

SPEAKING TO THE DEAF: HERODOTUS, HIS AUDIENCE, AND THE SPARTANS AT THE BEGINNING OF THE PELOPONNESIAN WAR

Editors' Note: The following is a revised and updated version of an article, 'Parlare ai Sordi: Erodoto, il suo pubblico, e gli Spartani all'inizio della guerra peloponnesiaca', that originally appeared in A. Casanova and P. Desideri, edd., *Evento, Racconto, Scrittura nell'Antichità Classica* (Florence 2003) 21–34.

Abstract: This paper argues that Herodotus hoped that his account of his investigations, among other purposes, would warn his contemporary audience of listeners and readers of the dangers of imperialist ambitions not only in Athens, but also in Sparta. Through key episodes and personalities (Tegea, Cleomenes, Leonidas, the Isthmus wall), Herodotus portrays the Spartans as paradoxically both imperialist and isolationist. He implies that Greeks should not trust Sparta as a champion of Greek freedom from Athenian tyranny, but many did not heed the warning.

1. Herodotus and His Audience

Herodotus treated the great actions of the Greeks and the Persians of the period from about 550 BC to about 479, posing the question, 'why they fought the war', that is, the great war of 480–479. We know that he had recounted orally the fruit of his investigations into these events before beginning his immense written work, the *Histories*.¹ His stories were based on oral tradition, or more precisely, on various oral traditions which he collected, evaluated, and transformed while writing his book.² The hostility existing between Athens and Sparta at the time was of major significance in his presentation of his investigations. In this paper I will focus particularly on Herodotus' depiction of Sparta and the Spartans, and how this depiction was received—or rather not received—by his audience. It is this lack of acceptance which suggests the title of the paper: 'Speaking to the deaf'. But before addressing this topic, it is necessary to explain my premise.

The growing enmity between Athens and Sparta, which exploded in 432 BC with the Peloponnesian War, had a major effect on the *Histories*, both for the author and for his public. The long cold war that Thucydides describes in his *Pentactontaetia*, with moments of open conflict in the fifties and forties

¹ Three articles in E. J. Bakker *et al.* 2002 give an overview of the issues: Bakker (2002); Slings (2002); and Rösler (2002). See also Johnson (1994) and Stadter (1997).

² See Luraghi (2001) and Thomas (1989) and (1993).

of the century, and the war itself, of which Herodotus did not see the end, should be considered implicit but ever-present facts behind the *Histories*, both in the initial oral phase and in the composition of the written text. Neither author nor audience could avoid the constant pressure of the war, threatening or present, on their modes of conceiving and interpreting the past. In the debates that preceded the final rupture in 432, Thucydides teaches us, the roles of the Spartans and the Athenians in the Persian War were of fundamental importance. The Athenians justified their empire by the memory of their courage at Salamis, ‘which blocked the Persians from sailing against the Peloponnese and destroying its cities one after the other’ (Thuc. 1.73). The ephor Sthenelaidas rejected the argument: ‘if they behaved well in the past against the Persians, and now are bad with us, they should pay double, since they have changed from good to bad’ (Thuc. 1.86).

Herodotus himself speaks of the conflicts of his time as part of the long period of woes for the Greeks which had begun under Darius and continued during the reigns of Xerxes and Artaxerxes: the period that included the Ionian revolt, the battle of Marathon, the expedition of Xerxes, the battle of the Eurymedon, the so-called First Peloponnesian War, the revolt of Samos, and the first years of the Peloponnesian War (6.98). In this passage Herodotus insists that the troubles came not only from the Persians, but ‘from the wars between the leading cities for domination’, that is, the conflicts of Sparta and Athens and their allies. The *Histories* conclude with the end of the year 479 BC, but history continued while Herodotus was composing. He knew that the mental horizon of his audience was and would be dominated by the antagonism of the two rivals. He refers a number of times to events that took place after the end of the *Histories*. These references become more frequent in the final books, where there are a number of allusions to the first two years of the war.³ Although it is impossible to establish securely the moment in which Herodotus completed his work, these references give a secure terminus post quem of 430 BC, soon after the beginning of the war.⁴

In what follows I would like to consider the effect of these contemporary events on the composition of the *Histories*. How did the political situation influence the manner in which Herodotus presented his inquiries, and the manner in which he expected that his public would receive them? Among the many topics which could be treated, the behaviour of the two hege-

³ Cf. 6.91; 6.98; 7.137; 7.233; 9.73. Cobet (1971) discusses the references to events after 479 BC.

