

DEFENDING THE DIVINE: PLUTARCH ON THE GODS OF HERODOTUS*

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Abstract: Plutarch's attack on Herodotus' characterisation and portrayal of the gods in the *de Herodoti malignitate* and Plutarch's own portrayal of the divine in his Persian-War *Lives* show a similar approach and orientation, arising from Plutarch's belief that Herodotus had either not treated the divine in an appropriate way (e.g., Solon's remark on the jealousy of the divinity, which was a serious affront to Plutarch's Platonist beliefs) or that Herodotus had not included enough of the divine in his narrative of the Persian Wars, omitting the clear signs and indications of divine involvement that could so easily be found in other authors

Keywords: Herodotus, Plutarch, divine *phthonos*, religion, Persian Wars.

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The texts of Plutarch cited in this article are from the Teubner editions of the *Lives* and *Moralia* (unless otherwise noted); the translations of Herodotus and Plutarch's *Lives* are from the respective Penguin editions, sometimes modified; those of the *Moralia* are from the Loeb editions, again sometimes modified.

I

Platonist and priest at Delphi, Plutarch was much interested in the workings of the divine, as both the *Moralia* and the *Lives* attest. As might be expected, Herodotus' history does not loom large in Plutarch's many musings on the divine, but there are several places where Plutarch does engage with the historian and his gods, and, in doing so, reveals not only much about how his own sense of the gods informs his work, but also about the way in which a 'canonical' work in antiquity could continue to provoke thought and criticism.

The most sensible place to begin is with Plutarch's essay, *de Herodoti malignitate* (*On the Malice of Herodotus*), for it is here that Plutarch directly engages with Herodotus' history. A number of scholars have seen Plutarch's criticisms in this essay as misguided, unfair, and tendentious; but even so, the work remains valuable for what it can tell us about a particular approach to the writing of history in antiquity.¹ For our present purposes the work furnishes a number of criticisms of Herodotus' approach to the divine. In just over a dozen passages of the *de Malignitate*, Plutarch finds fault with the way in which Herodotus has treated the gods in his history, whether by misrepresentation, confusion, or omission. It may be significant that the divine is the very first item with which Plutarch introduces his 'prosecution' of Herodotus,² and even when he treats other aspects of Herodotus' work, the divine is never far from Plutarch's thoughts.³

¹ This work has been judged differently by different scholars, and for a long time was thought to be spurious; today it is generally considered genuine. The most recent contributions to the debate (where further bibliography can be found) are Seavey (1991); Bowen (1992); Hershbell (1993); Marincola (1994); Grimaldi (2004); Pelling (2007); Dognini (2007); Baragwanath (2008) 9–20; and Marincola (2015).

² This is a good example of the priority of the divine, a phenomenon to be found everywhere in Greek culture, whereby divine business is always taken up before human business: Mikalson (1983) 13–17.

³ No more than five chapters separate one discussion of religion from the next. For the divine as the first item, see next note.

We may begin by listing in order the passages in the *de Malignitate* where Herodotus is faulted.

1. Herodotus has slandered Io, whom all the Hellenes consider to have been deified and the ancestor of the most distinguished races and families. He says that her seduction was voluntary and thus that the Trojan War was fought for a worthless woman. He suggests that the gods do not care when men violate women, although other evidence suggests differently. (856D–857A)
2. Herodotus acquits Busiris of human sacrifice and the murder of a guest, and he asserts that the Egyptians have a strong sense of religion and justice. (857A–B)
3. Herodotus claims that the Greeks learnt their processions and festivals, including those for the twelve gods, from the Egyptians. He observes a religious silence for the Egyptian gods but has no such scruples about Heracles and Dionysus: for the former he claims that the Egyptians worship the god but the Greeks a human ‘grown old’; he says similar things about Pan. In all this he uses Egyptian ‘braggadocio and mythic accounts’ (*ἀλαζονεία καὶ μυθολογία*) to overturn what is most revered and most hallowed in Greek religion (*τὰ σεμνότατα καὶ ἀγνότατα τῶν Ἑλληνικῶν ἱερῶν*). (857C–D)
4. Herodotus tries to make Heracles a foreigner by having the Persians trace his ancestry back to the Assyrians, yet none of the ancient and learned poets know of this Heracles. (857E–F)
5. He uses Solon, in his meeting with Croesus, as a mouthpiece for the abuse of the gods, compounding blasphemy with malice (*κακοθήθειαν τῇ βλασφημίᾳ προστίθεισι*). (857F–858A)
6. He presents Croesus’ dedications to Apollo as a most impious deed (*πάντων ἀσεβέστατον ... ἔργον*) because Croesus made the dedications from a

- man who had supported his brother and whom Croesus had flayed. (858E)
7. He claims that Cleisthenes bribed the priestess at Delphi and thus links a noble deed—the expulsion of the tyrants from Athens—with impiety and fraud; he also thereby denies credit to the god for his excellent instruction. (860C–E)
 8. Though he treats the battle of Marathon, Herodotus does not mention the vow made by the Athenians to Artemis before the battle, nor the procession and sacrifice made by the Athenians in the aftermath of their victory. (862B–C)
 9. Herodotus claims that Leonidas and the Thebans were hostile towards each other, but one can demonstrate that they were friends by the fact that Leonidas requested, and received, permission to sleep in the temple of Heracles, where he saw and reported a dream that concerned the future fate of Thebes. (865E–F)
 10. In Herodotus' treatment of the battle of Artemisium he takes what almost all agree to have been a Greek victory and has the Greeks fleeing south, thereby suggesting that the verses the Greeks inscribed to Artemis Proseoea were empty words and boasting. (867B–F)
 11. In his attack on Corinth, Herodotus fails to mention the inspired prayer of the women of Corinth to the goddess, although the tale is told everywhere and Simonides wrote the epigram for the dedication of the bronze statues. (871A–C)
 12. Herodotus claims that Apollo demanded from the Aeginetans the *aristeia* they had won at Salamis, thereby using the god to deny Athens pride of place in the battle. (871C–D)
 13. Herodotus suggests that the dedications made to the gods by the Greeks after their victories are full of lying words. (874A–B)

The criticisms on view here concern a variety of aspects of the gods and religion, but can perhaps be divided into three types. First, Herodotus deliberately misrepresents⁴ the true nature of individual deities or heroes; related to this is the charge that he deliberately confuses the relationship of Greek religion to that of foreign peoples, especially the Egyptians. Second, Herodotus misrepresents the true nature of the divine, as can be seen most clearly in the Solon story. Third, Herodotus omits evidence of the importance of the divine for the historical participants whose actions he narrates.⁵

My focus in this paper will be on the second and third items. As to the first, we can note that Plutarch treats religious syncretism differently in different works: in the *On Isis and Osiris*, for example, he is respectful of Egyptian religion and willing to countenance that Greek gods have Egyptian equivalents; at other times, he is less tolerant of this kind of thing. And although he appreciates Egyptian wisdom, he was usually far too much a partisan of Hellenic culture to allow the Egyptians, as Herodotus did, to be the source of Greek beliefs and practices.⁶

II

The second criticism that Plutarch offers of Herodotus' attitude towards the gods is far more substantial and has more serious consequences: namely, that he misrepresents the true nature of the divine. This can be seen most clearly in his narrative of the meeting of Solon with Croesus, where

⁴ I say 'deliberately misrepresents' rather than 'misunderstands' or the like because deliberate falsehood is a precondition for the ascription of malice, and justifies the kind of on-going hostile attack mounted by Plutarch in this essay: for the important difference between intentional and accidental falsehood see Marincola (1997) 231.

⁵ I do not categorise here Plutarch's remarks on Croesus, Cleisthenes, and the dedications of the Persian wars (nos. 6, 7, and 13) since the main purpose of these is to suggest dishonest action on the part of human beings rather than anything about the divine itself.

⁶ On Plutarch and Egyptian religion see Griffiths (1970) 18–33.

‘Solon’ offers an unacceptable view of divinity. The story is the first extended narrative in Herodotus’ *Histories* (1.29–33), and scholars have long observed the important role that it plays in setting out some of the major themes and concerns of the historian’s work.⁷ For Herodotus, the story of Croesus’ meeting with Solon comes as part of his *logos* about Croesus and his capital Sardis which Solon visits, Herodotus tells us, when it is at the height of its prosperity (*ἀκμαζούσας πλούτῳ*, 1.29.1)—a detail that can hardly be coincidence since prosperity and its perils loom so large in this particular story. Herodotus notes that many Greek teachers of the time visited Sardis (1.29.1), though Solon is the only one on whom he focuses.

Having entertained Solon for several days Croesus then orders his servants to give his visitor a tour of the royal treasuries, at the end of which he asks Solon a question, prefacing it by saying that Solon had a reputation for wisdom and knowledge. The famous question, of course, is who is the ‘most prosperous’ (*ὀλβιώτατος*) man whom Solon has ever seen.⁸ Solon frustrates Croesus by giving two answers: first, Tellus the Athenian (1.30.3) and then the Argives Cleobis and Biton (1.31.1). The ‘insult’ is compounded for Croesus by the fact that all three of these men were commoners who could not in any way aspire to the power and wealth of a Lydian king. Croesus, therefore, demands to know what Solon thinks of Croesus’ own prosperity, and Solon gives him a long reply, full of musings on the divine, on the span and scope of mortal life, and on human happiness. At the beginning of this speech Solon utters one of Herodotus’ most famous remarks about the divine (1.32.1):

⁷ Harrison (2000) 33–41 and Asheri (2007) 97–104 discuss the passage at length and cite the relevant bibliography.

⁸ Hdt. 1.30.2: *νῦν ὃν ἐπειρέσθαι σε ἕμερος ἐπήλθέ μοι εἴ τινα ἤδη πάντων εἶδες ὀλβιώτατον*. For the terminology here see de Heer (1969) 71–2 and Mikalson (2010) 7–9. I have followed the latter in translating *ὀλβιώτατον* as ‘most prosperous’.

᾽Ω Κροῖσε, ἐπιστάμενόν με τὸ θεῖον πᾶν ἐὼν φθονερόν τε καὶ ταραχώδες ἐπειρωτᾶς ἀνθρωπῆϊων πρηγμάτων πέρι.

Croesus, you ask me—who understand that the divine is completely jealous and disruptive—about human affairs.

In the course of what follows, Solon advises Croesus that human beings are subject to fortune, and that one's present condition is often not one's last, nor is it the case that great wealth is always superior to the ability simply to meet one's daily needs (1.32.2–9). Croesus does indeed have the outward appearance (*φαίνεαι*, 1.32.5) of one who is wealthy and king over many, but Solon cannot estimate Croesus' happiness until he knows how his life ends; one must 'look to the end in every matter' (1.32.9), for it is the end that confers meaning, and until then a man can only be called 'fortunate' (*εὐτυχής*), not 'happy' (*ὄλβιος*).

