartan, nor a Corinthian, let alone a Theban, than in the knowledge that he or she is indeed an Athenian. Identities are defined both positively and negatively, but Herodotus is careful to avoid judgement or bias. After all, he is an outsider himself, and strangely proud of his own birthplace and heritage. The dominant rivalry of the mid-fifth century is that between Athens and Sparta. It leads to the great Peloponnesian War (431–403). Herodotus must be aware of it and treads a careful line between these parochial foes, tacitly promoting Hellenic unity with perhaps an underlying theme of Pan-Hellenism that is determinedly not always Athenocentric.

HERODOTUS' CONTEXT OF CONFLICT

Reference is made to a number of scholarly works by classicists and historians that delve into the details of the major battles fought by the Greeks against Darius and later Xerxes.¹⁹ These help put into perspective the contribution of the Persian and Greek military and naval commanders in terms of tactics and strategy. The late sixth- to

¹⁹ For example see authors such as Cartledge, Lazenby, Krantz, and Pomeroy.

early fifth-century military context is critical. It is this East-West conflict that provides the opportunity for individuals on both sides to distinguish themselves as great leaders. There are a number characteristics common to many of these individuals including *philotimia* (φιλοτιμία), a love of honour; *philonika* (φιλονικία) a love for victory; *philarchia* (φιλαρχία) a desire for power; and *philodoxia* (φιλοδοξία)—probably the dominant and surely Homeric motivation—a desire for fame or glory.²⁰ So Herodotus is describing an important naval battle not only within living memory of some of his oldest readers / listeners but an event which many in his audience witnessed. That it is difficult to reconstruct this particular battle from Herodotus' abbreviated account alone should not be surprising. Many in his audience were spectators and as an infant at the time, he was not. The land battles Herodotus describes were restricted to participants. There were no privileged non-combatant observers, and Herodotus has to piece together what really happened from many independent sources—ideally both Greek and Persian or Persian-allied.

EARLY LITERARY CRITICISM

Plutarch, the late first- early second-century historian and biographer writing in Attic Greek, provides a useful comparison to Herodotus for these character studies. From the many notable Greek and Persian men and women mentioned in the *Histories*, Plutarch wrote the biographies of five Greek men from this period—Theseus, Solon, Themistocles, Aristides, and Cimon the younger son of Miltiades son of Cimon. Plutarch often uses material directly from Herodotus, but he had access to many other no longer extant works. Unlike Herodotus, Plutarch never mentions women except in their domestic role. Besides being the most prolific author of biography in the ancient world, Plutarch was a major critic of Herodotus, a position he makes clear in his essay “On the Malice of Herodotus.”²¹

²⁰ Some of these terms are used by Herodotus, others are implied.

²¹ The epithet “Herodotus—Father of Lies” was not coined until the early sixteenth century by a Humanist colleague of Erasmus, Juan Luis Vives, in his *De Disciplinis Libri XX* (1531).

Plutarch was born in the Boeotian region of mainland Greece. Later named Lucius Mestrius Plutarchus upon becoming a Roman citizen he probably did not start writing his *Parallel Lives*, a series of biographies of famous Greeks and Romans arranged in pairs to illuminate their common moral virtues and vices, until near the end of the first century. His long essay “On the Malice of Herodotus” was likely composed while he was working on this much larger project. The major complaint that Plutarch pursues in this essay is that in his account of the Second Greco-Persian War (481–479) Herodotus misrepresents the contributions of the Corinthians to the naval victory at Salamis and misrepresents the Theban contribution to the victory at Plataea.²² He also complains about the story Herodotus tells of Gyges, king of Lydia. The problem here is that Herodotus is selecting his narrative from any number of oral traditions dating back to the end of the seventh century. What new evidence can Plutarch bring over five hundred years later beyond simple contradiction? If he has access to other traditions, he certainly does not cite them.

When compiling his *Lives*, Plutarch is fascinated by the details of his subjects’ family background, upbringing, physical appearance, and wealth, almost as if these matters determine their military and political fortunes. His *Life of Themistocles*—one of his longer episodes comprising over eight thousand words in the Greek and half as much again in any translation into English—is a good example. However, there are lacunae. He gives us no physical description, so whether in fact Themistocles is one of the long, the short, or the tall, we can only surmise that his appearance is unremarkable. But Plutarch leaves no doubt that Themistocles is not an aristocrat and in a tasteless put-down goes out of this way to detail his lowly birth and alien mother—Thracian or Carian (Plu., *Them* 1.1–3). Plutarch reveals his class prejudice—an Athenian aristocrat can marry a Thracian princess, but he frowns on the union of a common Athenian citizen and a Carian. Born into neither privilege nor wealth, Themistocles is ambitious. It is a

²² The Boeotian region of mainland Greece lies on the north shore of the Gulf of Corinth; its leading city even during the fifth century was Thebes. In his essay “The Malice of Herodotus” Plutarch writing centuries later comments that the Thebans may have owed Herodotus money—which leads one to surmise that Herodotus may have given paid performances of excerpts from his *Histories*—and this was why Herodotus gives such a disparaging account of any Theban resistance to the Persian invasion (Plut., *Mor.* 864 D–E).

character trait his teachers recognise, he is rarely given the patronymic, son of Neocles (Plu., *Them* 2.2–3). Plutarch notes that during his youth his rival, even in love, is always Aristides son of Lysimachus—nicknamed Aristides the Just (Plu., *Them* 3.1–2). He also appears to have tried to rival Cimon [son of Miltiades] in terms of generous hospitality, when he perhaps did not possess the means to do so (Plu., *Them* 5.2–3). But Plutarch concedes that he is an impartial arbitrator (Plu., *Them* 5.4).

Strangely Plutarch never mentions Themistocles' election to archon early in the fifth century, but he does recount that while in self-exile in Magnesia in Anatolia he commits suicide in the sixty-fifth year of his life (Plu., *Them* 31.5).²³ Neither does Plutarch ever mention his possible election as *strategos* of his tribe prior to the battle at Marathon; but this, if true, would partially account for Themistocles' reticence after the Athenians' stunning victory where his undistinguished and barely recorded presence leaves another basking in the glory he craved—a likely once in a lifetime opportunity missed (Plu., *Them* 3.3). Given his humble beginnings and perhaps his chagrin following the battle of Marathon, he does not hesitate to resort to bribery to ensure that he is in command of the Athenian forces when the Persian invade again, ten years after Marathon (Plu., *Them* 6.1). His earlier opportunity for renown has slipped away, or was always in the firm grasp of Miltiades son of Kimon, Plutarch describes a driven character from a humble background who, undaunted by the Athenian aristocracy, will not let a second opportunity for lasting glory vanish.

Perhaps the real dispute between Plutarch and Herodotus is over the content of the character vignettes that Herodotus produces. Herodotus never claims that the leaders he describes are exemplary characters that others should seek to emulate. Far from it; he shows that these Greek and Persian commanders have character flaws—flaws that their adversaries exploit from time to time. If Plutarch is writing “Lives” (biographies) unless he has new evidence—or evidence of bias—something Herodotus tries to avoid—historiography still has its obligations. If Herodotus has got something “wrong” it would

²³ As explained in the Appendix, Julian dates are a seventeenth-century innovation. But by piecing together other works scholars have determined, for example, that if Themistocles was elected archon in 493/2 when first eligible, then he was born sometime around 524 and died in 459.

be nice to know where, how, and why. However, Plutarch's essay remains one of the first examples of literary criticism, even if his contradictions are largely unsupported and reveal his own biases.

TRUTH VALUES AND THE ONE DEFINING MOMENT

Often in biographical writing we look for that special anecdote or quip which will become that *one defining moment*, perhaps recorded during the subject's youth, which appears to apply for all time. Whether the incident actually occurs, or the motives are as clear-cut as reported, is immaterial. We have to allow the writer some artistic licence in those cases where the absolute truth in comparison is somewhat disappointing if not deadly dull. People act from all manner of impulses and at times quite contrary to their immediate interests, each of these actions can be viewed as their *defining moment*.²⁴ It is only too easy to view people as either good or evil. Consequently there can be a very difficult adjustment to make when someone of whom we have great admiration also appears to have profound flaws.

WHAT CONSTITUTES THE GENRE

Much of the forgoing begs the question—what is it that actually constitutes biography? Hermione Lee provides her own definition—simply “biography is the story of a person told by someone else” (Lee 5). By story she means narrative and that captures the oral dimension of biography—“the recounting of memories, witness-testimony, and much-repeated anecdotes.” In an attempt to qualify this definition she devises ten rules for biography (Lee 6–18). First, the story should be true—this seems obvious, except that the true story will have gaps and pose unanswerable questions. Second, the story should cover the whole life—again a cradle to grave story may simply

²⁴ In the autumn of 1897, a young officer in the 4th Queen's Own Hussars, in a letter to his mother and again in his book about the Frontier War, yet another East-West conflict, writes: “Nothing in life is so exhilarating as to be shot at without result.” Conversely, to balance this exhilaration of adventure in far-away places with strange-sounding names, in the same work, the Lieutenant recounts his grief at finding the mutilated corpses of fellow officers and men of his acquaintance—killed in an unseen action by dissident tribesmen holding no fealty toward the Raj and moreover determined to wrest this jewel from the crown (Spencer-Churchill 172).

be impossible, too much has gone unrecorded. Third, nothing should be concealed or omitted—adherence to that sort of rule might well result in the banality of a Victorian triple-decker and be just as dry, dusty, and unread. Fourth, all sources should be identified—authentication would be nice, but is often not possible. Fifth, the biographer should know the subject—often not possible at all, even for a contemporary. Sixth, the biographer should be objective—that would be nice, but what if the sources are not objective. And does this imply that the biographer must like, or must not like, the subject? Seventh, biography is a form of history—this claim is fraught with difficulty. What does society value and what does it care about? Eighth, biography is an investigation of identity—here we might be finding firmer ground, but biography will always rub up against rival ways of understanding human behaviour and the unknowability of the self. Ninth, the story should have some moral value for the reader—Plutarch and his nineteenth-century disciples might agree, but a cautionary tale can be instructive too, even at the risk of blurring high and low art forms. But for her tenth rule, Lee concludes that there are no rules. Nor should there be any. The genre is unstable, perhaps necessarily so, and she is adamant that no biography can ever be definitive. This latter point is fair enough—twisting facts is as often or not a matter of viewpoint—was Thermopylae a disaster or a contemporary epic replay worthy of Homeric heroes?

AN ILL-DEFINED GENRE

This brings us back to the burial rites of Cimon Colemos and his mares—a colourful anecdote from a distinguished family that tells us little about his illustrious step-brother and even more distinguished younger son. But all is not lost. When tracing the development of Greek biographical writings over the fifth- and fourth-centuries, that is a half millennium before Plutarch, Homeyer compares aspects of Herodotus' work with several works by Xenophon. And here we might ask the question, “How many anecdotes about one individual do we need before we have a proto-biography?” Extending these thoughts to the plastic arts, Arnaldo Momigliano writes:

One might perhaps also find some biographical intention in vase painting, but the definition and discussion of it would take us too far. If we were prepared to see biographical episodes in certain vase scenes of about 500 B C—for instance Croesus on his pyre in Myson’s amphora—this still would not take us beyond that preliminary stage of biography which is the single anecdote (Momigliano 38–39).

HAPPINESS DURING THE JOURNEY FROM CRADLE TO GRAVE

Herodotus has Croesus, the man who turns out to be the last Lydian king, pose an intriguing question for Solon to address (Hdt 1.30–33). The answers Solon provides do not satisfy Croesus at all, perhaps because he does not understand his own question, let alone Solon’s answers, or perhaps because he is so enamoured of material possessions that his whole value system is warped.²⁵ Herodotus recounts the incident, Croesus asks:

“My Athenian guest, word of your wisdom and travels has reached us even here. We hear that you have wandered through much of the world in the search for knowledge, so I really can’t resist asking o now whether you have yet seen anyone who surpasses all others in happiness and prosperity?” [3] He asked this in the hope that he [Croesus] would be declared the happiest and most prosperous of all, but Solon had no intention of flattering him. He spoke he plain truth (Hdt 1.30.2–3).

Solon names Tellus the Athenian as the one surpassing all others, but in complete disbelief and doubtless disappointment Croesus demands that he explains why. Solon replies:

“For one thing, he [Tellus] lived in a famous city and had good and noble children, and he saw all his children and grandchildren surviving him. Besides he was well off, at least by our standards of living, and he ended his life in greatest glory, [5] for he came to the aid of the Athenians in a battle against their neighbours in Eleusis and forced them to flee before he died most nobly on the battlefield. The Athenians buried him at public expense in the very place he fell and gave him great honours “(Hdt. 1.30.4–5).

²⁵ Never great at chronology and indeed why should Herodotus let that pedantic pursuit (for some) spoil a good tale. Sadly Herodotus’ story must be fictitious; the two never met. Solon was long dead by the time Croesus assumed the throne. No matter the tale works better if the fictitious encounter takes place early in his reign.

Solon gives five criteria: living in a famous city, good children, children and grandchildren survive him, well-off, and dying nobly on the battlefield. After Solon supplies further details of Tellus' prosperity and happiness, Croesus, at least confident that he will claim second place, asks who might be the second-most happy man (Hdt 1.31.1). But none of Solon's criteria are exclusive—a glorious battlefield death, for example, is not mandatory, nor is having good and noble children.²⁶ Solon now tells the story of two Argives, Cleobis and Biton citizen farmers who had enough to get by on and who were sufficiently physically fit to win athletic contests:²⁷

“The Argives were having a festival for Hera, and their mother had to be taken to the shrine in a wagon, but the oxen were not back from the fields in time to pull it. With time running out, the young men put themselves under the yoke and themselves hauled the wagon, with their mother riding in it, for five miles, until they brought her all the way to the sanctuary. [3] Everyone who had gathered there for the festival watched them perform this feat; and then the god granted the young men the best possible departure from this life, showing clearly that it is better for a human being to be dead than alive.”

“The Argive men crowded around them and showered praises on their strength, while the Argive women commended their mother for being blessed with such good sons. [4] Their mother was simply elated by her sons' feat and by all the praise. She stood before the statue of the goddess and said a prayer for Cleobis and Biton: that since they had shown her such great honor, let the goddess grant them the best thing a human being could have. [5] After the prayer, they all sacrificed and had their feast. then the young men fell asleep in the sanctuary and never awoke again; this was the end of their lives. The Argives made statues of them and dedicated them at Delphi to commemorate that they had proven themselves to be the best of men” (Hdt 1.31.1–5).

²⁶ Just as Herodotus speaks through Gyges, there is the thought that he is now speaking through Solon and that these reported happiness criteria are more those of Herodotus.

²⁷ This pious tale of filial duty likely resonates poorly with twenty-first century audiences who might be much more attuned to the traditional Hebrew blessing popularized in the 1966–69 *Star Trek* TV series, “Live long and prosper” which we might note incorporates two of the criteria from Herodotus' earlier Tellus story.

After Solon explains why these two place second—not that runner up counts for anything much in Archaic Greek or Lydian culture—Croesus becomes visibly annoyed with his guest (Hdt 1.32.1). Solon gives Croesus two examples and they are from quite opposite ends of the social scale—one approaching the sublime or at least the privileged few, the other very ordinary. So ordinary that almost no one is excluded by his broad criteria, regardless of gender. Any child can honour his or her parents and any child can quietly perform acts of piety.²⁸ But he certainly does not advocate grinding poverty and is silent about chastity. Solon further explains that if we set the limit of human life at seventy years and that over such a long period of time a man will experience many things that he would rather not and that any one of these 26,250 days brings with it something completely unlike any other and therefore human life is pure chance (Hdt 1.32.2–4).²⁹ Solon then concludes that no one can be judged fortunate until they are dead. Solon explains:

You see, the man who is very wealthy is no more happy and prosperous than the man who has only enough to live from day to day, unless good fortune stays with him and he retain his fair and noble possessions right up until he departs this life happily. For many wealthy people are unhappy, while many others who have more modest resources are fortunate (Hdt. 1.32.5).

Solon expands on this theme explaining that while the wealthy man is more capable of gratifying his passions and sustaining himself during adversity, but that the fortunate man avoids these anyway by virtue of his good fortune (Hdt 1.32.6). Solon concludes his remarks to Croesus saying:

²⁸ Solon is a product of a patriarchal upbringing, but bar the glorious battlefield death, his happiness criteria are gender neutral—although his inclusion of women was likely inadvertent. He certainly did not go out of his way to exclude women from happiness at the end of their days. And his comments about children suggest he favoured matrimony.

²⁹ Herodotus' estimate of the average length of a year leaves much to be desired; instead of 365 days he uses 375. Indeed $375 \times 70 = 26,250$ —but his real point is that good luck always runs out.

Now, if in addition to all these things, he ends his life well, too, then this is the man you are looking for; he alone deserves to be called happy and prosperous. But before he dies, refrain from calling him this—one should rather call him lucky (Hdt 1.32.7).

Needless to say, none of this pleases Croesus at all and he does not like the idea of looking toward the end of every matter to see how it would turn out (Hdt 1.33).³⁰ This is not trivial entirely as it also has elements of inevitability in what the Hellenes depict as the goddess Tyche's wheel of fortune.³¹ Herodotus' more astute readers will have been aware that Croesus' newly married son, Atys, is killed in a hunting accident, and that later Croesus not only fatally misinterprets a critical Delphic oracle, but when defeated in battle, retreats to Sardis only to be besieged by Cyrus, and captured.

I will return to this question of Solon's happiness criteria, or more correctly Herodotus' own ideas about what can be described as a proverbial bucket list, at the conclusion to this study. Herodotus does not sketch in a cradle to grave narrative for the characters I have selected, far from it, and so it is left to his readers—ancient and modern—to divine how many of the individuals mentioned in his *Histories* approach and leave their end of days with a tolerable degree of happiness meeting one or more of Solon's criteria.³² We should also remember that Solon's criteria are largely gender neutral and we will be able to see if any of the women under study are also fortunate.

ARGUING FOR AND FROM A MODERN TRANSLATION

The 2007 publication of *The Landmark Herodotus* marks a new basis for further scholarship by combining an up-to-date translation with exhaustive annotation and short, state-of-the-scholarship essays on many aspects of this historian and his historical context. Many peripheral matters of context are mentioned in passing by Herodotus,

³⁰ Solon has already pointed out that “the gods are jealous of human prosperity and disruptive of our peace” (Hdt 1.32.1).

³¹ Solon further adds that “god shows many people a hint of happiness and prosperity, only to destroy them utterly later—a variant of Sod's Law (Hdt 1.32.9).

³² Herodotus gives his only cradle to grave narrative in book 1 which among other historical matters covers all of Cyrus' life, but this may well be happenstance rather than design.

perhaps not because he believes that they determine anything about the character of the subject, but because they make the selected subject much more human, interesting, and less legendary. Emulating Tomas Hägg, I have let Herodotus speak for himself, through long in-text quotations from the Purvis translation, before turning to my own analysis and interpretation; and, as Hägg comments:

The idea that [someone] knows the texts sufficiently well in advance, or has them at hand to consult continuously is a pious illusion: it is better to bring the texts physically into the discussion (Hägg ix).

And since this author is demonstrably not a classicist, I can happily leave any disputes over Purvis' nuances of Herodotus' fifth-century Ionian as opposed to Attic Greek to those who have spent decades with their blades and whetstones preparing for just such an encounter. Similarly, since I have written for a general, non-classicist, audience, I have given some background to Herodotus' contemporaries.³³ Although, as Helene Homeyer laments, much of this supposed material has been lost to the extent that it is now nigh impossible to trace the development of Greek biographical writings seamlessly from Herodotus to Xenophon. But it is unreasonable to take this lack as proof that no one wrote anything during the intervening century. The argument *ex silentio* might suggest that such as was written was deemed not worthy of preservation.

A final word about spellings used in this work. Most non-classicists are likely unaware that the spellings of the names of characters from Greek myth and the names of notable individuals from the Archaic and Classical periods with which they are familiar have been silently Latinised by generations of scholars—K's become C's, many "os" word endings become "us," and so on.³⁴ Even if this offends some scholars, I have

³³ That Heraclitus, one of the Pre-Socratics, or more formally one of the early Ionian philosophers—his name has nothing to do with either Heracles or Hera, let alone some affliction she may have given Zeus in revenge for his many infidelities—is from the Ionian seaboard and certainly not an Athenian citizen may represent an important-stepping stone in Pan-Hellenism's shared values.

arbitrarily adopted the familiar Latinised spellings and have silently changed quotations from academic articles, including those from the Purvis translation, to avoid confusing the non-classicists. Accordingly Kimon becomes Cimon throughout, and in similar vein: Alexandros becomes Alexander; Hephaistos becomes Hephaestus, but not Vulcan; and Herakles becomes Heracles, but not Hercules. And, of course, regardless of English pronunciation, we all know that Herodotus (Ἡρόδοτος) has long lost his Greek *os* ending and been Latinised for millennia.

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE, OR JUST PRURIENCE

Bringing these seven selected characters more into life, using the character anecdotes and vignettes that are liberally scattered throughout Herodotus' *Histories* demonstrates that during the mid-fifth century biography and history are not entirely separate genres. Whether what is written has any particular truth value is a very different question, and the writings become very much akin to Shakespeare's History plays, except that Herodotus is also his own Raphael Holinshed. We must remember Herodotus' general rider to all his writings—that he refuses to vouch for the truth of any of it and does not feel obliged to believe all of it himself (Hdt. 2.123.10). We should note that he does not write women out of history, he goes where the facts lead him and accordingly, notwithstanding the disclaimer given above, Herodotus never denies women their agency, authority, and autonomy. Stewart Flory writes:

We have found the father of history guilty of sometimes preferring fiction to truth. The only more damaging charge to bring is to accuse him of not taking the distinction between myth and history seriously. Yet humour is an important key to Herodotus' attitude to his work as a historian. This humour is not a light veneer of jokes and sly remarks gilding the Histories. It is a profound irony about the contradictions surrounding truth and fiction (*Archaic Smile*, 78).

³⁴ If for no better reason than that the Latin alphabet comprises only twenty-three letters with K, Y, and Z adopted for words of Greek origin. And only later is I differentiated into I; and, J and V differentiated into U, V, and W to give the twenty-six letter of the English alphabet.

Flory concludes his argument, about a critical distinction arguably first forged by Herodotus writing:

Yet fiction paradoxically often offers a more important category of historical truth than facts. The style of the anecdotes focuses the reader's attention on this paradox. Herodotus solution to the problem of the difference between myth and history is not only to admit it but to emphasise it with a characteristically wry wit (*Archaic Smile*, 78–79).

To his credit he at least sets his findings down for review and evaluation by successive generations. Only by such an evaluation can we determine whether Herodotus is indeed the Father of History, possibly a proto-biographer, and perhaps a proto-feminist with a huge Pan-Hellenic bent to boot, or when all is said and done he is just an entertaining peripatetic liar who, with little help from his friends and other undocumented sources, gleefully writes down the most prurient versions of whatever comes his way to garner “the applause of the moment.” And to be fair given a choice between prejudice and prurience, that particular choice is easy.

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Alexander of Macedon

[Hdt. 4.123, 5.17.1–2, 5.19–21, 5.22.2, 7.172.1, 8.139, 9.44.1–45.3]

INTRODUCTION

Herodotus gives us part of the life story of only one ruler of Macedon, and even these fascinating, chronologically isolated, stand-alone, episodes about Alexander I are scattered over four books of his *Histories*. Large in area and undeveloped, but neither wealthy nor populous, this northern Aegean kingdom's importance late in the sixth and early in the fifth century is determined entirely by its geography. Not landlocked, it has direct access to the sea through the Thermaic Gulf, and hence the intense interest of the Persian rulers Darius and his son Xerxes. This kingdom, which during the late sixth and the early fifth centuries does not yet include the Chalcidian Peninsula, lies north of Thessaly but east of Thrace. Therefore it is situated along the strategic route that any invading land armies with designs on mainland Greece—Attica and the Peloponnese—would take when advancing west from either the Black Sea or from the south after crossing the Straits from the Anatolian peninsula into Europe. But neither Alexander nor his people are true Asian / Near Eastern *Barbaroi* either—far from it. Whatever Alexander's true ethnicity, there is considerably less doubt about his people, and the Southern Greeks (Athens and Sparta) at this time do not regard them as true *Hellenes* at all—despite some similarities in religion if not culture, they are not Doric, Aeolian, Ionic, let alone Attic Greek-speaking, some have suggested that their language was more an uneducated backward Greek brogue.¹ Given its military and economic insignificance, Macedon's ruler finds himself in a similarly perilous position to his contemporary in the nearby Chersonese, Miltiades son of Kimon.² They are both far too weak to resist

¹ Barbarian (*Barbaroi*) is now a pejorative term, implying primitive, savage, uncivilized, crude, and uncultured; but rather like the Gaelic word *sasunnoch* or *sassanach* (originally meaning Saxon) it should really be translated as *outsider* in the mildly xenophobic sense of *not one of us*.

² During the late sixth- and early fifth-century Miltiades, the scion of a wealthy and influential Athenian family, was appointed tyrant of the Thracian Chersonese—a region better known now as the Gallipoli Peninsula.

Persia's territorial expansion ambitions and too far away to solicit meaningful support from either Athens or Sparta.

At this time, despite some shared religious beliefs, Alexander's Macedon people are not recognised either ethnically or culturally as *Hellenes*. But young Alexander—having successfully petitioned the *Hellanodikai* for permission to compete in the Olympic Games—regards himself not only as a Hellene, but as Hellenic royalty with an uncontested lineage stretching back beyond the Trojan War.³ Once again, Herodotus shows his fascination with genealogy, a fascination which fits well with the Heraclitean maxim: *character is destiny*, and his Homeric echoes of heroic deeds. Alexander's privileged high-birth potentially gives him the opportunity to exercise independent agency, and these are opportunities usually denied those of less than noble birth. For all their bleats about democracy, the Hellenes, and the Athenians in particular, are still a long way away from creating a functioning meritocracy. Agency alone is never going to be enough; it must be coupled with it autonomy and authority—and in the early fifth-century all three are most readily secured through pedigree.

A KINGDOM IN HARM'S WAY

At the end of the Persian's stalemated Scythian expedition of 513 Darius the Great withdraws west along the northern shores of the Black Sea slowly making his way through Thrace to Sestos on the Chersonese peninsula where he ferries his army back over to Anatolia, leaving behind one of his generals, Megabazos, and eighty-thousand troops on the European side of the waterway (Hdt. 4.143).⁴ This particular East-West conflict, directed by Darius, is by no means over. Megabazos' orders are to subdue every city throughout Thrace (Hdt. 5.1–5.3), and under special orders given a year or so later he also is to capture and entirely uproot the Paionian people moving them to new settlements

³ The (Ἑλληνοδίκαι) *Hellanodikai* are the elected Elean officials from the ruling families of Elis charged with maintaining the standards and traditions of the games, including determining who may and who may not compete. Given the religious significance of the celebrations they take their duties very seriously and are virtually incorruptible.

⁴ One suggestion is that Byzantium was in revolt against the Persians and Darius stays on the European side rather than returning the way he came (How and Wells 1.4.143).

in Anatolia (Hdt. 5.12–5.15). After this conquest of Paionia, Megabazos sends seven of his most distinguished men south as emissaries to neighbouring Macedon demanding that their king swear fealty to Darius (Hdt. 5.17.1). Herodotus' first mention of Alexander's father, King Amyntas, is when, perhaps as late as the year 510, he is hosting these Persian dignitaries at a state banquet held in the royal court at Aegae (Hdt. 5.18.1). Doubtless the nearby presence of eighty-thousand Persian troops heavily influences King Amyntas' unhappy and humiliating but unhesitating acquiescence—he accepts the only alternative to certain annihilation. His large, not quite impoverished, but minor kingdom is far too weak to effectively resist Persian aggression or territorial expansion, let alone pose a military threat to anyone. And so Amyntas is able to retain a measure of authority and autonomy to avoid his kingdom becoming just part of another large Persian satrapy.

THE SEEDS OF PANHELLENISM

Whether events at the state banquet unfold exactly as Herodotus recounts is immaterial. And regardless of any bias stemming from his Macedonian sources, he is creating a discourse distinguishing Hellenic freedom from Persian despotism.⁵ Herodotus next spins a lurid tale of a clash of courtly customs and expectations that ends in the murder and complete disappearance of the seven Persian emissaries, along with all trace of their attendants, servants, baggage, and carriages (Hdt. 5.18.2–5.21.1). The Persians, who have been drinking, complain to their host that it is their custom to bring their concubines and wives to sit beside their guests at a feast. Herodotus is continuing his contrast or catalogue of differences. Non-Greeks, or barbarians are those “who lacked Greek virtues and exhibit all non-Greek vices, such as luxury, effeminacy, despotism, and lack of self control.”⁶ King Amyntas reluctantly brings in the women as

⁵ I am indebted to Kostas Vlassopoulos for the phrase; “Oriental despotism” which he admits is an oversimplification of the polarity and conflict between Greece and what he calls the Near East (321).

⁶ Vlassopoulos lists what he calls all non-Greek vices, but I would hesitate ever to put any degree of ethnical ownership on a vice (8). They are universal. It is during the late archaic and early classical period that the Hellenes are *inventing themselves* and at the same time inventing *not-themselves*, or the barbarian. Ideologically this leads to the simple adage that it is always a

demanded, but the Persians insist that they sit beside not opposite them and immediately commence taking liberties. Clearly Persian and Macedonian customs and culture are as diverse as they are irreconcilable (Scaife 132); and although the Greeks do not yet regard Macedonians as Hellenes nor are they Barbarians.⁷ Young Alexander, who is outraged at this lewd, ungracious behaviour, asks his father to retire, and suggests that if the Persian guests insist that it is their right to casually fornicate with these young women—the wives and daughters of their hosts—the women should at least be permitted to bathe first.⁸ Alexander’s outrage that the Persians should even ask is only exceeded by the anguish of witnessing his father’s powerlessness and humiliating acquiescence in reducing Macedon’s younger attractive female courtiers to little better than *pornai* (πόρναι)—noblewomen dragooned as substitutes for Persian army camp followers. Here Herodotus reveals one of the more insidious and invidious aspects of foreign dominance—when you are deprived of the freedom to boldly act on, or perhaps more strictly to exercise, the courage of your convictions, whether these be right or wrong, you are effectively reduced to being a slave. Slaves either have no choice at all, or are at best obliged to select what they perceive as the least bad from among a number of evils.⁹ And this is what the Persian emissaries are doing, while rubbing it in with pleasure.

good thing to be a Hellene—and you might wish to thank the gods for that—and a very bad thing to be a Barbarian—and you might really wish to thank the gods for that, too.

⁷ Barbarian is now a pejorative term, but the term *barbarophonoi* is used by Homer when describing the Trojans’ Carian allies from the western coast of Anatolia:

Nastes led the Carians wild with barbarous tongues,
men who held Miletus, Phthires’ ridges thick with timber,
Maeander’s currents and Mount Mycale’s craggy peaks (*Iliad* 2.979–981).

Some scholars argue that Homer uses the term specifically for the Carians not because they did not speak Greek, but because they spoke an almost unintelligible Greek dialect (Dueck, Lindsay, and Pothecary 47–48). However, according to Herodotus, the Egyptians call any who do not speak their language “barbarians” (Hdt. 2.158.5). The Gaelic notion of *not one of us* will suffice, and it has that Pan-Hellenic seed.

⁸ The astute will note that any question of consent never arises—their monarch, Amyntas, has ordered the palace womenfolk to let his Persian guests have their way with them. Likely Alexander had several motives in play and will not follow in his father’s footsteps.

Not yet enthroned and likely still a teenager well short of his majority, this incident becomes Alexander's *one defining moment*. He might even have vowed never to be forced into a similar powerless position himself. He immediately dresses an equal number of lightly armed, smooth-skinned, young men in women's clothing and brings them back into the banqueting room, where seated beside their amorous drunken guests—and with shades of book 22 of the *Odyssey*—they put the guests to death for their grotesque violation of the most paramount of Greek virtues—*xenia*. Very much unlike late sixth- and early fifth-century Athens where prostitution was rampant, one might here interject the notion that in Macedon, as in Sparta—although for very different reasons—casual heterosexual intercourse was simply not part of their culture. Herodotus is showing that it is the barbarians who can do no better than turn a state banquet into an excuse for drunken debauchery.¹⁰ If money is the root of all evil, then Spartan xenophobia coupled with their reluctance to monetise gold and silver bullion explains why prostitution did not flourish there until the Hellenic era.¹¹

Proving once again that nothing beats plausible deniability, coupled with the offer of a princess-bride and palm oil, Persian inquiries about the vanished emissaries come to nothing. Herodotus credits the young Alexander, rather than the king, with arranging the marriage of his sister Gygaia to Boubares, Megabazos' son and the Persian general responsible for the—quickly dropped—inquiry (Hdt. 5.22.2). Whether the tale is true or not is immaterial; Herodotus is carefully establishing that despite all outward appearances Macedon is only paying forced lip-service to Darius and that the future Macedon king is

⁹ Part of the justification for a monarchy is that the strong will always protect the weak—king Amyntas fails his country-women in a spectacularly miserable way.

¹⁰ The Persians display the most degenerate. Wealthy and influential Athenian men may hold drinking parties, *symposia*, but the only women present are *hetairai* and perhaps a better class of *pornai* provided by the host and where non-reproductive, recreational intercourse is *de rigueur*. Athenian men will not bring their *gynaikai*, let alone their *pallakai*.

¹¹ See I Timothy 6:10 although the argument from Scripture is not the economic one. See also Pomeroy 98. The archaic and classical Spartan economy was agrarian and trade facilitated by barter—but there will always be a limit to the number of laying hens or sacks of barley the residents and keepers of such houses of pleasure can accept in exchange for services rendered. Carnal access to these foreign women likely also required access to foreign money.

anxious to be free of the Persian yoke.¹² Herodotus is also highlighting significant cultural differences—Hellenes do not get paralytically drunk and Hellenes do not expect to be invited to fornicate in public with their host’s servants, let alone with their wives and daughters.¹³

In a long historical digression Herodotus describes how in the mid-seventh century three brothers: Gayannes, Aeropos, and Perdiccas, flee from Argos into exile in Illyria and then move eastward into northern Macedon and after deposing the local ruler eventually conquer the whole region (Hdt. 8.137–8.138). Herodotus gives the genealogy of Alexander I stretching back six generations.

And it was from this Perdiccas that Alexander was descended; for Alexander was the son of Amyntas, who was the son of Alcetes, whose father was Aeropos son of Philippos, the son of Argaios, who was the son of that Perdiccas who acquired the rule of this land (Hdt. 8.139).

Herodotus gives no source for this king list, but it is clearly a proud Macedonian tradition likely as not carved in stone.¹⁴ Also worth mention is that Macedon is a vast region, and

¹² A number of scholars have dismissed this story as apocryphal—perhaps it is even pro-Macedon propaganda fabricated by Herodotus (Roisman and Worthington 136). But one of the flaws in their logic is that because Herodotus, or his sources, are unable to provide the necessary synchronicities, not only are we unsure of when this medizing first occurred—and was it by Amyntas or Alexander—we do not know the ages of either Alexander or Gygaia. There is no evidence that Gygaia is considerably younger than her brother, Alexander, and so pushing her marriage to Boubares to early in the fifth-century when she will be in her thirties creates other credibility challenges. The point of the digression is to reveal Herodotus’ assessment of Alexander’s sympathies, not the whereabouts of the Persian emissaries’ bones.

¹³ Greek culture should be emulated, and a culture that eschews *xenia* is boorish beyond decadence. Herodotus does not say it directly, but falconry or wild boar hunting is a more appropriate recreational pursuit for visiting diplomats than catering to their preference for drunken fornication. Again, only slaves please others by acting against their convictions.

¹⁴ The Argead dynasty spans five centuries from 808 to 305 and includes twenty-seven monarchs—one of whom ruled for all of four days. Alexander I is the tenth in this line, whereas Alexander III, better known as Alexander the Great, is the twenty-fifth. Why Herodotus should defer revealing details of Alexander’s genealogy until book 8, rather than introduce it early in book 4 or 5, is puzzling. If, as suggested by several scholars, Herodotus never got around to final revisions of his *Histories*—a draft extending over as many as fifty book rolls—likely he only set

the royal palaces at Aigai (Aegae) in the south are not built in an urban environment resembling a city-state but operate more a ceremonial meeting place. But what is critical here is that Alexander believes that it was important for his ruling family, the Argeads (Ἀργεάδαι), if not his subjects, to be accepted as *Hellenes* with Hellenic values and not be dismissed as Barbarians.¹⁵ Further reinforcing Alexander's claim of Hellenic (Temnid) heritage, Herodotus notes that he petitioned for and was permitted to compete in the Olympic Games.¹⁶

Furthermore, even those who preside over the Olympic games of the Hellenes have come to recognise that this is the case. [2] For when Alexander chose to compete in the games and entered the lists to do so, his Greek competitors tried to exclude him, by claiming that the contest was for Greek contestants only, and barbarians were not allowed to participate.¹⁷ But when Alexander proved that he was of Argive ancestry, he was judged to be a Hellene, and proceeded to compete in the footrace, in which he was tied for first place (Hdt. 5.22.1–2).

down this version of the Macedonian king list when a copy from what he regarded as a reliable source first came into his hands (Flory 15 and Roisman and Worthington 81).

¹⁵ Geographic and ethnic boundaries in this region have changed numerous times over the last two and one-half millennia and it would be naïve if not absurd to ignore how these changes have impacted Greek and Slavic/Balkan cultural identity. The modern Balkan Republic of Macedonia is landlocked and roughly corresponds to the ancient kingdom of Paeonia. Consequently, the existence of a Macedonian ethnicity is still bitterly contested, especially after the break-up of the former Yugoslavia in 1991-92. When Josip Broz Tito, who had held the country together since the end of WWII, died in 1980 the country slowly morphed back into the eight former nineteenth-century constituent Slavic states. Alexander I's Macedon kingdom, which is not landlocked, has been part of mainland Greece for millennia. Accordingly I have referred to Alexander's homeland as Macedon. Alexander's subjects are described as Macedonians if only to avoid the grammatically clumsy Macedon peoples or peoples of Macedon.

¹⁶ Temenos (Τήμενος) is a great-great-grandson of Heracles who helps lead the fifth and final attack on Mycenae in the Peloponnese where he becomes king of Argos. He is the father of Karanos (Κάρανος) who in some traditions is the first king of Macedon and the founder of the Temnid or Argead dynasty. In other earlier traditions, including the one adopted by Herodotus, Perdikkas, Temenos' great grandson, founds the dynasty.

¹⁷ Alexander, as the king of Macedon or perhaps still just a prince of Macedon, most likely makes an honoured guest appearance at the seventy-first Olympiad in 496, or possibly at the games held in 500 or 504, and competes in the furlong (stadia) race. Neither Herodotus nor any other contemporary sources indicate which games nor how old he was, but we can surmise—if there is any truth to the earlier hospitality story—that he was then aged about thirty and had only recently assumed the throne.

Herodotus gives us his own definition of what it means, to be a *Hellene*.

And second it would not be fitting for the Athenians to prove traitors to the Greek people, with whom we are united in sharing the same kinship and language, with whom we have established shrines and conduct sacrifices to the gods together, and with whom we also share the same way of life (Hdt. 8.144.2).

In another digression Herodotus mentions the silver mine located between Lake Prasias and Mount Dysoron from which Alexander I will later derive an income of a talent of silver—6,000 to 8,000 drachmas—per day (Hdt. 5.17.2).¹⁸ The kingdom's other source of revenue is forestry and the export of timber and pitch used in shipbuilding throughout the eastern Mediterranean. No matter, Herodotus' narrative establishes that thirty years before the second Greco-Persian war, Amyntas I is coerced into accepting Persian sovereignty, but notably without a resident Persian satrap and garrison; and, that later his son Alexander I reluctantly accepts the status quo while recognising that the continued independence and prosperity of Macedon is also dependent on the continued independence of the city-states within mainland Greece.

FIRST GRECO-PERSIAN WAR

Herodotus makes no further reference to Alexander until the summer of 480. We know that Alexander succeeds to his father's throne in 498 and from Herodotus' silence we may surmise that Macedon plays no role in the Ionian revolt and does not hinder Mardonios' forces during what turned out to be a disastrous foray into Thrace and Macedon in 493–492 when Darius seeks retribution for Athenian and Eretrian participation in the Ionian raid on Sardis in 498 (Hdt. 6.44). It is when taking his fleet from the Strymonic Gulf around the Chalcidian Peninsula that Mardonios loses some three-hundred ships from his fleet and some twenty-thousand soldiers before reaching

¹⁸ Unlike the Scythian people who are nomadic, the agricultural community in Macedon practice transhumance—they keep their livestock grazing in sheltered lowland areas during the winter, but move them to upland areas during the spring and summer. Efficient land use results, as this livestock migration also lets the Macedon farmers grow crops for winter feed in their lowland fields. However, in the event of invasion this transhumance makes it particularly difficult to quickly muster defensive troops no matter whether infantry or cavalry.

Macedon territory west of the peninsula (Hdt. 6.44.2–3). With these crippling losses punitive raids on Athens and Eretria, let alone permanent subjugation, are no longer feasible and Mardonios ignominiously withdraws to Asia (Hdt. 6.45). Since Mardonios fails so miserably, next year in 491, Darius appoints two other generals, Datis and Artaphrenes with instructions to enslave both Athens and Eretria (Hdt. 6.94.20). Partly because of the unpredictable storms in the northern Aegean and a desire to subjugate a number of city-states on islands in the Aegean Sea the new strategy is one of which can best be described of island-hopping over the Cyclades Islands.

Alexander will doubtless have viewed this new strategy with a mixture of relief and apprehension—relief that another land army would not be crossing over from the Hellespont to Thrace—and apprehension that a large amphibious force routed safely through the Cyclades might successfully invade Attica and continue on through to the Peloponnese with some city-states medizing without a fight. As things turn out Eretria is betrayed from within and razed to the ground, but the Athenians, with Miltiades as commanding general and without Spartan assistance, defeats Datis at Marathon in the summer of 490. Furthermore, the promised betrayal from within Athens never materialises—the Persian invasion fleet gets as far as anchoring off Phaleron only to see the victors at Marathon waiting for them. They never land and return to Susa with only the conquest of a few small islands in the Aegean Sea, the sack of Eretria, and some hapless Eretrian prisoners to show for their efforts.

SECOND GRECO-PERSIAN WAR

It will be a decade before the Persians try again. In the meantime Darius is succeeded by his son, Xerxes. In the aftermath of Marathon, leaders in mainland Greece argue over whether the Persian menace is over and whether a victory such as Marathon could ever be repeated. When Athens starts to build a significant navy—doubtless with timber and pitch purchased from Macedon—Alexander would be fully aware that the Greco-Persian conflict is far from over. Herodotus does not say when Alexander is recognised by Athens as a *proxenos* and *euergetes*, it might well have been before his succession to the throne. What is important is that Alexander has earned and subsequently been awarded these significant honours on proven merit and that the Persian

commanders know so. But we can surmise that just as Alexander knows something of what is happening in Athens and in Sparta, he will also be fully aware of what is afoot in Susa.¹⁹

Following the sack of Sardis in 498, Darius resolves to subjugate all of Hellas once and for all (Hdt 5.105.1). Later, goaded by his mother, Atossa, for yet another invasion of the Greek mainland Darius dies in 484 in the midst of his preparations (Hdt. 7.4). His heir, Xerxes, inherits these preparations and one of his generals, Mardonios, is anxious to argue for revenge and perhaps covets the appointment as the satrap of all Hellas himself (Hdt. 7.6.1–2). It is in 484 that Xerxes assembles the Persian nobility to discuss his plan for the invasion of Hellas and tells them (Hdt. 7.8).

