HERODOTUS' HOMER: TROY, THERMOPYLAE, AND THE DORIANS

Peter Gainsford

In: C. Matthew and M. Trundle (eds.), *Beyond the Gates of Fire: New Perspectives on the Battle of Thermopylae*, Pen and Sword, 2013. (In print Mar. 2013)

For Greeks who were alive at the time of Thermopylae in 480 BCE, the Trojan War had held a central place since time immemorial as the greatest war of legend. And in the few decades just before the Persian Wars—since about the 520s, possibly a little earlier—a craze for Homeric epic had spread like wildfire through the Greek world, immortalising the Trojan War in an especially memorable way.[1] To be sure, there were famous historical wars in which many Greek states had participated, like the Lelantine War (ca. 700 BCE); and there existed other legends that featured heroes from all over the Greek world, such as the story of the Argonauts. But Troy was *the* war: the iconic example of all Greek peoples banding together against a non-Greek enemy from the east.

Herodotus' account of Thermopylae plays on the battle's status as a significant mythological moment. He evokes the realm of legend in some ways that are obvious: displays of valour and a heroic death are evocative tropes in Greek legend, and Herodotus creates numerous mythological echoes by means of specific allusions to Homeric epic. But as well as this, the battle itself evokes the legendary past in some more subtle ways: both by virtue of its location, and through the fact that the Dorians—the ethnic group to which the Spartans belonged—had, according to legend, not been

[1] Although Trojan War legends had always been popular, it is now widely accepted that the Homeric epics enjoyed widespread familiarity only from the late sixth century onwards (at least a century and a half, possibly well over two centuries, after they were composed). For the point generally see W. Burkert, 'The Making of Homer in the Sixth Century B.C.' in *Papers on the Amasis Painter and His World* (Malibu, Getty Museum, 1987) 43-62. A. Snodgrass, *Homer and the Artists* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998), especially 67-100, demonstrates that pictorial depictions of Trojan War scenes after ca. 550 show a sharp increase in the rate of episodes that also appear in Homer. Burkert (this note, *supra*) and J.S. Burgess, *The Tradition of the Trojan War in Homer and the Epic Cycle* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001) 114-131 and 190-191 show that there is scarcely any evidence for awareness of Homer prior to 550; the only sign is in Herodotus' rather doubtful story, 5.67.1, of Cleisthenes of Sicyon banning the performance of 'Homer' (and as Macan observes, 'Homer' here probably does not refer to the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*). After 550 we begin to find references to Homer in the philosophical writers Xenophanes and Heracleitus; Burgess argues that Homeric parallels in earlier 'literary' poets are best explained by a shared poetic tradition. M.L. West, *Studies in the Text and Transmission of the Iliad* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001) 15-19 expands on Burkert and conjectures that Homeric epic may have been first popularised in Athens at the Great Panathenaea of 522, in the wake of Cynaethus' (also conjectural) success with the *Hymn to Apollo* at the combined Pythia-Delia of the previous year. Hippostratus, *BNJ* 568 F 5 (= sch. on Pind. *Nem.* 2.1c), informs us that Homeric epic was first performed in Syracuse in 504/1, by Cynaithus. And on an important technology for the dissemination of Homer, namely writing, J. Svenbro, *Phrasikleia: an Anthropology of Reading in Ancient Greece* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1993) 28-43 demonstrates that it was only in and after the 540s that written text moved from *being* an utterance towards assimilating the function of *transcribing* a pre-existing utterance. In spite of this accumulation of evidence (Snodgrass, Hippostratus, Svenbro) and argumentation (Burkert, Burgess, West), the late sixth century date for Homer's popularisation is not universally believed; for documentation of disagreement see Snodgrass and Burgess.

Electronic copy available at: http://ssrn.com/abstract=2665956

at Troy. So the battle of Thermopylae has its own resonances, in addition to Herodotus' epic echoes. First, though, we shall look at the use of Homeric epic in poetic treatments of the Persian Wars as a background to Herodotus' use of Homer.

I. The Persian Wars as a Reiteration of the Trojan War

With the Trojan War as a legendary archetype, it did not take long for the Greeks to begin making comparisons with the Persian Wars: both were wars fought by a pan-Hellenic alliance against the eastern barbarians.[2] Indeed the process may have begun even before the second Persian invasion: Andrew Erskine traces the process back to Aeginetan cult worship of the Aeacids (descendants of the hero Aeacus, including Peleus and Achilles) in the 480s, and more specifically to Pindar's sixth and fifth *Isthmian* odes, probably composed in 482 and 480 respectively. The poems, both sung in honour of athletic victors from Aegina, refer to the cult, and the later poem draws a link to the battle of Salamis which had taken place that very year.[3]

The parallels are much nearer the surface and much more central in an elegiac ode composed by Simonides of Keos to celebrate the battle of Plataea, whose surviving fragments were recovered and published only recently.[4] Here already, in a poem composed in 479 or 478,[5] we find Simonides—in his late seventies at this point, and perhaps the most renowned Greek poet of the day—not only treating Plataea as a reiteration of the battle for Troy, but even drawing parallels between Achilles and the victorious Spartan general Pausanias. The ode opens with an extended invocation to the

[2] J. Haubold, 'Xerxes' Homer' in E. Bridges et al. (eds.) *Cultural Responses to the Persian Wars* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007) 47-63, at 48-49, suggests the reverse: that it was only after the Persian Wars that the Trojan War was reinterpreted as celebrating pan-Hellenic unity against the barbarians. There may be something in this idea; but as it stands, the argument relies on ascribing some of Herodotus' Trojan War echoes to Xerxes' propaganda machine, which is hazardous given that so many other echoes are unquestionably Herodotus' own doing (see parts II and III, below); it also relies on downplaying the qualitative distinctions drawn *within the Iliad* between the Greeks and Trojans.

[3] See A. Erskine, *Troy between Greece and Rome* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001) 61-92, for this and other parallels drawn by fifth century Greeks between the two wars; for further bibliography see J. Grethlein, 'The Manifold Uses of the Epic Past: the Embassy Scene in Herodotus 7.153-63' *AJP* 127 (2006), 485-509, at 502-505.

[4] Simonides fr. eleg. 10-fr. eleg. 17, ed. M.L. West, *Iambi et Elegi Graeci* vol. 2, 2nd ed. (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992); cited as 'W^2'. *Editio princeps*: P. Parsons, '3965: Simonides, Elegies' *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* 59 (1992), 4-50. For discussion of the poem see especially the essays in D. Boedeker and D. Sider (eds.), *The New Simonides: Contexts of Praise and Desire* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001).

[5] There is more consensus about the poem's date now than when it was first published. Simon. fr. eleg. 11.31-34 W^2 eulogises Pausanias in glowing terms, which—absent any evidence of poetic irony—must predate Pausanias' fall into ignominy and the formation of the Delian League in 478/7. Similarly Parsons (n. 4) 6; D. Boedeker, 'Simonides on Plataea: Narrative Elegy, Mythodic History' *ZPE* 107 (1995), 217-229, at 225; A. Aloni, 'The Proem of Simonides' Plataea Elegy and the Circumstances of Its Performance' in *The New Simonides* (n. 4) 86-105, at 99-102. In the early 1990s M.L. West, 'Simonides Redivivus' *ZPE* 98 (1993), 1-14, at 8-9, favoured a later date, interpreting fr. eleg. 14.9-10 W^2 (Teisamenus' prophecy, corresponding to Hdt. 9.36) as referring to the founding of the Delian League, hence dating the poem to 477 or later. In light of Pausanias' heroic status in the poem, it is far more likely that these allusive and very fragmentary lines refer to the alliance under Pausanias' leadership immediately in the wake of Plataea.