As commentators have noted, the remark that the divine is jealous and disruptive can be paralleled in many passages of early Greek literature and is quite consonant with Solon's own poetry; indeed, for Herodotus' original audience, it may be doubted whether the remark would have caused any stir at all.⁹ But for Plutarch this was an abominable statement, and one which calls for particular censure (*DHM* 857F–858A):

τοῖς δὲ θεοῖς λοιδορούμενος ἐν τῷ Σόλωνος προσωπεῖω ταῦτ' εἶρηκεν· “᾽Ω Κροῖσε, ἐπιστάμενόν με τὸ θεῖον πᾶν ἐὼν φθονερόν τε καὶ ταραχώδες ἐπειρωτᾶς ἀνθρωπῆϊων πραγμάτων πέρι”· ἃ γὰρ αὐτὸς ἐφρόνει περὶ τῶν θεῶν τῷ Σόλωνι προστριβόμενος κακοθήειαν τῇ βλασφημίᾳ προστίθησι.

⁹ For similar sentiments in Greek literature see Harrison and Asheri as cited in n. 7, above. For the interconnection here between the Herodotean Solon and Solon's own work see Chiasson (1986).

Abusing the gods in the persona of Solon, he says as follows: ‘Croesus, you ask me—who understand that the divine is completely jealous and disruptive—about human affairs’. By attributing to Solon his own ideas about the gods he compounds his blasphemy with malice.

The remark rankled because it struck at the very heart of Plutarch’s beliefs about the divine and about its relationship to human beings. For Plutarch, the god is the source of all goodness for mankind, ‘for it is impossible, where the god is responsible for everything, for anything evil to come into being, or for anything good to come where God is responsible for nothing’ (*ἀδύνατον γὰρ ἢ φλαῦρον ὀτιοῦν, ὅπου πάντων, ἢ χρηστόν, ὅπου μηδενὸς ὁ θεὸς αἴτιος, ἐγγενέσθαι*, *de Isid. et Osir.* 369A–B). Such a remark betrays Plutarch’s clear intellectual debt to Plato as can be seen from Socrates’ words at *Rep.* 2.379c2–5:

οὐδ’ ἄρα, ἦν δ’ ἐγώ, ὁ θεός, ἐπειδὴ ἀγαθός, πάντων ἂν εἴη αἴτιος, ὡς οἱ πολλοὶ λέγουσιν, ἀλλὰ ὀλίγων μὲν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις αἴτιος, πολλῶν δὲ ἀναίτιος· πολὺ γὰρ ἐλάττω τὰγαθὰ τῶν κακῶν ἡμῖν, καὶ τῶν μὲν ἀγαθῶν οὐδένα ἄλλον αἰτιατέον, τῶν δὲ κακῶν ἄλλ’ ἅττα δεῖ ζητεῖν τὰ αἴτια, ἀλλ’ οὐ τὸν θεόν.

Therefore, since the god is good, he is not—as most people claim—the cause of everything that happens to human beings but only of a few things, for good things are fewer than bad ones in our lives. He alone is responsible for the good things, but we must find some other cause for the bad things, not the god. (trans. Reeve)

In his essay, *That Epicurus Makes Even a Pleasant Life Impossible*, Plutarch, quoting Plato, argues that the divine is not subject to the baser human feelings (*Non poss. suav.* 1102D–E):

... σκεψόμεθα τὸ βέλτιστον ἀνθρώπων καὶ θεοφιλέστατον γένος ἐν ἡλίκαις <καθεστᾶσιν> ἡδοναῖς, καθαραῖς περὶ θεοῦ δόξαις συνόντες, ὡς πάντων μὲν ἡγεμῶν ἀγαθῶν πάντων δὲ πατὴρ καλῶν ἐκεῖνός ἐστι, καὶ φαῦλον οὐθὲν ποιεῖν αὐτῷ θέμις ὥσπερ οὐδὲ πάσχειν. ἀγαθὸς γὰρ ἐστίν, ἀγαθῷ δὲ περὶ οὐδενὸς ἐγγίνεται φθόνος, οὔτε φόβος οὔτε ὀργὴ ἢ μῖσος· οὐδὲ γὰρ θερμοῦ τὸ ψύχειν ἀλλὰ <τὸ> θερμαίνειν, ὥσπερ οὐδ' ἀγαθοῦ τὸ βλάπτειν. ὀργὴ δὲ χάριτος καὶ χόλος εὐμενείας καὶ τοῦ φιλανθρώπου καὶ φιλόφρονος τὸ δυσμενὲς καὶ ταρακτικὸν ἀπωτάτω τῇ φύσει τέτακται· τὰ μὲν γὰρ ἀρετῆς καὶ δυνάμεως τὰ δ' ἀσθενείας ἐστὶ καὶ φαυλότητος. οὐ τοίνυν ὀργαῖς καὶ χάρισι συνέχεται τὸ θεῖον, ἀλλ' ὅτι χαρίζεσθαι καὶ βοηθεῖν πέφυκεν, ὀργίζεσθαι καὶ κακῶς ποιεῖν οὐ πέφυκεν.

... let us examine that best class of men, those dearest to god, and discover in what great pleasures they find themselves, since their beliefs about god are pure: that he is our guide to all blessings, the father of everything honourable, and that he may no more do than suffer anything base. 'For he is good and in none that is good arises envy about anything' [Plat. *Tim.* 29e] or fear or anger or hatred; for it is as much the function of heat to chill instead of warm as it is of good to harm. By its nature anger is farthest removed from favour, wrath from goodwill, and hostility and the tendency to disturb from love of man and kindness. For on one side there are virtue and power, on the other weakness and wretchedness. The nature of the divine 'is not subject to feelings of anger and favour', but since it is the nature of the divine to bestow favour and lend aid, it is *not* its nature to be angry and do harm.

It may be no more than coincidence that both envy¹⁰ and disruptiveness, the two qualities Herodotus' Solon attributes to the gods, appear here, but the remarks make clear how deeply Plutarch believed that the gods were the source of goodness in human life.

At the same time, Plutarch is not so foolish as to deny that there is evil in the world, but he suggests that nature herself is responsible for this, since nature contains nothing unmixed, and he invokes warring principles (*de Isid. et Os.* 369B–D):¹¹

διὸ καὶ παμπάλαιος αὕτη κάτεισιν ἐκ θεολόγων καὶ νομοθετῶν εἷς τε ποιητὰς καὶ φιλοσόφους δόξα, τὴν ἀρχὴν ἀδέσποτον ἔχουσα, ... ὡς οὐτ' ἄνουν καὶ ἄλογον καὶ ἀκυβέρνητον αἰωρεῖται τῷ αὐτομάτῳ τὸ πᾶν, οὐθ' εἷς ἐστὶν ὁ κρατῶν καὶ κατευθύνων ὥσπερ οἶαξιν ἢ τισὶ πειθηνίοις χαλινοῖς λόγος, ἀλλὰ πολλὰ καὶ μεμιγμένα κακοῖς καὶ ἀγαθοῖς· μᾶλλον δὲ μηδὲν ὡς ἀπλῶς εἰπεῖν ἄκρατον ἐνταῦθα τῆς φύσεως φερούσης, οὐδὲν πίθων εἷς ταμίας ὥσπερ νάματα τὰ πράγματα καπηλικῶς διανεμῶν ἀνακεράννυσιν ἡμῖν, ἀλλ' ἀπὸ δυεῖν ἐναντίων ἀρχῶν καὶ δυεῖν ἀντιπάλων δυνάμεων, τῆς μὲν ἐπὶ τὰ δεξιὰ καὶ κατ' εὐθείαν ὑψηλομένης, τῆς δ' ἔμπαλιν ἀναστρεφούσης καὶ ἀνακλώσης, ὃ τε βίος μικτὸς ὃ τε κόσμος, εἰ καὶ μὴ πᾶς, ἀλλ' ὁ περίγειος οὗτος καὶ μετὰ σελήνην ἀνώματος καὶ ποικίλος γέγονε καὶ μεταβολὰς πάσας δεχόμενος. εἰ γὰρ οὐθὲν ἀναιτίως πέφυκε γενέσθαι, αἰτίαν δὲ κακοῦ τὰγαθὸν οὐκ ἂν παράσχοι, δεῖ γένεσιν ἰδίαν καὶ ἀρχὴν ὥσπερ ἀγαθοῦ καὶ κακοῦ τὴν φύσιν ἔχειν. καὶ δοκεῖ τοῦτο τοῖς πλείστοις καὶ σοφωτάτοις. νομίζουσι γὰρ οἱ μὲν θεοὺς εἶναι δύο καθάπερ ἀντιτέχνους, τὸν μὲν ἀγαθῶν, τὸν δὲ φαύλων δημιουργόν· οἱ δὲ τὸν μὲν ἀμείνονα θεόν, τὸν δ' ἕτερον δαίμονα καλοῦσιν ...

¹⁰ Earlier in the dialogue (1086F) Plutarch had cited Plato's remark (*Phaedr.* 247a6–7) that 'envy stands outside the divine chorus' (*φθόνος γὰρ ἔξω θείου χωροῦ ἵσταται*).

¹¹ Text and translation as in Griffiths (1970) 190–1.

There has, therefore, come down from theologians and lawgivers to both poets and philosophers this ancient belief which is of anonymous origin, ... namely that the universe is not kept on high of itself without mind and reason and guidance, nor is it only one reason that rules and directs it in the manner of rudders or curbing reins, but that many powers do so who are a mixture of evil and good. Rather, since nature, to be plain, contains nothing that is unmixed, it is not one steward that dispenses our affairs for us, as though mixing drinks from two jars in a hotel. Life and the cosmos, on the contrary—if not the whole of the cosmos, at least the earthly one next to the moon, which is heterogeneous, many-hued and subject to all changes—are compounded of two opposite principles and of two antithetic powers, one of which leads by a straight path to the right, while the other reverses and bends back. For if nothing comes into being without a cause, and if good could not provide the cause of evil, then nature must contain in itself the creation and origin of evil as well as good. This is the view of the majority and of the wisest; for some believe there are two gods who are rivals, as it were, in art, the one being the creator of good, the other of evil; others call the better of these a god and his rival a daemon ...

Much has been written about Plutarch's daemonology, in particular whether or not Plutarch thought of *δαίμονες* as always evil, and the evidence is, as so often in these matters, far from conclusive.¹² We shall see in a moment that Plutarch sometimes assigns a *δαίμων* a positive role. It would be more profitable for our purposes here to focus on some remarks Plutarch makes in the *On Superstition*, which have important points of intersection with Plutarch's treatment of Herodotus' Solon. For Plutarch, superstition—

¹² The fullest treatment of the topic is Brenk (1977) who gives a comprehensive discussion of earlier approaches.