⁴ For various opinions on the dates of composition and publication (or diffusion) see Fornara (1971) and (1982); Cobet (1977) and (1987) and Sansone (1985). I believe that the relative absence of notices on Lesbos and Mytilene, contrasted with the emphasis given to Samos, suggests that the written text of the *Histories* was substantially complete before the revolt of Mytilene in 428 B.C.

monic states, Athens and Sparta, is without doubt the most important. Throughout his work, Herodotus privileges these two among the Greek states: they were the most important at the time of Croesus (cf. 1.56–69) and dominate the narrative of the struggle against Xerxes.

Much has been written recently on how Herodotus represented the Athenians. After for a long time arguing that Herodotus admired and praised the Athenians, scholars now have changed their opinion, and make the *Histories* a warning that the Athenians, while brave, are also imperialists, aggressors, and tyrants.⁵ According to these scholars, this attitude would be the historian's reaction to the expansion of the Athenian empire and to the violent suppression of attempts at revolt, of which the conquest of Samos in 439 was a recent example. Athens, in this view, had abandoned its role of preserver of liberty and assumed that of oppressor, imitating the earlier Persian example. Without doubt there is a great deal in the *Histories* to support this reading, but in my opinion the emphasis on the negative aspects of Herodotus' judgment of Athens lacks balance if it does not consider the other hegemonic city, Sparta, and its role in the struggle for power.

To right this balance, there is a need to examine how Herodotus depicts Sparta and the Spartans for his contemporary audience. What might this portrayal suggest to his public at the beginning of the Peloponnesian War? Sparta presented itself in this period as the defender of autonomy and freedom of the Greek cities. Among the many passages illustrating Spartan behaviour that might be considered, two episodes that Herodotus places at the centre of a network of events especially reveal to his contemporaries negative aspects of the Spartans and suggest a certain caution concerning Spartan propaganda.

2. Imperialist Sparta: Tegea and Cleomenes

Two themes stand out in Herodotus' vision of the leading Doric city. On the one hand, Sparta is shown as dynamic, aggressive, and imperialist; on the other, defensive, isolationist, and dedicated to self-preservation. The episode of Tegea's subjection introduces the first theme; the heroic account of Thermopylae paradoxically refers to the second.

Sparta is first given extended treatment at 1.65–8.⁶ Herodotus tells us that after Lycurgus' constitutional reforms had established *eunomia*, a foundation of good laws, the Spartans decided to conquer Arcadia, secure in

⁵ See Strasburger (1955); Raaflaub (1987); Stadter (1992); and Moles (1996) and (2002).

⁶ Herodotus had previously in Book 1 mentioned the Spartans at 1.4.3-4; 6.3; 51.3-4; and 56.2.

their new prosperity. Encouraged by a Delphic oracle, they made an expedition against Tegea, carrying with them fetters (*πέδαι*) to bind the defeated Tegeans. However, the Spartans were quickly defeated, and they found themselves chained in the fetters that they themselves had brought (1.66). The disgrace was still remembered in Herodotus' day, when those fetters still hung in a temple at Tegea. This picture of the Spartans who carry chains to enslave the Tegeans offers a model of imperialism, the desire to conquer one's neighbours simply to have more, confident in one's own prosperity. The fact that the Spartans end up being enchained by their presumptive victims displays the instability of human success, the inscrutability of divine communication, and the inevitable defeat of the aggressor.