“I intend to bridge the Hellespont and lead my army through Europe to Hellas, so that we can punish the Athenians for all that they did to the Persians and to my father. [2] Now you saw how even Darius had his mind set on marching against these men, but that he died and did not have the opportunity to exact vengeance upon them. I, however, on his behalf and that of the rest of the Persians, shall not give up until I conquer Athens and set it on fire, since it is they who began the offenses against me and my father” (Hdt. 7.8β 1–2).

The first offence, in Xerxes’ mind, is the raid on Sardis, but he also regards the defeat at Marathon as an “offence” to be avenged (Hdt. 7.8β 3). And in due course, that is exactly what Xerxes does. Once the Athenians and Spartans know that Xerxes has crossed the Hellespont into Thrace and is moving toward Macedon and Thessaly they decide to act (Hdt. 7.172). In response to a Thessalian request, they send an army by sea to Halos in Achaia where they disembark and march toward Tempe and the pass between Mount Olympus and Mount Ossa which leads from Macedon into Thessaly. But this very bold strategic move—bottling up the huge Persian force in Macedon—is very poorly planned and based on faulty, or grossly misleading local knowledge. Herodotus writes

¹⁹ A *proxenos* is a citizen of a state (in this case Macedon) appointed by another state (namely Athens) to host its ambassadors and to represent and protect its interests there (Athens’ interests in Macedon). Another term applicable to Alexander I is *euergetes*: a benefactor and therefore a title of honour in ancient Greece granted to those notables who have done the state some service. Both titles have a hereditary element. (See Hdt. 8.143.3; and, Roisman and Worthington 141.)

that in the early summer of 480, it is messengers from Alexander who point out their precarious position.²⁰

They remained there for only a few days, however, for messengers soon arrived from the Macedonian Alexander son of Amyntas, telling them of the number of troops and ships the enemy had and advising them to depart, lest by remaining at the pass, they would be trampled under by the invading army. The Hellenes thought that this was sound advice and, recognizing that the Macedonian was thus displaying his goodwill toward them, they followed it (Hdt. 7.173.3).

Herodotus' story here shows the fragility of any slowly emergent early fifth-century Pan-Hellenism. It is the Thessalians, who do not want to be overrun by Xerxes' hordes, who persuade the Spartan and Athenian commanders, who were then assembled near Corinth, to travel north to help them defend the pass at Mount Olympus (Hdt. 7.172.2). The Thessalians must have known that there was more than one mountain pass that an army advancing south from Macedon into Thessaly might take, and that all of the passes would have to be defended. A naval force to prevent the defenders being by-passed and attacked from behind is also necessary.

The existence of such an alternative route soon becomes evident. Herodotus' readers will be thinking of the similar situation soon to be revealed at Thermopylae. Perhaps also Alexander does not want the Persians fighting against the Greeks within his kingdom, where Xerxes is certain to demand that Macedonian levees would be active participants. A minor military point, but the best way to defend a pass is at the entrance where you have a narrow front and with small numbers can prevent your enemy even entering it. To do this Euainetos son of Karenos and Themistocles would have to enter Macedon territory leaving Alexander in an invidious position regarding Xerxes' advance.

But in my opinion, what really convinced them to leave was fear, which arose when they learned that another pass into Thessaly led from northern Macedon through Perraiibia, by the city of Gonnoi, which was the pass that the army of Xerxes actually

²⁰ The military advice is not entirely altruistic; Alexander will have every reason to hope that the Persian hordes and their allies pass through his kingdom as peacefully and as quickly as possible.

did take. So the Hellenes returned to their ships and sailed back to the isthmus ²¹ (Hdt. 7.172.4).

Certainly this allied retreat from Thessaly, agreed by the two commanders, Euainitos son of Karenos from Sparta and Themistocles son of Neokles from Athens, leaves their former allies the Thessalians little choice but to submit to Xerxes and grant him unimpeded passage south toward Attica and the Peloponnese.

THERMOPYLAE AND AFTER

This invasion of Europe occurs during the summer of 480. Herodotus may have his facts right and yet be in error over the motivation. Herodotus does not say whether Macedonian forces commanded by Alexander—probably cavalry—were present at the battle of Thermopylae in August or September of 480. However, just prior to that battle when the Persian forces assemble near Cape Sepias, Herodotus lists the men in the forces recruited from Europe.

Land forces were provided by the Thracians, Paionians, Eirdians, Bottiaians, the nation of Chaldicians, Brygoi, Pierians, Macedonians, Perraians, Ainianes, Dolopians, Magnesians, Achaeans, and all who inhabited the coastal region of Thrace (Hdt. 7.185.2).

In the aftermath of the Spartan defeat at Thermopylae, the Persians, gleefully guided by the Thessalians, overrun the entire country of Phocis freely burning, pillaging, and raping their way south (Hdt. 8.32–8.33). However, the entire population of Boeotia, who pragmatically medize after the battle of Thermopylae, are protected by Macedonian troops from the threat of unsanctioned Persian ravages. Herodotus writes.

After leaving Parapotamioi the barbarians came to Panopereos, and there Xerxes sorted out his army and divided it in two. The largest and strongest part continued with

²¹ Herodotus does not say which isthmus, but the Isthmus of Corinth is the most likely possibility for the various contingents of the combined fleet and army to re-assemble and later disburse toward home.

Xerxes to invade Boeotia through the territory of Orchomenus and march toward Athens. The entire population of Boeotia were medizing, and their cities were being protected by some Macedonians who had been appointed and sent to them by Alexandros. The purpose behind this move was to make clear to Xerxes that the Boeotians were taking the side of the Medes (Hdt. 8.34).

Perhaps this is an instance of Alexander I earning the title *euergetes*? He would not have forgotten the Persian's behaviour toward women at his father's palace thirty years earlier and now he appears to be challenging Xerxes to insist that his own troops and allied levees act honourably. The simple presence of a handful of Macedonian cavalrymen in each Boeotian settlement would deter undisciplined marauders from preying on the defenceless civilian population no matter whichever part of Xerxes' empire—Asia or Europe—they came from. Clearly the Macedonians were not involved in the ill-omened Persian raid on Delphi, a grotesque act of impiety that would appall any ruler claiming Hellenic values.

Whether Macedonian troops take part on the sack of Athens, Herodotus does not say, nor do we know whether Macedonian troops assemble at Phaleron. Perhaps they were too busy with their garrison duties in Boeotia and only rejoin Mardonios when he withdraws to Thessaly after the naval disaster at Salamis? Herodotus makes no further mention of Alexander until the winter of 480/479 when the Persian general Mardonios withdraws his troops from Attica and is encamped in Thessaly. Here, taking advantage of Alexander's status as both *proxenos* and *euergetes*, Mardonios seeks to break up the Hellenic Alliance with a deal. We must not forget that in whatever capacity she or he may act ambassadors—are essentially very noble but obedient messengers.

After Mardonios had read the oracles, he sent Alexander of Macedon, the son of Amyntas, as a messenger to Athens, because the Persians were related to Alexander by marriage; Gygaia, who was the daughter of Amyntas and Alexander's sister, was the wife of Boubares of Persia. . She had given birth to Amyntas of Asia, who bore the name of his maternal grandfather and to who the King had given the large Phrygian city of Alabanda from which to draw revenues. Moreover, since Mardonios had heard that Alexander was a *proxenos* and a benefactor of Athens, [2] he thought that by this

move he could best succeed in winning over the Athenians to his side. Because he had learned that they were a populous and warlike people, and he knew that the disaster that had befallen the Persians at sea had been accomplished mainly by the Athenians, [3] he fully anticipated that if they were on his side, he would easily gain control over the sea which was certainly a correct assumption (Hdt. 8.136.1–3).

Believing an oracle that suggests that the Persians should ally with the Athenians, Mardonios decides to send Alexander to Athens to present an offer that purports to come from Xerxes (Hdt. 8.136.3).²² Herodotus reports Alexander’s speech to the assembled Athenians, an assembly which includes some messengers from Sparta, as follows:

“Men of Athens, Mardonios has this to tell you: ‘A message has arrived from the King [Xerxes], saying: I will forget all the wrongs done to me by the Athenians [2] so now, Mardonios, you must do as I say. First give them back their land, and let them have another land of their choice in addition, which they may govern independently (Hdt. 8.140α 1–2).

Alexander also offers his own addendum to the Xerxes/Mardonios message:

“That, Athenians, is what Mardonios instructed me to tell you. As for myself, I shall say nothing of my own goodwill toward you (since now would not be the first time you could recognize that), but I do entreat you to follow the advice of Mardonios. [2] For I can see that you will not be able to wage war against Xerxes forever—if I had observed that you were capable of doing so, I would never have come to you with this advice. The fact is, the King’s power is superhuman, and his reach extends far and wide. [3] And so if you do not immediately come to an agreement with the Persians while they are offering you such generous conditions, then I fear for you indeed, because you alone of all the allies dwell along the most beaten track of this war and constantly suffer devastation, and the land you possess is often chosen as the disputed ground on which battles are waged. [4] So, then, do heed my advice, since you have such a precious

²² Mardonios needs the Athenian navy, but he may be unaware that Themistocles has threatened to relocate the entire Athenian population to Siris in Italy. This would deny either side his triremes and troop transports (Hdt. 8.62.2).

opportunity, insofar as the great King wishes to become your friend and to forgive you alone of all the Hellenes for the wrongs done to him” (Hdt. 8.140β 1–4).

The astute listener will note that it is Alexander’s Macedon that lies along the most beaten track of this war. But, no matter, the Spartan response is immediate, self-serving, and predictable and includes an *ad hominem* attack on Alexander.²³

“Do not let Alexandros of Macedon win you over with his polished version of Mardonios’ message. [5] For he really must act this way: he is, after all, a tyrant who is assisting another tyrant. But if you have any sense at all, you must not follow the advice of barbarians, knowing as you do that they are neither trustworthy nor truthful” (Hdt. 8.142.4–5).

Strictly, Alexander is not a tyrant, but he has claimed Temenid ancestry—which means Argos—and for any Spartan that would be enough to put him beyond the pale. Herodotus reports both the Athenian response first to Alexander and then their response to the Spartans.

Report back to Mardonios that the Athenians say: ‘As long as the sun continues on the same course as it now travels, we shall never come to an agreement with Xerxes. Trusting in the gods and heroes as our allies (for whom he showed no respect when he burned their homes and images) we shall advance against him and defend ourselves’ (Hdt. 8.143.2).

The Athenian response to the Spartan messengers is more measured, but includes a plea that the Spartans do not simply defend themselves and other cities of the Peloponnese behind the fortifications they have constructed across the isthmus at Corinth (Hdt. 8.144.1–5).

²³ Arguably the Spartans are disingenuous. Long ago they had threatened Cyrus the Great, but more recently they had abused Persian heralds (diplomats) adding injury to insult (see How and Wells 2.8.142.2).

“Do send out an army as quickly as possible, [5] for it is our conjecture that before long, indeed as soon as the barbarian hears that we have refused to do as he asked, he will be here invading our land again and so now before he reaches Attica, is the time for you to hasten to battle in Boeotia” (Hdt. 8.144.4–5).

As expected, after Alexander relays the Athenian response to the Xerxes / Mardonios offer, the Persian armies again prepare to move south toward Attica. Having occupied a deserted Athens for a second time (Hdt. 9.3), Mardonios tries again to separate the Athenians from their Spartan allies by repeating the earlier offer conveyed by Alexander and soundly rejected (Hdt. 9.4.1).

DEFEAT AT PLATAEA

This diplomatic ploy also fails, and when Mardonios learns that the Spartans under Pausanias are marching out of Sparta he sacks Athens for a second time and destroys everything in his path as he withdraws north from Attica into Boeotia. It is here, just south of Thebes along the Asopos River that Mardonios decides is the right terrain where he can use his cavalry to advantage when engaging the Hellenic Alliance in a decisive battle (Hdt. 9.13.3). From Herodotus we learn that “Mardonios also positioned the Macedonians and the inhabitants of the region surrounding Thessaly so that they faced the Athenians” (Hdt. 9.31.5).

The two armies face each other for ten days, neither attacking the other because the omens each receives after offering sacrifice are always unfavourable (Hdt. 9.38.2). One of Mardonios’ advisers, Artabazos, even suggests that the Persians should abandon their present positions and retreat behind the walls of Thebes—where their cavalry would be useless—but to use the treasure stored there to bribe leaders of the Alliance into accepting Persian sovereignty on very favourable terms (Hdt. 9.41.2). Mardonios, who craves the glory of a military victory, rejects this advice and gives the signal for the battle to be joined on the following day (Hdt. 9.42.4). It is at this critical moment that Alexander, whose forces are positioned directly opposite the Athenians, decides to secretly help the Alliance as much as he can. Herodotus writes of what takes place at one outpost of the Greek camp:

The night was well advanced; all was quiet throughout the camp, and most of the men were asleep when Alexander son of Amyntas rode up on horseback to a guard post of the Athenians, seeking to speak to their generals [2] While most of the guards remained at their posts, some ran to their generals, and when they found them they told them that someone on horseback had arrived from the camp of the Medes, and that he would say nothing more than he wished to speak to some of their generals, whom he named (Hdt. 9.44.1–2).

Although Herodotus does not speculate, Alexander may not have left the Persian lines without the acquiescence of the Persian generals—what the Persians might have expected him to say is another matter.²⁴ Herodotus has already indicated that there were levees from Macedon under Alexander’s command in Mardonios’ army, but Alexander is not visiting the Hellenes’ camp to lend direct military assistance, although his secret forewarning reveals which side he is really on.²⁵

Alexander said to them, “Men of Athens, I entrust you with what I am about to say, charging you to keep it an absolute secret and to tell no one but Pausanias, lest you utterly destroy me. You must know that I would not be speaking to you if I did not care greatly about all of Hellas, [2] for I myself am a Hellene of ancient lineage and would not wish to see Hellas exchange its freedom for slavery.²⁶ And so I am here to tell you that Mardonios and his army are unable to obtain from their sacrifices the omens they desire. Otherwise you would have fought a long time ago. Now, however, Mardonios has resolved to dismiss the oracles and to engage in battle beginning at the break of day; my guess is that he is very worried that more men will come here to join you. So you should prepare your selves for this. If it turns out that Mardonios delays the encounter

²⁴ Alexander might well not know which Greek commanders are present, several may well be with the Hellenic fleet at Mycale (How and Wells 2.9.44.1–2).

²⁵ The Persian commanders must have very short memories about Alexander—they should know that nothing very good happens to a Persian after midnight—especially when it comes to Macedon and Macedonians.

²⁶ See Hdt. 8.137.1–8.139 where Herodotus goes through the genealogy and migration of the Argead royal house as mid-seventh-century refugees from Argos in the Peloponnese—Herodotus’ Macedonian sources want to establish that Alexander and many of his nobles are *Hellenes* not *Barbaroi* but of Argive rather than Dorian or Ionian descent.

and does nothing, you should remain and persevere, for they have enough food left for only a few days. [3] And if this war ends in your favor, then you must remember me and my quest for liberation, for it is on my own initiative that I have performed this dangerous feat as a service to the Hellenes; I wish to reveal the intent of Mardonios to you so that the barbarians will not be able to fall upon you suddenly and unexpectedly, I am Alexander of Macedon.” After saying this he rode away, back to his camp and his own post (Hdt. 9.45.1–3).

Evidently Macedon is still obliged to supply Mardonios with troops, but whether they winter with the Persian forces in Thessaly or travel home to Macedon at the end of the 480 campaign season and reassemble the spring of 479 Herodotus does not say. Clearly, Herodotus is going well out of his way to show that at a crucial moment Alexander of Macedon is only paying lip service to the Persians and wants to help the Hellenes.

This, Herodotus’ last mention of Alexander I, ends with his account of this Greco-Persian battle in the summer of 479—a stunning Persian defeat, closely followed by another defeat on the Anatolian coast at Mycale. Herodotus leaves his readers to determine what influence this timely forewarning has on the outcome of the battle of Plataea and to assess Alexander’s motives in approaching the Athenian generals and the Spartan commander Pausanias in particular.²⁷ Remember, Herodotus’ first mention of Alexander is at least thirty years earlier, well before the Ionian revolt at the beginning of the fifth century and at a time when Alexander is still only a minor and just a prince of Macedon. From other sources we know that Alexander remains on the throne for another quarter-century, and that neither he nor his countrymen are held to account for their medism. With others the Hellenes were no so charitable, Thebes and a number of wealthy aristocratic Thebans come to mind.

²⁷ But as the Spartans lament so bitterly after being instrumental in driving Hippias, the last of the Peisistratid tyrants, out of Athens and into exile at the close of the sixth century—the Athenians are a thankless people (Hdt. 5.92.2). Never made clear in this well-known Herodotean quotation is who in Sparta said it—perhaps a member of the *Gerousia*—and to whom the Spartans were referring—the privileged and wealthy Athenian aristocrats—or those *others* who several millennia later in a similar context are quite foolishly and contemptibly—citizens with only just enough to get by, Athenians not wealthy enough to equip themselves and train as hoplites, let alone own slaves.

PAN-HELLISM TAKES ROOT

Few have not heard of the late fourth-century military prodigy Alexander-the-Great, or more properly, Alexander III of Macedon; in fact he is a direct descendant of the comparatively very little-known Alexander I of Macedon. Even fewer will have ever heard of Alexander I's father, King Amyntas I, yet Alexander I is the only Macedonian given any prominence by Herodotus in his *Histories*. Shortly after Alexander I's death and some thirty or forty years after the battle at Plataea, Herodotus is still researching, revising his writing, and more than likely entertaining crowds with excerpts from his not yet complete *Histories*. It is fair to ask whether his generally favourable view of Macedon and the Macedonian monarchy is not directed toward some Pan-Hellenic goal—the fifth-century Macedonians are not yet regarded as Hellenes, but encouraged by their Argead dynasty myth a slow process of Hellenisation arguably has its beginnings during the late sixth century. During the Second Greco-Persian War Macedon medizes and supplies Xerxes with troops, but what are the realistic alternatives for this small nominally independent kingdom—a kingdom always in harm's way if the Persians pursue their ambitions to expand their empire into Europe?

Geography is always important to Herodotus and is important here; had Alexander's kingdom been only a little further north neither the Persians nor the Hellenes would have cared one way or the other. For both sides, Macedon would have remained strategically insignificant and out of mind. Whether Macedon joins the Delian League after Xerxes' defeat and withdrawal in 479 and Xanthippus' siege of Sestos in 478, Herodotus does not say. But it is difficult to imagine that somehow Herodotus' writings are sponsored propaganda directed toward preserving an independent and autonomous Macedon against Athenian expansion in the wake of Xerxes' unsuccessful invasion and the decline of Persian military power.²⁸ Perhaps Herodotus' principal sources are from Macedon and these are anxious to show their late king in a good light? We know from

²⁸ The Athenians take a dim view of medizing—but under what circumstance might it be an acceptable political or military ploy and a pragmatic matter of Hobson's choice? Alexander saw at first-hand what happened in Phocis and what might well have happened in Boeotia had he not intervened—when your city-state or rural kingdom is on the route of an invading army you let them pass through and trust that under their commanders the invading hordes will remain sufficiently disciplined to eschew rape and pillage.

other sources that Alexander I rules Macedon until his death in 454, when he is succeeded by his eldest son, Alcetas II, who rules for about six years before being assassinated; he in turn being succeeded by a younger brother Perdiccas II who rules from 448 to 413; and, of course, it is this same Argead royal house that in the latter half of the fourth century will produce Philip II of Macedon and his son, Alexander III—Alexander the Great. But it is Prince Alexander who insists that drunken fornication is a grotesque violation of *xenia*—the most enduring and endearing of Homeric and therefore a foundational Pan-Hellenic values—and doubtless much else beside. For good reason Athenian values and practices are not adopted *holus-bolus*. Ross Scaife concludes his 1989 article with the judgement:

Thus Herodotus portrays in Alexander a leader whose cultural marginality presented a stark choice between heroic resistance and compromise. While the king could prove his Hellenism in a genealogical sense to the satisfaction of Herodotus and the Olympic judges, he did not support that heritage in a consistent, dependable manner (Scaife 137).

In the preface to his 1979 article, *Collaboration with the Persians*, Daniel Gillis adopts a less critical and more pragmatic approach to the reactions of Greek city-states [and others] facing imminent Persian invasions:

But ideology played remarkably little role in those critical times—certainly less than later Greeks would care to admit—and options were limited. Survival was the goal, and the methods chosen to attain it differed. One should hardly expect otherwise from a people as factious as the Greeks. They acted under pressure, according to their lights. Few were noble. All were vulnerable.

I believe that Scaife misinterprets both Herodotus' text and Herodotus' intent in writing about early fifth-century Macedon and their Argive monarch.²⁹ Athens, which as

²⁹ Given his Argive / Argead heritage Alexander doubtless sees himself as a Homeric hero and one, who, if necessary, will indulge in copious *Iliadic bloodshed*—ideally largely that of his enemies. But he owes it to his subjects—principally shepherds and foresters—to come up with a pragmatic resolution of the conflict between his personal Pan-Hellenic convictions and his very practical political obligation to avoid his adult countrymen becoming both *good and dead* and

a city has been burned, razed, and looted twice during the Second Greco-Persian War, has a credible alternative to medizing—the citizens can abandon their Attic homeland and with it their ever unreliable allies and sail en masse to Siris in southern Italy and start afresh: something they have already threatened to do.³⁰

Alexander does not have the luxury of such an escape with safe relocation to a distant colony for his Macedonian countrymen—they are simple shepherds and foresters tied to their land base. Compromise can be a dirty word; but sober if unexciting pragmatism trumps foolhardiness. Even in Homer's epics heroic resistance—often understood as valour—has never been an interchangeable term with pointless mass suicide. While there is no reason to believe that Herodotus consults only Macedonian sources about Alexander's role during the First and Second Greco-Persian Wars there is another aspect to Herodotus' observations. Pan-Hellenism is the only certain antidote to medizing and Herodotus' sympathetic portrait of Alexander points the Athenians away from alliances based largely on coercion, exorbitant fines, military and naval dominance, and punitive retribution.

dead and good with their children similarly butchered or the young boys emasculated and packed-off with their female siblings by marauding Persians to the Mediterranean slave markets.

³⁰ See Themistocles' speech to his allies just before the battle off Salamis (Hdt. 8.62.2). Siris, a long-established Ionian colony, was a port city on the Gulf of Taranto in southern Italy. This mass relocation is something the Spartans cannot even remotely consider. As a warrior society they rely on their virtually captive helots (slaves) to fuel their isolationist agricultural economy. Unless it is to feed hay to his favourite race-horse, a Spartan male likely will never touch a pitchfork in his lifetime.

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Miltiades the Younger of Athens

[Miltiades son of Kypselos, also known as Miltiades the Elder—Hdt. 6.35.1, 6.35.3, 6.34–36, 6.36.2, 6.37, 6.38–39]

[Miltiades son of Kimon, also known as Miltiades the Younger—Hdt. 4.137.1, 6.39–40, 6.41, 6.103, 6.104, 6.109–110, 6.132–134, 6.136, 6.137–140, 6.134.2, 6.136.2–3]

INTRODUCTION

Whether fully deserving of such a singular honour or not Miltiades the Younger, or more formally Miltiades son of Cimon, comes down to us as the Athenian general, one of the ten *strategoï*, largely responsible for the successful tactics employed by the Athenians during the battle of Marathon in the late summer of 490. But as the Spartans lament so bitterly—after being instrumental in driving Hippias the last of the Peisistratid tyrants out of Athens and into exile at the close of the sixth century—the Athenians are a thankless people (Hdt. 5.92.2).¹ Within a year of his Marathon triumph Miltiades is disgraced, tried on a capital offence, and unable to immediately pay a colossal fine dies while imprisoned for debt. Election to general in early fifth-century Athens, particularly in time of war, does not come about strictly on merit—you need a little help from your friends and along the way a little help from your enemies and rivals, too.² However, there is much more to Miltiades' spectacular military and political career than his ignominious demise in 489, but for this we have to examine the increasing Athenian dependence on trade during the sixth century with the kingdom of Thrace and with numerous other resource-rich kingdoms along the shores of the Black (Euxine) Sea.³

¹ From other sources we learn that Hippias (a Peisistratid) was elected *eponymous archon* or chief magistrate in Athens for the year 526/525; Cleisthenes (an Alcmeonid) in 525/524; and Miltiades (a Philaid) in 524/523. To be eligible these citizens had to be aged at least thirty, but were limited to one term and could not stand for re-election later.

² We do not know to whom this comment applies, nor who said it, but it likely applies to the *demos* rather than the Athenian aristocracy.

³ Herodotus describes the ancient kingdom of Thrace as most numerous, second only to India. But extending from the European side of the Aegean in the west to the Danube in the east it was disunited and therefore militarily weak (Hdt. 5.3.1). The Thracian Chersonese—better known

This examination is exactly what Herodotus does in book 6 of the *Histories*. But to make sense of the opportunities exploited by Miltiades son of Cimon, we must look at his family, the Philaids, as ambitious and wealthy aristocrats and weigh their influence on events in the eastern Mediterranean during the latter half of the sixth century and early fifth century.

ATHENIAN TYRANTS

Political power and influence throughout sixth-century Athens is unequally shared among a handful of prominent aristocratic families. Over time these families amass land, wealth, prestige, and privileges which they pass on to succeeding generations, in turn reinforced by marriage alliances within the community and outside. One notable family, the Peisistratids, claim descent from Neleus, the father of Nestor who fought in the Trojan War. Another, the Philaids, claim descent from Philaios a son of Ajax, another legendary hero of the Trojan War. Other families, the Alkemeonids, for example, who represent an old Attic family, do not pretend to go back that far, but are nevertheless wealthy and influential.

Tyrant and tyranny are terms that are now considered pejorative, but they had a very different connotation in the eastern Mediterranean during the sixth-century.⁴ It is important to recognise that at that time tyranny was usually a transitional form of government. The citizens facing internal chaos or a threat from an external power select or concur with the temporary appointment of a strong ruler. If this non-hereditary ruler is successful, the crisis which led to this appointment fades and with it the justification for this form of authoritarian rule.⁵ But, given human nature, power leads to a sense of entitlement and the expectation that their privileged rule should be extended for life if not become hereditary. In the latter half of the sixth century Athens is governed by the

now as the Gallipoli Peninsula—lies on the European rather than the Anatolian side of the Dardanelles and is usually considered part of the Thracian kingdom.

⁴ Modern readers must accept the anachronism. For Plato the terms king (*basileus*) and tyrant (*tyrannos*) are not equivalent and indeed are at opposite poles—the philosopher-king the best and happiest of all men, the tyrant the worst and most miserable (Andrewes, 28).

⁵ For further discussions about the rise and fall of sixth- and fifth-century Greek tyrants see Prentice, 84–87.

Peisistratid tyranny—first the father, Peisistratos, and then his two sons Hippias and Hipparchus, possibly twins.⁶ At this time other communities, Greek- and non-Greek-speaking, are also governed by tyrants or some form of hereditary monarchy, so in this respect Athens is not exceptional.

MILTIADES SON OF KYPSELOS

It is into this dynastic struggle among prominent Athenian families—a struggle which will continue long after the reforms instituted in the last decade of the sixth century by Cleisthenes—that Herodotus first mentions that in about the year 555 Miltiades son of Kypselos, the step-uncle of the future Miltiades son of Cimon—the hero of Marathon—who will be born a year or so later. A Philaid, at a time when the Peisistratids have a tight hold on power, Miltiades son of Kypselos is likely to be discontented with his lot seeing absolutely no opportunities for adventure, let alone political advancement in Athens. However, his career prospects change in an entirely unexpected and unsought direction.⁷ Herodotus writes:

The Thracian Dolonci were then in possession of the Chersonese, and because the Apsinthians were pressuring them with war, they sent their kings to Delphi to consult the oracle about the war. [2] The Pythia told them that after they left the sanctuary, the first man that they met on their journey home who offered them hospitality should be invited by them to come to their land as leader of their settlement. So the Dolonci left and traveled down the Sacred Way through Phocis and Boeotia, but since they received no invitation from anyone, they turned off the road toward Athens (Hdt. 6.34.1–2).⁸

⁶ Peisistratids is the common term for the three tyrants who ruled in Athens from 561 to 510, namely Peisistratos who was born in the last decade of the seventh century and his two sons, Hipparchus and Hippias.

⁷ Kypselos was the first tyrant of Corinth who reigned for thirty years until his death in 627. Through his daughter, who married an Athenian, he is the grandfather of Kypselos son of Agamestor, who was archon in 597/6 and great-grandfather of Miltiades son of Kypselos (Shapiro 306).

⁸ The walking distance from the temples at Delphi to Athens is over 150 kilometres.

From Herodotus' account, the Pythia's sole criterion for selecting a leader is surprisingly progressive—someone who will serve as what we might call *the first among equals*: someone who will provide leadership without becoming autocratic. And surprising in what she clearly discounts—wealth, noble birth, or military prowess—in favour of a generous, unpretentious individual whose altruistic nature it is to host weary strangers without thought of reward or reciprocity. Reading between the lines we can surmise that the Dolonci are also seeking an alliance with one of the city-states of mainland Greece as a deterrent to endless depredations by their neighbours. Their quest is suggestive of embryonic Pan-Hellenism and Athenian hegemony. It might also be that the Chersonese nobles cannot unite under the leadership of one of their own, and so inviting an outsider to rule is an effective compromise.⁹ Herodotus' account continues:

This occurred during period when Peisistratos had complete political control over Athens. Miltiades son of Kypselos, however, did command a degree of influence and prestige there; his household was wealthy enough to race four-horse chariots, and he was descended from Aiakos and Aegina, but he was Athenian by a more recent ancestor—Philaios son of Ajax—who was the first of this family to become an Athenian. [2] Now this Miltiades was sitting on his front porch when he saw the Dolonci passing by. He noticed that they were wearing clothes that had not been made locally and were carrying spears. He called out to them, and when they drew near offered them lodging and hospitality. They accepted, and after they had been fed and entertained by him, they revealed everything the oracle had said and asked him to obey the god. [3] As soon as he heard their story, Miltiades consented to their request, since the rule of Peisistratos irritated him and he wanted to get away from it. So he immediately sent an inquiry to the oracle at Delphi, asking whether he should do what the Dolonci had asked of him (Hdt. 6.35.1–3).

Miltiades is interested, but only consents after he too takes the time to consult the oracle at Delphi. Although the Dolonci are seeking a tyrant, Herodotus is going out-of-his way to legitimise Miltiades' invitation to rule. At no time does Miltiades seek this power and

⁹ Remember Athens is still almost a half-century away from any form of democracy.

the two quite separate consultations at Delphi—theirs and his—do not suggest anything but piety and prudence by both parties.

MILTIADES IN THE CHERSONESE

Herodotus does not say as much, but Miltiades and his hosts the Dolonci can hardly take this step without the benign acquiescence of Peisistratids. Immediately we see Miltiades demonstrating both *xenia* and piety—two Homeric character traits that the Athenian aristocrats in particular at the time of Herodotus' writing consider important and which makes them different if not superior to other Greeks. Herodotus continues his narrative:

The Pythia ordered him to do so, and thus Miltiades son of Kypselos, who had previously achieved a victory at Olympia in the four-horse chariot race, now took with him every Athenian who wanted to participate in his expedition, sailed with the Dolonci to their land, and took possession of it, whereupon the Dolonci who had brought him there established him as tyrant. [2] The first thing he did was wall off the isthmus of the Chersonese from the city of Kardia to Paktye, so that the Apsinthians would be unable to invade the land and cause damage there.¹⁰ This isthmus measures somewhat less than four miles wide, and extending from it, the Chersonese measures something more than 46 miles (Hdt. 6.36.1–2).

Even in the mid sixth century many city-states in mainland Greece are experiencing severe population pressures, so Miltiades likely has little difficulty recruiting not only a bodyguard, but adventurous Athenian citizens, perhaps from good but less well-to-do families, to join him as colonists in the Chersonese. Equally, Miltiades wants to do more with his life than self-indulgently own winning racehorses. For Athens's current tyrant, Peisistratos, this is all fortuitous—he gets a potential aristocratic rival and any number of under-employed citizens busy rather than idle and

¹⁰ Now known as the Bulair Isthmus it lies east of Agora running from Cardia on the Gulf of Soros to Paktye on the Sea of Marmara. The Apsinthioi occupied a region of Thrace directly north of the Chersonese across the Gulf of Soros—presumably this wall isolated any beachheads to the east, so whether they raided by land or sea, this sixth-century defensive wall hindered any attack.

out-of-town. And he gets a fledgling Athenian colony to help protect the vital waterway between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. Having dealt with any threat from across the Gulf of Soros Miltiades goes on the offensive against Lampsacus on the Anatolian side of the Dardanelles where he is promptly, if not ignominiously, captured. Fortunately, he appears to have quickly found friends in high places. From Herodotus' narrative, Miltiades reputation as a thoroughly worthy ruler went ahead of him to the extent that king Croesus soon intervenes on his behalf, and he is released unharmed.¹¹

Thus by walling off the isthmus of the Chersonese, Miltiades repelled the Apsinthians.¹² Then among all the peoples in that region, he first began a war against the people of Lampsacus.¹³ The Lampsacenes, however, set up an ambush and captured him alive. Now Miltiades was highly respected by Croesus the Lydian, and when Croesus learned what had happened to him he sent a declaration to the Lampsacenes commanding them to release Miltiades, threatening that if they did not do so, he would wipe them out as if they were a pine tree. [2] The Lampsacenes who tried to interpret this message were at first bewildered as to why Croesus had used the phrase "wipe them out like a pine tree" in his threat, but then, after much hard thinking, one of the elders came to the realization of its true significance: the pine alone of all trees does not produce any new shoot once it has been chopped down, but is utterly destroyed and gone forever. So now in fear of Croesus the Lampsacenes freed Miltiades and let him go (Hdt. 6.37.1–2).

Lacking a convenient synchronicity Herodotus and his sources are unable to date this event. But from book 1 of the *Histories* we know that Croesus reigned for fourteen years from about 560 until his defeat by Cyrus the Great; so this incident likely occurred late in Croesus' reign but early in that of Miltiades. Whatever Miltiades' previous military

¹¹ Croesus may simply be adopting Hogwarts' school motto, "Draco dormiens nunquam titillandus." In this case, imprisonment or execution of an Athenian aristocrat by the Lampsacenes will likely only bring savage retribution from the Greek mainland.

¹² Herodotus' readers will discover that in 480 during the second Greco-Persian War the Spartans hastily construct a similar length defensive wall across the isthmus at Corinth to make it more difficult for Xerxes' troops, particularly his cavalry, to invade the Peloponnese.

¹³ Lampsacus is a city-state on the Asian (Anatolian) side of the Dardanelles Strait.

experience this defensive wall is important whether future attacks come from the north or across the Dardanelles.¹⁴

MILTIADES AND DARIUS

Evidently he also acts as general of the Chersonese forces and therefore vulnerable to the fortunes of warfare; but Herodotus gives only an outline of how Croesus brought the city-states in Anatolia under his control before his military defeat by Cyrus the Great in 547 and the continuing rule of Persia by the Achaemenid emperors: Cambyses II, briefly followed by his brother Bardiya, and then by Darius I.

Whatever else he accomplishes during a thirty-five-year long incumbency, Miltiades maintains a measure of Chersonese autonomy and keeps the small Thracian kingdom free of any permanent Persian garrison. However, Miltiades is not immune from the machinations of the Peisistratids. Even after the death of Peisistratos, exiled members of his family, the Philaidae, may have stayed with him from time to time. Curiously Herodotus does not record his reaction to news of his younger half-brother's murder. Herodotus' comment about Cimon son of Stesagoras proclaiming his Olympic victory in Peisistratos' name and the thanks he got for it are deliberately derogatory. He is cautioning his readers that tyranny easily becomes despotic and is fraught with uncertainty if not murderous treachery.

Cimon, son of Stesagoras, had been driven into exile from Athens by Peisistratos son of Hippocrates. [2] And during his exile he won a race with his four-horse team at Olympia, achieving the same victory that had been won by Miltiades [son of Kypselos], his half-brother by the same mother. At the next Olympiad, Cimon won again with the same mares, but this time gave up his victory so that it could be proclaimed in the name of Peisistratos. By relinquishing his victory, he was able to return from exile to his own land. [3] But when he had won with the same mares yet again, it was his fate to die at the hands of the sons of Peisistratos after Peisistratos was no longer alive. They killed him by placing men at the Prytaneion at night to ambush him, he now lies buried at the entrance to the city, across the road called "Through the Hollow," and the horses that

¹⁴ To finally expel the Persians from the mainland after the Greek victories at Plataea and Mycale, Xanthippos is obliged to conduct a long siege of Sestos in 479 (Hdt. 9.114–118).

won his three Olympic victories are buried opposite him. [4] The horses of Euagoras of Laconia accomplished this same feat, but no others have ever done so. Cimon's elder son Stesagoras was at the time being raised in the Chersonese with his [step-] uncle Miltiades, while the younger son was with Cimon himself in Athens.¹⁵ He was named Miltiades after the Miltiades who had settled the Chersonese (Hdt 6.103.1–4).

From Herodotus' account, bar the ongoing conflict with the Lampsacenes, Miltiades' thirty-five year rule is largely uneventful. If he treated his hosts unfairly there would have been discontent or perhaps revolt which Herodotus would surely record. Tyrannies are rarely hereditary, but in this instance it appears that the Dolonci either solicited or acquiesced in the succession by another Philaid aristocrat as their new ruler.

So Miltiades escaped this peril through the aid of Croesus, and later, when he [Miltiades] died childless [circa 519], he handed down both his office and his wealth to Stesagoras son of Cimon, who was his maternal half-brother.¹⁶ And after his [Miltiades'] death, the people of the Chersonese sacrificed to him with the same rituals that are traditionally used to honor the leaders and founders of settlements; they instituted equestrian and gymnastics contests in which none of the Lampsacenes were permitted to compete (Hdt 6.38.1).

The Chersonese nobles would hardly have honoured Miltiades son of Cimon in this way if dissatisfied with their aristocratic Athenian ruler, nor would they have accepted his half-brother's son, another Philaid, as tyrant. This can only be interpreted as a successful rule by an outsider, and is a vindication of the Pythia's selection criteria given decades earlier—which criteria fit uncannily well with Heraclitus' maxim—character is destiny.

¹⁵ Rebuilt and relocated a number of times over the centuries, but usually on the Acropolis, the Prytaneion is the building formally used by the chief magistrate (eponymous archon)—and serves more like court offices than a town hall.

¹⁶ The genealogy can be confusing, but the patronymics Kypselos and Stesagoras make it clear that their mother, whose name is never given, married twice. Sometimes for additional clarity Miltiades the Younger is listed as Miltiades son of Cimon son of Stesagoras.

From Herodotus' account we infer no end to the strife with the city of Lampsacus and indeed the Lampsacenes waste no time in assassinating Stesagoras son of Kimon—Miltiades' nephew—the new ruler who on his assassination in 517 is also childless.

During the war against the Lampsacenes, Stesagoras was overtaken by death [assassinated] and was also childless. He was struck on the head with an axe in the city hall by a man pretending to be a deserter, but who was actually a hot-tempered foe (Hdt. 6.38.2).

MILTIADES SON OF CIMON

Herodotus hints that Athens is watching this unrest in the Chersonese with concern. The grain trade with the Scythians in Crimea and a number of settlements around the Black Sea is a necessity not a luxury. Given this reliance, the strategic nature of Athenian influence in the Chersonese is obvious.¹⁷ Other settlements, particularly those on the Asian side of the Hellespont, the Sea of Marmara, and the Bosphorus—notably Lampsacus—usually hostile to Athenian interests, can guard or obstruct the passage of merchant shipping at will. Hippias, the Athenian tyrant who has followed in his father's footsteps, loses no time in installing another prominent Philaid, Miltiades son of Cimon, who had served as eponymous archon as recently as 524/523, as ruler in the Chersonese. From Herodotus' account it appears that the people of the Chersonese are not exactly coerced into accepting him, although—perhaps for speed alone—he arrives in a warship rather than a regular Black Sea merchant vessel.

After Stesagoras died in this way, the Peisistratids sent his brother Miltiades son of Kimon in a trireme to take control of affairs in the Chersonese [circa 516]. The Peisistratids had treated Miltiades [son of Kimon] well in Athens, just as if they had not been guilty of his father's death, which I shall describe in another part of my history.
[2] After Miltiades arrived in the Chersonese, he stayed indoors, ostensibly to honor

¹⁷ This waterway—now referred to as the Turkish Straits—separating Asia from Europe is over 200 miles long. The Bosphorus is about 19 miles long, running from the Sea of Marmara to the Black Sea; the sea of Marmara, or Propontis, is about 175 miles long; and, the Dardanelles or Hellespont, about 38 miles long, running from the Aegean Sea to the Sea of Marmara.

his brother by mourning for him. When the people of the Chersonese learned what he was doing, the most powerful men from all the cities around assembled and set out together to join him and share his grief: but when they arrived, Miltiades had them bound and confined. Miltiades now seized control over the Chersonese, took on the support of 500 mercenaries, and married Hegesipyle daughter of Oloros king of the Thracians (Hdt. 6.39.1–2).¹⁸

That Miltiades son of Cimon does not sense the depth of trust that the Chersonese nobles willingly gave to his uncle, Miltiades son of Kypselos, is obvious. Several factors may be in play. First of all, he was sent there by the Athenian tyrant Hippias—the Chersonese nobles do not choose him and the selection is neither prophesised nor confirmed by the oracle at Delphi. Although his uncle may have died of old age after a long and successful rule, his elder brother is murdered after a very short rule. Was this assassination a conspiracy? Are others planned?¹⁹ To secure a powerful ally in the immediate area, one of Miltiades' first measures is to marry Hegesipyle the daughter of the Thracian king, Oloros.

DARIUS' TERRITORIAL AMBITIONS

Evidently there is no prohibition on an Athenian aristocrat taking a Thracian princess—who was certainly not a Hellene, let alone the daughter of a noble Athenian family—as bride, nor vice-versa.²⁰ Herodotus gives few details, but it appears that

¹⁸ Herodotus tells us that the tyrant Miltiades son of Cimon son of Stesagoras married a Thracian princess shortly after becoming the ruler in 516 (Hdt. 6.39.2). However, Herodotus also tells us that his eldest son, Metiochos, who was in command of a trireme, was captured by the Phoenicians when Miltiades was escaping the Chersonese en route to Athens in 493 (Hdt. 6.41.1–3). Perhaps Miltiades was a widower, or had divorced his first wife—Herodotus does not say.

¹⁹ Although elected archon in 524/3, his father's murder a few years earlier would make Miltiades wary of anything the Peisistratids said or did. His brother was murdered here; was he sent to the Chersonese to be conveniently murdered, too? It would not matter by whom—a disaffected Chersonese noble, another Lampsacene, or a paid Peisistratid thug—he would still be dead.