Electronic copy available at: http://ssrn.com/abstract=2665956

spirit of Achilles (the 'son of a sea-nymph' addressed in the second line):[6]

… for m[y compos]ition […]
[O son of] sea-[nymph], glorious in thy fame.
. . .
[It was no ordinary mortal] laid you low,
['twas by Apoll]o's hand [that you were struck.]
[Athena] was at [hand, and smote the famous t]ow[n]
[with Hera: they were wro]th with Priam's sons
[because of P]aris' wickedness. The car of God's
Justice o'ertakes [the sinner in the end.]
[And so] the valiant Danaans, [best of warr]iors,
sacked the much-sung-of city, and came [home;]
[and they] are bathed in fame that cannot die, by grace
[of one who from the dark-]tressed Muses had
the tru[th entire,] and made the heroes' short-lived race
a theme familiar to younger men.

After this hymnic invocation, Simonides goes on to emphasise the link between the Spartans at Plataea and those that had been at Troy. He links the contemporary Spartans to Menelaus, the legendary Spartan king on whose behalf the Trojan War was fought:[7]

… so that rem[embrance is preserved]
of those who held the line for Spart[a and for Greece,]
[that none should see] the da[y of slavery.]
They kept their co[urage, and their fame rose] heaven-high:
[their glory in] the world [will] never die.
[From the Eu]rotas and from [Sparta's] town they [marched,]
accompanied by Zeus' horsemaster sons,
[the Tyndareid] Heroes, and by Menelaus' strength,
[those doughty] captains of [their fath]ers' folk,
led forth by [great Cleo]mbrotus' most noble [son,]
[…] Pausanias.

Simonides goes on to refer to other cities, too, though Sparta remains at the front of attention in a

[6] Simon. frs. eleg. 10.4-5, 11.1-12 W^2. Verse translations of Simonides are from M.L. West, *Greek Lyric Poetry* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1993) 168-170.

[7] Simon. fr. eleg. 11.24-34 W^2.

subsequent fragment.[8] It is not certain that the Spartans remained central throughout the poem—though the phrase 'for Sparta and for Greece' (Σπάρτ[ηι τε καὶ Ἑλλάδι), if West's restoration is correct, strongly suggests that they did—, but even if they did not, that does not detract from the Trojan War parallels contained in these passages.

The poem plays on Homeric echoes in a number of ways. For one, Pausanias actually outdoes Achilles. It may have taken a god's hand to strike down Achilles, but he still died before Troy fell; Pausanias, implies Simonides, enjoys the gods' favour even more. For another, hexameter verse—epic—is the usual vehicle for heroic narrative. Simonides' poem is not epic, but he comes close: in elegiac verse every second line is a hexameter, and Simonides' poem has numerous incidental linguistic and stylistic features that are characteristic of epic.[9] This is not without precedent: we have a sprinkling of earlier examples where poets use verse forms close to the epic hexameter as vehicles for both historical and heroic narratives.[10]

Simonides also composed poems on the battles of Artemisium, Salamis, and possibly Marathon; unfortunately the surviving fragments of those poems are much less extensive.[11] There is a further poem that has often been taken as an ode on Thermopylae, whose one surviving fragment mentions Leonidas (531 *PMG*). But the fragment does not mention Thermopylae, as almost every edition erroneously indicates; and its phrasing implies that Leonidas is being cited in parenthesis, as a paradigm of valour, rather than as the topic of the poem.[12] As for the most famous poem on the

[8] Corinth, Megara, and probably Athens included in the army's itinerary, fr. eleg. 11.35-42 W^2; Sparta nonetheless remains central, fr. eleg. 13.8-10 W^2.

[9] Examples taken just from fr. eleg. 11 W^2: numerous epic linguistic forms; hymnic proem (lines 1-18), concluding with conventional transition (19-20) and followed by invocation of Muse (21-28); death of Achilles, hero slain by god (1-8); simile (1-2); pain and grief take hold of the people (5; cf. *Il.* 1.2 'placed countless pains on the Achaeans'); sacking cities (13 πόλι]ν πέρσαντες; cf. *Od.* 1.2 πτολίεθρον ἔπερσε); 'immortal glory' (15 and 28); personal reference to Homer (15-18).

[10] See especially I. Rutherford, 'The New Simonides: toward a Commentary' in *The New Simonides* (n. 4) 33-54, at 41-42; also E.L. Bowie, 'Ancestors of Historiography in Early Greek Elegiac and Iambic Poetry?' in N. Luraghi (ed.) *The Historian's Craft in the Age of Herodotus* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007) 45-66. In addition to Rutherford's examples (foundation elegies by Mimnermus, Tyrtaeus, Semonides, Xenophanes, and Ion), note also two fragments specifically on Trojan War themes: the Archilochus elegiac fragment in p.Oxy. 4708^{v}, published in 2005, which recounts the Greeks' defeat by Telephus (but cf. D. Obbink, 'A New Archilochus Poem' *ZPE* 156 (2006), 1-9, at 8, who distances Archilochus' poem from Simonides'); and Sappho fr. 44 Voigt, on the wedding of Hector and Andromache, is in a glyconic metre with dactylic expansion, i.e. similar to the first four and a half feet of a hexameter, and even contains echoes of epic formulae.

[11] Artemisium: elegiac, some or all of frs. eleg. 3-9 W^2 (cf. 532-535 *PMG*); eight complete lines survive. Salamis: probably melic, 536 *PMG*, but genre not altogether certain; if elegiac, some of frs. eleg. 3-9 W^2 probably come from the Salamis poem. On these poems and their genres see West, 'Simonides Redivivus' (n. 5) 2-4; Rutherford (n. 10) 35-38. Marathon: elegiac; attested by the major *Life* of Aeschylus at 8; but likely to be only a pseudo-Simonidean epigram (cf. n. 13 below).

[12] On the unlikelihood of 531 *PMG* being about Thermopylae, see especially M.L. West, 'Some Lyric Fragments Reconsidered', *CQ* 25 (1975) 307-9, at 308-9; also A.J. Podlecki, 'Simonides: 480' *Historia* 17 (1960), 257-275, at 257-262. West's points have been almost universally ignored, though they have never been answered, let alone refuted. Diodorus, our source for the fragment (11.11.6), frames the quotation with the words τῶν ἐν Θερμοπύλαις θανόντων

Persian Wars, the epigram for the Spartan dead at Thermopylae: the epigram is popularly attributed to Simonides, but there is no doubt that this attribution is false. Herodotus knew the epigram, and he knew his Simonides well, but the epigram's real author was unknown to him.[13] Other named poets who wrote about the Persian Wars focused almost exclusively on Salamis and Plataea, so far as we know; and their depictions do not draw as heavily on Homer.[14] So it is in Simonides' Plataea ode that we can most clearly see the parallels being drawn between the war of the present and the war of the legendary past.