δεισιδαιμονία—is the opposite side of the coin of atheism, and both equally are false notions of the divine (*Superst.* 165B):

... ἡ μὲν ἀθεότης κρίσις οὐσα φαύλη τοῦ μηδὲν εἶναι μακάριον καὶ ἄφθαρτον ... τὴν δὲ δεισιδαιμονίαν δὲ μηνύει καὶ τοῦνομα δόξαν ἐμπαθῆ καὶ δέους ποιητικὴν ὑπόληψιν οὐσαν ἐκταπεινούντος καὶ συντριβόντος τὸν ἄνθρωπον οἰόμενον μὲν εἶναι θεούς, εἶναι δὲ λυπηρούς καὶ βλαβερούς.

... atheism is a worthless judgement that there is nothing blessed or incorruptible ... but superstition, as the name indicates, is an emotional idea and an assumption productive of a fear which utterly humbles and crushes a man, who thinks that there are gods but that they are the cause of pain and injury.

The superstitious man is tormented, ‘for superstition alone makes no truce with sleep, and never gives the soul a chance to recover its breath and courage by putting aside its bitter and despondent notions regarding God’.¹³ Equally, he sees the gods as responsible for everything (*Superst.* 168A–B):

οὔτε γὰρ ἄνθρωπον οὔτε τύχην οὔτε καιρὸν οὔθ’ αὐτὸν ἀλλὰ πάντων τὸν θεὸν αἰτιᾶται, κακῆθεν ἐπ’ αὐτὸν ἤκειν καὶ φέρεσθαι ῥεῦμα δαιμόνιον ἄτης φησί, καὶ οὐ δυστυχῆς ὢν ἀλλὰ θεομισῆς τις ἄνθρωπος ὑπὸ τῶν θεῶν κολάζεσθαι καὶ δίκην δίδόναι καὶ πάντα πάσχειν προσηκόντως δι’ αὐτὸν [τὸν νοῦν] ὑπονοῶν.

For he puts the responsibility for his lot upon no man nor upon fortune nor upon occasion nor upon himself, but lays the responsibility for everything upon god, and says that from that source a divine stream of mischief

¹³ *Superst.* 165F: ἡ δεισιδαιμονία μόνη γὰρ οὐ σπένδεται πρὸς τὸν ὕπνον, οὐδὲ τῇ ψυχῇ ποτε γοῶν δίδωσιν ἀναπνεῦσαι καὶ ἀναθαρρῆσαι τὰς πικρὰς καὶ βαρείας περὶ τοῦ θεοῦ δόξας ἀπωσαμένη.

has come upon him with full force; and he imagines that it is not because he is unlucky but because he is god-hated that he is being punished by the gods, and that the penalty he pays and all this he is undergoing are deserved because of his own conduct.

And he assumes the worst about the gods (*Superst.* 170D–E):

ὄρῳ δ' οἷα περὶ τῶν θεῶν οἱ δεισιδαίμονες φρονοῦσιν, ἐμπλήκτους ἀπίστους, εὐμεταβόλους τιμωρητικούς ὤμοιους μικρολύπους ὑπολαμβάνοντες, ἐξ ὧν ἀνάγκη καὶ μισεῖν τὸν δεισιδαίμονα καὶ φοβεῖσθαι τοὺς θεούς. πῶς γὰρ οὐ μέλλει, τὰ μέγιστα τῶν κακῶν αὐτῷ δι' ἐκείνους οἰόμενος γεγονέναι καὶ πάλιν γενήσεσθαι;

You see what kinds of thoughts the superstitious have about the gods; they assume that the gods are rash, faithless, fickle, vengeful, cruel, and easily offended; and, as a result, the superstitious man is bound to hate and fear the gods. How could he not, since he thinks that the worst of his ills are due to them, and will be due to them in the future?

Plutarch strongly separates this kind of approach to religion from the true knowledge of the gods, which, he says, is the only thing that allows us to escape from such superstition.

For Plutarch, then, the notion that the divine could be anything but good was simply unacceptable. And indeed his criticism of Herodotus for the portrayal of the divine as 'jealous and disruptive' might be the end of the story. But it so happens that Plutarch himself treated the visit of Solon with Croesus in his *Life* of Solon, and he treats it, in fact, at greater length than Herodotus does. His account of this incident is clearly dependent upon Herodotus, as can be seen by the similarity of the details.¹⁴ Moreover, Plutarch

¹⁴ Cf. Manfredini and Piccirilli (1998) 268–71. Pelling (2002) 267–8 points out that Plutarch assumes a good knowledge of Herodotus' version in his own account.

clearly liked the story, as can be seen from several references to it in the *Moralia*, and from the strenuous (and infamous) arguments he makes before narrating it against those who have doubted its historicity on chronological grounds.¹⁵ So it is very clear that Plutarch wanted the story in his *Life* and that he based himself on Herodotus in telling it. And yet—not surprisingly—Solon’s ‘slandorous’ remark about the jealousy and disruptiveness of the divine does not make it into Plutarch’s account. Instead, Plutarch, by a sophisticated recasting and refocusing, manages to keep the majority of Herodotus’ sentiments, while eliminating the one that he found most problematic.

As one would expect in a biography (as opposed to a history), Plutarch’s treatment of the incident is focalised through the subject of the biography, Solon himself. Plutarch begins by using a simile to express the wonder that Solon encountered as he entered this ‘foreign’ realm (*Solon* 27.2–3):

τὸν δ’ οὖν Σόλωνά φασιν εἰς Σάρδεις δεηθέντι τῷ Κροίσῳ παραγενόμενον παθεῖν τι παραπλήσιον ἀνδρὶ χερσαίῳ κατιόντι πρῶτον ἐπὶ θάλατταν. ἐκεῖνός τε γὰρ ὄρων ἄλλον ἐξ ἄλλου ποταμὸν ᾗετο τὴν θάλασσαν εἶναι, καὶ τῷ Σόλωνι τὴν αὐλὴν διαπορευομένῳ καὶ πολλοὺς ὄρωντι τῶν βασιλικῶν κεκοσμημένους πολυτελῶς καὶ σοβούοντας ἐν ὄχλῳ προπομπῶν καὶ δορυφόρων, ἕκαστος ἐδόκει Κροῖσος εἶναι, μέχρι πρὸς αὐτὸν ἦχθη, πᾶν ὅσον ἐν λίθοις, ἐν βαφαῖς ἐσθῆτος, ἐν τέχναις χρυσοῦ περὶ κόσμον ἐκπρεπῆς ἔχειν ἢ περιττὸν ἢ ζηλωτὸν ἐδόκει περικείμενον, ὡς δὴ θέαμα σεμνότατον ὀφθείη καὶ ποικιλώτατον.

So then the story goes that Solon came to visit Sardis at Croesus’ invitation, and there experienced much the same feeling as a man from the interior of a country travelling to the sea for the first time, who supposes that

¹⁵ *Sol.* 27.1 with the important remarks of Pelling (2002) 143; though I would hesitate to describe Plutarch’s attitude here as ‘cavalier’.

each river, as it comes into sight, must be the sea itself. In the same way Solon, as he walked through the court and saw many of the king's courtiers richly dressed and walking proudly about amid a crowd of guards and attendants, thought that each of them must be Croesus, until he was brought to the king himself, whom he found decked out in jewels, dyed robes, and gold ornaments of the greatest splendour, extravagance, and rarity, so as to present a most majestic and colourful spectacle.

This plausible detail of Solon's growing astonishment serve both to focus the reader's attention on the gulf between the Greek sage and the Persian prince, and to concentrate attention on the figure presented last as the climax of the series. As in Herodotus, Croesus gives the order to show Solon around the treasuries, though Plutarch adds the detail that Solon hardly needed such confirmation of what he could already see was incredible wealth. After the tour Croesus asks Solon a question similar to that found in Herodotus (*Solon* 27.6):

ὡς δ' οὖν αὖθις <εἰς>ήχθη γεγονώς ἀπάντων θεατής,
ἠρώτησεν αὐτὸν ὁ Κροῖσος εἴ τινα οἶδεν ἀνθρώπων
ἑαυτοῦ μακαριώτερον.

When he had seen everything, however, and was again brought before the king, Croesus asked him whether he knew anyone more blessed than he.

I say a 'similar' rather than the same question because the interplay of vocabulary in Plutarch is not quite the same as in Herodotus. In Herodotus the king asks Solon who is ὀλβιώτατος of all those whom he has known, and Solon, of course, names first Tellos and then Cleobis and Biton. Herodotus says that Solon assigned to these latter two 'the second place in εὐδαιμονίῃ' (εὐδαιμονίης δευτερεῖα ἔνεμε τούτοισι, 1.32.1), to which Croesus then asks whether his own εὐδαιμονίῃ is so contemptible as to not even compare

with private citizens (ibid.: ἡ δ' ἡμετέρη εὐδαιμονίη οὕτω τοι ἀπέριπται ἐς τὸ μηδέν, ὥστε οὐδὲ ἰδιωτέρων ἀνδρῶν ἀξίους ἡμέας ἐποίησας;). And it is *this* that brings forth Solon's remark about the 'jealousy of the divine'. After that, in the course of his explanation, Solon draws a distinction between being εὐτυχής and being ὄλβιος. The latter term can only be applied to a man when his manner of death is known. Importantly, for Solon, although wealth can be one factor in such a determination, it cannot in any way be the determining factor. The wealthy man is not ὀλβιώτερος than the man of modest means unless τύχη grants that he end his life with his good things intact (εἰ μὴ οἱ τύχη ἐπίσποιο πάντα καλὰ ἔχοντα εὖ τελευτῆσαι τὸν βίον, 1.32.5). Many who have wealth are ἄνολβοι while those of moderate means are εὐτυχεές. So then one cannot call a man ὄλβιος before knowing how he ended his life; until that time he can only be called εὐτυχής.

Plutarch clearly knows this passage well and much of the same spirit is present in his own Solon (*Solon* 27.8–9):

καὶ ὁ Σόλων, οὔτε κολακεύειν βουλόμενος αὐτὸν οὔτε περαιτέρω παροξύνειν, "Ἐλλησιν", εἶπεν, "ὦ βασιλεῦ Λυδῶν, πρὸς τε τὰλλα μετρίως ἔχειν ἔδωκε ὁ θεὸς, καὶ σοφίας τινὸς ἀθαρσοῦς ὡς ἔοικε καὶ δημοτικῆς, οὐ βασιλικῆς οὐδὲ λαμπρᾶς, ὑπὸ μετριότητος ἡμῖν μέτεστιν, ἢ τύχαις ὀρώσα παντοδαπαῖς χρώμενον αἰεὶ τὸν βίον, οὐκ ἔᾶ τοῖς παροῦσιν ἀγαθοῖς μέγα φρονεῖν οὐδὲ θαυμάζειν ἀνδρὸς εὐτυχίαν μεταβολῆς χρόνον ἔχουσαν. ἔπεισι γὰρ ἐκάστῳ ποικίλον ἐξ ἀδήλου τὸ μέλλον. ᾧ δ' εἰς τέλος ὁ δαίμων ἔθετο τὴν εὐπραξίαν, τοῦτον εὐδαίμονα νομίζομεν. ὁ δὲ ζῶντος ἔτι καὶ κινδυνεύοντος ἐν τῷ βίῳ μακαρισμὸς ὥσπερ ἀγωνιζομένου κήρυγμα καὶ στέφανός ἐστιν ἀβέβαιος καὶ ἄκυρος.'