²⁰ The eldest son of this diplomatic marriage, Cimon, was born circa 510. Whether Cimon participates in the first Greco-Persian War, Herodotus does not say. But during the second

Miltiades son of Kimon quickly follows in his uncle's footsteps securing some sort of diplomatic alliance or non-aggression treaty with the Persians across in straits in Anatolia. By surrounding himself with a bodyguard Herodotus suggests that he is an unpopular ruler from the start (Hdt. 6.39). But one can surmise that this bodyguard and his confinement of a number of Chersonese nobles is only an initial reaction to the murder of his predecessor and a suspicion that internal Chersonese factions lie behind his brother's assassination. It is also at about this time that Hippias son of Peisistratos arranges for the marriage of his daughter to the son of the tyrant of Lampsacus.²¹ Whether this marriage alliance helps or hinders Miltiades, Herodotus does not say.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH SUSIA AND ATHENS

Athenian audiences, whether reading, being read to, or perhaps listening to a public recitation by Herodotus himself, cannot help but draw their own parallels with the sixth-century political reformer Cleisthenes, who serves as archon during the term immediately preceding that of Miltiades son of Kimon. These men are, of course, from different aristocratic families—Cleisthenes from the Alcmaeonidae and Miltiades from the Philaïdae. Cleisthenes' election to archon in 525/524 suggests that he was born no later than 555/554, but scholars have determined that he was in fact much older and probably born circa 570.²² Cleisthenes of Athens is named after his maternal grandfather Cleisthenes, tyrant of Sicyon, a city-state in the northwest Peloponnese near the Gulf of Corinth.

Just as Miltiades son of Cimon marries the daughter of a Thracian king, Megacles makes a similar dynastic or diplomatic alliance when selecting, or perhaps competing for

Helleno-Persian War he may well have fought at Salamis in 480 and participated in the largely Athenian naval expedition that after the battle at Mycale successfully attacking the Chersonese fortress at Sestos in 479 effectively removing the remainder of Xerxes' invaders from the European side of the Dardanelles (Hdt. 9.117–9.121).

²¹ Herodotus does not mention this at all, but Thucydides does so in a digression on Athenian history (Thuc. 6.59.3). Doubtless Miltiades son of Cimon is not impressed and may well have suspected that Hippias is preparing a number of safe havens in Persian-controlled Anatolia should he ever be exiled from Athens.

²² Provided that the usual eligibility rules were in effect, if Miltiades is elected *archon* in 524/523 he would have to have been aged at least thirty then and therefore in his mid-sixties, or perhaps older over thirty years later at Marathon.

his bride. In a delightful digression Herodotus tells the story of the year-long betrothal festivities possibly around the year 575 put on by Cleisthenes, tyrant of Sicyon, for his only daughter Agariste (Hdt. 6.129–6.131). Whether it really happened that way is neither here nor there, but the tale has echoes of the mythical competition held by Tyndareus for Helen’s hand.²³ And given that most marriages are arranged it is telling that in this instance the father has no interest in marrying his daughter to a boorish drunk no matter how advantageous the match. What becomes important for Athenian politics in the sixth century is Megacles (ca. 605–526) is the successful suitor and among their offspring are Cleisthenes, Hippocrates, and a daughter, Coesyra. Another parallel that Herodotus’ audiences might discern would be to Peisistratos, who widowed, eventually takes Coesyra, Megacles’ daughter by Agariste, as bride thus becoming brother-in-law to a much younger Cleisthenes. However Peisistratos already has two sons Hippias and Hipparchos from an earlier marriage and has no interest in siring further progeny—and a disappointed and morally outraged Alkmeonid family quickly dissolve their most unhappy and assuredly unfruitful union.

Nor does Herodotus comment on any ongoing relationship between Miltiades and Hippias. But the people of the Chersonese are about to be dragged into military adventures further afield. Given that there are several Chersonese cities—including Sestos and Paktye—on the European side of the straits and Lampsacus is a port city on the Anatolian side, rivalry for control of shipping to and from the Black Sea is inevitable. During the sixth century the Scythians, a nomadic people from an area now known as Ukraine and the Crimea, had raided across the Black Sea, and sometime after his putting down of a revolt in Babylon, perhaps in 513 only a few years into Miltiades’ rule in the Chersonese, Darius decides it is time to punish them (Hdt. 4.1.1–2). But he does not embark on this venture unaided.²⁴ Herodotus writes:

²³ Here Herodotus relies on his audiences’ familiarity with Homeric epic and Greek mythology and the range of stories about the search for the most worthy suitor for the most beautiful woman in the world—Helen of Sparta. Notably the father gives each of unsuccessful suitors a talent of silver as salve for their disappointment—not quite the Oath of Tyndareus, but gratuity enough for them to save face.

²⁴ Scholars differ about when Darius embarked on this punitive expedition. The consensus is the year 513. The Persian tactic differs little from the medieval *chevauchée* where the objective is to

In preparation for his campaign against Scythia, Darius sent messengers around his kingdom to order some of his subjects to provide troops for a land army, some to provide ships, and others to build a bridge across the Thracian Bosphorus. Darius' brother Artabanos son of Hystaspes pleaded with Darius not to lead an expedition against the Scythians, describing in detail how impossible it would be to deal with them. [2] Although this was good advice, he could not persuade Darius to follow it, and so ceased his efforts. When Darius had completed his preparations, he led his army out of Susa (Hdt. 4.83.1-2).

RAIDING SCYTHIA

The cost of good relations with the Persian emperor is supplying his generals with military assistance on demand; and so Miltiades has to join the proposed Black Sea expedition. Herodotus does not say whether the Chersonese and other Thracian cities had previously suffered depredations from Scythian raids. If so, the costs of supporting Darius' revenge are justified; if not then the raid is a pre-emptive deterrent. Herodotus devotes much of book 4 of his *Histories* to the geography and culture of the Scythian peoples, but whether Darius' intent is simply a raid, or whether he intends a permanent occupation is left uncertain. In any event, Miltiades has a difficult balancing act carefully avoiding the ire of the Persian ruler Darius while ensuring some measure of security for the shipping trade between Athens and the Black Sea.²⁵ Darius marches his army from Susa to Chalcedon where the Bosphorus has been bridged (Hdt. 4.85.1). According to Herodotus, Darius has already sent the Ionians ahead to the mouth of the Danube.

He had earlier sent orders to the Ionians to sail on the Pontus [Black Sea] up to the Ister [Danube] River, and upon their arrival, to build a bridge over the river and wait for him, for the fleet was being led by the Ionians, Aeolians, and the people of the Hellespont [2] So the fleet sailed through the Kyaneai directly to the Ister. After sailing up the

cause as much destruction as possible within the enemy territory especially when the opponent's forces, often guerrillas, cannot be drawn into a decisive set piece battle.

²⁵ From time to time temporary floating bridges using anchored boats strung together with cables have been constructed across this waterway which separates Europe from Asia and links the Aegean Sea with the Black Sea. Darius successfully bridges the Bosphorus near Byzantium for his Scythian expedition in 513 and Xerxes bridges the Dardanelles between Abydos and a headland near Sestos in 480 during the second Greco-Persian War using this same technique.

river for two days from the sea, they reached the neck, where the Ister's mouths divide and here bridged the river (Hdt. 4.89.1–2).

Herodotus does not say whether the Chersonese forces under Miltiades are part of this advance bridging party. When Darius arrives at the bridge, his first thought is that once his forces have crossed it should be taken down (Hdt. 4.97.1). However, Koes son of Erxandros, a general of the Mytilenians, persuades him to leave the bridge of boats standing and guarded by the men who built it, thus providing a safe return route for Darius's army (Hdt. 4.97.2–6). Darius then directs them to remain on guard for sixty days. Herodotus' narrative continues:

Darius tied sixty knots in a leather strap, called the Ionian tyrants to a conference, and announced to them: [2] "Ionians, let my initial plan for the bridge be canceled. Instead, take this strap and follow these orders: as soon as you see me on my way against the Scythians, begin untying one knot each day. And if you go through all the knots and the days exceed them before my return, sail home to your own lands. [3] But until then, the new plan is for you to guard the bridge of boats and exert every effort to keep it safe and secure. If you follow these orders you will do me a great favor" (Hdt. 98.1–3).

Sixty days passes and Darius' war against the Scythians does not go as planned; and Darius devises a withdrawal falling back to his floating bridge over the Ister (Hdt. 4.133.3, 4.134.2–4.136.1). Unfortunately, elements of the Scythian cavalry reach the bridge before Darius and address the guards.²⁶

"Ionians the appointed number of days has passed, and you do wrong to remain here [4] Before this you lingered on because of your fear, but now you could immediately tear down the bridge and depart with peace of mind: fare well in your freedom, and be

²⁶ Herodotus names the Ionian tyrants whose forces are left to guard the bridge, a list which includes Hippoklos of Lampsacus (Hdt. 4.138.1). Lampsacus and the Chersonese are Persian allies for this raid, but whether Darius is able to moderate their often bitter rivalry Herodotus does not say.

grateful to the gods and the Scythians. As for your former master, we shall deal with him in such a way that he will never wage war against anyone again” (Hdt. 4.136.3–4).

Remember Darius has given orders to the effect that they should not stay guarding the Ister crossing beyond the sixty days, so Miltiades is indeed just following orders.

The Ionians then conferred about how they should respond to this advice. Miltiades of Athens, the general and tyrant of the Hellespontine Chersonese, proposed that they obey the Scythians and thereby free Ionia. [2] Histiaios of Miletus was of the opposite opinion. He said that it was because of Darius that each of them now governed his city as tyrant, and if the power of Darius were destroyed, he himself would not be able to keep ruling Miletus, nor would anyone else be able to rule his own city either. For he said, all of their cities would prefer democracy to tyranny (Hdt. 4.137.1–2).

Eventually, the Ionians decide to deceive the Scythians by only dismantling the easternmost, or Scythian end, of the bridge (Hdt. 4.139). This passage is also Herodotus’ first mention of Miltiades son of Kimon and we learn here that Chersonese forces under his command provide mainly logistical support for the invasion.²⁷ Darius’ forces evade the Scythian cavalry, make contact with the Ionian rear guard, the dismantled section of the bridge is rebuilt, and the Persians make their way back to Susa. Herodotus writes:

Darius made his way through Thrace to Sestos in the Chersonese; from there he crossed over to Asia by ship, leaving in Europe a Persian named Megabazos as his general (Hdt. 4.143.1).

We learn that Megabazos backed by some eighty-thousand Persian troops has orders to subdue every city throughout Thrace (Hdt. 5.1–5.3), and he is also to capture

²⁷ Scholars dispute this story, principally because Darius would hardly have left Miltiades alive, let alone continuing to rule the Chersonese if he had proposed such a treacherous revolt against the Persian Emperor. Doubtless, the Ionian leaders were uncertain about disobeying direct orders, but they had likely used many of their ships building the floating bridge across the Ister and cannot sail home without dismantling the bridge. Elementary military tactics dictate that you do not place the bulk of your forces on the wrong side of an unfordable river, nor do you let your enemy occupy your line of retreat in force.

and uproot the Paionian people (Hdt. 5.12–5.15). After this conquest of Paionia, Megabazos sends emissaries to neighbouring Macedon demanding that they swear fealty to Darius (Hdt. 5.17.1).

PERSIANS ON THE EUROPEAN SIDE OF THE WATERWAY

Doubtless the presence of Persian troops on the European side of the Straits heavily influences King Amyntas' unhappy but unhesitating acquiescence. His sparsely populated kingdom is far too weak to pose a military threat and Amyntas is able to retain a measure of autonomy and avoids his kingdom becoming just part of another Persian satrapy.²⁸ Megabazos eventually leaves Thrace and returns to Susa. From what happens next, it would appear that the Persians take oaths of fealty from many rulers on the European side of the Straits, but do not leave permanent Persian garrisons. Perhaps a few nobles' children as hostages are deemed sufficient—Herodotus does not say. But in 510 the Scythians, in retribution for Darius' largely unsuccessful punitive expedition against their homelands between the Danube (Ister) and the Don on the north shore of the Black sea, launch a raid on Darius' allies including the Thracian settlements on the European side of the Straits.

Then he had fled to avoid the Scythian nomads, who, after having been provoked by King Darius, united their forces and advanced against the Chersonese. [2] Miltiades had not waited for their attack but had fled the Chersonese and stayed away for three years until the Scythians had departed and the Dolonci had brought him back (Hdt. 6.40.1.2).²⁹

Miltiades temporarily flees to Athens, but resumes his rule of the Chersonese when the invading nomads withdraw (Hdt. 6.40). At first sight, from Herodotus'

²⁸ It is from Herodotus that we learn that King Amyntas' son and heir, Alexander, is appalled at what he interpreted as his father's fear of the Persians leading to Macedonian medizing (Hdt. 5.19).

²⁹ The timeline here is not easy to establish. At the end of the Persian's stalemated Scythian expedition of 513 Darius withdrew west along the shores of the Black Sea making his way through Thrace to Sestos on the Chersonese peninsula leaving behind one of his generals, Megabazos, and eighty-thousand troops (Hdt. 4.143).

account, this flight looks like cowardice. However, if the Scythians were only interested in getting even with Miltiades, his well-known absence may well have spared his adoptive countrymen the ravages of conflict. Left unexplained is why Darius does not send Persian troops to support his recent allies. Indeed Herodotus writes very little about Miltiades' rule between his return to the Chersonese in 507 and his final departure some fifteen years later in 493/492. That the peoples in this region bring him back when the Scythian nomads leave suggests that like his uncle, Miltiades son of Kypselos, he is now a popular ruler and a majority support him.

THE IONIAN REVOLT

From Herodotus' account it would appear that Miltiades goes along with, or does not vigorously counsel against, the Ionian revolt, not that his Ionian neighbours would listen. While there is no evidence that Miltiades involves the Chersonese in the ill-advised raid on Sardis which takes place in 498, he takes advantage of the Persian preoccupation with the Ionian revolt to even an old score by raiding Lemnos and Imbros and handing these two northern Aegean islands near the Chersonese over to the Athenians.³⁰

Miltiades son of Cimon had taken possession of Lemnos in the following way. The Pelasgians had been expelled from Attica [during the sixth-century] whether just or unjustly I cannot say, I merely recount what others have told me: Hekataios son of Hegesandros said in his works that they did so unjustly. [2] For he claimed that the Athenians had given the land below Mount Hymettos to the Pelasgianns to reside in as their payment for the wall that had once surrounded the Acropolis. But later, when the Athenians saw how well cultivate this land had become after having been infertile and worthless before, they were seized with envy and a desire to have it back for themselves again. [3] According to the Athenians, however, the expulsion was just, for the Pelasgians inhabiting the area under Hymettos used this land as a base for unjust acts.

³⁰ Herodotus' chronology leaves much to be desired here; whereas scholars do not doubt that Miltiades captures Lemnos and Imbros, they debate when, and some even which Miltiades (Evans 1963). I follow Evans and favour sometime between 498 and 493, but other dates both much earlier and much later are plausible.

At that time the daughters and sons of the Athenians used to frequent the Nine Springs to fetch water, since neither they nor any other Hellenes has servants yet. And whenever the daughters would go there the Pelasgians would insult and show their contempt for the Athenians by violating them. And they did not rest with that offense, but were finally caught in the act of plotting to attack Athens. [4] The Athenians say that they proved themselves to be so much better men than the Pelasgians that though they could have killed them when they caught them plotting, they instead simply ordered them to depart from their territory (Hdt. 6.137.1–4).

Expelled from Attica, some Pelasgians settle on Lemnos and from there plot revenge. They raid Brauron during the annual festival to Artemis abducting young unmarried Athenian women to be distributed among themselves as concubines (Hdt. 6.138.1). Later, viewing the culturally Greek offspring as a threat, they decide to butcher all the male children and their mothers. The Pelasgians are cursed for this outrage but ignore the advice of the oracle at Delphi, bragging they will only leave their land when a ship sails with a north wind from Attica to Lemnos in a day—impossible as Lemnos lies far to the north (Hdt. 6.138–139). Many years later, Miltiades sails from the Chersonese to Lemnos claiming that as the Chersonese was synonymous with Attica the oracle is fulfilled. The people of Hephaestia obey but those of Myrina resist until besieged (Hdt 6.140.1–2). Herodotus shows Odysseus-like guile on Miltiades' part, integrated with equal measures of piety and moral outrage. Miltiades is an Athenian aristocrat, a former archon, but many of these young victims of abduction, rape, and murder are his kinfolk. Miltiades' family, the Philaids, come from the Brauron region of Attica. Accordingly, the Pelasgians' cowardly and sacrilegious behaviour in Miltiades' own homeland is an old score far too close to home he will not leave forever unsettled. Herodotus does not record the immediate reactions of either Darius or the Athenians, nor whether the Athenians immediately secure Miltiades' gift by colonising the islands.

MILTIADES' FLIGHT TO ATHENS

Perhaps in light of Athens' strategic territorial expansion in the Aegean, by 493 Miltiades is regarded by Darius as an unreliable Greek ally. Consequently he is obliged to abdicate his rule of the Chersonese and to seek asylum with his countrymen back in

Attica. Nominally allied to Darius he has led Chersonese troops against the Scythians; his dilemma is that he will not lead these same troops against Athens.

Miltiades son of Cimon had only recently come back to the Chersonese, but he was now overtaken by more difficult problems than he had faced two years before this return (Hdt. 6.40.1).

Herodotus' chronology here is a little deceptive; Miltiades may well have been back in the Chersonese for as many as fourteen years.

He then learned, however, that the Phoenician fleet was at Tenedos, so he filled five triremes with all his wealth and sailed away to Athens, setting out from the city of Kardia and going through the Black Gulf [Gulf of Soros]. But as he was passing the Chersonese, he encountered the Phoenician fleet, [2] and although Miltiades himself and four of his ships managed to escape to Imbros, his fifth ship was pursued and taken by the Phoenicians. It happened that the commander of this ship was Miltiades' eldest son, Metiochos, whose mother was not the daughter of Oloros of Thrace, but another woman. [3] The Phoenicians captured him along with his ship, and when they learned that he was the son of Miltiades, they took him inland to the King, thinking that they would thereby gain great favor, since they assumed that this man's father was the Miltiades who had proposed that the Ionians should, in compliance with Scythian advice, tear down the bridge and sail away to their own lands. [4] However, when the Phoenicians brought Metiochos son of Miltiades to the King, Darius not only did him no harm but indeed much good instead. For he gave him a house and possessions as well as a Persian wife, who bore him children who were to be regarded as Persians. Meanwhile, Miltiades left Imbros and sailed to Athens (Hdt. 6.41.1–4).

Whether Metiochos son of Miltiades is a hostage held in luxury is immaterial—dead he is valueless to Darius. Conceivably Darius is thinking ahead and wants both Hippias and Miltiades on his side as potential puppets to leverage opinion and support in Athens.

In preparation for a punitive raid on Eretria and Athens—retribution for their foolhardy participation in sack of Sardis in 498—Mardonios, the Persian general and Xerxes' first cousin, crosses the Hellespont with a large army complete with naval

support with orders to subjugate this area of Thrace and Macedon (Hdt. 6.43.3–4). With absolutely no prospect of military support from mainland Greece the inhabitants of the Chersonese medize, as do Alexander I of Macedon and other rulers. Miltiades flees, but Herodotus does not necessarily imply cowardice. If the Persians are after anyone it is Miltiades himself, not annihilation of the Chersonese nobles or common folk. Choosing abdication over pointless sacrificial resistance by the Chersonese peoples Miltiades sails to Athens and lands right in the hands of his political rivals (Hdt. 6.104.2). Accused of tyranny Miltiades is tried but acquitted and shortly afterward he is elected *strategos* by his tribe. Precisely why these charges are brought against him is uncertain; after all he had been appointed to serve Athenian interests as tyrant of the Thracian Chersonese following the assassination of his brother. Herodotus does not suggest that he sought the position. Alas, the appointment was by Hippias, Athens' last tyrant, and even after twenty years, to many, still tainted. What exactly happens to his remaining four triremes “filled with all his wealth” Herodotus does not say, but given his family's long absences from Attica his estates may well have presented daunting needs.

This was the Miltiades who had escaped death twice and who had left the Chersonese and was now a general of the Athenians. For the Phoenicians, judging his capture and delivery to the King [Darius] to be of great importance had pursued him as far as Imbros. [2] But he escaped them and returned to his own land, thinking that he was now safe. There, however, his [Athenian] enemies caught up with him and prosecuted him in court for having behaved like a tyrant in the Chersonese. But he was acquitted and escaped them, too, and thus came to be a general of the Athenians, elected by the people (Hdt. 6.104.1–2).³¹

THE FIRST GRECO-PERSIAN WAR

Miltiades does not have to wait long for an opportunity to serve the Athenian people. During the summer of 492 Mardonios with a vast fleet and a huge land army assemble at Cilicia and move northward along the coast to the Hellespont and then

³¹ One of Cleisthenes' many reforms was the annual election of the *strategoí*—one from each of the ten tribes; so Miltiades was indeed elected an Athenian general, but only by *his* tribe or *phyle*.

having crossed the straits march through Europe toward Eretria and Athens (Hdt. 6.43). They subjugate the island of Thasos and add the Macedonians to their host as well as all the peoples to the east of Macedon. However, near Mount Athos when sailing west from the Strymonic Gulf around the Chaldice Peninsula, Mardonios loses some three hundred ships and twenty thousand soldiers in a storm before reaching western Macedon. With these fleet losses—warships and transports—along with men and animals Mardonios abandons his march on Eretria and Athens and ignominiously withdraws from the European side of the Straits.

From Miltiades' encounters with Darius, particularly on the Scythian expedition, he must know that Darius will not leave the Sardis raid unavenged. Having already dismissed Mardonios either for bad luck, or failure, or both, in the summer of 490 Darius appoints two other generals, "instructing them to enslave Athens and Eretria, and to bring back the captive slaves into his presence" (Hdt. 6.94.2). Herodotus writes:

After their conquest of Eretria, the Persians lingered for a few days and then sailed for Attica thus applying pressure on the Athenians and fully expecting that they would do to the Athenians what they had done to the Eretrians. Since Marathon was the region of Attica most suitable for cavalry as well as the one closest to Eretria, that is where Hippias son of Peisistratos led them (Hdt. 6.102).³²

The Athenians are aware of the fall of Eretria and have been able to repatriate the 4,000 tenant farmers they had offered in aide (Hdt. 6.100.1–3). Herodotus tells us nothing about the debates the Athenians must have conducted in the city about resisting the Persian invasion in terms of who said what to whom, but they make two decisions.

The first thing the generals did, while still in the city, was to send a message to Sparta by despatching a herald named Philippides, who was a long-distance runner and a professional in this work (Hdt. 6.105.1).

³² Hippias the deposed tyrant of Athens, who has been living in exile in Anatolia, accompanies the two Persian generals hoping to be reinstated either by treachery by his Athenian supporters within the city, or by the victorious Persians if the city does not surrender.

Arriving there a day after leaving Athens, the herald appeals to the Spartans, saying:

“Lacedaemonians, the Athenians beg you to rush to their defense and not look on passively as the most ancient city in Hellas falls into slavery imposed by the barbarians. For in fact Eretria has already been enslaved, and thus Hellas has become weaker by one important city” (Hdt. 6.106.2).

We should note that the Athenians’ message is Pan-Hellenic and disingenuous; they imply that all of Hellas is now in danger of Persian conquest—quietly passing over the notion that perhaps only two cities are targets for savage retribution for the Ionian sack of Sardis which included troops from both Eretria and Athens. Whether by Persian design or happenstance, the timing of the Persian landing at Marathon could not be worse for the Athenians. As Herodotus points out, the Spartans are about to begin nine-day celebrations of one of their more important religious festivals—the Karneia, a harvest festival held annually in honour of Apollo—and the Spartan army cannot leave the city until the full moon (Hdt. 6.106.3).³³

MARATHON: THE LEGEND

Athens’ status vis-à-vis the Peloponnesian League is never defined by Herodotus, but the Spartans are prepared to help. Perhaps this is in Spartan self-interest. Should the Persians invade the Peloponnese the League will react, but for the moment if the Persian raids are limited to looting and burning Eretria and Athens, taking slaves back to Darius and reinstalling Hippias as tyrant the isolationist view might simply prevail that this is justifiable revenge for burning Sardis in the spring of 498. Independent of whether Sparta will help, the other Athenian decision is to muster their own army.

³³ For phases of the moon in antiquity see <<http://www.paulcarlisle.net/mooncalendar/>>. This line from Herodotus has led to much scholarly conjecture about the (Julian) date for the battle. The Karneia was an important nine-day harvest festival in honour of Apollo celebrated near the end of the Spartan year—their New Year commenced with the Autumn Equinox (September 21/22). Scholars differ, but it is critical to use a Spartan rather than an Athenian calendar; accordingly one plausible argument is based on the full moon occurring on 8 September 490. This would have the battle occurring on September 11 and the late-arriving Spartan contingent viewing the battle field on September 12.

As soon as they heard about this [Persian landing], the Athenians rushed to Marathon to defend it themselves, led by the ten generals, of whom Miltiades was the tenth (Hdt. 6.103.1).

It is at this stage that the Athenians are joined in the field by the Plataeans (Hdt. 6.108.1). They are the only allies to provide support against the invaders.

The Athenian generals were divided in their opinions: some were against joining battle, thinking their own numbers were too few to engage the forces of the Medes, while others, including Miltiades, urged that they fight. [2] So they disagreed, and the worst of the two proposals seemed to be prevailing when Miltiades went up to the polemarch at that time, one Callimachos of Aphidna, who had been selected by lot for his office as polemarch of the Athenians. It was he who had the eleventh vote, for in the old days the Athenians used to grant the polemarch an equal vote with their generals (Hdt. 6.109.1–2).

Miltiades must know that a long siege of Athens risks betrayal from within—their hoplite army and auxiliaries will be disarmed and enslaved, or butchered without striking a blow. And although the Spartans have promised to help, it is time to show real leadership and not to wait for others. What if the Spartan army travels no further north than the Isthmus at Corinth? Do any of the city-states in the Peloponnese believe that they are threatened by the Persians? But he is only one of the ten generals. He cannot act alone. He appeals to the polemarch.³⁴

Miltiades said to Callimachos, “it is now up to you, Callimachos, whether you will reduce Athens to slavery or ensure its freedom and thus leave to all posterity a

³⁴ At this time, early in the fifth-century, following Cleisthenes’ reforms, the polemarch, who was almost certainly a member of the aristocracy, was one of ten archons appointed by the Assembly. Scholars debate whether by 490 the *archon polemarchos* was only the titular commander-in-chief. Like the other archons he would have to be aged at least thirty, would serve for only one term, but unlike the *strategoí* is ineligible for re-election. Although Callimachos has been selected by his tribe, he gets his particular post by lot, so he may be an able individual but totally devoid of any military experience or prowess. Either way, Herodotus believes that the polemarch holds the tie-breaking vote should be *strategoí* be deadlocked.

memorial for yourself which will exceed even that of Harmodios and Aristogeiton.³⁵ For from the time Athenians first came into existence up until the present, this is the greatest danger they have ever confronted. If they bow down before the Medes, it is clear from our past experience what they will suffer when handed over to Hippias; but if this city prevails, it can become the first among all Greek cities. I shall explain to you how matters really stand and how the authority to decide this matter has come to rest with you. We ten generals are evenly divided in our opinions, some urging that we join battle, others that we do not. [5] If we fail to fight now, I expect that intense factional strife will fall upon the Athenians and shake their resolve so violently that they will medize. But if we join battle before any rot can infect some of the Athenians, then, as long as the gods grant both sides equal treatment, we can prevail in this engagement. [6] All this is now in your hands and depends on you. If you add your vote to my proposal, your ancestral land can be free and your city the first of Greek cities. But if you choose the side of those eager to prevent a battle, you will have the opposite of all the good things I have described (Hdt. 6.109.3–6).

Callimachos' is unaware that he is being manipulated, but the appeal to *kleos*—"leave to all posterity a memorial for yourself"—is effective.³⁶ Miltiades is also aware that opinions among Athenians are divided. Whether Hippias' re-instatement dreams are realistic or not, there are some in Athens who believe that they can negotiate an advantageous and personally beneficial arrangement with the Persians.

³⁵ At that time this comment is mildly flattering as these two men—"legendary tyrant slayers of Athens" *eleutherioi* and *tyrannophonoi*—were responsible for assassinating Hippias' brother Hipparchos in 514—hardly legendary in 490, but obviously more so fifty years later when Herodotus is writing. But shortly following Peisistratos' death in 527 his two sons were responsible for the assassination of Miltiades' father, Kimon, son of Stesagoras.

³⁶ Complete *archon* lists of all ten *archons*—one representing each tribe—for the early fifth-century are no longer extant. By 487/6 each tribe would select ten candidates, then one of these from each tribe would be chosen by lot, and then these candidates would cast lots for the several functions including eponymous archon, polemarch, and so on (Sealey 204). Nor have the names of the other nine generals for the year 490/89 survived. Herodotus writes that the *polemarch* was selected by lot, which suggests that even in 490 the candidates for the board of *archons* did not know which post they would eventually hold.

Miltiades' arguments persuaded Callimachos, and when the Polemarch's vote was added to the tally, the decision was made to join battle. And afterward, the generals in favor of the battle each in their turn ceded their day of command to Miltiades when the day came around for each to be in charge. But while Miltiades accepted this, he would not make the attack until it was his day to preside (Hdt. 6.110).³⁷

Delaying giving the order to attack until it was his day to preside Herodotus suggests that Miltiades is prepared to accept sole responsibility for the outcome—glory or ignominy. It also suggests prudence—once a battle starts events change demanding that early plans be jettisoned—right or wrong he will need instant obedience not debate. He knows half of his generals are reluctant to engage and these *stratego*i did not cede him their turns to preside. Over the years Miltiades has learned enough not to risk being outgeneralled.

AN UNEXPECTED DECISIVE VICTORY

The course and result of the battle need little retelling. Herodotus' account, which is also the earliest extant, is given in the closing chapters of book six (Hdt. 6.111–6.116). Modern military historians do not depart dramatically from his account which credits Miltiades with implementing the strategy of meeting the Persian invaders at their Marathon beachhead a full day's march north of Athens. Miltiades, who has likely never previously commanded a large hoplite army, is also credited with the tactic of rapidly advancing in close formation across the plain and dashing over the last stadia when the Greek infantry become within lethal range of the Persian archers.³⁸ Never satisfactorily

³⁷ According to Herodotus the armies are at a standoff for several days, but the decision to attack the Persians is taken by Miltiades. The tactic of deploying the phalanx with strong wings and a weak centre may simply have been the necessity to match line lengths. No matter whose idea, and remember Miltiades had never commanded a hoplite army of any size, it was adopted and when both Persian flanks retreated under pressure the two Hellenic wings rotated back to support the centre.

³⁸ Since Callimachos was killed on the battlefield and Miltiades' son Cimon subsequently becomes the most influential man in Athens in the 470s and 460s, one suspects that Miltiades' image as the victor of Marathon also owes much to the accretions of family influence and tradition. Nevertheless, although the *stratego*i are elected by their tribe, in times of war, the tribe will likely only consider candidates of some military competence—everyone is further ahead if the social *dilettante* wait for peaceful times before showing their interest.

explained, the much-feared Persian cavalry is never a factor. But Miltiades' Philaid family gained fame in the sixth-century breeding racehorses; perhaps Miltiades, with some equestrian expertise, gambles that the Persian mounts, after transportation by sea across the Aegean might need several weeks to acclimatize to different water and forage? We know little, except that Herodotus does not mention their cavalry at Marathon.

One of the Persian's military strengths is their light cavalry. Although cavalry are effective against broken infantry in open terrain—the Greek phalanx usually does not break and indeed Greek commanders choose their battle locations with this in mind. Moreover, animals need water and fodder—both in short supply in Attica—indeed alfalfa, now quite ubiquitous was introduced to the Greek mainland inadvertently by Xerxes' horses. The Persians' other major weakness is reliance on their allies for naval support. That it is difficult to reconstruct this particular battle from Herodotus' abbreviated account alone should not be surprising—many in his audience were participants or have relatives who were there. And as an infant at the time and living on the Anatolian side of the Aegean, he was not. Sources for details of the land battles Herodotus describes in his *Histories* are restricted to surviving participants; there are no privileged non-combatant observers, and Herodotus has to piece together what really happened from many independent sources—ideally from both Greek and from Persian or Persian allies. No matter, after the defeat at Marathon, those who might have betrayed their city reconsider and the Persians withdraw.

HUBRYS AND IMPIETY

As the Spartans observed decades earlier, the Athenians are an ungrateful people (Hdt. 5.92.2).³⁹ The euphoria over the unexpected and lop-sided victory over the Persian invaders does not last long. Miltiades comes from an influential wealthy aristocratic Athenian family, which means that enmity among other powerful aristocratic families is never far beneath the surface. Herodotus writes:

³⁹ Again we must ask—who are the ingrates? The most likely candidates are from that segment of society that a contemporary American political aspirant arrogantly and contemptibly dismissed—those members of the demos always cash-strapped and in this case those who signed up to crew the triremes and who were doubtless relying on their pay as oarsmen to get them out of debt.

Though previously Miltiades had been held in high esteem by the Athenians, after the defeat of the Persians at Marathon he gained even more power and influence. Thus the Athenians were thrilled to grant his request when he asked them for seventy ships, an army, and some money, without revealing against what country he would lead these forces; he claimed, however, that he would make them all rich if they followed him, because they were certain to gain much gold from the land to which he would lead them—at least that’s the sort of thing he told them as he asked for the ships (Hdt. 6.132).

Herodotus does not tell his audience why Miltiades wants to attack Paros, let alone why he chooses not explain his strategy to the Athenians. Is Miltiades now looking down on those who look up to him? ⁴⁰ The Paros attack closely follows his victory at Marathon, but everyone is aware and remembers that in 490 the Persian invasion fleet of 600 triremes and horse transports sail unhindered across the Aegean by island hopping. Herodotus writes:

So the newly appointed generals [Datis and Artaphrenes] left the King and set out on their journey. They went first to the plain of Alcion in Cilicia, bringing along a huge and well-equipped land army. As they camped there, all the ships that had been levied from the various districts arrived to join their forces, as well as the horse-transport ships which Darius had ordered his tribute-paying people to prepare the year before. [2] After putting the horses on board these ships, the land army embarked, and the expedition sailed to Ionia with a fleet of 600 triremes. From there, instead of keeping their ships close to the mainland and sailing toward the Hellespont and Thrace they set out from Samos, went past Ikaros, and made their voyage through the islands (Hdt. 6.95.1–2).

Herodotus explains that Naxos had not yet been conquered. The Naxian islanders flee but are caught and enslaved and Herodotus mentions that the Persians set sail for other islands (Hdt. 6.96). The Delians—Delos is adjacent to Paros—flee to Tenos (Hdt. 6.97).

⁴⁰ Herodotus’ readers will recall that in 506 the Spartan dyarch, Cleomenes, makes the same secretive miscalculation when he “mustered an army from the entire Peloponnese without stating his purpose”—that they were going to punish the Athenian people (Hdt. 5.74).

But the Persians sail from Delos and put in at other islands—presumably including Paros—where they take hostages and enlist others to join their forces (Hdt.6.99).

One way to ensure that Darius does not repeat this strategy is to deny him military use of the Cyclades and for that Athens must be sure of their continued allegiance. Lacking a navy to challenge the Persians at sea, swift punishment for medizing is a clumsy deterrent of sorts. And so Pharos, like Aegina, must not so easily fall under Persian control again.

So Miltiades took command of the army and sailed for Paros, on the pretext that the Parians had initiated a conflict by earlier contributing a trireme to the Persian forces at Marathon.⁴¹ That was his excuse, but actually he bore a grudge against the Parians because Lysagoras son of Teisas, a Parian by birth, had maligned him to Hydarnes the Persian. And so Miltiades sailed out, and when he arrived at Paros, he laid siege to the city while the Parians confined themselves within their city walls. Then he sent a herald to demand 100 talents from them, saying that if they did not give him the money, he would not permit his army to withdraw until it had completely destroyed them. [3] The Parians had no intention of giving any money to Miltiades, and instead began to devise strategies to protect their city; in particular, they set to work at night to double the original height of their wall wherever it had recently proved to be vulnerable (Hdt. 6.133.1–3).

Herodotus' criticism is directed at the Athenians; they accept Miltiades promise of riches to share among the demoi, just as they had been won over by Aristagoras some ten years earlier (Hdt. 5.97). The Athenian motivation is naked greed rather than a noble quest for justice or future security.

That much of the story is related by all the Hellenes, but from here on, the Parians say that what happened is the following. Miltiades was at a loss as to what to do next; but then a captive slave woman named Timo, who was a Parian by birth and a temple

⁴¹ Paros which lies west of Naxos in the Aegean Sea is one of many islands among the Cyclades group and is some 160 kilometres (as the crow flies) south-east of Athens. The Persian invasion forces reach mainland Greece by island hopping from southern Anatolia subjugating Paros and other islands in turn as their armada of triremes and transport ships progress north-west toward Eretria and Athens.

servant of the goddesses of the underworld met with him and told him that if the capture of Paros was of great importance, he should follow her advice. [2] After hearing her counsel, Miltiades went to the hill that lies in front of the city and, since he was unable to open the doors, leapt over the wall enclosing the sanctuary of Demeter Thesmophoros. Then once he had jumped to the inside, he went toward the hall of the temple in order to do whatever he intended within, perhaps to remove some object that was not supposed to be moved or maybe to do something else. As he approached the doors [of the temple], however, he was suddenly overcome with trembling and ran back the way he had come, but as he jumped down from the wall, he badly twisted his thigh, though other say he injured his knee (Hdt. 6.134.1–3).

IMPIETY AND MILTIADES' DEMISE

Herodotus' story has Homeric echoes of the theft of the Palladium from Troy. The Greeks take matters of impiety seriously—it is a capital offense—any scepticism is buried under a fifth-century version of Pascal's Wager: Ignoring a prophecy being as foolhardy as not taking the time to consult one of the oracles for guidance in the first place.

When the Parians found out that a temple servant had provided guidance to Miltiades, they wished to punish her for it, so they sent sacred delegates to Delphi as soon as they had obtained a respite from the siege. The question they sent to Delphi was whether they should put to death the temple servant of the goddesses because she had instructed their enemies on how to capture her native land and had revealed sacred matters to Miltiades that were not to be disclosed to any male. [3] The Pythia would not permit them to do this, saying that it was not Timo who was at fault for what happened; that Miltiades was destined to end his life unhappily and that Timo had appeared in order to start him down the path to its bad ending (Hdt. 6.135.2–3).

Throughout his *Histories*, Herodotus is careful to include reference—doubtless very selective—to those prophesies sought by the protagonists and their adversaries.

So Miltiades sailed home in a sorry state; he was bringing no money for the Athenians, nor had he added Paros to their territory, despite the fact that he had besieged it for twenty-six days and laid waste to the island (Hdt. 6.135.1).

There is another element at work here. Throughout his *Histories* Herodotus is carefully pursuing the Heraclitan notion that individuals are responsible for their own actions—good or ill. But the Greek religion still has a very Homeric element of communal responsibility, in which the impiety of one individual can jeopardise the well-being of a much larger group. But the expiation of the transgressions of this one offending individual can restore the favour of the gods to all.⁴²

Herodotus shows Miltiades at a pinnacle of popularity after Marathon, but he also shows his audience that this pinnacle can become either a plateau or a precipice and that any act of impiety can have immediate and disastrous consequences.

Now when Miltiades returned home from Paros, he was the subject of much discussion among the Athenians. One in particular, Xanthippos son of Aripbron, brought him to court to be tried by the people on the capital charge of having deceived the Athenians. [2] Miltiades, though present, did not speak in his own defence, for he was incapacitated by his thigh, which was now infected. So as he lay there on a couch, his friends and relatives spoke on his behalf, recounting at length the battle of Marathon and how Miltiades had conquered Lemnos and given it over to the Athenians to punish the Pelasgians.⁴³ [3] The people sided with him to the extent that they released him from the death penalty, but they fined him fifty talents for his offense. After the trial, gangrene developed in Miltiades' already infected thigh, and ended his life. His son Kimon subsequently paid off the fifty talents (Hdt. 6.136.2–3).

⁴² The rape of Cassandra who had taken sanctuary in a temple to Athena by the Lesser Ajax comes to mind. The Greek leaders do not take Odysseus' advice that the offender be stoned to death and Athena—although she supported the Greeks against the Trojans—requests the aid of Zeus and Poseidon in search of revenge for this outrage. Roughly translated as impiety (*ἀσέβεια*) *asabeia*, it is difficult to define in modern terms, but in the fifth and fourth-centuries is a capital offence.

⁴³ A date in the mid 490's for this conquest and generous territorial gift of strategic importance—he would not have the resources to garrison the islands—would strengthen the case that Miltiades' friends make at the trial that his governance of the Chersonese was always to Athens' advantage and that he should be treated as an Athenian benefactor.

Within a year of his triumph at Marathon Miltiades is on trial for his life a second time. This time the fault is his recent unsuccessful campaign against the Parians and the deceit he used to gain authorisation for the punitive raid. Found guilty, his life is spared, but despite being bedridden with a battle wound turning gangrenous he is fined—and imprisoned until this is paid (Hdt. 6.136.3).⁴⁴ Although his young son Cimon, perhaps aged only twenty, eventually clears the debt—he is too late—his father, the hero of the miraculous Athenian victory over the invading Persian armies has already died miserably and disgraced in prison.⁴⁵

Herodotus has a warning here, the Athenian reaction to their victory at Marathon is short-sighted. Punishing those city-states who medize with heavy fines in gold and silver bullion, or razing their cities to the ground is only exchanging one promise of oppression for another. Pan-Hellenic ambitions are founded on common interests not threats of crippling fines or assured destruction. Herodotus' readers will readily see that Themistocles' scheme of building a powerful Athenian navy which will deny the Persians free use of the Aegean Sea means that Athens can offer meaningful protection rather than threats to her potential allies. Luckily for the Athenians, this time around, Darius' generals make tactical mistakes at Marathon—mistakes the Persians will learn from and not repeat when they come again. Very few Athenians recognise that there will be a next time and that next time will be very different.

Having failed in court a few years before Marathon, his political enemies finally get a capital charge to stick.⁴⁶ If Miltiades had successfully coerced the Parians into parting with the one hundred talents demanded as reparation for their medizing—two

⁴⁴ The whole affair is clouded in mystery; Miltiades' pretext for attacking the island (Paros) is that the Parians had supported the Persians at Marathon, but Herodotus suggests that there was also a personal grudge Miltiades wished to settle, perhaps a notable example of why not to mix state business with pleasure (Hdt. 6.133.1).

⁴⁵ Fifty talents of silver is an outrageously large fine; there are 6,000 drachmas to the talent, so the fine is equivalent to 300,000 drachmas at a time when the daily wage for a skilled worker was one drachma at most. But it might also approximate the cost of the venture—70 triremes, each with a crew of 200, for 30 days, paid at a half-drachma a day amounts to some 210,000 drachmas. Since the Attic standard talent is about 25.9 kg the fine imposed is well over a tonne of bullion.

⁴⁶ The Philaid (sometimes described as the Cimonid) dynasty is continued by his son Cimon the Younger (510–450).

metric tons of silver bullion—no such trial would have been held—greasing greedy palms with silver usually erases all manner of presumed iniquities.⁴⁷ But the Paros revenge raid is a fruitless and expensive failure and at times such as this Miltiades needs more than a little help from his friends.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ This is just expedience. Herodotus is unable to conceal a measure of religious / judicial scepticism here. Cicero's treatise from the first century *On the Nature of the Gods* comes to mind, where he criticises state-sponsored religion for substituting religious awe when other pressures fail—a slippery slope to state-sponsored religious corruption (Cic., *Nat D.* 1.117–118).

⁴⁸ Many have paraphrased Tacitus from the first century “Inquissima haec bellorum condicio est: prospera omnes sibi indicant, aduersa uni imputantur.” John F. Kennedy said as much on April 21, 1961 about the Bay of Pigs fiasco, “Success has a thousand fathers, but failure is always an orphan.”

