

Rapid #: -6015710

Ariel
ariel.lib.usf.edu

CALL #: PA1 .A715
LOCATION: LUU :: Main Library :: Middleton Library (Main Collection)
TYPE: Article CC:CCL
JOURNAL TITLE: Arethusa.
USER JOURNAL TITLE: Arethusa (special volume titled "Herodotus and the Invention of History," ed. by Deborah Boedeker)
LUU CATALOG TITLE: Arethusa.
ARTICLE TITLE: Herodotus, Political Thought, and the Meaning of History
ARTICLE AUTHOR: Kurt Raaflaub
VOLUME: 20
ISSUE:
MONTH:
YEAR: 1987
PAGES: 221-48
ISSN:
OCLC #: 1513998
CROSS REFERENCE ID: [TN:892380][ODYSSEY:usf.hosts.atlas-sys.com/TPA]
VERIFIED:

BORROWER: FHM :: Main Library
PATRON:



This material may be protected by copyright law (Title 17 U.S. Code)
System Date/Time: 11/8/2012 3:19:59 PM MST

Ariel**ariel.lib.usf.edu****2 Rapid #: -6015710**

Status	Rapid Code	Branch Name	Start Date
New	FHM	Main Library	11/8/2012 12:20:20 PM
... note: only the last 3 transactions are shown below. view details			
Unfilled	SUC	Main Library	11/8/2012 12:36:18 PM
Pending	LUU	Main Library	11/8/2012 12:40:53 PM
Batch Not Printed	LUU	Main Library	11/8/2012 12:57:04 PM

CALL #: PA1 .A715

LOCATION: LUU :: Main Library :: Middleton Library (Main Collection)

TYPE: Article CC:CCL

JOURNAL TITLE: Arethusa.

USER JOURNAL TITLE: Arethusa (special volume titled "Herodotus and the Invention of History," ed. by Deborah Boedeker)

LUU CATALOG TITLE: Arethusa.

ARTICLE TITLE: Herodotus, Political Thought, and the Meaning of History

ARTICLE AUTHOR: Kurt Raaflaub

VOLUME: 20

ISSUE:

MONTH:

YEAR: 1987

PAGES: 221-48

ISSN:

OCLC #: 1513998

CROSS REFERENCE ID: [TN:892380][ODYSSEY:usf.hosts.atlas-sys.com/TPA]

VERIFIED:

BORROWER: FHM :: Main Library

PATRON:

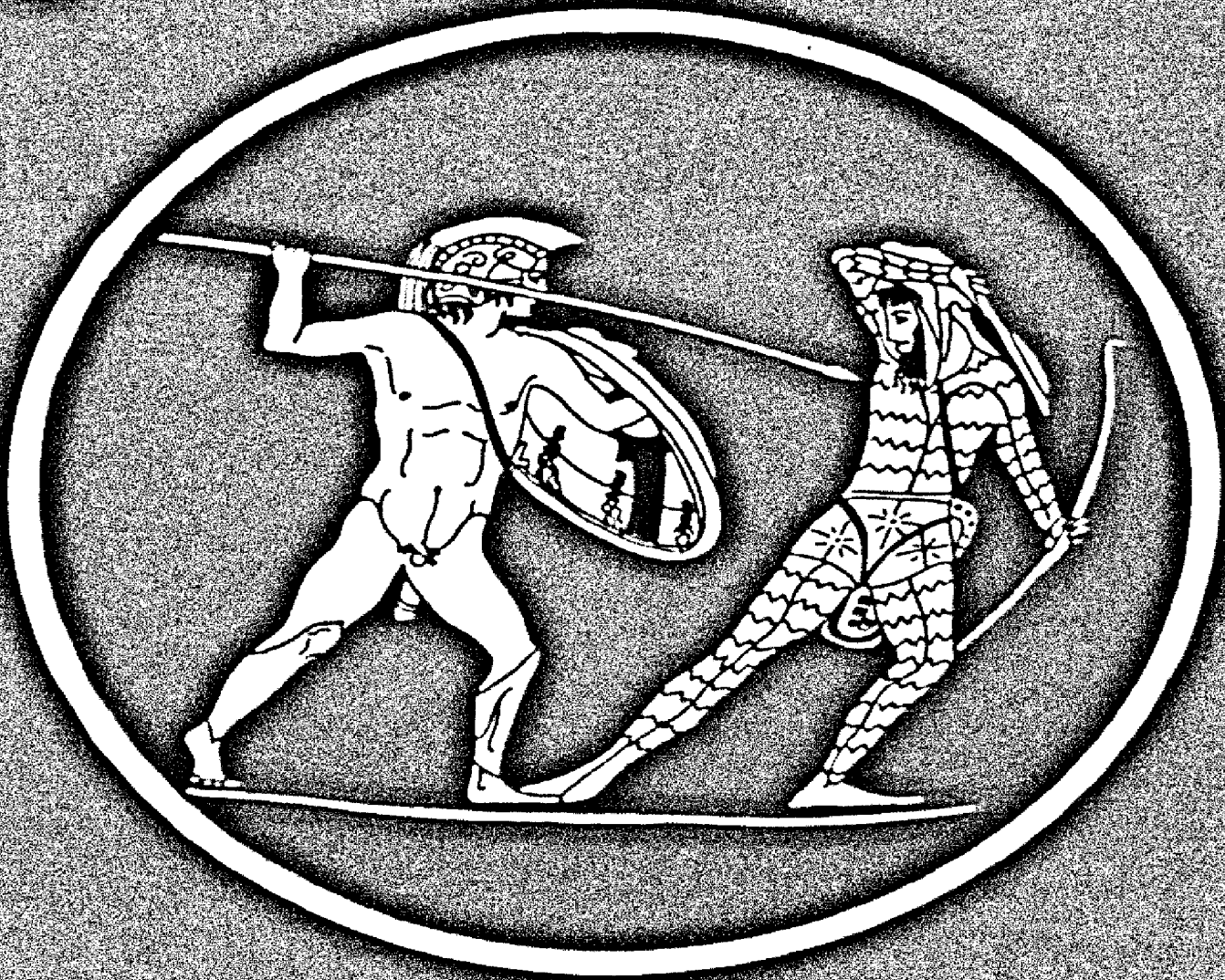


This material may be protected by copyright law (Title 17 U.S. Code)
System Date/Time: 11/8/2012 12:57:04 PM MST

mfp

ARETHUSA

HERODOTUS



AND THE
INVENTION
OF HISTORY

Volume Twenty/Numbers One & Two/
Spring and Fall 1987

HERODOTUS, POLITICAL THOUGHT, AND THE MEANING OF HISTORY

KURT A. RAAFLAUB

In memoriam Hermann Strasburger (1909-1985)

Überall spürt man, dass Herodot über die politischen Probleme seiner eigenen Zeit viel schärfer nachgedacht hat, als er sich den äusseren Anschein gibt.

I

Unlike Thucydides, Herodotus does not enjoy a high reputation as a political thinker.¹ According to his critics, he lacks consistency in his political judgment and in his assessment of political institutions and constitutions; his historical interest is not focused exclusively on political aspects, his historical interpretation not based on primarily political concerns, and his judgment not dominated by the standards of political history; political theories enter the picture only occasionally and do not provide clearly established principles and guidelines for the historian. In all these respects Herodotus falls short in comparison with Thucydides. Moreover, scholars have been preoccupied with defining Herodotus' political preferences and have had great difficulties in finding clear answers.² All this, combined with his specific

¹ H. Strasburger belongs to a small group of scholars who rate him more highly. His important article on Herodotus and Periclean Athens (1955) is reprinted in *Marg* 1982.574-608 (the motto quoted above is on p. 602; equally important statements are, e.g., on pp. 575, 604 f., 607). Besides Strasburger, C. Fornara's book on Herodotus (1971) and C. Meier's article on the origins of historiography (1973) were most helpful for my specific needs. I am grateful to A. Boegehold, C. Fornara, M. Nussbaum and my other colleagues in Brown's Classics Department, and particularly to D. Boedeker for useful comments.