Solon had no desire to flatter the king, but he did not wish to exasperate him further, and so he replied: 'King of the Lydians, the god has given the Greeks a moderate share in other things too, and especially in being able to share through moderation in a cautious

(so it seems) and demotic sort of wisdom, not regal or magnificent, and it perceives that human life is subject to shifts of fortune of every kind and forbids us to think big about the good things of the present, or to admire a man's prosperity while there is still time for it to change. For the future will come to each man differently, and unforeseen, and we can only count a man as faring well (εὐδαιμόνα) when the *daimôn* has granted him success (εὐπραξίαν) to the end. To call someone blessed (μακαρισμός) while he is still alive and contending with all the perils of the mortal state is like proclaiming an athlete the victor and crowning him before the contest is decided: it is neither certain nor authoritative.¹⁶

Plutarch begins by noting Solon's disposition towards the king: he is politic (we can understand how he was successful as an arbitrator at Athens) and is willing, while not abandoning his principles (he will not stoop to flattery),¹⁷ to moderate nonetheless his speech so that it will be acceptable to the king. In this he shows himself an accomplished teacher, even if in this case Croesus will not learn his lessons.

Solon begins by drawing a distinction only implied in Herodotus in this episode, that between the demotic and the regal.¹⁸ The contrast, as Thomas Schmidt has pointed out, is one that is especially effective in delineating Greek from barbarian, and serves to allow Solon's specifically *Greek* wisdom to stand out.¹⁹ And as Christopher Pelling has

¹⁶ The earlier part of this translation follows Pelling (2011) 42 closely.

¹⁷ In this he is like the Herodotean Solon: Σόλων δὲ οὐδὲν ὑποθωπεύσας, ἀλλὰ τῷ ἐόντι χρησόμενος λέγει, κτλ. (1.30.3). See Pelling (2006) on the challenges inherent in talking to tyrants.

¹⁸ It is implied in the contrast between the man of moderate means and the wealthy man, but also, and more importantly, in the contrast between royalty and commoners, as seen in Croesus' angry question, ἢ δ' ἡμετέρη εὐδαιμονίη οὕτω τοι ἀπέρριπται ἐς τὸ μηδέν, ὥστε οὐδὲ ἰδιωτέρων ἀνδρῶν ἀξίους ἡμέας ἐποίησας; (1.32.1).

¹⁹ Schmidt (1999) 130–1.

shown, the use of the terms *μετριότης* and *δημοτικός* are crucial for interpreting the passage.²⁰ As in Herodotus, so too in Plutarch, Solon begins with the divine, but now emphasising its gifts, even if those gifts are moderate (*μετρίως, ὑπὸ μετριότητος*). The detail is, again, not haphazard: for as we all know, such ‘moderate’ gifts are sufficient for discerning how one should live and how one should look at the world.²¹ Having in this way placed a positive ‘spin’ on the gods, Solon then goes on to attribute the variant fortunes of each human life not to jealous and disruptive gods but to *τύχη*.²² We remember here the superstitious man who ascribes everything to the gods and does not consider himself or circumstance to blame. Plutarch, by contrast, knows the disruptive effects of chance and has his Solon carefully separate this from the work of the gods. Indeed, as the sentence is here written, *τύχη* is not even personified so as to be a force; rather, it is characterised as something that *life* ‘employs’ (*χρώμενον*) or, more blandly, ‘has’.

This notion of *τύχη* is then reinforced by *εὐτυχία* in the next sentence, which again is not ascribed to any kind of agent. Then, in the following sentence, what ‘comes upon’ men is again devoid of divine agency, and is simply ‘the future’, *τὸ μέλλον*. Only with the last part of his speech does Solon again refer to a deity—now it is *ὁ δαίμων*—and again this *δαίμων* appears precisely where the positive notion of success (*εὐπραξίαν*) is in question: it is the *δαίμων* who affords *εὐτυχία*, and the one to whom he affords this we

²⁰ Pelling (2011) 41–4.

²¹ Moreover, Solon in Herodotus had emphasised that the man of moderate means has advantages, in fact, over the wealthy man who is not *ὄλβιος*: *οὗτος δὲ [sc. ὁ ἐπ’ ἡμέρην ἔχων] πλουσίου καὶ ἀνολβίου πολλοῖσι [sc. προέχει]* (1.32.5–6).

²² Here again, such a thought is not absent in Herodotus’ Solon, for he states it as necessary that *τύχη* be present to a man in order to end his life well (1.32.5: *οὐ γάρ τι ὁ μέγα πλούσιος μᾶλλον τοῦ ἐπ’ ἡμέρην ἔχοντος ὀλβιώτερός ἐστι, εἰ μὴ οἱ τύχη ἐπίσποιτο*); and of course it is present in the word *εὐτυχής* throughout.

consider to be *εὐδαίμων* (a nice play on words, amongst other things).²³

The shifts are hardly major, yet one must admire Plutarch's artistry in maintaining so many of the points of the Herodotean story about the nature of human success and failure, while significantly modifying the divine mechanism that lies behind the alternation of fortune experienced by human beings. For Plutarch, there is no jealous and disruptive god, there is only *the* god (ὁ θεός or ὁ δαίμων) who gives us good things—including, importantly, wisdom sufficient for success.

III

The final section of Plutarch's *On the Malice of Herodotus* is mainly concerned with the historian's narratives of the Persian-War battles: mentioned there are Marathon, Artemisium, Thermopylae, Salamis and Plataea. Plutarch, at least in the *Lives*, did not treat all of these battles equally: for Thermopylae we have nothing;²⁴ for Marathon, we have but a short passage in the *Aristides*; for Artemisium, a short passage in the *Themistocles*. We fare somewhat better with Salamis and Plataea, both of which receive substantial treatment in the *Themistocles* and *Aristides*.

Not surprisingly, given Plutarch's brief treatment of Marathon in the *Aristides*, there is no mention of the vow and sacrifice to Artemis Agrotera (no. 8 above), although he does mention an inscription to Artemis Proseoea (no. 10 above) in the short narrative on Artemisium (*Them.* 8.3):

²³ See Mikalson (2002) for evidence of the continued relevance of the notion of *δαίμων* in *εὐδαιμονία*; he points out the persistence of the idea that a *δαίμων* is responsible for one's *εὐδαιμονία*.

²⁴ A *Life* of Leonidas is promised at *DHM* 866B, but the only evidence for it are the remarks collected under Leonidas' name in *Sayings of Spartans*, 224F–225E. Presumably Thermopylae would have featured as the largest portion of such a *Life*.

ἔστι δὲ τῆς Εὐβοίας τὸ Ἀρτεμίσιον ὑπὲρ τὴν Ἑστίασαν αἰγιαλὸς εἰς βορέαν ἀναπεπταμένος, ἀνταίρει δ' αὐτῷ μάλιστα τῆς ὑπὸ Φιλοκτήτη γενομένης χώρας Ὀλιζών. ἔχει δὲ ναὸν οὐ μέγαν Ἀρτέμιδος ἐπίκλῃσιν Προσηφίας, καὶ δένδρα περὶ αὐτὸν πέφυκε καὶ στηλαὶ κύκλῳ λίθου λευκοῦ πεπήγασιν· ὁ δὲ λίθος τῇ χειρὶ τριβόμενος καὶ χροάν καὶ ὄσμῃν κροκίζουσιν ἀναδίδωσιν. ἐν μιᾷ δὲ τῶν στηλῶν ἐλεγείον ἦν τόδε γεγραμμένον

παντοδαπῶν ἀνδρῶν γενεὰς Ἀσίας ἀπὸ χώρας

παῖδες Ἀθηναίων τῷδέ ποτ' ἐν πελάγει

ναυμαχίῃ δαμάσαντες, ἐπεὶ στρατὸς ὤλετο Μήδων,

σήματα ταῦτ' ἔθεσαν παρθένῳ Ἀρτέμιδι.

δείκνυται δὲ τῆς ἀκτῆς τόπος ἐν πολλῇ τῇ πέριξ θινὴ κόνιν τεφρώδη καὶ μέλαιναν ἐκ βάρους ἀναδιδούς, ὥσπερ πυρίκαυστον, ἐν ᾧ τὰ ναύαγια καὶ <τοὺς> νεκροὺς καῦσαι δοκοῦσι.

Artemisium is a beach of Euboea which stretches away to the north above Hestiaea. On the Thessalian shore opposite, Olizon rises up, in the territory which was once ruled by Philoctetes. Here there is a small temple of Artemis, named Proseoea, which is surrounded by trees and pillars of white stone in a circle. This stone, when rubbed with the hand, gives off the colour and odour of saffron. On one of these pillars the following elegiac verses are engraved:

The races of varied men coming from the land of Asia / the children of the Athenians once on this sea / defeated in a naval battle, when the army of Medes perished / and they dedicated these tokens to the virgin Artemis.

There is also a place on the beach that is pointed out, where deep down, mingled with the thick sand, there is a dark ashy powder, which seems to have been produced by fire, and it is believed that the wrecks and dead bodies were burned here.

Plutarch clearly attempts to set right here Herodotus' omission of the role of Artemis in the battle, even though he

follows Herodotus carefully in the other details,²⁵ and this is one of the chief ways in the Persian-War narratives that Plutarch ‘defends’ the gods from Herodotus’ treatment, as further examination will show.

For Salamis it may be helpful first to summarise Herodotus’ references to the gods or the divine in his narrative. He certainly does not shy away from such references.²⁶ For example, in the build-up to the battle, he mentions the ‘wooden wall’ oracle and the Athenians’ discussion about how best to interpret the god’s remarks (7.141–3). He also notes the disappearance of the sacred snake on the Acropolis, and the subsequent announcement of this event by the priestess, which caused the people to conclude that the goddess herself had abandoned the city (8.41). Herodotus narrates in addition (and at some length) an event which Dicaeus, an Athenian exile, claimed to have witnessed in the presence of the Spartan king Demaratus (to whom, Herodotus adds, Dicaeus often appealed to validate the truth of the story): being in the Thriasian plain after the evacuation of Attica, Dicaeus said that he and Demaratus saw an enormous cloud of dust emanating from the direction of Eleusis along with the sounds of people singing the ‘Iacchus’ song, and he explained to Demaratus that since all of Attica was empty, this must be a divine voice coming from Eleusis to help the Athenians against their

²⁵ It is noteworthy, for example, that although finding fault with Herodotus’ narrative because it suggested a defeat at Artemisium, Plutarch does not in the *Themistocles* actually call the battle a victory: what he says is that the battle, although not producing a decisive result (*κρίσιν μὲν εἰς τὰ ὅλα μεγάλην οὐκ ἐποίησαν*, 8.1) benefitted the Greeks by giving them a strong sense of bravery; and he interprets even his quotation of Pindar, which names Artemisium as the place ‘where the sons of the Athenians set down the bright corner-stone of liberty’, not in terms of victory (though that could easily be inferred) but in terms of psychological benefit, since he interprets the lines as meaning ‘confidence is truly the beginning of victory’ (*Them.* 8.2).