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Cleomenes of Sparta

[Hdt. 3.148.2, 5.39.1, 5.40.2, 5.41.1–3, 5.42.2, 5.42.1, 5.48, 5.49–51, 5.64–65, 5.70, 5.72, 5.74–75, 5.75, 5.90–99, 6.50, 6.51–60, 6.64–65, 6.68–69, 6.73, 6.74–75, 6.78–80, 6.82, 6.75, 6.84, 6.75.3, 7.204]

INTRODUCTION

Cleomenes I, the late sixth- and early fifth-century Agiad king of Sparta, and arguably the architect of the Peloponnesian League, is not among the Greek luminaries Plutarch selects for comparison with notable Romans in his *Parallel Lives*. We can only speculate on his reasoning for this omission—the simplest explanation, Occam’s razor, is that he did not have in mind any particularly notable Romans with whom he could make an intriguing comparison.¹ Yet of all the noble and notable Greeks Herodotus mentions in his *Histories*—barring Cleomenes’ childhood, his marriage, whether along with his three half-brothers he undergoes the rigors of the *Agoge* from age seven to twenty, and other necessary endurance trials before being nominated as King Anaxandridas II’s successor—he gives us a more or less complete portrait of Cleomenes’ ruling life. Alas, absent any information about his youth, for that *one character-defining moment*, we must wait until after he is enthroned; doubtless Sparta’s Council of Elders is much more dutiful and much less patient about this critical character evaluation—their kingdom’s stability depends on it. The battlefield is no place for the physically or mentally impaired, let alone cowards. A detailed discussion of governance in late sixth- and early fifth-century Sparta is beyond the scope of this study. The intricacies may well not have been fully understood by Herodotus. Much of what twenty-first century scholars contend is based on *Plutarch’s Lives*, and notably even Plutarch, hedging his bets, introduces his discussion of this legendary king as follows:

Concerning Lycurgus the lawgiver, in general, nothing can be said which is not disputed, since indeed there are different accounts of his birth, his travels, his death, and

¹ If his account of Cleomenes I has not been lost, this lack also falls under Occam’s razor—however under Occam’s broom Plutarch may have had access to any number of no longer extant but unflattering or maddeningly contradictory accounts of Cleomenes’ long rule.

above all, of his work as law-maker and statesman; and there is least agreement among historians as to the times in which the man lived (Plu. *Lycurgus*, I. i).

In fact, among the twenty-three pairs of notable individuals and four stand-alone biographical accounts—fifty in all, but with possibly an unknown number lost—Plutarch examines no women and only five Spartans, including the quasi-legendary late ninth-century Lycurgus and the late third-century Agiad ruler Cleomenes III.

CLEOMENES' EARLY LIFE

Herodotus' first mention of Cleomenes is dated to about the year 517 where very early in his long reign he is described as “the most just of men” (Hdt. 3.148.2). But beyond sketchy details of his birth-mother, we know nothing about his early childhood, let alone anything about his adolescence, nor how old he was when selected for the Agiad kingship.² And as is usual with Herodotus, we also know nothing about Cleomenes' physical appearance, but if it was remarkable he might have mentioned something.³ Of course, if he is following Heraclitus' maxim his focus will be on character not on stature, posture, or physiognomy. But following Hesiod and Homer he will also detail his Agiad genealogy or pedigree. Indeed, Herodotus gives his readers a detailed account of how Anaxandridas II the son of Leon, who ruled Sparta from about 560 to 520, is manoeuvred by the ephors and gerontes into bigamously ensuring the Agiad line of succession.

Anaxandridas is happily married to his niece—his sister's daughter—and although he has absolutely no wish to divorce her—they are childless and hence the problem. Herodotus does not indicate how soon into his reign this succession concern

² Divine descent—the Heraclid myth—constitutes the Spartan kings' entire claim to legitimacy. The double kingship is attributed to a Delphic oracle. While honouring the first born, it assigns joint rule to Eurysthenes and Procles, the twin sons of Argeia by Aristodemus, the great-great-grandson of Heracles. Their sons, Agis and Eurypon, in turn, become the eponymous ancestors of the two royal houses. Because Agis' father Eurysthenes is determined to be the elder of the twins, this gives justification for the Agiad line of succession holding ascendancy over the Eurypontid line (Hdt 6.52). As descendents of Heracles, the kings are strictly Achaeans and not Dorians, a distinction Cleomenes will claim at least once during his rule (Hdt. 5.72.3–4). The direct Homeric allusion will not be lost on Herodotus' audiences.

³ Unlike Plutarch, and Homer for that matter, evidently Herodotus has almost no interest in the physical appearance of any of the individuals he mentions in his *Histories*.

arises, perhaps within as little as ten years of marriage. Nor does he reveal how it is that the ephors and gerontes are so certain that the infertility problem does not lie with Anaxandridas. That particular deficiency, if known, would have been an absolute bar to his selection to the Spartan kingship and so it is likely that any concern on those grounds is snuffed long before Anaxandridas assumes the Agiad throne.⁴ Herodotus recounts:

Because of this situation, the ephors summoned him and said, “Even if you are not thinking of your future, we ourselves cannot look on and allow the line of Eurysthenes to die out. You do have a wife already, but since she has not given birth, divorce her now and marry another. By doing this you will please the Spartans.” Anaxandridas replied that he would do neither of these things, and that they had given him bad advice in telling him to throw away the wife he now had, who was faultless in his eyes, and to marry another. No, he said, he would not obey them (Hdt. 5.39.2).

This brings up again a somewhat contested aspect of governance in late sixth- and early fifth-century Sparta; neither of the dyarchs is an absolute ruler—far from it, although the details of how this all works out over time are still vigorously disputed by scholars (see Hdt. 6.51–60). Much of what we believe we know about the governance of late sixth- and early fifth-century Sparta comes from *Plutarch’s Lives* (Lycurgus) which was written some six centuries later. There is a five-member Board of Ephors elected annually by the Assembly, and a thirty-member Council of Elders—the *Gerousia*—comprising the two kings plus twenty-eight men aged over sixty, but elected for life, again by the Assembly. The Assembly (*Ekklesia*) consists of all male Spartan citizens who will certainly vote on important matters such as peace or war. A king continually at odds with several of his ephors only has to wait a year for the blockage to clear—but slipping something really important past his co-monarch, the Board, the *Gerousia*, and the Assembly is well nigh impossible—checks and balances indeed.

⁴ In this instance Helot maiden honour will remain untarnished. Sparta will have bevyies of widows and aristocratic wives with young healthy children, who will partake in this critical royal function, whereas their adolescent heir apparent will be introduced to heterosexual intercourse under the guise that frequent liaisons are for conception. Pomeroy discusses the mutually consenting, but not-quite-adulterous “open” triangular arrangements which are deemed entirely acceptable in Spartan society (*Goddesses, Whores* 37).

Anxious to break the impasse with their Agiad king, the ephors discuss the matter with the Council of Elders and offer the king a bigamous compromise (Hdt. 5.40.1):

“We no longer ask that you divorce your present wife; continue providing all that you now provide for her. But marry another wife in addition, one who can give you children.” To this Anaxandridas agreed, and afterward he had two wives and maintained two separate hearths, a practice that was not at all customary for a Spartan (Hdt. 5.40.2).

Always the first and about the only indisputable duty of any hereditary monarch anywhere and at any time is Darwinian in simplicity—ensure the succession. Showing just how far the Spartan dyarchs are from being absolute monarchs, Anaxandridas II dutifully complies. The detail about maintaining two separate households reminds Herodotus’ readers that the Spartans do not build luxurious palaces for their dyarchs, that polygamy is a barbarian anathema, and that Cleomenes does not expect the two wives or their respective offspring to live under the same roof.⁵ Nevertheless, demonstrating that the gods move in mysterious ways, a surprise is in store for the ephors.

Not much time passed before the new wife [name never given] subsequently gave birth to Cleomenes. But now just as she was showing off to the Spartans the heir to the throne that she had produced, by some coincidence the first wife [name never given], though childless before, became pregnant. [2] And although she was truly pregnant, the relatives of the new wife, when they heard about it, made things difficult for her, claiming that she was just making an empty boast, and that she intended to substitute another child and pretend it was her son. They expressed their indignation in that way, and when her time drew near, the ephors, who were suspicious, took seats around the woman to guard her as she gave birth. [3] And she did give birth to Dorieus, and then at once conceived Leonidas, and immediately after he was born, she conceived Cleombrotus. Some say that Cleombrotus and Leonidas were actually twins. The

⁵ Herodotus’ audience will immediately see the contrast between this Hellenic compromise and the barbarian practice of multiple wives and concubines, vast royal palaces in multiple capitals, and perhaps prodigious numbers of royal but illegitimate offspring.

second wife, who had borne Cleomenes never gave birth to another child (Hdt. 5.41.1–3).

There could be any number of reasons, beyond the obvious, why Cleomenes should remain an only child. But the dark cloud over his birth, which the Council of Elders created and remained powerless to dispel, does not fade with time.

DISPUTED SUCCESSION

And demonstrating that no good deed, let alone such an ill-conceived one, should ever go unpunished, the net result is a bitterly disputed succession and dissention. When Anaxandridas II dies in about 520 the Spartans nominate this eldest son—Cleomenes—to the kingship (Hdt. 5.42.2).⁶ Dorieus, the eldest son by the late king’s first wife, pig-headedly perhaps, refuses to accept this decision and goes into self-exile dying in battle trying to establish his own Spartan kingdom in Italy, perhaps in Croton or possibly Sybaris. Herodotus writes:

Because Cleomenes, it is said, was not right in his mind and lived on the verge of madness, Dorieus, who was the leading youth among his peers, assumed that he would obtain the kingship by virtue of his manly excellence” (Hdt. 5.42.1).

But was this true back in 520?⁷ This matter is still bitterly disputed by scholars, but the evidence is thin.⁸ From Herodotus’ account, neither of Dorieus’ younger half-brothers,

⁶ This expression “the Spartans” which occurs frequently when Herodotus refers to decisions emanating from Sparta likely means the Assembly. We can surmise that from time to time the kings together with the elders and ephors put their recommendation(s) to the Assembly—with or without discussion—for ratification by a simple *yea* or *nay* voice vote (*viva voce*).

⁷ The two crucial words from the Greek translated here are *phreneres* and *acromanes*. The first literally means “master of his mind,” the second “on the verge of madness.” Neither expression is common for this period.

⁸ In view of Hdt. 6.75.1–2, where Herodotus writes that in 491 Cleomenes was “stricken by madness” and Hdt. 6.84 where he writes that Cleomenes “went mad” perhaps from strong drink. The simplest explanation—Occam’s Razor, if not Occam’s Broom—is that some parts of this book are missing and this part is misplaced.

Leonidas nor Cleombrotus, disputes the succession. In fifth-century Sparta, the interests of the state always trump personal ambition. Although Herodotus never gives us the full genealogy of Cleomenes I, son of Anaxandridas, he gives one for his younger half-brother Leonidas I, which is of course identical since birth-mothers are ignored in the tabulation:

Leonidas son of Anaxandridas, the son of Leon son of Eurykratides, the son of Anaxandros son of Eurykrates, the son of Polydoros son of Alkamenes, the son of Teleklos son of Archelaos, the son of Hrgesilaos son of Doryssos, the son of Leobotas son of Echestratos, the son of Agis son of Eurysthenes, the son of Aristodemos son of Aristomachos, the son of Kleodaios son of Hyllos, who was the son of Heracles (Hdt. 7.204).

In book 8, Herodotus also gives us the full genealogy of Leotychidas II, Cleomenes' nominee to replace his *bête noir* Demaratos, the dyarch he deposes and exiles in 491.⁹

Commanding both the army and the navy was Leotychidas son of Menares, the son of Hegisilaos, the son of Leotichidas son of Anaxilaos, the son of Archidamos son of Anaxandridas, the son of Theopompos son of Nikandros, the son of Charilaos son of Eunomos, the son of Polydektes son of Prytanis, the son of Euryphon son of Prokles, the son of Aristodemos son of Aristomachos, the son of Kleodaios son of Hyllos, who was the son of Herakles. Leotychchidas belonged to the second of the two houses of the kings of Sparta (Hdt. 8.131.2).

Although Cleomenes, the Agiad king of Sparta is twenty-four generations removed from the famed Heracles—four or five centuries or more, depending upon how many generations on average you estimate per century—the point of the genealogical table is to demonstrate the longevity and therefore the legitimacy of his royal house.¹⁰ The Agidae

⁹ Leotychidas, a Spartan king, is in overall command of the Hellenic forces in the eastern Aegean during the spring and summer of 479 and therefore the victor at Mycale (Hdt. 9.106.1).

¹⁰ Twenty generations, let alone twenty-four, in an unbroken male line of succession is a fanciful claim, if not downright impossible—but we might note that later Herodotus gives the equivalent

trace their lineage back to Heracles because according to legend, the Heraclidae, regarded as direct descendants of Heracles, invaded the Peloponnese to reclaim their paternal inheritance and establish themselves as rulers.¹¹

SPARTAN STATESMANSHIP

One incident early in Cleomenes' reign, perhaps as late as 517, shows the young king in a particularly flattering, albeit isolationist light, and becomes perhaps his *one character-defining moment*.

Maiandrios, after escaping from Samos, sailed to Lacedaemon [Sparta]. He had taken what he could when he left, and when he got there, he set out his silver and gold cups and had his servants polish them while he went out to engage in conversation with Cleomenes, son of Anaxandridas, who was king of Sparta, and to bring him to his house. When Cleomenes looked at the cups, he was struck with wonder and amazement. Maiandrios would then tell him to take as many as he wanted. [2] After Maiandrios had said this two or three times, Cleomenes proved himself to be the most just of men, in that he refused to take what Maiandrios was trying to give away to him. But he realized that Maiandrios would find a way to take revenge on him by offering the gifts to others in the community; so he went to the ephors and said that it would be better for Sparta if the Samian visitor were made to leave the Peloponnese so that he could not persuade him or any other Spartan to become corrupt (Hdt. 3.148.1–2).

sixteen generations for Leotychidas of the Eurypontid line (Hdt. 8.131.2). A king list extending from Heracles to the mid-fifth century is the stuff of mythology, but a partial list from the sixth century looks as follows:

AGIADS		EURYPONTIDS	
Leon	590–560	Agasikles	575–550
Anaxandridas II	560–520	Ariston	550–515
Cleomenes I	520–490	Demaratos	515–491
Leonidas I	490–480	Leotychidas II	491–469
Pleistarchos	480–459	Archidamos II	469–427

¹¹ Herodotus' estimate of three generations of men per century fits poorly with later experience (Hdt. 2.142.2). However in book 2 of the *Histories* he is focussed on demonstrating that Egyptian History stretched much further back than did that of the Hellenes. Taking three generations per one hundred years rather than the five generations he used in book 1 when commenting on and obscure lineage of Heraclid kings of Lydia (23 years per generation = $505 \div 22$) is an easy way of achieving this (see Hdt. 1.7.4).

The ephors complied and proclaimed the banishment of Maiandrios (Hdt. 3.149.1).

Not only does this suggest that some Spartans, despite their institutional austerity, are potentially susceptible to bribery—although clearly here Cleomenes is not—we should note that the young king only makes the banishment request; the ephors have the executive power. A subtlety here is that Herodotus has the young king suggesting that one or more of his ephors may be even more susceptible to bribery than he is! This question about bribery and corruption reoccurs throughout the *Histories* particularly in relations between Sparta and Athens and between both cities and the Oracle at Delphi. One interpretation is that Cleomenes is incorruptible by nature and hopes that others will share the same ethical standards—he will not even dream of corrupting the Pythia until presented with irrefutable evidence that others have succeeded in doing so. For Cleomenes this ethical if not religious lack among other rulers must have been a very bitter pill to swallow.

Herodotus will recount a similar incident some sixteen years later, when another Ionian tyrant, perhaps ignorant of how matters are usually conducted in Sparta, makes the same gross miscalculation. Both incidents highlight Sparta's strict isolationism—if the problem lies outside of the Peloponnese they must have good reason to become involved. There is also the pragmatic view that the cost of garrisoning the Greek city states on the western coast of Anatolia is prohibitive. A combined naval force might offer some defence to Greek settlements on islands in the Aegean, but the Spartans are not seafarers.

SPARTA AND ATHENIAN POLITICS

Herodotus gives very little background to the Spartan interest in Athenian politics near the end of the sixth century during the Peisistratid tyranny. After his father's death in 527, Hippias son of Peisistratos continues his family's rule in Athens, but is embittered by the murder of his brother Hipparchos in 514.¹² Sometime around the year 511, the

¹² Two of the more powerful aristocratic families in sixth-century Athens are the Peisistratids—Peisistratos and his sons Hippias and Hipparchus—and a rival family the Alcemeonids, led at that time by Cleisthenes son of Megacles and the Sicyon princess Agariste (Hdt. 6.126). Isagoras, who establishes an oligarchy of three-hundred nobles with tacit support from Sparta, comes from another aristocratic family, bitter rivals of the Alcemeonids for power and influence.

Alcmeonids, who have been exiled by the Peisistratids, try to eject the tyrant, but are unsuccessful (Hdt. 5.62.1–2). However, these Athenian aristocrats are exceedingly wealthy and are currently responsible for re-building the temple at Delphi. According to the Athenians, it is at this time that Cleisthenes bribes the Pythia to continually urge all Spartans coming to the oracle for guidance to also help drive the Peisistratids out of Athens (Hdt. 5.62.1–2).¹³ The first Spartan expedition to do this fails miserably, but next year the Spartans, led by Cleomenes, try again with a more powerful invasion force. What Sparta has to gain from this intervention is unclear—altruism is most unlikely—but it is possible that the Spartans are seeking a favourable oracle for some other matter, in which case helping fulfill another prophesy does no harm—this is simply the archaic and classical Greek version of Pascal’s Wager.

In 510, a Spartan land army, this time commanded by Cleomenes, invades Attica. They quickly rout the Thessalian cavalry, enter Athens, and besiege the tyrant Hippias and his supporters who have taken refuge on the Acropolis (Hdt. 5.64–5.65). The Spartans cannot conduct a long siege, but by happenstance the Peisistratid children are captured trying to escape from Athens. Consequently, Hippias and his supporters have no alternative but to accept exile and they travel outside of mainland Greece to Persian sponsored sanctuary in Anatolia (Hdt. 5.65).¹⁴ This expulsion leaves two powerful aristocratic families led by Cleisthenes son of Megacles and by Isagoras son of Teisandros competing for power.¹⁵ Facing political defeat, Isagoras requests Cleomenes’ military assistance to expel the Alcemeonids (Hdt. 5.70.1). Herodotus tosses in the scurrilous if not salacious bone that Cleomenes was known to have been close to Isagoras’ wife and that this intimacy governed the Spartan king’s actions (Hdt.

¹³ This may be the first instance during his reign that Cleomenes is made painfully aware that the Delphic oracle is corruptible. And sadly, what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander.

¹⁴ This is not the last we hear of Hippias. In the summer of 490 he accompanies the Persian invaders who land at Marathon hoping that he will be reinstated following a Persian military victory or through treachery within Athens.

¹⁵ Cleisthenes, an Athenian aristocrat from the Alcmaeonid family, was born in about 565 and dies some time before the battle of Marathon. He is credited with introducing a number of reforms aimed at reducing the power of rival aristocratic families, excluding his own, of course.

5.70.1).¹⁶ Isagoras attempts to resurrect an Alcemeonid curse from late in the seventh-century. This attempt in 507 fails and Cleomenes after seizing the Acropolis is obliged to accept a truce and leave (Hdt. 5.72). It is during this invasion that Cleomenes enters the temple to Athena on the Acropolis, to be challenged by the priestess.

Thus a divine utterance was fulfilled, for when Cleomenes had climbed up to the Acropolis with the intent of taking possession of it, he went to the inner chamber of the goddess to address her. But before he could pass through the doors the priestess stood up from her throne and said, "Foreigner from Lacedaemon: go back, and do not come into the shrine. For it is not lawful for Dorians to enter here." He replied, "But woman, I am not a Dorian; I am an Achaean." And so now he made his attempt, heedless of the words of omen, and again was evicted with the Lacedaemonians (Hdt. 5.72.3–4).

According to Herodotus, in 506 Cleomenes musters a large army and tries again to establish Isagoras as tyrant of Athens (Hdt. 5.74). Herodotus comments that Cleomenes believes that the Athenians have treated him badly, but whether this refers to their bribing of the Pythia or their ingratitude for expelling the Peisistratids, or both, is unclear (Hdt 5.74.1). But this invasion, which gets into Attica, but only as far as Eleusis also collapses when first the Corinthians and then Demaratos, the other Spartan king, decide that they are all becoming embroiled in unjust acts, or, more likely, military acts of no particular direct benefit to their city-states in the Peloponnese (Hdt. 5.75.1–5.76).

This particular incident—the Corinthians' refusal to support a Spartan led regime-change endeavour in Athens—is convincing evidence that the Peloponnesian League is governed by consensus. The city-states making up the League might not accomplish much outside of the Peloponnese without Spartan support, but Sparta cannot act alone either. Herodotus does not tell us when or how the Peloponnesian League is formed, but he does give some hints.

¹⁶ Remember Heracles is Zeus' son by Alcmena. Twenty-four generations later, Cleomenes, a Heraclid, may well have very much enjoyed her proffered favours and she his; but given the complex decision-making process in Sparta Isagoras' pandering will not have been that influential. In Sparta it was not unknown for the husband to invite another whom he greatly admired to sire a child with his wife.

Sometime around 548 or 547, early in the reigns of Anaxandridas II and Ariston, Sparta receives envoys from Croesus of Lydia who declare:

“Croesus king of the Lydians and other peoples sent us here with this message: ‘Lacedaemonians, the god’s oracle told me to acquire the Hellene as friend and supporter. You, I have learned, are the leaders of Hellas, and so I invite you to comply with the oracle; and I am eager to become your friend and military ally without treachery or guile’” (Hdt. 1.69.2).

So clearly Cleomenes inherits a kingdom recognised as powerful by the Barbarians, although the agreement with Croesus quickly becomes moot when he is defeated and captured by Cyrus. And perhaps at this point it is important to differentiate among the very different forms that an alliance at this time can take.

The simplest alliance is one where two independent states agree *here and now* to defend each other when another state threatens to attack, or when they agree *here and now* to attack a third party. In the former case, since it is the third party that has already taken the decision to attack, it becomes a simple matter of invoking the defensive agreement. But when the action is offensive and no longer immediate—*here and now*—who gets to say who should be attacked and when? This leads to the notion of inequality—one member state takes the lead in decision making. As soon as the alliance expands to more than two members we get the potentially complicated situation where membership in the alliance implies that each state has agreed to have the same friends and enemies. And so when Corinth takes the decision not to support the Spartan-led attack on Athens, what are they doing? Are they breaking their alliance with Sparta, or only disagreeing about whether Athens as an enemy of Sparta is also an enemy of Corinth? ¹⁷

¹⁷ See W. G. Forrest 88–89 for an expansion of this argument about the nature of defensive and offensive alliances in the sixth- and fifth-century Greece, and the difference between these and simple non-aggression treaties.

SPARTAN ISOLATIONISM

Cleomenes is more interested in matters close to home and in the Peloponnese in particular. He may or may not have been aware of Persian territorial ambitions in Europe, but he has very little interest in getting Sparta embroiled in the independence and other political ambitions of the Dorian and Ionian city-states on islands in the eastern Aegean and city-states along the western coast of Anatolia. In 499 the Ionians in an attempt to enlist Spartan support for a revolt against their Persian ruler, Darius, send Aristagoras, the tyrant of Miletus, to Sparta.

To begin the discussion, Aristagoras said, “Cleomenes, do not be surprised at my urgency in coming here, for this is how matters stand: that the sons of the Ionians are slaves instead of free men is a disgrace and the most painful anguish, but also to you especially of all others, inasmuch as you are the leaders of Hellas. [3] So now—by the gods of the Hellenes—come rescue the Ionians from slavery; they are of the same blood as you, after all. This will be easy for you to accomplish, since the barbarians are not valiant, while you have attained the highest degree of excellence in war (Hdt 5.49.2–3).

Aristagoras continues his flattery, skipping lightly over the geographical obstacles and the fact that the Spartans are not seafarers, saying: ¹⁸

[8] Well, then, would it not be advantageous for you to postpone your fight against the Messenians who are your equal in battle and whose land is neither so extensive nor fertile and is limited by confining boundaries, and to cease fighting against the Arcadians and Argives, who have no gold or silver, for which a man eagerly fights to the death? But when it is possible to gain the rule over all of Asia, why would you choose to do anything else? [9] That was what Aristagoras said, and Cleomenes replied, “My guest friend of Miletus, I am going to delay giving you my answer until the day after tomorrow (Hdt 5.49.8–9)

Herodotus continues his account:

¹⁸ Unless Aristagoras is suggesting that the Spartans take an all land route to the Hellespont then depending upon the scale of island-hopping across the Aegean the sailing distance from the Peloponnese to (say) Ephesus on the Anatolian coast is some three hundred nautical miles.

When the day they had appointed for the answer arrived and they met at the place they had agreed upon, Cleomenes asked Aristagoras how many days the journey would take to go from the sea of the Ionians to the King. [2] Aristagoras, though he had cleverly misled Cleomenes in everything else, stumbled at this point. For he ought not to have told him the real distance if he wanted to bring the Spartans into Asia, but instead, he told them it was a journey of three months inland. [3] And at that, Cleomenes cut him short and focussing on the journey said, “My guest-friend of Miletus, you must depart Sparta before sunset. Your request will never be accepted by the Lacedaemonians. if you intend to lead them on a three-month journey away from the sea” (Hdt 5.50.1–3).

According to Herodotus, Aristagoras will not take no for answer and follows Cleomenes back to his residence where he tries to bribe the Spartan king with silver bullion, starting at ten talents and increasing the bribe to fifty talents (Hdt. 5.51.1–2). But Cleomenes is not alone and refuses to send his daughter, Gorgo, into another room as Aristagoras requests. It is at this stage that she interjects, “Father, your guest-friend is going to corrupt you unless you leave and stay away from him” (Hdt. 5.51.2). Apocryphal or not, Gorgo is making the point that bribery can be difficult to resist; and, even worse, quickly becomes endemic as it engenders bribery of others with the proceeds—perhaps even for a good cause.

TROUBLES WITH ARGOS

There is always an uneasy rivalry between Argos and Sparta (Hdt. 6.76). And in 494 Cleomenes, taking advantage of guile and a particularly ambiguous Delphic double oracle, decisively defeats the Argives at Sepeia. In an early morning attack many Argive hoplites are slaughtered while the remainder flee for refuge into a sacred precinct within the grove of Argos (Hdt. 6.78). Cleomenes forces then deceive some fifty Argive fighters into surrendering as prisoners of war by announcing that the appropriate ransom has been paid—those surrendering are immediately butchered (Hdt. 6.79). At that point, Cleomenes orders his helots to pile up wood around the grove, and . . . he [then] set the entire grove on fire (Hdt. 6.80).¹⁹ On his triumphant return to Sparta his political

enemies bring him on trial before the ephors for his conduct of the war against Argos—specifically that he had not captured and razed the city when he had the opportunity and had accepted bribes not to do so (Hdt. 6.82.1).²⁰ Resorting to a plausible interpretation of oracles, Cleomenes is acquitted by his judges (6.82.1–2). Either way, with the massacre of so many Argive men of military age, Argos ceases to pose a major threat to Spartan hegemony for a generation (Hdt. 6.83).²¹

PERSIAN EXPANSIONISM IN EUROPE

At the end of the campaign season in 492 Mardonios who has been subduing scattered resistance in Thrace, but who loses much of his supporting navy in violent storms in the northern Aegean Sea, withdraws with his remaining troops and ships back to Asia (Hdt. 6.45). But next year Darius makes it evident that he intends attack mainland Greece.

Darius tried to test the Hellenes to find out whether they intended to wage war against him or to surrender to him. [2] He sent out heralds in all directions throughout Hellas and ordered them to ask for earth and water for the King [swear fealty to him] (Hdt. 6.48.1–2).

On the mainland, many of the Hellenes visited by the heralds gave what the Persians asked, as did all of the islanders to whom the heralds had come with the request.

¹⁹ We infer that those who did not surrender to be butchered on the spot are burned alive in the sanctuary.

²⁰ In her long article entitled “Herodotus and Spartan Despotism,” Ellen Millender tries to make the case against Cleomenes; but close reading shows that at this time, late in the sixth century and early in the fifth, the Spartan kings operate very much under a constitutional monarchy, strictly a dyarchy, and their freedom to act in matters foreign and domestic is very limited and governed by precedent, if not law.

²¹ A continual irritant, the Spartans cannot venture outside of the Peloponnesus without leaving a hostile Argos behind them with the Argive leadership just itching to cause trouble among Sparta’s helots when the Spartan army is preoccupied elsewhere. During the Second Greco-Persian War, Argos promises the Persian general Mardonios that they will hinder any Spartan troops leaving the Peloponnesus. In fact the Argives are far too weak and can only warn the Persians who have occupied Athens again that Pausanias is on the march (Hdt. 9.12.1–2).

Included among the islanders who gave earth and water to Darius were the Aeginetans. [2] And as soon as they had done so, the Athenians assailed them thinking that the Aeginetans had granted the King's request out of hostility to themselves, in order to march with the Persians. Happily exploiting this pretext, they went to Sparta, where they accused the Aeginetans of betraying Hellas (Hdt 6.49.1–2).²²

We know that Demaratos and Cleomenes share the Spartan throne at this time, but it appears that Demaratos has his own agenda and never takes Cleomenes' lead in anything, and generally quite the converse.²³

TROUBLES IN AEGINA

Given the failure of the Persian expedition through Thrace the previous year, and the flurry of ship building in Persian controlled coastal cities, both Athens and Sparta must have been aware that the Persian invasion strategy might now involve island-hopping across the Aegean Sea rather than a naval supported land army crossing the Hellespont and then moving slowly west through Thrace and Macedon, and then south through Thessaly en route to Attica and the Peloponnese. Herodotus credits Cleomenes with recognizing that troubles in Aegina are not just an ongoing petty Athenian-Aeginetan maritime trade squabble, but that a fully medized Aegina in the middle of the Saronic Gulf represents a real and present danger to mainland Greece and he takes immediate, forceful, unilateral action (Hdt. 6.49.1). Aeginetan apologists will argue that Aegina's wealthy thalassocracy collapses without good relations with Persia and her

²² These heralds were to ask the rulers of these mainland and island, city-states for the traditional gift of "Earth and Water" which symbolized their surrender and submission to Persian rule—at the very least they would become tribute-paying vassal states, likely with a small Persian garrison to keep watch. We learn later that these heralds were not treated very diplomatically at all by either Sparta or Athens—they were murdered and their bodies never seen again (Hdt 7.133.1). This incident has echoes of the young prince Alexander of Macedon's actions several decades earlier with Persian envoys demanding fealty from his father (Hdt. 5.18.2–5.21.1).

²³ The dyarchs are all Heraclidae, or Heraclids, hereditary masters of the Peloponnese. They are descended from Hyllus, the eldest of Heracles' four sons by Deianira—all of whom become Achaean kings (synonymous with Homer's Danaans, Argives, and Hellenes, but specifically not Dorians). Heracles, the only mortal in Greek mythology ever to become a god, is mentioned in eight books of the *Iliad* and three books of the *Odyssey*.

allies, particularly the Phoenicians; Herodotus will suggest that being a slave to Persian silver is neither being free nor Greek. The Aeginetan oligarchy sells out any notions of a Pan-Hellenic identity to economic expedience. Pan-Hellenism has many facets including: economic, religious, and cultural in addition to the military and political.

In response to this accusation against them, the Spartan king Cleomenes son of Anaxandridas crossed over to Aegina intending to arrest the most guilty Aeginetans. [2] But when he tried to arrest them, other Aeginetans showed up to oppose him, foremost among them one Krios son of Polykritos, who said that Cleomenes would not get away with seizing even on Aeginetan for he [Cleomenes] had no authority from the Spartan government for doing this, but had been swayed by Athenian money; otherwise his fellow king of the Spartans would have accompanied him to make the arrests. [3] The source of Krios' accusation was a letter from Demaratos (Hdt. 6.50.1–3).

Like the Athenians, Cleomenes sees immediately what a strategic “plum” the island represents. In his case, Sparta has no navy and must rely on her League allies; but from a secure base on Aegina a Persian invasion force can sail around to the Gulf of Laconia perhaps capturing Kythira en route, disembark, and moving up the Eurotas river valley from the south attack Sparta, a completely unwallled collection of villages rather than a city.²⁴ In this instance the Aeginetan' accusation of Athenian bribery is ridiculous; but the conclusion that Demaratos' meddling borders on treason is not.²⁵ Cleomenes' frustration is understandable. This is not the first time that his diplomatic and military missions have been thwarted by Demaratos' backstabbing.

Completely blind to all this, Demaratos son of Ariston, the other dyarch is not present, but remains behind in Sparta where, according to Herodotus, he is actively maligning Cleomenes (Hdt. 6.51). Again, according to Herodotus, Demaratos is

²⁴ Kythira, which perhaps fortunately in this instance, has no natural deep water harbours, is strategically located between Crete and the Peloponnesus.

²⁵ The Aeginetans should have thought along the lines of Isagoras several decades earlier and proposed acceptance of a bribe that is difficult either to confiscate or to be obliged to share (Hdt. 5.70.1). But Cleomenes is now older and among the Athenian dignitaries' wives there may not have been any credible, that is both alluring and wilfully patriotic, candidates.

motivated by jealousy and malice. And Cleomenes ponders how to legally depose him from the Eurypontid kingship seizing on what may have been an irregular birth (Hdt. 6.61.1).²⁶ Ariston son of Agasicles was dyarch of Sparta from about 550 to 510, but despite marrying twice he remained childless.

Herodotus comments without elaboration that Ariston knew that he was not “the cause of the problem” (Hdt. 6.61.2). The intrigue of divine descent would only add to the allure and conceivably for such an important dynastic matter appropriately youthful Spartan widows with children of their own patriotically agree to sequester themselves for several months while being visited by the teenaged Agiad or Eurypontid heir, providing an enviable opportunity for him to demonstrate his potency and reproductive prowess to the ephors and elders.

He divorced his second wife and tricked his good friend Agetus into giving him his wife. She duly bore him a son, Demaratos; but unless he was premature he may not have been Ariston’s biological son at all (Hdt. 6.63.1–3). Cleomenes uses this incident from thirty or forty years ago for revenge (Hdt 6.64). He persuades Leotychidas, who is from a cadet branch of the Eurypontid line, to challenge Demaratos’ legitimacy in court (Hdt. 6.65.1–4).²⁷ Remember, an unassailable claim of Heraclid descent is the sole legitimizing criterion in Sparta’s unique dual monarchy. In this case the Spartans are forging a link back to the Heroic Age and to a time just before the Trojan War, and so this is serious, near religious, business.

In 491 a year before Marathon, Cleomenes with the new dyarch, Leotychidas, returns to Aegina. Herodotus writes:

[Cleomenes] at once took Leotychidas with him and advanced on the Aeginetans, against whom he bore a bitter grudge for their having treated him so contemptuously before. [2] Now that both kings had come against them the Aeginetans decided not to

²⁶ The Persians, notable horsemen, are hardly great seafarers, but their allies the Phoenicians deservedly hold an enviable reputation. One obvious invasion route involves leaving the Anatolian coast and sailing north-west across the Aegean Sea subjugating one-by-one those Cyclades Islands not already controlled by Persia.

²⁷ Demaratos’ mother subsequently explains to him that he was either Ariston’s son or the son of the Agiad Spartan hero Astrabakos—not really an explanation at all (Hdt. 6.68–6.69).

offer any further resistance, so the Spartan kings selected ten Aeginetans of the highest value in terms of wealth and lineage and took them away. Among them were the most powerful Aeginetans, Krios son of Polykritos and Kasambros son of Aristokrates. The kings brought these men to Attica and deposited them as hostages with the Athenians, who were the most hostile enemies of the Aeginetans (Hdt. 6.73.1–2).

We will never know whether the Persians seriously entertain the notion of using Aegina as a base for their attacks on Eretria and Athens. If they did, their plan on an unopposed landing and occupation during the 490 campaign season, Cleomenes' actions effectively scotch a critical part of the Persian's island-hopping invasion option. Doubtless the Athenians who were trading rivals with Aegina were delighted to take these Aeginian hostages off Cleomenes' hands.

IMPIETY AND CORRUPTION OF THE DELPHIC ORACLE

Cleomenes' efforts to depose a dyarch lead to one of the more distressing episodes in his reign, all stemming from his seemingly endless disputes with his co-regent from the Eurypontid line, Demaratos, and result in his corruption of the priestess at Delphi. The end rarely justifies the means, particularly when the Delphic Oracle is invoked.

The controversy continued until finally the Spartans decided to ask the oracle at Delphi whether Demaratos was or was not the son of Ariston. [2] It was Cleomenes who had come up with the idea to refer his question to the Pythia, and he next gained the support of Kobon son of Aristophanes, who wielded the greatest influence at Delphi and who then persuaded Periallos the Pythia to proclaim what Cleomenes wanted her to say. [3] And thus when the sacred delegates presented their question, the Pythia asserted that Demaratos was not the son of Ariston. Later, however, these intrigues became known, and as a result, Kobon was exiled from Delphi, while Periallos the Pythia was ousted from her position of honor (Hdt. 6.66.1–3).

And so that is how Demaratos is deposed in about 491, and why Leotychidas, a close relative in the Eurypontid line of succession, is appointed to his place (Hdt. 6.67.1).²⁸

With Demaratos out of the way, Cleomenes and the new Eurypontid king Leotychidas finally act against the Aeginetans and take the ten most powerful citizens prisoner and leave them with the Athenians as hostages (Hdt. 6.73). It will be another decade before any Pan-Hellenic unity in this East-West aggression will emerge, and only when the Hellenes all know that Xerxes is assembling his huge invasion force in Sardis. The most serious of these hostilities is that between Athens and Aegina, who mutually agree to temporarily set aside their grievances (Hdt. 7.145.1). Self-interest is a powerful motivator.

Demaratos is exiled and seeking safety ends up as an honoured guest and respected advisor in Darius' court in Susa. Herodotus goes out of his way to imply that Demaratos is not guilty of treason but almost certainly has no expectations that he will ever recover the Spartan throne.

MYSTERIOUS DEMISE

Cleomenes' final days as the Agiad king are no less controversial and cloaked in mystery—does he drift into insanity—is there a medical explanation for what appears to be dementia—or is he now regarded as a loose cannon and quietly assassinated on orders from the Board of Ephors or perhaps a clique within the Council of Elders?²⁹ Even the date of his demise—before or after Marathon—is clouded in uncertainty. Herodotus offers several seemingly plausible accounts but does not supply a chronology.

When the Lacedaemonians learned what Cleomenes was up to, they became afraid and brought him back to Sparta, where he resumed ruling on the same terms as he had

²⁸ In book 1, Herodotus describes the lavish silver and gold *dedications* that Gyges bestows on the Delphic oracle after he and Candaules' widow receive a favourable pronouncement on their violent dynastic change (Hdt. 1.14.1–2). Throughout his *Histories* Herodotus hints that there is often more than a sulphurous whiff of something else emanating from Delphi's depths. Cleomenes is far from the first Greek or non-Greek to dip into their treasury to encourage, assure, or reward, a favourable prophesy—corruption.

²⁹ See Alan Griffiths' article "Was Cleomenes Mad?" in Anton Powell, ed. *Classical Sparta*. Griffiths admits that he cannot separate fact from folklore (nuggets from *nugae*), but observes a certain literary parallel with Cleomenes' Persian contemporary Cambyses, both of whom—whether nonsense or not—are accused of insanity evidenced by their numerous atrocities exacerbated by acts of impiety.

before. But as soon as he returned, he was stricken by madness (although he had been somewhat deranged even before this). For now, whenever he encountered a Spartan, he would thrust his staff into his face. [2] Because he was doing this and not in his right mind, his relatives confined him to a wooden pillory, and while he was thus confined, he noticed that one of the guards had been left alone with him and he asked the guard to give him a knife. The guard refused at first, but when Cleomenes threatened what he would do to him when he was released, the frightened guard, who was a helot, gave him a knife. [3] Cleomenes then took the weapon and started to mutilate himself beginning from his shins. Cutting his flesh lengthwise, he proceeded to his thighs, and from his thighs, his hips, and then his sides, until he reached his abdomen, which he thoroughly shredded and then died (Hdt. 6.75.1–3).

Herodotus summarizes contemporary thoughts on what may have caused this bizarre behaviour.

Many of the Hellenes say this happened because he bribed the Pythia to give those responses concerning Demaratos; but according to the Athenians it was because he had invaded Eleusis, he had ravaged the precinct of the goddesses. The Argives, however, say it was because he had brought the fugitives out of the sanctuary of Argos and executed them, and had no regard for the grove itself but burned it down (Hdt. 6.75.3).

The Spartans, however, say that Cleomenes became deranged not because of any divine force, but because he had become, through his association with Scythians, a drinker of undiluted wine. [2] For the Scythian nomads, eager to punish Darius for having invaded their lands had sent an embassy to Sparta to form an alliance and to organize a plan whereby they themselves would attempt to invade Media from the Phasis river, and they wanted to arrange that the Spartans would march inland from Ephesus and meet them at the same place. [3] They say that when the Scythians had come to Sparta for this purpose, Cleomenes spent a great deal of time in their company, and in fact associated with them more than was appropriate; and it was from them that he learned to drink unmixed wine, which the Spartans believe was the cause of his madness (Hdt. 6.84.1).

Herodotus, ever cautious about impiety, which is still a capital offence, also takes the view that one way or another Cleomenes' insanity is divine punishment for his treatment of Demaratos.³⁰ But the impiety accusation is potentially capricious, if not downright disingenuous. Some five hundred years later Cicero explores the general point about state sponsored religion, writing:³¹

For the doctrines of all these thinkers abolish not only superstition, which implies a groundless fear of the gods, but also religion, which consists in piously worshipping them. Take again those who have asserted that the entire notion of the immortal gods is a fiction invented by wise men in the interest of the state, to the end that those whom reason was powerless to control might be led in the path of duty by religion; surely this view was absolutely and entirely destructive of religion (Cic. *Nat. D.* 1.117–118).

Herodotus reveals his ambivalence if not mild scepticism in several instances in his *Histories*, and he may harbour the same heretical thoughts as those that Cicero puts down in the first part of his treatise, *The Nature of the Gods*.

We will never know, but Cleomenes' largely successful reign over some three decades suggests that dementia, if that is what it is, comes very quickly and only at the end of his reign.³² He is succeeded to the Agiad throne by his younger half-brother Leonidas who is already married to his niece, Cleomenes' only child, Gorgo, and who has at least one male child, Pleistarcus, by her.³³ Herodotus does not comment on the

³⁰ There is always the background thought that like Wenceslaus I, the early tenth-century duke of Bavaria, Cleomenes was stabbed to death by his nobles because they feared that he was too progressive.

³¹ Arguably fifth- and fourth-century Greeks, especially the Athenians, are always quick to take down any leader before (in their opinion) he gets far too big for his boots. And this particular accusation—impiety—is often circular and exceedingly difficult to defend, as even (ὑβρις) *hybris*—another charge—is used as evidence.

³² Alas, we do not know when these Scythian envoys were in Sparta and that story may be entirely fanciful. If the Ionians were unable to lure the Spartans into a military adventure in Persia, what is the likelihood that the nomadic Scythians (modern Ukraine) from the Black Sea, even further away, could ever interest them in a punitive raid?

selection process, but obviously Leonidas' marriage to Gorgo considerably tidies-up any lingering Agiad succession uncertainties which were created in the middle of the sixth-century when the Spartan ephors and gerontes insist that his father, Anaxandridas II, however unwillingly, enters into a bigamous union with the sole purpose of providing the state with a legitimate Agiad male heir apparent. But with Cleomenes' death comes the death of the architect of the Peloponnesian League. Herodotus continues his *Histories* and we learn that no one, however weakly Pan-Hellenic, is able to take up this particular leadership challenge.