The first attempt to become masters of Tegea failed, but the Spartans, after having brought the bones of Orestes from Tegea to Sparta according to an oracle, succeeded in a second attempt (1.67–8). The secret was a new kind of fetters, not actual but symbolic. The enigma of the oracle that gave the location of Orestes' bones was resolved when the Spartan Lichas discovered the bones of the hero near a blacksmith's forge, where, as Lichas recognised, 'there is blow upon blow and grief upon grief', as the Pythia had said. However, the reader has to recognise in the solution of the oracle's riddle another riddle, the analogy between these bones and the chains made for the Tegeans. Both are used to hold down a people, and both are found at a forge. The Spartans went from iron fetters made in their forges to new bonds, the bones of the hero found in the forge of the enemy. David Asheri writes regarding this passage, 'the new cults actually served to legitimise Sparta's expansionism in Arcadia and in other parts of the Peloponnese'.⁷ With the help of Delphi, the Spartans found in the bones of Orestes new, less rough but equally strong fetters for Tegea. After the transfer of the bones, they defeated Tegea, and besides, Herodotus tells us, 'the greater part of the Peloponnese' (1.67–8).⁸

Fetters return as fact and symbol at other significant moments of the *Histories*. The story just discussed is inserted into the story of Croesus' expedition against Cyrus. Croesus himself, after having planned to conquer Cyrus, ended up defeated and in fetters on a pyre (1.86.2). Only then does he recognise the truth of Solon's words, 'for all things, it is necessary to look to the end'. Once he has been freed by Cyrus, Croesus complains to Apollo, sending his fetters to the oracle at Delphi. The god is not disturbed: Croesus' own folly was responsible. Just like the Spartans, Croesus in his enthusiasm

⁷ Asheri et al. (2007), 129, to 1.67.2.

⁸ Boedeker (1993) suggests that the true purpose of the transfer of the hero's bones was to unify the city's factions. This may be true, but Herodotus does not allude to this motive: his attention is directed to Sparta's external relations.

to subdue Cyrus had interpreted wrongly the sense of an oracle, and like them finished in fetters.

Fetters in this way establish an analogy between the Spartans' confidence in their prosperity, which made them ready to force others into submission, and Croesus' confidence in his wealth, which led him to a preventive attack against the Persians, in an attempt 'to restrain in some way their growing power' (1.46). Later this same motive drives the Spartans when they attempt to hinder the growth of Athenian power under its new democratic regime by reinstalling Hippias as tyrant of Athens (5.91.1–2). It is surely not a coincidence that Thucydides adduces the same reason—to hinder the growth of Athenian power—for the Spartan decision to begin the war in 432 (Thuc. 1.118.2, cf. 1.23.6; 1.86.5; 1.88). The parallel between Croesus and the Spartans suggested by the references to the fetters extends also to the motivation of each and has a contemporary parallel.

Chains are the physical representation of the attempt to control another. For this reason Herodotus records them also regarding the Persian kings Cambyses, Darius, and Xerxes. Cambyses sends to the Ethiopian king along with his spies golden necklaces, as a present, but the king recognises them as chains of subjection, and mocks their fragility.⁹ Darius gives Demodocus as a reward golden chains, to substitute the iron ones which he was wearing,¹⁰ chains which drive the doctor to do all he can to flee his slavery. Finally, Xerxes throws chains into the Hellespont in the vain attempt to enslave the sea (735.1; cf. 8.109.3). The gesture is analogous to his construction of the bridge over the Hellespont and to his attempt to enslave the Greeks, but it is equally futile: storms destroy the bridge, and the Greeks escape his army. The chains, symbol of domination and slavery, in every case mark also the lack of understanding of the right relation between man and god, and the defeat of the oppressor.¹¹

The anecdote of the fetters for Tegea introduces the theme of Sparta as imperial power, and suggests, as does the story of Croesus, its eventual defeat. Thanks to its good government and prosperity, Sparta desires to dominate its neighbours, and thus becomes like Croesus and Xerxes, even if, after the defeat at Tegea, Sparta down to Herodotus' day had not encountered a power which could counter its empire. To Herodotus and his audience this theme could suggest the possibility of Sparta's defeat in their own time.