²⁶ I do not consider here the most explicit statement of belief in oracles found at Hdt. 8.77, since a number of scholars have made forceful arguments that this entire chapter is interpolated: see Bowie (2007) ad loc. but see Asheri (1993) for a defence of its genuineness.

enemies. Demaratus enjoined Dicaeus not to tell anyone of the event and while they were speaking the cloud of dust rose high in the air and drifted away towards Salamis, and the two men knew by this that Xerxes' navy would be destroyed.²⁷ In addition, when the battle begins, a divine voice is heard urging the men not to row astern but to plunge into battle.²⁸ Finally, when the Corinthian squadron has deserted the alliance at the beginning of the battle, an unknown boat appears and tells the men that they are abandoning Greece but that the Greeks are victorious; and since no one could account for the boat, the Corinthians reckoned it as divinely sent.²⁹

Thus it can hardly be said that Herodotus ignores the divine in his narrative of Salamis. Plutarch, for his part, is selective in what he chooses to use and how. For example, he does not have the divine voice reprimanding the Greeks at the outset of the battle, but this is no doubt because he accepts the version, known from the time of Aeschylus' *Persians*, that the Greeks sailed straight against the enemy without hesitation.³⁰ Nor does Plutarch employ the story of Corinthian desertion and the appearance of the miraculous boat; although he knows it, it is clear that he does not

²⁷ Hdt. 8.65, with Bowie (2007) 151–3.

²⁸ Hdt. 8.84: λέγεται δὲ καὶ τάδε, ὡς φάσμα σφι γυναικὸς ἐφάνη, φανείσαν δὲ διακελεύσασθαι ὥστε καὶ ἅπαν ἀκοῦσαι τὸ τῶν Ἑλλήνων στρατόπεδον, ὀνειδίσασαν πρότερον τάδε, “ὦ δαιμόνιοι, μέχρι κόσου ἔτι πρύμνην ἀνακρούεσθε;”

²⁹ Hdt. 8.94.2–3: ὡς δὲ ἄρα φεύγοντας γίνεσθαι τῆς Σαλαμινίης κατὰ ἱρὸν Ἀθηναίης Σκιράδος, περιπίπτειν σφι κέλητα θείῃ πομπῇ, τὸν οὔτε πέμψαντα φανῆναι οὐδένα, οὔτε τι τῶν ἀπὸ τῆς στρατιῆς εἰδῶσι προσφέρεσθαι τοῖσι Κορινθίοισι. τῆδε δὲ συμβάλλονται εἶναι θεῖον τὸ πρῆγμα. ὡς γὰρ ἀγχοῦ γενέσθαι τῶν νεῶν, τοὺς ἀπὸ τοῦ κέλητος λέγειν τάδε. Ἄδειμαντε, σὺ μὲν ἀποστρέψας τὰς νέας ἐς φυγὴν ὄρμησαι καταπροδοὺς τοὺς Ἑλλήνας· οἱ δὲ καὶ δὴ νικῶσι ὅσον αὐτοὶ ἡρώτων ἐπικρατήσαντες τῶν ἐχθρῶν.

³⁰ Aesch. *Pers.* 394: εἰς μάχην ὀρμῶντες εὐψύχῳ θράσει. Cf. Groeneboom (1960) II.93: ‘die Darstellung, die Aischylos hier von der Bereitwilligkeit der Griechen zur Seeschlacht gibt, ist geschmeichelt, jedenfalls verglichen mit dem Bericht bei Hdt. VIII 84.’

believe it, and thinks, on the contrary, that the Corinthians fought amongst the foremost.³¹

He does employ, however, the stories of the ‘wooden wall’ oracle, the disappearing snake, and the cloud from Eleusis, although (in true Plutarchan fashion) he gives these stories his own spin. The story of the snake, for example, he couples with that of the oracle as part of Themistocles’ fervent attempt to persuade the Athenians to abandon their city (*Them.* 10.1–3):

ἔνθα δὴ Θεμιστοκλῆς, ἀπορῶν τοῖς ἀνθρωπίνους λογισμοῖς προσάγεσθαι τὸ πλῆθος, ὥσπερ ἐν τραγαδία μηχανὴν ἄρας, σημεῖα δαιμόνια καὶ χρησμούς ἐπήγγεν αὐτοῖς· σημεῖον μὲν λαμβάνων τὸ τοῦ δράκοντος, ὃς ἀφανῆς ταῖς ἡμέραις ἐκείναις ἐκ τοῦ σηκοῦ δοκεῖ γενέσθαι, καὶ τὰς καθ’ ἡμέραν αὐτῷ προτιθεμένας ἀπαρχὰς εὐρίσκοντες ἀψαύστους, οἱ ἱερεῖς ἐξήγγελλον εἰς τοὺς πολλούς, τοῦ Θεμιστοκλέους λόγον <δια>διδόντος ὡς ἀπολέλοιπε τὴν πόλιν ἢ θεὸς ὑφηγουμένη πρὸς τὴν θάλασσαν αὐτοῖς· τῷ δὲ χρησμῷ πάλιν ἐδημαγώγει, λέγων μηδὲν ἄλλο δηλοῦσθαι ξύλινον τεῖχος ἢ τὰς ναῦς· διὸ καὶ τὴν Σαλαμῖνα θείαν, οὐχὶ δεινὴν οὐδὲ σχετλίαν καλεῖν τὸν θεόν, ὡς εὐτυχήματος μεγάλου τοῖς Ἑλλησιν ἐπώνυμον ἐσομένην. κρατήσας δὲ τῇ γνώμῃ ψήφισμα γράφει, κτλ.

³¹ Herodotus’ story of Corinthian desertion is recounted by the Athenians alone, he says, whereas the rest of Greece avers that the Corinthians fought in the battle (*μαρτυρεῖ δὲ σφι* [sc. the Corinthians] *καὶ ἡ ἄλλη Ἑλλάς*, 8.94.4). Plutarch attacks Herodotus seriously on this score at *DHM* 870B–871B and scholars who defend Herodotus generally see the story as evidence of anti-Corinthian bias at Athens at the time of the Peloponnesian War. Bowie (2007) 182 says that the inclusion of the story is evidence of Herodotus’ claim that he sees his role as to tell stories and does not necessarily himself believe it; but such naïveté on the part of the historian is hardly likely here: for Herodotus has written a narrative of the battle of Salamis in which the Corinthians play no role in the fighting, and he thus shows that, on some level, he agrees with the Athenian version.

It was at this point that Themistocles, seeing no hope of winning over the people to his plans by any power of human reasoning, introduced to them signs and oracles from heaven, as if raising the crane in a tragedy. He seized upon the sign of the snake, which was believed to have disappeared at this time from its sacred enclosure on the Acropolis, and treated it as a divine portent. When the priests discovered that the first-fruits which were offered to it every day had been left untouched, they told the people on Themistocles' instructions that the goddess had abandoned her city and was showing them their way to the sea. In his efforts to sway the people he again invoked the famous oracle from Delphi, and insisted that the 'wooden wall' could only refer to their ships and that the god had spoken of Salamis in his verses as 'divine', not as 'terrible' or 'cruel', for the very reason that its name would one day be associated with great good fortune for the Greeks. At last his proposal carried the day and he proposed a decree, etc.

In Herodotus' account of the snake (8.41.2–3), Themistocles plays no role, and it is the priestess who reports the disappearance and the people who conclude that the goddess has abandoned the city. When he comes to tell of the oracle Themistocles does appear, it is true, but only to provide a detail that finally persuades the Athenians; Themistocles does not himself come up with the interpretation that 'the wooden wall' was the ships.³² Now it is not unusual for Plutarch to ascribe to an individual what in his source is ascribed to a collective or to an unnamed actor: there are innumerable examples of this in the *Lives*. What is unusual, however, is the somewhat negative light in which Themistocles' actions are portrayed: he 'introduced to' (ἐπήγγειν) the Athenians divine portents and oracles 'as if raising the crane in a tragedy' (ὥσπερ ἐν τραγωδίᾳ μηχανήν

³² Hdt. 7.142–3; this is a minor point, of course, but one that is consistently missed in the scholarly literature, which regularly attributes to Themistocles the interpretation of the oracle *tout court*.

ἄρας), a reference, of course, to the appearance of the *deus ex machina* at the end of a play. It is clear from other places in Plutarch where this simile is employed that Plutarch disapproves of such activity.³³ The oracle too is considered part of Themistocles' 'trickery' here.

It may seem strange that Plutarch in his presentation of these incidents seems to characterise them in a way that is less respectful than Herodotus had been, since the latter does not suggest any kind of 'manipulation' on the part of Themistocles or other leaders. Indeed, Themistocles' actions here resemble closely those of Lysander later on, when he is trying to get the Spartans to cease appointing their kings from the Heracleidae (*Lys.* 25.1–2):

πρῶτον μὲν οὖν ἐπεχείρησε καὶ παρεσκευάσατο πείθειν δι' ἑαυτοῦ τοὺς πολίτας, καὶ λόγον ἐξεμελέτα πρὸς τὴν ὑπόθεσιν γεγραμμένον ὑπὸ Κλέωνος τοῦ Ἁλικαρνασσέως. ἔπειτα τὴν ἀτοπίαν καὶ τὸ μέγεθος τοῦ καινοτομουμένου πράγματος ὁρῶν ἰταμωτέρας δεόμενον βοηθείας, ὥσπερ ἐν τραγωδία μηχανὴν αἴρων ἐπὶ τοὺς πολίτας, λόγια πυθόχρηστα καὶ χρησμούς συνετίθει καὶ κατεσκευάζεν, ὡς οὐδὲν ὠφελησόμενος ὑπὸ τῆς Κλέωνος δεινότητος, εἰ μὴ φόβῳ θεοῦ τινι καὶ δεισιδαιμονίᾳ προεκπλήξας καὶ χειρωσάμενος ὑπαγάγοι πρὸς τὸν λόγον τοὺς πολίτας.

First of all, then, he prepared to try to win over his countrymen by his own powers of persuasion, and he studied carefully a speech written on the subject by Cleon of Halicarnassus. He soon saw, however, that any scheme of reform so far-reaching and so unexpected as this called for more daring measures to carry it through. And so, just as in a tragedy, he raised the crane on his fellow-countrymen, by collecting and arranging various oracular prophecies and responses of Apollo. He felt that Cleon's skilful rhetoric would be of little use to him, unless he could first alarm and

³³ Plutarch's view of tragedy is very much informed by Plato's: see De Lacy (1952).

overwhelm the Spartans' minds with a certain fear of the god and superstitious terror before trying to lead the citizens to reason.