II. Epic Echoes in Herodotus Book 7

Herodotus' affinity to Homeric epic has often attracted comment.[15] Most famously, his prologue begins by stating one of his chief aims as that 'human events should not fade away with time, and that great deeds and amazing things … should not be without fame', echoing the Homeric (and Simonidean!) use of heroic narrative verse to preserve 'unfading honour' or 'undying fame'.[16] Also

('of those who died at Thermopylae'). This phrase is often misquoted as part of the poem, but that is unlikely: it is a poor fit with the poem's metre, which is mostly dactylo-epitrite. The poem's reference to Leonidas—'Leonidas, too, bears witness to this: …' (μαρτυρεῖ δὲ καὶ Λεωνίδας)—sounds not like a poem about Leonidas, but like a parenthesis alluding to him as a semi-legendary *exemplum*. Less decisively, West also has a stylistic objection to 'line 1'. In any case, it is likely that Diodorus does not know the rest of the poem: M. Flower, 'Simonides, Ephorus, and Herodotus on the Battle of Thermopylae' *CQ* 48 (1998), 365-379, at 369, argues that he found it in Ephorus. In that case, Diodorus only describes the poem as being about 'those who died at Thermopylae' because it alludes to Leonidas.

[13] Hdt. 7.228.2, = 'Simon.' epigr. xxii(b) Page. Herodotus' familiarity with Simonides is shown by his juxtaposition of Simonides' epitaph for Megistias, Hdt. 7.228.4 = Simon. epigr. vi Page. The more famous epigram's association with Simonides is a result of widespread 'upward attribution' in Hellenistic anthologies; several other anonymous epigrams in Herodotus suffered the same fate. Megistias' epitaph is the only Herodotean case where there is any good evidence for Simonidean authorship. Cf. Podlecki (n. 12) 258 with n. 6.

[14] Phrynichus, *Phoenissae* (perhaps 476 BCE) and Aisch., *Pers.* (472), both focusing on Salamis and performed in Athens; Pindar, *Pyth.* 1.75-78 (470), alluding to Salamis and Plataea, performed by a Theban singing to a Syracusan audience (an audience that would have included Simonides, who had settled at Hieron's court by that time). Later in the fifth century there are Choerilus' epic *Persica*, which may have covered the whole Persian Wars (ed. A. Bernabé, *Poetarum epicorum graecorum testimonia et fragmenta*, vol. 1, editio correctior [Stuttgart, Teubner, 1996]); and Timotheus' melic *Persae* (788-791 *PMG*), on Salamis (Timotheus imitates Simonides' Plataea ode in some respects).

[15] See especially (with further bibliography) D. Boedeker, 'Epic Heritage and Mythical Patterns in Herodotus' in E. Bakker, I. de Jong, H. van Wees (eds.) *Brill's Companion to Herodotus* (Leiden, Brill, 2002) 97-116. Cf. also *ead.*, 'Heroic Historiography: Simonides and Herodotus on Plataea', in *The New Simonides* (n. 4) 120-134, especially 121-124, adding Simonides' Plataea ode to the Homer-Herodotus connection; A. Griffiths, 'Stories and storytelling in the *Histories*', in C. Dewald and J. Marincola (eds.) *The Cambridge Companion to Herodotus* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006) 130-144, especially 135-142; J. Marincola, 'Herodotus and the Poetry of the Past' in *The Cambridge Companion* (this note, *supra*) 13-28.

[16] Hdt. 1, prologue. Translations of sources other than Simonides are my own. Phrases of the form 'unfading glory, undying honour,' etc., are found in *Iliad* 9.413; Sappho fr. 44.4 Voigt; Simonides' Plataea ode, fr. eleg. 11.15 and 28 W^2, and his ode on the fallen, 531.9 *PMG*; and in several other Archaic poets. Cf. also Achilles singing of 'the glories of men', *Iliad* 9.189; Simonides' Plataea ode is sung 'so that rem[embrance is preserved] / of those who held the line for

famously, one Hellenistic-era literary critic known only as 'pseudo-Longinus' refers to a tradition of describing Herodotus as 'the most Homeric' of writers;[17] and a second-century poetic inscription from Herodotus' hometown, Halicarnassus, celebrates him among its citizens as 'the historians' Homer on foot' (i.e. in prose).[18] Herodotus was well-acquainted with epic poetry other than Homer;[19] he also has links to contemporary epic poets. The *Souda*, a Byzantine encyclopaedia, tells us (probably falsely) that Herodotus was the lover of Choerilus of Samos, who composed an epic *Persika* on the history of Persia, including the Persian Wars; and (probably accurately) that another epic poet, Panyasis of Halicarnassus, was Herodotus' cousin or possibly his uncle.[20]

To put Herodotus' account of Thermopylae in context, the remainder of this section is devoted to a catalogue of allusions to epic, and to the Trojan War more generally, in the lead-up to Thermopylae, throughout book 7 of the *History*. Some allusions are not specifically Homeric, but evoke Trojan War legend more generally.

7.10.θ.3. Artabanos warns the Persian general Mardonius that if he goes to Greece, those back home 'will hear that Mardonius did great harm to Persia, and was torn apart by dogs and birds somewhere in the land of the Athenians or the Lacedaemonians.' *Iliad* 1.4-5: Achilles' wrath 'made strong-souled heroes prey for dogs / and for all birds.'[21]

7.12-18. Xerxes has a dream that orders him to invade Greece or suffer dire consequences. The most direct referent of the motif is probably Agamemnon's false dream in *Iliad* 2.1-40, sent by Zeus to command him to attack Troy; but the episode contains a mix of epic and eastern motifs.[22]

7.28.1. Verbal echo: Pythus of Lydia answers a question put to him by Xerxes with the words, 'O king, I shall not hide it from you nor pretend I do not know … but I shall tell you exactly.' Compare the Homeric ἀτρεκέως καταλέξω 'I shall tell you exactly' (*Il*. 10.413, 10.427; *Od*. 24.123, 24.303); and 'I shall hide no word, nor conceal it' (*Od*. 4.350, 17.141).[23]

7.33. Foreshadowing of Atayktes' desecration of Protesilaus' shrine, an incident that takes place after Plataea (Hdt. 9.116-121). This is not primarily an Iliadic echo (though Protesilaus is

---

Spart[a and for Greece]', fr. eleg. 11.24-25 W^2. Similarly Boedeker, 'Epic Heritage' (n. 15) 99.

[17] Ps.-Longinus *On the Sublime* 13.3; but it is often forgotten that ps.-Longinus himself thinks Stesichorus, Archilochus, and Plato all outdo Herodotus in their 'Homeric-ness'.

[18] *Pride of Halicarnassus* 43-44, ed. S. Isager, 'The Pride of Halikarnassos: Editio Princeps of an Inscription from Salmakis' *ZPE* 123 (1998), 1-23. Cf. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *On Thuc.* 23 = 360.12-16 Usener-Rademacher, who echoes the poem ('Herodotus … designed his prose phraseology to be like the strongest poetry').

[19] Hdt. 2.116-117 compares the stories of Paris' journey with Helen as reported by the *Iliad* and the *Cypria*, and concludes that the *Cypria* cannot have been by Homer. J. Burgess, 'Kyprias, the *Kypria*, and Multiformity' *Phoenix* 56 (2002), 234-245, especially 239-240, argues on the basis of the *Pride of Halicarnassus* that Herodotus knew of a Halicarnassean variant of the *Kypria*, which was (later?) attributed by the Halicarnasseans to 'Cyprias of Halicarnassus' rather than to the more commonly assigned author, Stasinus of Cyprus.

[20] Choerilus T 1 Bernabé (= *Suda* χ.594); Panyasis T 1 Bernabé (= *Suda* π.248).

[21] See also Boedeker, 'Epic Heritage' (n. 15) 102.

