
Reconfiguring the Past: Thyrea, Thermopylae and Narrative Patterns in Herodotus

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RECONFIGURING THE PAST: THYREA, THERMOPYLAE AND NARRATIVE PATTERNS IN HERODOTUS

The recurrence of the wise–advisor, the endless parade of dynasts who destroy themselves through their self–delusion and excess, the inevitability of vengeance are all familiar motifs and story–patterns to those who read Herodotus; and indeed, scholars have long recognized the repetition of character types and story–lines in his *History*.¹ To this ever increasing list of repeated narrative patterns I would like to add another: the duel and the sole survivor in Herodotus. In particular I will examine two passages from two widely separated parts of the history that bear a striking resemblance to one another:² the contest between Argos and Sparta for the control of a place called Thyrea (1.82),³ and the Spartan defence of the pass at Thermopylae (7.175, 202–32).

But in exploring the connection between these two events, and others like them, I would like to move beyond simply providing the taxonomy of a new story pattern; I would like also to raise historiographic questions of major importance. If Herodotus tells us two remarkably similar stories that are widely separated by time and narrative space—indeed one that comes from what we may call the more legendary portion, and one from the more historical—does that mean he wants us to see the events as similar or even connected in some way? If the connection between them cannot reliably be considered “intended,” what do we make of the similarities? Was Herodotus a liar who had certain “default” settings into which his mind naturally slipped when inventing? To what degree is a robust or “thick” description of the duel useful, one that aims at recovering the cultural assumptions that shape Herodotus’ understanding and so explains perhaps the similarities between the conflicts?⁴ What, finally, can be learned by trying to see how Thyrea can be seen as a model for Thermopylae?

¹See, e.g., Bischoff, *Der Warner bei Herodot*, and Lattimore, “The Wise Adviser.” For narrative patterns, consult esp. the magisterial treatment by Immerwahr, *Form and Thought*; see also Lateiner, *Historical Method* 163–86.

²Cf. Flory’s approach, *Archaic Smile* esp. 16.

³On the problems of the precise location of Thyrea—or Cynuria, as it is sometimes called—see Cartledge, *Sparta and Lakonia* 6.

⁴Geertz, *Interpretation* 10; see also Connor, “Warfare as Symbolic Expression” 8. Consult also Bourdieu, *Outline* 79–80, on “habitus,” as well as Sourvinou–Inwood, “Reading” *Greek Culture* 244–45.

Indeed it is with this last issue that I believe most is to be gained towards a better understanding of Herodotus' overall aims in his *History*. The narrative of Thyrea reflects an unconscious tendency of Herodotus to present duels and their sole survivors as tests that require "ratification" by a second contest. The "Thyrea" pattern, when applied to the battle of Thermopylae, reveals the more famous conflict to be one that Herodotus reconfigured from a defeat into a victory. Thermopylae, after the fashion of Thyrea, was a contest that tested the national character of both Sparta and Persia; it was a battle that Herodotus tried to show the Spartans actually won; and as proof of the Spartans' victory, the true outcome of the battle was in a sense ratified by the refighting of the contest at the battle of Plataea. At the conclusion of the paper I will briefly examine the Thermopylae Ode (*PMG* 531) of Simonides and show by way of corroboration that Herodotus was not alone in reconstituting the battle as a victory.

Using Thyrea as an interpretive guide to Thermopylae will not only help illuminate this reconfiguring of the more famous battle, it will also help to shed light on two interrelated problems of more general importance to the study of Herodotus that I mentioned at the outset: the issues of narrative patterning and of Herodotus "the Liar." At issue, ultimately, is the difference between history and fiction. I will show that although Herodotus may be engaged in activity that overlaps significantly with the creation of literature, inasmuch as distinct and therefore presumably un-historical patterns for the duel can be seen to emerge in his work, he was nonetheless attempting to present what he believed were facts about real events and real persons from the past. The reconfiguring of Thermopylae, while partially a literary enterprise, must finally be understood as an attempt to capture the truths of history.⁵

THE STORY OF THYREA (HDT. 1.82)

Herodotus reports that at around the time of Croesus' request for help against the Persians (c. 547 B.C.), Sparta and Argos were in dispute (*eris*) over the borderland of Thyrea, an area that had been under Argos' control but which at some point prior to that time the Spartans had seized. The Argives, we are told, marched out to recover their lost land and were met by the Spartans. Before coming to blows, however, both

⁵Cf. Momigliano's criticisms of White's *Metahistory*: "The Rhetoric of History," 50–51.

sides decided to let the question of the ownership of the land be determined by a combat between three hundred men chosen from each side. The armies withdrew and the champions fought their duel. In the end only three men remained standing—two Argives and a Spartan named Othryadas. Thinking that they had won the contest the Argives ran back to Argos to report the news; Othryadas on the other hand despoiled the enemy dead and brought the trophies to the Spartan camp. When both armies returned the next day, another dispute (again *eris*) arose, this time over who had won the battle of the champions: the Argives claimed *they* had on the grounds of numerical superiority, the Spartans on the grounds that their opponent had relinquished the field. Another battle followed, this time between the entire armies of both cities. The struggle was hard fought, with Sparta eventually winning the day.

Herodotus provides a double coda to the story of the double battle. First he reports that the Argives from that day forward cut their hair short, having formerly worn it long, and they made a law which put under a curse anyone who wore it long; additionally they forbade their women to wear gold jewelry. Both prohibitions were to be in force until they recovered Thyrea. The Spartans, on the other hand, made a law requiring men to wear their hair long, having formerly worn it short. Herodotus then tells us that the Spartan survivor, Othryadas, ashamed to return home, alone out of all those who made up the three hundred, committed suicide in Thyrea.

The passage is intrusive, detailed, and seems to encourage an interpretation that goes beyond the “facts” it provides. Thyrea seemed to prove that the Spartans were in a position to become the masters of the Peloponnese and the champions (*prostatai*) of the Greeks. As a test of national character, the Spartans won the duel: their legendary bravery in war is emphasized both by their willingness to fight to the last man, as well as by Othryadas’ shame at returning safely to Lacedaemon. Further, the assumption of leadership status in the Peloponnese and the rest of Greece has a correlate in the physical world: Spartan hair is changed, indeed it is fashioned into a form (long as opposed to short) that would become one of the special marks of the soldier from Lacedaemon.⁶ But

⁶See David, “Sparta’s Social Hair”; cf. Cartledge, “Hoplites and Heroes” 15 and n. 39, and Loraux, “La ‘belle mort’ ” 119–20 and n. 121. Long hair also had, of course, connections with notions of heroism: see Boardman, “Heroic Haircuts,” and Harrison, “Ritual Haircuts.” See also below, p. 239.

someone familiar at all with the course of the Persian wars would be puzzled, I think, by the similarity between Thyrea and Thermopylae: three hundred Spartans, a sole-survivor, and a focus on Spartan hair custom. How can these similarities be explained, as well as Thyrea's placement in the narrative of Herodotus?

FORMAL PROBLEMS: THYREA AND ARCHAIC NARRATIVE

At the formal level, the digression on Thyrea has a ready explanation: the structure of archaic narrative. It has often been pointed out that archaic narrative does not prioritize information:⁷ rather, on the analogy of its principal stylistic mode, the so-called *lexis eiromenē*, "chains" of items that are in some way tangentially related to the main topic are presented in their entirety and are not subordinated to the overarching argument. Once Herodotus turns his attention to the state of affairs at Sparta at the time of Croesus' appeal, the passage takes on a momentum of its own, working its way to an internally motivated sense of closure (the change in societal practice, the suicide of Othryadas) that does not necessarily cohere well with the main narrative.⁸ Simply put, it seems that once launched on the story of Thyrea Herodotus feels obliged to bring up the aftermath of the battle.

There are two problems, however, that persist even after we grant that Thyrea and its aftermath find a formal explanation in the style of archaic narrative presentation. If the digression on Thyrea aims at being comprehensive, and thus more detailed than we would necessarily want or expect, why does Herodotus not bother to tell us precisely how the Argives lost the land around Thyrea in the first place? This is a detail that has baffled modern scholars for some time.⁹ Indeed, after the Spartan defeat at Hysiae some time in the middle of the seventh century B.C., the Argives were presumably the dominant power in the Peloponnese;¹⁰ consequently, the first Spartan seizure of Thyrea, which presumably took place shortly before c. 547 B.C. would have, along with the defeat of Te-

⁷See esp. Fränkel, "Stileigenheit" 86–93, and id. *Early Greek Poetry* 518–19.

⁸Cf. Asheri, *Libro I ad Hdt.* 1.82–83.

⁹See Busolt, *Griechische Geschichte* 595–96 n. 3; Kelly, "Traditional Enmity" 974, Immerwahr, *Form and Thought* 37 n. 66, and Tomlinson, *Argos* 88.

¹⁰The Argive victory over the Spartans at Hysiae (669 B.C.?) is described at Paus. 2.24.7; see Jeffery, *Archaic Greece* 139. Herodotus does not report this battle. Cf. Forrest, "Central Greece" 310.

gea, which Herodotus does in fact report shortly before (1.65–68), constituted a major turning point in Greek history that was as deserving of attention as the aftermath of the final, deciding battle. Another difficulty is the way in which the digression on Thyrea begins. Normally when Herodotus begins an excursus from his main story–line he provides a narrative marker or “directional statement”—a simple declaration of the pertinent fact that is to be amplified in the digression.¹¹ So, in the story of the Spartans’ conflict with Tegea mentioned above, their suitability as allies for Croesus is first grounded in the declaration that they were successful in their conflict with their neighbor, Tegea (1.65.1);¹² the conflict is then reported in detail, and a concluding statement recapitulates the introduction and thereby alerts the reader or perhaps auditor that the digression is at an end (1.68.6). With the case of Thyrea, we have no introductory marker; rather the vague chronological observation that about the time of Croesus’ request the Spartans were engaged in a dispute with Argos.