Each case is similar: the leader, fearing that rational argument will not be successful, is 'compelled' to turn to the divine so that, as Plutarch makes clear, he may manipulate the population into doing the right thing by an effective employment of *deisidaimonia*.³⁴ As we have seen in the previous section, Plutarch had strong beliefs about this, and it seems clear that in these two stories at least, Plutarch means to portray the statesman as knowledgeable in the ways of manipulating the populace. It should be noted that Plutarch is not in any way questioning the oracle or its 'accuracy'; and even the snake's disappearance (though couched with the guarded *δοκεῖ*) is not questioned outright, but rather is brought forward as evidence of Themistocles' brilliance because he 'interpreted' it in a particular way and managed to combine this portent with the warnings of the oracle. Plutarch's desire, therefore, to display Themistocles' brilliance at this, the apex of his career,³⁵ has caused him to show how adept Themistocles was at recognising the nature of the common people and exploiting it for the common good.³⁶ But it must also be pointed out that any manipulation of the populace has to be done towards good ends; thus Themistocles' 'laudable' goal contextualises his manipulation, just as Lysander's 'revolutionary' goal contextualises his.³⁷

The story of the cloud and din from Eleusis shows Plutarch manipulating Herodotus in an important but different way. In Herodotus, the story is told right after mention of the fact that the Greeks had decided to fight at

³⁴ See Duff (1999) 126 n. 95 for other examples in the *Lives*.

³⁵ See Marr (1998) ad loc.

³⁶ For the importance of the leaders' manipulation of the commons, see Marincola (2010) 135–9 and (2012) 107–11.

³⁷ Lysander's actions include the attempt to corrupt three different oracles; for the moral ambiguity surrounding Plutarch's portrayal of Lysander see Duff (1999) 184–93.

Salamis and had sent to Aegina for the Aeacids (8.64.2). While Herodotus does not express any disbelief in the story, he narrates it entirely in indirect discourse (introduced by ἔφη ... Δίκαιος, 8.65.1) and the appearance seems to occur (though the exact time is not specified) at some point before the battle. It is focalised through Dicaeus and Demaratus who hear the din and see the dust rise from the area of Eleusis and move in the direction of Salamis. In his actual narrative of the battle Herodotus does mention the report that a voice was heard admonishing the Greeks not to back water, but thereafter does not portray any figures actually fighting other than the human ones. In Plutarch, by contrast, there is no earlier mention of Dicaeus or Demaratus, and the story is reserved for a crucial moment in the battle itself, i.e., when the Persian admiral Ariamenes has been killed and pitched into the sea by the Athenians Ameinias and Socles (*Them.* 15.1–2):

ἐν δὲ τούτῳ τοῦ ἀγῶνος ὄντος φῶς μὲν ἐκλάμψαι μέγα λέγουσιν Ἐλευσινόθεν, ἦχον δὲ καὶ φωνὴν τὸ Θριάσιον κατέχειν πεδίον ἄχρι θαλάττης, ὡς ἀνθρώπων ὁμοῦ πολλῶν τὸν μυστικὸν ἐξαγόντων Ἰακχόν. ἐκ δὲ τοῦ πλήθους τῶν φθεγγομένων κατὰ μικρὸν ἀπὸ γῆς ἀναφερόμενον νέφος ἔδοξεν αὐθις ὑπονοστεῖν καὶ κατασκήπτειν εἰς τὰς τριήρεις. ἕτεροι δὲ φάσματα καὶ εἴδωλα καθορᾶν ἔδοξαν ἐνόπλων ἀνδρῶν ἀπ' Αἰγίνης τὰς χεῖρας ἀνεχόντων πρὸ τῶν Ἑλληνικῶν τριηρῶν, οὓς εἴκαζον Αἰακίδας εἶναι παρακεκλημένους εὐχαῖς πρὸ τῆς μάχης ἐπὶ τὴν βοήθειαν.

At this point in the battle they say that a great light suddenly shone out from Eleusis and a loud cry filled the Thriasian plain down to the sea, as though an immense crowd were escorting the mystic Iacchus in procession. Then, from the place where the shouting was heard, a cloud seemed to rise slowly from the land, drift out to sea, and descend upon the triremes. Others believed that they saw phantoms and the shapes of armed men coming from Aegina with hands

outstretched to protect the Greek ships. These they reckoned to be the sons of Aeacus, to whom they had offered prayers for help just before the battle.

In Plutarch's telling, the event becomes more vivid both because he saves the story for a crucial point in the battle itself and because it is now focalised through the Greeks' own eyes.³⁸ In Herodotus the story, removed as it is from the battle proper, has mainly a sense of foreboding; in Plutarch, by contrast, the story is dramatic and validates the belief that the gods had a direct interest in the outcome.³⁹

These, then, are the stories Plutarch inherited from Herodotus and which he uses in the account of Salamis. It is noteworthy, however, that Plutarch adds two incidents not found in Herodotus. The first occurs during the debate between Themistocles and Eurybiades, the Spartan commander, about where to fight the Persians.⁴⁰ Eurybiades wishes to sail for the Isthmus but Themistocles is insistent that they must fight where they are. An omen seems to confirm the wisdom of Themistocles' advice (*Them.* 12.1):

λέγεται δ' ὑπό τινων τὸν μὲν Θεμιστοκλέα περὶ τούτων ἀπὸ τοῦ καταστρώματος [ἄνωθεν] τῆς νεῶς διαλέγεσθαι, γλαῦκα δ' ὀφθῆναι διαπετομένην ἐπὶ δεξιᾶς τῶν νεῶν καὶ τοῖς καρχησίοις ἐπικαθίζουσιν· διὸ δὴ καὶ μάλιστα προσέθεντο τῇ γνώμῃ καὶ παρεσκευάζοντο ναυμαχήσοντας.

³⁸ Plutarch has, in a sense, 'continued' the story from Herodotus, where the last that Dicaeus and Demaratus saw of the apparition was its journey towards Salamis (Hdt. 8.65.6: ἐκ δὲ τοῦ κονιορτοῦ καὶ τῆς φωνῆς γενέσθαι νέφος καὶ μετασιωθὲν φέρεσθαι ἐπὶ Σαλαμῖνος ἐπὶ τὸ στρατόπεδον τὸ τῶν Ἑλλήνων).

³⁹ This is true even though the story has certain 'distancing' features such as the introductory λέγουσιν along with ἔδοξεν and ἔδοξαν.

⁴⁰ As Marr (1998) 98 points out, Plutarch has made Eurybiades the foil for Themistocles, although in Herodotus it is the Corinthian Adeimantus. But this makes no difference to the point I wish to make above.

Some writers say that while Themistocles was engaged in this argument from the deck of his ship, an owl was seen to fly on the right of the fleet and perch at his masthead. Because of this they especially favoured his advice and began to prepare for battle.

Yet their acceptance of Themistocles' view is short-lived, and when they see the vast number of the Persian forces, they completely forget Themistocles' arguments and would, then and there, have sailed straightway for the Peloponnese if Themistocles had not then engaged in his stratagem whereby he tricked the Persian king into surrounding the Greek forces. But the point in any case has been made clear that the gods were 'indicating' that Themistocles' advice was the best and the one that should be followed.

The other incident not mentioned by Herodotus but narrated by Plutarch is the infamous account of the human sacrifice performed before Salamis (*Them.* 13.2–4 = Phantias, F 25 Wehrli = *FGrHist* 1012 F 19):

Θεμιστοκλεῖ δὲ παρὰ τὴν ναυαρχίδα τριήρη σφαιγιαζομένῳ τρεῖς προσήχθησαν αἰχμάλωτοι, κάλλιστοι μὲν ιδέσθαι τὴν ὄψιν, ἐσθῆτι δὲ καὶ χρυσῷ κεκοσμημένοι διαπρεπῶς. ἐλέγοντο δὲ Σανδάκης παῖδες εἶναι τῆς βασιλέως ἀδελφῆς καὶ Ἄρταύκτου. τούτους ἰδὼν Εὐφραντίδης ὁ μάντις, ὡς ἅμα μὲν ἀνέλαμψεν ἐκ τῶν ἱερῶν μέγα καὶ περιφανὲς πῦρ, ἅμα δὲ πταρμὸς ἐκ δεξιῶν ἐσήμνηε, τὸν Θεμιστοκλέα δεξιωσάμενος ἐκέλευσε τῶν νεανίσκων κατάρξασθαι καὶ καθιερεῦσαι πάντας ὠμηστῆ Διονύσῳ προσευξάμενον· οὕτω γὰρ ἅμα σωτηρίαν καὶ νίκην ἔσεσθαι τοῖς Ἑλλησιν. ἐκπλαγέντος δὲ τοῦ Θεμιστοκλέους ὡς μέγα τὸ μάντευμα καὶ δεινόν, οἶον εἴωθεν ἐν μεγάλοις ἀγῶσι καὶ πράγμασι χαλεποῖς, μᾶλλον ἐκ τῶν παραλόγων ἢ τῶν εὐλόγων τὴν σωτηρίαν ἐλπίζοντες οἱ πολλοὶ τὸν θεὸν ἅμα κοινῇ κατεκαλοῦντο φωνῇ καὶ τοὺς αἰχμαλώτους τῷ βωμῷ προσαγαγόντες ἠνάγκασαν, ὡς ὁ μάντις ἐκέλευσε, τὴν θυσίαν συντελεσθῆναι. ταῦτα μὲν οὖν ἀνήρ φιλόσοφος καὶ

γραμματῶν οὐκ ἄπειρος ἱστορικῶν Φανίας ὁ Λέσβιος εἶρηκε.

Meanwhile, Themistocles was offering sacrifice alongside the admiral's trireme. Here three remarkably handsome prisoners were brought before him, magnificently dressed and wearing gold ornaments. They were reported to be the sons of Sandace, the King's sister, and Artaÿctus. At the very moment that Euphrantides the prophet saw them, a great bright flame shot up from the offerings on the altar and a sneeze on the right gave a sign. At this, Euphrantides clasped Themistocles by the right hand and commanded him to dedicate and sacrifice all the young men to Dionysus, the Eater of Raw Flesh, for if this were done, it would bring deliverance and victory to the Greeks. Themistocles was struck by the greatness and terribleness of the prophet's command, but the majority, as customarily happens in great contests and in difficult affairs, expected that safety would come more from irrational actions than well-reasoned ones, and called upon the god simultaneously with one voice; and leading the prisoners to the altar, and they forced the sacrifice to be carried out as the prophet had demanded. This, at any rate, is the account we have from Phantias of Lesbos, who was a philosopher and knowledgeable in history.