² For the futility of such efforts, see, e.g., Strasburger in *Marg* 1982.577-79, 597.

blend of traditional and innovative views and his exceptionally wide range of concerns and interests, made it difficult to classify the author and understand his intentions. At the very least, clarity and stringency of political thought did not seem his main strength. T. A. Sinclair's judgment may be taken as fairly representative: the "mixture of the old and the new in political thought" (as we find it, for example, in the "constitutional debate")

is a feature of Herodotus' work as a whole. He does not obtrude his own opinions but he often lets his sympathies be seen. He stands for freedom and equality. He is the relentless foe of tyranny and oppression and dwells with pleasure on the stories of the downfalls of great tyrant houses; for he had himself fled from tyranny at home. Such an attitude does not make for clear thinking and Herodotus' many admirers do not claim that he is a political thinker.³

"Yet," Sinclair continues, Herodotus' "work taken along with the *Persae* of Aeschylus would be a much better introduction to Greek political thought than Plato's *Republic* with which so many students begin." Although this comes as a surprise after those earlier remarks, I think here Sinclair is quite correct. Herodotus may not be much of a political thinker according to the standards established by the Sophists and Thucydides, and obviously even less so according to those introduced by Plato and Aristotle. However, in this as in every other respect, he deserves to be judged on his own merit. Moreover, political thought in Greece did not begin with the Sophists.⁴ If set in the framework of the earlier tradition, Herodotus' achievement looks different. I suggest that he offers a valuable example of the modes and intentions of political thought that we find among the leading Greek authors before

³ T. A. Sinclair 1967.39. The standard textbooks on Greek political thought — besides Sinclair, E. Barker 1918, D. Kagan 1965 — mention Herodotus mostly because of his "constitutional debate" (3.80-82) and his emphatic distinction between Persian despotism and the "liberty under the rule of *nomos*" typical of the Greek *polis* (most clearly in 7.101-4). P. Weber-Schäfer 1976.128-43 is much more substantial.

⁴ For surveys of early Greek political thought, see the works mentioned in the previous note and E. Voegelin 1957; Meier 1980, parts A and B, contains important observations. For a preliminary sketch of my own views, see Raaflaub 1981.36-67; a much expanded version is forthcoming in I. Fetscher and H. Münkler, eds., *Handbuch der politischen Ideen I* (Munich 1987).

the emergence of political and rhetorical theory in roughly the last third of the fifth century. Let me begin with a few examples that seem to me characteristic of Herodotus' way of political thinking.

II

In 510 B.C. the Spartan king Cleomenes yielded to urgent requests by Athenian exiles and the Delphic oracle and overthrew the tyranny of Hippias (5.62-65). Soon thereafter he failed to establish his friend Isagoras as the head of an oligarchic or, as Herodotus says, tyrannical government in Athens (5.70-72, 74-76). The liberation from tyranny freed surprising energies in the Athenian citizens and Athens soon became a much more powerful city than it had been previously (5.66, 77 f.). Meanwhile the Spartans found out how they had been deceived by the Alcmeonids and the Delphic priestess; they were troubled by certain prophecies (allegedly found by Cleomenes in Athens) "which declared that many dire calamities should befall them at the hands of the Athenians" (5.90),⁵ and since they "saw that the Athenians were growing in strength, and had no mind to acknowledge any subjection to their control, it occurred to them that, if the people of Attica were free, they would be likely to be as powerful as themselves, but if they were oppressed by a tyranny, they would be weak and submissive." So they planned to reinstate Hippias as tyrant of Athens by a joint action of the Peloponnesian League (91). In a meeting of this League the representative of Corinth gave an impressive speech. He reminded the others of how badly his own city had suffered under the tyrants (92) and how absurd it would be if Sparta, the traditional enemy of tyranny, were to "put down free and equal governments (*isokratia*) in the Greek cities, and to set up tyrannies in their stead" (92a.1). Hippias replied "that certainly the Corinthians will, more than anybody else, long for the Peisistratids, when the fated days come for them to be plagued by the Athenians" (93.1). Hippias could say that, Herodotus adds, because he knew those oracles better than anybody else. At the end, however, the Spartan proposal did not prevail (93.2).

Whether this story is historically authentic or not, it serves an important narrative and interpretative purpose. In particular, it establishes by association a close connection with an important event of

⁵ Translated here as elsewhere by G. Rawlinson with my modifications.

contemporary history,⁶ namely the council of the Peloponnesian League in Sparta in 432. At this meeting many allies complained bitterly about Athenian aggression, the Corinthian delegates spoke most fiercely against Athens, the tyrant-city in Greece, and their proposal to go to war met with overwhelming support (Thuc. 1.66-88). As H. Strasburger suggested long ago, Herodotus' story could only assume its full historical relevance if these events and the contemporary role and reputation of Athens were fully taken into consideration by the audience.⁷ The same city, they were expected to think, that was then saved from tyranny for the second time, and thereby was enabled to contribute decisively to saving the freedom of the Greeks against the Persians, soon thereafter subjected the liberated cities to its own tyranny. Keeping that in mind, we, like the historian's audience, can appreciate the profound irony that it was Hippias of all people who uttered the all too realistic warning; that it was precisely the Corinthians who argued against the imposition of tyrants in Greek cities; and that Sparta, traditionally the liberator from tyranny, intended in this one case to violate its own principles, to prevent tyranny on a large scale by imposing tyranny on a small scale, and to sacrifice the freedom of one city in order to save that of all the others.

The phenomenon observed in this case is, I suggest, typical of Herodotus' working with history and communicating through history with his audience. Many of his stories gain additional depth and meaning because certain names, words, events, situations, or thoughts mentioned in them trigger associations with problems that were familiar and of great concern to his audience. The association provoked here, the notion of *polis tyrannos*, was familiar to all Greeks since roughly the middle of the century.⁸ In Herodotus' time they were accustomed to associating the notion of tyranny with the rule of the *polis tyrannos* and to see the *polis tyrannos* represented by the figure of the tyrant (metaphorically and, if B. Knox is correct,⁹ on stage as in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*). Accordingly, it was possible for Herodotus to work purposely with this potential of associative think-

⁶ By "contemporary" I always mean the time of the composition of the *Histories*.

⁷ Strasburger in Marg 1982.583 ff.; cf. also Raaflaub 1979.234-41.

⁸ Cf. Raaflaub 1979.237-52, esp. 243, 251 f.; id. 1985.170 f. The *terminus ante quem* would have to be moved up to 457 if, as I suspect, Zeus' tyranny in Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* at least partially refers to this aspect.

⁹ B. M. W. Knox 1954; cf. id., 1957.53 ff.

ing which would, even without his explicit comments, connect the events of the past with experiences of the present. We might then expect to find such topical relevance in other tyrant stories as well. I mention one more; there are others, not all equally plausible but worth thinking about.¹⁰

When Polycrates, tyrant of Samos, died in 522 B.C., his deputy, Maeandrius, inherited rule and power but felt uncomfortable and tried to get rid of it. He set up a shrine for Zeus Eleutherios and announced in an assembly his intention to give back his power to the community and to bestow liberty and equality upon the Samians, only keeping for himself some of Polycrates' money and the new priesthood of Zeus. For, he said, "I did not like it that Polycrates ruled as a despot over men who were his peers, nor do I approve of anybody else's doing that" (3.142.1-4). The Samians' reaction to this offer, however, was negative; one of the leading citizens even threatened to take action against him (3.142.5-143.1). Maeandrius feared, then, that if he resigned someone else would establish a tyranny. He kept his power and secured it by eliminating his opponents. "It seems," concludes Herodotus, "that the Samians did not want to be free!" (3.143.2). M. Ostwald pointed out that the last sentence establishes a clear contrast between this episode and the events in Athens where the citizens were ready for freedom, used it to their advantage and resolutely re-

¹⁰ (a) The excursus on the Alcmeonids begins with the statement that they hated tyranny most bitterly, and ends with Agariste's dream (6.121-31). Herodotus here goes out of his way in order to mention Pericles, the man who, more than any other Athenian, was identified with democracy and power politics. As, e.g., Strasburger in Marg 1982. 596-98 and Fornara 1971.53 pointed out, the dream about the lion cub is at least ambiguous. We might therefore be entitled to connect the beginning and end of this excursus: the family that most bitterly hated the tyrants also produced the man who was himself accused of tyrannical ambition and was the most consistent advocate of Athenian imperialism and the leader of the *polis tyrannos*. (b) The story of Deioces and the foundation of monarchy among the Medes (1.95-101; explicitly called a tyranny in 96.1 f., 100.1) contains a number of elements that might well have caused the audience to think of the emergence of the *polis tyrannos*: peoples that free themselves from foreign domination only to fall under the rule of a tyrant soon thereafter; a leader who cunningly disguises his intentions, makes himself indispensable and helps those he leads to feel secure and confident under his protection, then gets himself elected into a position of power and subjects his protégés to his tyranny while continuing to perform well the tasks for which he was elected. (c) For the story of Polycrates see below note 58.