This imprecision draws our notice to the reason Sparta was unable to help Croesus in his hour of need and thereby the second interpretive problem. The request comes at a time when the Spartans are in conflict with Argos (1.82.1). It is presumably this fact that will help to explain why Sparta was not in a position to help Croesus; as at other times of emergency later in the history, the Spartans were preoccupied.¹³ But we learn at 1.83 that *despite* their own pressing concerns they decide to help their foreign ally. To judge from this detail, the story of Thyrea has no point whatsoever. The Spartans were about to send men to Croesus when they learned of his defeat; their preoccupation with Thyrea did not in the end delay them at all.

INTERNAL INCONSISTENCIES AND ASSOCIATIVE THINKING IN HERODOTUS

What begins as a story about a conflict between powers in the Peloponnese for borderlands ends with a discussion of changes in their cus-

¹¹ *Pace Asheri, Libro I ad loc.* Lang, *Herodotean Narrative Discourse* 6, notes that Herodotus is capable of putting digressions in after a topic sentence that makes clear the importance of a fact in the main narrative; she characterizes the Thyrea episode (*ibid.* 7), however, as one where the material is “incidental and merely relevant,” suggesting that the suspense of the main narrative (the fall of Sardis) is enough “to keep the audience involved.” She characterizes Thyrea as a “flat space” in the narrative; also as “filler.”

¹² Cf. Boedeker, “Hero Cult” 171.

¹³ Notably, Marathon: Hdt. 6.106.3.

toms and the suicide of a hero. It is precisely the conclusion of the digression that is so patently unrelated to the main narrative having to do with Croesus' appeal for help. Further, the point of the whole digression is put in jeopardy when we find out that the Spartans were prepared to help Croesus and seemed to suffer no delay because of their war with Argos. In order to understand how Thyrea functions in Herodotus' *History*—how, that is, such a bewildering array of apparently unrelated concepts can in some meaningful way be put together in a digression the purpose of which seems obscure—it is best to consider the episode and its consequences under three subheadings: a) the duel and the test of national character in Herodotus; b) hero and the mass destructions of groups; and c) stories of violence, *aitia*, and societal memory.

Thyrea and the Duel in Herodotus

Military historians often treat Herodotus' report of the combat between the Spartan and Argive champions as evidence for the existence of the duel or *monomachia*, for the most part in early Greek warfare.¹⁴ Duels are, however, common features in the legendary pasts of states in antiquity. Although the ancient historians who report them often had their doubts about their truth, they are widespread; one has only to think of the Horatii and Curiatii or the defence of Cremera by the Fabian *gens* in Livy (1.24–25 and 2.48 respectively) to see a telling parallel.¹⁵ A number of factors may account for the popularity of the single combat or combat of champions. Duels were thought to avoid massive loss of life on either or both sides: this is an explanation Herodotus seems to be aware of (9.48; cf. 7.9.β and below). Indeed, it is often pointed out that ancient Greek warfare was in general “an affair of honor” in which supremacy was to be decided without the vanquished state being entirely

¹⁴See Pritchett, *Greek State at War* 17–20, esp. 18–19 no. 9.

¹⁵Of course Livy does not know in the case of the Horatii and Curiatii who were the Romans and who the Albans (1.24.1). As for the heroism of the Fabii, the story of the three hundred is due probably to a perceived synchronism with Thermopylae: see, e.g., Ogilvie, *A Commentary on Livy* 359–60, and Wiseman, *Clio's Cosmetics* 23–24. As Ogilvie also noted, Dionysius of Halicarnassus thought the story of the Fabii was “like theatrical fiction” (πλάσματος . . . θεατρικοῦς 9.22.3).

For a list of important battles of champions, see Pritchett *Greek State at War* 17–20. It should be pointed out that the Argives and Spartans considered the possibility of holding another contest for Thyrea in 420 (Thuc. 5.41.2; cf. 5.14.4).

destroyed;¹⁶ a battle such as Sepeia (494 B.C.; cf. Hdt. 6.77–83), in which the Spartans utterly destroyed the army of Argos, was unusual.¹⁷ With this attitude in mind, it is easy to see how the legendary duel would appear natural to minds accustomed to the principles of so-called reluctant warfare—special, almost ritualized combat familiar from around the world at all periods.¹⁸ Further, it is worth noting in this context that Thyrea is a struggle for control of “liminal” or border territory—the area most often contested in ritual warfare (cf. the struggle between the Athenians and Boeotians for Oropus, which Strabo [1.4.7] compares to the conflict over Thyrea).¹⁹ The concept of such a type of ritualized and perhaps imaginary battle was appealing to the Greeks: well after duels were in actuality fought (if in fact they ever were), representations of them persisted well into the period when the manner of warfare was in fact based on the collective unit.²⁰

A number of duels or combats between groups of identical strength occur in Herodotus' *History*. Based on an examination of several of them, three points emerge that are relevant to the contest at Thyrea: duels, if intended to prevent a large scale conflict that might result in massive loss of life, often fail; further, duels are often associated with issues of determining character or worth, especially of tribes or nations; finally, duels seem to cluster around the reporting of Thermopylae and Plataea.

Thyrea is above all the story of a failed duel. As I have already pointed out, it was in all likelihood intended to resolve the dispute (*eris*) regarding the borderland between Sparta and Argos without the entire armies of both sides being engaged; inasmuch as a second dispute (*eris*) ultimately embroils all the combatants, the first combat did not achieve what it was designed to do. This failure to accomplish a resolution of a larger conflict is not unique to Thyrea. Perhaps the most famous duels in Greek literature, and ones Herodotus must have known, are the two found in the *Iliad* (3.84–380 and 7.67–312); they too do not bring to a close the greater conflict, and both end ambiguously (Paris' rescue from

¹⁶See, e.g., Rüstow and Köchly, *Kriegswesens* 154, and Adcock, *Art of War* 7. In general consult Connor, “Warfare as Symbolic Expression,” and Hanson, *The Other Greeks*, esp. Ch. 8.

¹⁷Herodotus says (6.83) that Argos lost so many men that slaves had to run the government until the sons of the slain could take over.

¹⁸Cf. Kiernan, *The Duel* Ch. 2. Cf. also Snodgrass, “Interaction” 51.

¹⁹Brelich, *Guerre, Agoni e Culti* 22–34 and 53–59; cf. id., *Paidēs e Parthenoi* 189–93.

²⁰D'Agostino, “Military Organization” 69.

Menelaus; the draw between Ajax and Hector). There are also other “failed” duels in Herodotus in addition to Thyrea.

Of the other “failed” duels Herodotus relates,²¹ the one between the Perinthians and Paeonians at the beginning of Book 5 (5.1) is the most helpful in connection with Thyrea. Herodotus states that the people of Perinthus suffered two catastrophic setbacks in their history. In the first place, they were the first people on the European side of the Hellespont to be put under the yoke of Darius. But, as he says, this was not the first time they met with such adversity at the hands of others. Herodotus explains that much earlier the Paeonians had attacked them on the advice of an oracle: it told the Paeonians to attack the Perinthians when they were challenged by them by name (*onomasti*). When the Perinthians went out to meet them in the outskirts of their city, a *monomachia* was held between the two sides. The combatants: a man, a horse and a dog from each city.²² When two of the Perinthian champions won (we are not told which ones), they rejoiced and raised a *paean* of victory. Thinking this to be their cue (παῖάν ~ Παῖον), the Paeonians attacked the celebrating Perinthians, were victorious, and destroyed almost the entire Perinthian army.

As with Thyrea, the side that eventually loses the larger conflict considers itself the winner in the duel. Although the logic of this passage is also obscure, it would seem that the Paeonians initially made an error. Since duelling regularly required the calling out of champions from either side, perhaps the Paeonians thought this would be the best way to get the Perinthians to issue a challenge *onomasti*—and hence the oracle would be fulfilled. That this should happen in a way they do not expect—the singing of the *paean*—is typically Herodotean. He often draws attention to the ways in which even planned-for events have unexpected consequences, both on the battlefield and more generally.²³ A duel is manifestly an attempt to forestall the machinery of fate: issues of victory and defeat can be determined without the bloody price tag; additionally, if one of the participants does not like the outcome of the combat, a

²¹ Cf. Eurybates (Hdt. 6.92.3), as well as Hyllus and Echemus (Hdt. 9.26).

²² Paeonian dogs and horses were quite famous: horses, Mimnermus (West 2²) 17; dogs, Pollux (Bekker) 201–2. Cf. Macan, *Herodotus Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Books ad loc.*

²³ A good example: Periander’s command that no one should speak to his son Lycophron. When later Periander attempts to reconcile himself to his son, his son points out that he is not allowed to speak to him under the provisions of his own law (3.52).

more general battle can of course be waged. And yet, Herodotus seems to be saying in the case of the Perinthians that sometimes such expedients cannot help one avoid the price that must be paid. The oracle had recommended that the Paeonians attack the Perinthians under special circumstances; the implication is that if the instructions are followed, the destruction of Perinthus is inevitable.

The Perinthian double combat raises an important point. Duels permit Herodotus to present and at the same time complicate the workings of historical causation. He can suggest that alternative outcomes were possible, and yet put his authority behind a determinist position that “what happened, had to happen.” Duels can be false markers that paradoxically reveal the true direction history is taking; in the case of Thyrea, that the supremacy of Sparta following her defeat of Tegea was guaranteed. An Argive victory in the duel was in a sense an impossibility, and the inevitability of Sparta’s success is manifested by the very fact that the duel does not work.