[22] See further E. Baragwanath, *Motivation and Narrative in Herodotus* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008) 251.

[23] See also Boedeker, 'Epic Heritage' (n. 15) 101.

mentioned in *Il*. 2.698-702), but refers to an incident at the beginning of the Trojan War: Protesilaus was the first Greek to set foot on Trojan soil, and was promptly killed. Herodotus chooses the very moment that Xerxes is leading his army across the Hellespont into Greek lands to foreshadow the story. In addition, the story of Protesilaus' death is one that bodes ill for people leading an invasion; presumably this includes Xerxes.[24]

7.43. Xerxes goes up to the acropolis of Troy, having a yearning (ἵμερος) to see Priam's citadel, and sacrifices a thousand oxen to 'Ilian Athena'; his *magoi* pour libations to the (Trojan) heroes. Xerxes' sacrifice has been interpreted as a propaganda move, to cast himself as 'the avenger of Priam';[25] in Herodotus' hands it recalls the Trojan women's unsuccessful offering to propitiate Athena in *Iliad* 6.263-312. In Homer, the icon of Athena averts its gaze from the offering (*Il*. 6.311); in Herodotus, the sacrifices are followed by a night-time panic in the Persian camp (perhaps alluding to the Homeric Athena's use of the *aigis* to strike fear into the Trojans?). After this episode, in 7.44, Xerxes organises a rowing contest at Abydos, perhaps faintly echoing the athletic games in *Iliad* 23.257-897.

7.61-100. The catalogue of Xerxes' forces, in imitation of the lengthy Catalogue of Ships in *Iliad* 2.484-785. There are also shorter catalogues and catalogic elements elsewhere in Herodotus book 7: 7.20-21, on the size of Xerxes' force; 7.40-41, Xerxes' marching order and equipment; 7.44, Xerxes reviews his forces at Abydos (juxtaposed with his visit to Troy, above); 7.184-187, headcounts of Xerxes' forces; 7.202, the catalogue of the Greek allies stationed at Thermopylae; and 7.226-227, on which see part III, below.

7.101-105, **7.209**, and **7.234-237.** Xerxes and Demaratus. On three occasions Xerxes asks the former Spartan king for information: first, about what to expect from the Greeks; second, about his scout's report on the Spartans' preparations for battle; and third, about the Spartans' performance at Thermopylae and what the Persians' subsequent tactics should be. On all three occasions Demaratus gives accurate information and good advice, but Xerxes fails to believe the information or follow the advice (on the third occasion, because Achaimenes gives contrary advice). Demaratus' role is more than a little reminiscent of the Homeric Poulydamas, whose main role in the *Iliad* is to give the Trojan leader Hector advice about matters that Hector should already have thought of.[26] In some scenes Hector receives Poulydamas' advice amicably (*Il*. 12.60-80, 13.723-755; similarly 5.471-98, Hector accepts a rebuke from Sarpedon), though in the book 13 scene he never actually follows up the advice; in a group of more elaborate scenes, he rejects the advice arrogantly (12.210-250, 18.249-313; similarly 17.140-82, Hector rejects a rebuke from Glaucus). At one point the poet even offers an editorial comment on Hector's poor sense (18.311-313).

7.133-137. The wrath of Talthybius. Herodotus recalls an episode from Darius' invasion ten years earlier: when Darius had demanded earth and water as a sign of submission, the Athenians

[24] On the Atayktes story see especially D. Boedeker, 'Protesilaos and the End of Herodotus' *Histories*' *ClAnt* 7 (1988), 30-48; see 41-45 on the book 7 foreshadowing.

[25] So Haubold (n. 2) 55; see 54-58 on this episode generally.

[26] On Poulydamas in the *Iliad*, see especially M. Clark, 'Poulydamas and Hektor' *College Literature* 34 (2007), 85-106.

and Spartans murdered the Persian ambassadors. Herodotus can report no divine punishment of the Athenians; but he records how, before Xerxes' invasion, the Spartans suffered the anger of Talthybios, Agamemnon's herald at Troy, who had a cult in Sparta. To propitiate the hero the Spartans sent two volunteers to Xerxes to compensate for the murder with their lives; but Xerxes refused to kill them, and as a result Herodotus considers that Talthybius was not fully appeased.

7.156-162. Homeric quotations during the Greek embassy to Syracuse. When Gelon, the tyrant of Syracuse, insists on leadership of the Greek forces, the Spartan ambassador Syagros replies 'Surely he'd groan loudly, Pelops' son Agamemnon, if he heard that Spartiates had been deprived of leadership.' The first part is very nearly a strict hexameter, and paraphrases *Iliad* 7.125, where Nestor says 'Surely he'd groan loudly, the aged horseman Peleus.' Nestor's line is a rebuke to the Greek heroes *including Agamemnon* after the latter had dissuaded Menelaus from fighting a duel; Herodotus' quotation therefore has a layer of irony. Next the Athenian ambassador refuses to give up command of the navy, and quotes in full *Iliad* 2.553-554 to support the Athenian claim to command by reference to the Athenian hero Menestheus; but the original is about Menestheus' skill at marshalling *infantry*, not naval forces, and is therefore also ironic. Jonas Grethlein discusses the whole episode in detail.[27] The Menestheus quotation probably also hints at an elegiac inscription about Menestheus erected in the Athenian agora in the 470s, which Herodotus would have seen, and which refers to the Homeric passage explicitly.[28]

7.169-170. Crete consults the Delphic oracle and is berated for having aided the Spartan leader Menelaus in the Trojan War, seeing as the mainland Greeks had refused to help avenge the death of their own legendary king Minos previously.

7.191.2. Sacrifices to Thetis. In Thessaly Xerxes' forces are prevented from sailing by a storm, so Xerxes' *magoi* offer sacrifices to Thetis and the other Nereids. In Trojan War legend, Thetis is Achilles' mother, and Peleus his father. Herodotus' story recalls two incidents. (1) Explicitly: Herodotus specifies that the sacrifices were offered on the very spot where Peleus raped Thetis. This additionally recalls Herodotus' preface, where he traces the history of Greco-Persian conflicts back to a conflicts over women that one nation has raped from the other, including the Trojan War. (2) Implicitly: a sacrifice to assuage a storm recalls an incident at the beginning of the Trojan War, when the Greek fleet had been prevented from sailing by a storm; on that occasion they appeased Artemis by sacrificing Agamemnon's daughter, Iphigeneia.[29]

---

[27] Grethlein (n. 3). Grethlein cautiously declines to assume that Herodotus could rely on his audience picking up Syagrus' paraphrase; but as he points out, Syagrus uses a distinctive epicism/Aeolism, κε, and its presence would unmistakeably provoke at least the suspicion of an allusion. In addition, imagining the phrase as a hexameter would require imagining a lengthened *ē* in 'P<ē>lops' (ἦ κε μέγ' οἰμώξειε ὁ Π<η>λοπίδης Ἀγαμέμνων): it is at least possible that this should be understood as a false echo of 'Pēleus' in the original (γέρων ἱππηλάτα Πηλεὺς).

[28] Aischin. *Against Ctesiphon* 185; Plut. *Cimon* 7.6. Both quote the poem and report that the inscription was erected in the Stoa of the Herms after the battle of Eion in 475.

[29] *Cypria* argumentum 42-49 Bernabé; ps.-Apollod. *Bibl*. epit. 3.21-22.