POSTSCRIPT ON MILITARY ALLIANCES

In 491 and 490 there is no such thing as a Hellenic Alliance, nor is there one in 480 and 479. We know that Athens requests *ad hoc* Spartan assistance during the first Greco-Persian War, but this is a *here and now* request. We know that Sparta sends assistance, albeit too late to participate in the battle at Marathon; but Herodotus does not suggest that any other members of the Peloponnesian League send troops. Maddeningly, Herodotus does not tell us by whom the Spartan contingent is led—surely not one of the kings or he would have said so (Hdt. 6.120). Arguably, the Peloponnesian League believe that the Eretrians and Athenians have brought this Persian visitation upon themselves with their earlier raid on Sardis and provided that the retaliatory Persian raid is limited to looting, butchering the male defenders, selling the women and children into slavery, and burning the two cities to the ground with no intention of ever establishing a permanent garrison, their interest in the continued well-being of such a demonstrably ungrateful people is minimal.

Although Herodotus uses an expression which scholars may want to translate as Hellenic Alliance when describing the events of the second Greco-Persian War, the usage is potentially misleading. In 481 and 480, a decade after Cleomenes has been succeeded by his half-brother Leonidas, Athens and her allies again seek military support from the Peloponnesian League knowing that Xerxes will cross into mainland Greece from the

³³ Pleistarcus was still a minor when his father, Leonidas I, was killed at Thermopylae in 580. His uncle, Cleombrotus, and then Pausanias, Cleombrotus' son and therefore Pleistarcus' cousin, serve as regents.

east with a huge land army. The political cost of this military assistance is to give overall command of all land and naval forces to Spartan nominees.

AN OMINOUS FUTURE

The Athenians must agree to this surrender of overall command because they know that other members of the Peloponnesian League will not participate under anything but Spartan leadership. Consequently, any so called Hellenic Alliance is essentially the Peloponnesian League plus Athens and a small handful of weak passengers, many of whom quickly medize before or following the battle of Thermopylae. We know that several members of the League immediately before the naval battle off Salamis call a council meeting arguing for a combined naval and land army defence at the Isthmus (Hdt. 8.73.2). Evidently Sparta has no veto to prohibit a member state from withdrawing their contingent from the League, nor absolute control over strategy.

Conversely we know that the Delian League is formed sometime after 479 and comes into being because of completely divergent interests between the city-states in the Peloponnese and Athens with her new-found allies in the Aegean (Hdt. 9.106.4 and 9.114.2). And Athens retains tight control of this League and those who do not contribute manned triremes are obliged to provide bullion in lieu of ships and men. Even more ominously, over time, members of the League will be persuaded to simply supply bullion rather than manned warships—effectively unilateral disarmament for all but the Athenians. Initially the communal bullion is stored within the temple treasuries at Delos, but then—ominously—it is moved to Athens for what the Athenians perversely, if not disingenuously, call safekeeping. The threat of Persian dominance is quickly replaced by real Athenian dominance.³⁴

³⁴ After Athens creates the Delian League, the Peloponnesian League, sometimes called the Spartan Alliance, continues in being; whereas Argos is never a member, several cities outside of the Peloponnese including Thebes and Phocis are added.

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Atossa, Queen of Persia

[Hdt. 2.1.1–2, Hdt. 3.66.2, 3.88.2, 3.133–134, Hdt.7.2.1–3, and 7.3.4]

INTRODUCTION

What Herodotus principally tells us about Atossa's life is that as a daughter of Cyrus the Great she actively participates in rather than just witnesses the reigns of the first four Achaemenid kings—Cyrus, Cambyses, Darius, and Xerxes—and plays a critical role during this long period of dynastic turbulence influencing both the succession and the direction and pace of Persian empire building during the late sixth and early fifth centuries. Given that under the Achaemenid Empire polygamy is the conventional practice, and where for dynastic and diplomatic reasons Persian monarchs take multiple official wives for legitimate progeny and any number of concubines for pleasure and progeny, at first sight, the likelihood of an enduring companionate marriage appears to be remote.¹ Generally in his *Histories*, whether of noble birth or not, women are given virtually no role beyond the purely domestic in many of the city-states in mainland Greece. Nonetheless, one Herodotian scholar has noted fifty-three instances in the *Histories* where women or femininity play a decisive role in the outcome of a particular event.² Although this seldom seen or heard domestic restriction is particularly true for Athenian women, Herodotus shows that Spartan women are a surprising and noteworthy

¹ Herodotus frequently records the matrimonial practices of other cultures occasionally pointing out the differences between these and Hellenic serial monogamy with its double standard for male infidelity. This companionate marriage is in the same sense that Odysseus wishes for Nausicaa (*Od.* 6.201–202). Herodotus notes that the sixth-century Egyptian king, Amasis, refuses to send his daughter to Cambyses because he knows that she will be used only as one of many royal concubines and not honoured as an official wife (Hdt. 3.1.2–5). From time to time, even royal concubines could be “assigned” to pleasure visiting dignitaries as a mark of their high esteem.

² In an appendix to his article “La femme et le pouvoir chez Herodote” Alexandre Tourraix lists the passages from all nine books of the *Histories*: Hdt. 1.1–5, 1.7–14, 1.34, 1.60, 1.73–74, 1.84, 1.91, 1.93, 1.105, 1.107–120, 1.184, 1.185, 1.201; Hdt. 2.1, 2.35, 2.54, 2.104, 2.111, 2.121, 2.151; Hdt. 3.1, 3.31–32, 3.50, 3.68–69, 3.84–88, 3.118–119, 3.124, 3.133–134, 3.150–159; Hdt. 4.1, 4.60, 4.145, 4.154–155; Hdt. 5.12–15, 5.20, 5.39–42, 5.92, 5.126; Hdt. 6.43, 6.51–52, 6.61, 6.107, 6.137–140; Hdt. 7.1, 7.2, 7.3, 7.5, 7.75, 7.61–62, 7.205; Hdt. 8.137, Hdt. 9.108–102, 9.122 (Tourraix 385–386).

exception.³ This exception applies even more dramatically in the case for well-born women whose ethnicity and culture is distinctly other than Greek—non-Greek—or as Herodotus puts it, Barbarian. Xerxes’ mother, Atossa, is such an exception.

THE LAST OF THE ASIAN HERACLIDS

In fact Herodotus’ *Histories* are book-ended with lurid, prurient tales of two remarkably strong-minded, non-Greek, women—Candaules’ queen Nyssia and Xerxes’ queen Amestris—not that we should surmise that Herodotus is remotely suggesting either consort should serve as a suitable role model even for Barbarian women to emulate.⁴ Although silent about the exercise of male sexuality, Herodotus lets both remarkable women vigorously defend not only their own dignity, but the dignity of the monarchy in general. However, both women elect to use what one scholar will describe as “royal barbaric power.”⁵ The story of the late eighth-century Lydian king, Candaules; his queen, and a favoured royal bodyguard, Gyges son of Daskylos, is quickly told (Hdt. 1.7.4–1.14.4).

Candaules son of Myrsos is so proud of his exceedingly beautiful wife, to the extent that he even wants to show her off completely naked to his bodyguard.⁶ Although assured that this viewing can take place without her knowledge, the bodyguard, Gyges, initially wants nothing to do with this impropriety and carefully explains why:

³ Arguably, both Gorgo and Artemisia are Spartan / Dorian exceptions to this largely Athenocentric observation. Although she is never named by Herodotus, Nysia’s first husband is the somewhat strange Lydian king, Candaules. In stark contrast, Amestris, who is named by Herodotus and indeed becomes Xerxes’ queen, is a daughter of the Persian nobleman and kingmaker Otanes. For the woeful Nysia story in full see book 1 (Hdt. 1.8.1–1.14.4), and for that of Amestris see book 9 (Hdt. 9.109.1–9.113.2).

⁴ See David Ashiri et al, 81. Scholars have unearthed a number of names for Candaules’ wife from other sources: including: Nysia, Clytia, Habro, and Toudo. Likely facing such a cornucopia, or perhaps a plethora of possible names, Herodotus elects not to privilege any particular one.

⁵ For this phrase and its ambiguous if not confusing word order I am indebted to Vivienne Gray.

⁶ Gyges may well be a bachelor and his sexual experience limited to amorous liaisons with accommodating widows and *pornai*. One speculation is that Candaules is a voyeur and assumes everyone else is, too. Evidently it is a short step from voyeurism to insisting that the vicarious observer becomes the observed performer.

“My Lord, what are you saying? Insanity! You order me to see your mistress naked? When a woman’s dress is removed so is her dignity. [4] People long ago recognized what principles are noble and good, and we should learn from them. Among them is this one: ‘Look only at what belongs to you.’ I do believe that she is the most beautiful of all women, and I beg you not to ask for what is against all decency” (Hdt. 1.8.3–4).⁷

Woefully lacking the courage of his convictions Gyges eventually decides that he must comply with his king’s wishes, and one evening Candaules conceals his bodyguard behind an open door in the royal bedchamber before withdrawing himself.⁸ Later, Gyges watches as the queen enters, prepares herself for bed, and undresses in front of him. He silently slips out of the bedchamber; alas not unseen, and so ends this compulsory introduction to voyeurism by his monarch. The queen, although hopping mad about the lewd affront, realises that this must be all her degenerate husband’s doing, pretends not to notice.⁹ The next day she summons Gyges and delivers her murderous ultimatum:

“Now, Gyges, there are two roads before you, and I shall let you choose which you want to take. Either kill Kandaules and have me and the kingdom of the Lydians, or

⁷ Although speaking through a Barbarian, this is a rare instance of Herodotus revealing his own take on morally acceptable behaviour. Far beyond covetousness, let alone a proto-feminist rejection of treating women as objects of sexual desire and twenty-three hundred years before Kant, Herodotus is firmly rejecting the notion of using any person as a means to an end. He also shows how the exercise of royal barbaric power can turn even an aristocrat into a slave.

⁸ Exploiting a very different variant of this story Plato has Gyges as a simple shepherd. There is no reason to presume that Herodotus’ Gyges is a peasant, he is more probably an aristocrat, and such social status will make his future marriage to the widowed queen more plausible and less problematic; in any case—pauper or prince—he reluctantly obeys. Herodotus writes, “Since Gyges could not escape, he was won over” (Hdt. 1.10.1). He may not be executed if he declines, but he will lose favour and might be dismissed—instead of following his conscience and accepting any consequences, he complies, becoming less than upright and a slave.

⁹ You do not have to be a late nineteenth-century Austro-German psychiatrist to divine that Candaules’ behaviour—after whom the psychiatric disorder *candaulism* is named—is aberrant. The term was first coined by Richard Freiherr von Krafft-Ebing in his book *Psychopathia sexualis: Eine klinisch-forensische Studie* first published in 1886. There must be more desirable ways to get your name into a Psychology handbook such as the APA’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Psychiatric Disorders* (DSM-5).

you yourself must die at once so that in the future you will never see things you should not see in your complete obedience to Candaules. [2] At any rate, either he should die, since he planned the deed, or you should, since you saw me naked, which violated all decency” (Hdt. 1.11.2–3).

Herodotus is telling a story. Of course, just like his contemporary audience, we all know that reported direct speech—especially in another language, and certainly not in any fifth-century Greek dialect—has not been preserved over several centuries for any of the characters in his *Histories*, so we momentarily and willingly suspend our disbelief. There is no way Candaules’ queen is going to let him get out of this one; and when faced with one of history’s more obvious of Hobson’s choices if not the classic definition and an example of an *aporia*, Gyges the king’s bodyguard meekly asks the king’s consort how best the assassination might unfold—to which she replies with savage, if poetic, justice:

“The attack will be made from the very place he revealed me naked, and the assault will be made upon him in his sleep” (Hdt. 1.11.5).

The queen even provides the dagger—doubtless a keen heirloom—Gyges kills Candaules exactly as directed, and now with bedchamber and throne vacated promptly claims the dowager queen and the kingdom.¹⁰ Perturbed over this violent dynastic change, the Lydian people request the Delphic Oracle to pronounce final judgement.¹¹ Candaules is, of course, a Heraclid, but Cyrus, a Persian and not a Heraclid at all, is the unwitting

¹⁰ There is no mention of regency; so perhaps at this time Nyssia is childless and her *faits accomplis* with Gyges diminish any potential claims to the Lydian throne by others. The Lydians use the mythical name Tylon for Heracles and his descendants; Tylonids are therefore synonymous with Heraclids. Candaules was the last Lydian king of this long dynasty of twenty-two descendants. Gyges is the first king of the Memnad, or Gygid, dynasty

¹¹ Gyges’ kingship is confirmed, but with a weasel clause to the effect that Heraclid retribution will come to his fourth descendent. Of course, by the middle of the sixth century when Croesus—who turns out to be the last king of Lydia—reaches the throne, everyone has forgotten about this part of the Pythia’s pronouncement. Croesus is defeated by the Persian king, Cyrus, in 547/546 (Hdt. 1.91.1). Cyrus had already defeated Croesus’ brother-in-law, Astyages—the last king of the Medes—in 550 (Hdt. 1.130.1–3).

instrument of the Heraclids bringing retribution for the earlier regicide.¹² No good deed should go unpunished.¹³

Never far from a Homeric and mythological link, this introduces a number of interpretive challenges as a number of Greek city-states also claim Heraclidian descent.¹⁴ The Heraclid kings of Lydia stem from the union of Heracles and Omphale, whereas the Heraclid kings of Sparta stem from the union of Heracles and Deianira. But in a strange role reversal at one time Omphale owns Heracles' body if not his soul, outright as a slave, but the slave-owner quickly becomes her own slave's mistress and even later his second spouse. Gyges is not the Lydian queen's slave at all, just one of husband's court appointees but likely a noble. Furthermore, Candaules' self-satisfaction is a similar pathology but much more severe than that demonstrated by Croesus with Solon.¹⁵ We might also note that possession of a *Playboy Centrefold* spouse is not among Solon's happiness criteria. Both Candaules and Croesus are saying, "Look at how lucky I am." From an Athenian viewpoint, where even the names of their wives and daughters remain unmentioned outside the home and the immediate family, Candaules' transgression is unbelievably vile. Nyssia may take great delight in being admired by her subjects, but not in that demeaning way; knowing how easily sex is commodified, she has no interest in being commodified herself. We can readily concede that she is provoked, while not

¹² Actually, Candaules is the twenty-second in a continuous line of father-to-son Heraclids—Asian Heraclids, that is (Hdt. 1.7.4 and Gantz, *Myths: Vol. 1* 439–442). Perhaps the point is that after that number of generations only the primitive and least desirable aspects of Heracles' character endure—namely a weakness for and propensity to succumb to the most base of male urges—an unbridled appetite for sex and extreme violence. This brings us back to Heraclitus' maxim—character is destiny.

¹³ Not part of that oracle, but the argument can be made that the victories of Pausanias at Plataea and Leotyichidas at Mycale are also the (Spartan) descendants of the Heraclids getting even with the ultimate successors to, or perhaps usurpers of Candaules' kingdom.

¹⁴ In terms of heritage, we should not forget the Thirteenth Labour of Heracles (Gantz, *Myths: Vol. 1* 379).

¹⁵ Recall that Croesus was displeased with, if not incapable of comprehending, either of Solon's judgements that immeasurable wealth does not necessarily translate into great happiness, and that good luck does not endure forever (Hdt. 1.32.8–9, and 1.33).

conceding that her reactions are justified.¹⁶ Fifth-century Athenians might extol a youthful naked male body in athletic competition and in sculpture, but their women are covered from their shoulders to their ankles to the extent that the skimpy off-shoulder, slit-skirt tunics favoured by young Spartan women are considered shamelessly indecent (Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores* 36, 83).

ROYAL BARBARIC POWER

For Herodotus' audience, the Queen's reaction is understandable, albeit extreme. It is also in line with the precedent set by more than one Olympian goddess for similar transgressions.¹⁷ However, the principal issue is not her behaviour; it is Candaules'. He authors his own demise. In many respects Candaules is exhibiting a more extreme variant of Croesus' narcissistic and histrionic personality disorder. Does he wish to create envy in a loyal and trusted subject? Does he want to torment Gyges, his chief bodyguard, with an arousal where fulfillment is forbidden? In this instance the queen, in turn, has no hesitation in showing Gyges how these newly unleashed desires can be gratified with a kingdom thrown in to boot.¹⁸

In short, both kings are so grossly insecure to the extent that they crave being envied for their possessions and reinforce this with the wish to flaunt everything—"Look at what a lucky dog I am!"—"Look at with whom I enjoy ecstasy in my bedchamber, whenever I wish"—or—"Look at all these amphora, each filled to the top with gold"—"And, it is all mine, mine, mine!" The Amestris story from early in the fifth century, to be discussed later, similarly explores the unforgiving nature of an absolute monarchy in terms of the dignity of women in a polygamous, potentially carnally competitive and

¹⁶ This is much more than the "looking" confession by James Earl Carter, see *Playboy* Interview, Vol. 23. No. 11 (November 1976): 63-86.

¹⁷ In one myth variant Athena blinds the seer Tiresias, and in another, Artemis turns Actaeon into a stag which is soon torn into pieces by his own hunting dogs.

¹⁸ Throwing either monarch on the psychoanalyst's couch is far beyond the scope of this study, let alone this author's interests—but both rulers display elements of the narcissistic and the attention seeking pathology of the histrionic. Neither trait is ever particularly endearing.

factions, royal household harbouring barely governed ambitions and sexual desires. In her 1995 article, Vivienne Gray argues:

The tendency to read these two stories [involving Nyssia and Amestris] exclusively in terms of the otherness of women seems unjustified, however. The vengeful queen represents “other” for an audience used to nonactive women, but so does the king [Astyages] who serves up a dismembered child. The stories can also be read in terms of the rhetoric of the otherness of royal barbaric power, in which rulers demonstrate their otherness by coercing and oppressing their subjects to their despotic will. The role of women in the stories is better understood in this broader context, in which Herodotus constructs images of royal barbaric power—where queens are partners of kings, sharing in the “otherness” of barbaric royalty (Gray 209–210).

Gray’s important phrase here, or gallows pun, is *royal barbaric power*; indeed she goes on to argue that “the Greeks constructed barbaric royal otherness to affirm their Greekness” (Gray 201).¹⁹ Precisely why Herodotus should insert the Lydian link to Heracles and the Heraclids—one of the greatest of Greek heroes—is open to speculation. Part of the reasoning involves the structure of book 1 of the *Histories*. Herodotus draws a sharp line between myth and those events that can be affirmed. In the *Iliad*, Homer refers to the Lydians, who fought with the Trojans, as Maeones, with their capital city in the Hermus river valley.²⁰ Despite the gap of some five-hundred years Herodotus is able to show that there is an historical connection and that the chronologies of the various Anatolian kingdoms can be related in Homeric terms to those used in mainland Greece.²¹

¹⁹ Spoiling her contrast somewhat, Gray appears to forget that Astyages, the last king of the Median Empire, is not the only ancient monarch with revolting culinary practices (Hdt. 1.119.3–7). Atreus, the king of Mycenae, famously goes even one or two better and serves his estranged twin brother, Thyestes, an entrée containing the boiled flesh of two or three of his sons—their heads and hands saved for a taunting dessert. Aerope, Atreus’ adulterous spouse who also rather “liked” his twin and demonstrated this affection in the usual way, is the mother of Agamemnon and Menelaus—and everyone knows how their stories all ended up.

²⁰ The Lydian city of Sardis is not mentioned by Homer, their capital is given as Hyde, but it is in the Hermus valley, as is Sardis, in sight of snowy Mount Tmolus (*Il.* 2.976–979, 5.49–53. and 20.439).

Herodotus' audience will note that although strictly non-Greek, the Lydians, among others, will approach oracles across the Hellenic world for guidance.²² The Greeks, whatever the squabbles and petty differences among themselves—and this is where Herodotus' embryonic Pan-Hellenism creeps in—share a value system, religion, and culture that is completely incongruous with that accepted as normal by the Persians. The Achaemenid kings are absolute monarchs—they can do whatever they like, to whomever they like or dislike, whenever they like with impunity; and, to a certain extent this absolute power extends to their spouses. Not only can this absolute power be used capriciously, it can be used without restraint irrespective of good or evil intent.²³ Consequently temptation has no meaning, for Persian royalty it is solely a matter of appetite—sociopathy does not even enter into it.²⁴ Once again we must bear in mind Herodotus' general rider to all his writings—that he refuses to vouch for the truth of any of it and does not feel obliged to believe any of it himself (Hdt. 2.123 and 7.152.3). Furthermore, we must separate *why* from *what*. Rejecting Herodotus' assessment about some particular motivation or objective is one thing, but a very different thing from questioning his narrative about events—*why* is always the tougher question of the two to address and often fraught with speculation or perhaps even insight.

²¹ Arguably it is this same *royal barbaric power* that the Trojan prince Paris exercises when he visits Menelaus' palace in Sparta. He sees and desires Helen of Sparta—the most beautiful woman in the world—so he abducts her and also makes off with the bulk of Sparta's treasury to boot. His sense of entitlement is boundless, but it is others who ultimately must pay for his personal carnal gratification.

²² Arguably Herodotus has two audiences. The first comprises his performance audiences, where he presents portions of his work to the public. Here reactions might engender expansions, deletions, or subtle revisions. Finally, there are the more well-heeled reading audiences who have both leisure and access to his written work. Lacunae not evident in Herodotus' earlier oral presentations will be evident to these readers and some will ponder over his omissions. However, *ex silentio* arguments cut both ways—why write down a commonplace and bore your audience?

²³ We have to allow for some ambivalence here. Herodotus is often careful not to judge when it comes to customs. He famously lets Darius give a comparative example of the appropriate rites for disposal of the dead (Hdt. 3.38.2–4).

²⁴ See Arther Ferrill's article "Herodotus on Tyranny" where in a similar vein to that taken by Vivienne Gray, Ferrill argues that in Herodotus' view (and certainly Plato's and Aristotle's) "an oriental monarch was a legitimate *basileus*, but the *hybris* of the Persian king made him a *tyrannos*"(392).

WIDOWED TWICE

Not quite bookended, but exceptional none-the-less, Atossa, Cyrus' daughter by Cassandane, is in all probability also a full sister to the Persian king Cambyses II—her first husband. Atossa is quoted directly twice in the *Histories* and is mentioned obliquely another five times in passages from the third and the seventh books. Nevertheless by playing hop-scotch through seven of the nine books we can piece together an almost complete narrative. She is born sometime around 550 and dies in about 475, during which period she becomes the queen to three kings and the mother of Darius' successor, Xerxes. Cyrus' open-mindedness on the one hand and the advanced trend practiced by the Persians in educating their children and youth is decisive.²⁵ One of the things that Herodotus does is show that although Atossa has this absolute *royal barbaric power* she never uses it for downright evil or personal retribution. Elsewhere—again, showing rather than just telling—Herodotus demonstrates that neither the Athenian leadership nor the Spartan dyarchy have this absolute power, not that some individuals do not seek it, or at least wish for it, from time to time. For Herodotus any particular individual, regardless of personal merit, is quite simply either Greek or non-Greek.

Rightly dismissed by Gray, notions of *otherness* are often not helpful and need not be pursued further here—Greek or non-Greek is enough without introducing the now pejorative term *Barbarian*. Part of Herodotus' purpose is to uncritically show rather than judge or evaluate differences—difference is enough—and this includes differences among Persian, Spartan, and by inference Athenian women. But to begin at the beginning, we know that Cyrus the Great—sometimes identified as Cyrus II—is born at the very end of the seventh century and rules largely successfully from about 560 until his battlefield death in 530. Herodotus leads his audience through the recent history of this part of Asia showing how Cyrus creates the enormous Achaemenid Empire.²⁶

²⁵ Whether actually true or not, Herodotus goes out of his way to show that after their military defeats Cyrus does not put to death either the last king of the Medes (Astyages) or the last king of the Lydians (Croesus). We infer that they were permitted to live out their days under tight surveillance, but under considerable luxury (Hdt. 1.130.3 and 1.90.2). Since under royal barbaric power Cyrus could easily use their cured hides to cover his footstools or make decorative wall hangings, their acquiescence is assured.

When Cyrus died, the kingship was inherited by Cambyses. He was the son of Cyrus by Cassandane daughter of Pharnaspes. Cassandane had died before Cyrus, and he had grieved for her with great sorrow and ordered all of his subjects to grieve for her, too.

[2] As the son of this woman and Cyrus, Cambyses considered the Ionians and Aeolians as his slaves whom he had inherited from his father, and when he made his expedition to Egypt, he took with him these Hellenes who were now under his rule, along with the rest of his subjects (Hdt. 2.1.1–2).

Herodotus' readers will recall that Croesus, the last Lydian king, conquered the mainland Anatolian Aeolians and Ionians (Hdt. 1.26.2), but made a treaty with the Ionian Islanders (Hdt. 1.27.5). Herodotus calls all these peoples Hellenes, reinforcing the notion that they have not and will not be assimilated into the Persian Empire.²⁷ Cambyses is no fool; by taking all the young Ionian men of military age with him to Egypt, they cannot foment trouble at home in his absence, the numbers and quality of garrison troops Cambyses must leave behind is minimised, and they also serve a dual function as useful hostages.

Although the Achaemenids practise polygamy, this does not prevent the Persian rulers from having favourites among their wives if not among their concubines, although sons of the latter would be out of the line of succession. But fierce rivalry and jealousy among legitimate male offspring always engenders the threat of a disputed succession. Elsewhere, Herodotus indicates that the Persians do not practice strict primogeniture.²⁸ This discretion avoids the shadow of a demonstrably inept male heir-apparent casting gloom among the courtiers, but introduces instability with the very real prospect of civil

²⁶ Cyrus is killed battling the Massegetai having ruled for twenty-nine years (Hdt. 1.214.3). Herodotus tells us that Cyrus dreamt that one of his generals, Darius, the eldest son of Hystaspes from a cadet line of the Achaemenids, was plotting to overthrow him (Hdt. 1.209–210). But the Persian monarchy is always unstable; Xerxes, Cyrus' grandson, rules for less than twenty years before his assassination in 466.

²⁷ Herodotus' readers will learn that even at Thermopylae Xerxes' regimental commanders use whips to encourage their allied levee troops to engage with the Spartan defenders (Hdt. 7.223.3).

²⁸ Following Persian custom, before a king goes into battle, Cyrus appoints [selects?] his son, Cambyses, by his favourite wife, Cassandane, to be his heir (Hdt. 1.208).

war. Strict primogeniture only paints a large target on the back of the first-in-line of succession as a road-map to the throne

THE PERILS OF MALE-PREFERENCE PRIMOGENITURE

Evidently in Persia, but not in fifth-century mainland Greece, a brother marrying a full sister is not an odious anathema. Polygamous endogamy—in Cambyses' case to strengthen his claim to the throne—marrying the daughters of the late king—necessitates degrees of consanguinity that most cultures would abhor.²⁹ It is also possible that early signs of Cambyses' insanity are evident³⁰ Doubtless Cambyses is unstable—to use a polite term—he arranges the murder of his younger brother Smerdis, also known as Bardiya—a particularly crude way of tightening any line of succession (Hdt 3.30.1–3). He also murders one of his sisters, one who is also an official wife (Hdt. 3.32.3–4). Again, limiting the line of succession, he marries two of Cyrus' three daughters. That they are his full sisters does not worry him at all. Herodotus recounts an incident leading up to these irregular marriages:

Before this time, it was not the custom of Persians to live with their sisters. But Cambyses had happened to fall in love with one of his sisters [Atossa] and wanted to marry her. Since what he wanted was unconventional, he summoned the officials called the royal judges and asked if there was any law that would sanction a man's marrying his own sister. [3] The royal judges are men selected from all Persians to serve in this capacity until they die or are found guilty of some injustice. They judge lawsuits and are the interpreters of ancestral ordinances and institutions, and every question is

²⁹ Herodotus sometimes makes no distinction between Persians and Medes, although strictly Astyages is the last Median king, whereas Cyrus, born in Persis, is a Persian king. Herodotus uses both terms indiscriminately—Persians later include Medes, Lydians, and Carians and so on, but the term for formally offering fealty to the Achaemenid monarchy remains *medizing*. Medes are Medes. There is also a hint that the interregnum following Cambyses' death is the Medes attempting to put one of their own—one of the priestly Magoi—on the now unified throne (Persia, Media, Babylon, and Lydia including the Ionian and Dorian settlements on the Anatolian coast). The Magians (Magus / Magoi) were a Median tribe (or caste) who traditionally performed a number of religious duties within the Persian Empire.

³⁰ Herodotus reports that this insanity might be the royal disease (epilepsy) and elsewhere an addiction to strong drink (the Spartan king Cleomenes comes to mind) is suggested (Hdt. 3.33.1 and 3.34.2–3).

referred to them for judgement. [4] So they responded to Cambyses' question with an answer that was both just and safe: they said that they had discovered no law that would sanction marriage between a man and his sister, but they had found another law stating that the king of the Persians was permitted to do whatever he wanted. [5] Thus they did not break the law because of their fear of Cambyses, but in order that they would not destroy themselves by protecting the law, they discovered another one that supported the king in his desire to marry his sister (Hdt 3.31.2–5).

As is often the case, Herodotus notes cultural differences—in this case tolerated degrees of consanguinity—without judgement, while insisting that the law must never appear to be capricious as that is no law at all. But perhaps his courtiers are not entirely appalled that Cambyses insists on marrying Atossa. At least the consort to Cyrus' heir will be entirely sane. Herodotus is making the point that under an absolute monarchy perversity easily overshadows and becomes the nature of royal barbaric power—royal judges, the individuals the common people should trust the most, are as corruptible as slaves—on command they find weasel clauses in the law to make Cambyses above the law and give him *carte blanche*.³¹ In Athens, as in Sparta, the law is not so easily manipulated by those in power.

In another digression, and a brutal reminder of how fragile Atossa's influence in court might be, Herodotus recounts two lurid versions of the tale of his murder of Atossa's sister—Roxanne—who also happens to be pregnant by him.³² One is given by the Hellenes and the other by the Egyptian, where the murder took place.

The Hellenes say that Cambyses had pitted a lion cub against a puppy, and that this wife of his viewed the fight with him. When it appeared that the puppy had begun to lose the fight, another puppy, its brother, broke its chain and went to its brother's side and the

³¹ Atossa, the second youngest daughter, may well have been only teenaged when first married and in her mid-twenties when first widowed; and finding herself quickly remarried to the impostor, widowed again, and then finally married to Darius. A royal bedroom pawn, she likely never had any choice in the matter.

³² Herodotus does not give her name. Possibly there was no consensus among his sources, but this is yet another reminder of the usual status of women in fifth-century Persia—to be used either for pleasure or progeny, and then put aside.

two of them together then prevailed over the lion cub. [2] Cambyses enjoyed watching this fight, but his wife sat beside him in tears. Noticing this, Cambyses asked why she was crying, and she replied that it made her weep to see the puppy defending its brother, as she recalled Smerdis and realized he would not be able to defend Cambyses in the future. [3] The Hellenes say that Cambyses slew her because of this remark (Hdt. 3.32.1–3).

But the Egyptians say that this woman [Roxanne] was sitting next to him at the dinner table, she took a head of lettuce and stripped it of its outer leaves, and then asked her husband whether the lettuce was better stripped of its leaves or thick and full. When he answered “thick and full,” she said, [4] “But you have stripped the house of Cyrus bare, just like this lettuce.” Cambyses flew into a rage at this remark and leapt upon her. She was pregnant at the time; she miscarried and then died (Hdt. 3.32.3–4).

That the tales are different should surprise no one: Hellas is a long sea voyage away and remote from vengeance, whereas Cambyses is already occupying Egypt. The tales are difficult to interpret beyond criticising the mindless winnowing of the clan—taking siblings as deadly rivals rather than powerful supporters—but that he dies childless seems hardly punishment enough. Either way, his wives and concubines will feel particularly insecure and the youngest of Cyrus’ daughters—Artystone—relieved that she is too young for duty in anyone’s marriage bed or game of thrones. Dependant solely upon gender, Cambyses’ siblings and close Achaemenid relatives are either bedded or beheaded. Herodotus is showing what despots never learn—respect and loyalty are won, not commanded. Ultimately Cambyses’ prime duty as hereditary ruler is to secure the succession in his line, and in this he fails miserably.

Because Atossa has learned how to write and read herself, she plays a decisive role in educating and training her own children, as well as those of other Persian aristocrats—important abilities beyond the traditional skills of horsemanship, mounted-archery, and always telling the truth.³³

³³ Herodotus highlights the primary and secondary education curriculum of Persian male youth (Hdt. 1.126.2). Likely making all Persian latrine walls much less informative or entertaining, the

Cambyses son of Cyrus [the Great] died after reigning a total of seven years and five months. He had sired no children at all male or female (Hdt. 3.66.2).

So much for his amorous attentions to his multiple wives and many concubines—responsibility for the shortcoming in progeny is obvious.³⁴ Herodotus then describes a short interregnum where an impostor—who claims to be Cambyses II’s brother, Smerdis (Bardiya)—rules for seven months. He tells of how officials quiz two of the real Smerdis’ wives, Phaidymie and Atossa, and it turns out that the impostor is Smerdis the Magus (sometimes known as Gaumata)—whose ears had been lopped off earlier by Cyrus the Great as punishment for some grave but unspecified offence. The whole episode has that whiff of steamy palace intrigue and wilful collusion.³⁵ Herodotus suggests that Cambyses’ former wives, including Atossa and Otanes’ daughter, Phaidymie risk their lives in helping the Persian aristocracy to unmask the Median genealogical impostor (Hdt. 3.68.1–3.69.6).³⁶

DARING DARIUS

It is at this time, as early as 521 or as late as 518, that Darius, son of Hystaspes, joins six other conspirators who plot to depose if not kill the impostor (Hdt. 3.70.1–3).³⁷

three R’s are conspicuously absent. Close readers will note that Cambyses asserts that “his custom was to punish liars with death” (Hdt. 3.27.3).

³⁴ Elsewhere he comments that in Persia the wives visit their husbands in strict rotation (Hdt. 3.69.6). He does not tell us when, once rendered pregnant, they can leave his serving line, nor when they return to this bedchamber rotation after childbirth.

³⁵ A salacious story perhaps for the more prurient in his audience, especially one where the spouse solicits regicide in lieu of committing mariticide, nevertheless here and elsewhere Herodotus shows his fascination in the endogamous, and indeed the exogamous, matrimonial practices of other cultures. Smerdis / Bardiya was either a full or a half-brother to Cambyses; but Cambyses certainly married his sister/half sister, Atossa; and, according to Herodotus he ordered Bardiya’s murder by Prexaspes (Hdt. 3.30.3).

³⁶ Cyrus had at least three daughters by Cassandane, who was the daughter of Pharnaspes who was also an Achaemenid; the second youngest daughter, probably named Roxanne, was murdered by Cambyses in a drunken rage or perhaps an epileptic fit (Hdt. 3.32).

³⁷ Herodotus, who like many fifth-century Greeks is fascinated by genealogy, lets Xerxes give us Darius’ genealogy, during an incident when he denounces his uncle saying, “If I fail to punish

Smerdis the Magus is eventually stabbed to death in his palace by Darius with the assistance of several other conspirators. Herodotus then embarks on a long digression about a supposed Persian debate among the conspirators on what form of government to adopt (Hdt. 3.80.2–3.83.3). Darius favours an absolute monarchy and eventually secures the kingship through trickery and a rigged equestrian competition among the other surviving conspirators (Hdt. 3.84.1–3.87). If nothing else, Herodotus is pointing out that a hereditary monarchy is by no means immune from jiggery-pokery—doubtless an essential facet of royal barbaric power—when it comes to establishing the lawful line of succession.³⁸ Herodotus writes, “And so Darius son of Hystaspes was appointed king” (Hdt. 3.88.1). But Darius still has to secure the succession and he does this through a series of multiple aristocratic and royal marriages. What these aristocratic young women, including Atossa, really think of being royal bedchamber pawns in the rightful Persian succession game of thrones Herodotus does not say. To secure his reign Darius makes a travesty of the rules of both male-preference primogeniture and the expected behaviour of stallions (Hdt. 3.85.1–3.87).

Darius married eminent Persian women, among whom the first were Atossa and Artystone, both daughters of Cyrus. Atossa had earlier been the wife of her brother Cambyses and then had been left to the Magus, while Artystone was a virgin. [3] In addition, Darius married the daughter of Smerdis son of Cyrus, whose name was Parmys, and also [Phaidymie] the daughter of Otanes who had revealed the identity of the Magus (Hdt. 3.88.2–3).³⁹

the Athenians, may I be disowned as the son of Darius son of Hystaspes, the son of Arsames son of Ariaramnes, the son of Teispes son of Cyrus, the son of Cambyses son of Teispes, the son of Achaemenes (Hdt. 7.11.2). That Herodotus, or his sources, get the line slightly wrong is neither here nor there—the origin and destiny of much genealogical data is often enhanced with an element of fudge—Darius is an Achaemenid, but from a cadet line. He is not a direct descendant of Cyrus the Great.

³⁸ Here Herodotus inserts a variant of his usual credibility disclaimer (Hdt. 3.80.1). But in the quotation he has Darius compare the best examples in theory of: democracy, oligarchy, and monarchy (Hdt. 3.82.1).

³⁹ While Darius marries the daughter of a co-conspirator Otanes, Otanes in turn marries one of Darius’ sisters [unnamed]. It is their daughter, Amestris, who will marry her first cousin Xerxes. Otanes a Persian nobleman was the brother of Cassandane, Cyrus’ favourite official wife.

ATOSSA, QUEEN OF PERSIA

Darius—following Cambyses' and Smerdis' example—marries the two surviving daughters of the late Cyrus, Atossa now widowed twice and the unmarried Artystone; a decision which later turns out to be critical.⁴⁰ His polygamous selections amount to judicial sequestering of all available royal brides, plus those of the more prominent Persian aristocrats. Whether the marriages are fully consummated or not is immaterial, Darius denies any other claimants the opportunity to enhance their positions in any perceived line of succession by pursuing similar royal unions themselves.

In another digression, illustrative of royal barbaric power, Herodotus tells of how when the king's Egyptian physicians cannot heal his foot—injured in a hunting spill—the king engages a Greek physician Democedes of Croton, who although handsomely rewarded is subsequently appalled to learn that the king intends to impale the Egyptian physicians for their earlier failure and successfully appeals for clemency (Hdt. 3.129.1–3.132.2).⁴¹ Such are the perils of late sixth- and early fifth-century quackery. Shortly thereafter, Democedes also becomes court physician to Atossa. It is perhaps from his unconcealed but totally unexplained animosity toward mainland Greece that she suggests that Darius invades the mainland (Hdt. 3.133–134.3).⁴² Perhaps he is clairvoyant and realises that Atossa has ambitions rather than illusions of grandeur for her spouse, and Democedes is simply telling her something that she wants to hear

Atossa then went to bed with Darius, and as she was lying with him, she presented this proposal to him: “Sire, although you possess such great power, you are doing nothing to acquire either new nations or additional power for Persia. [2] It is reasonable to

⁴⁰ Darius is already married and may already have children by the [unnamed] daughter of one of his fellow conspirators, Gobryas (Hdt. 7.2.2). Xerxes is only the first-born male child by Atossa who by Herodotus' account was Darius' favourite, but not necessarily his second spouse. Born in 519 he succeeds to the Achaemenid throne in 486.

⁴¹ *Royal barbaric power* is a wonderful tool provided it remains an effective deterrent; the paradox, of course, is that if it has to be used, then ironically it is demonstrably ineffective and is just sadistic revenge at best or a crude deterrent (*pour encourager les autres*).

⁴² Herodotus never quite explains precisely why or from where a peripatetic citizen of Croton, a Dorian colony in southern Italy, gets this animosity toward Hellas nor why he wants Darius' Persian forces to enter Europe.

expect that a man who is young and the master of great wealth will display his power openly so that the Persians will know that they are being ruled by a real man. There are actually two reasons why you should do this: not only so that the Persians will realise that their leader is a man, but also to keep them so occupied in war that they have no leisure to conspire against you. [3] For now is the time, while you are young, that you can achieve something, since, as the body grows, so does the mind, but as it ages, the mind ages with it, too, and thus loses its edge” (Hdt. 3.134.1–3).

Atossa is belittling Darius’ reign. He has already completed conquest of Egypt—something Cambyses failed to complete—and expanded southeastward through to the Indus valley. He has also embarked on a building programme greatly expanding the principal Persian capital cities and royal centres.⁴³ The chronology is not given by Herodotus, but evidently plans for the punitive Scythian expedition to avenge perceived wrongs are formed early during Darius’ reign. By inference, the Scythians have a history of crossing the Black Sea to raid Persian settlements in Anatolia and a destructive strike, as opposed to a prolonged occupation necessitating garrison troops, is deemed an effective deterrent against ongoing troubles.

Of course, in telling Darius all this, she was following Democedes’ instructions. Darius responded, “My wife, I intend to do exactly as you have said, for I have already formed a plan to build a bridge from this continent to the other and to conduct a military campaign against the Scythians. This will in fact be carried out within a short time.”

[5] Atossa then said, “Let the Scythians wait a while; they will still be there whenever you want to attack them. In my opinion, you should lead an army first against Hellas. For I have heard accounts of that land and have set my heart on obtaining Laconian [Spartan] women to wait on me as my servants, and I would also like to have Argive, Athenian, and Corinthian women, too. Moreover, you have a man who is perfectly suited to act as your guide, and to inform you of every detail about Hellas—the same man who healed your foot” (Hdt. 3.134.4–5).

⁴³ Pasargadae founded by Cyrus remained the coronation city; Persepolis (Pārsa) founded by Darius the ceremonial capital, Ecbatana the summer capital, Susa the spring capital, and Babylon the principal centre for over seven months of the year.

Hers is not a great military argument, neither the Scythians nor the Greeks are going anywhere. Atossa's stated preference for Spartan women as her personal attendants immediately also expands her husband's military objectives which we initially take to be limited to punitive raids on Eretria and Athens alone with no mention of venturing into the Peloponnese. Arguably she ranks Spartan women above all other slaves from captive territories. From where she receives this knowledge, Herodotus does not say; not that Democedes would have no opinion at all.⁴⁴ We can only surmise that she finds that women from less sheltered social environments are more independent of thought and more interesting to have around her. Literate and accomplished herself she is no fool and likely does not suffer them willingly. Although she has to accept the monarchy's polygamous culture—multiple official wives and any number of concubines—we can surmise that she has no wish to surround herself with either doe-eyed, or illiterate matrons with no life-experience beyond the bedchamber, birthing chamber or the nursery.⁴⁵ Atossa will take her pick of the youthful female captives, whereas the others—plain or comely—can be added to the palace's cortège of concubines, work in the nearby Kissian bitumen pits, or be sold off to brothel-keepers across the Empire (Hdt. 6.119.2–4).⁴⁶ In this instance Atossa does not get her own way.⁴⁷ Although Darius

⁴⁴ Atossa may also be aware of Greek mythology and believe that since Helen of Troy [of Sparta] by all accounts was the most beautiful woman in the world, her contemporary Spartan descendants are likely more than just comely.

⁴⁵ The author comments on the scale of Persian polygamy—"many legitimate wives, but . . . still more concubines"—without judgement (Hdt. 1.135). A nuanced discussion of what might be called the Persian monarchy's sexual mores are beyond the scope of this study—suffice it to say that Herodotus' serially monogamous Hellenic male audiences—well, nominally, provided all those regular liaisons with *pornai* (πόρναι) do not count—would regard the notion of multiple official wives, any number of concubines, with scores of resulting offspring intriguing if nothing else. Athens had an extensive sex-trade with a wide range of services from base release to sophisticated hedonism available (Skinner 118–123).