It is perhaps useful to consider a couple of passages where the duel is effective. On the eve of the battle of Plataea (9.26) Herodotus tells us that the Tegeans were forced to explain, against the counter-demand of the Athenians, why they deserved their accustomed second position in the battle line after the Spartans. In defence of their claim, they tell the story of their ancestral chieftain, Echemus. When the Heracleidae were attempting to return to the Peloponnese after the death of Eurystheus, they were met at the Isthmus by the Tegeans and other Peloponnesians, together with Achaeans and Ionians. The commander of the Heracleidae, Hyllus, made a proclamation to the effect that it was right that the whole army not be risked against whole army, but that the question of the return of the Heracleidae be decided by a combat of champions: if Hyllus won, they would be allowed to return; if the Peloponnesian champion won, the Heracleidae would go away and not attempt to return for one hundred years. Echemus, the Tegean commander, accepted the challenge and killed Hyllus in single combat. Because of this action, the Tegeans say, they were given many prizes, one of which was the right to hold one end of the battle line, whichever the Spartans did not wish to occupy themselves.

In the first place this duel is important because it makes explicit the thinking behind the *monomachia*: massive loss of life—the obliteration of the city-state—is avoided. But more to the point the duel is linked to Tegea’s worth. Like Thyrea, the city’s character is made literally percep-

tible by enshrining a moment from the past. The Tegeans won the right to assume a place of honor in the Peloponnesian battle line second only to the Spartans: a custom serves as a vehicle for representing worth.

Even more illuminating in this regard are two cases of duelling in Herodotus found among barbarian peoples. The duel between the Cimmerians and their own Royal tribe is a story Herodotus personally endorses as being nearer to the truth than other ones concerning the Pontus region (4.11.2). He tells us that when Cimmeria was invaded by Scythians, the Cimmerians met in assembly to decide what to do. The nation was split: the people (Herodotus uses *dēmos*) recommended that they abandon their land to the invaders, while the Royal tribe insisted that everyone remain and fight. When no agreement could be reached between the two parties, they decided to settle the matter by a duel; they divided up into equal groups and fought to the death. All the members of the Royal tribe were killed and then were buried in their native soil (their great wish); the rest of the people departed.

What is so important about this duel is that it makes explicit Herodotus' thinking about the nature of champion-combats. A glaring problem with his account is that if the Royal tribe was so determined to remain, and the rest of the Cimmerians equally determined to leave, an easy accommodation could have been reached: the Royal tribe could have stayed behind and the people could have left without them (cf. the nearly parallel case of Phocaea 1.165.3). That they did not reach such an obvious compromise could be a function of Herodotus' interest in making the non-Greek seem strangely, even illogically motivated. But something else may also be at work too. Duels determine the future. If the Royal tribe had been strong enough to defeat an equal number of their own people, perhaps they could also have resisted, together with the remaining Cimmerians, the invasion of the Scythians. Since they were not, there was no point in contesting the land with the Scythians. The duel makes the departure of the Cimmerians a logical or even necessary outcome; fighting the Scythians after their own internal combat would have been pointless. Their worth was measured by the duel, and paradoxically their bravest component was destroyed.

The case of the Auseans of Libya (4.180) may even be more useful in helping to explain Thyrea. Herodotus tells us that there are two neighboring tribes in Libya, the Auseans and Machlyans, who both wear their hair long, but in precisely opposite ways. Further, he reports that among the Auseans there is an annual contest among the virgins of the tribe to determine the "true" *parthenoi* and the "false." Clearly, the passage is a

reflection of Greek rituals of maturation for girls.²⁴ But what is important for the purposes of this discussion is the collocation in Herodotus' report of symmetrical hair customs among the two different tribes, the combat between equal numbers of girls, and the notion of the test.

Thyrea, the Hero and Mass Destructions of Groups

In addition to the duel, another issue connected to the digression on Thyrea is the suicide of Othryadas. While perhaps understandable from the perspective of the well-known Spartan ideology of warfare,²⁵ it is nonetheless a strangely self-contradictory act—after all, his survival from the first combat constitutes Sparta's claim that they won, and yet he feels the need to "correct" this embarrassment by the taking of his own life. Again, in order to understand this detail better, it is best to link it to other, similar episodes in Herodotus. As Legrand wisely observed some time ago, Herodotus permits himself to comment on the actions of specific individuals before, during and after battles, and the mention of Othryadas in connection with Thyrea is part of this tendency.²⁶ Correct and useful as this observation is, it does not explain why Herodotus does this, nor that many of the individuals he notices in connection with his battle narratives die.

At one level the answer to the first question is that Herodotus is dealing in his *History* with the "deeds of men"—*klea andrōn*—as we can tell from his proem (μήτε ἔργα. . . ἀκλεᾶ γένηται). As for the second question, of course, part of the answer surely lies in the widespread feeling that it was honorable to die in the defence of your homeland (e.g., Homer *Il.* 15.494–99, Tyrtaeus 10.1–2 [West], Aesch. *Th.* 1011). But more can be said beyond these generalities.

Often the people reported as being killed before, during or after a major conflict or other military enterprise are exceptional.²⁷ The story of

²⁴See, e.g., Calame, *Les Choeurs des Jeunes Filles* 222–23 n. 97, Rosellini and Saïd, "Femmes et autres 'nomoi'" 981–82, and King, "Bound to Bleed" 119–20. Cf. Usener, "Heilige Handlung" 297–313. In general consult Cole, "The Social Function of Rituals."

²⁵See, e.g., Plutarch "Sayings of Spartan Women," *Mor.* 240 F; cf. Hdt. 7.104.5, 209.1 and 3. See, e.g., Loraux, "La 'belle mort'." For earlier discussions of Othryadas, see Kohlmann, "Othryades," and id. "Die Inschrift des Othryades."

²⁶Legrand, *Introduction* 56–57. Cf. de Romilly, *Histoire* 113–15, and Immerwahr, *Form and Thought* 240.

²⁷So, the stories of Callicrates (9.72.1) and Masistius (9.23.2). Significantly, three hundred Athenians fight and gain possession of the latter's body.

the Persian Artachaees is perhaps the most helpful example in trying to determine what Herodotus may be getting at in the story of Othryadas. At 9.117 we are told that an exceptional man in the army of Xerxes died, one Artachaees. There is no question as to his nature: he is a hero. In addition to the fact that he is later worshipped by the Acanthians, his stature is also proof (eight feet tall; cf. the bones of Orestes: about ten feet long 1.68.3), as is his commanding voice. It is of course common in Herodotus, as well as other texts, for a hero to be originally a noteworthy adversary who then receives heroic honors from his enemy, sometimes after the site of his eventual worship suffers unusual difficulties such as drought or disease:²⁸ hence the stories in the *History* of the Phocaeen colonists at Caere (1.67.2), Archias and Lycopas on Samos (3.55), Adras-tus at Sicyon (5.67), and Onesilus at Amathus in Cyprus (5.114).²⁹

In a certain sense, all war dead at Sparta could be revered as heroes,³⁰ and this inclination may well have been especially in evidence in the treatment of Othryadas; I should hasten to add, however, that I have not found any direct evidence suggesting that he was revered as a hero.³¹ But be that as it may, even if not a literal hero, in the narrative of Herodotus he functions as such. There are several examples of individuals in Herodotus who perform “brave gestures” in moments of crisis.³² Further, if a conflict was noteworthy, indeed if it had lasting results in Herodotus’ mind, great individuals had to die to mark the event. So we see the lists of famous dead after Marathon (6.114), Thermopylae (7.224), Salamis (8.89), and Plataea (9.85). These obituaries are often accompa-

²⁸See the classic discussion of Rohde, *Psyche* 115–55; cf. Parker, *Miasma* 243–45. Of course, the ancient Greeks were not the only ones to do this; see Hitti, *History of the Arabs* 201–3.

²⁹One might also add Timesius of Clazomenae (1.168).

³⁰Cf. Wide, *Lakonische Kulte* 357.

³¹It is interesting to note, however, that in a second century A.D. inscription from Priene (SIG³ 1265), recording the names of “ephors” or overseers of boys’ games, is found the name “Othryadas”; the list contains the names of extremely well-known Spartans such as Cleomenes, Lysander, Gylippus, Brasidas, and Leonidas. Othryadas occurs in a number of poems in the Greek anthology, often in contexts that make one think of Thermopylae as well: see Rawson, *The Spartan Tradition* 88–89 and n. 1.

Chrysermus of Corinth (*FGrH* 287), a shadowy figure who may be the doctor associated with the school of Herophilus, and hence alive in the middle of the first century B.C. (see von Staden, *Herophilus* 523–27), also tells the story of Othryadas and the “Battle of the Champions.” His account is preserved in two versions, one in ps.–Plutarch and one in John Stobaeus (F 2 a, b), and seems derived from Herodotus. Cf. Plato, *Phd.* 89c.

³²See Flory, “Brave Gestures.”

nied by statements as to who fought best. Interestingly, the one battle where we have neither obituary or list of *aristeiai* is Lade—a Greek defeat, and one in which they showed themselves cowards in Herodotus' estimation (note especially the Ionians' unwillingness to complete their training under Dionysius of Phocaea 6.12.3–4, and their subsequent flight in battle with the Phoenicians 6.14).³³ This line of thinking is most clearly expressed by Herodotus in connection with the death of Leonidas at Thermopylae: a prophecy was delivered to the Spartans early in the war that either their city had to fall or one of her kings (7.220; discussed below). The noteworthy dead, that is future heroes (and indeed we know that Leonidas later received heroic honors),³⁴ are in some sense surrogates for their cities. They are the mirror opposites of “scapegoats,” who also represent the collective from which they come, and who through their destruction also insure the survival of the community:³⁵ in this connection it is interesting to note that Leonidas is almost treated as a scapegoat by the Persians; Xerxes orders that his corpse be decapitated (7.238.1), the standard ritual for scapegoats (cf. 2.39.1–3, the head of the sacrificial bull in Egypt is removed and then cursed),³⁶ and some heroes (Onesilus 5.114.1). The hero as representative of Sparta is also found in Herodotus in the story of the two heralds sent to Xerxes to expiate the crime of the murder of Persian messengers at Sparta (7.134.2).³⁷

As for Othryadas, the idea seems to be that if Sparta was to emerge from the contest with Argos as the undisputed *hegemōn* of the Peloponnese, then, in a way, the entire community had to go through a test or crucible in which its worth was proven: Othryadas represents Sparta, and his suicide permits his city to pass the test, to be destroyed and reconstituted as a new power.