sisted all attempts to restore tyranny (5.70, 72-78).¹¹ But there is another connection as well: tyranny is unjust; to step down from it is the most just of all acts (7.164). Maeandrius, says Herodotus, "wanted to become the justest of men, but it did not work out for him" (3.142.1). For, as he found out, to relinquish tyranny was dangerous because of the subjects' proverbial hatred of the tyrant. This was a firmly established part of the typology of tyranny, long known to all Greeks. Equally well-known, if we can trust Thucydides, was the use made of this *topos* abroad and at home by the Athenians, as seen in the speech of the Athenian ambassadors in Sparta (1.75.3 f., 76.1 f.) and in Pericles' last speech. At least the Athenians in Herodotus' audience, when hearing about Maeandrius' ordeal, might have remembered the words of their leader:

And do not imagine that what we are fighting for is simply the question of freedom or slavery: there is also involved the loss of our empire and the dangers arising from the hatred which we have incurred in administering it. Nor is it any longer possible for you to give up this empire. . . . Your empire is now like a tyranny: it may have been unjust to take it; it is certainly dangerous to let it go (2.63.1 f.).¹²

Let us now look at some different stories. In the final stage of the Ionian revolt the admiral Dionysios of Phokaia took the Ionian fleet through a tough regime of daily training, insisting that they had a choice between enduring temporary toil (*ponos*) which would enable them to win and gain their freedom, or continuing in their disorderly ways and to lose (6.11.2). Initially they accepted his advice and underwent his merciless drill, "so that the men had nothing but *ponos* all day long" (12.1). But then, worn out, they refused, willing to suffer anything rather than such evil. "If it is a choice between two sorts of slavery," Herodotus makes them say, "then the one we are threatened with, however bad it turns out to be, could hardly be worse than what we are putting up with now" (12.3). As could be expected, they lost the

¹¹ Ostwald 1969.166.

¹² To date such thoughts in Thucydidean speeches is difficult. J. de Romilly 1963, esp. 147 ff., argues mostly for the end of the war. I have tried to show how they fit into a consistent and comprehensive "ideology" that played an important role in Athens around the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War: Raaflaub 1984.53 f., 70 ff.

final battle and were cruelly subjected again by the Persians. This scene draws upon the wide-spread contemporary prejudice against the Ionians.¹³ Moreover, an audience familiar with the contemporary character portrait of the Athenians as it is sketched by Thucydides and tragedy, could hardly fail to remember how much it was considered typical of the Athenians, and a main cause of their greatness, never to shy away from *ponos*.¹⁴

The use of terminology, of course, is crucial for our purposes. Particularly important and connotative words that the audience was used to hearing in specific political contexts were likely to provoke associations which helped to connect the past with the present.

Every Greek of Herodotus' time knew the Athenians' reputation for being busybodies, always meddling in other people's affairs (*polypragmones*), of being obsessed by the desire to acquire more (*pleonexia*) and unable to sit still and observe peace (*hēsychian echein*). In all this Athens presented a stark contrast with Sparta.¹⁵ The audience would notice therefore that Herodotus uses these concepts quite extensively. Of Themistocles who after the victory of Salamis went around the islands forcefully collecting money (8.111 f.) he says: "he never ceased his pursuit of gain" (*pleonekteōn*: 112.1).¹⁶ When Cyrus was ready to launch his fatal attack against the Massagetae, queen Tomyris sent a message warning him to confine himself to his own property and not to rob others of theirs. "But you will not want to listen to this counsel," she said, "but do anything rather than live in peace" (*di' hēsychiēs einai*: 1.206.2). Indeed, Cyrus' reign is described by Herodotus as one sequence of conquest, and his last campaign is motivated by "his good fortune in all his former wars, wherein he had always found, that against what country soever he turned his arms, it was impossible for that people to escape" (1.204.2).

Strong traces of the same language appear in the discussions surrounding Xerxes' decision to go to war against Greece (e.g., 7.8a.

¹³ Cf. Raaflaub 1985.223 f. with note 44. It should be emphasized, however, that the Ionians were criticized as soft, fond of a luxurious lifestyle, and unwarike already in the sixth century (the sources are collected by W. Nestle 1942.74 f. with notes 86 f.).

What matters to us is the repeated emphasis on *ponos*.

¹⁴ Cf., e.g., Thuc. 1.70.8 with the parallels cited by Gomme 1945-81, vol. I ad loc.; 2.63.1, 64.3, 6; Eur. *Suppl.* 323, 577. See also A. Boegehold 1982.147-56.

¹⁵ Cf., e.g., Thuc. 1.70.8 f., 83.3; 6.18.6 with Gomme's comm. and more examples; J. H. Finley 1967, index s.v. *hēsychia*, *polypragmosynē*, *pleonexia*.

¹⁶ Cf. H. Barth 1965.30-37.

1, 11.2, 16.2). It has long been seen that the speeches given by Mardonios, Xerxes and Artabanos in Xerxes' crown council before the campaign (7.5-19), and those by Xerxes and Artabanos after the review of the Persian army at Abydos (7.45-53) contain elements that to a remarkable extent correspond on the one hand with formulations of Aeschylus,¹⁷ on the other with the contrasting attitudes of the Spartans and Athenians and the thoughts especially of Pericles as they are described by Thucydides. Let me give just a few examples: When Xerxes says, "we have never yet kept quiet" since we took over the hegemony from the Medes (7.8α.1), we again think of Athens' inability to keep quiet. Xerxes then mentions the achievements of several generations of his ancestors and the obligations put on his shoulders by such a tradition (8α.1 f.); similarly, Pericles describes both the climax reached by the imperial city in his days as the result of the efforts of three subsequent generations (Thuc. 2.36.1-3), and the obligation put on the present generation not to fall below the standards set by their ancestors (2.62.3).¹⁸ Referring to the Ionian Revolt, Xerxes proposes the strategy of the pre-emptive strike: if we keep quiet, the Greeks are going to invade our country. "So now retreat is on both sides impossible, and the choice lies between doing and suffering injury; either our empire must pass under the dominion of the Greeks, or their land become the prey of the Persians; for there is no middle course left in this quarrel" (7.11.2-3).¹⁹ Despite the burning of Sardes by the Ionians it is unlikely that Xerxes said that. The decisive element here is not the thought of a Greek counteroffensive which was familiar ever since the Delian League was in full operation; rather it is the idea of a struggle for survival and sole power, the "them or us" attitude which clearly points to the period around the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War.²⁰ In Abydos, repeating a thought expressed earlier by Mardonios (7.9γ), Xerxes says, "great empires can only be conquered by great risks" (7.50.3); this, like the entire surrounding passage, once more recalls the collective character portrait of the Athenians familiar from Thucydides and tragedy.²¹

¹⁷ Cf. Pohlenz 1937.121, 124 f.

¹⁸ Cf. the parallel drawn by Pohlenz 1937.133 note 1 between Xerxes' words in 7.50.3 and Thuc. 2.36.4.

¹⁹ Cf. the variations of this thought in 1.71.4, 207.3; 3.21.3.

²⁰ Cf. in Herodotus 6.98.2 and 1.46.1; Thuc. 1.23.6, 88. See also Eur. *Heraclid.* 933 f.: Eurystheus' intention to destroy Athens.

²¹ Pohlenz 1937.133 note 1 refers to Eur. *Suppl.* 323 and 577. See also Thuc. 1.70.3.

Artabanos, on the other hand, emphasizes the need for good counsel (*eu bouleuesthai*: 7.10δ.2) and warns against rushed decisions: "Hurry always brings about disasters, from which huge sufferings are wont to arise, but in delay lie many advantages, not apparent (it may be) at first sight, but such as in course of time are seen of all" (10ζ.1). Great importance was attributed to these very aspects both in the theoretical discussion about democratic decision making and, once again, in the comparison of the attitudes characteristic of the Athenians and Spartans.²² When Artabanos severely criticizes Mardonios for reviling the enemy, and gives a little diatribe against slander ("slander is of all evils the most terrible": 10η.2), Herodotus may well be playing on an old proverb,²³ but we should not overlook the negative role of slander in democratic politics as it is exposed, for example, in Diodotus' speech in the Mytilenian debate (Thuc. 3.42 f.). Artabanos' warning that the god likes to bring down everything that exalts itself certainly is a very Aeschylean thought and deeply rooted in Herodotus' own beliefs, but it is also dramatically present in some tragedies performed during the Peloponnesian War. Finally, Artabanos explains that he advised against the Greek campaign because he did not want to encourage Xerxes' *hybris* but rather humble it by showing "how hurtful it is to allow one's heart always to covet more than one at present possesses (7.16α.2: *pleon ti dizēsthai aiei echein*); here again the famous Athenian *pleonexia* comes to mind.