III. Epic Echoes in the Thermopylae Narrative

There is no reason to expect the account of Thermopylae (Hdt. 7.207-233) to be designed primarily around Homeric allusions. However, epic motifs are even more prominent than in the earlier parts of book 7. They are naturally more densely clustered because of the nature of battle narrative; but it would be a mistake to suppose that their function is *only* to add flavour. Herodotus uses epic echoes to evoke mythological paradigms for more recent events: in the case of Thermopylae, he especially uses them to evoke the battle's archetypal, mythological, status. The resulting undertones are not generally surprising or ironic (unlike the case of the embassy to Syracuse, above).

(1.) 7.220: Leonidas' short life and unfading fame. Still in the prelude to the battle, Herodotus justifies and heroises Leonidas' forthcoming death and his dismissal of (some of) the Greek allies by citing an oracle that the Spartans had supposedly received from Delphi at the start of the war.[30] Both the 'dismissal' and the oracle are certainly *post eventum* rationalisations. The 'dismissal' rationalises the Greeks' partial (and perhaps rather disorganised) withdrawal in the face of certain defeat; the oracle may have been composed either before or after the battle, but was certainly attached to Thermopylae in hindsight. The oracle alludes to the Persians' supposed descent from Perseus and the Spartans' from Heracles:

> Hear your fate, dwellers in wide-spaced Sparta:
> either your great and famous city is sacked by Perseus' sons,
> or if not, then from Heracles' descent
> a king will die and be mourned by the land of Lacedaemon:
> for the strength of bulls and lions will not hold him,
> opposing him; for he has the strength of Zeus. And I say he
> will not be stopped until he has consumed one of these two.

In Herodotus' account, the Spartan king is of course Leonidas.

An ambiguity in the fifth line warrants a short digression. It is uncertain what the word τόν, 'him' or perhaps 'it', refers to: grammatically the options are Heracles, the king, and Lacedaemon (it cannot be the plural 'Perseus' sons'). Macan rejects all of these options and suggests an abstract sense, something like 'bulls and lions cannot prevent <this event>';[31] if that is the case, then the pronoun's masculine gender is odd. The reference to 'lions' and their association with Leonidas' name ('Leonidas' = 'lion's son') may suggest that Xerxes himself is meant, i.e. 'bulls and

[30] On the motivations for Leonidas' supposed strategic choices at Thermopylae, see C. Matthew, 'Was the Defence of Thermopylae in 480 BC a Suicide Mission?', this volume ???-???, at ???; also R.H. Simpson, 'Leonidas' Decision' *Phoenix* 26 (1972), 1-11; Baragwanath (n. 22) 64-78.

[31] R.W. Macan, *Herodotus. The Seventh, Eighth, & Ninth Books*, vol. 1 part 1 (London, Macmillan, 1908) 326.

Leonidases cannot hold Xerxes back'; but that would presuppose that the oracle was written specifically with Thermopylae in mind,[32] which is an unsafe assumption. Another possibility is that the oracle was written with the first Persian invasion in mind, and that Darius is meant. Personally I favour a reference to Heracles, in spite of Macan's dismissal: it strikes me that the thrust of the oracle is that a god demands a sacrifice. If so, the god in question can only be Heracles. In support of the notion, the 'bulls and lions … opposing him' in a heroic duel (line 6 ἀντιβίην, used often in epic for duels) looks like a reference to Heracles' labours, that is, the bull of Erymanthus and the lion of Nemea; and the phrase 'he has the strength of Zeus' refers much more easily to Heracles than to a Persian. However, there can be no certainty: this is an oracle, and oracles are obscure.

In any case Herodotus' quotation of the oracle is not focused on Heracles, though he does serve as a useful reminder of the Spartans' heroic forebears. Rather, Herodotus uses the oracle to emphasise the irresistible nature of divine will (whether that means the will of the Delphic god or of Heracles), as a way of strengthening his rationalisation of Leonidas' 'suicide'. Not only were Leonidas and the three hundred so heroic as to choose their own destruction over that of Sparta; it was even the will of a god that one or the other had to be chosen. Other ancient accounts of Thermopylae go even further and cast the battle as a suicide mission from the start (Diod. 11.4.3-4; Trogus *apud* Justin 2.11; ps.-Plut. *Laconian Sayings* 224f, 225c; (ps.-?)Plut. *Malice of Herodotus* 866b); in fact, our only source who does *not* cast Leonidas' death as a planned suicide is the one who relied the most heavily on Persian sources, Ctesias (*apud* Photius cod. 72, 39.i.23-40).

The epic echo lies only partly in the allusions to ancient heroes (Perseus and Heracles) and their present-day heritage (the contemporary Persians and Spartans). More centrally, it lies in the notion of the good death: Leonidas' death is the more heroic for being chosen voluntarily. Herodotus forges close links between Leonidas' choice and his fame. Before quoting the oracle Herodotus tells us, 'Since he remained, he left behind great fame and his legacy; and the prosperity of Sparta was not erased'; and after the oracle, we are told that Leonidas 'wished to store up fame for the Spartiates alone'. These sentiments are still more accentuated in later sources like Diodorus, who concludes his account of the battle with an unreserved eulogy on the Spartans and quotation of Simonides' ode on the fame of those who died in battle.[33] The archetype for this kind of glory through self-sacrifice is the Homeric Achilles (*Iliad* 9.410-416):

> For my mother says—the goddess silver-footed Thetis—
> the fate I bear goes two ways, and my death's end.
> If I stay and fight over the Trojans' city
> my homecoming is lost, but my fame will be unfading;
> but if I get home to my own native land
> my good fame is lost, but long life for me

[32] So R.V. Munson, *Telling Wonders: Ethnographic and Political Discourse in the Work of Herodotus* (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2001) 246.

[33] Diod. 11.11.6; cf. n. 12 above.

> there'll be: my death's end wouldn't come quickly.

As we have already seen, the phrase 'my fame will be unfading' is echoed by Simonides, and has resonances in several Archaic poets. The Iliadic Achilles does not choose fame and a short life—in fact, he states firmly that there is no justification for losing one's life[34]—but as it turns out other considerations prevail, and Achilles does ultimately stay, die young, and win eternal fame. Leonidas, by contrast, is constant in his 'choice'.

(2.) 7.224: the Spartan *aristeia*. In Homer, an *aristeia* is a stock scene where a hero shows his 'excellence' by going on a killing spree; the scene tends to draw on a fairly regular set of motifs.[35] There are five major *aristeiai* in the *Iliad* (Diomedes, 5.1-6.236; Agamemnon, 11.15-283; Idomeneus, 13.240-515; Patroclus, 16.130-863; and Achilles, 19.357-22.404, this last with several interludes). *Aristeiai* do not follow as strict a sequence of motifs as some stock scenes, but one sign that an *aristeia* is about to begin is an arming scene (Agamemnon, Achilles; also Idomeneus, though abbreviated); and often they end with the rampaging hero being injured or killed (Agamemnon, Patroclus; Teucer is wounded at the end of a minor *aristeia*, 8.266-334).

In Herodotus, the excellence that is on display is that of the Spartans generally. We do not get an arming scene at the beginning; but we do get the story of how one of Xerxes' scouts saw the Spartans exercising and combing their hair to prepare for battle (7.208-209). And as in most Homeric *aristeiai*, the Spartan *aristeia* concludes in defeat: first Leonidas, then the rest of the three hundred (7.224-225).