Allied to the concept of heroic war—dead as representative of their community is the notion of total—destruction or holocaust. In addition to his belief that great individuals had to die as markers for episodes of transcendent importance, he may also have thought that for a moment from the past to take on epochal status, a total annihilation is called for.

³³De Romilly, *Histoire* 114.

³⁴See below, n. 84.

³⁵Parker, *Miasma* 258–60. See also Burkert, *Greek Religion* 82–84, and Stern, “Scapegoat Narratives.” Cf. the death of Histiaeus, Hdt. 6.30.2.

³⁶Lloyd, *Herodotus Book II 178 ad 2.39.3* notes that “sentiments of the curse do not seem to occur in our Eg[yp]tian sources,” although the notion of turning aside evil is evident in liturgies and rituals.

³⁷Parker, *Miasma* 264.

He certainly does stress the obliteration of groups of people throughout his history: there is Thermopylae of course, but also (for example) the disappearance of the Persian expedition to Siwah (3.25–26), the destruction and enslavement of Miletus (6.18–20), and the self-destruction of Boges governor of Eion and his family (7.107.2). In the case of Miletus, it is important to note that the depopulation of the city cannot in reality have been as complete as it is represented by Herodotus.³⁸

Thyrea and Social Memory: Aitia, Custom and Stories of Violence

Thyrea left a “mark” on the people who contested it: both the men and women of Sparta and Argos looked differently after the battles reported at Hdt. 1.82. In the case of Argos, this change in appearance was linked to a determination to recover their lost land.³⁹ In the case of Sparta, the episode constituted a test of national character, something that would in a sense prove and legitimize their historic leadership of the Peloponnese and Greece as a whole. It is hence important to look at the battles, and especially their aftermath, in connection with the notion of societal change and societal memory. I want to focus especially on the issue of hair as a marker of change.⁴⁰

Of course there is an abundance of evidence from antiquity, even from Herodotus himself, that the Greeks included the cutting or tearing of cephalic hair in ritual involving both rites of passage as well as mourning.⁴¹ However, the commemoration of a specific historical event by the

³⁸As commentators have noted, the Milesians turn up again after Mycale: see Macan, *Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Books ad 6.20*.

³⁹A case of sympathetic magic: cf. the behavior of the Phocaeans (1.165). See, e.g., Faaraone, “Molten Wax.”

⁴⁰Of course the passage speaks also of a prohibition on the wearing of jewelry at Argos. This is problematic; if there was a corresponding encouragement of the wearing of jewelry by women at Sparta, something that the passage could be construed to imply, there is no mention of it in Herodotus or elsewhere. Indeed, there seems to have been a ban on women wearing jewelry at Sparta, as well as a requirement that they wear their hair short: see Heraclides Lembus *Ex. Pol.* (Dilts) 13: τῶν ἐν Λακεδαιμονίᾳ γυναικῶν κόσμος ἀφίρηται, οὐδὲ κομᾶν ἔξεστιν, οὐδὲ χρυσοφορεῖν. Cf. MacDowell, *Spartan Law* 114. The Thyrea passage may, of course, be a reflection of sumptuary legislation: cf., e.g., Mills, “Greek Clothing Regulations” esp. 263.

⁴¹The lock that Achilles cuts off in honor of Patroclus combines both ideas (*Il.* 23.141ff.); it was originally promised the river Spercheus (rite of passage), but became part of the mourning ceremony for Patroclus. Cf. Burkert, *Greek Religion* 70; cf. Barrett, *Euripides Hippolytos* 3–4 with notes. For Greek practice in general, consult Sommer, *Das Haar*

alteration of personal appearance is more difficult to parallel. From Herodotus also comes the story of the ban at Athens on long dress-pins and an attendant change in chiton-type as a result of an attack on the one Athenian survivor of an expedition to Aegina by women wielding these pieces of personal adornment (5.87.3)—a story that is linked to the account of Thyrea through the fact that Argos plays a central role in both episodes.⁴² In several ways this account is especially close to the case of the “Battle of the Champions” and the story of Othryadas; both passages feature the death of the sole survivor, as well as changes in societal behaviors.⁴³ Further, these changes, like the ones after the “Battle of Champions,” are complementary: while the Athenian women were forbidden to wear long pins, the women of Aegina and, significantly, Argos “made a law” prescribing the wearing of pins longer than before (5.88.2–3).

What is important to see from the parallels to Thyrea in Herodotus is how events from the past, specifically episodes of violence, are thought of as moments that are worth remembering, even enshrining, in the manipulation of societal practice.⁴⁴ The duel and subsequent full-scale battle at Thyrea are strictly speaking *aitia*—stories that locate the beginning of custom and ritual, and simultaneously give them their meaning. In

and Eitrem, *Opferitus und Voropfer* 344–415. On hair and rite of passage ceremonies specifically, see Versnel, *Transition and Reversal* 317.

We can tell from a passage in Book 2 that Herodotus knew that it is customary for the Greeks (= “the rest of mankind,” in opposition to the Egyptians: see, e.g., Hartog, *Mirror* 213) to cut their hair during mourning (2.36.1). Curiously, he does not mention hair-cutting or plucking in the description of mourning for Spartan kings (6.58), even though striking oneself and wailing are noted (6.58.3). Regarding the cutting of hair and rites of passage, Herodotus knows of a ritual observed on Delos in memory of the Hyperborean maidens that features both boys and girls (Hdt. 4.34).

⁴²Argos is allied to Aegina (5.86.4; cf. 87.1 and 88.2). See Immerwahr, *Form and Thought* 227. Cf. Dunbabin, “Εχθρη παλαίη,” and Figueira, “Early Hostilities.”

⁴³The notion of the sole survivor is familiar from other contexts; note, e.g., Lynkeus and the fifty Egyptian cousins, and Thoas and the men of Lemnos; cf. also Sophocles *OT* 118, 756. Closer to the account of Thyrea, as well as the Athenian survivor from Aegina, is the story of Tydeus’ destruction of the Cadmean men; from *Il.* 4.397–98 we learn that one Maion survived the attack of Tydeus, and from Statius *Th.* 3.49 that he reluctantly returned to his home to report the disaster and later killed himself (3.87ff.).

⁴⁴Modern parallels can be cited in particular for the commemoration in hair-behavior of specific events from the past. Among the Yoruba people of Nigeria, especially the women, events as wide-ranging as bridge-construction, athletic contests, and, significantly for our purposes, the surrender of Biafran rebels in that country’s civil war, have been remembered, among other things, in elaborate hair-styles: see Houlberg, “Social Hair” esp.

general, Herodotus likes to report how customs and institutions are started, and in particular how innovation of custom is the result of violent death or the threat of violent death.⁴⁵ Thyrea and hair length at Sparta and Argos—initially an unlikely pairing—should be seen as logical in Herodotus' understanding.

In seeing Thyrea as *aition*, however, we encounter a serious difficulty. Although Herodotus observes how the battles led to change in hair length and the wearing of jewelry at Sparta and Argos, he fails to mention that the conflict was also commemorated in ritual by the Spartans. We learn from the Hellenistic antiquarian Sosibius (*FGrH* 595 F 5) that during the Gymnopaediae festival at Sparta the leaders of the three choruses wore a special crown in honor of the victory won at Thyrea over the Argives; it is uncertain, but examples of these special "Thyreatic crowns" may have survived to us.⁴⁶ We also hear, rather indirectly, of an athletic contest that was held at a place called Parparos in the Thyreatis, the area believed to be the site of the battle. A fifth-century inscription refers to boys' foot races, as well as a horse race at the Parparonia.⁴⁷ Some confusion remains as to which festival was actually held in honor of the victory, and when exactly each festival was founded. But it seems certain that at least one of them celebrated the victory. This is very important.⁴⁸ As we have seen, Herodotus is quite interested in reporting

354–55 and 359–60 and plates 4 and 13. I owe the reference to David, "Social Hair" 13 n. 13. Cf. Leach, "Magical Hair," and Synnott, "Shame and Glory."

It may be useful to enlist as a theoretical explanation the concept of the "mnemonic body" from recent anthropological studies, that is to say the body as a site of remembering through the fashioning of new behaviors in adornment. Cf. Bourdieu, *Outline* 94–95; see also Connerton, *How Societies Remember* 72–104, and Comaroff and Comaroff, *Ethnography* 70–71.

⁴⁵Cf. Herodotus on the dining customs of Milesian women (1.146.2–3), the festival in honor of Phocaeans at Caere in Etruria (1.167.2), the story of the sesame-cake festival on Samos (3.48.3), and the Magophonia in Persia (3.79.3).

⁴⁶Cf. Tresp, *Kultschriststeller* 130–33. See also Fitzhardinge, *The Spartans* 106, and Cartledge, *Sparta and Lakonia* 140. In general, consult Robertson, *Festivals and Legends* 147–65, esp. 161–64.