Xerxes' crown council and his talk with Artabanos at Abydos form the crucial introduction to the last section and climax of Herodotus' work; the two scenes are modeled with greatest care. The accumulation of topical allusions therefore seems significant: the audience would notice that the Persian leaders were facing decisions and dealing with attitudes that in very essential ways were similar to those of their own time. I consider it likely therefore that the historian wanted his audience to continue to think of the present while they were hearing of the past, from the confident beginnings of Xerxes' campaign to its miserable failure.²⁴

²² Cf., e.g., Thuc. 2.40.2 f.; 3.42.1 f.; Eur. *Suppl.* 419 f.; Her. 3.81.2 (both critical). For the comparison: Thuc. 1.70.

²³ Cf. DK on *Vorsokratiker* 86 B17, where it is correctly emphasized (as in Pohlenz 1937.123 note 1) that Herodotus hardly needed to borrow this from the sophist Hippias.

²⁴ All this assumes even greater urgency if some surprising analogies between Mardonios' and Xerxes' arguments and those used in Thucydides' Sicilian debate (6.1 ff.) are not merely accidental: see below note 40.

III

All the stories discussed so far contain elements which could have reminded, and may indeed have been intended to remind, the audience of their own concerns and experiences. Whether or not they picked up the analogies in every instance, there seems to be a strong tendency on Herodotus' part to transcend in this way the lower chronological limit of his work. This is made even more plausible by a small number of explicit remarks referring to events or developments of the period after the Persian Wars.²⁵ Obvious cases include an allusion to Athens' eagerness to take over the hegemony from Sparta in 478/77 (8.3.2; see below after n. 44) and the following observation: in 490, when the Persian armada that was to be defeated at Marathon had passed the sanctuary of Apollo at Delos, the island was shaken by an earthquake.

the first and last shock that has been felt to this day. And truly this was a prodigy, whereby the god warned men of the evils that were coming upon them. For in the three subsequent generations of Darius the son of Hystaspes, Xerxes the son of Darius, and Artaxerxes the son of Xerxes, more woes befell Greece than in the twenty generations preceding Darius; woes caused in part by the Persians, but in part arising from the contentions among their own leading powers (*koryphaioi*) fighting about the domination (*archē*) of Greece (6.98.2).

The topical relevance of this statement is significantly enhanced by a note in Thucydides (2.8.3) that shortly before the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War Delos was shaken by an earthquake — "a thing that had never happened before in the memory of the Hellenes. This was said and thought to be a sign of impending events." Who is correct we shall never know.²⁶

²⁵ Listed by W. Schmid and O. Stählin, *Geschichte der griechischen Literatur* I.2 (Munich 1934, rep. 1959) 590 note 9. The references to the time of the Peloponnesian War (6.98.2; 7.235.2-3; 9.73.3) are discussed by Fornara 1971a.32-34; 1981.149-51.

²⁶ French 1972.21 assumes retrojection by Herodotus; contra: Gomme 1945-81, vol. II ad loc., who, however, points out that Pindar, fr. 87 (= 33c Snell-Maehler), dated by Wilamowitz not before 472, calls Delos *akinēton teras*.

This finally leads me to my thesis concerning the specific nature of political thought in Herodotus. I believe that Herodotus' political thinking is closely comparable to that of the tragic poets and that it stands in a long tradition of such thinking that goes all the way back to Homer's epics.²⁷ Like tragedy, Herodotus' historiography is a complicated fabric woven of many strands, dealing with many issues and serving many purposes. The political component on which I am focusing here addresses the author's contemporaries in their function as citizens of Greek cities during the Peloponnesian War. Through occasional explicit comments but mostly by implication and association, the historian of the past frequently interacts with the present and encourages his audience to do the same. The tragic poet occasionally uses myth to analyze and interpret for his audience some of the most urgent political problems they are facing in their capacity as citizens. In a similar way, I suggest, Herodotus uses the history of the past to shed light on contemporary political issues. Both the tragedians and Herodotus deal with such issues through a medium that is not only and not a priori political, and through a subject matter that is distant in time and often in place and not directly related to the present.²⁸ They do it not through abstract analysis but through dramatic narrative, discourse between actors, and the voice of a party not directly involved (the chorus and the historian himself). Both intend to educate their audience and, I would think, increase the political awareness and responsibility of their fellow citizens and fellow Greeks by conveying strong messages; they do that not, however, by giving direct advice or taking a stand pro or contra certain decisions or policies, but by demonstrating the preconditions, implications, and consequences of such policies, by putting them into a much broader framework, by bringing into the open and making available for public discussion aspects that tend to be suppressed and overlooked in the emotional and polemical atmosphere of actual politics. In the case of Herodotus, the history of the past, culminating in the great war between Persia

²⁷ See, for Homer and tragedy, my two forthcoming chapters in *Handbuch der politischen Ideen* (note 4 above). For excellent interpretations of political thought in tragedy see Meier 1980.144-246 on Aeschylus' *Eumenides* and, on the *Prometheus*, id., "Zeus nach dem Umbruch: Aischylos und die politische Theologie der Griechen," forthcoming in a collection of his essays with the same title.

²⁸ Aeschylus' dealing with history in the *Persians* offers a good example of how history very quickly becomes myth.

and the Greeks, offers a large number of examples and patterns that, if interpreted and presented accordingly by the historian, can assume immediate relevance for the understanding of contemporary developments. C. Fornara suggested that Herodotus "is interpreting the past by the present."²⁹ I would add that he is also interpreting the present by the past. Herodotus thereby assumes the traditional role of the epic, lyric and tragic poet, that of being the educator of his people both in a moral and political sense.

To what extent, however, are we really dealing here with "political thought" and not just with occasional expressions of "political views"? Let me try a preliminary definition, both negatively and positively. Herodotus does not deal with political issues in an abstract or theoretical way; he is not exclusively concerned with the political aspects of history; these political aspects frequently and over long stretches disappear from center stage; in his thought political, ethical and religious aspects often cannot be sharply separated. What all this means is that "the political" for him is neither a completely autonomous nor a predominant category. On the other hand, Herodotus does think politically because he not only pays close attention to political causation in history but, more importantly, through his history addresses some of the central political concerns of his audience and time; the *testimonia* for such political thought, though scattered through his work, attest a consistent political concept that is essential both for his interpretation of history and his judgment of contemporary politics; and such political thought serves an educational or admonitory purpose. I should think that to an ancient Greek and particularly to an Athenian my thesis would appear quite natural, much less problematic than it might seem to a modern critic. What can I say in support of it?

First, both C. Fornara and C. Meier have argued (although with different focus) that concern about contemporary developments played a decisive role in turning Herodotus into an historian.³⁰ In a world of *poleis* that were so highly politicized such concern, I think, must have been political to a considerable extent. Second, as was just said, in all aspects of my definition, I see close parallels between Herodotus' political thought and that of tragedy; the better we understand the latter (and much still needs to be done here), the better we

²⁹ Fornara 1971.88.

³⁰ Fornara 1971.75-90; Meier 1980.422-34, esp. 427 ff.

shall grasp the former. Third, there seems to be a strong possibility that the *Histories* were initially known through oral presentation (whatever the exact form and audience of such presentations and whatever the relationship between them and the written form which we have).³¹ If so, although it is written in prose, this work shares with poetry from Homer to tragedy not only the oral transmission of most of its material but also the form of oral presentation. We should not be surprised if it also assumed some of the intentions and functions traditionally attributed to, and naturally expected from, poetry by the Greek audience.