⁹ Hdt. 3.22.2, 23.4. Herodotus ironically has the king say that the golden chains that the Ethiopians use to hold prisoners are stronger than those of Cambyses.

¹⁰ Hdt. 3.129.3; 130.4.

¹¹ It is not a coincidence that Herodotus also records the chains used by the Athenians to bind the Chalcidians after their defeat, sign of the imperialist thrust of the new democracy.

Other episodes of the *Histories* reinforce the theme of an imperialist Sparta. These can be divided into two categories. In the first, Sparta is tempted to extend its power to the Aegean and Asia minor, and westward to Libya and Sicily, but its projects fail or are abandoned. In the second, the Spartans act in continental Greece, and succeed in imposing their power more extensively. Sparta's alliance with Croesus is mentioned at the beginning of Herodotus' work (1.6) and is described in more detail immediately after the story of the bones of Orestes. The Spartans are so captivated by Croesus' generosity and his admiration for them that they enthusiastically accept his proposal of alliance. Because of their war with Argos and the unexpected defeat of Croesus (1.70; 77; 82–3) they do not profit from the alliance: in fact they lose the magnificent bronze vase that they had sent to the king. Later they send an expedition to Samos to oust its tyrant, Polycrates. This was 'the first time that the Spartan Dorians had sent an army against Asia', but they had to return unsuccessful, leaving only the memory of two Spartans, killed at Samos but still honoured for their courage by the Samians (1.57). After the death of Polycrates, his successor Maiandrios, having fled Samos, sought the help of king Cleomenes to recover the island. Only with difficulty did Cleomenes succeed in resisting the bribes offered by Maiandrios and expelled him from Sparta (3.148). Finally, Aristagoras of Miletus asked Cleomenes and the Spartans to help the Ionian revolt, setting out the advantages for the king and for the city: the chance to free Ionia and to win without difficulty enormous riches—honour and profit without effort. Again Cleomenes almost accepted, but finally decided not to, alarmed by the distance to the Persian capital and embarrassed to accept Aristagoras' enormous gifts in the presence of his daughter (5.49–51).

At roughly the same time, Dorieus, Cleomenes' half-brother rival for the kingship, yielded to the temptation of overseas adventures, with some support from other Spartiates.¹² He directed himself westward, hoping to establish a Spartan colony. His first attempt, in Libya, ended when he was driven off by the Carthaginians and a local tribe. His second, in Sicily, was opposed by the local inhabitants, the Elymites of Segesta and Phoenician settlers. His force was routed and he and three other Spartiates lost their lives. A fourth Spartiate persevered, eventually setting himself up as tyrant of Selinus, but was later killed in an uprising. Dorieus' hopes for a western expansion of Spartan power thus brought no fruit.

In this way the Spartans' attention remained fixed on continental Greece, where it showed an aggressiveness that overwhelmed friends as well as enemies. During his reign the same Cleomenes who had refused the expeditions to Asia invaded Attica twice (5.64–5; 74–5) and destroyed the mili-

¹² Hdt. 5.42–48. Cf. Hornblower (2007).

tary capabilities of Argos (6.76–83). Under Cleomenes Sparta used the threat or the reality of an invasion by its superbly trained army to keep under control the major cities of Greece.

It is worthwhile to examine the invasions of Attica more closely. The first freed Athens from the tyranny of Hippias; the second aimed at installing Isagoras as a new tyrant, but failed (the other king, Demaratus, and the Corinthians had refused to participate). Between the two, Cleomenes had entered Attica with a troop of soldiers to expel Cleisthenes and his supporters, but was besieged on the Acropolis and forced to return to Sparta. Cleomenes' actions reveals Sparta's readiness to intervene during his reign, but Herodotus extends this Spartan interventionism to his own time. A propos of the second, failed, invasion, he comments that this was the fourth Doric invasion of Attica, and enumerates two invasions made for the good of the Athenian people, and two hostile (5.76.1). This list called attention to the ambivalent relationship of the two cities and stimulated Herodotus' contemporary hearer or reader to continue the list of Spartan invasions down to his own times, remembering other occasions: the attempt to install Hippias once more as tyrant (5.91–3); the Spartan promise to invade Attica in support of the revolt of Thasos ca. 465 BC (Thuc. 1.101.2); the invasion under Pleistoanax of 446 (Thuc. 1.114.2); and finally the annual invasions from 431 on. That Herodotus himself was thinking of these last invasions is clear from another passage, where he recalls that 'during the war that broke out between the Athenians and Peloponnesians many years later, the Spartans sacked the rest of Attica, but spared Decelea' (9.73.3). Herodotus presumes that his reading public had in mind the history of Spartan invasions.