⁴⁷See Wade-Gery, "Spartan Gymnopaediai" 79 and n. 7; cf. Bölte, "Lakonische Feste" 124–32, Moretti, "La guerra contro Argo per la Tireatide" 207–9. The inscription in question is *IG* 5.1 213.44–49 and 62–64; cf. LSJ⁹ s.v. "Παπαρώνια." From Bekker, *Anecdota* 1408, we learn that Parparos was the site of the battle; from Hesychius s.v. "Πάραρος" we learn that an *agon* was held there, as well as choruses. For a recent discussion that connects Thermopylae to Thyrea at the Gymnopaediae, see Malkin, *Myth and Territory* 155.

⁴⁸Cf. Brelich, *Guerre, agoni e culti* 30–34.

the *aitia* of festivals and other ceremonies that are contemporary with him; further, we know in the case of the Gymnopaediae that he knew of the festival because he mentions it by name in connection with Demaratus' humiliation and flight from Sparta (6.67.2). Of course, we could maintain that the Thyreatic crowns were not yet a part of either the Gymnopaediae or the Parparonia. That, however, seems unlikely; as noted above, the inscription reporting the boys' foot race at the Parparonia is fifth century in date. While it is to be admitted that it is an *argumentum ex silentio*, nonetheless it is worth pointing out that Herodotus does not refer either to the Gymnopaediae or the Parparonia in connection with the contest for Thyrea. I do not have an explanation for this anomaly.⁴⁹

Setting this difficulty aside, why was Thyrea so intimately connected in Herodotus' mind with Spartan national character? As we have already seen, one distinctive physical feature of the men he was to know as the Spartans was established in memory of the battle: long hair. We can perhaps extend this point a little further. It was perfectly natural for Herodotus to see in the ascent of Sparta and the decline of Argos concomitant changes in their customs. To his way of thinking the identity of a people was bound up with how they looked.⁵⁰ In the great catalogue of nations in Xerxes' army (7.61–95),⁵¹ clothing-type figures prominently as an identifying feature. Indeed, manner of dress is a common component of Herodotus' ethnographic description (e.g., the Matienians 1.202.3); it can link one people to another who dress similarly (e.g., the savage Massagetae and the equally savage Scythians 1.215); and some people are even called after their clothing, such as the "Blackcloaks" (Melanchlainoi 4.100.2). What the Spartans are is bound up very much with how they look. That surely is the point of the famous story about them combing their hair and exercising at Thermopylae; this behavior, which Herodotus attributes uniquely to them, allows Demaratus to make his point: they are no ordinary men (a point he also makes before: cf. 7.102:

⁴⁹This might also be a good place to note that Herodotus does not mention the festivals that were held at Athens in celebration of the battles of Marathon, Salamis and Plataea; see Barron, "The Liberation" 620, and Burkert, "Athenian Cults and Festivals" 260. The omission is strange. He must have known about them through his extensive exposure to Athenian life and history; he is otherwise inclined to note *aitia* for cult; and he is interested in commemorations of the Persian wars (e.g., the Serpent Column, 8.82.1).

⁵⁰One may also want to compare Thucydides' digression on the dress of the Athenians and Spartans (1.6.3–6).

⁵¹See Calmeyer, "Greek Historiography and Achaemenid Reliefs." Note, however, Armayor, "Herodotus' Catalogues" and Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian* 75 n. 84.

see below). What Herodotus says of the Athenians at Marathon makes better sense in this connection: they were the first to charge the enemy “at quick pace” (δρόμῳ), and the first to endure looking upon *Median garb* (6.112.2–3; cf. 1.135), which is to say to look upon the Persians and not run away.⁵² This seems an odd point; note, he does not say “the first to look upon the Median soldier” or “army.” But, significantly, this remark comes immediately after he observes that the Athenians “fought in a manner worthy of record” (ἐμάχοντο ἀξίως λόγου 6.112.3). Combat, detail of appearance, memory: again, as at Thyrea, these apparently unrelated concepts are allied.⁵³ And indeed, it is useful to note here that archaic haircuts and clothing types were common in the period immediately following the Persian wars.⁵⁴

THYREA AND THERMOPYLAE: THE PROBLEM OF NARRATIVE PATTERNING

Considerations of the cultural import of duelling, while useful in helping to explain the function of such contests in Herodotus’ imagination, do not, finally, help with the understanding of his aims in the *History*. The problems associated with the truth of his account of Thyrea, especially in connection with the later battle of Thermopylae, are not addressed. It is to historiographic questions I now wish to turn.

Thyrea featured a battle of three hundred Spartans, one survivor, and a focus on hair adornment. Thermopylae also had three hundred Spartans, one survivor, and a peculiar accent on Spartan hair. What do we make of these similarities? It seems to me three courses are possible: a) Herodotus *meant* Thyrea to look like Thermopylae for specific historiographic reasons; b) Thyrea looks like Thermopylae because Herodotus was, in essence, an *unimaginative liar* or inventor; and c) Thyrea looks like Thermopylae because Herodotus in fact thought of *Thermopylae as a duel*. Obviously position (c) has much in common with the detailed analysis I have been making of Thyrea in relation to other duels and similar stories in Herodotus of violence and custom change. The assumption is that the two battles look alike because Herodotus tended to

⁵²This claim cannot be true: see How and Wells, *Commentary ad* 6.112.3.

⁵³It is perhaps worth noting here the description Persian/Mede as “long-haired” from Persian war era episodes; cf. Aeschylus’ epitaph (βαθυχαιτήεις Μηδος [Peek *GVI* 43]) and Hdt. 6.19.2–3 (κομήταις . . . Περσέων ἐόντων κομητέων).

⁵⁴See Harrison, “Ritual Haircuts” 254.

think similarly about similar events. While this may seem a banal conclusion, I hope to show in the remainder of this paper that it is not. Indeed, that much is to be gained in our understanding of Herodotus' view of Thermopylae if we assume that a narrative pattern (the duel) is at work in his description of the battle of which he is not necessarily aware. But first, the other two positions.

Thyrea as Intentional Pattern for Thermopylae

Setting aside the possibility that the two episodes were in fact similar,⁵⁵ it cannot be proved that Herodotus intended Thyrea to be read as a specific precursor to Thermopylae. Indeed if we look at how Herodotus does in fact connect events that are separated over time, we see that he mentions the particular episodes by name. So, in the case of Plataea we will see that duels which took place at other times are specifically linked to that event (see below). Similarly, Thermopylae is itself evoked in several places in the narrative of Plataea. Generally speaking, Herodotus is quite able to recall at later points in his narrative specific episodes he dealt with earlier on: the famous case of the Constitutional Debate is probably the best example of this procedure, first described at 3.80 and referred to later at 6.43.3. Although it is less common for Herodotus to refer prospectively to a later event, there are examples of this device too, even (notoriously) places where he refers to later discussion which he does not in fact provide.⁵⁶ When Xerxes somewhat ominously refers to his predecessors' great campaigns at 7.8.α, we are entitled, I think, to call to mind the fact that all were in some sense failures; what is more, we are perhaps even encouraged to think of the reasons why those expeditions failed as Xerxes contemplates his own aggressive action against the

⁵⁵This may not be completely fair. It could be of course that we are dealing with a common approximation for a medium- to small-sized contingent of men that ran about three hundred men. Cf. in this connection Arimnestus and his three hundred in the war with the Messenian helots (Hdt. 9.64), as well as the fact that Ctesias reports Pausanias in command of three hundred Spartans at Plataea (*FGrH* 688 F 13; see also below, n. 74); recall also the three hundred members of the Sacred Band of Thebes—for which see DeVoto, "Sacred Band"; their destruction was also noteworthy (see Plutarch *Pel.* 18). Furthermore, the unit that finally surrendered to the Athenians on Sphacteria was 292 men (or rather "300 less eight"), out of an original complement of 440 (Thuc. 4.38.5). Cf. Thuc. 5.72.4.

⁵⁶Darius' accession 1.209; 1.106.2, 1.184—the so-called Assyrian *logoi*. Cf. Evans, *Explorer of the Past* 89 and n. 1.

Greek people. This is a type of narrative patterning that Herodotus seems to want us to detect and take to heart.⁵⁷ The earlier events inform our understanding of how later ones are to transpire, and an architecture is given to the whole of *History*. The feature that makes me confident that all the above mentioned passages are cases of intended connection by Herodotus himself is that the specific passages or persons are explicitly referred to—no such reference is to be found in the case of Thyrea and Thermopylae.⁵⁸

Thyrea and Herodotus the “Liar”

If we cannot maintain securely that Herodotus meant Thyrea to look like Thermopylae, we can perhaps say, with Detlev Fehling, that the similarities are due to “free invention” (“freie Erfindung”). In both the size of the contingents involved at Thyrea and Thermopylae, as well as in the death of the sole survivor, Fehling finds evidence for regularizing features of the Herodotean imagination.⁵⁹ The argument seems to be that Herodotus’ imagination had certain “default settings” into which his narrative would naturally settle when he was inventing—illustrating the principle that it is difficult to capture with consistency the variety of events as in fact they truly happen. Simply put, the repetitions of Herodotus’ narrative suggest its fictive nature; imagination can only generate so much variety before it starts to repeat its earlier inventions. Seen in this way, both Thyrea and Thermopylae look suspicious.

⁵⁷Cf. Flory, *Archaic Smile* 14–20.

⁵⁸If the evidence from Herodotus is not thought decisive enough, there is a telling parallel from Thucydides. The practice of this near-contemporary historian suggests that if Herodotus had seen a similarity between Thyrea and Thermopylae, he too would have noted it himself. In describing how the Spartans became encircled at Sphacteria in 425 and forced to surrender, he writes: “the Spartans, now being struck by missiles from both sides and finding themselves in the same predicament—to compare the small with the large—as at Thermopylae (for those men were destroyed when the Persians went around them by the pathway), they no longer offered resistance . . .” (Thuc. 4.36.3). Here Thermopylae is mentioned by name; the specific feature that the historian finds similar to the related event is singled out; and finally, he acknowledges that he is making the comparison himself. None of these features occurs in connection with Herodotus’ presentation of Thyrea.