Fourth, at least for Athens, we know from tragedy and comedy and from explicit remarks by Thucydides that the authors expected alertness and sophistication on the part of their public.³² Athenian citizens were trained from early on to assess the arguments of political and legal rhetoric in assembly and lawcourts and to grasp a wide variety of poetic allusions and moral and political "messages" in the annual theatrical performances. They had learned to understand the contemporary relevance of mythical paradigms presented to them on stage and to recognize the importance of new variations of traditional myths introduced with specific intentions by the poets. To them it was not difficult but normal to extrapolate beyond what was explicitly said, to connect what they saw and heard with what they knew and were concerned about otherwise, and to draw their own conclusions. Herodotus, I suggest, could expect his listeners or readers to follow his stories with the same readiness to extrapolate, to grasp implications, and to understand the topical relevance of much of what he had to tell them. The historian therefore could consciously work with such expectations; I believe that much of Herodotus' work was written with precisely this in mind.

³¹ Among others, Momigliano 1978.64-6 and Fornara 1971.59 f. take Thuc. 1.22.4 (*agōnismos es to parachrēma akouein*: a "declamation intended for a momentary display") as referring to, or including, Herodotus. (Fornara, however, tells me that he now thinks that Thucydides refers to epideictic oratory.) For a discussion of oral presentations by Herodotus see, e.g., Pohlenz 1937.208-11; Momigliano 1978.61-6 and, in this volume, the contributions of Dewald and Nagy; a different view in Flory 1980.

³² Cf., e.g., Thuc. 2.40.2 (for political experience); 3.38.4-6 (critical, but highly informative); Aristoph. *Ekkli.* 173-244. Cf., for tragedy, Meier 1980.214 ff.; for tragedy and Herodotus, Fornara 1971.61, 64-66; for Herodotus, Strasburger in Marg 1982.575, 582.

Fifth, Herodotus mentions three purposes of his historical writing, two of them in the preface (to preserve from decay the remembrance of great deeds and to record why Greeks and barbarians fought against each other). These are the headings for Herodotus' ethnographic-antiquarian and historical intentions. The third purpose is introduced a little later (1.5.3-4):

after which I shall go forward with my history (*logos*), describing equally the greater and the lesser cities. For the cities which were formerly great, have most of them become insignificant; and such as are at present powerful, were weak in the olden time. I shall therefore discourse equally of both, convinced that human happiness never continues long in one stay.

Herodotus' concept of history is based on this pattern of rise and fall, growth and shrinking of cities, peoples and rulers, as it is illustrated in the story of Croesus. Human success and happiness (*eudaimonia*) is not stable, success inevitably is followed by failure; as Croesus says to Cyrus, "there is a wheel on which the affairs of men revolve, and its movement forbids the same man to be always fortunate" (1.107.2).³³ This, I suggest, is the programmatic heading for Herodotus' topical interpretation of history, both in a moral and political sense. Although much of his work deals with the rise and fall of great empires and monarchs, in this heading (1.5) he speaks of cities (*astea*), not of empires (*archai*). For his *Histories* are composed with regard to, and supposed to be meaningful for, the Greek cities and their citizens, particularly, I should think, for those that were big and thought of themselves as fortunate in his own time, and that were doomed to become small again at some point in the future.

IV

The main problem with my thesis is that we are not ancient Greeks and Athenians. We all know how difficult it is on the basis of

³³ A characteristic adaptation of this motif is to be found in 9.27.4: "But what boots it to speak of these ancient matters? A nation which was brave in those days might have grown cowardly since, and a nation of cowards then might now be valiant." Cf. by contrast Thuc. 1.73.2.

our limited evidence to gain a reasonable degree of certainty concerning facts and events. As soon as we deal with political concepts that are not explicitly designated as such, with an author's thoughts and intentions, and the audience's perceptions and reactions, the case becomes nearly hopeless. I am perfectly aware, therefore, that all I can present here are possibilities,³⁴ stimuli to continue to think about something that may be important. Let me now face some of the difficulties.

First, the vehicle for such topical interpretation of history is provided by the speeches and the dramatic arrangement and elaboration of events. Even more than in Thucydides, there are strong reasons to consider Herodotus' speeches expressions of his own thoughts; they serve his specific purposes of illumination and interpretation.³⁵ Unlike in Thucydides (at least so we think), however, the same intention has also caused in Herodotus a significant amount of factual elaboration. Because we have very little independent evidence, we are only able to prove this in a few cases.³⁶ Those few cases, however, should warn us that even the historical reconstruction (at least of the more remote past) might to an extraordinary extent be subordinated to the purpose of exposing the topical relevance of history.³⁷

Second, in trying to understand this particular aspect of Herodotus' work we need to know what were the main political concerns of his audience. If the *Histories* were intended to be similarly attractive and relevant to audiences in many places — which no one will seriously doubt³⁸ — Herodotus had to focus not on local problems but on the

³⁴ Cf. Strasburger in Marg 1982.607.

³⁵ See, e.g., Solmsen 1943 and 1944; for the position and function of the "warner speeches," see Bischoff 1932.19, 31 ff. *passim*.

³⁶ See, e.g., for the story of Solon and Croesus, Regenbogen 1930; for the Maeandrius episode, Raaflaub 1985.139 f.

³⁷ This concerns both the selection and presentation or elaboration of the material. For the former, note, e.g., the remarkable lack of interest in expansion as such; conquests receive close attention only when they either lead to an ethnographic excursion or to the demise of the conqueror. As for the latter, the problems may be comparable more closely than we wish to those posed by Livy's reconstruction of early Roman history in books I-X. For a discussion, see the contributions by T. J. Cornell, myself, and particularly J. von Ungern-Sternberg in Raaflaub (ed.) 1986. Unfortunately, the question of the topical relevance of Livy's early books for his own time has rarely been recognized as a serious problem in modern scholarship.

³⁸ Cf. Fornara 1971, chapters III and IV, esp. p. 74. Momigliano 1978.60 f. claims this for all fifth-century historiography.

common political concerns of all Greeks in his own time. These we know, though exclusively from the Athenian perspective, nevertheless well enough. They are the tensions and war between the two great power blocs in Greece and the internal strife between "democratic" and "oligarchic" factions in many cities. If my thesis is correct these concerns would have to dominate the outlook of Herodotus and be mirrored in his specific interpretation of history. We are entitled therefore to read him with the contemporary political discussions in mind, as we know them for the period before and during the Archidamian War³⁹ from Thucydides, Euripides, Aristophanes and the Sophists.

Third, we have to make sure that what we compare is really comparable. If the closest or only *comparandum* to a Herodotean term or thought is found only in Thucydides, and there possibly in only one speech, we should, for obvious reasons, be cautious.⁴⁰ If, however, parallels can be found in a number of contemporary sources, attesting widespread use in a definable period, we may feel more confident. The examples given earlier fit into this category.

³⁹ Or even, if Fornara is correct (see next note), down to c. 415.

⁴⁰ Two examples: (a) In explaining why no man should be declared happy before his end, Solon emphasizes the concept of self-sufficiency, *autarkeia*. "As there is no country which contains within it all that it needs (*katarkeei panta heōutēi parechousa*), but each, while it possesses some things, lacks others, and the best country is that which contains the most; so no single human being is complete in every respect (*sōma autarkes*) — something is always lacking" (1.32.8). There is in Herodotus no other reference to this concept, but Thucydides indicates that it played an important role in Pericles' presentation of Athens' unique greatness: in the funeral oration he characterizes Athens as *autarkestatē polis* (2.36.3) and the Athenian citizen as endowed with a *sōma autarkes* (2.41.1) which is proved wrong by the plague (2.51.3). There is reason to believe that such political use of *autarkeia* had come up just around that time and that it was specific for Athens (cf. Raaflaub 1984.59-66; 1985.237-41). If knowledge of this concept was widespread at least in Athens, Herodotus' audience might well have noticed his determined refutation of such claims.

(b) The description of Xerxes' crown council contains a fair number of elements that remind us of the Athenian debate about the Sicilian expedition in Thucydides VI. Apart from the similar role played by the Greek exiles at the Persian court (Her. 7.6.2-5) and the ambassadors from Egesta in the Athenian assembly (Thuc. 6.6.2), both enterprises are justified with a limited and politically plausible motive but aim at an ulterior and far bigger goal: for Xerxes it is revenge for injustice committed by Athens as opposed to the conquest of all of Europe (Her. 7.8a.2-γ.3), for the Athenians support for an ally as opposed to the conquest of all of Sicily (Thuc. 6.6.1). In both cases it is a young and hotheaded leader who is driven by excessive personal ambition and

Fourth, every historian tends to describe the history of the past not only with the terminology and conceptions but also on the basis of the experiences of his own time. We are, therefore, accustomed to expect a certain amount of retrojection in ancient historians; we know that they tend to reconstruct the past on the model of the present. How can we be sure that such retrojection of terms and ideas as we are talking about here is not “innocently” intended to “flesh out” the historical narrative and make it more plausible⁴¹ but rather purposely designed to reveal the topical relevance of history? Apart from the politicization of, and general expectation in, Herodotus’ audience described before, we can only rely on some of his direct statements, on some remarks that, although they are made by historical persons, obviously refer to contemporary situations, and on the frequency and coherence of some motifs that were both essential for Herodotus’ historical interpretation and meaningful to a contemporary audience. The accumulation of such cases would seem significant in itself. It is time therefore to look at some other passages and to show how they fit into a coherent political concept.