Much has been written about this story, not least because it seems to be an important *testimonium* for the practice of human sacrifice in Greece.⁴¹ Again, it may seem odd that Plutarch should introduce a story about which he himself may have had qualms,⁴² and one which, it is clear, causes

⁴¹ Scholars are divided on the possible historicity of this event. See Mikalson (2003) 78–9 who on balance accepts the story; he surveys other opinions at 216 nn. 259–60. See also the detailed commentary by Engels ad *FGrHist* 1012 F 19.

⁴² Marr (1998) 106 sees the *μὲν οὖν* as distancing (he compares 7.7), which, of course, it can be; but the characterisation of Phantias as

revulsion in Themistocles (here, of course, mirroring Plutarch's own revulsion). Yet Plutarch must have included the incident (which is mentioned elsewhere in his works)⁴³ because he had found it in the tradition and was sufficiently convinced of at least its possibility. Here, as with the story of Themistocles' manipulation of the snake and the oracle, the common people (here *οἱ πολλοί* (13.4) must be the rank and file of the soldiers) do as they commonly do in great dangers, and are led astray by irrational beliefs: it is they who 'force' (*ἡνάγκασαν*) the sacrifice to take place.

The incident is complicated by the fact that it is the seer, Euphrantidas, who interprets the flame and sneeze as indicating the need to sacrifice the prisoners and Themistocles, though appalled, is unable or unwilling (Plutarch's text suggests the former) to prevent the sacrifice from occurring; and given that Euphrantidas' interpretation is that such a sacrifice would bring 'salvation and victory' to the Greeks, the actual performance of the sacrifice does in fact validate the seer's interpretation. This story, then, despite its troubling aspects, actually reinforces the notion of divine presence and interest in the affairs of the Greeks and of the hand of heaven in the Greek victory over the Persians.

Turning now finally to Plataea, we should, as in the case of Salamis, first say something of Herodotus' narrative, which certainly does not lack for evidence of the divine: Herodotus mentions the omens before battle, in which each side is promised victory only if it does not attack first (Hdt. 9.36); he tells at length the background stories of the two seers, Teisamenus and Hegesistratus (9.33–7); he narrates

γραμμμάτων οὐκ ἄπειρος ἱστορικῶν would seem to indicate confidence, not hesitation.

⁴³ Cf. *Arist.* 9.2 where we are given the detail, which is not in the *Themistocles*, that the prisoners were sent to Themistocles by Aristides who had captured them on Psyttaleia (a detail that argues against the historicity of the incident, as commentators have noted). See also *Pelop.* 21.3, where it is mentioned (not by the narrator but by some speakers who adduce it as a parallel) together with the self-sacrifice of Leonidas at Thermopylae.

Pausanias' dramatic look towards the temple of Hera and his prayer for divine assistance at the crucial moment of battle (9.61.3); and he expresses the belief—one of the rare remarks on the divine that he makes in his own person—that no Persians fell in the sacred precinct of Demeter because the goddess herself prevented them on the grounds that they were impious men.⁴⁴

Yet even here Plutarch outdoes Herodotus. He mentions the prophecies and Pausanias' prayer, but he adds fully half a dozen other incidents not mentioned by Herodotus. Two of these concern oracles given to the Athenians and the first is given impressive treatment indeed, the more remarkable in that no other source mentions it. Though lengthy, it must be quoted in full (*Arist.* 11.3–8):

Παυσανία μὲν οὖν καὶ τοῖς Ἑλλήσι κοινῇ Τεισαμένος ὁ Ἥλειος ἔμαντεύσατο, καὶ προεῖπε νίκην ἀμυνομένοις καὶ μὴ προεπιχειροῦσιν· Ἀριστείδου δὲ πέμψαντος εἰς Δελφοὺς, ἀνεῖλεν ὁ θεὸς Ἀθηναίους καθυπερτέρους ἔσεσθαι τῶν ἐναντίων εὐχομένους τῷ Διὶ καὶ τῇ Ἥρᾳ τῇ Κιθαιρωνίᾳ καὶ Πανὶ καὶ νύμφαις Σφραγίτισι, καὶ θύοντας ἥρωσιν Ἀνδροκράτει, Λεύκωνι, Πεισάνδρῳ, Δαμοκράτει, Ὑψίονι, Ἀκταίῳ, Πολυεῖδῳ, καὶ τὸν κίνδυνον ἐν γὰρ ἰδίᾳ ποιουμένους ἐν τῷ πεδίῳ τῆς Δάματρος τῆς Ἐλευσινίας καὶ τῆς Κόρας. οὗτος ὁ χρησμὸς ἀνενεχθεὶς ἀπορίαν τῷ Ἀριστείδῃ παρέλκεν. οἱ μὲν γὰρ ἥρωες οἷς ἐκέλευε θύειν ἀρχηγέται Πλαταιέων ἦσαν, καὶ τὸ τῶν Σφραγιτίδων νυμφῶν ἄντρον ἐν μιᾷ κορυφῇ τοῦ Κιθαιρωνός ἐστιν, εἰς δυσμὰς ἡλίου θερινὰς τετραμμένον, ἐν ᾧ καὶ μαντεῖον ἦν πρότερον ὡς φασι καὶ πολλοὶ κατεῖχοντο τῶν ἐπιχωρίων, οὓς νυμφολήπτους προσηγόρευον. τὸ δὲ τῆς Ἐλευσινίας Δῆμητρος πεδίον, καὶ τὸ τὴν μάχην ἐν ἰδίᾳ χώρᾳ ποιουμένοις τοῖς Ἀθηναίοις νίκην δίδοσθαι, πάλιν εἰς τὴν Ἀττικὴν ἀνεκαλεῖτο καὶ μεθίστη τὸν πόλεμον. ἔνθα τῶν

⁴⁴ On this see 9.65 with Flower and Marincola (2002) ad loc. and Boedeker (2007) 70–1. This passage, unlike 8.77 (above, n. 26), is not suspected as an interpolation.

Πλαταιέων ὁ στρατηγὸς Ἀρίμνηστος ἔδοξε κατὰ τοὺς ὕπνους ὑπὸ τοῦ Διὸς τοῦ Σωτήρος ἐπερωτώμενον αὐτόν, ὅτι δὴ πράττειν δέδοκται τοῖς Ἕλλησιν, εἰπεῖν, ἄρριον εἰς Ἐλευσίνα τὴν στρατιὰν ἀπάξομεν ὧ δέσποτα, καὶ διαμαχοῦμεθα τοῖς βαρβάροις ἐκεῖ κατὰ τὸ πυθόχρηστον. τὸν οὖν θεὸν φάσαι διαμαρτάνειν αὐτοὺς τοῦ παντός· αὐτόθι γὰρ εἶναι περὶ τὴν Πλαταικὴν τὰ πυθόχρηστα, καὶ ζητοῦντας ἀνευρήσειν. τούτων ἐναργῶς τῷ Ἀριμνήστῳ φανέντων, ἐξεγρόμενος τάχιστα μετεπέμψατο τοὺς ἐμπειροτάτους καὶ πρεσβυτάτους τῶν πολιτῶν, μεθ' ὧν διαλεγόμενος καὶ συνδιαπορῶν εὗρεν, ὅτι τῶν Ὑσιῶν πλησίον ὑπὸ τὸν Κιθαιρῶνα ναὸς ἐστὶν ἀρχαῖος πάνυ Δῆμητρος Ἐλευσινίας καὶ Κόρης προσαγορευόμενος. εὐθύς οὖν παραλαβὼν τὸν Ἀριστείδην ἤγεν ἐπὶ τὸν τόπον, εὐφύεστατον ὄντα παρατάξαι φάλαγγα πεζὴν ἵπποκρατουμένους διὰ τὰς ὑπωρείας τοῦ Κιθαιρῶνος, ἄφιππα ποιούσας τὰ καταλήγοντα καὶ συγκυροῦντα τοῦ πεδίου πρὸς τὸ ἱερόν. ταύτῃ δ' ἦν καὶ τὸ τοῦ Ἀνδροκράτους ἠρώων ἐγγύς, ἄλσει πυκνῶν καὶ συσκίων δένδρων περιεχόμενον. ὅπως δὲ μηδὲν ἐλλιπὲς ἔχη πρὸς τὴν ἐλπίδα τῆς νίκης ὁ χρησμός, ἔδοξε τοῖς Πλαταιεῦσιν, Ἀριμνήστου γνώμην εἰπόντος, ἀνελεῖν τὰ πρὸς τὴν Ἀττικὴν ὄρια τῆς Πλαταιίδος καὶ τὴν χώραν ἐπιδοῦναι τοῖς Ἀθηναίοις, ὑπὲρ τῆς Ἑλλάδος ἐν οἰκείᾳ κατὰ τὸν χρησμὸν ἐναγωνίσασθαι.

Now for Pausanias and the Greeks in general, Teisamenus of Elis was the seer, and he foretold that they would win a victory provided that they did not advance to the attack, but stayed on the defensive. And when Aristides sent to Delphi, his messengers received an answer from the god that the Athenians would overcome their adversaries on condition that they prayed to Zeus, Hera of Cithaeron, Pan and the Sphragitic nymphs; that they sacrificed to the heroes Androcrates, Leucon, Peisandrus, Damocrates, Hypsion, Actaeon, and Polyeidus; and that they risked a battle on their own territory in the plain of Eleusinian

Demeter and Kore. This oracle was reported to Aristides, who found it bewildering in the extreme. Certainly, the heroes to whom he was ordered to sacrifice were founders of Plataea, and the cave of the nymphs of Sphragis was situated on one of the peaks of Cithaeron, facing the point on the horizon where the sun sets in summer. In the past this cave was said to have contained an oracle, and many of the inhabitants nearby became possessed of oracular powers and were known as *nympholepti*. But the mention of the plain of Demeter, and the promise of victory to the Athenians if they fought a battle on their own soil appeared to summon them back to Attica and transfer the seat of the war there. At this point the Plataean commander, Arimnestus, had a dream, in which he was questioned by Zeus the Saviour as to what the Greeks had decided to do, and he replied: 'Tomorrow, Lord, we shall lead our army back to Eleusis and fight it out with the Persians there, as the Delphic oracle has commanded us.' At this the god declared that they had missed the whole meaning of the oracle, for the places which it mentioned were all in the neighbourhood of Plataea, and they would find them if only they searched. All this was revealed so clearly to Arimnestus that as soon as he awoke, he sent for the oldest and most experienced of his fellow-countrymen. When he had discussed his dream and questioned them, he discovered that under Mount Cithaeron near Hysiae there was a very ancient temple dedicated to Eleusinian Demeter and Kore. He at once took Aristides with him and led him to the place, which offered an excellent position in which to station a body of heavy infantry against a force that was superior in cavalry, since the spurs of Cithaeron, where they adjoin the temple and run down into the plain, make the ground impassable for cavalry. Close by, too, stood the shrine of the hero Androcrates in the midst of a thick and shady grove. Finally, to make sure that the conditions for victory which the oracle had mentioned should be fulfilled in every detail, Arimnestus put

forward a motion, which the Plataeans then passed, that they should remove their boundary stones on the side facing Attica, and give this territory to the Athenians, to enable them to fight in defence of Greece on their own soil, as the oracle had laid down.