⁵⁹Fehling, *Herodotus and His “Sources”* 201, 222; Fehling has his supporters: see, e.g., S. West, “Herodotus’ Epigraphical Interests” 279.

The work of O. K. Armayor is similar but superior to Fehling’s, inasmuch as it is based on comparison of Herodotus with the material record. See, e.g., “Herodotus’ Catalogues,” and “Did Herodotus Ever Go to Egypt?”

But having said that, I do not think that Fehling is correct. Without wanting to enter into an extensive discussion of his views here, it is enough for me to say that such a critique of Herodotus implies an unrealistic standard of historiographic achievement that existed before him—that in his writing he was attempting to imitate truer, more accurate historical texts that were also available. This view also directly challenges Herodotus' assertion that he intended his history to protect from oblivion “the deeds accomplished by men” (proem; see above).⁶⁰ On both these counts Fehling's argument is, in my mind, brought seriously into question. Nonetheless, he has detected significant patterns of thought that need to be explained, even if they are not signs of intentional fabrication.⁶¹

Passages such as Thyrea suggest to me that we need to think about two different types of narrative patterning in Herodotus—one that he intends us to see, and another that is a function of his way of viewing events.⁶² Thyrea seems to be very much in keeping with the latter process. It is not specifically recapitulated later in the text, nor is Thermopylae alluded to when Thyrea is presented. The two battles are separated by an enormous amount of narrative. Further, despite the undeniable thematic continuities between the passages, it is difficult in the end to see what the purpose would be to invoke the memory of Thermopylae at the point Thyrea is mentioned. It is far easier, as well as more plausible, to think that Herodotus viewed the two battles in strikingly similar ways. What is more, thinking of Thermopylae in this way has a real interpretive benefit in connection with Herodotus' treatment of the more famous battle—specifically it permits us to see how he could represent what was a catastrophic defeat retrospectively as a great victory.

Thermopylae as Duel

Herodotus' narrative of the battle of Thermopylae seems in some way to answer the dialogue between Xerxes and Demaratus after the crossing of the Hellespont,⁶³ and perhaps also the council of war at the

⁶⁰Cf. Murray, “Herodotus and Oral History” 101 n. 12, and Gould, *Herodotus* 136–37 n. 16. See also Pritchett, *The Liar School of Herodotus*, and Rhodes, “In Defence of Greek Historians” 158–61.

⁶¹Cf. Marincola, “Herodotean Studies” 32.

⁶²See above, nn. 1 and 4.

⁶³Cf., e.g., Boedeker, “The Two Faces of Demaratus” 195–96.

beginning of Book 7. The Spartan valor Demaratus had boasted of is proven in the pass of Thermopylae. Indeed, in Demaratus' remarks, the battle of Thermopylae, and finally the preliminaries to the battle of Plataea we see the notion of combat as duel, and specifically a duel that settles a question of dispute that otherwise would be settled by larger armies. This is an important point because this element in the narrative is precisely the device that permits Herodotus to style Thermopylae a success. It is at this point in the present discussion that it is useful to think of the pattern of Thyrea—the duel that simultaneously proves the worth of the true winners, yet must be contested again on a larger scale to have its original decision validated.

In his conversation with Xerxes Demaratus makes the famous claim that even if only one thousand Spartans line up against Xerxes' troops, they will nonetheless fight; *peniē*, *aretē*, and, as we learn a little later in the same exchange, *nomos* all make them who they are and render the king's reasonable assumption that they will capitulate in the face of the vast numbers of the Persian host an impossibility (7.102.1; 104.4). Demaratus stresses that respect for the law compels the Spartans to flee no host of men, but rather to face them in formation, ready either to conquer or be killed (7.104.5). Of course, in keeping with other Persian kings in Herodotus who do not understand Greek freedom and its consequences, Xerxes dismisses the warning as ridiculous.⁶⁴ Moreover, he ventures to claim that if the Persian numbers were the same as the Spartan, even then the Spartans would have a difficult time. As a final jab, Xerxes states that he too has in his army men who are willing to take on the enemy in superior numbers—his bodyguards, some able to fight three opponents at one time (7.103.5). Demaratus takes this last remark as an insult and says that if the need were upon him he could take on one of the men Xerxes believes could handle three Greeks.

The language of the duel is obvious throughout the exchange. Xerxes believes his own army in equivalent numbers could vanquish the Greeks. Further, that he too has some especially outstanding men capable of fighting in single combats against three opponents. Demaratus, for his part, is prepared to prove the truth of his assertion of Spartan superiority by fighting one-on-one with one of these same soldiers—and this at an advanced age (although Herodotus does not tell us precisely, it is thought he assumed the throne of Sparta in c. 515 B.C., making him about

⁶⁴See, e.g., Evans, *Herodotus, Explorer of the Past* 26.

sixty at the time of Xerxes' invasion). These details would not mean much in and of themselves were it not for the fact that the concept of the duel is then reintroduced prominently both on the eve of the battle of Thermopylae and, even more importantly for my purposes, before Plataea as well.

Immediately before the battle of Thermopylae Xerxes is told by a messenger that far from panicking (what he no doubt expected), the Spartans were exercising and combing their long hair (7.208.3). Puzzled and unaware that they were preparing either to kill or be killed, he summons Demaratus and speaks with him again. Emphasizing what he said before about Spartan bravery irrespective of the odds, Demaratus informs Xerxes that at Sparta there is a law that when men are about to risk their lives, they comb their hair (7.209.3). Further, he says that if the Persians can defeat these men and the ones left in Sparta, there is no other race of men that would be able to resist Xerxes and his army (7.209.4). Again, we see the notion of the duel—here the Spartans as representative of not only all Greeks, but all humanity. It is true that Demaratus' boast seems at this point in the narrative to have more to do with a claim to Spartan uniqueness than the Spartans as champions. However, in the actual combat that follows we see first two contingents of barbarians fail in their assault on the Spartans—the Cissians and the Medes. Significantly, the next to attack are the Immortals—reputedly the best soldiers in Xerxes' army (7.83). Hence, the very scenario Xerxes imagined in his conversation with Demaratus on the Hellespont in a sense actually takes place—his best against the enemy's best. Yet, these troops do no better than the others. So dire is the struggle for the Persian side that Xerxes even despairs for the success of the entire army no less than three times (7.212.1).⁶⁵ Obvious hyperbole, but nonetheless an insight into Herodotus' thinking. However improbable it may seem, he seems to be saying that the Spartans took on the best the Persians had to offer and much more, and very nearly wrecked *the entire campaign*. Their valor is proved, and what is more they duel with the best men in Xerxes' army and defeat them. Only treachery in the end, and the miscalculation of their allies, get the better of the men from Lacedaemon. Importantly, as at Thyrea, only one Spartan, the coward Aristodemus, survived from the 300 at Thermopylae. He later redeems his reputation by dying at Plataea (7.229–31). Curiously, Herodotus reports that there

⁶⁵This seems the only possible meaning of τῆ στρατῆ. Cf. Powell, *Lexicon* s.v.

was even another story that featured a different sole survivor—a certain Pantites (7.232); significantly, like Othryadas, he feels ashamed and kills himself—however, at Sparta, not Thermopylae.

Given the traditions surrounding the Persian wars, Herodotus' positive accounting of Thermopylae was not exceptional. Popular memory of the events of the conflict was surprisingly labile and inaccurate. Events from the first (Darius) phase of the struggle could be conflated with the second (Xerxes) phase that happened ten years later; indeed, if Aristophanes can be relied on, Athenians could even appropriate to themselves features of the war that belonged properly to the Spartans.⁶⁶

However, despite the temptation to view Thermopylae with our ancient authorities as some sort of victory, we should not lose sight of the fact that that battle at least, and perhaps Artemision also, was a failure. Herodotus tells us quite clearly that according to the Greek plan the first line of defence was going to be the Vale of Tempe in Thessaly, and that when that position was found to be indefensible, the line was moved to Thermopylae (7.172–75). This suggests that the Greeks planned for this line to offer the Persians real, concerted resistance. Indeed, modern historians have suggested that the strategy which lay behind the early phase of Greek response to the invasion of Xerxes was one of land containment that allowed for the naval arm to inflict a decisive defeat on the Persians: specifically, that a defensive line was to be held in central Greece at Thermopylae while at Artemision the Greek ships were to destroy the Persian navy and thereby make impossible a prolonged campaign in the Greek homeland.⁶⁷

This original plan of action, however, was soon obscured by mythologizing. Herodotus reports an oracle before Thermopylae that said that a Spartan king had to fall in battle for Lacedaemon as a whole to survive the conflict with the Mede (7.220.4; see above). It was probably a *post eventum* prophecy that then became the source for the understanding of the resistance of the Spartans at Thermopylae as an intended

⁶⁶Thomas, *Oral Tradition* 225–26, demonstrates that in Aristophanes' *Wasps* (1079ff.) Marathon, the arrows of Thermopylae, and Xerxes' destruction of Athens, are all rolled into one event. It should be added that there were a number of controversies in the fifth century regarding which battles of the Persian wars were the most important, a situation that is reflected in Herodotus' text; see, e.g., Immerwahr *Form and Thought* 240–41 n. 8.