Describing the final day of the battle, Herodotus again emphasises the Spartans' fame, telling us that he knows the names of all three hundred—though none of the Thespiaeans' or Thebans' names, it seems—and then goes on to catalogue the Persian dead:

> And numerous Persians of name fell there too, including two sons of Darius, Habrocomes and Hyperanthes, who were born from Artanes' daughter Phratagoune; Artanes was the brother of Darius, and the son of Hystaspes, son of Arsames. In handing over his daughter to Darius, he handed over his whole estate, as she was his only child.

As catalogues go this is a brief one. But the fact of its presence, and especially the anecdote from Habrocomes' and Hyperanthes' family history, are strikingly reminiscent of Homeric passages of the following kind (*Il*. 11.218-225):

---

[34] *Il*. 9.318-320 ('The same destiny for one who holds back, the same if he fights hard; / the same honour for both the base man and the good. / As the man without deeds dies, so does the one who's done much'); 9.401-409 ('Not worth my life, not all the wealth that they say / Ilios has acquired … / a man's breath doesn't come back, can't be won, / can't be caught, once it's crossed the teeth's barrier').

[35] On stock scenes in Homeric battle narrative generally see B. Fenik, *Typical Battle Scenes in the Iliad* (Wiesbaden, Steiner, 1968).

> Tell me now Muses, you who hold the halls of Olympus,
> who was the first to come against Agamemnon
> either of the Trojans or of their famous allies?
> Iphidamas son of Antenor, good and big:
> he was raised in Thrace, a fertile land and mother of flocks:
> Cisses reared him in his house when he was a tot,
> his mother's brother, who bore lovely-cheeked Theano;
> but when he came to the measure of splendid youth, …[36]

The whole anecdote does not need to be quoted; anecdotes of this kind are common in Homeric death scenes. We also find several lists of slain warriors framed with lines like 'There who was the first one, and who the last killed …?': *Iliad* 5.703-709 (list of warriors slain by Hector); 8.273-277 (Teucer as slayer); 11.299-309 (Hector again); 16.692-697 (Patroclus). These catalogues' emphasis on location—each list begins with the word 'there' (ἔνθα)—is echoed by Herodotus in his own miniature catalogue: 'numerous Persians of name fell there [ἐνθαῦτα] too'. Likewise also 14.508-510, a list of Achaeans of whom each slays a Trojan (14.508-509a = 11.218-219a). Several of these Homeric passages occur within the context of a formal *aristeia*.[37] As in Herodotus, these catalogues are brief: the longest runs to eleven lines. But they are nonetheless distinctive, and characteristic of epic.

(3.) 7.225.1: the battle over Leonidas' body. The moment at Thermopylae that has most often been compared to Homer is the fight over Leonidas' corpse (Hdt. 7.225.1):

> Xerxes' two brothers fell there fighting, and over the body of Leonidas there was a great struggle between the Persians and the Lacedaemonians; until by their merit, the Greeks dragged him away, and turned the enemy back four times.

The Homeric archetype is the protracted battle over the body of Patroclus (*Il*. 17.1 to 18.238, 999 lines in total). There the Trojans are trying to secure the corpse of the Greek hero Patroclus: at first, so that they can despoil it of the arms of Achilles which Patroclus was wearing (and Hector does indeed despoil them and arm himself in them: 17.119-127, 188-214); later for the horses of Achilles (the Trojans do not succeed: 17.426-542); and at last simply for boasting rights. However, the body changes hands again and again. Michael Flower particularly compares *Iliad* 18.155-158:[38]

> Three times from behind shining Hector grabbed his feet
> intending to drag, and he shouted loudly to the Trojans;

[36] Cf. also *Il*. 14.508-510, which repeats the first one and a half lines of this passage verbatim.

[37] *Il*. 8.273-277, in Teucer's *aristeia*; 11.218-225, Agamemnon's *aristeia*; 16.692-697, Patroclus' *aristeia*.

[38] Flower (n. 12) 375.

> three times the two Aiantes, clothed in furious strength,
> drove him away from the corpse; …

He suggests that the Spartans at Thermopylae outdo the Aiantes: the Spartans beat off their opposition four times to the Aiantes' three. But Herodotus' account really evokes the whole battle, and not only this small snippet. This epic echo does not depend only on a specific verbal repetition; it also depends on the key role played by Menelaus, the Spartan leader, in that battle.

Menelaus is the hero who initially takes a stand over Patroclus' body, and kills Euphorbus, the Trojan who first wounded Patroclus (17.1-69); Menelaus is driven off by Hector, but returns and drives off Hector with the aid of Ajax (17.84-139). (The scenes with Euphorbus are not just Iliadic but part of the Trojan War legend more generally, as evidenced by allusions pre-dating the *Iliad*'s popularisation in the late sixth century: namely, a famous seventh century Rhodian plate that depicts Menelaus fighting Hector over Euphorbus' body, a scene that does not take place in the Iliadic account; and Pythagoras' claim to be Euphorbus reincarnated.)[39] Next in the battle, Menelaus and Ajax rouse the Greeks to protect the body (17.237-261); later, it is Menelaus that is inspired by Athena to lead the defence of the body, and he actually begins dragging it away from the Trojans (17.543-581); when the Trojans gain the upper hand, it is Menelaus who sends Antilochos to give word to Achilles of Patroclus' death (17.626-699). Finally, Menelaus and Ajax reenact another famous legendary scene, from the death of Achilles—strictly speaking, in their own future—where Ajax carries Achilles' body out of battle while Odysseus protects him; here, Menelaus and Meriones begin to carry away Patroclus' body while the two Aiantes protect them (17.700-754).[40] It is hard to imagine a more heroic setting. The Spartan leader has no formal *aristeia* in the *Iliad*, but no stock scene could be more memorable and evocative than his string of deeds throughout book 17.

The parallel that Flower cites (*Il*. 18.155-158, above) is itself a Homeric trope, and is not solely associated with the battle over Patroclus. Compare (*Il*. 5.436-439):

> Three times then he sprang, intending to slay him;
> three times Apollo beat aside his shining shield.
> But when the fourth time he rushed, equal to a divinity,
> he shouted terribly, he addressed him, far-shooter Apollo: …

[39] On the Euphorbus plate (BM 1860.4-4.1) see especially Snodgrass (n. 1) 105-109. Pythagoras as Euphorbus reincarnated: Ovid *Met*. 15.160-64 and several later sources. On Euphorbus' role in *Iliad* 16-17 see also R. Nickel, 'Euphorbus and the Death of Achilles' *Phoenix* 56 (2002), 215-233, at 216-221, rejecting the thesis that Euphorbus is nothing more than a duplicate of Paris' role in the death of Achilles.

[40] On this scene as a reenactment of the death of Achilles see W. Kullmann, *Die Quellen der Ilias* (Wiesbaden, Steiner, 1960) 329-330; M.W. Edwards, *The Iliad: A Commentary* vol. 5 (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991) 132. Both cite further bibliography; the latter also cites variants where the roles of Ajax and Odysseus are swapped.

Herodotus' use of this trope evokes several passages. In the passage quoted, 5.436-444, Diomedes charges Aeneas three times; on the fourth try Apollo warns him off and he gives way 'a little'. In 16.702-711 Patroclus tries three times to climb the walls of Troy; on the fourth try Apollo warns him off and he gives way 'a long way'. In 16.784-792 Patroclus charges the Trojans three times; on the fourth try he is struck by Apollo, and then killed by Euphorbus and Hector. In 20.445-454 Achilles charges Hector three times, but Apollo conceals Hector; on the fourth try Achilles taunts Hector for fleeing. When Herodotus' Spartans beat off the Persians 'four times', they echo all of these passages, not just a single episode.