Cleomenes was an aggressor, but can his belligerence be considered characteristic of Sparta? Without doubt Cleomenes is the most important Spartan figure of Herodotus' narrative. His activity against other cities and against his colleagues and fellow citizens dominate Spartan history, so that even heroic figures like Leonidas and Pausanias seem pallid in comparison. Certainly we have to say that for Herodotus, if Leonidas and Pausanias offer one aspect of Sparta, Cleomenes offers another, much less heroic.

Cleomenes, in fact, despite his victories, died by his own hand, slicing himself with a knife, from his shins up to his belly. When Herodotus considers the probable causes of so horrible a death, he focuses on Cleomenes' outrageous actions, especially the slaughter at Argos (6.75–84). The Argives blamed his decision to burn down the sacred grove of the hero Argos and his massacre of the Argive soldiers who had fled there for sanctuary. The Athenians remembered that Cleomenes had cut down the sacred grove at Eleusis when he invaded Attica. The other Greeks, with whom Herodotus agrees, instead recalled that he had persuaded the Pythia at Delphi to deny the validity of the claim to the throne of the other Spartan king, his col-

league Demaratus. The Spartans ascribed his death to his habit of drinking excessively, in the Scythian manner. Of these accusations, the first two link Cleomenes' military aggression to divine transgressions, a connection made by Herodotus often, most prominently for Xerxes. Invading foreign territory carries with it a violation of sacred places. The second two concern violations of sacred laws and civic traditions. All mark Cleomenes as mad: like Cambyses, he violates divine and human law. As king at Sparta, he personifies the imperialist side of Sparta, that facet that wants to dominate the other Greek cities, both within the Peloponnese, like Tegea and Argos, and beyond, like Aegina and Athens. For Herodotus, Sparta shows a desire to dominate Greece, suggestively indicated from the beginning by its first attempt to fetter the Tegeans.

3. Isolationist Sparta: Thermopylae and the Isthmus

However, there is another side of the Spartan character portrayed in Herodotus, its isolationism and caution. These are apparent during the Persian wars, in the Spartan tendency to trust to walls which would both protect their land and force the enemy to confront their soldiers at a restricted point. A starting point for considering this theme may be found, paradoxically, in the heroic battle of the Three Hundred at Thermopylae. As Herodotus explains with care, at Thermopylae there was a narrow passage blocked by a wall, that the Greeks hoped to defend (7.176). Herodotus' account of the days of combat at this wall are extremely vivid and dramatic, and include many set 'scenes', like that presenting the Persian observer who watches awestruck while the Spartans, the days before the battle, calmly comb their long hair or exercise naked in front of the wall (7.208–9). Of major significance, however, are the moments after the discovery of Ephialtes' betrayal of the path and the withdrawal of the other Greeks, when the Spartans remain alone with the Thespians and the Thebans. 'On the previous days', Herodotus writes, 'they had tried to hold the defensive wall, ... but now they met the enemy in front of the narrows' (7.223). While the Persian officers whipped their troops into combat, the Spartans place themselves before the wall for the last battle. 'At that point', Herodotus continues, 'almost all their spears had been broken, and they were using their swords to kill the Persians. Leonidas fell in this struggle, displaying an extraordinary courage'. (7.224). When the Persian troops guided by Ephialtes arrived behind them, the Spartans still remaining retreated within the wall to higher ground, and fought to the death, with knives, hands, and teeth. (7.225). It was an historic moment, and Herodotus paints a grand scene, with Leonidas at the centre. The story of the heroic sacrifice of the three hundred Spartans continues as

a legend to this day. For Herodotus, this moment represented the zenith of Spartan courage and sacrifice. Leonidas, he tells us, chose this death with open eyes, knowing that according to an oracle only the death of a king could save Sparta, and that his death would bring eternal glory to his city (7.220). The Spartans' courage is evident, but exactly this sacrifice establishes the limits of their strategy and their character.