⁶⁷Macan, *Herodotus The Seventh, Eighth, and Ninth Books* 260–61, and Hignett, *Xerxes' Invasion* 113–27 and 371–78.

self-sacrifice.⁶⁸ To be sure, even as Herodotus presents it, we can detect an awareness in his own account that there was reason to doubt that self-sacrifice was the original intention.⁶⁹ However, the presence of the oracle in the story tells us that he, for one, believed (or wanted to believe) the later mythologizing. That a planned self-sacrifice was in fact extremely unlikely is suggested first by the Greek plan outlined above. Secondly, it seems also unlikely that the Spartans would willingly send to certain death three hundred of their number when, some fifty years later, they sought an end to their conflict with the Athenians because one hundred and twenty Spartiates from Sphacteria were being held captive: as Thucydides declared, “therefore to both sides, reckoning up the situation, peace seemed the best course of action; and not least to the Spartans, who were eager to recover the men who surrendered on the island” (5.15.1; cf. 5.17.1).⁷⁰

What we see in Herodotus is an attempt to reconfigure the past in light of the ultimate outcome of the Persian wars. The Greeks did win. However, Thermopylae was a terrible defeat. Borrowing an explanation from modern psychological studies, we can see in Herodotus a type of reassessment that involves “cognitive dissonance.”⁷¹ All the famous events leading up to Greek victory are made to explain this outcome, even when the modern historian would characterize some of them as having nothing to do the Greeks’ ultimate success—indeed, when some of them ought even to be seen as outright setbacks. A self-imposed structure of distancing allows Herodotus at one time to view the episode

⁶⁸Cf. Macan, *Herodotus The Seventh, Eighth, and Ninth Books* 261, and esp. Hignett, *Xerxes’ Invasion* 371.

⁶⁹As Hignett has demonstrated, *Xerxes’ Invasion* 123–26 and Appendix IV, Herodotus’ account betrays both a mythologizing tendency and one that seems to represent the original intention of the Greeks. That the self-sacrifice of the Spartans was not planned is suggested by the reasons Herodotus reports for their ultimate destruction—the Persian march around the Spartan position along the Anopaea and the consequent movement of the Phocians out of position (7.216–18), and the abandonment by the other Greeks (7.219). At 7.220 Herodotus shows some anxiety as to the real reason for the departure of most of the Greek forces. It is at this point that he mentions the oracle requiring the death of the Spartan king. Cf. Immerwahr’s excellent analysis of the two structures of explanation at work in Herodotus’ description of Thermopylae, the “pragmatic” and the “moral,” *Form and Thought* 261–62.

⁷⁰There may have been special circumstances involved in connection with the men of Sphacteria. Cf. Gomme, *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides ad loc.*

⁷¹For an application of the theory of “cognitive dissonance” to ancient texts, see Carroll, *When Prophecy Failed* 86–110.

of Thermopylae as a heroic defeat, resulting in the deaths of several men, and yet at the same time somehow also implicated in, and perhaps significantly responsible for, the later Greek victory; the patent internal inconsistency of this view is permitted to remain, residing in this “cognitive dissonance.”

PLATAEA AS “CULMINATION” OF THERMOPYLAE

In Book 9 Herodotus tells us that before the battle of Plataea the Greeks readjust their battle line. Informed that the Persian attack was imminent, Pausanias “took fright” and called upon the Athenians to take the Spartans’ usual place on the right wing, facing the Persian forces as opposed to the Boeotian. The pretext for the change in formation is to put the fighters with the most experience of Persian ways of war opposite the Persian contingents: the Athenians had fought at Marathon and knew the opponent well. The Persian supreme commander, Mardonius, informed by the Boeotians of the change in formation changes his own line to face the Spartans again. At this Pausanias changes places once more, and Mardonius again responds by deploying the Persians opposite the Spartans. At this juncture Mardonius upbraids the Spartans for their apparent cowardice (we know it was Pausanias’ alone):

O Spartans, you are said to be the best men by those who dwell in this land; they claim that you neither flee nor abandon your post, but rather that, remaining at your station, you either destroy your enemy or are destroyed. There is, it seems, no truth to these statements. For before we joined in battle and came to blows in a fair fight, we saw you fleeing and abandoning your post, putting the burden of testing our arms in the hands of the Athenians, while you placed yourselves opposite our slaves . . .

(9.48.1–2)

The resonance between what Demaratus said earlier to Xerxes about the Spartans being prepared either to conquer or die is clearly invoked here; unlike Thyrea and Thermopylae, there are close verbal parallels between the two passages.⁷² Hence it seems likely that Herodotus has in mind the dialogue between the two men before Thermopylae. This is a very important point, given what Mardonius says next. He follows his abuse of Spartan valor with a strange offer:

⁷²See Solmsen, “Speeches” 251.

Why don't you, on behalf of the Greeks—since you are thought to be the best—and we, on behalf of the barbarians, fight it out with equal numbers on both sides? And if it should seem best that the rest also fight, let them do so afterwards; if this is not agreeable, but rather we alone should be enough, let us fight it out to the end; whichever one of us wins, let him win for his entire army. (9.48.4)

Clearly what Mardonius has in mind is a contest between champions representing the entire armies of both sides, one that would decide the issue of the entire war. Given the fact that Thermopylae is in all likelihood alluded to immediately before this offer, it would seem that Mardonius has in mind specifically a replay of the earlier battle. Assuming that nothing like these words were spoken by Mardonius before Plataea, and Herodotus is either inventing them or adapting a report, what is the purpose of this odd evocation of Thermopylae before Plataea?

At first glance Herodotus offers no help in answering this question. All that he tells us is that Mardonius' suggestion was not answered by the Spartans, and that he was delighted at their silence and became encouraged at what Herodotus understands as a "cold victory" (*ψυχρὴ νίκη* 9.49.1). He then sent in his cavalry against the Greeks, and so began the battle of Plataea. However, that Herodotus wants us to remember Thermopylae while reading about Plataea is abundantly clear from the narrative of the battle. He tells us that Aristodemus "the Trembler," the sole survivor of Thermopylae, redeemed himself at Plataea by fighting more bravely than any other Spartan and dying in combat (9.71). Further, Mardonius' death in the battle, at the head of one thousand picked men, is characterized by Herodotus as the atonement (*dikē*) for the death of Leonidas (9.64; cf. 9.78, 84). He tells us, finally, that the man who killed Mardonius was a Spartan, appropriately named Arimnestus ("greatly remembered"),⁷³ a soldier who (significantly) was later killed during the Helot revolt while commanding yet another group of three hundred, all of whom were lost in battle (9.64.2).⁷⁴

At one level these allusions surely make Plataea the vengeance exacted for Thermopylae. But what of the offer of Mardonius? This is not as easily explained. Thermopylae had already been fought; why fight an-

⁷³Or Aeimnestus ("always-remembered"), with the MSS. Plutarch *Arist.* 19.1 (Ziegler) shows a similar confusion. See Macan *ad loc.*, and cf. Aesch. *Pers.* 760.

⁷⁴Ctesias reports that Pausanias led a contingent of three hundred Spartans at Plataea (*FGrH* 688 F 13); he too understood that battle to be in some sense a replay of Thermopylae.

other duel before Plataea? We need to return to Mardonius' reaction to the silence of the Spartans after hearing his offer of a combat of champions. At one level, surely, the victory he felt was "cold" because he did not understand the Spartans' position; they were perfectly prepared to fight, it was their commander who was initially panicked.⁷⁵ Mardonius was mistaken; he does not know his enemy. Indeed, at the beginning of Book 7 it was Mardonius himself, in another of his speeches that is clearly unhistorical, who ridiculed the Greeks for their manner of fighting: they pick out a level plain and fight until one side is destroyed and the other, nearly so (7.9.β).⁷⁶

At another level, however, the victory was cold because Mardonius did not really understand the outcome specifically of Thermopylae.⁷⁷ The battle in fact proved that the Spartans were not the sort of men Mardonius thinks they are. They were the best soldiers Greece had to offer, and they would not flee. In this way, it is natural to understand Thermopylae as a "moral victory": Spartan virtue and Persian weakness were proved there, and hence the outcomes of Plataea and of the entire war were truly anticipated.

Curiously and importantly two more of Herodotus' duel-stories are connected explicitly to the battle of Plataea. As I have already discussed above, on the eve of the battle of Plataea (9.26) the Tegeans are forced to explain why they have a right to the coveted second position in the battle line, and in defence of their claim, tell the story of their ancestral chieftain, Echemus. The other duel Herodotus reports in connection with Plataea is recorded in two places. In the course of presenting Athens' conflict with Aegina, Herodotus tells us of Argos' unwillingness officially to help the Aegenetans (6.92.3). However, volunteers (one thousand of them), led by one Eurybates, a winner of the pentathlon, go from Argos to help. Most do not return home, including Eurybates. Herodotus reports that he killed three men in single combats, and in a fourth was himself slain by an Athenian named Sophanes. In the later notice of the same event (9.75), we are told more about Sophanes. It turns out he was the Athenian who won the most renown at Plataea: he literally anchored himself to the field of battle to prove his unwillingness to flee, or perhaps carried a shield with a moving anchor affixed to it as a device that presumably symbolized the same attitude. He earlier slew

⁷⁵Cf. Evans, *Herodotus Explorer of the Past* 82; perhaps the story was an Athenian invention.

⁷⁶See Connor, "Early Greek Land Warfare" 18; cf. Hanson, *The Other Greeks* 334.

⁷⁷Note, Mardonius is absent from Herodotus' presentation of Thermopylae.

Eurybates, and was himself some time after Plataea killed near Datum on the river Strymon in Thrace, fighting with distinction there as well.

We are perhaps entitled to wonder why duelling figures so much in the narrative surrounding Plataea. It may be coincidence. But it may also be that Herodotus viewed Plataea as the culmination of a historical process set in motion by Thermopylae; he saw the earlier battle as integrally bound up with the results of the later one. Consequently, even duels that were not directly related either to Thermopylae or Plataea were given prominence. Perhaps since the duel was central to his understanding of the two engagements, he sought out other duels in connection with the battles; perhaps he did not consciously seek them out, but rather simply noticed them when he might not have otherwise.