⁴⁶ Pomeroy, comparing the education of young Spartan children, comments that Spartan girls are married at eighteen—a substantially later age than their Athenian counterparts—they would also have time in an all female milieu to learn reading and writing as well as other aspects of *mousike* (μουσική)—an archaic and classical Greek performance art incorporating: music, dance, and poetry, not to mention horsemanship (*Spartan Women* 24).

sends Democedes along with a number of Persian spies to find out more about mainland Greece and her peoples these ventures largely comes to nought (Hdt. 3.134.6–3.138.4).

THE FEINT BEFORE MARATHON

However, Darius' younger brother and uncle of Xerxes, Artabanos, who believes that making war against the semi-nomadic Scythians is a hopeless challenge, fails to persuade him to abandon the Black Sea venture (Hdt. 4.83.1–2). Darius' march from Susa to the Bosphorus is not without incident and another display of royal barbaric power when one of his subjects, Oiobazos, requests that not all three of his sons should serve simultaneously on the same campaign (Hdt. 4.84.1–2). At this stage in his narrative Herodotus makes no further reference of any kind to Atossa for almost two decades. We do not know her reaction to either Darius' largely unsuccessful Scythian raid, nor to his leaving the Persian general Megabazos with an army of 80,000 men on the European side of the Straits to subdue Thrace and Macedon (Hdt. 4.143.1–3). She must have been aware of the Greek raid on Sardis in 498—a raid that is certain to inspire Persian retribution against the Ionian colonies and their mainland backers from Athens and Eretria. She must wait, doubtless impatiently, while the Ionian revolt is put down. She will await news with interest and disappointment of the failed attempt in the summer of 492 by the Persian general Mardonios, when the wreck of his supporting naval fleet by unexpected storms in the northern Aegean obliges him to return to Persia (Hdt. 6.43.4–6.44.3, and 6.45.2). Abandoning the notion of a land-based attack on Eretria and Athens Mardonios is relieved of command and in 490 Darius appoints two generals, Datis, a Mede, and Artphrenes, a nephew, to lead the next expedition—a seaborne operation with his army and navy island hopping across the northern Aegean (Hdt. 6.94.2).

MARATHON AND THE AFTERMATH

Darius does not accompany his army, but awaits news of their successes in Susa. All starts well enough, sailing past Samos and Ikaros, attacking Naxos while leaving Delos untouched, and then landing near Eretria (Hdt. 6.95–6.100). The city is besieged,

⁴⁷ Pomeroy comments, “Like male landowners, Spartan women could drive or ride out to survey their property as men did. Driving horses or riding them endowed Spartan women with an autonomy that was unique for women in the Greek world” (*Spartan Women* 21).

falling when betrayed from within and then looted and burned and the surviving citizens and dependants enslaved (Hdt. 6.101.1–3).⁴⁸ The destruction is such that Eretria, which will join the Delian League, takes decades to recover. We might note that Atossa does not get her desired bevy of vivacious Athenian, Corinthian, and Spartan young women to serve as her personal attendants. Herodotus does not record Atossa's reaction to this setback in Europe, except that Darius intends to try again soon.⁴⁹

While Darius was still making arrangements for these expeditions against Egypt and Athens, his sons began a fierce dispute over which of them should hold supreme power, since according to Persian custom, the King always appointed his successor before marching out to war. [2] Darius had had three sons [Artobazanes, Ariabignes, and Arsamenes] by an earlier wife [unnamed], the daughter of Gobryas; and after becoming King he had four others [Xerxes, Achaimenes, Masistes, and Hystaspes] by Atossa, daughter of Cyrus. Artobazanes was the eldest of the three he had sired earlier, and Xerxes the eldest of those born later. [3] These two sons, since they did not share the same mother, now entered into a hostile rivalry with each other. Artobazanes asserted that he was the eldest of all Darius' offspring, and that it was the custom among all peoples for the eldest to hold the power, while Xerxes countered that he should rule, since he was the son of Atossa, who was the daughter of Cyrus, the King who had won freedom for the Persians (Hdt. 7.2.1–3).

For Herodotus, this link to Cyrus the Great is important, and if we follow Heraclitus' maxim about destiny, the grandson of Persia's first Achaemenid king Xerxes has inherited the necessary agency, autonomy, and authority to rule effectively. This selection also attempts to repair the rightful line of Cyrus' succession through a daughter by the king's favourite spouse.

⁴⁸ Unlike the Ionian raid on Sardis some eight years earlier, the marauding Persian troops know the elementary rules of pillage and remember to loot first and burn later (Hdt. 5.99.1–5.101.3).

⁴⁹ In Aeschylus' tragedy the *Persians* we learn of Atossa's grief and despair following the Persian losses at Salamis. But if there were other contemporary dramas about Persian reactions to their shortcomings at Marathon, or Athenian glee—and it would be astonishing if there were none—they have been lost.

DARIUS' QUEEN AND THE HEIR APPARENT

It is at this time that Demaratos, the deposed and exiled Spartan dyarch, takes up permanent residence in Susa as an advisor to the Persian king's household.⁵⁰ When the succession dispute erupts, Demaratos provides Xerxes with arguments from Spartan tradition to strengthen his claim (Hdt. 7.3.2–3).

Xerxes followed Demaratos' advice, and Darius realizing that his argument was just, appointed him King. But I suppose that even without this advice, Xerxes would have become King, since it was Atossa who really held all the power (Hdt. 7.3.4).

Atossa—now to be the mother of a king as well—must have been delighted with Demaratos' advice, and advice that is taken. Herodotus makes his claim about Atossa's power behind the throne without providing any supporting evidence—he gives it as a bald statement of fact. Undeniably Atossa is Darius' favourite spouse, but perhaps, as their Spartan guest the exiled dyarch suggests, it is her genealogy that is the trump card Xerxes should play—better the genes you know than those you do not. Atossa's genealogical attributes severally as: a daughter of, a wife of, and a mother of give her neither any notable identity nor agency—but the dynastic relationships position her well and ensure a measure of tradition and continuity, albeit in patriarchal terms. But having that special *je ne sais quoi* such as to be selected as Darius' favourite wife confers both unique identity and real agency. This alone meets Heraclitus' maxim—character is destiny. And for Darius in particular, this goes a considerable way toward meeting Solon's criteria for happiness. For Atossa, as Cyrus' daughter, she vicariously wants first her spouse and later her own son to emulate her father, earning “the Great” as an enduring and endearing epithet and appendage to their names.⁵¹ Richard Stoneman

⁵⁰ The chronology is inexact, but in 491, well before the battle of Marathon, the Eurypontid Spartan king is deposed by Cleomenes I—not without good cause, although probably fraudulently—exiled and his life threatened Demaratos escapes to Asia and is made welcome in Darius' court (Hdt. 6.70.2–3).

⁵¹ Darius I of Persia is sometimes referred to as Darius the Great.

expands on this claim, perhaps citing Xenophon from the fourth century, arguing that Xerxes remains in awe of powerful women.⁵²

Having appointed Xerxes as King of the Persians [his successor], Darius then directed his thoughts to war. But after this appointment and the revolt of the Egyptians in the following year, Darius was fated to die in the midst of his preparations and was thus deprived of the opportunity to punish the Egyptians and Athenians. He had reigned a total of thirty-six years, and at his death the kingship was assumed by his son Xerxes (Hdt. 7.4.1).⁵³

However, Atossa is probably painfully aware that her father's successors to the Achaemenid throne do not exercise the same restraint with regard to royal barbaric power that Cyrus consistently shows. Herodotus does not recount whether Atossa or the Achaemenid Empire go into extended mourning on Darius' death, but we know that Cyrus ordered all his subjects to grieve when Cassandane died, so a period of state mourning for Darius is likely (Hdt. 2.1.1).⁵⁴

Herodotus tells us that despite his mother's wishes her son, Xerxes, has no immediate desire to march on Hellas; he wants to subdue Egypt first, a tactic to which his courtiers agree (Hdt. 7.5.1–7.6.5).⁵⁵ Recall that Atossa criticises her husband for not

⁵² Richard Stoneman argues that Xerxes is dominated by strong women (*Xerxes: A Persian Life* 9, 30, and 123).

⁵³ Herodotus, through his Persian sources, gives us the chronological sequence and lengths of reign, but he is rarely able to provide any direct synchronicities to other events in the Eastern Mediterranean. See the chapter titled "Herodotus and Time" where using other evidence and perhaps working backward, modern scholars have been able to derive appropriate Julian calendar dates. Darius rules from about 521 until his natural death in 486, aged in his mid-sixties, four years after the battle of Marathon.

⁵⁴ Surprisingly Herodotus does not describe Achaemenid funerary practices which are significantly different from those practiced in Hellas and Egypt; but from other sources we know that the royal remains were embalmed and interred in large mausoleum structures such as the remains of Cyrus' tomb at Pasargadae. Aeschylus' tragedy the *Persians* is set in Susa with scenes in front of Darius' rock-cut tomb in Naqsh-e Rostan near Persepolis—alas the playwright is no geographer as Susa is over five hundred kilometres away from Persepolis: Not that an Athenian audience would notice let alone care.

expanding the empire given to him by Cyrus, and the same criticisms applies to her son (Hdt. 3.134.1–3). It is not until the spring of 480, six years later, ten years after Marathon, and following four years of preparation that Xerxes, with massive naval support moves his huge allied army on specially constructed floating bridges across the Dardanelles from Asia into Europe.⁵⁶ Keeping in close touch with his naval support and supply transports, the huge Persian army and their allies are deployed on the European side of the Straits.

Xerxes, who is the supreme commander, moves northward out of the Chersonese through Thrace and into Macedon encountering no resistance. He moves into Thessaly to find the Thessalians only too quick to medize and anxious to assist Xerxes' conquest of Phocis en route to occupying the surrendering Boeotian cities including Thebes. Whatever the long-term strategy, the Greeks decide to halt this advance and engage the invaders on land at Thermopylae and at sea off Artemision. The small Spartan holding force is annihilated, the supporting naval engagement indecisive, and the Greek fleet, largely intact, withdraws southward to Salamis. Doubtless those in Susa are kept informed.⁵⁷ Xerxes' forces divide but fail to sack the temples at Delphi (Hdt 8.34–8.39), and they advance through Attica to discover that the Athenians have already abandoned their city (Hdt. 8.41.2 and 8.51.2).⁵⁸ The Spartans with their allies arrive

⁵⁵ The most influential of Xerxes' courtiers, bar his mother Atossa, appears to be Mardonios who was the son of Darius' sister (Hdt. 7.5.1–2). Actually the relationship was a bit more complicated. Mardonios was the son of Gobryas, the Persian aristocrat who was one of the seven conspirators who deposed the impostor. To cement their alliance Darius married Gobryas' daughter, and Gobryas married Darius' sister. Furthermore, Mardonios married Darius' daughter Artozostra and so Darius was simultaneously Mardonios' uncle, father-in-law, and half-brother-in-law.

⁵⁶ Over thirty years previously his father had used similar cable and floating boat (pontoon) bridge construction to provide temporary crossings over both the Bosphorus near Byzantium (Istanbul) and the Ister (Danube).

⁵⁷ Remember, important dispatches might take as little as ten days (see note #19).

⁵⁸ Herodotus does not say when the Athenians start to evacuate their city and the surrounding countryside, only that the non-combatants are transported to Troizen, Aegina, and Salamis (Hdt. 8.40–8.41). After a short siege the few Athenians who had declined to leave the city are butchered and the whole Acropolis set on fire (Hdt. 8.53.2).

from the Peloponnese to help construct a four-mile long fortified wall across the isthmus near Corinth (Hdt. 8.40.2 and 8.71–8.74).

Herodotus does not tell us about Atossa’s reaction to the naval disaster off Salamis, nor that of Amestris, but the playwright Aeschylus, who likely witnesses if not participates in the battle, features Atossa in his topical tragedy, the *Persians*, where she certainly appears as a high-maintenance dowager queen.⁵⁹

We do not know what his wife or his mother have to say, but he will surely remember the considered advice of his uncle Artabanos in 484 well prior to the second Hellenic campaign—if his generals win it only makes him look good—if his generals fail then he remains blameless and his prowess untarnished (Hdt. 7.10–7.11). It is unlikely that Atossa even heard, let alone remembers her father’s words to Artembares long ago about soft places tending to produce soft men. In other words the game, in this case the proposed conquest, is not worth the candle, and by no stretch of the imagination could anyone argue that the venture would be self-financing. But the “soft men” epithet has come down to us through Herodotus and more than one advisor to the Persian king has told Xerxes that the land of the Hellenes is not rich (Hdt. 9.121.3).⁶⁰ Earlier Atossa has argued for expanding the empire, but barren kingdoms do not make a return on the costs of garrison troops to secure the territory.

ROYAL BARBARIC POWER REVISITED

Although Atossa eschews resort to *royal barbaric power*, the same cannot be said of her daughter-in-law, Xerxes’ queen, Amestris, who allegedly in her old age desperate to purchase a longer life tries to buy-off the grim reaper by sacrificing children in lieu of

⁵⁹ Less than a decade after the battle off Salamis in Aeschylus’ tragedy the *Persians* (Πέρσαι, *Persai*) first performed in 472 shortly after her death Atossa plays a major role. This tragedy set in Susa near the tomb of Darius features: Atossa the queen-mother, her son Xerxes, a Messenger, a Chorus of Persian Elders, and the Ghost of Darius. The Ghost accuses their son of hubris saying to Atossa, “Zeus is the chastener of overboastful minds, a grievous corrector” (Aesch., *Pers.* 828–829). Aeschylus almost certainly fought at Marathon and also may have fought at Salamis.

⁶⁰ Recall that this must be after 550 when Cyrus defeats Astyages, the last Lydian king, which is about the time that Atossa is born.

herself.⁶¹ But in book 9 Herodotus chooses to close his *Histories* much as he opens them in book 1 with another tale of non-Greek barbarity, this time orchestrated by Xerxes' wife Amestris (Hdt. 9.108–9.113). Like Nyssia's story, this one—hardly a love story—is quickly told and takes place in the Persian capital, Susa, where Xerxes has been residing since his return following the unexpected naval humiliation off Salamis.

Xerxes, until now monogamous in terms of official wives, falls in love, or more likely in lust, with his sister-in-law, but she has no interest in becoming his mistress.⁶² Foiled, Xerxes arranges the marriage of the crown prince, Darius, his eldest son by Amestris, to his niece, Artaynte, the daughter of Masistes and this unnamed woman. Artaynte has no reservations whatsoever about surreptitiously becoming her uncle's latest mistress. Meanwhile Amestris embroiders her husband a spectacular new robe, which delights him—it also delights his new mistress who inveigles Xerxes into promising to give her whatever she wishes. Alas, it is the new royal robe, and he cannot talk her out of it. Overjoyed beyond discretion, Artaynte lets everyone see her sashaying around the palace wearing it—alas, everyone includes Amestris. According to Herodotus, Xerxes is anxious to keep this dalliance entirely clandestine because of “his fear of Amestris” (Hdt. 9.109.3). Fear of what she might say to him? Or fear of what she might do with her own exercise of royal barbaric power—Nyssia's keen filleting knife comes to mind? Or is this just another instance of Xerxes' respect for strong women passed down from his mother?

Outraged, Amestris blames the woman's mother and plots her revenge. A feast is held on the king's birthday, and custom dictates that the king distributes rather than receives gifts. Amestris demands Masistes' wife as a gift—Xerxes knows what this is all about but is imprisoned by precedent. He seeks to avert certain disaster by ordering his brother to put his wife aside. Masistes, who is delighted with his present wife and has

⁶¹ In a loathsome display of her absolute power Amestris orders fourteen aristocratic children be buried alive as an offering to the Persian god of the underworld (Hdt. 7.114.2). Evidently over the years she has learned little from her mother-in-law.

⁶² Forever unnamed, she is married to Xerxes' full brother, Masistes; although Xerxes is emperor and king of kings, brute force or even royal demand is no substitute for the joyful carnal enthusiasm he seeks—an enthusiasm which quite unlike obedience cannot be commanded. Arguably from tales about the Trojan prince Paris, he knows that taking someone not yours to take seldom proves to be a good idea.

sons and daughters by her, simply refuses. Nor is he interested in acquiring a royal niece as a wife.⁶³ While this exchange is taking place, Amestris orders Xerxes' bodyguards to mutilate Masistes' wife—cutting off her breasts and cutting out her nose, ears, lips, and tongue. Masistes returns home too late to intervene, but decides to return with his children and entourage to Bactria where as their popular satrap he will find safety.⁶⁴ But Xerxes, fearing that his brother might lead a revolt against him, sends an army in pursuit with orders to wipe out everyone in their party en route (Hdt. 9.113.2). Such is the reach of royal barbaric power.

THE DOWAGER QUEEN ENDURES

What Atossa, the dowager empress and Amestris' mother-in-law, really thinks about all this, Herodotus does not say. Evidently Amestris, although she is Xerxes' sole official wife—a rare instance of royal Persian monogamy—does not share the companionate union with Xerxes which Atossa shared with Darius and which Cassandane shared with Cyrus. As the favourite among a number of Darius' official wives Atossa is aware of countless and endless palace intrigues and jockeying for preferment, and knows from experience that infatuation and lust quickly burn out.⁶⁵ Perhaps it is she who steers her son toward monogamy. At least under the general rules of male preference primogeniture strict if serial monogamy simplifies the legitimate line of succession. And she sees that Artaynte's illusions of personal grandeur and her tasteless put-down and humiliation of her aunt and empress only degrades the prestige

⁶³ Although the Persians nobility practise polygamy and there is no reason to suppose that Masistes does not have multiple official wives and any number of concubines. It appears from Herodotus' narrative that these customs do not preclude companionate marriage and that Demosthenes' fourth-century dictum about different women for separate roles does not always apply.

⁶⁴ The Achaemenid Persian Empire was vast. Bactria is an enormous region in Central Asia roughly corresponding to much of modern Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan.

⁶⁵ The ease with which Xerxes switches his amorous or perhaps just plain lecherous desires from this unnamed sister-in-law—who treats this lewd advance with the contempt it deserves—to her daughter proves that beyond physical attraction, he is selfishly susceptible to the lure of the forbidden—if all he wants is variety in his recreational fornication he already has concubines which he can add to at will.

and majesty of the Achaemenid dynasty. To all this, Artaynte is blind: she has been around the Susa palace long enough to see sex commodified. Yet, without a thought toward the certain destiny of discarded official wives and out-of-favour mistresses, she enthusiastically commodifies herself. Pleasure always does. Remember, Herodotus makes the claim, without detailing any specifics, that Atossa is the real power behind the Achaemenid throne for decades (Hdt 7.3.4). Perhaps such knowledge was a commonplace—why document what everybody knows? We can readily and favourably contrast her behaviour as the Persian queen-consort with that of Candaules’ queen (Nyssia) and Amestris. This interpretation is consistent with the notion that for Herodotus, Cyrus was an almost ideal and magisterial monarch and from that illustrious peak the Achaemenid dynasty is all down-hill. The Persians have become accustomed to ease and luxury and are now soft—hence the womanish behaviour insult at Salamis (Hdt 8.88.3). Cyrus would have wept.

POWER BRAKING, POWER STEERING, OR BOTH

If Heraclitus’ maxim is right and “character is destiny” then Atossa shows how the majesty of the Achaemenid dynasty is enhanced without ever resorting to the capricious exercise of royal barbaric power. The greatest test of all is to have absolute power and yet refrain from using it—something the few who hold it can ever resist. Should we argue that Herodotus is also a proto-feminist, he is certainly reminding his Athenian, or perhaps his Periclean, audience that the consorts of those in power can make meaningful contributions to policy and good governance beyond the abysmally low horizon set by the Athenian aristocrat Isagoras for his spouse (Hdt. 5.70.1).⁶⁶

All of which, through Herodotus, goes to show that a determined yet privileged and principled individual who is born a non-Greek does not always have to behave in an cruel and barbaric fashion at all; but that being born Greek offers no immunity to such moral lapses. The major difference between fictional characters and biographical depictions of historical characters is that as readers we demand that the fictional ones

⁶⁶ Aspasia of Miletus was Pericles’ companion during the last fifteen years of his thirty plus years of leadership in Athens. A near contemporary of Herodotus, Pericles (495–429) a statesman and general came from a wealthy aristocratic Athenian family.

behave consistently and that their actions always make some sort of sense. Real life imposes no such rational restriction on individuals, and yet we are stunned when those we might admire behave with unbelievable stupidity. The time-worn naval dockyard expression, “You incredible bloody fool!” comes to mind. Novelists can get into the minds of their heroines and heroes—something historian and biographers can only pretend to do. Furthermore, we should not let Gray persuade us that the Achaemenids have a monopoly on the exercise of royal barbaric power. Herodotus is living through a time of great change; Pan-Hellenism has not yet taken root, but some of the hallmarks of what it means to be Greek, rather than what it means to be other-than-Greek, are starting to become evident. Just recognising the worst lapses from Hellenic cultural and religious norms is a start.

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Artemisia of Halicarnassus

[Hdt. 5.49–50, 5.51.2–3, 7.99, 7.239.3–4, 8.68–69, 8.87–88, 8.93, and 8.101–103]

INTRODUCTION

Bar Aeschylus' topical tragedy the *Persei*, first performed in 472 in which Artemisia, queen of Halicarnassus, is not mentioned at all, our only other early extant accounts of the contributions of individual commanders who participate in the naval battle off Salamis in the late summer of 480 are given by Herodotus in his *Histories*.¹ And here Artemisia, an ally of Xerxes in his punitive expedition against mainland Greece, is given almost as much attention as Mardonios, a close royal relative, and Xerxes' overall battlefield commander.² Curiously, our next earliest mention of the queen of Halicarnassus is given in Aristophanes' exceedingly bawdy but topical, anti-war comedy *Lysistrata*, first performed in 411, where Artemisia gets honourable mention on a par with the Amazons. But just as nature abhors a vacuum and rushes to fill it, storytellers are happy to exploit any glaring lacunae in the historical record. And we can surely blame Herodotus for these lacunae about Artemisia. She is, after all, his own countrywoman, from an aristocratic ruling family, and he of all contemporary individuals is well-placed to provide an exhaustive cradle to grave account of her impact on the Dorian colony on the Anatolian coast that her family governed, should he so wish. Why he does not write more about his near contemporary countrywoman is difficult to gauge, unless it is simply that the Athenians in particular are still seething over her impact and their humiliation. As Rosaria Vignolo Munson comments, "the conspicuous feature of

¹ Aeschylus, a veteran of Marathon, may also have been a participant in the naval battle off Salamis—an oarsman or a marine—not just a distant hillside spectator. His tragedy, the *Persians* (Πέρσαι, *Persai*), with the Ghost of Darius incidentally criticizing Xerxes for hybris (ὕβρις) focuses on the Persian losses at Salamis and predicts further losses the following year (Plataea). His play is, of course, our earliest extant account of any of the East versus West military / naval encounters during the Greco-Persian Wars.

² For reasons discussed earlier in "Herodotus and Time" Herodotus is unable to give us anything that we would recognise as dates. The Julian-Gregorian dates given in the margins of Strassler's Landmark edition of the *Histories* are based on other evidence, but unless noted otherwise are those generally agreed by classicists.

her feminine gender and masculine role, which in all likelihood sparked Herodotus' interest in this extraordinary character, already relates her to the history of the war between the Greeks and Barbarians" (Munson 92). Perhaps, as Munson points out, what really distinguishes her from all of Xerxes' subordinate commanders is that she is the only one serving under no compulsion whatsoever (95). Halicarnassus may have been obliged to supply a number of fully crewed triremes, but Artemisia is in no way obliged to command this contingent.³ Although high birth presents some measure of opportunity denied those of more modest heritage, Artemisia exercises authority, agency, and autonomy—and in the process proves her destiny as an able leader of men—an admirable character trait befitting an admiral.⁴

LEGENDARY HEROINE

The legendary Artemisia who emerges from centuries of these fascinating but totally unfounded accretions is often inconsistent with Herodotus' account.⁵ In the second century, alas some six-hundred years later, even Plutarch gets into the act, as does Polyaeus of Macedonia; but neither give reliable sources for their plausible accretions. Artemisia is a widow, but in all likelihood does not seduce Themistocles during a secret assignation just before the battle off Salamis. But, she likely does direct her marines to festoon the drowning Kalyndian king's body with spears and arrows—just to make sure it floats. However is it also unlikely that when spurned by a youthful Persian lover she throws herself off a cliff into the Aegean Sea—she likely had no use whatsoever for a boy toy in the first place. Herodotus makes no mention of her either before or after the

³ Her contingent amounts to only five ships—an otherwise trivial less than half of one percent of a combined Persian fleet of over one thousand.

⁴ We do not know when Artemisia, the governor or queen of Halicarnassus, is born—but when first mentioned by Herodotus she is a widow and is serving as regent for her underage son. Nor does Herodotus mention when her forever-unnamed husband—the late tyrant of Halicarnassus—died. Whether an able ruler or not, he has served his primary purpose—ensuring the succession.

⁵ We do not know when Artemisia was born—but when first mentioned by Herodotus she is a widow and has been serving as regent for her underage son. However, at the time of the second Greco-Persian war her son is of military age. Nor does Herodotus mention when Artemisia's husband—the tyrant of Halicarnassus—died. If her son was aged at least eighteen in 480 and Artemisia was married in Spartan fashion when in her late teens, a good guess is that she was born no later than 516.

two naval battles of 480. In four short paragraphs, Herodotus gives us a few biographic details in his first entry, followed by three anecdotes; the first of the three concerning her interactions with Xerxes after the three-day long indecisive naval engagement off Artemision which takes place before the battle off Salamis, then an account of an incident during the battle off Salamis, and closing with her personal and strategic interactions with Xerxes after that disastrous naval defeat. One effectively way to write someone right out of history is to deliberately write as little about the individual as possible.⁶

DESTINY DEFINED

The significance of Artemisia's boldly theophoric name cannot be overlooked and at the very least constitutes an interesting challenge to divine Greek myth for the child on the part of her royal parents.⁷ Artemis, the goddess of chastity, virginity, archery, the hunt, the forests, the wilderness, and the moon, is only a secondary Olympian deity.⁸ Nevertheless, she is widely worshipped throughout mainland Greece and in the various Dorian and Ionian settlements in the Aegean and the Anatolian mainland. A number of

⁶ See lines 672-683 of the *Lysistrata*. The Chorus of Old Men lament the women's current audacity, offering a cautionary reminder of Artemisia's fighting prowess which they compare with that of the Amazons fighting at Troy against the Argives. Much of the rest comes from the fertile minds of Hollywood script-writers who in former years felt obliged to meet some mandated T and A quota.

⁷ There are only three virgin goddesses among the Olympian pantheon—Hestia, Athena, and Artemis—although all three have many ardent suitors they certainly have no offspring. They are honoured as virgin goddesses partly because they remain chaste and celibate with absolutely no wish to marry; but principally because, bar heeding their father, Zeus, they pursue their own interests independent of any male influence or subservience. Artemis and her twin brother Apollo are the irregular offspring of Zeus and the Titanide Leto.

⁸ Except when being shown as the moon goddess, Artemis is always depicted wearing a skimpy, off-shoulder, mid-thigh length, slit-skirted Dorian *peplos*—similar to the short tunic, the *chiton exomis*, favoured by young Spartan women—in stark contrast to the voluminous, heavily folded, ground-length Ionian *chiton* favoured by Athenian women and, of course, the style Athena is invariably depicted as wearing (Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores* 36). A young Spartan woman wearing the *peplos* is often referred to as a thigh flasher *μηρό φώτων* (*miró fóton*) a form of dress eschewed by Athenian women (Pomeroy, *Spartan Women* 25). Wonder Woman notwithstanding, the skimpy clothing for athletic and fit, Spartan women was likely flattering, whereas from Pomeroy's remarks, far too polite to say as much, that since Athenian women's exercise is limited to housework mainly indoors or in the adjacent courtyard, we might surmise that their flabby thighs and heavy buttocks are far better not flashed (Pomeroy, *Spartan Women* 31).

major festivals are held to honour her including one held every four years at Brauron, north of Athens in eastern Attica, and others at her temples in Ephesus and in Sparta.⁹ According to Homer, Artemis is one of the Olympian goddesses who support the Trojans in their war with Greece; Athena, of course, supports the Argives. The unanswered conundrum remains that when the Greek goddesses, one way or another, and Athena in particular, are just as powerful as any of the male gods in the pantheon, and just as widely worshipped, why is the status of Greek women generally kept so low and restricted?¹⁰

The first few sentences below are the extent of the strictly biographical information Herodotus gives about his countrywoman, the queen of Halicarnassus. He must have known much more about the ruling family than he gives in Book 7 of his *Histories*, and we can only speculate on the reasons for his brevity. Part of this may be Herodotus' belief that to be truly Greek one has to be free; and the Dorian and Ionian colonies in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Anatolian coast are anything but free and as a Persian appointed ruler she and her family are more than complicit in their continued subjugation. Very little is known of Herodotus' early life, but most scholars believe that he leaves Halicarnassus voluntarily, or is indeed exiled moving first to Samos and eventually to Thurii in Italy, but is never free to return home.¹¹

Although I am not mentioning the other subordinate commanders because I am not compelled to do so, I shall mention Artemisia. I find it absolutely amazing that she, as a woman, should join the expedition against Hellas. After her husband died, she held the tyranny, and then, though her son was a young man of military age and she was not

⁹ See Hdt 6.138.1 for an account of the abduction of young Athenian women when attending the festival held at Brauronia; and, Hdt. 1.26.2 for mention of Artemis' major temple in Ionian Anatolia rebuilt by Croesus in the mid sixth-century. Rebuilt again in the fourth century, eventually becoming three or four times larger than the Parthenon, the temple is ranked among the seven wonders of the ancient world.

¹⁰ Recall that Poseidon, the god of the Seas, and Athena, the goddess of Wisdom and Skill compete to be the patron deity of the city-state founded and ruled by its first king, Cecrops—they almost go to war over the honour but Athena's gift of an olive tree beats Poseidon's brackish spring water supply hands down. She gave her name to the city.

¹¹ One suggestion is that Herodotus' family—or perhaps just a brother—fell afoul of the ruling family and are essentially deemed *persona non gratia*—sometimes constructive criticism of an autocratic regime is taken as dissent with a whiff of irreparable disloyalty bordering on treason.

forced to do so at all, she went to war, roused by her own determination and courage. [2] Now the name of this woman was Artemisia; she was the daughter of Lygdamos by race part Halicarnassian on her father's side, and part Cretan on her mother's side. She led the men of Halicarnassus, Kos, Nisyros, and Kalymna, and provided five ships for the expedition. [3] Of the entire navy, the ships she furnished were the most highly esteemed after those of the Sidonians, and of all the counsel offered to the king by the allies, hers was the best. I can prove that all the cities under her leadership which I have just mentioned were Dorian, since the Halicarnassians came from the Troizen and all the rest from Epidaurus (Hdt. 7.99).¹²

A matter Herodotus' text does not make clear is that late in the sixth century Artemisia's father—king Lygdamos I—is appointed by the Persians as ruler of Halicarnassus, so she too is the daughter, queen-consort, and mother of a king. Artemisia's husband, whose name is not recorded, succeeds to her father's satrapy—a succession likely enhanced by this marriage.¹³ He dies before their son Pisiadelis reaches the age of majority, and so, quite unusually, Artemisia, his mother, is appointed by the Persians to serve as her son's regent.¹⁴

NO PERSIAN PUPPET

Although Artemisia is briefly married to her father's successor as the tyrant of Halicarnassus, he is forever unnamed. Just as the role of many Greek women—with a few notable Spartan exceptions—is limited to the domestic sphere, it is ironic that her

¹² Troizen and Epidaurus are both Dorian city-states in the eastern Peloponnese. When Athens is evacuated after the battle of Thermopylae the non-combatants, mothers and children are taken to Aegina, Salamis, and Troizen.

¹³ This suggests strongly that Artemisia is an only child (or an only surviving child) and an heiress particularly attractive to those aristocratic Carians/Halicarnassians with ambitions for royal appointment to the local governorship. Her family is Dorian rather than Ionian and so they may adopt the more liberal Spartan *patrouchoi* precedents rather than those for Athenian *epikloroi*. Either way her husband's line is terminated. Although the throne is infinitely less exalted than that for Sparta let alone Persia, this is another of many similarities she shares with Gorgo, and Atossa and perhaps even Helen of Sparta.

¹⁴ That her spouse remains nameless is priceless. Athenians never name their womenfolk and dismiss their genetic contribution as incubators—Artemisia's spouse is a nameless inseminator.

husband fulfills the domestic cum barnyard function of ensuring the possibility of succession with a male heir and is promptly vaporized from all record. That Artemisia is deemed an acceptable regent by Darius and later by Xerxes is notable, and not just because the status of widows who decline to remarry is often problematic in many societies.¹⁵ Just as significant, five sailing masters and their crews accept Artemisia as their admiral—this is not an empty honorific, they are granting her real agency as their naval commander and putting their well-being, opportunities for glory, battle-honours, and survival in her hands. Herodotus tells us in book 6 that in the aftermath of the Ionian revolt Mardonios commands a large land army and a fleet which he leads down to Cilicia and then sweeps up the Anatolian coasts toward the Hellespont (Hdt. 6.43.1–4).¹⁶ From Herodotus' account Mardonios deposes all the tyrants of the Ionians and establishes democracies in their cities. This is possibly an exaggeration; all Darius wants is for these city-states to continue paying annual tribute and to respond to his requests for levees for military expeditions.

We know that Darius divides his empire into some twenty large provinces or satrapies and each province is governed by a satrap appointed by the king and to serve at his pleasure. Herodotus does not name these provinces but he does number them and the first province includes much of the Anatolian coast (Hdt. 3.89–90).¹⁷ We also know that in the middle of the sixth century the Dorian city-states, including three on Rhodes, form a loose alliance and hold an annual festival which they celebrate at the Triopian sanctuary. Herodotus writes:

¹⁵ In this respect, as widows, Gorgo, Atossa, and Artemisia face the same challenge—except that we know that for internal dynastic reasons Atossa is compelled to re-marry twice, whereas Gorgo and Artemisia are at liberty to decline and do so.

¹⁶ Mardonios is not just a Persian general. He is Darius' nephew, brother-in-law, and son-in-law. His mother is Darius' sister, his sister is one of Darius' wives, and he is married to one of Darius' daughters, Artazostre.

¹⁷ See Hdt. 3.90.1—for the first provincial district: the Ionians, the Magnesians of Asia, the Aeolians, Carians, Lycians, Milyans, and Pamphylians, all of whom were assessed as a single unit for payment of tribute, came 400 talents of silver.

In the same way the five cities of the Dorians (formerly known as the six cities of the Dorians) refuse to admit any neighbouring Dorians to their Triopian sanctuary. Moreover they bar all those who break any of the rules of the sanctuary from participating in the rites and activities there (Hdt. 1.144.1).

Although Herodotus gives us few details, the Carians are involved in the Ionian revolt, but he does not specifically say that the Halicarnassians join in and one inference is that they do not. Again, we resort to the argument from silence, where in this instance it is inconceivable that Herodotus does not know or is misinformed. Either way, it appears from his commentary that the ruling family or the aristocracy in general, are regarded as loyal and reliable. We know that Artemisia is permitted to serve as regent for her then underage son, so even if she is not personally known to the Persian monarchs, she is deemed an acceptable place holder. Likely she earns this esteem long before supporting Xerxes' invasion with five manned triremes and is thus admitted to such military councils as Xerxes chooses to hold from time to time.

AN ADMIRABLE ADMIRAL

Some time after the inconclusive naval battle off Artemision, but just before Xerxes' disastrous engagement off Salamis, Herodotus recounts:

So Mardonios made his way around and questioned them, beginning with the Sidonian. They all expressed the same opinion, urging him to initiate a battle at sea, except for Artemisia who said:¹⁸

“Speak to the King for me, Mardonios, and tell him what I say, since I have not proven to be the worst fighter in his naval battles off Euboea, nor have I performed the least significant of feats.¹⁹ Tell him, ‘My Lord, it is right and just that I express my opinion, and what I think is best regarding your interests. Here is what I think you should do: spare your fleet; do not wage a battle at sea. For their men surpass yours in strength at sea to the same degree that men surpass women. [2] And why is it

¹⁸ At this time Sidon along with Tyre are the two most powerful Phoenician city-states.

¹⁹ See Hdt. 8.9–10, this is the first we learn of her participation in the inconclusive naval battle at Artemision a week or so earlier in the late summer of 480.

necessary for you to risk another sea battle? Do you not already hold Athens, the very reason for which you set out on this campaign? And do you not have the rest of Hellas too? No one is standing in your way; those who have stood against you have ended up as they deserved.

“Let me tell you what I think your foes will end up doing. If you do not rush into waging a sea battle, but instead wait and keep your ships near land, or even if you advance to the Peloponnese, then, my lord, you will easily achieve what you intended by coming here. [2] The Hellenes are incapable of holding out against you for very long; you will scatter them, and each one will flee to his own city. For I hear that they have no food with them on this island, and if you lead your army to the Peloponnese, it is unlikely that those who came from there will remain where they are now and concern themselves with fighting at sea for the Athenians.

“But if you rush into a sea battle immediately, I fear that your fleet will be badly mauled, which would cause the ruin of your land army as well. And there is one more thing that you should think about, sire, and keep in mind: bad slaves tend to belong to good people, while good slaves belong to bad people. And you, the best of all men, have the worst slaves, who are said to be included among your allies, namely, the Egyptians, Cyprians, Cilician, and Pamphylians; they are absolutely worthless.”

As Artemisia was speaking to Mardonios, all those who were well-disposed toward her thought her words most unfortunate, since they believed she would suffer some punishment from the King for telling him not to wage a battle at sea. On the other hand, those who were envious and jealous of her, because she was honored as one of the most prominent of the allies, were delighted by her response to the question, thinking that she would perish for it. [2] When these opinions were reported to Xerxes, however, he was quite pleased with Artemisia's answer. Even prior to this, he had considered her worthy of his serious attention, but now he held her in even higher regard. Nevertheless, his orders were to obey the majority; he strongly suspected that off Euboea they had behaved like cowards because he was not present, but now he was fully prepared to watch them fight at sea (Hdt. 8.68–69).

Just as the two virgin goddesses, Athena and Artemis, who never marry and, except to their father Zeus, remain accountable for their own actions and never answerable to any of the other Olympian deities, Artemisia of Halicarnassus keeps her own counsel.²⁰ Having listened to the advice of his commanders, with only Artemisia dissenting, Xerxes commits to an immediate naval engagement. Perhaps Xerxes surrounds himself with too many sycophants who will ultimately serve him poorly—he needs independent minded councillors who are not afraid to tell him when he is in error—but we can infer that rightly or wrongly he has already decided on a course of action, and any meeting of commanders is just for a show of unity. Doubtless Artemisia perceives a closed mind, which is why she asks Mardonios to speak for her—if only to speak for the record. She has the courage to voice her convictions, but the loyalty and discipline to obey her emperor’s orders without further dissent.

I cannot speak with certainty about the rest of them, how each specific group of barbarians and Hellenes performed in the fighting, but this is what happened to Artemisia, which resulted in her winning still higher esteem from the King. [2] The King’s fleet had reached a state of mass confusion, and it was during this crisis that Artemisia’s ship was pursued by one from Attica. She was unable to escape it because there were so many other friendly ships in front of her, and since her own ship was closest to those of the enemy, she made a decision which turned out to be very much to her advantage. While she was still being chased by the Attic ship, she rammed at full speed, a friendly ship manned by Kalyndians and the king of the Kalyndians himself, Damasithymos. [3] Now I cannot say if there was some quarrel she had with him that had arisen while they were still near the Hellespont, or even whether, when she ran into the Kalyndian ship, the deed was premeditated or accidental. [4] But when she rammed it, the good she accomplished for herself was twofold. For when the trierarch of the Attic ship saw that she was ramming a ship of the barbarians, he assumed that Artemisia’s vessel was either a Greek ship or one that was deserting from the barbarians and now fighting for the Hellenes, so he turned away from her ship to attack others (Hdt. 8.87.1–4).

²⁰ Nor, like Hestia, does she become a respected but colourless old maid.

Surely Herodotus is disingenuous here rather than just diplomatic. He claims that he does not know whether or not there was some cause of a quarrel between Artemisia and Damasithymos, and then proceeds to name the time and place.²¹ Perhaps there is well-known, but not very interesting long-standing enmity between the two city-states, Halicarnassus and Kalynda, or between their ruling families? More likely, Damasithymos is envious of her renown and sufficiently boorish to cast insulting, misogynistic aspersions at her expense and behind her back figuring that he would get away with them.²²

That was one result to her advantage: she escaped and was not destroyed. But another outcome was that, even though she was doing harm to her own side, she won the highest possible praise from Xerxes. [2] For it is said that as the King was watching, he noticed one ship ramming the other, and one of the men with him said, “My lord, do you see how well Artemisia is fighting, and how she has sunk an enemy ship?” Xerxes inquired if it was truly Artemisia who had accomplished this feat, and they confirmed that it was, clearly recognising the ensign of her vessel, and believing that the one she had destroyed belonged to the enemy. [3] So all that, as I have explained, brought her good fortune. And in addition, no one from the Kalyndian ship survived to become her accuser. In response to what he had heard, Xerxes is reported to have said, “My men have become women, and my women, men!” (Hdt. 8.88.1–3).

DUAL STANDARDS EVEN FOR MEDIZING

Although we can infer that it is the Athenians, Herodotus does not say precisely which party among the League offers the reward for the capture of Artemisia. But the reasons he gives are unconvincing—and one suspects, but cannot prove, that there was

²¹ In addition to Artemisia not being truly Greek, despite her Dorian ethnicity, Herodotus may be suggesting that culturally some of the *royal barbaric power* has rubbed off on her and that as a Persian-appointed governor she readily adopts any degree of ruthlessness to get the job done. If a *bête noir*'s vessel happens to get in her way of course she will plough straight through it. She might even ask her marines to give its former commander a few spears to aid his flotation.

²² Happenstance perhaps, but fully in character with her eponym, the goddess Artemis, has a habit of emptying her quiver into anyone arrogant enough to make an unsolicited lecherous advance. Artemis even dispatches her boon hunting companion Orion, Poseidon's mortal son by Euryale, in this manner—perhaps in error.

much more to it than just her gender.²³ Nor does he indicate whether the commanders of the many other Ionian and Dorian naval contingents allied to Xerxes are similarly proscribed. But we can argue from his silence that they were not. We might also observe a strange paradox; Alexander I of Macedon goes out of his way to be accepted as Greek and the Peloponnesian League turn a forgiving blind eye to the accommodations he makes over the years with both Darius and Xerxes to remain in power. In contrast, Artemisia is accepted as Greek, evidently to her disadvantage, as the League does not grant her the same leniency over the same politically and militarily necessary realities. Possibly in land battles it is easier to disguise indifference to vigorous engagement, whereas in fleet action—at that time, an archery, ramming, and boarding contest at sea performed at five or six knots—such action avoidance is harder to conceal whether Xerxes is actually watching or not.

Of the Hellenes who fought in this naval battle at Salamis, praise for the greatest valor went to the Aeginetans, and after them to the Athenians; of individual men, to Polykritos of Aegina and the Athenians Eumenes of Anagyrous and Ameinias of Pallene. It was Ameinias who had pursued Artemisia; if he had realized that she was sailing on that ship, he would not have stopped before capturing her or being taken himself, [2] for orders to capture her has been given to the Athenian trierarchs, and a prize of 10,000 drachmas has been offered to whoever captured her alive, since they considered it a disgrace that a woman should wage war on Athens. But as I described earlier, she managed to escape, and there were others whose ships had survived also who were all now at Phaleron (Hdt. 8.93).