This scene assumes a different and equally suggestive meaning when considered together with another famous passage. Speaking of the Athenian decision to defend Greece with its ships, even with the loss of their city, Herodotus had prophesied a heroic end for the Spartans if the Athenians had not resolved to oppose the Persians. 'The Lacedaemonians would have been isolated', he says, 'and in that situation they would have displayed their character and fought courageously—and they would have died nobly' (7.139). This passage praises Sparta, but with an important caveat: the wall from one side to the other of the Isthmus, on which the Peloponnesians relied so much, would be useless. The historian predicts that the Isthmian wall would have been circumvented by the Persian fleet, as Ephialtes and the Persians had skirted the wall at Thermopylae defended by Leonidas.¹³ He reaffirms this prediction when he reports Demaratus' advice to Xerxes to capture Cythera, the large island off the coast of Laconia, which would have permitted the Persian fleet to get around the Greek defence at the Isthmus (7.235).

Thus the glorious death of Leonidas, the ideal example of Spartan courage and obedience to their laws, turns out to be ambivalent. An army of soldiers, without the support of a fleet, can sacrifice itself heroically at a wall, but cannot stop the Persian onslaught. Herodotus' words at 7.139 offer a sceptical reading of the frantic effort of the Peloponnesians to fortify the Isthmus with a wall, frequently mentioned in books eight and nine.¹⁴ He recalls also that the greater part of the Greek fleet wanted to flee from Salamis to the Isthmus and the protective wall. However, for Herodotus that wall is like the wooden walls of the Acropolis, behind which certain Athenians hoped to defend their city: weak and easily outflanked.¹⁵

¹³ At 7.207 Herodotus couples the two defensive positions, noting that many of the Peloponnesians wanted to retreat from Thermopylae to the Isthmus. Sparta itself had no walls, so that the Isthmian wall was the last barrier against the invaders.

¹⁴ Cf. 8.40.2; 49.2; 56; 60; 63; 71-72; 74.1; and 9.7-10.

¹⁵ Without doubt Herodotus also thought of the walls of Athens, behind which Pericles and the Athenians in 432 hoped to defend themselves from the Peloponnesian troops. If my interpretation is correct, Herodotus would have believed that also this defensive barrier was destined to be circumvented in one way or another. Herodotus' thinking on walls and his use of this image still need to be studied adequately, in particular regarding the 'wooden walls', in which Themistocles had seen the Athenian fleet.

By emphasising the folly of defending the Isthmus, Herodotus' narrative demonstrates that the Spartans possessed not only a desire to dominate continental Greece but a fundamental isolationism, a need to shut themselves up, to pull back on themselves, and trust solely in their courage in defending a single point. This characteristic is highly significant both for the Persian wars and for the history of the fifth century. When, for example, the Athenians returned to their city after the battle of Thermopylae, they were deeply discouraged to hear that, as Herodotus writes, 'the Peloponnesians were constructing a defensive wall across the Isthmus, since they were only concerned with the survival of the Peloponnese and to protect it and abandon the rest' (8.40). The situation in the following spring was even more black for the Athenians. After the battle of Salamis, in the winter of 480–79, Alexander of Macedon advised the Athenians to choose the Persian side. The Spartans begged the Athenians not to yield, and in fact the Athenians refused the offer (8.140–44). But in the spring the Spartans no longer were worried about the Athenians, because, as Herodotus says, 'they had now finished the Isthmian wall and thought they had no further need of the Athenians'. Only at the last moment did they decide to march beyond the Isthmus, and then only because they realised that with the Athenians assisting the Persians, there was no way the Isthmus wall could hold (9.8–9). The same behaviour is apparent with regard to the Greek fleet. After the victories of Plataea and Mycale, king Leotychidas, the admiral of the fleet, departed with the Peloponnesian ships from Ionia, leaving the Aegean to the Athenians (9.114). This action is emblematic of the Spartan renunciation of any role in Ionia after the recall of Pausanias, and naturally opened the door to Athenian ambitions.