Herodotus' Thermopylae narrative echoes the battle over Patroclus in another place too. Herodotus tells us that in the end, the Greeks—'all except the Thebans', he writes—form up in a close group on the hillock at the entrance to the pass (7.225.2, ἵζοντο ἐπὶ τὸν κολωνὸν πάντες ἀλέες); that is, a shieldwall manoeuvre. Compare *Iliad* 17.364-365, where the Achaeans form a shieldwall around Patroclus' body: 'much fewer of them died; for they kept in mind always / to protect each other in the throng from unstoppable murder.' Kurt Raaflaub has seen in these lines an anticipation of 'the spirit of the later phalanx'; while Hans van Wees rejects the notion that passages like this specifically depict phalanx warfare.[41] The basic premise—a line of shielded warriors protecting one another—does not depend on a specific military formation or manoeuvre, in either Homer or Herodotus. There is nothing specifically Classical Greek about the shieldwall (the tactic also appears in, for example, Anglo-Saxon heroic poetry).[42] It is the gesture, more than the specific manoeuvre, that resonates between Herodotus' and the *Iliad*'s accounts of the Greek tactics: the image of a wall-like formation; soldiers defending one another (on a hillock, in Herodotus' case); and the context of a fight over the body of a slain hero.

(4.) 7.226-227: 'Who then stood out as the best of them …?' After the end of his account of the battle, Herodotus highlights some individuals' participation (7.226.1):

> Of the Lacedaemonians and Thespiaeans who were involved in this, it is said that the best man was a Spartiate, Dieneces: they tell this story of him, that before the battle …

There follows the story of Dieneces' remark that the Persians' arrows, by blotting out the sun, would allow the Greeks to fight in the shade. After the anecdote Herodotus goes on (7.227):

> After him, the ones who are said to have shown their excellence were two Lacedaemonian brothers, Alpheus and Maron, sons of Orsiphantus. Of the Thespiaeans the one who is held in greatest honour was Dithyrambus son of Harmatides.

[41] K. Raaflaub, 'Homeric Warriors and Battles: Trying to Resolve Old Problems' *CW* 101 (2008), 469-483, at 478; H. van Wees 'The Homeric Way of War: The *Iliad* and the Hoplite Phalanx' *G&R* 41 (1994), 1-18 and 131-155, at 2-9.

[42] E.g. *Beowulf* 2980, 3118; *Battle of Maldon* 102, 242, 277.

Picking out the 'men of the match', so to speak, is again a poetic trope. This time the archetype is in the Catalogue of Ships, in *Iliad* 2. At the end of the Greek catalogue, the Homeric poet digresses (*Il.* 2.760-770):

> These then were the Danaans' leaders, and their commanders.
> Who then stood out as the best of them—tell me, Muse—
> the men and the horses who followed with Atreus' sons?
> By far the best horses were those of Pheres' son,
> the ones Eumelus drove, like swift birds …
> … Then of the men, far the best was Telamonian Ajax,
> so long as Achilles was angry; for he was much the bravest,
> and also the horses that served Peleus' blameless son.

As well as giving a precise account of each contingent, each leader, and the number of ships they brought, the poet also puts on record the most outstanding individuals. One Homeric critic, Kirk, has doubted the authenticity of the passage; but that doubt comes from treating the Catalogue as an inert chunk of memorised information, or as a purely historical record.[43] If we consider the aesthetic character of the Catalogue and take it for what it is—a virtuosic showpiece, an impressive poetic feat that entertains by virtue of its sheer extravagance—then this conclusion serves useful functions. It is not a thematic peak but a theatrical gesture: a cue for applause, a memorable moment that makes an impact. Herodotus was affected by it, for one: his conclusion to the account of Thermopylae imitates it to the extent of citing not just the best warrior, but the second-best too. Homer gives us Achilles as the best warrior, followed by Ajax, and Achilles' horses followed by Eumelus'; Herodotus gives us Dienekes, but also gives us Alpheus, Maron, and Dithyrambus.

In addition to all the above echoes and borrowings, it is worth remembering that Herodotus does not play only with Homeric echoes—John Dellery has argued that Herodotus' account of Thermopylae also has his own account of the battle of Thyrea (Hdt. 1.82) as another important archetype[44]—and that he does not include *every possible* epic or Homeric motif. Our other surviving accounts of Thermopylae[45] contain echoes that in Herodotus are less pronounced or even absent. For one thing, as noted above, our other sources (Ctesias excepted) are even more insistent on the heroism of Leonidas' choice to remain at his post. But the most pronounced difference lies in the end of the battle. In Herodotus, Leonidas falls, then the Greeks make a shieldwall on a hillock,

[43] G.S. Kirk, *The Iliad: A Commentary* vol. 1 (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985) 242-243, citing the passage's 'inappropriateness' and describing it as 'some kind of afterthought'. Cf. J. Latacz et al., *Homers Ilias. Gesamtkommentar*, vol. 2.ii (Munich/Leipzig, K.G. Saur, 2002) 247-250, who defend the passage by stressing its function as a spectacular showpiece.

[44] J. Dellery, 'Reconfiguring the Past: Thyrea, Thermopylae and Narrative Patterns in Herodotus' *AJP* 117 (1996), 217-254.

[45] Ctesias *apud* Photius cod. 72, 37.i.23-40 (= *FGrH* 688 F 13 §27); Trogus *apud* Justin 2.11; Diod. 11.3-11; ps.-Plut. *Laconian sayings* 224f-225e; (ps.-?)Plut. *Malice of Herodotus* 865a-867b.

are surrounded, and perish. But in Diodorus and pseudo-Plutarch we hear of a night raid made by the Greeks on the Persian camp, supposedly in order to assassinate Xerxes, which was unsuccessful and resulted in final defeat.[46] Flower suspects that the later sources may be more accurate than Herodotus in this respect; but he stresses that they give a distinct impression of drawing on epic tropes as well. In the case of the night raid, the Homeric archetype is the so-called 'Doloneia' episode: a more successful raid, where Odysseus and Diomedes find and kill the Thracian king Rhesus, and escape with their lives (*Il.* 10.469-525). Of course it may well be that there are still other archetypes lurking behind the night raid: the sack of Troy also takes place at night, and so does the theft of the Palladion.[47] Flower concludes that both versions draw on epic models; but different models. The presence of epic echoes in both has the additional consequence that it is difficult to take either story at face value.[48]

IV. The Dorians

The last Trojan War element to discuss in connection with Thermopylae is based on interpreting it as a mythological moment for the Dorians as an ethnic group. This is not about Herodotus *per se*, nor about any specific account of Thermopylae, but about the battle itself and its significance on a mythological level.

The central idea is that the Spartans who at Troy were not Dorian, because the chronology of legend has it that the Dorian occupation of the Peloponnese post-dates the Trojan War. One reason that Thermopylae is such a brilliant mythological moment, then, is that the Dorians are making up for lost time. On a mythological level, the heroism of Leonidas' Spartans at Thermopylae compensates for the Dorians' supposed absence from the Trojan War. The Dorians were not involved in the earlier, legendary, pan-Hellenic conflict against the eastern powers, at Troy; so it is all the more important that they are central to the Persian Wars of 490-479 BCE. At Thermopylae, Dorians take a central role in the resistance to an invasion from the east, and they even sacrifice their lives in doing so, becoming martyrs as well as heroes. It was already obvious to Greeks of the time that the Dorian Spartans had a central role on the stage of history; at Thermopylae they gain one on the stage of mythology too. It is only at Thermopylae that the Dorians acquire a role in a truly pan-Hellenic 'myth'. And even more specifically: the Dorians who are being mythologised in this way are the Dorians *of Sparta*, and not (for example) the Dorians of Argos, Sparta's old enemies, who had refused to join the alliance against Xerxes.