This Athenian bounty—ninety-five pounds of silver—needs some explanation beyond perceived disgrace by the Athenians and the gender discrimination later voiced by Xerxes equating female gender with cowardice. None of the other Ionian commanders attracted bounties for their capture—whether dead or alive Herodotus does

²³ We know that her ships fought well at Artemision, Herodotus lets her tell us so (Hdt. 8.68.1). Perhaps she came to Athenian notice then. But she ignores the messages left by Themistocles urging the Ionians to detach themselves from the Barbarian forces, or if that is not possible to be neutral, or at the very least fight very poorly (Hdt. 8.19 and 8.22.1–3). Actually Themistocles likely hoped that Xerxes would hear of these messages and not trust his Carian allies.

not say. Herodotus' final entry directly concerning Artemisia takes place in Xerxes' campaign headquarters, presumably near Phaleron, shortly following the disastrous naval battle off Salamis and comprises three paragraphs:

Xerxes felt as much joy and pleasure in hearing this as he could, considering his adversities. He told Mardonios that he would first consult with others about the two courses before giving him an answer. And while he was deliberating with his specially chosen counselors, he decided to summon Artemisia to join the consultation, because she had obviously been the only one before who had correctly perceived what should be done. [2] When Artemisia arrived, Xerxes sent away all of the others, his counselors as well as his bodyguards, and said to her, "Mardonios bids me to stay and make an attempt on the Peloponnese, claiming that the Persians—the land army, that is—are not to blame for the disaster, and that they want to display proof of that. [3] In any case, he bids me to do that, or if not, he wants to pick out 300,000 troops from the army and completely enslave Hellas, and bids me lead the rest of the army back to my homeland. [4] Well, then, since you counseled me well by trying to prevent me from waging the naval battle that has taken place, please tell me now how I can prosper through your good advice."

Thus he requested her advice, and this is what she told him: "Sire, it is difficult for me to give the best advice to you, as you are seeking the best possible course of action, but in view of the present situation, it seems to me that you should go back home, and if Mardonios wants and promises to do what he has suggested, leave him behind here with the men of his choice. For if he does subjugate this land as he claims he would like to do and thus succeeds in this plan, the success will be yours, my lord, since the conquest will be performed by your slaves. On the other hand, if the outcome is the opposite of what Mardonios thinks will happen, it will be no great misfortune, since you will survive and so will your power in Asia as far as your house is concerned. [3] And if you and your house survive, the Hellenes will have to run many races for their lives. Besides, if something happens to Mardonios, it is of no great consequence. And if the Hellenes win, they will not win anything substantial by destroying your slave, while you will march home after you have burned Athens, and thus will have achieved the goal of your expedition.

Strangely, Artemisia's strategic advice very closely matches that given to Xerxes by Artabanos four years earlier, long before the Persians muster their army and embark on their punitive expedition (Hdt. 7.10.Θ.1–3).

Xerxes was delighted with this advice, for she had succeeded in telling him exactly what he was thinking himself. But I suppose that even if all the men and women in the world had advised him to stay, he would not have done so, such was his state of utter terror. After praising Artemisia, he sent her off to take his sons to Ephesus, for some of his illegitimate sons had accompanied him (Hdt. 8.101–103).

A DORIAN AMAZON

What can we deduce about Artemisia's character from the four extended anecdotes that Herodotus provides? He goes to considerable lengths to give her genealogy as more Dorian than Carian, let alone Ionian; and it is fair to ask why. When describing the battle off Salamis Herodotus appears to be comparing her role as a trusted military/naval advisor to Xerxes to the parallel strategic discussions Themistocles is having with other members of the Hellenic Alliance. Xerxes' treatment of her is gender neutral—she is one of his more trusted and able naval commanders and that is all there is to it.²⁴ Neither fish nor fowl—Artemisia, unlike Atossa is not the consort of a Persian emperor. But to her credit she has earned agency, autonomy, and authority: moreover she is prepared to accept the cost—accountability.²⁵ Nor has she been obliged to become androgynous like Artemis or Athena to achieve this—she takes a spouse and is a child-bearer. Unlike Gorgo she is not the consort of a Spartan king. She is an effective ruler in her own right, and it is this effectiveness that Herodotus and his audience find disturbing with an ambivalence fluctuating between admiration and revulsion.²⁶ On a

²⁴ Richard Stoneman argues that Xerxes is dominated by strong women; initially by his mother (obviously), then by his principal (and only wife), and that perhaps he was similarly impressed by Artemisia (*Xerxes: A Persian Life* 9, 30, and 123). But unless Xenophon or Strabo have given scholars independent evidence, then this is just a Stoneman interpretation of Herodotus, perhaps overly influenced by modern popular novelists.

²⁵ These three essential elements—the three A's—are always present in whichever wave of feminist theory you scrutinise let alone adopt.

personal and domestic level the Greek commanders have no difficulty seeing themselves fulfilling three roles for their wives: father for their children, but companion and lover for their children's mother; but they are blind to the notion that their spouses might well see themselves fulfilling three similar roles for their husbands—namely *hetairai*, but not just *pornai*, *pallakai*, and *gynaikai*. Just as the men have temporarily suspended their domestic responsibilities to go to war, Artemisia, albeit a widow, has done much the same thing. The Athenian playwright's jest about her being an Amazon is dangerously telling, and that is not just because the Amazons, like Artemis, fought on the Trojan's side against the Hellenes.²⁷

Furthermore, do events in Anatolia within living memory have any bearing on her style of governance? Artemisia will doubtless have heard of the very similar rebuff given by the Spartan king Cleomenes in 500 when Aristagoras, the tyrant of Miletus, comes to Sparta soliciting his interest in a self-financing raid on the Persian capital Susa (Hdt. 5.49.1–4, 7–9). All Spartan interest vanishes, if there ever was any, when Cleomenes learns that the Persian capital is a three-month long journey inland from the coast (Hdt. 5.50.2). That Aristagoras is successful in obtaining Athenian interest is the cause of Darius' crushing of the Ionian Revolt early in the fifth century, and one of the reasons behind several Persian punitive expeditions to mainland Greece and the two Greco-Persian wars. In short, as the ruler of Halicarnassus Artemisia knows that causing trouble for Xerxes and then relying on Athens, let alone Sparta, for military protection forever afterwards is naïve if not foolhardy. This puts her in a similar position to that of Alexander of Macedon. She best serves her subjects, let alone her own family, by keeping Xerxes' garrison troops well out of her domain and by giving Xerxes no cause to

²⁶ One of the more famous dictums of Demosthenes comes to mind, “Mistresses we keep for the sake of pleasure, concubines for the daily care of our persons, but wives to bear us legitimate children and to be faithful guardians of our households” (Demosthenes, *Orations* 59.122).

²⁷ The Amazons, who Herodotus tells us came from a region in northern Anatolia and who perhaps inveigle young Scythian warriors to come ashore solely for breeding purposes—copulation on demand for procreation—are always depicted dressed very much like Artemis, wearing the short Spartan peplos with right shoulder bare (Hdt. 4.111.2–4.113.1). From post Homeric sources we know that the Amazons are skilled mounted archers and fought against the Greeks during the Trojan War. There are also mythical stories of Theseus and the Amazons attacking Athens.

dismiss her and appoint a Persian commander to her governorship—in short, pay the agreed tribute on time, respond promptly to troop levies, and do not knowingly harbour malcontents.²⁸

²⁸ As hinted at by several scholars, appearances are sometimes not deceptive at all and this may be why Herodotus and possibly his family become *personae non gratae* in Halicarnassus.

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Gorgo of Sparta

[Hdt. 5.48, 5.51.2–3, and Hdt. 7.239.2–4]

INTRODUCTION

Herodotus names very few Greek women in his *Histories*, nor does he assign many of them significant roles during the Helleno-Persian Wars. But his readers must readily note that in terms of political judgement he has nothing but praise for one royal Spartan woman—Gorgo—who is born somewhat later than Atossa of Persia but about the same time as Artemisia of Halicarnassus and is therefore her contemporary. Women are mentioned 375 times by Herodotus (Dewald 94, and 125). But when including Greeks, Barbarians, divinities, and other mythological figures he actually names fewer than fifty women and very few of these are Greek. Nevertheless, women or femininity have a significant influence on the outcome of over fifty events depicted in the *Histories* (Tourraix 369 and 385–386).

As is often the case, the biographical details that Herodotus gives of many individuals fall far short of fully developed cradle to grave assessments. But that is not to say that these gleanings defy either expansion in context or interpretation; or that in many cases that these oblique references and anecdotes cannot be pieced together to form a reasonably continuous narrative. Herodotus' first entry for Gorgo reads: ¹

That then is how Dorieus met his end. Now if he had stayed in Sparta, and had endured the rule of Cleomenes, he would have become king of Lacedaemon, since Cleomenes did not rule for long but died without siring a son. He left behind only a daughter, whose name was Gorgo (Hdt. 5.48). ²

¹ See the Gorgo/Medusa entry by J. N. Bremmer in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, fourth ed. Herodotus gets his chronology for 490 somewhat tangled. Whether Cleomenes died or was assassinated before or after the battle of Marathon is not known.

² This entry amounts to all of thirty-seven words in the Greek book roll, with only ten referring to her: ἀλλ' ἀπέθανε ἄπαις, θυγατέρα μούνηνλιπών, τῆ οὔνομα ἦν Γοργώ

Hardly an auspicious entry, most of which is about her father and an uncompromising uncle. Much more is very likely widely known about Gorgo at this time, even outside of Sparta, but perhaps for this reason alone these details are deliberately omitted by the author as utter commonplaces of minimal contemporary audience interest—we will never know—perhaps another example of that *axioma vulgare* Occam’s broom.³

AN ONLY CHILD

Gorgo is the only known legitimate child of Cleomenes I, the Agiad king of Sparta; and she becomes the wife of Leonidas I—the Spartan dyarch killed in battle at Thermopylae in the late summer of 480—and the mother of Pleistarchus, dyarch of Sparta from 479 to 458. Since Gorgo’s own son is still a minor upon his father’s battlefield death, initially his only surviving uncle Cleombrotus and then his first cousin Pausanias serve as his regents. Whether as dowager queen-consort Gorgo assumes a significant role in the Spartan court, Herodotus does not say. Although the Ephors will change annually she will know of them and they of her, and she will be entirely familiar with many members of the Gerousia including, of course, the kings or the appointed regent.⁴

HERACLID HERITAGE

The significance of Gorgo’s name, which derives from the ancient Greek (γοργός) *gorgós*, meaning grim, or dreadful, is an interesting anachronism and arguably evidence of a royal Spartan, perhaps even tongue-in-cheek, challenge to established, late sixth-century Greek mythology. According to Hesiod’s *Theogony* the three Gorgons are female monsters of frightening appearance where even a lock of Medusa’s hair can defeat an

³ See the *Moralia* “Sayings of Spartan Women” where Plutarch includes six sayings, which he attributes to Gorgo (Babbitt, 451–469). These appear to be in character, and although he does not credit his sources for these, none of them come from Herodotus—this gives some credence to the notion that Herodotus makes his own selection from many now lost anecdotes about her.

⁴ Sparta has a five-member Board of Ephors elected annually by the Assembly which comprises all male Spartan citizens; and, the Gerousia, a thirty-member Council of Elders—the two kings plus twenty-eight men aged over sixty but elected for life by the Assembly. This Assembly, known as the Ekklesia, would always be required to vote on matters of peace or war (Cartledge 2002, 45–46).

entire army and their gaze turn anon who looks at them into stone (*Th.* 270–279).⁵ However, over time, the beauty/ugliness—desire/fear ambivalence fades and by the fifth century the Gorgon’s are portrayed as beautiful (gorgeous—no pun intended) young women.⁶ In addition, Gorgo’s name might be an abbreviation of, or an allusion to, the name Gorgophone (Γοργοφόνη) which translates as ‘gorgon-slayer’ a reference to Perseus’ greatest deed—his beheading of the only mortal Gorgon—Medusa.⁷ Gorgophone is the daughter of Perseus and Andromeda. One of the sons of Oibalos, Gorgophone’s first husband, is Tyndareus, stepfather of Helen of Troy and Pollux, and father of Clytemnestra, and Castor, and another son is Icarius, father of Penelope, Odysseus’s spouse. One of their great-great-grandsons is Heracles.

Such an abundance of Homeric and mythical allusions cannot be happenstance. Cleomenes is blessed with only one child and he brings her up much as he might the son and heir he did not have, but with similar *great expectations*.⁸ As the Agiad king’s *patrouchoi* (πατροῦχοι) she is nevertheless an exceptional individual and at once the most powerful and easily the most desirable of contemporary Spartan heiresses.⁹ Arguably the path to the throne offered by Gorgo and Helen of Sparta to respectively Leonidas and

⁵ Two of the Gorgons were immortal (Stheno and Euryale) whereas Medusa was mortal (killed by Perseus). Arguably her name, Gorgo, will resonate as heavily theophoric with any contemporary Hellenic audience.

⁶ These myths are extended by later writers including Apollodorus and Pausanias.

⁷ This mystery is raised by at least one Spartan scholar; but not quite flummoxed he hesitatingly shies from the notion that her name is the Spartan king’s equivalent of the 1969 “A Boy Named Sue” challenge by J. R. Cash/Shel Silverstein (Cartledge 2002, 104–105).

⁸ Spartan *patrouchoi* are more generously treated than *epikleroi* (ἐπίκληροι), their counterparts elsewhere in mainland Greece. In Greek drama, Antigone, Oedipus’ eldest daughter in Sophocles’ tragedy the *Antigone*, becomes an *epikleros* when her two brothers Eteocles and Polyneices are killed and the new Theban ruler, her uncle Creon, becomes responsible for her marriage as well as that of her younger sister Ismene.

⁹ Herodotus points out that by the Spartan interpretation of male-preference primogeniture rules, because Cleomenes has no male heir, if Dorieus, the eldest of Cleomenes’ younger half-brothers, had not been killed in 510 during a forlorn attempt to found an independent Spartan colony in Sicily, he would have succeeded to the throne on Cleomenes’ death (Hdt. 5.48 and Hdt. 5.42–5.46.1). Interestingly, neither of his younger brothers, Leonidas or Cleombrotus, join Dorieus in these colonial misadventures.

Menelaus is a variant of male-preference primogeniture.¹⁰ Given their age differences, it is possible that Leonidas either put aside an earlier spouse, or more likely simply remained unmarried until his niece, Gorgo, had reached her late teens.

THE SON HE NEVER HAD

One of Herodotus' more delightful anecdotes and perhaps one which constitutes her *one character-defining moment* concerns Cleomenes' early fifth-century meetings with the Ionian tyrant Aristagoras, at the last of which Gorgo is in attendance (5.49–5.50).¹¹ Aristagoras, the tyrant of Miletus seeks Spartan assistance in a proposed Ionian quest for independence, but Cleomenes is unconvinced and delays his decision (Hdt. 5.49.9). It is when they next meet that Cleomenes learns how far inland the Persian capital, Susa, lies (Hdt. 5.50.1–2).¹² At this point Cleomenes says:

“My guest friend of Miletus, you must depart from Sparta before sunset. Your request will never be accepted by the Lacedaemonians if you intend to lead them on a three-month journey away from the sea” (Hdt. 5.50.3).

Note that he says, “accepted by the Lacedaemonians” a clear indication that an affirmative vote from the Assembly is mandatory. Herodotus does not say where this meeting takes place, but he does say that despite the formal public banishment decree Aristagoras

¹⁰ Tyndareus is king of Sparta, but his consort, Leda, gives simultaneous birth to two sets of twins—Clytemnestra and Castor fathered by him and to Helen and Pollux fathered by Zeus. Myths vary but in most Castor and Pollux predecease Helen, and after Menelaus marries Helen Tyndareus and Leda abdicate the Spartan throne in their favour. Therefore one reason why Menelaus is so anxious to recover Helen is because her presence as his spouse legitimises his rule in Sparta—his succession is strictly matrilineal.

¹¹ This meeting in Sparta takes place in 499, well before the foolish if not abortive Ionian raid on Sardis in 498. This raid, in which the Ionians were supported by contingents from Athens and Eretria, is one of the causes of the first Greco-Persian war.

¹² At one stage Aristagoras produces a map engraved on a tablet; but whether it really shows to scale that Ephesus, a likely port for any invasion force, is around 555 kilometres (300 nautical miles) away from the Peloponnesus, Sardis, a provincial capital, over 100 kilometres from Ephesus, and Susa, the Persian capital, another 2,700 kilometres from Sardis with Persepolis and Pasargadae even further distant, Herodotus does not say (Hdt. 5.49.5–7).

follows Cleomenes home (Hdt. 5.51.1).¹³ The inference is that their first meeting was in some public place with several ephors or members of the Gerousia in attendance. He also uses the word home rather than palace, the inference is that the Spartan dyarchs do not indulge in the use of splendid personal accommodation during their reign.

He first asked Cleomenes to send away the child there, for his daughter whose name was Gorgo was standing beside the king. He happened to have only this one child, who at that time was about eight or nine years old. Cleomenes ordered Aristagoras to speak out and say what he wanted and not to hold back because of the presence of the child. [2] So Aristagoras began by promising him ten talents if he would fulfill his request. Cleomenes refused, and Aristagoras increased the sum step by step, until he has raised the offer to fifty talents. At this point the child blurted out, "Father, your guest-friend is going to corrupt you unless you leave and stay away from him." [3] Cleomenes was pleased with his child's advice, and he went into another room. Aristagoras departed and then left Sparta completely, losing the opportunity to explain the journey inland to the king any further (Hdt. 5.51.1–3).

If Cleomenes' only child had been male, the boy might well have been sent off to the Agoge when aged seven and would rarely see either his mother or his father; as things turn out Cleomenes gets the best of both worlds and he is able to raise and perhaps indulge his only child at home throughout her childhood and adolescence.

SPARTAN EDUCATION AND ETHICS

Why Herodotus should include this anecdote leads to more questions than answers. We know very little about the inner workings of the Spartan court, but evidently diplomatic visitors can seek private audiences with one of the kings or perhaps one or

¹³ Never great at chronology and indeed why let that spoil a good story—a fault largely attributable to his own and his sources' lack of a supranational calendar and dating system—Herodotus exaggerates Gorgo's youth in this anecdote from 499, perhaps to make her appear exceedingly precocious and her father rather doting. She was already married to her uncle on her father's death in 490/489 and since her son came out of regency in 479, we can surmise that she married Leonidas a year or so after this bribery incident, putting her year of birth around 516 as was Artemisia's. Nevertheless Gorgo is the daughter, wife, and mother of a Spartan king. The Persian queen Atossa is some thirty-five years older.

more of the ephors. There is a hint here that Cleomenes' authority has increased over the past fifteen years.¹⁴ A royal child's silent attendance might be a compulsory part of their upbringing.¹⁵ Neither illiterate nor innumerate, these young Spartan girls acquire not only the same grounding, if not much better, in the three R's—*reading, 'riting, and 'rithmetic*—as their male siblings; but in addition the wonderful potentially off-road freedom from close surveillance afforded by the fourth R—riding.¹⁶ The one-hour ride horizon is vast compared to that accessible on foot. And it matters little whether this riding was astride or aside—it would be another millennium before the saddle is invented.

In contrast, if ever allowed outside the home, Athenian women, irrespective of age are driven by others, trusted male slaves, in covered wagons. And famously even a Phaeacian princess has to inveigle her doting father, Alcinous, for permission to drive the wagon loaded with laundry and her maid-servants; although her confidence and skill with mule team suggests that she is no novice and this is not the first time the king has acquiesced in granting his daughter such freedom (*Od.* 6.39–44, 6.61–65 and 6.80–94).¹⁷

Although the lifestyle of the Spartan people is already synonymous with simplicity and communal austerity, were individuals, particularly those in positions of influence, invariably immune to bribery?¹⁸ Evidently Aristagoras believes that the Agiad Spartan

¹⁴ Earlier in his reign, when Maiandrios of Samos attempts to bribe him, the young king immediately informs the Ephors and recommends that Maiandrios be banished from the Peloponnese lest he succeed in corrupting other Spartan leaders (*Hdt.* 3.148.1–3.149.1). Now he has the authority to banish Aristagoras (see How and Wells 2.5.50.3–51.2).

¹⁵ For general comments on the education of young female children in Sparta see Pomeroy (*Spartan Women*, 3–32).

¹⁶ We hardly need Fay Weldon to point out that possession of these four “R’s” ultimately leads to acquisition of the three “A’s”—autonomy, authority, and agency—and the cost—accountability—trivial and not unreasonable at all.

¹⁷ Claiming that Homer—particularly in the *Odyssey*—might also qualify as a proto-feminist is far beyond my present scope. But Herodotus' audiences will recall that it is the Phaeacian queen, Arete, who appears to be the real power beside the throne, and Odysseus follows Athena's advice to approach her and not the king when seeking assistance (see *Od.* 6.340–345 and 7.164–175). Again, Herodotus' audiences will recall the possibility of a succession with matrilineal enhancement—Alcinous marries his niece, Arete, both sole surviving children (*Od.* 8.74–78).

king can be bribed; but whether Aristagoras, the tyrant of Miletus, fully understands the intricacies of Sparta's almost unique dyarchy—two kings, neither an absolute ruler, who must work in conjunction with the Board of Ephors, the Council of Elders, and ultimately the Assembly—Herodotus does not say. But Aristagoras is hardly the first ruler to harbour misconceptions about how most effectively to influence Spartan leadership, and furthermore ultimately to be disappointed. Herodotus tosses in the salacious tale that some ten years earlier Cleomenes is known to have been extraordinarily if not intimately friendly with the wife of the Athenian aristocrat Isagoras (Hdt. 5.70.1). However much Cleomenes may well have enjoyed her bedroom favours and she his; given the complex decision-making process in Sparta, Isagoras' pandering his spouse likely results in only their mutual delight and/or base release without the desired significant influence on any diplomatic outcome. She is an Athenian aristocrat and therefore remains unnamed, but likely not at all unknown one way or another to the more influential contemporary Athenian politicians some of whom may have been offered similar carnal inducements by Isagoras.¹⁹

Evidently, in this instance, Herodotus is letting an otherwise naïve female teenager make the obvious point that no matter where one is positioned in politics and diplomacy, almost everyone ultimately has a price. Irrespective of how her sense of morality is instilled and perhaps ethics are a part of her palace upbringing, Gorgo's suggestion that her father simply leaves the room shows she is gentler, kinder, and more diplomatic than he is. Herodotus is also subtly hinting that educating women will create an important societal asset. This is not to say that once Cleomenes accepts Aristagoras' clumsy silver bullion bribe he can or would even consider ever following through. But more importantly to Gorgo is the notion that by even listening her father risks dragging the Agiad kingship and Sparta in general into disrepute.

¹⁸ The word *spartan* enters the English language as a noun for austerity and indifference to luxury during the seventeenth century. Notwithstanding this famed austerity, Herodotus and Thucydides are littered with instances of Spartan leaders both offering and accepting bribes.

¹⁹ As John Heywood (1546) might surmise, it would be “an yll wynde that blowth no man to good” (*Prov., Part ii, Chap ix*)

This is a broad jab to his contemporary readers that other Greek city-states—piously proffering the usual and expected denials—are also demonstrably susceptible to political and judicial corruption.²⁰ Moreover, Herodotus is setting the stage so that after her Agiad dynasty repairing marriage Gorgo can be regarded as the equal in stature of such legendary Homeric consorts as at least Andromache in the *Iliad*, or in much more flattering terms to Penelope in the *Odyssey*.²¹ However, until Gorgo marries, the best model or *fit* in Homeric terms for a vivacious and intelligent young woman of royal birth, welcome and active in her parent's court, is the beautiful Phaeacian princess, Nausicaa.²² Hers is that rare ability to immediately discern nobility, virtue, and character despite all outward appearances (*Od.* 6.148–158). Conversely Gorgo instantly discerns that Aristagoras lacks all of these attributes and—like many self-serving politicians then and now—that he has nothing to say worth listening to.

A DUTIFUL PRINCESS

A year or so after this incident Gorgo marries her uncle Leonidas, her father's half brother by a different mother. Endogamy—a favoured pastime of many royal houses and the landed aristocracy—is a commonly accepted practice by the Greeks, including Athenians and Spartans.²³ In Gorgo's case—despite what in modern terms we might regard as distressing consanguinity—her marriage tidies up a major loose end in the Agiad

²⁰ Gorgo's father is outraged to learn that the Athenians have corrupted the oracle at Delphi to garner Spartan support (*Hdt.* 6.123.2), but less than two decades later Cleomenes will bribe the Pythia—Periallos—to aid in his deposing of Demaratos (*Hdt.* 6.66.1–3). Note that in this case—perhaps because the Pythia's behaviour is so disreputable—her name is given.

²¹ As usual Herodotus tell us nothing about her physical appearance; but we can argue from his silence that it was quite unremarkable, not rivalling Helen of Sparta or he would have said as much.

²² See books 6 to 8 of the *Odyssey*, set before Odysseus begins his storytelling after washing up on the shores of Scheria (probably Corfu). Nausicaa is the only daughter of King Alcinous and Queen Arete of the island kingdom of the Phaeacians.

²³ Leonidas (his name a loose reference to the lion-slaying Heracles) was born around the year 540 and would be expected to marry when in his early- to mid-twenties. As Cartledge points out, unless he was widowed or set aside an earlier bride, he would be in his mid-forties when he marries the teen-aged Gorgo (242–243). Or was he simply waiting?

line of succession.²⁴ Recall that when Gorgo's grandfather's spouse appears to be barren, Anaxandridas is reluctantly persuaded by his Council of Ephors to enter into a bigamous marriage—a union that promptly produces the required son Cleomenes, Gorgo's father. Most surprisingly and shortly thereafter Anaxandridas' first wife, unnamed, of course, quickly gives birth to three sons: Dorieus, Leonidas, and Cleombrotus thereby clouding the Agiad succession.²⁵ Gorgo's father, Cleomenes, may have spent his entire lifetime deprived of the secure knowledge of his Agiad legitimacy; the ephors forced the issue are now long gone, and many of those elected to the Gerousia will have passed away. One way or another, this marriage of his only child to a legitimate Agiad nephew removes any future cloud.

Herodotus tells one last anecdote concerning Gorgo in the year 485.²⁶ And we should be mindful that these are flattering anecdotes that he cannot possibly tell about contemporary Athenian women.²⁷ During this period Athenian women whether

²⁴ Herodotus' audiences will see another Homeric echo here. Menelaus' succession to the Spartan throne was matrilineal. Tyndareus stepped down abdicating in favour of his daughter and son-in-law; and, without Helen as his consort Menelaus has no claim (see Calame 174–175).

²⁵ Although entirely of their own making the Ephors' dilemma is simple—is the true heir apparent the absolute first-born, albeit by the second, possibly bigamous union—or is he the somewhat younger first-born male child by Anaxandridas' first and unquestionably legitimate spouse? They can stall for a few years to see which children survive infancy, but not forever.

²⁶ Classicists will recall that among *Plutarch's Moralia* he devotes a chapter to “Sayings of Spartan Women”—*Lacaenarum Apophthegmata*—there is no such chapter for Athenian women, nor for any other group of women (Babbitt, 451–469). However, Plutarch has a not entirely relevant chapter also among his *Moralia* entitled “Bravery of Women”—*Mulierum Virtutes* (Babbitt 471–581). Athenian men insisted on protecting their wives, sisters, and daughters from the public sphere, consequently like little Victorian children they were to be rarely seen and seldom heard. In fact, if an Athenian woman's name is given, more likely than not, she is an accomplished *hetaira* (ἑταίρα) or perhaps one of many well-known local *pornai* (πόρναι) rather than a noblewoman—Aspasia of Miletus—Pericles' concubine comes to mind.

²⁷ This sounds much like an Archaic Athenian variant of “Kinder, Küche, Kirche” (aber keine Komödie). Without giving any clues toward a date, we can only assume that it was late in the sixth century, Herodotus describes how the Pelasgians, who were at one time justly expelled from Attica by the Athenians, some of whom settled on Lemnos in the northern Aegean and from there plotted their revenge. Some years after the expulsion they raid the temple at Brauron during the annual Festival to Artemis abducting many young Athenian women to be distributed among themselves as concubines. As the religious ritual was performed entirely by teenaged women,

aristocratic or ordinary citizens are confined to the domestic sphere and generally cannot appear in public—unless it is to attend an all-female religious festival.²⁸ But whether Herodotus’ audiences ever notice this remarkable inclusion in his *Histories* of an independent and gifted woman who was neither an Amazon nor a courtesan contemporary Greek commentators do not say.

When Demaratos son of Ariston was in exile among the Medes, I do not believe—and here reason is my ally—that he had goodwill toward the Lacedaemonians, though one may conjecture whether he acted out of benevolence or out of spiteful satisfaction. For when Xerxes resolved to lead an expedition against Hellas, Demaratos was in Susa, and upon learning Xerxes’ plans, immediately wanted to communicate this information to the Lacedaemonians. [3] There was a risk that he would be caught, so there was no other way he could inform them except by the following scheme. Taking a double writing tablet, he scraped off the wax and inscribed the plan of the King onto the wood of the tablet. After doing this he melted some wax back over what he had written, so that the tablet would be apparently blank and thus cause no trouble from the guards as it was conveyed to its destination. [4] When it arrived at Lacedaemon, the Lacedaemonians could not understand what it meant until, according to what I have heard, Gorgo the daughter of Cleomenes and wife of Leonidas deduced the answer herself. She ordered them to scrape off the wax, and said that they would then discover a message written on the wood (Hdt. 7.239.2–4).

A QUEEN’S PLACE AMONG COURTIERES

To claim Gorgo as the first female cryptanalyst overstates the case as she is not deciphering Demaratos’ message, just revealing it.²⁹ But in closing book 7 of his

very few men, other than the covered wagon drivers, would be in attendance making the raid particularly cowardly (Hdt. 6.137.3–6.140.2).

²⁸ In a comparison between Spartan and Athenian women Cartledge comments that young Spartan women “were married at eighteen—a substantially later age than their Athenian counterparts” (*Spartans Epic* 24).

²⁹ Until deposed by Cleomenes in 491, in what can only be described as the dirtiest of deeds including corruption of the oracle at Delphi, Demaratos was the Eurypontid king of Sparta (Hdt. 6.65.1–6.67.1). Banished from the kingdom, he eventually ends up an advisor at Xerxes’ court.

Histories Herodotus goes out of his way to make the case that where a roomful of men—supposedly Sparta’s brightest and best—are utterly flummoxed, she is not.³⁰ There is no evidence that Gorgo shares her father’s enmity with Demaratos. Indeed this incident suggests that she knew him sufficiently well to be confident that he would not risk his life with any secret communication without good reason.³¹ Again, why Herodotus should include this anecdote raises interesting questions far beyond the ethnic (Athenian) slur that all Spartan males were Neanderthal Heraclids bred for brawn and not brain. He is sorting through and selecting from any number of near contemporary but unwritten stories in current circulation from his sources in the Peloponnese and Attica.³² Most stories *improve with the telling* and Herodotus is certainly free to creatively re-work his source material both to his liking and to that of his audiences.

Arguably we can make the case that Herodotus is also a proto-feminist, almost two and a half millennia before the word is ever coined. Near the end of her article Lynette Mitchell writes, “It remains to ask whether it is significant that many of these women come from cities which might, from an Athenocentric point of view, be considered to lie on the edges of the Greek world” (Mitchell 20). Athenians may piously take their cue from Homer, and Hector in particular, who believes that women should solely “tend to . . . the distaff and the loom” (*Il.* 6.585–586).³³ The centre is often taken as the pinnacle of

He may well have wished every ill of Cleomenes while harbouring no ill-will against the Spartan people.

³⁰ Arguably Gorgo is a very different heroine than Andromache, who is hardly praised by Hector for her listing of her personal losses during the course of the war and lamenting his role (*Il.* 6.480–520). But unlike Andromache, Hector’s spouse, Gorgo—who is more like Penelope—in a point raised in her article about the role of the women of ruling families—is not telling her husband’s courtiers how to conduct the war (Mitchell 10).

³¹ Scholars differ on interpretation of this incident; the fairest comment is that it is at least a misplaced fragment and makes a poor transition from book 7 to book 8 to boot (How and Wells 2.7.239).

³² If, as might be inferred from a disparaging comment by Plutarch, Herodotus gave public performances of near-completed portions of his work, we could argue that the perceived bias or spin on any particular story is a palimpsest of the last audience to whom it was successfully presented (Plu., *Mor.* 864D).

³³ To point out the obvious: Hector is killed in battle and his body mutilated by Achilles, his infant son Astyanax has his brains splattered beneath the walls of Troy by Neoptolemus, Achilles’

achievement, but it can equally be the slough of despair. No matter, we can make the claim that Gorgo, just to name one remarkable woman, earns her own place in Greek history on her own merits and not just upon those of the Spartan ruler to whom she is married or on those of her father. There is an unresolved paradox here—five of the Olympians are goddesses and are depicted in divine myth in their own ways as just as powerful as the Olympian gods.³⁴ This leaves unexplained why the status of mortal women is generally so low.

GLOOMY PROPHECIES

Long before leaving the Peloponnese for Attica and the Hot Gates of Thermopylae to meet the Persian invader, the Spartans consult Apollo's oracle at Delphi and for once the Pythia's prophecy is particularly gloomy but unequivocal. The Pythia's prophecy is a simple either—or—either their city [Sparta] would be sacked by the Persians or that their king would die (Hdt. 7.220.2–4). Herodotus does not recount Gorgo's reaction, but Plutarch does. Gorgo must know about the oracle and Plutarch suggests that she discusses *what if's* with Leonidas.³⁵ Herodotus does not discuss what the Spartan authorities thought of this either, but offers the suggestion that Leonidas immediately perceives the Achilles-like parallel—*kleos* or everlasting renown—partially explaining why he assumes overall command but eventually sends much of his force away to fight another day.

Herodotus' audiences will not miss the point that Gorgo is widowed when her husband accepts, if not actively seeks, the most gloriously Homeric of all battlefield deaths—fighting to almost the last man when his three hundred Spartan hoplites and disputed but likely similar numbers of loyal Thebans and Thespians are grossly

son, and Andromache is a live trophy and taken away into involuntary concubinage by the victors and assigned to Neoptolemus.

³⁴ There are twelve (or perhaps thirteen) Olympian gods and Hestia (certainly sober and a virgin) is often displaced in the listings by Dionysus (most determinedly neither). Three of the Olympian goddesses are virgins—there are no male virgins on Mount Olympus.

³⁵ See Babbitt 455–456, possibly an apocryphal tale, Gorgo encourages Leonidas to show himself worthy and asks him what she should do, and he replies, “Marry a good man, and bear good children” (Plu. *Mor.* 240.6E).

outnumbered by Xerxes' army of tens of thousands.³⁶ Her husband's battlefield death becomes even more Homeric when his remaining hoplites are killed when unsuccessfully trying to protect his corpse from Persian mutilation. Homer's battlefield heroes have a similar aspiration for what might be termed surrogate immortality stemming from eternal fame.³⁷ Herodotus' contemporary audiences—steeped in Homer—may even compare and contrast her behaviour with Hector's spouse—who berates his role and bewails his responsibilities—except that Gorgo is no weeping Andromache (*Il.* 22.550–570 and *Il.* 24.893–912)—and also with Odysseus' spouse, Penelope—who accepts that such was her lot—indeed to win her he had devised and taken the Oath of Tyndareus himself and his duty was clear.³⁸ Whether Gorgo ever questions her husband's motives is a matter Herodotus leaves largely unexplored—but it is fair to ask whether in a Kantian sense Leonidas does all the right things at Thermopylae for all the wrong reasons. For some valour is necessarily selfless. Although bravery may not be fearless, neither is it mindless or suicidal. Herodotus actually comments on the two Spartan survivors of Thermopylae (*Hdt.* 7.229–7.231 and *Hdt.* 9.71.2–4). From what Herodotus writes about Aristodemos' battlefield death at Plataea, he leaves Leonidas' quest for *kleos* open to re-evaluation.³⁹

³⁶ Patroclus is killed in battle by Hector (*Il.* 16.951–971), but much of the action of book 17 of the *Iliad* covers the subsequent fight over his armour and his corpse. On Xerxes' orders Leonidas' corpse is mutilated and his severed head is mounted on an infantryman's spear—an unusual and ignominious treatment by the Persians of a brave warrior and monarch (*Hdt.* 7.238.1–2). There is a comparison here to Cambyses' attempt to desecrate the mummified body of the Egyptian ruler Amasis (see How and Wells 2.7.238).

³⁷ See Michael Clarke, “Spartan *Atē* at Thermopylae” where (*ἄτη*) *atē* is the term for reckless folly (65). (*Ἄτη*) *Atē*, perhaps a daughter of Zeus, is also the goddess of delusion, mischief, and ruin.

³⁸ Herodotus' contemporary audiences, most of whom will know their Homer backward, will be familiar with Odysseus' surprisingly progressive views on companionate marriage, in particular in book 6 where he sincerely wishes that with her future husband Nausicaa will find “two minds, [and] two hearts that work as one” (*Od.* 6.201–202).

³⁹ Of the Three-Hundred, three were sent away from Thermopylae as messengers: Aristodemos, Eurytos, and Pantites. Eurytos although totally blind with an eye disease returns to fight and dies in battle, whereas Pantites does not return to participate in the battle and hangs himself in disgrace. Aristodemos suffering from similar blindness does not return to the battle but survives to live in disgrace in Sparta. One year later Aristodemos is killed at Plataea, but is denied any measure of

There is no evidence that Gorgo ever re-marries, indeed doing so might confound her son's succession; but equally—widowed to a Spartan hero—she has no interest in a potentially second-rate, second mate. Herodotus has penned the outline of an enduring love story.⁴⁰ But all this grief is in Gorgo's future—the bare description of her birth by Herodotus—more a lament over no male heir—and the two anecdotes above place her *defining moments* in the same context as those of Homer's Phaeacian princess Nausicaa.

kleos by the Spartans because they believed that he wanted to make a spectacle of his battlefield death and such *atē* is never rewarded.

⁴⁰ Here we might recognise two aspects of Aphrodite's nature—"Aphrodite Urania, born of Uranus without a mother, represented intellectual, non-physical love. Aphrodite Pandemos, said to have been created by the union of Olympian Zeus and the sky goddess Dione, was the Greek patroness of prostitutes and represented common or vulgar love" (Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores* 7). Accordingly we might represent the dichotomy between the two sorts of love as that indicated by Nausicaa/Gorgo and Helen/Phryne.

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Conclusions

Although the focus of this study is on the deeds and at times misdeeds of seven exceptional individuals from antiquity, none of whom are studied by Plutarch, all of the foregoing is written with an acute awareness of the narrative issues lurking behind non-fiction literary genres. In the proem to his *Histories*, Herodotus claims that he is interested in the cause of the Greeks and Persians warring against each other (*Hdt.* 1.1). Perhaps: but not solely. In his quest for causation Herodotus cannot resist delighting himself and therefore his audiences by weaving into his historical narrative all manner of fascinating digressions, including material that literature scholars might—almost two and a half millennia later—want to classify as biographical sub-narratives. But Herodotus does not stop there. He might now be recognised as the first Western historian, but in the mid-fifth-century this non-fiction literary genre is very new. It is not that the genre boundaries are ill-defined; there were none. Consequently the author of the *Histories* can segue in his book-rolls from fanciful meteorology, to the geography of far-away places with strange-sounding names, to a discussion of dowries, and then to the sometimes very different matrimonial customs adopted by other peoples.

I believe that we can argue that Herodotus is demonstrably more than just a proto-biographer. He is that, too, of course. But there are several other issues nagging at him which he subliminally threads into his narratives. He is no crusader; others can bang the drum, storm the *Prytaneion*, or otherwise directly challenge the elected authorities for societal change. He is not an Athenian citizen and cannot become one. This means that in aristocratic, Periclean Athens he is destined to be a lowly outsider always looking in. Beyond athletic contests Pan-Hellenism is still in its infancy. The city-states can bury their bitter rivalries from time to time, but never for long. The other issue relates to the status of women. Here surprisingly women in general have significantly more agency, autonomy, and authority under a Spartan dyarchy than they do anywhere else across the other city states in the Eastern Mediterranean including democratic Athens, let alone women in the Near East.

PANHELLENISM IN INFANCY

Notions of Pan-Hellenism are evident throughout the life of Alexander I of Macedon. Shortly after succeeding to his father's throne, he pursues the logical consequence of his claimed Argive heritage. He is determined to compete in the most famous of all Pan-Hellenic festivals, the Olympic Games. Despite Athenian objections, in 496 the elected Elean officials—the *Hellandikai*—who take their religious responsibilities very seriously—deem his candidacy acceptable. His Macedon people may not yet be even faintly accepted by others as true Hellenes, but the Macedonian inclusion quest has to start somewhere. And it starts with Alexander. Of course, if he is eligible, then doubtless his ancestors were also eligible. Perhaps they were far too busy with other matters, or—just as likely—neither particularly interested in athletic competition nor the expenses of four-horse chariot racing, let alone pursuing formal Hellenic recognition. Then there are practical issues involving travelling perhaps 600 to 700 kilometres, both the expenses and extended absence from the kingdom. We can interpret the childhood incident with the visiting Persian dignitaries as an early indication of where Alexander's ethnic and cultural interests lie. Because of geographical realities his autonomy and agency are constrained. Alexander cannot pursue meaningful membership in any formal Hellenic military alliance until the existence of such an alliance itself poses a formidable and credible deterrent to any potential aggressors. The short-lived Peloponnesian-led defence plans for Thessaly are witness enough for that lack—in the summer of 480 Pan-Hellenic unity is laughably fragile and even in 479 civic leaders in Thebes, for example, are confident that a campaign of well-placed Persian palm-oil will sour any Hellenic unity and give Mardonios, Xerxes' overall commanding general, the bloodless military victory he craves.

Bar his aristocratic family's interest in Olympic chariot racing, I would be hard pressed to trace Pan-Hellenism through the life of Miltiades son of Kypselos—Miltiades the Elder. His mid-sixth-century appointment as tyrant of Thracian Chersonese is more a matter of Athenian colonisation with a strong element of maritime trade protection. The straits separating Europe from Asia, which also provide a strategic route to the Black Sea, are a commercial waterway and a Hellenic presence on the European side provides a deterrent to those who might wish to exercise malevolent control over this trade. Traces

of Pan-Hellenic interest might be found in the life of Miltiades son of Kimon—Miltiades the Younger. His subjugation of Lemnos and Imbros in the northern Aegean in the 490's and subsequently transferring their control to Athens for possible colonisation is a case in point (Hdt. 5.26 and 6.140).

It would be hard to argue for a Pan-Hellenic theme in much of what Herodotus writes directly about Artemisia. But we must note that the Athenians put a large bounty on her capture—and the reasons Herodotus poses for this are far from convincing, particularly in the light of what Themistocles does following the inconclusive naval engagement off Artemision. Readers will recall that messages are left at all the coastal sites that might provide drinking water—messages exhorting Xerxes' Ionian allies not to help the Persians and to ask the Carians not to help them either (Hdt. 8.22.1–3). The wording is translated as “Men of Ionia, you do not do what is right by going to war against [the land of] your fathers and reducing Hellas to slavery.”²⁸⁴ One of Herodotus' constant themes is that if a people are to be truly Greek then they must first be free. Recall that he holds the Ionians from Phocaea on the western Anatolian coast in highest esteem because they (and the people of Teos) refuse to tolerate slavery under Cyrus' general Harpagos. In the mid-sixth century, to avoid subjugation, the Phocaeans choose to abandon their homeland in the Aegean and emigrate en masse at first to their existing colony, Alalie, in Corsica (Hdt. 1.164–1.166). After defections, and much tribulation a remnant of these migrants will finally settle in Elea on the western coast of mainland Italy (Hdt 1.167.3–4).