In Herodotus' narrative, Leonidas dies not for Greece but for Sparta and Sparta itself does not fight for Greece but first of all for itself, and then for the Peloponnese that it dominates. Spartan isolationism is founded on the desire to preserve its independence, prosperity, and control of the Peloponnese. Of course, it was also strongly driven by fear of the Helots, but this basically reflects the same motive: fear of losing the dominating position that guarantees its prosperity.

If we consider these two scenes and their related passages, we discover that in Herodotus' account the Spartans are exceptionally courageous, but are also inclined to dominate the other Greek cities as much as they can and to pull themselves back into a defensive position within the Peloponnese when attacked. Their pretensions to be the leader of Greece were based on the economic prosperity and the bravery and military skill of their citizens, and reflected more their own interests than a generous sense of Hellenic community. After the Persian wars, the rise of Athens became a challenge to these expectations and led ineluctably to war.

4. Contemporary Resonances

It seems clear that Herodotus wanted his hearers or readers not only to learn of the great deeds of the Persian wars, but to consider contemporary events in the light of the past. While he was performing his research and speaking or writing up his results, that is roughly in the years from 445 to 428, the hostility between the two rival cities, Sparta and Athens, each with their respective allies, grew until it ignited the Peloponnesian War. Several scholars have demonstrated, as has been seen, that Herodotus, despite his praise of Athens at 7.139 and elsewhere, wanted to suggest that Athens revealed indications of imperialism and had become in a sense the heir of the Persians in their domination of the Aegean. This analysis, however, leaves the impression that the Spartans escaped from this criticism. Instead, I hope to have brought to light the ambivalence which characterises the presentation of Sparta in the *Histories*. With all his great admiration for their courage and their indispensable role in saving Greece from the Persian attack, Herodotus shows another aspect of the Spartans, their imperialism and self-interest. Thucydides tells us that all Greece looked to the Spartans as liberators who would save them from the growing power of Athens (Thuc. 2.8). Herodotus rather recalls to the Spartans and to their allies, present and future, that things were not so simple. He reminds the allies that Spartan imperialism was different from that of Athens, but not for that less real. When the Spartans talk of freedom for all Greece—if the past as it appears in the *Histories* can be an indication—they are thinking only, or in large part, of the interests of Sparta. Herodotus asks the Spartans, as he does the Athenians, to think of the end of the imperialism of Croesus and of all the Persian kings, down to Xerxes. The aggressor sooner or later will be defeated.

In the *Histories* Herodotus reminds his contemporary audience that in this struggle between Greeks no one will be victor. He approves the Athenian decision at Artemisium not to challenge Sparta for the command of the fleet. They were right, he tells us, ‘because a civil war (στάσις ἑμφυλος)—that is, war among Greeks—is as much worse than a war on a united front (πολέμου ὁμοφρονέοντος) as war is worse than peace’ (8.3.1). He foresaw that the war between Sparta and Athens would be much worse than the war against Persia. In his *Histories* he recounted lucidly the struggles among the Greek cities for supremacy, but also suggested that through cooperation they had been able to defend themselves from despotism and defeat the Persian empire. In those heroic moments, by some divine miracle, Sparta and Athens had fought ‘a war on a united front’.

In Herodotus’ telling, neither Sparta nor Athens are spotless, and neither has the right to dominate Greece. The fruit of discord would be war and slavery; the fruit of cooperation would be peace and liberty.

Unfortunately, his words fell on deaf ears. Like the Pharisees in the gospel, the Greeks did not understand how to interpret and profit from the stories that Herodotus told or wrote down. The Greeks, and their two leading cities, chose the course of conflict, of the struggle for supremacy. Thucydides wrote that history.

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