It is noteworthy that Plutarch introduces the incident without any fanfare, simply as part of a *μὲν ... δέ* clause, the first element of which is the prophecy known from Herodotus, and in a way which suggests that the story was equally well known. One slight difference, however, is that in Herodotus the prophecy that the Greeks would be successful if they awaited rather than initiated battle, was for all the Greeks, whereas Plutarch characterises it as given to Pausanias and the Greeks, a subtle change that then allows him to introduce another prophecy, this one specifically for the Athenians. Scholars have been at a loss to explain where this incident comes from, and for our present purposes the source is immaterial.⁴⁵ Nor is it relevant here to determine whether or not the oracle is ‘genuine’.⁴⁶ It is important instead to emphasise what the incident contributes to Plutarch’s overall portrait of the divine in the victories of the Persian Wars.

The story is a complicated one because although the prophecy is given to Athens,⁴⁷ it requires both a second divine intervention (to a Plataean) and the Plataeans’ knowledge of their own territory to ensure that the

⁴⁵ See Marincola (forthcoming) for the argument that Plutarch’s source must be the Atthidographer Cleidemus.

⁴⁶ The oracle is no. 102 in Parke and Wormell (1956) and Q154 in Fontenrose (1978); the latter calls it ‘partly genuine’, accepting the genuineness of the order to worship the particular gods and heroes, while seeing the stipulation of the battle location as ‘a *post eventum* addition’ (Fontenrose (1978) 319–20). In accordance with his suspicion of all post-Herodotean sources, Hignett (1963) 419–20 dismisses the incident as unhistorical; for a brief but good recent discussion see Mikalson (2003) 78–9, with earlier references there; he is inclined to accept its historicity and integrates it with Herodotus’ account (95).

⁴⁷ Plutarch says that the oracle prophesied victory *for the Athenians* over their foes: Ἀθηναίους καθυπερέρους ἔσεσθαι τῶν ἐναντίων.

Athenians (and the Greeks) ultimately do the right thing. This familiar oracular pattern—uncertainty and error followed by eventual clarity and fulfilment of the god’s wishes—usually occurs slowly, sometimes taking generations to work out. Plutarch has accelerated this process by a nearly immediate second divine intervention, which sets the Greeks on the right path.⁴⁸ The oracle together with the ‘clarifying’ dream indicates both the importance of the battle and the gods’ care for the Greeks. Once again, the hand of heaven is made manifest in the kind of overt way usually avoided by Herodotus. Finally, the Plataeans’ generosity in making over their territory to the Athenians is the kind of sacrifice for the general good that is a consistent feature of Plutarch’s treatment of the Persian Wars.⁴⁹

The story of Aristides and Delphi also has the important function of tying Delphi closely to the ultimate victory over the barbarians. By giving detailed instructions to the Athenians (and, by extension of course, to all the Greeks), the oracle ensures that the correct strategy is employed, and divine guidance is made explicit and real. We need not here attribute conscious apologetic purposes to Plutarch⁵⁰ but rather may observe that such a story would have strongly suggested itself to him as characteristic of the gods’ interest in Greek success over the barbarians.

The next two incidents are more minor. Plutarch’s story of the attack by some Lydians during Pausanias’ sacrifice before the battle and their subsequent rout seems to be told as an *aition*, mainly to explain the unusual Spartan custom of beating young men with rods at the altar at Sparta.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Mikalson (2003) 207 n. 111 notes the uniqueness of Arimnestus’ ‘very helpful’ dream which ‘is unparalleled in Herodotus’ *Histories*’.

⁴⁹ Marincola (2010) 136–8.

⁵⁰ For the role of Delphi in the Persian Wars see Elayi (1978) and (1979); Harrison (2000) 122–57; and Mikalson (2003) 111–35; we need not posit conscious apologetic because, as Mikalson (2003) 121 points out, the ancients did not question the positive role of Delphi in the Persian Wars: ‘[n]ot until modern scholarship do we find criticism of Apollo’s behavior in the Persian Wars coming to the fore.’

⁵¹ *Arist.* 17.10, with Sansone (1989) and Calabi Limentani (1964) ad loc.

Pausanias' prayer to Hera, given briefly in Herodotus as a request that the goddess 'not deceive them of their hope' (*χρηζοντα μηδαμῶς σφέας ψευσθῆναι τῆς ἐλπίδος*, 9.61.3) is expanded by Plutarch in two ways: first, the prayer is made to Hera 'and the other gods who watch over the Plataean land' (*Arist.* 18.1), and, second, by giving a 'fuller' version of Pausanias' prayer in which he prays 'that if it were not the gods' will that the Greeks should conquer, they might at least do some great deed before they fell and prove to their enemies that they had taken the field against brave men who knew how to fight' (*ibid.*).

The treatment of Mardonius' death reveals important differences between the two authors. In Herodotus, there are intimations of Mardonius' death already in the council at Persia that decides to invade Greece: there Artabanus, opposing Mardonius' strong desire to attack the Greeks, says that 'the day will come when many a man left at home [sc. in Persia] will hear the news that Mardonius has brought disaster upon Persia, and this body lies a prey to dogs and birds somewhere in the country of the Athenians or the Spartans, if not upon the road thither' (7.108.3). Later, when the Lacedaemonians receive an oracle from Delphi that they should demand reparation for the death of their king Leonidas, they are told by Xerxes with a laugh (and with deep irony) that 'they will get all the satisfaction they deserve from Mardonius here' (8.114). Indeed, in Herodotus' account it is clear that Mardonius' death is retribution for the death and mutilation of Leonidas.⁵² Plutarch, of course, has not the narrative space to work something like this out, even if he were inclined to do so, and so contents himself with a brief and compact account (*Arist.* 19.1–2):

καὶ τὸν Μαρδόνιον ἀνὴρ Σπαρτιάτης ὄνομα Αἰμίμηστος ἀποκτίννουσι, λίθῳ τὴν κεφαλὴν πατάξας, ὥσπερ αὐτῷ προσήμανε τὸ Ἀμφιάρεω μαντεῖον. ἔπεμψε γὰρ ἄνδρα Λυδὸν ἐνταῦθα, Κᾶρα δὲ ἕτερον εἰς τὸ Πτῶνον ὁ

⁵² See Hdt. 9.64.1 with Flower and Marincola (2002) 10–11, 219.

Μαρδόνιος καὶ τοῦτον μὲν ὁ προφήτης Καρικῆ γλώσση προσεῖπεν, ὁ δὲ Λυδὸς ἐν τῷ σηκῷ τοῦ Ἀμφιάρεω κατευνασθεὶς ἔδοξεν ὑπηρετήν τινὰ τοῦ θεοῦ παραστήναι καὶ κελεύειν αὐτὸν ἀπιέναι, μὴ βουλομένῳ δὲ λίθον εἰς τὴν κεφαλὴν ἐμβαλεῖν μέγαν, ὥστε δόξαι πληγέντα τεθνάναι τὸν ἄνθρωπον· καὶ ταῦτα μὲν οὕτω γενέσθαι λέγεται.

Mardonius was killed by a Spartan named Aeimnestus, who struck his head with a stone, just as the oracle at the shrine of Amphiaraüs had prophesied to him. Mardonius had sent a Lydian to this oracle and also a Carian to the Ptoön. The latter was actually addressed by the prophet in the Carian tongue, but the Lydian, when he lay down to sleep in the sacred enclosure of Amphiaraüs, dreamed that one of the god's attendants stood at his side and commanded him to be gone, and when he refused, hurled down a great stone on his head, so that in his dream he was killed by the blow. These things then are said to have happened in this manner.

In Herodotus, Mardonius sends the Carian Mys to consult the oracles throughout Greece and Mys visits the shrine of Amphiaraus as well as the Ptoön, where the priestess gives the god's response in the Carian language, a marvel that Herodotus makes a particular point of noting (8.133–5). But whereas Herodotus distinctly fails to say what the prophecies revealed to Mardonius,⁵³ Plutarch has Amphiaraüs indicate clearly the manner of his death. So once again Plutarch offers a narrative in which there are clear indications of the role of the divine in the working out of the Greek victory over Persia.

Finally, Plutarch details a number of religious activities after the battle. He mentions the Athenians' sacrifice to the

⁵³ Hdt. 8.136.1; the only thing Herodotus tells us is that as a result of the prophecies Mardonius sent Alexander of Macedon to the Athenians to offer an alliance.

Sphragitic Nymphs, which takes us back to the prophecy given to Aristides before the battle, and is an indication of Plutarch's care to mention such things.⁵⁴ Similarly, he mentions a Delphic pronouncement (the Greeks are said specifically to have inquired of the oracle: *περὶ δὲ θυσίας ἐρομένοις αὐτοῖς*, 20.4) which enjoined the establishment of an altar to Zeus Eleutherios as well as a purification after the battle, the extinguishing of all fire and the conveyance of pure fire from Delphi. The latter injunction leads to the story of the Plataean Euchidas, who, like Pheidippides at Marathon, performs a marvellous deed, in Euchidas' case running a thousand stades from Delphi to Plataea on the same day so as to bring the sacred fire as quickly as possible and then expiring upon completion of the deed (*Arist.* 19.7–9, 20.4–8). In this way Plutarch has very carefully ensured that the gods figure in the battle of Plataea before, during, and after the conflict.

IV

To sum up, then: Plutarch's attack on Herodotus' characterisation and portrayal of the gods in the *de Herodoti malignitate* and Plutarch's own portrayal of the divine in his Persian-War *Lives* show a similar approach and orientation. Although Herodotus in no way left the divine out of his history (quite the contrary, in fact), Plutarch believed nonetheless that Herodotus either had not treated the divine in an appropriate way (as in the case of Solon's remark on the jealousy and meddlesomeness of the divinity, which was a serious affront to Plutarch's Platonist beliefs) or had not included enough of the divine in his narrative of the Persian Wars, omitting the clear signs and indications of divine involvement that could so easily be found in other authors. We must remember, of course, that half a millennium separates Plutarch from the Persian Wars, and that by his time the events had long taken on a 'heroic'

⁵⁴ Recall that he faults Herodotus for not including these things (above, no. 8).

colouring in which a united Greece had turned back the whole power of Asia, and had done so, moreover, with scant resources. Plutarch in no way minimises the human contribution to this success—indeed his *Lives* and *Moralia* celebrate it—but he also consistently makes clear in his narratives that the gods had been necessary throughout the struggle, and that it was they, as much as Themistocles, Pausanias or Aristides, who ensured that Greece should be free.

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