Artemisia, almost in defiance of her Dorian heritage, and unlike Alexander, is hardly a poster-child for Pan-Hellenism. What she displays in battle is *mêtis*—intellectual but practical cunning—something much admired by the Hellenes but a talent they abhor and dread to find in any woman, let alone in a barbarian leader.²⁸⁵ As a mortal she represents a complete inversion of the Homeric ideal. Women are spoils of war; a leader celebrates his victory by enslaving his enemies' womenfolk, bringing them

²⁸⁴ Herodotus' wording is unambiguously Pan-Hellenic, Ἴωνες, οὐ ποιεῖτε δίκαια ἐπὶ τοὺς πατέρας στρατευόμενοι καὶ τὴν Ἑλλάδα καταδουλοῦμενοι.

²⁸⁵ Athenian society is unashamedly patriarchal with a well-developed, state sponsored, and thriving sex trade employing slaves and non-citizens.

home as trophies—rarely ransomed, they will serve as sex slaves and when no longer desirable toil as menial domestics or labour in the fields. Or is it that the Athenians are afraid that Artemisia will humiliate any Greek commander she might capture with the magnanimity they feel compelled to eschew?

Nevertheless, Herodotus' interest in Pan-Hellenism is evident in his choice of words, a choice that is dramatically different from the choices made by Homer. In fact, in the *Iliad* the words Hellene and Pan-Hellenes each occur only once.

PROTO-FEMINISM BEFORE THERE WAS A WORD FOR IT

In the late Archaic and early Classical periods we are so accustomed to learning of women, in terms of the male figures with whom they are most closely associated, where as often as not even their names remain unrecorded, that we forget that mythology is loaded with exceptions.²⁸⁶ Paris, one of Hecuba's nineteen children and the world's most easily corruptible beauty pageant adjudicator to boot, would remain almost as completely unknown as the majority of Priam's other fifty sons, including his hapless younger brother Troilus, except for the status and fame of the woman he abducted. This identity paradox extends to the king of Locris, the Lesser Ajax son of Oileus, whose principal claim to Homeric fame is his mindless desecration of Athena's temple with the rape of Priam's daughter Cassandra, where the virgin priestess sought refuge during the sack of Troy—both so-called warriors appear to rely on the moral compass suspended below the belt rather than one above the shoulders for their moral guidance. Herodotus goes out of his way to sketch-in some of the laudable accomplishments of three women—Atossa, Artemis, and Gorgo. Of course they are also someone's daughter and another's spouse, and admittedly it is their station in life that makes these deeds even possible. By giving them their own names, Herodotus gives them an independent identity. Names are usually not gender neutral, so identification in terms of whether the

²⁸⁶ It can hardly go unnoticed that Zeus' first spouse is the Oceanid, Metis, a daughter of the two Titans Oceanus and Tethys. She is the goddess of wisdom, prudence, and deep thought whom, when tricked momentarily into turning into a fly, Zeus will swallow. This swallowing is partly to foil the prophesy that the son Zeus has by her will be more powerful than he is and partly to ensure that Metis can continue to give him wise counsel from within—ruminating perhaps? The Greek word (μητις) *metis* —meaning cunning or crafty like a fox, or Odysseus—is not pejorative and often contrasted with (βία) *bie* brute force.

named individual is an inseminator or incubator is unavoidable. But once with the autonomy, authority, and agency trident firmly in hand—all three named individuals show that they need wait on no man. Of course, Herodotus also describes the less laudable deeds of several other similarly armed women—notably Nyssia and Amestris. Lewis Carroll’s Queen of Hearts favourite command, “Off with her head!” comes to mind, but so too does Shakespeare’s Duke of Vienna with his similar command of “Let him be whipped and hanged.”²⁸⁷ But what Herodotus’ contrast really shows is that the trident of three A’s can be used for good or ill and that possession of great power is not enough—the holder has to know how and when to use it wisely—the difference between (μητις) *metis* and (βία) *bie* becomes critical when resort to Herculean displays of strength are not an option.

SOLON’S MEASURES OF HAPPINESS

We might well ask whether any of the seven characters studied in this close reading dies happy.²⁸⁸ It is not a question that Herodotus addresses directly and of the seven characters studied, all but the two Miltiades, uncle and step-nephew, and Cleomenes and are still alive when his narrative ends at the end of summer 479. Obviously, among those known to die happy, we cannot possibly include Miltiades son of Cimon (Miltiades the Younger), the hero of Marathon, who dies ignominiously of a gangrenous wound in prison pending payment of crippling fine. His reversals of fortune spectacularly illustrate Solon’s maxim that “no one can be judged fortunate until they are dead’ (Hdt. 1.43.7). Cleomenes’ suicide—if was not an assassination—either just before the battle of Marathon or shortly thereafter—is so clouded in mystery, if not dynastic intrigue, that the question is unanswerable. But we know from Herodotus that at least

²⁸⁷ See Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure* 5.1.512.

²⁸⁸ The seven characters are: Alexander, Miltiades the Elder, Miltiades the Younger, Cleomenes, Atossa, Artemisia, and Gorgo. Miltiades son of Kypselos is assassinated in 519, Miltiades son of Cimon dies disgraced in prison in 479, and Cleomenes commits suicide or is assassinated in 480 or 479. Atossa, in her mid-seventies, dies sometime around 475, but we have no information about how or when either Gorgo or Artemisia pass away—but both women live long enough to see their legitimate descendants (children / grandchildren) assume respective power in Sparta and Halicarnassus. Alexander, who lives into his early seventies, dies in 454.

one of his Spartan sources is immensely prejudiced and in the corollary to Solon's maxim claims that Cleomenes "lived on the verge of madness" which at first sight is incompatible with ruling for three decades (Hdt. 5.42.1). Cleomenes' epitaph is to be judged mad after his death. But he meets some of Solon's happiness criteria—he lives in a famous city and sees his daughter, Gorgo, and likely his grandson, Pleistarchus, survive him.²⁸⁹ Luxurious living would be an anathema to a Spartan dyarch, and we know that Cleomenes resists bribery, but as a first among equals we assume that he is never in real want. This leaves us to consider whether Miltiades son of Kypselos (Miltiades the Elder) likely meets any of Solon's *only happy when dead* criteria. From Herodotus' account he is honoured by the people of the Chersonese with funeral games. He dies childless but he meets several of Solon's other happiness criteria—the ones Herodotus puts on his *bucket list*—Miltiades is from a famous city and is born into the extremely wealthy and prosperous Philaid family—a member of which has won the Olympic four-horse chariot races three times.

THE OTHERS

As for the four others, who are to our knowledge still alive and well at the close of Herodotus' narrative, we can only speculate based on how matters appear to be headed. We can probably exclude at least two if not all three of the women. Gorgo is widowed to a Hellenic hero who perhaps sought a famed Homeric death, and Atossa lives to see her son assume the Persian throne but militarily humiliated by the Hellenes. Herodotus tells us nothing about Artemisia following her return to Anatolia after Salamis, but she is certainly not militarily humiliated by the Hellenes—the reward for her capture is evidence enough of that. This just leaves us to speculate about Alexander I of Macedon who moves his kingdom and his people toward Hellenic inclusion and avoids the stain and potentially crippling penalties for medizing. Neither Herodotus nor

²⁸⁹ Cleomenes does not die gloriously or otherwise in battle (for his own homeland), but following Lt. General George S. Patton's maxim he certainly ensures that many of his enemies do just that for theirs—die gloriously or preferably quite ignominiously. Perhaps the corollary to Solon's happiness criterion should read *you are only judged happy when your enemies are dead*. And then you become rather like the village sexton who gets the pleasure of digging graves for those parishioners whom he likes the least.

other sources tell us how he dies, but we know that he makes it into his early seventies, a ripe old age at that time.

PROTO-BIOGRAPHY, BEFORE THERE WAS HISTORY AND WHEN BOTH ARE ILL-DEFINED

One objective of this study is to demonstrate that one way or another Herodotus is a proto-biographer. He writes when the genre of history is ill defined beyond the obvious—now, but not then—that the subject matter is not entirely myth, or by how much must we suspend our disbelief. Anyone reading his *Histories* will find that certain names keep popping up. For example, one individual not studied herein is the Persian general Mardonios—Xerxes’ first cousin—who is mentioned at least thirty-three times. We first read of him in about 493–492 when he deposes the Ionian tyrants but then loses much of his invasion fleet near Mount Athos during violent storms in the Northern Aegean.²⁹⁰ He is relieved of command and has no role in the subsequent Persian defeat at Marathon in 490, but he is heavily involved in the second Greco-Persian Wars of 480–479 and killed in battle at Plataea. Just naming an individual, and closely associating her or him with an historical event, has the effect of granting that individual agency and therefore some responsibility or credit if things go rather well, and some culpability if the desired outcome is not obtained. Indeed, we could have pieced together some sort of biography for Mardonios, if we wished, or had time, or thought that Herodotus had given us enough in those thirty plus entries to weave into an engaging tale. He gives us his pedigree, but I believe that Herodotus demonstrates that it takes much more than that. Pedigree may ease the path, but is no prophylaxis against adversity, or stumbling and falling by the wayside.

This brings us back to the: who, what, where, why, and when of story-telling. By just giving a name—a unique being—“far from the madding crowd’s ignoble strife”—Herodotus grants a measure of identity and verisimilitude to this individual.²⁹¹ But if Heraclitus is right about character and destiny—then exactly what deed, why, and

²⁹⁰ Recall that when challenged, Napoleon Bonaparte expressed his personal view that he would much prefer very lucky generals over particularly good ones.

²⁹¹ Back to that village sexton again and with apologies to Thomas Gray and line 73 of his *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*. Anything Hardy can do

perhaps with what and when this individual assumes autonomy, exercises authority, putting agency into action—this places the selected individual right in the front row of history. In short, Herodotus makes sure that story remains part of history. Although he is blissfully unaware of a new and important literary genre to come; this amounts to proto-biography.

Appendix: Herodotus and Time

INTRODUCTION

Just as there is no Archaic or Classical Greek word for biography, there is no word in Classical Greek or Latin for date—I mean a numerical, supranational, chronological date as in the children’s nursery rhyme, “In sixteen-hundred and sixty-six, London Town was burnt to sticks.”¹ This is a massive challenge to Herodotus and to any of his oral sources in the Eastern Mediterranean trying to tell him when something happened—how do they date events and communicate them to others? The simple answer is that must rely on synchronicities—if they can find a pair that fit. When reading Herodotus today, particularly in an annotated edition, which provides scholarly estimates of the Julian dates for the events under discussion, it is only too easy to be blissfully unaware of the author’s extreme handicap. Using synchronicities is not quite the same as trying to count from one to ten when your vocabulary extends to only: one, two, three, another, another, and another—but you get the idea. Long winded little rhymes such as, “Themistocles’ archonship was over and done, when Miltiades sailed to Athens on the run” can never tell us much about exactly when as the one that runs “In fourteen hundred and ninety-two, Columbus sailed the ocean blue.”²

Although Julius Caesar, like Herodotus an Egyptophile but of a somewhat different ilk, gives the Western world a calendar that actually works—albeit one likely adapted from the one used by the Egyptians for centuries—he does not take it any further (Feeney 42). Once the Romans get their seasonal year to match their festival year, they are happy enough to use the *conciliar* year as their identification grid throughout their

¹ Conspiracy theorists continue to delight in what is to them the obvious evil *omen* that when this date is given in Roman numerals—the one thing we know for certain that the Romans plainly never did—MDCLXVI—we see all of their numerals in reverse order of magnitude. Something very *bad* was certain to happen to someone somewhere during *that* year.

² Not only are Archon lists for the sixth and fifth centuries incomplete, many of the entries are contradictory, and the appointments span two Julian years running from July until June. So Themistocles term as chief magistrate, (*eponymous archon*) runs 493/492, and his term is followed by that of Diognetus 492/491 and Phoenippus 491/490.

empire.³ At least they move away from the Ancient Greek luni-solar system of 354-day years with somewhat capriciously intercalated 384-day years every two or three years by doubling one of the months. The Romans also get their New Year to start shortly after the winter solstice; before then everyone's New Year started on different days throughout the year, usually one related to an important civic or religious festival.

SUPRANATIONAL DATES

But fixing the calendar—which incidentally makes celebrating birthdays and anniversaries possible—does not give the Romans a convenient system of supranational chronological dates; they retain the system with which they were familiar despite its clumsiness and obvious defects. One example from the second century of the Roman Empire will suffice to illustrate this. One of the more reliable surviving histories of Alexander the Great, the *Anabasis of Alexander*, was compiled in Attic Greek by the prodigious writer Lucius Flavius Arrianus of Nicomedia, commonly known as Arrian.⁴ He describes Alexander's succession to the Macedon throne as follows:

Now we are told that the death of Philip occurred in the archonship of Pythodelus at Athens; then about twenty [years old], Alexander succeeded, as Philip's son, and arrived in the Peloponnesus (Arr., *Anab.* 1.1.1).

When he comes to describing Alexander's death, Arrian writes:

³ Using the Julian calendar reforms of the late first century, the usual dates for the solstices are between June 20/21 and December 21/22, and for the equinoxes March 20/21 and September 22/23. However, over a four-hundred year cycle the vernal equinox can fall as early as March 19 and the autumnal equinox as late as September 24. No matter, the Julian calendar with sixteenth-century Gregorian reforms at least narrows down the dates of these celestial events to one of three possible days in the four months of interest. But even today, if you want to do something special on say the first day of spring, rather than guess and only get close, you will have to look it up from a reliable source.

⁴ Arrian of Nicomedia (c. 86/89–c. 140/160), a Greek historian, public servant—serving variously as senator, consul, archon, and priest, military commander, and philosopher, was one of the most distinguished and prolific authors of the second-century Roman Empire. Of his many known works the *Indica* and *Anabasis* have survived intact, the remainder of his works are extant only in fragments.

Alexander died in the hundred and fourteenth Olympiad and the Archonship of Hegesias at Athens. According to Aristobulus, he lived thirty-two years and eight months; his reign lasted twelve years and the same eight months (Arr., *Anab.* 7.28.1).

Should any of Arrian's many contemporary readers not have a list of Athenian archonships readily to hand they would just be left with the notion that Alexander III's short rule was quite some time ago; but not quite sure about how long ago? Of course, modern historians with access to many other documents and a supranational grid, are happy to inform us that Alexander III was born in 356 (probably in October), succeeded to the Macedon throne in October 336—the exact date of Philip's assassination was either not recorded, or has been lost—and that he died on the 10th or 11th of June 323 BCE. The amount of archival sifting to reliably generate Alexander's date of death is likely mind-boggling.

BEFORE CHRIST AND ANNO DOMINI

The axis of time along the now familiar BC/AD line is comparatively recent and its conception is generally attributed to the sixth-century Scythian monk Dionysius Exiguus [c 470–c 544]. Indeed the Dionysian Anno Domini system is used in the mid-eighth century by the Venerable Bede to date some events when he is compiling his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Feeny 2–3). Partly because scholars could never agree on the year of Christ's birth, let alone a particular month and day, it is not until AD 1627 that the Jesuit scholar Dominic Petavius seriously proposes the BC/AD system as the basis for a universal time-line for scholars and historians. He gets around the indeterminacy of an actual date for Jesus of Nazareth's birth by proposing that AD year one is simply a reference point—a convenient convention—but not a verifiable, let alone an agreed year for the event.⁵ However, despite its obvious convenience for future and past events, Petavius' preset numerical grid did not come into universal acceptance until the eighteenth century.⁶

⁵ Note that the abbreviation AD always precedes the year number, whereas for the secular systems BCE and CE always follow the year number.

ESTABLISHING SYNCHRONICITIES

Just how difficult it is to establish, let alone describe, a reliable chronology of events in the sixth and fifth centuries is illustrated by an anecdote about Xenophanes of Colophon (c. 570/560–478) who asks at a dinner, “How many years do you have my good man? How old were you when the Mede came?” In Julian terms, we now surmise that Xenophanes is talking about an event in Anatolia that occurred in 546/45.⁷ However even today we often organise our thinking and recollections in terms of a striking event—for example, most of us can remember exactly where we were and what we were doing when two hijacked passenger aircraft were flown into the twin towers of the World Trade Centre in New York City. Otherwise, for many of us, there would be no reason to remember anything about that particular Tuesday morning on 11 September, 2001. For many, the popular abbreviation of the date—9/11—signifies the event.⁸

Of all ancient calendar systems those adopted by the Greeks are the most confusing—even to Greeks at the time. They share a basic similarity from region to region as they are all luni-solar, but each city-state keeps its own version of a twelve month calendar with a periodic intercalation of a thirteenth lunar-month. The Athenian or Attic calendar, despite being mired in mystery, is still the best known and most intensively studied. The intercalary month usually comes after the sixth month, Poseidon, and is called Second Poseidon. Hekatombion, the first month, and hence the beginning of the year, falls in the summer after the summer solstice. Other Greek city-states and regions start their new year on different days; for example, Sparta and

⁶ Until comparatively recently Parliamentary statutes in the United Kingdom were identified using only regnal years, as in: 2 Geo. 6 for an Act receiving royal assent over the period 11 December 1937 to 10 December 1938, and so on.

⁷ We know from Homer that the Lydians, whom he calls the Meiones (Maeonians), led by Mestheles and Antiphos, fought with the Trojans during the Trojan War (Hom., *Il* 2.864). Cyrus the Great besieged and captured the Lydian capital Sardis in 546; a year later the last Lydian king, Croesus, was dead. Admittedly confusing, but during the sixth century the terms Mede and Persian were often used interchangeably.

⁸ Remember that in the United States the date format is month-day-year—a convention of no great consequence until the month is abbreviated to a numeral and the year dropped. Ambiguity really dominates when the year is abbreviated from four digits to two and the reader is then unsure whether the given date format is YY MM DD, DD MM YY or MM DD YY.

Macedonia start theirs following the autumnal equinox, whereas Delos starts theirs following the winter solstice. Coming from Halicarnassus which would have Dorian, Ionian and Carian influences we should not be surprised that Herodotus finds the Athenian calendar baffling.

ANOTHER GOLDEN RULE: ALWAYS BLAME THE ATHENIANS

For the historian inclined towards tidy orderliness, the regrettable fact is that the Athenians were stubbornly unwilling to adopt anything resembling a completely regular calendar, which makes reconstruction difficult. Their irregularity is not from lack of astronomical knowledge. In 432, the Athenian astronomer Meton instituted his nineteen-year cycle, fixing regular intercalations—whether Meton got this cycle from Babylonia or discovered it himself is not known. From that point onward, a small group of Greek astronomers use the Metonic cycle in their calculations, but this should be regarded as an astronomer's ideal calendar. Abundant epigraphical evidence demonstrates that in the civil calendar, while the archons inserted approximately the correct number of intercalary months over the long term, the specific corrections are somewhat arbitrary, inserted as the archons saw fit. This irregularity does not really affect the long-term workings of the calendar, but it does make things very confusing when trying to establish a precise date for an event. The Athenians seem to have taken a rather casual attitude toward their calendar. It appears they used neither a regular formula nor continuous direct observation to determine the length of the months. Most likely, they followed a general rule of alternating months (29 and 30 days long), subject to periodic correction by observation.

In addition to this calendar, which has been called the festival calendar, Athenians maintained a second calendar for the political year. This “conciliar” year divided the year into “prytanies,” one for each of the “phylai,” the subdivisions of Athenian citizens. The number of phylai, and hence the number of prytanies, varies over time. Until the end of the fourth century there were ten phylai. After that the number varies between eleven and thirteen, but usually twelve. Even more confusing, while the conciliar and festival years are basically the same length in the fourth century, such is not regularly the case in the fifth century.

LUNI-SOLAR CHAOS

Ordinary records of Greek city-states are dated according to the eponymous year of the person in power, be that the archon, ephor, king, priest of Hera, and so on. Unfortunately, for Athens, the list of archons is incomplete for the fifth century. Moreover, regional eponymous years are difficult to use when trying to correlate the various areas, a problem no less evident to the ancient Greek historians than it is to us. Late in the fifth century, Meton of Athens noticed something that the Babylonians had recognised since the sixth century or earlier, that two hundred and thirty-five lunar months made up almost exactly nineteen solar years. Using modern measurements for the length of the solar year and the lunar month, the arithmetic is trivial:

$$19 \times 365.2425 = 6,939.6075 \text{ days (or about 6,940 days), and}$$

$$6,939.6075 \div 29.53059 = 234.9973 \text{ months (or about 235 months)}$$

Now everyone knew that the twelve-month lunar year—approximately 354 days—falls short of the solar year by just over eleven days. They also knew that the lunar month was not exactly twenty-nine days long and that it varied in length. Accordingly they had six *full* months of 30 days and six *hollow* months of only 29 days, giving them a ‘short’ year.⁹ Consequently the archons would somewhat capriciously insert a thirteen-month ‘long’ year of 384 days from time to time to keep their “calendar” in step with the seasons. And so in the sixth century—using neither the *metonic* cycle, nor the *octaeteris*—and in the early fifth century Athenians would repeat one month, usually the sixth month, Poseidon.¹⁰ But there was no prescribed rule for this intercalation and it was left up to the archon to decide. They did not even have a special name for this thirteenth month. Even after Meton’s observations became well-known, his regular system of seven intercalary years in every nineteen year cycle was not scrupulously followed by the archons.¹¹ But more confusion was to come as soon as Herodotus started to inquire about events outside of Attica.

⁹ For the arithmetically challenged $6 \times 30 = 180$ and $6 \times 29 = 174$ ($180 + 174 = 354$)

¹⁰ The *octaeteris* comprised an eight year cycle of 99 lunar months, where three of the eight years were thirteen full lunar months long.

CHACUN POUR SOI

Although most of the calendars follow the same principles, virtually every Hellenic city-state uses its own calendar with different month names, different beginnings to the year, and different intercalations,. The Hellenes use luni-solar calendars with years of twelve or thirteen months. A month could be ‘hollow’ or ‘full’ having either twenty-nine or thirty days respectively. Intercalations seem to have been done as needed and arbitrarily. In any case there is no fixed pattern although several cycles were known to the Hellenes. According to Robert Hannah by the late fifth century the Athenians more or less follow the scheme developed by Meton of Athens and his colleagues. Hannah writes:

So over a period of 19 years there were 6,940 days or 235 months, including seven intercalary months. Of the 235 months, the Greeks made 110 ‘hollow’ (in other words, of 29 days each), and the remaining 125 ‘full’ (of 30 days each). The imbalance between ‘full’ and ‘hollow’ months means that they cannot [simply] alternate throughout the cycle, but sometimes there would be two ‘full’ months in succession. Geminus—a first century mathematician—explains how the devisers of the cycle arrived at 110 ‘hollow’ months: all 235 months are initially assigned 30 days each, which gives a total of 7,050 days to the 19 year period.¹² This overshoots the sum of 6,940 days of 235 lunar months by 110 days, so 110 months must each have one day omitted through the cycle, and they become 29-day months. To ensure as even a distribution of this omission as possible, he says that the Greeks divided the 6,940 days by 110 to get a quotient of [about] 63, so that the 110 days were removed at intervals of 63 days (Hannah 35).

The years are named after the holder of a certain office whose term lasts one year. For Athens this is one of the archons, in Sparta one of the ephors. The twelve months of

¹¹ Again the arithmetic is trivial $7 \times 384 = 2,688$ and $12 \times 354 = 4,248$ ($2,688 + 4,248 = 6,936$ which is only a few days short of the actual 6,939.6075 which was rounded up to 6,940).

¹² Actually Geminus’ arithmetic is not quite right; this works better if the omitted day is every sixty-fourth one. But Herodotus is compiling and writing his *Histories* several decades before Meton and so he is obliged to follow a somewhat more capricious calendar where the adjustments are ultimately directed by the Archon. Any apparent match might still just be happenstance.

a common year bear different names from city to city. For most of the Greek and non-Greek city-states, neither all the names nor the exact sequence of the months are known, and often neither the beginning of the year, nor the name of the intercalary month. The diversity is astonishing.

ATHENIAN CALENDARS

There were three calendars in use in Athens. The most important was the civil calendar. The beginning of each month in theory is determined by observation, in effect the day of the first visibility of the waxing crescent in the evening and becomes the first day of the month.¹³ This calendar is subject to manipulations of the Archons.¹⁴ There is even evidence of single days being repeated several times. They might even add a few days to one month—perhaps to favour a festival with better weather—and subtract a few days from the next. Thus, due to intercalations for political rather than astronomical reasons, this calendar can be out of step with the actual seasons. A third calendar is the prytany calendar which is used to regulate the execution of certain offices by representatives of one of the so-called tribes. In the fifth century this calendar comprised ten months of thirty-six days, which ensures that it was always out-of-step with both the civil calendar and the seasonal or astronomical one.

AND ELSEWHERE IN THE HELLENIC WORLD

We know almost nothing about the calendar used in Delphi. As in Athens they may well have utilised more than one system. Even the actual names of the months used

¹³ · The Athenian New Year starts on the first new moon following the summer solstice. The names of the twelve Athenian months along with their Julian equivalents are as follows. The first month of the Attic New Year is always *Hekatombion*, and the last month *Skirophorion*:

<i>Hekatombion</i>	July/August	<i>Gamelion</i>	January/Feb.
<i>Metageitnion</i>	August/September	<i>Anthesterion</i>	February/March
<i>Boedromion</i>	September/October	<i>Elaphebolion</i>	March/April
<i>Pyanepsion</i>	October/November	<i>Mounichion</i>	April/May
<i>Miamakterion</i>	November/December	<i>Thargelion</i>	May/June
<i>Poseidon</i>	December/January	<i>Skirophorion</i>	June/July

¹⁴ In those years with thirteen lunar months the sixth month is repeated simply as *Second Poseidon*.

during the fifth century are uncertain. Scholars believe that Delphi took their New Year, like Athens, with the first visibility of the waxing crescent after the first new moon after summer solstice. We know the names and sequence of months used in Boeotia from the fifth century onward, and that they are different from those used in Attica. However, scholars believe that the Boeotian New Year begins around the winter solstice. The sequence and names of the months in Miletus in Anatolia are known, but again they differ from those used in Attica. Their year begins after the autumnal equinox, possibly with the first visibility of the crescent after the first new moon. Our knowledge of the Spartan calendar is exceedingly limited. We know their names of only nine of the twelve months, and scholars have been unable to reconstruct a complete sequence. Nor do scholars know the beginning of their year, or the mode of intercalation which likely lay in the hands of the ephors. It is believed that the Spartan New Year begins on the first full moon following the autumn equinox.

ANOTHER PAN-HELLENIC CHALLENGE FOR HERODOTUS

Herodotus has to do what he can without a Pan-Hellenic (calendar) grid, let alone a supranational one, and we see that in book 1 of the *Histories* he relies on a kings' list to map out the sequence of events in Lydia and Media—modern Turkey, Iraq, and Iran. Arguably his first mention of the last Lydian king, Croesus, marks his transition from myth to history (Hdt. 1.6.1–2).¹⁵ From Herodotus we know that Gyges rules for thirty-eight years (Hdt. 1.14.4). His son, Ardys, rules for forty-nine years; and Ardys' son, Sadyattes, rules for the next twelve years (Hdt. 1.16.1). He is succeeded in turn by Alyattes who, perhaps improbably, reigns for fifty-seven years (Hdt. 1.25.1). Herodotus then describes how Alyattes' son, Croesus, then aged thirty-nine, ascends to the Lydian throne which he will hold for fourteen years before being captured and imprisoned when Cyrus' Persian forces besiege and take his capital, Sardis (Hdt 1.26.1 and 1.86.1).

¹⁵ See Hdt 1.7.4: his estimate for regnal generations—about five per century—where he writes “they governed for twenty two generations, five hundred and five years” is not unreasonable. In England, for example, there have been thirty-nine monarchs between the ascension of William I in 1066 and the death of George VI in 1952—an average reign of just over twenty-years, or, near enough, five generations of monarch per century. This claim is inconsistent with that made by Herodotus in 2.142.1–2. However, in book 2 of his *Histories* he focusses on demonstrating that Egyptian history extended much further back than that of the Hellenes.

And so this particular dynasty in the Lydian empire comes to an end after one hundred and seventy years, absorbed by another. But although Herodotus gives us the sequence of Lydian monarchs, he does not completely link this dynasty to events in mainland Greece or elsewhere. But, in a digression about a war between the Lydians and Medes during Alyattes' implausibly long reign, and perhaps entirely by happenstance, he mentions an eclipse of the sun (Hdt 1.74.1–2). If Herodotus puts in this *rabbit-into-the-hat* then just over two-thousand years later, Petavius—a remarkable polymath—pulls this same *rabbit out-of-the-hat* to show that the astronomical event and therefore the ancient battle could be reliably dated back to 28 May, 585 BC. Or could he? ¹⁶

We can begin to see the challenge that Herodotus faces as he gathers these oral traditions and tries to distil historical fact from legend while clearly identifying what he believes to be interesting but entirely mythical tales. Donald Wilcox writes:

In fact the generations have no quantitative aspect. They exist as pure indications of *the fact of duration* (italics mine); the relation among separate generations is discontinuous and extrinsic. But Herodotus was not indifferent to progressive and continuous elements of time. Alongside this episodic chronology he also drew up a linear sequence of years leading back to the dimmest recesses of known time. By this second chronology he conveyed the temporal dimension of Greek culture in a linear fashion. These two chronologies are fundamentally different in their orientation and function, though they combine to give Herodotus' narrative a richness and subtlety it would otherwise lack. By examining the episodic and linear chronologies in turn we can see more clearly the separate functions they served in Herodotus' work (*The Measure of Times Past* 54).

Wilcox overstates the case, or perhaps minimises the challenges. Herodotus simply does not have the tools to address the two problems adequately. ¹⁷ Herodotus expresses his

¹⁶ There was another total solar eclipse visible in the southern area of Anatolia on 19 May 557—some twenty-eight years later than the “Eclipse of Thales” which occurred on 28 May 585—which leads some scholars to infer that Alyattes' reign was not fifty-seven years (Shaw 235). See also How and Wells 1.1.74.2, evidently scholars differ.

complete dissatisfaction with the Hellenic calendar by commenting that the Egyptians are the first to employ the solar year by dividing it up into twelve months of thirty days and adding five days each year beyond that number, whereas the Hellenes attempted to preserve the timing of the seasons by inserting an intercalary lunar month every other year. The passage from Herodotus reads:

As to all matters concerning the human world, they were in agreement. They said that the Egyptians were the first of all people to discover the year, by dividing up the seasons into twelve parts to total one year., and that they discovered how to do this from the stars. The Egyptians seem to me to be much wiser than the Hellenes in the way they regulate the timing of seasons. While the Hellenes attempt to preserve the timing of the seasons by inserting an intercalary month every other year, the Egyptians divide the year into twelve months of thirty days each and add just five days in every year beyond that number, and thus their seasons do return at the same periods in the cycle from year to year (Hdt 2.4.1).¹⁸

Four centuries later the Romans wisely takes their calendar clues from the Egyptians, not the Hellenes.

IS DATING EVEN IMPORTANT

Another example concerns establishing precisely when the battle off Salamis took place, and with it the most likely dates for the preceding land battle at Thermopylae and naval engagements off Artemision. Quite inadvertently, with an oblique reference to a

¹⁷ “It ain’t necessarily so” with apologies to Ira Gershwin (*Porgy & Bess*, 1935). This brings to mind the twelfth-century *Historia* written in Latin by the Welsh cleric, Geoffrey of Monmouth, sometime bishop of St. Asaph. Using a curious system of synchronisms and only three Julian dates, the medieval author gives a pseudo-historical account of the history of the Britons from Brutus the mythical twelfth-century great-grandson of the Trojan Aeneas down to the seventh-century ruler of the Britons, Cadwallader, who died, self-exiled in Rome in AD 689, having finally abandoned his kingdom to the seemingly never-ending Saxon invasions.

¹⁸ For a comparison between the Greek Solutions and the Egyptian Solutions to the luni-solar challenge see How and Wells 1.2.4.2–3.

partial solar eclipse, Herodotus gives modern readers precisely what is needed to determine the date for Salamis in Julian terms.¹⁹

The Karneian festival, or simply the Karneia (Κάρνεια), is an important festival in honour of Apollo; held near the end of the year and just before the autumn equinox, the beginning of the Spartan New Year. This nine-day Doric harvest festival is celebrated during the late summer and the ceremonies conclude on the full moon. Scholars disagree on how the ephors determine when to hold the festivities, but it is likely that in Julian terms they would have ended on the full moon that fell between mid-August and mid-September.

Olympiad dating is interesting and certainly Pan-Hellenic, but we must recognise that it was not established until the end of the second century. Robert Hannah writes:

The four-yearly periods of the Olympic Games formed the basis of the best-known era, that of the Olympiads, which started traditionally in 776 BC. Its invention is associated with Timaeus (c. 350–260) and Eratosthenes (c. 285–194). As the Olympic year began in mid-summer, it straddled the second half of the Julian year and the first half of the next, so that, for example the third year of the sixth Olympiad (conventionally written as Ol. 6, 3) corresponds to the Julian years 754/3 BC (Hannah 48).

The Olympiads were not numbered until the second century when Erasthenes decided that naming the ‘year’ after the winner of the stadia race was inconvenient—and that taking 776 (Ol. 1, 1) as the date of the first Olympiad was much easier than remembering who won, or having access to a list of winners. That winners’ list was as inconvenient to use as the Athenian list of past archons or the Spartan list of past ephors.

Introducing his 1975 article on the uncertainties of Olympic dating, Stephen G. Miller writes:

¹⁹ “Cleombrotus had led the army back from the isthmus because as he was sacrificing to determine what to do about the Persians, the sun was darkened in the heavens” (Hdt. 9.10.3). There was a partial solar eclipse visible from Corinth on October 2, 480. Scholars can confidently work backward from this astronomical event.

One of the greatest of the many paradoxes of classical studies must surely be that the precise date of Olympic festivals is not agreed upon. It is incredible that we do not know the date of an event which occurred with regularity for perhaps more than a millenium [sic], and which was constantly used in antiquity as a framework for time references. Much of our understanding of ancient chronology rests ultimately upon dates which are given in terms of Olympiads, and yet there is no general consensus as to the time when, every four years, the Olympic Games took place (Miller 215).

Miller further writes that:

The present status of scholarly opinion regarding the date of the festivals is perhaps most succinctly put by Bickerman, “the games were held every four years at the height of the summer. A more precise date is not possible” (Miller 215).

All this, as Miller equally succinctly points out, raises the interesting question:

In the scholarship which has been devoted to the question of the date of the Olympia, one fundamental question has never been asked: how did the Greek world know when to assemble for the festival? One can, of course, suppose that the (σπονδοφόροι) *spondophoroi* [Elean citizens acting as games officials] were able to announce the sacred truce and the festival time throughout the Greek world, but one has only to consider the magnitude of such a task to realise that a common date known to every Greek, would have been desirable, if not necessary (Miller 219).

And this leads to the challenge, whose calendar are the Eleans using, if indeed they are using a calendar at all? We can say a little bit more; by the fifth century the Olympic festivities lasted for five days and were concluded on a full moon. But whether that full moon could fall as early as July, in August, or perhaps as late as September, remains under bitter dispute.

To return to the question about when, in Julian terms, did the Battle off Salamis take place there is an answer. In an appendix to his biography of Xerxes, titled “The Chronology of Xerxes’ Advance through Greece” Richard Stoneman derives a workable schedule combining Herodotus’ text with the certainties offered by the Persian New Year

and the partial eclipse of the sun observed from the isthmus at Corinth in early October 480.²⁰

A TENTATIVE TIMETABLE FOR 480 BC

[Late March]	<i>Nowruz</i> festival in Sardis
Early May	[Floating bridge construction and] crossing of the Hellespont
10–19 August	Spartan Karneia: Leonidas advances northward [from Sparta]
12 August	Persian army advances from Therme [Chalcidice Peninsula]
14–19 August	75th Olympic festival ($776 + 4 - (4 \times 75) = 480$)
24 August`	Persian fleet battered by three days' <i>meltemi</i>
29–30 August`	Battle of Thermopylae
2 September	Attic month of Boedromion begins
2–4 September	Battle off Artemision: [more] storms
7 September	Persian army reaches Athens
8–29 September	Sack of Athens
29 September	Persian fleet reaches Phaleron
30 September	Battle off Salamis
2 October	[Partial] solar eclipse [observed at defensive wall near Corinth]

Unfortunately Stoneman appears to have the date of the vernal equinox for the year 480 as 21 April, whereas late March is correct. The April date in 480 is not even the first full moon following the equinox. And what this really tells us is that somewhat inexcusably, despite their pressing need for fleet repairs, the Persians are in no hurry after their victory at Thermopylae to finish off the Peloponnesian Alliance. They wilfully let their tactical and strategic advantages slip away. With winter approaching and with it the end of the 480 campaigning season time was on the Hellenic side provided the Hellenes retained any measure of unity.

²⁰ See Stoneman 226-228. For the year 480 (Thermopylae) the vernal equinox fell on March 25, the summer solstice on June 29, the autumnal equinox on September 29, and the winter solstice on December 26. Similarly for the Julian year 490 (Marathon) the vernal equinox fell on March 27, the summer solstice on June 29, the autumnal equinox on September 29, and the winter solstice on December 27.

A ROUGH CHRONOLOGY

Over the years classical scholars have inferred a number of reasonably reliable Julian dates for the events described by Herodotus. Also included in this list overleaf are some events and the dates of several notable individuals before the Hellenistic period just to show *who's who* in the Eastern Mediterranean and where they might fit in:²¹ Modern western readers of Herodotus should not begin to feel too complacent, as we still have the remnants of a luni-solar calendar system when it comes to determining the date of the principle Christian festival. The First Council of Nicaea settled this once and for all time back in AD 325 with the simplest of all possible formulas, but they omitted to write down and individually sign-off on precisely what it was that they had all agreed upon. Following one interpretation using the Gregorian calendar, Easter Sunday can fall as early as March 22 and as late as April 25, but as is often the case: Satan lurks in the details.²²

A minor mystery posted by Herodotus appears in his commentary on Persian customs. He is explaining that the Persians celebrate their birthdays and that the biggest celebrations of all are those for their monarch. His challenge is that there is no Ionian Greek word that he can use to describe this sort of anniversary, so he settles for ἐγένετο meaning “come into being.”

Of all the days of the year, one's own birthday is held in the most honour. On this day they claim the right to serve a larger feast than on any other day. The more fortunate among them serve the meat of oxen, horses, camels, and donkeys roasted whole in

²¹ Adapted from Pomeroy (*Goddesses, Whores* vi). The Bronze Age of Ancient Greece is taken as 1600–1100; the Dark Age 1100–800; the Archaic 800–480; and the Classical 480–323.

²² Their deliberations resulted in the agreement that Easter would be celebrated on the first Sunday after the first full moon occurring after the vernal equinox. Except if that first full moon fell on a Sunday then Easter would be the next Sunday. Simple enough—using the Julian calendar—if it was right—it wasn't quite. But the ecclesiastics wanted to settle the date for hundreds of years into the future and did not want to use astronomical predictions based on celestial observations—astronomers being of the same heathen ilk as astrologers—so they decreed a notational date for the vernal equinox (set as March 20) and compiled a list of notational or ecclesiastical full moons. Consequently, if we use the simple Nicaean formula with correct astronomical dates for the equinoxes and cycle of full lunations, we can sometimes still get the “wrong” answer. Three-hundred and eighteen mitres and pointy-hats give neither assurance of wisdom nor infallibility.

ovens, while the poor serve the meat of small animals such as sheep and goats. [2] They eat few main dishes, but consume many desserts, and the latter are not served as one course, but at intervals throughout the meal (Hdt. 1.133.1–2).²³

He goes on to jest that the Hellenes are always hungry as nothing worthwhile is served after the main course!²⁴ But the real mystery that Herodotus does not explore concerns how the Persians are able to compute a birthday or anniversary—what sort of calendar did they use?

That Herodotus does not have an orderly supranational dating system is largely irrelevant, no matter how frustrating modern readers find some of his chronological vagaries. But there are instances where more certainty in the ordering of events might make motives or causality more evident. Examples abound. When did Miltiades capture the island of Lemnos and give it to Athens? If he did so early in the fifth-century then he is an Athenian benefactor, but if he did it during the penultimate decade of the sixth century, then he is just a minor tyrant and sycophant—all the difference in the world. When did Cleomenes die? Was it before or after the battle of Marathon? And for that matter—when was the Battle of Marathon? Most scholars agree on the summer of 490, but not on which month, and some will even dispute the year. Like many a commonplace—why write down what everybody knows? Herodotus tells us the Spartans arrived in Attica too late to participate in the battle, perhaps deliberately. But nowhere does he tell us who leads the Spartan contingent, although the Spartan army is almost invariably led out of the Peloponnesus and into battle by a king or a regent. So often we convince ourselves that he knew something that we now consider important, but for some reason—perhaps it was too much of a commonplace—he never set it down in writing.

²³ the Greek for this passage reads as follows:

ἡμέρην δὲ ἀπασέων μάλιστα ἐκείνην τιμᾶν νομίζουσι τῇ ἕκαστος ἐγένετο. ἐν ταύτῃ δὲ πλέω δαῖτα τῶν ἀλλέων δικαιοῦσιπροτιθέσθαι: ἐν τῇ οἱ εὐδαίμονες αὐτῶν βοῦν καὶ ἵππον καὶ κάμηλον καὶ ὄνον προτιθέαται ὅλους ὅπτοῦς ἐν καμίνοισι, οἷδὲ πένητες αὐτῶν τὰ λεπτὰ τῶν προβάτων προτιθέαται.

²⁴ For further discussion on Persian dessert dishes and alcohol consumption see How and Wells 1.1.133.1–4.

No one else did, and now it is lost. Sometimes the arguments from Herodotus' silences are less than compelling and are just maddening.

APPROXIMATE TIMELINE FOR HERODOTUS' *HISTORIES* AND AFTER

	1600		
BRONZE AGE		1184	Traditional date for the fall of Troy
	1100		
DARK AGE			
	800		
		776	Traditional date for the first Olympiad Homer—late eighth- early seventh-century Hesiod—late eighth- early seventh-century
	regnum	716–678	Gyges of Lydia
	700		
		650–600	Draco, first Athenian legislator (Laws 621)
	600		
		594	Archonship of Solon
		590–519	Miltiades son of Kypselos
		590–529	Cyrus the Great
		554–489	Miltiades son of Kimon
		550–486	Darius the Great
		550–475	Atossa of Persia
		545–510	Tyranny of Peisistratids
ARCHAIC		535–475	Heraclitus
		523–456	Aeschylus
	regnum	519–489	Cleomenes I of Sparta
		516–?	Gorgo of Sparta
		516–?	Artemisia of Halicarnassus
	500		
	regnum	498–454	Alexander I of Macedon
		497–406	Sophocles
		490–479	Helleno-Persian Wars
	regnum	486–465	Xerxes I of Persia
		484–425	Herodotus
		480–406	Euripides
			Partial solar eclipse October 2, 480
	480		
		431–404	Peloponnesian War
CLASSICAL			
		429–347	Plato
		428–354	Xenophon
	400		
		384–322	Demosthenes
	regnum	359–336	Philip II of Macedon
	regnum	336–323	Alexander III of Macedon

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