V

Stories with topical relevance can be divided into two main categories: (a) stories or statements that by contrast or analogy provoke

tries to persuade his emotional, inexperienced, unknowledgeable and ambitious sovereign to begin an enormous campaign of conquest in a distant country (Mardonios: Her. 7.6.1; Alcibiades: Thuc. 6.15.2). Both represent the campaign as easy by reviling the enemy as weak, disunited and hardly likely to offer serious resistance (Her. 7.9; Thuc. 6.17). In both cases the self-perpetuating dynamics of imperialism offer an important argument (Her. 7.8a.1-2., 9γ; Thuc. 6.18.3, 6 f.), and both times the advocates insist that the choice is only between attacking the enemy first or being attacked by the enemy (“them or us”: Her. 7.11.2 f.; Thuc. 6.6.2, 18.3). If we could consider these parallels not only substantial and close enough but also intentional echoes of a real debate — which in turn means, if Thucydides indeed gives us the substance of a real debate — then we would not only gain a *terminus post quem* to confirm the late date of publication suggested by Fornara 1971a and 1981, but also a much more precise historical date for Herodotus’ work and with that a much more urgent reason for his particular political message. As it is, there are too many “ifs” that cannot be substantiated.

⁴¹ This aspect is examined by French 1972, cf. esp. 26 f.

associations with the present (such as the tyrant stories),⁴² and (b) stories that have the same effect by using arguments or specific and highly charged terms familiar to the audience from contemporary debates (such as we found them in Xerxes' crown council). To begin with the latter category, when Herodotus describes both Sparta and Athens as dominating large parts of Greece long before the Persian Wars, he goes far beyond any artistic need to focus on the Greek protagonists from the very beginning. The terms he uses are obviously anachronistic and applicable only to a much later period. "Athens was most mightily lord over the others" (5.97.1: *edynasteue megiston*) could only be said when the Athenian empire had emerged,⁴³ and "most of the Peloponnesus was subjected by the Spartans" (1.68.6: *katestrammenē*) reflects a polemical interpretation of Spartan leadership in the Peloponnesian League hardly to be expected long before the Peloponnesian War.⁴⁴ Or think of Miltiades' words to the polemarch Kallimachos before Marathon: if you vote for risking a battle "your country will be free and the first city in Greece" (6.109.6; cf. 3). Only from hindsight could it be obvious that this victory would result in Athens' rise to greatest power. Such remarks seem to me to serve as "pointers" intended to make the audience aware of the connections between "ancient history" and the present.

At the beginning of the war against Xerxes, the historian mentions Athens' ambition to command the fleet.

Since the allies objected, the Athenians gave in; for there was nothing they had so much at heart as the salvation of Greece, and they knew that, if they quarrelled among themselves about the command, Greece would be brought to ruin. Herein they judged rightly; for internal strife (*stasis emphylos*) is a thing as much worse than war carried on by a united people, as war itself is worse than peace. The Athenians, therefore, being so persuaded, did not push their claims, but waived them, so long as they were in such

⁴² Fornara 1971.61 ff. assumes a similar technique on the historian's part (albeit for mainly artistic and dramatic purposes) and compares it with the active mental participation expected from the audience at tragic performances; cf. also *ibid.* 81 ff.

⁴³ For *dynasteia* see J. Martin 1978.

⁴⁴ Cf. Thuc. 1.144.2 for the Athenian point of view; 5.17.2, 22.1, 25.1, 27.2, 29.3 for allied dissatisfaction during the war; cf. Raaflaub 1985.158 f., 253 f.

great need of aid from the other Greeks. And they afterwards showed their motive; for at the time when the Persians had been driven from Greece, and were now threatened by the Greeks in their own country, they took occasion of the insolence of Pausanias to deprive the Spartans of their leadership. This, however, happened later (8.3).

Add to this strong statement the other one, mentioned earlier, about the evil brought upon the Greeks by their leaders (*koryphaioi*) fighting with each other about the *archē* (6.98.2), and Mardonios' sarcastic remark about the plain stupidity of the Greeks who were determined not only to fight their wars with methods that guaranteed the highest possible losses but to decide their differences through battles at all rather than negotiations although they all spoke the same language (7.9β). Obviously, while composing his history, Herodotus had in mind not only Athens' rise to power but also the destructive antagonism between the two leading powers and their detrimental inclination primarily to be concerned with their own interests.⁴⁵

It is likely therefore that similar associations were encouraged even without specific hints. We think of the debate between Tegea and Athens about who was to command the left wing at Plataea (9.26 f.): the Athenians argue with their mythical and historical merits in the manner known from the funeral orations, the tragedies utilizing the motif of the suppliants,⁴⁶ and the justification of their empire by the Athenian ambassadors in Sparta (Thuc. 1.73 f.). We also think of the unfortunate tendency among Athenian leaders immediately to exploit their victories to their own advantage and to the detriment of other Greeks: Miltiades' campaign against Paros (6.133-36) and Themistocles' efforts to extort money from several islands (8.111 f.) both anticipate the future policy of their city.⁴⁷

Once we are used to thinking along those lines,⁴⁸ we, like Herodotus' audience, are no longer able to overlook the profound and

⁴⁵ What is said of Athens in 8.3 applies in similar ways to Sparta: compare 8.141 f. with 9.8.2.

⁴⁶ As Euripides' *Heraclidae* and *Suppliants* show, the motif was highly popular precisely in the early phase of the war.

⁴⁷ Strasburger in Marg 1982.602; Immerwahr 1966.200 note 29, and others have pointed out similarities between 8.111 and the Melian Dialogue.

⁴⁸ This seems to me crucial; then possibly even a seemingly innocent comment like that on Themistocles' program to build 200 triremes for the war against Aegina could

tragic irony that it is the later *polis tyrannos* that is justly praised above Sparta for its decisive contribution to saving the liberty of Hellas in the historian's famous personal statement in 7.139, and that so admirably defends those very principles in refusing the advantageous offer of a separate peace by Mardonios in the winter of 480/79 (8.136-44).⁴⁹ To the Spartans who cry out in alarm: "it would surely be absolutely intolerable that the Athenians who always in the past appeared to have preserved the freedom of many, should now turn out to be responsible for bringing all other Greeks into slavery" (142.3), they respond: your fear is understandable but, being so familiar with our way of thinking, you should have known better; "not all the gold that the whole earth contains nor the most beautiful and fertile of all lands would bribe us to medize and enslave Hellas" (144.1).

There is no reason to doubt the core of the story, the peace offer by Mardonios. He knew there was no sense in trying Sparta. Athens might be different. After all, her "colony" Miletus earlier had collaborated with the Lydians and Persians in exchange for privileged status, several individual Athenians were seeking the King's favor, and the city's determination to resist had not always been iron-clad.⁵⁰ Indeed, the historian points out, despite their admirable principles and speeches, the idea of collaborating with the Persians was not unthinkable to the Athenians (9.6-11). After all, as it turned out later, they did have a lot in common with the Persians. But what about the Spartans? Although there never was any doubt about their commitment to resistance, they did not really want to fight for anything but their own territory. Herodotus insists on this aspect several times:⁵¹ to the Spartans, the defense of the liberty of the Greeks was only a means to secure their own liberty and protect their own interests. According to Thucydides' careful presentation of the motives of the Spartans at the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War, this was precisely the constellation of the late thirties.⁵² Wasn't the audience supposed to

assume higher significance: "the outbreak of that war at that time saved Hellas for it forced the Athenians to become a naval power" (7.144.2); yes, and that same fleet enabled them to subject the Greeks to their power!

⁴⁹ Cf. Fornara 1971.81 ff.

⁵⁰ Miletus: Her. 1.141.4, 143.1; Themistocles himself tried to secure the King's goodwill: 8.75 with 109.5-110.3; for doubts about Athenian determination, see Raaflaub 1985.99 f.