CONCLUSION: HERODOTUS, THE “NEW SIMONIDES” (WEST 2² 10–17) AND THE THERMOPYLAE ODE (PMG 531)

It is precisely the duelling motif that permits Herodotus to represent Thermopylae as a victory. The pattern of national test and valorization that we see in Thyrea is also to be found there. Indeed, Thyrea goes a long way towards explaining the odd reference to hair custom in the later battle (national character), as well as more generally the intensification of duelling images and references around the battles of Thermopylae and its reprise, Plataea. The cost of Thermopylae was high, and it had to be not only explained, but made essential to the eventual Greek victory. The events themselves did not encourage such a view. The victory of Thermopylae had to be contested and proven, and Herodotus did this through understanding the battle as a duel. Others had different strategies.

In the “New Simonides”—the fragments that celebrate the Greek, and specifically the Spartan victory over the Persians at Plataea (West 2² 10–17)—the poet uses the epic past to lionize the Persian war heroes.⁷⁸ This was not an inevitable procedure. At the beginning of his *History* Herodotus, while adopting the language of Homer, invokes the legendary past to suggest the greater certainty and, by implication, the even greater importance of the events he intends to chart. Similarly, the comparison Thucydides draws at the beginning of his account between the

⁷⁸See esp. M. L. West, “Simonides Redivivus.” See also Luppe, “Zum neuesten Simonides,” Lloyd-Jones, “Notes on the New Simonides,” and Boedeker, “Simonides on Plataea.”

Trojan and the Peloponnesian wars is designed to highlight how the later conflict was the greatest *kinēsis* ever known in the Greek world. In other words, the epic past confers greatness on events of later days by being shown to be in some sense inferior—either in some quantifiable way, or because it cannot be verified. According to both historians, Homer in particular is liable to distort the truth and make things from the past appear to be great; the events that form the subjects of both their accounts are of much greater significance, and are reliably so.

Of course, Simonides predates both Herodotus and Thucydides; nonetheless the historians make clear for us that use of the epic past for the laudation of the contemporary or near-contemporary was not necessarily an obvious course to take for a *laudator* of the Greeks of the Persian wars, nor one that would have been recognized as invariably successful in the fifth century. Their concerns regarding the appropriation of Homer for the purpose of conferring greatness on their own subjects reveal problems for a historian or poet contemplating the praise of a person or deed. It is important to remember that in the Plataea Ode, Simonides linked the legendary past (the Trojan War) to the conflict with Persia. In Herodotus, while the legendary event and recent history are very close in detail, the two are not connected.⁷⁹

To use the Trojan War as an analogue for the Persian wars entailed risk. Admittedly, there were no doubt very few indeed who wished to withhold praise from the heroes of the more recent conflict. However, at some level the notion of praising the Persian war heroes by means of the world of epic shows us that the interpretation of the later events was in theory contestable when considered as being worthy of praise. While later generations could view the events of the Persian wars as great and heroic and in no need of comparison with anything else,⁸⁰ for Simonides a case, however small, had to be made. With this in mind, let us look finally at his Thermopylae Ode (*PMG* 531).

⁷⁹As Pericles says of the Athenians in the Funeral Oration, “we do not need a Homer to praise us, nor someone else who will for the present delight us with his words [note, *epesi*], but whose plan the truth of what happens will wreck; we have rendered the entire sea and land susceptible to our daring, and have established jointly everywhere timeless memorials of our anger and our help” (2.41.4). Not only is the word invalidated by the deed, as is so often the case in Thucydides (see Parry, *Logos and Ergon in Thucydides*), but specifically the epic word. In general, consult Boedeker’s excellent discussion, “Simonides on Plataea.”

⁸⁰Note, e.g., Isocrates *Panegyricus* 68–74 (delivered c. 380 B.C.); cf. Aristotle *Rh.* 1396a; see also Thuc. 1.73.2, 2.36.4. Consult Loraux, *The Invention of Athens* 155–56.

At Diodorus 11.11.6 we are told that not only compilers of histories but also a number of poets took up the task of praising the “gallantry” (*andragathia*) of the men of the Persian wars. Simonides is singled out as having provided an “encomium” worthy of their valor, in which one can read the following verses:

τῶν ἐν Θερμοπύλαις θανόντων
 εὐκλεῆς μὲν ἅ τύχα, καλὸς δ' ὁ πότμος,
 βωμὸς δ' ὁ τάφος, πρὸ γόων δὲ μνάστις, ὁ δ' οἶκτος ἔπαινος·
 ἐντάφιον δὲ τοιοῦτον οὔτ' εὐρὼς
 οὔθ' ὁ πανδαμάτωρ ἀμαυρώσει χρόνος.
 ἀνδρῶν ἀγαθῶν ὅδε σηκὸς οἰκέταν εὐδοξίαν
 Ἑλλάδος εἶλετο· μαρτυρεῖ δὲ καὶ Λεωνίδας,
 Σπάρτας βασιλεὺς, ἀρετᾶς μέγαν λελοιπῶς
 κόσμον ἀέναόν τε κλέος.⁸¹

This poem contains a number of difficulties, and it is not my purpose here to discuss them.⁸² While specific events from the epic past are not alluded to here as in the case of the Plataea Elegy, nonetheless I would like to suggest that the same problem lies behind it that we see with greater clarity in the new fragments. In some sense the worthiness of the men who fell at Thermopylae, their right to praise, had to be proven. Again, I do not mean to suggest that there would have been anything like serious opposition to the heroization of the Persian war dead; however, against a certain silence a statement had to be made.

That there is a quasi-polemical tone to *PMG* 531 is suggested in the first place by the need for Leonidas in the last lines as a “witness.” It may be that Simonides is singling out Leonidas for special attention, as one might expect given the demands of “geometric equality.”⁸³ But Leonidas is testifying to the worth of the other men. As Fränkel noted

⁸¹For κόσμον cf. the “Plataea Ode,” West 2² 11.23.

⁸²The chief one is determining the precise circumstance of its performance. Was the poem composed for performance at a festival? If so, for whom—Leonidas (on whose veneration as a hero there is outside evidence, see below n. 84), or the whole group of 300; and, relatedly, where was the poem performed (at Plataea, at Sparta)? See, e.g., Podlecki, “Simonides,” and the bibliography cited there. Importantly, the “New Simonides” presents similar problems: see most recently Aloni, “L’Elegia di Simonide.” Also of importance is determining precisely what genre of poetry the piece falls into—specifically *encomium* or *threnos*. Cf. Podlecki, “Simonides” 258–59 and 262, Degani and Burzacchini *Lirici Greci* 316–17. This ambiguity supports my point.

⁸³See Loraux, *The Invention of Athens* 59.

some time ago, the heroism of Leonidas validates the hero-status of all those who fell with him.⁸⁴ The reason this guarantee works is that fallen kings were treated as heroes at Sparta; even if the heroic honors that Leonidas was eventually to receive were not in place when Simonides wrote his ode, they could be anticipated. The assumed or actual existence of some sort of *agōn* at Sparta for Leonidas serves as the proof that the other men who died at Thermopylae were heroes as well. I do not mean to suggest that the men ought to be thought of as receiving heroic honors themselves, and that this poem ought to be understood as being performed at a festival for them.⁸⁵ This is an unnecessary step. Rather, only Leonidas is needed to confer by association everlasting glory on all the Spartans of Thermopylae. Hence, Simonides can claim in his poem that the traditional features of Greek funerary practice—the tomb, lament, and pity—are converted into celebratory concepts: an altar, memorial, and praise, respectively.⁸⁶ Similarly, the men's fate (τύχαι) mentioned at the beginning of the poem, being a periphrasis for "death," ought to be misfortune, but the adjective εὐκλεής makes it into specifically *good* fortune;⁸⁷ their πόντος, normally "doom,"⁸⁸ becomes something beautiful. As has been noticed, it is not that the funereal items are erased by ideas associated with praise and memory; rather they become transformed into them.⁸⁹

Both the use of Leonidas as "proof," and the way in which the poem helps to change the elements of lamentation into those of praise suggest that Simonides felt the need to claim for the dead at Thermopylae the status of heroes. I have tried to make this point in order to suggest that praise of these men was not, at the time Simonides was writing, necessarily a given: a case had to be made. With the duel-structure such as we see in Thyrea and elsewhere, Herodotus could make just such a case for Thermopylae—the battle was a victory that in fact sealed the final success of the Greeks at Plataea. The odd assortment of details that we see in both passages—hair, sole survivor, three hundred men—is not

⁸⁴Fränkel, *Early Greek Poetry* 320–21. On the heroic honors for Leonidas, see Pausanias 3.14.1, and *IG* 5.1 18, 19, and 658; see also Wide, *Lakonische Kulte* 358 and 369, and Rohde, *Psyche* 140–41 n. 20 and 556 n. 36. They consisted of rhetorical and gymnastic contests. Cf. Xenophon *Lac.* 15.9.

⁸⁵See above, n. 82.

⁸⁶Cf. Podlecki, "Simonides" 260.

⁸⁷Fränkel, *Early Greek Poetry* 320 n. 30.

⁸⁸The word always has the meaning of "evil destiny" in Homer; see LSJ⁹ s. v.

⁸⁹See esp. Fränkel, *Early Greek Poetry* 320–21.

evidence of deliberate patterning, but much more importantly, illumination of how Herodotus' mind worked. The "thick" description—the associations attached to the duel in Herodotus' mind—steers us in the direction of a possible historiographic accounting of Thyrea and Thermopylae: the structure and meaning of the double battle.

Unlike Simonides, though, and ultimately separate also from the associative matrix of ideas that lay behind Thyrea and Thermopylae, is the issue not of praise or even of broader cultural meanings in Herodotus; it is the issue of historical truth. In the end, he believed (or wanted to believe) that Thermopylae contributed directly to the eventual Greek triumph. He constructed the battle as a duel, and with the help of Thyrea, we know who really won.⁹⁰

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