⁵¹ Cf., e.g., 7.139.3 f., 235 with 9.7 f.; cf. also 8.49, 57, 71 f., 74.

⁵² Cf. Raaflaub 1985.248-51.

think of that? Equally, of course, they would not fail to notice the contemporary relevance of the "constitutional debate" and various other passages describing Athenian democracy rather unfavorably.⁵³

VI

Through these "pointers" the past remains connected with the present in the audience's minds; time and time again their attention is drawn to the tragedy of Athenian imperialism and Greek infighting. It is now time to see how all this ties in with Herodotus' political message that pervades the entire work. All the relevant motifs occur already in the story of Croesus, a story that, as many have noticed, is meant to serve as a paradigm and therefore is elaborated with greatest care. First, Herodotus marks his historically firm point of departure: "I shall proceed at once to point out the person (Croesus) of whom I know that he was the first to commit deeds of injustice (*adika erga*) against the Greeks" (1.5.3). This statement is remarkable for its emphasis on injustice done to the Greeks; such injustice consisted of permanently subjecting their cities and forcing them to pay tribute (6.2); "before Croesus' reign all Greeks were free" (6.3). However, wars between Greeks and between Greeks and Croesus' predecessors had happened frequently before; Greek territories had been raided, cities taken and sacked, even populations expelled. All this is mentioned without negative comment by Herodotus, because such wars corresponded to the traditional pattern of warfare familiar to the Greeks since Homeric times. But to permanently rob a city of its independence

⁵³ 3.80-82; 1.59.4-6; 5.97 with 49.7 f. are the obvious passages. There is much more, however, which must be dealt with elsewhere. Cf., e.g., Strasburger in Marg 1982.587 ff.; Legrand 1932.30 f., 104 ff.; Edelmann 1975. The "constitutional debate," generally recognized as an important piece of political thought in Herodotus (cf. note 3, above), deserves our special attention. Although there is much controversy about its sources and date of composition (cf. the survey in Apffel 1957.9-23 and, among more recent contributions, Ostwald 1969.178 ff.; Connor 1971.199-206), certain parts of Darius' speech (3.82.4) are "most likely to have been developed only after the tendency to concentrate leadership in a single man was observed and criticized, hence during Pericles' career, probably the latter part of it, or even later" (Connor 1971.205). This problem is closely connected with another one, the beginning of the theory of *metabolē politeiōn*, which is reflected in 3.82.4 and must have been meaningful for the contemporaries of Alcibiades (cf. Thucydides 6.27-29, 53-61), if not earlier. This too will be discussed elsewhere.

was an entirely different matter; this provoked strong censure which will not have escaped the audience. We remember here that tyranny is the most unjust of all things and, more generally, that it is considered unjust to desire others' property or land. The king of the Ethiopians accuses Cambyses of not being a just man (*anēr dikaios*) "for were he so, he had not coveted a land which is not his own nor brought slavery on a people who never committed any injustice against him" (3.21.2; cf. 1.204.1); we understand: unprovoked subjection of others is the greatest of all injustices! Xerxes' *hybris* consists precisely of intending to enslave all the Greeks, whether they had, like the Athenians, committed injustice against the Persians or not (7.8γ.3).

Second, Croesus is the first to receive the warning about the instability of human life, happiness, success and power. He personally points out to Cyrus that Solon's message is generally valid by telling him how whatever Solon had said to him "had fallen out exactly as he foreshowed, although it was nothing that especially concerned him, but applied to all mankind alike, and most to those who seemed to themselves happy" (1.86.5). This warning, therefore, is meant to be relevant for the historian's audience as well; it is repeated frequently thereafter, to Polycrates who considered himself particularly *eutychēs* (3.39 ff.),⁵⁴ to Cyrus (1.207.1 f.) and to Xerxes (7.10ε, 46). It is worth mentioning here that Herodotus uses the figure of the warner very consciously — it obviously is his own device, whatever models he may have found for it. For example, in warning Cyrus not to attack the Massagetae, Croesus remembers Solon's wise but general remarks (1.32, 86) and applies them specifically to the conqueror who is about to overreach himself (1.207.2).⁵⁵ After crossing the Araxes, Cyrus sees in a dream Darius with wings on his shoulders, one covering Asia, the other Europe (1.209). He interprets that dream wrongly, and Herodotus' explicit explanation is simplistic (1.210.1). Implicitly this dream links this episode with Darius' attempt to conquer Europe; what is said here is to be remembered there. And indeed, Artabanos, as a warner the successor to Croesus, recalls that early episode when he is forced by another dream to abandon his opposition against Xerxes' plan to conquer Europe: he has seen many enterprises by great powers (*megala prēgmata*) thwarted by smaller ones; he knows how bad it is

⁵⁴ Cf. Bischoff 1932.76 f.

⁵⁵ This is to be connected with Cyrus' motives for the war: 1.204.2.

to submit to *pleonexia* (*pollōn epithymeein*), because he remembers all the failures of Xerxes' predecessors (7.18.2).

Third, Croesus is the first of all the great Eastern monarchs who are known to have subjected Greek cities, to have suffered from *pleonexia*, the self-perpetuating dynamics of expansionism, the overreaching of the conqueror. Herodotus gives several reasons why Croesus wanted to wage war against Cyrus: his wish to conquer more land and to avenge his brother-in-law, the Median King Astyages who had been overthrown by Cyrus, the ambiguous oracle from Delphi (1.73.1, 75.2, 87.2-4, 90.3), and fear of Cyrus' growing power (1.46.1).⁵⁶ The desire for more (*prosktēsasthai*: 73.1; cf. 29.1) seems to be considered decisive by the historian.⁵⁷ Croesus is then specifically warned by a wise Lydian, Sandanis, not to attack the Persians; he ignores this warning, crosses the Halys, loses the war and his empire and barely escapes with his life (1.53 ff., 71-91). Like Croesus, all the Eastern empire builders are presented as eventually failing because they are insatiable in their appetite for ever more conquest and fall victim to their *hybris* and *adikia*. They all ignore warnings of a wise and experienced advisor, and their act of *hybris*, of overstepping natural and god-set limits, is symbolized by their crossing a river, ocean, or desert. Cyrus, warned by Croesus, crosses the Araxes in order to subject the Masagetae and loses battle and life (1.204-14). Cambyses plans to conquer the Ethiopians at the very end of the world, loses a large part of his army in the desert, is forced to abolish his campaign and soon dies, not without having been warned again by Croesus (3.25 ff.). Darius, warned by Artabanos, crosses the Hellespont and the Danube in order to subject the Scythians, fails completely and barely escapes with part of his army and his life (4.1-4, 83-144). No more need be said about Xerxes.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ This again may be a "pointer": Croesus heard that Cyrus had destroyed the empire of Astyages, "and that the Persians were becoming daily more powerful. This led him to consider with himself whether he could somehow, before the Persians became too powerful, destroy their growing power." According to Thucydides, this was the deepest and truest reason (*alēthestatē prophasis*) that caused the Spartans to go to war with Athens in 432/31 (1.23.6, 88).

⁵⁷ Cf. Bischoff 1932.35-37.

⁵⁸ The story of Polycrates, elaborated as carefully as that of Croesus, fits into this scheme too. He was warned by Amasis (3.40-44) and, at the critical juncture, by seers, friends and a dream of his daughter (3.124), ignored all this advice, went across the ocean to Asia and was killed (125). Furthermore, Polycrates' story can be seen as

Fourth, Croesus is the first to receive a specific kind of warning. The Persians, he is told by Sandanis (1.71.2 f., cf. 89),

wear leathern trousers, and have all their other garments of leather; they feed not on what they like, but on what they can get from a soil that is sterile and unkindly. . . . If, then, you conquer them, what can you get from them, seeing that they have nothing at all?

The *hybris* of all the conquerors in Herodotus' *Histories* is made particularly conspicuous because the ultimate *pleonexia* that leads to their failure is aimed at countries and peoples that are either exotic and unreachable, or poor and much less civilized. The former applies to the Ethiopians (3.17.2-24) and Scythians (4.83, 120 ff.; 7.10α.2), the latter to the Persians in comparison to the Lydians (1.71, 89), the Masagetae (1.207.6 f., 211) and the Scythians. In either case, little can be gained by conquering such a country but much can be lost by failing to succeed (cf. 1.71.3). Imperialism in this last and self-destructive form has shed its cloak of economic and political or moral justification and appears in its undisguised form, it has become a purpose in itself,⁵⁹ which is underlined even more by Cambyses' and Xerxes' intention to extend their empire to the end of the world (3.17.1; 7.8).

The "poor land motif" receives extraordinary attention in the very last chapter in which Cyrus himself appears as the sage advisor of his people (9.122). There the motif is linked with theories that were developed in Herodotus' own time and established a close relationship between the climate and fertility of a region and the features and

yet another "pointer," connecting tyranny and the *polis tyrannos*. He had seized power through a revolt and then eliminated his co-regents (3.39). He was famous for his success (3.40-44), his great public buildings (3.60), and his maritime power: "Polycrates was the first of mere human birth who conceived the design of gaining the empire of the sea, and aspired to rule over Ionia and the islands" (3.122). He even dreamed of ruling over all of Greece (122.4). If this reminded the audience of the restlessly expanding maritime power of Athens, then Polycrates' end as a result of blind *pleonexia* could be perceived as ominously relevant, too.

⁵⁹ Cyrus wants to prove his super-humanness and unfailing luck (1.204.2); Darius wants to punish the Scythians for their conquest of Asia which, however, happened long before the Persians even rose to power (4.1.1 f.); Darius and Xerxes mostly have to prove their worth by following the example of their conquering ancestors (3.134; 7.8), i.e., they have to conquer for the sake of conquering.

character of its inhabitants: mild and even climates and fertile soil with rich vegetation produce soft and unwarlike people; rough and changing climates and poor soil produce tough, agile, adventurous and warlike men.⁶⁰ Croesus advises Cyrus to apply this theory in order to control the Lydians (1.155.4). In the last chapter Cyrus suggests to his Persians not to move down from their rugged mountains into one of the rich countries conquered by them. He told them, Herodotus says,

they might do so, if they liked — but he warned them not to expect in that case to continue rulers, but to prepare for being ruled by others — soft countries gave birth to soft men — there was no region which produced very delightful fruits, and at the same time men of a warlike spirit (9.122.3).

H. Bischoff and J. Cobet have emphasized the topical relevance of these ideas.⁶¹ For despite Cyrus' warning the Persians did become softened by their luxurious lifestyle, and eventually they met their destiny at the hands of tough warriors carving their livelihood out of the poor soil of Greece. In several passages Herodotus stresses the contrast between Persian luxuriousness and Greek poverty and simplicity (cf., e.g., 8.26.3; 7.102.1), most impressively in an anecdote inserted after the victory of Plataea which describes Pausanias' reaction to the wealth left by the Persians in their camp (9.80 f.): "I sent for you, O Greeks, to show you the folly of this Median, who, when he enjoyed such fare as this, must needs come here to rob us of our poverty" (9.82).

Again we are invited to extrapolate: the Persians, once a tough people in a rugged land, had risen to power and domination, and eventually been softened by their wealth; they had then suffered a crushing defeat by the Greeks, a poor people in a rugged country. Some of those same Greeks had then assumed imperial power and domination and gained wealth beyond their dreams.⁶² They too, it must be expected, would eventually become soft and lose their bite.⁶³

⁶⁰ Cf. Hippocrates, *Airs, Waters, Places* 12, 16, 23 f.

⁶¹ Bischoff 1932.78-83 = Marg 1982.681-87; Cobet 1971, esp. 172-76.

⁶² Cf., e.g., Thuc. 2.36.3, 38.2; Ps. Xen. *Ath. Pol.* 2.7; Hermippus, fr. 63 Edm.

⁶³ Cf. Cobet 1971.175 n.704 who refers to 8.111 as the beginning of the next cycle of confrontations between rich and poor, powerful and weak: Themistocles' and Athens' (111.2) attack against Andros is presented as equally senseless as those of the Eastern monarchs against poor countries. For hints at beginning Athenian imperialism, cf. also Immerwahr 1966.200 note 29; 322 note 40.

Here again, the pattern of rise and fall, revealed in the study of history, assumes high topical relevance.

VII

In conclusion, I have argued that through his presentation of the history of the past Herodotus encourages his audience to reflect on matters of great contemporary importance. He does this occasionally through explicit comments aimed at contemporary events and problems, but mostly through "pointers," stories that in various ways, through contrast or analogy, familiar thoughts and arguments, and specifically "loaded" terms, connect the past with the present and remind the audience of their own concerns. I have tried to show why these "pointers" can be considered intentional, not mere retrojections for artistic reasons, in what ways they were supposed to be meaningful, and why the historian could expect his audience to be able to recognize them and follow the interaction between past and present.

These "pointers" mostly deal with the rise of Athens to imperial power after the Persian Wars, with the corresponding loss of liberty by so many Greek cities — which stood in stark contrast to the great achievement of the Persian Wars —, and with the power struggle between Athens and Sparta that was threatening the existence and happiness of all Greeks. Finally, tying all this together, we followed a set of motifs that are frequently repeated, varied, and carefully elaborated: history presents itself to its student as a sequence of rises and declines of great powers and powerful leaders; human happiness, success and power are unstable and unlikely to last long; the higher a person or a country reach the sooner will they fall; it is unjust and hybriatic to overstep one's bounds, to rob others of their land and liberty; imperialism, because it is unjust, will end in disaster; even the greatest power can be brought down by a much smaller and poorer people driven by the right spirit.

This set of thoughts, though intimately connected with moral and religious concerns and frequently expressed in such terms, nevertheless is in essential ways political because it is gained from the observation of the political history of political entities (that is, the focus here is not primarily on families and relationships between individuals), and it is applicable to political phenomena in the present and

in the future.⁶⁴ Herodotus' political thought focuses on the rise and fall of tyrants and empires, on the formation and dissolution of power, and on the causes of what he perceives as a repetitive pattern in history. I want to emphasize again that this is not Herodotus' only concern and interest. But on the political level I think this is what it is. Of course, there are good reasons why a Greek, writing in the second half of the fifth century, should be so tremendously fascinated by and concerned about the phenomenon of power.⁶⁵

What, then, is the political message conveyed by Herodotus through his *Histories* to his contemporary audience? I think it is exactly what I tried to work out in the last section: if the hunger for power becomes excessive, if imperialism, disregarding justice and the rights of others, is pursued to the extreme and becomes a goal in itself, then disaster is inevitable. Looking at all the historical examples, one might be pessimistic: those who hold power tend to follow that path. But does it have to be that way? Are imperialism, wars between great powers or cities for ultimate domination, and the self-destruction of entire peoples inevitable?⁶⁶ I do not think Herodotus would put it that way. Unlike Thucydides, as far as I can see, he does not operate with an unchangeable law of human nature.⁶⁷ Just as the tragic hero falls not only because of circumstances and the will of the gods but to a large extent contributes himself to his own demise, so it is with Herodotus' tyrants and monarchs. None of them had to cross the fatal boundary, but none of them, with the partial exception of Xerxes, listened to the warner and was able to limit himself either. Equally, the Athenians did not have to turn their hegemony into tyranny, they did not have to rob their allies of land and liberty, they did not have to waste Melos and decide to conquer Sicily.

⁶⁴ Fornara 1971.60 f. rightly emphasizes that Herodotus was much more consciously addressing his contemporaries than Thucydides who "wrote with an eye to later generations." It seems to me, however, that Herodotus' insight was meaningful for future generations as well; cf. Strasburger in Marg 1982.604 f.: "[Man wird] Herodot auch als einem Historiker des Politischen Tiefsinn und Scharfblick zuerkennen müssen. Es war für Thukydides eine Lebensfrage, Herodot für einen Dilettanten zu halten, aber uns geziemt es, neben allem Trennenden auch zu sehen, wie nahe sie sich manchmal in der Tiefe der historischen Intuition berühren."

⁶⁵ See, e.g., Meier 1980.422-34; Raaflaub 1984.45-51.

⁶⁶ Fornara 1971.75 ff. answers this question positively and sees therein Herodotus' political message.

⁶⁷ Typically, M. Reinhold 1985 hardly mentions Herodotus.

Herodotus' own role resembles that of his warners. And with the noble Persian at Attaginus' banquet at Thebes he would probably say: "No one believes warnings, however true. Many of us . . . know our danger. . . . Verily it is the sorest of all human ills, to abound in knowledge and yet have no power over action" (9.16.4 f.). That throughout human history warners, like prophets, most often failed to be heard and accepted, does not make their views less correct, their intentions less sincere, or their messages less urgent.

Brown University