The basis for categorising the Spartans of the Trojan War legend as non-Dorian is fairly strong, but there are some hidden traps which we shall look at below. The supporting evidence lies in two

[46] Diod. 11.10; (ps.-?)Plut. *Malice of Herodotus* 866a-b.

[47] Sack of Troy: *Iliou persis* argumentum 10-12 Bernabé; ps.-Apollod. *Bibl*. epit. 5.19-21. Theft of Palladion: *Little Iliad* fr. 25 Bernabé (categorised by Bernabé as *incerti operis fragmentum*, but certainly authentic; = fr. 11 West); ps.-Apollod. *Bibl*. epit. 5.13.

[48] Flower (n. 12) 374-375; note that Flower treats Diodorus' account as simply replicating Ephorus.

points. The first is a double-barrelled legend: the *return of the Heracleids*, the story of the conquest of the Peloponnese by Heracles' descendants (Greek sources actually refer to the story as the 'invasion' of the Heracleids);[49] and the *Dorian migration*, referring to a movement of the Dorian people from Doris (near Phthiotis), *via* Thessaly, to settle ultimately in the Peloponnese.[50] Some modern scholars, such as Jonathan Hall, have suspected that these legends were originally separate, and that their combination is a rationalisation designed to make them consistent.[51] Even if that is so, their combination is very early, as Hall points out: they appear together at least as early as the seventh-century poet Tyrtaeus. In the fifth century, Simonides, Pindar, and Thucydides were happy to take it for granted that the two stories refer to a single event.[52] According to the chronology of legend, the 'Heracleids' story took place eighty years after the Trojan War;[53] therefore the 'Dorian migration' story, too, was imagined as post-dating the Trojan War. (I offer no comment about the historicity of either legend, which is a controversial topic;[54] rather I am referring to legends *qua* legends.)

The second point is the fact—often cited in this connection—that the name 'Dorian' does not appear in Homer, except in one problematic passage in the *Odyssey* describing Crete (*Od*. 19.177). Heracleids do appear in the Catalogue of Ships in *Iliad* 2, as the leaders of the Rhodes and Nisyros

---

[49] The sources for the 'Heracleids' legend are, most fully, ps.-Apollod. *Bibl*. 2.8; Diod. 4.57-58. For older allusions, see also Tyrt. fr. 11.1 W^2; Pind. *Pyth*. 5.69-72; Thuc. 1.9.2; cf. also the allusions to both together in Tyrtaeus and Simonides (see n. 52 below).

[50] The earliest sources for the 'Dorian migration' legend (as distinct from the 'Heracleids' legend) are Pind. *Pyth*. 1.62-66; Hdt. 1.56.2; Thuc. 1.12.3; cf. also the allusions to both together in Tyrtaeus and Simonides (see n. 52 below).

[51] J.M. Hall, *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997) 60-62; see 56-64 on the relationship between 'Dorians' and 'Heracleids', one an 'ethnic' category, the other genealogical. As a *caveat* to Hall's separation of the legends, note that the Heracleids' leadership of the Dorian migrations is paralleled by other ethnic migrations led by heroes, sometimes from a different ethnic group: cf. the Atreids' leadership of the Achaean migration, and the Neleids' leadership of the Ionian migration (see n. 57 below).

[52] Tyrt. fr. 2.12-15 W^2; Simon. fr. eleg. 13.9-10 W^2; Pind. *Pyth*. 1.62-66; Thuc. 1.12.3. Later see also Strabo 8.5.5, and especially Diod. 4.37.3-4: Diodorus is the only source to provide an explanation for how the Heracleids came to rule the Dorians. Diodorus' treatment is probably indicative of Ephorus', though Diod. 4.57-58 surely represents Ephorus more fully (see *FGrH* 70 T 8 for the fact that Ephorus' history opened with the 'Heracleids' legend).

[53] Eighty years after the Trojan War in Thucydides (1.12.3), Eratosthenes (*BNJ* 241 F 1a), and Crates of Mallos (fr. 73 Broggiato). Cf. sixty years in Strabo (13.1.3; Strabo's source is Ephorus, in the opinion of Jacoby commenting on *FGrH* 70 F 223); 120 or 180 years in Clement of Alexandria, without attribution (*Strom*. 1.21.139.3). It is likely that the datings with eighty and sixty years ultimately reflect the chronology in Spartan king-lists, especially since the variation is evidently caused by different methods of calculating generations: multiples of forty years vs. multiples of thirty.

[54] Some historians adopt the 'Dorian migration' legend as the basis for a model of historical population movements in the period 1200-900 BCE. See further S. Hornblower, *A Commentary on Thucydides* vol. 1 (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1991) 39-40, on Thuc. 1.12; D. Asheri, 'Book I' in *A Commentary on Herodotus Books I-IV* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007) 57-218, at 115-116, on Hdt. 1.56.2; Hall, *Ethnic Identity* (n. 51) 114-128; *id*., *Hellenicity: Between Ethnicity and Culture* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2002) 73-89. M. Finkelberg, *Greeks and Pre-Greeks: Aegean Prehistory and Greek Heroic Tradition* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005), especially 143-149, provides a recent application of the 'Dorian migration' model to reconstruct a linguistic map of Greece in the Bronze Age and relate it to linguistic divisions in classical times.

contingents (*Il.* 2.653, 678-679), but there is no explicit mention of a distinctive heritage. The only hint at any kind of distinctiveness is that each of the places that Homer associates with Dorians or Heracleids—Crete and the south-east Aegean islands, regions which were Dorian in classical times—are grouped together as a distinct section within the Catalogue of Ships (see below on the division of the Catalogue into three sections).[55] It is conventional to interpret Homeric silence about the Dorians as false archaism: the idea is that the epic poet imagines a time before the Dorian migration. The ethnic terms that appear instead are 'Achaean', 'Argive', and 'Danaan', but these are all used interchangeably to refer to any and all Greeks.[56] Of these, later Greeks used the category 'Achaean' to refer to the people that inhabited Dorian territories in the Peloponnese prior to the Dorians' arrival, and traced the main Greek ethnic divisions back to the legendary genealogy of the Deucalionids, which features eponymous ancestors named 'Achaeus', 'Ion', and 'Dorus' among others; and some ancient writers outline a complex sequence of migrations, heavily rationalised to explain the differences between the Homeric ethnic map of Greece and the historical reality.[57] (In fact, the historical Achaeans spoke a form of West Greek, just as the Dorians did.)

One important point about Thermopylae that enables its status as a pan-Hellenic 'mythological' event is the fact that it is located in what we might call an 'in-between' space. In early Greek thought, geographical space had to be conceptualised by verbal means. It seems that the Greeks did not have maps prior to the sixth century; by the late fifth century, although maps had become more

[55] See further Kirk (n. 43) 225-228; especially 226-227 on the division of Rhodes 'settled threefold, by tribes' (*Il.* 2.668, τριχθὰ … ᾤκηθεν καταφυλαδόν), probably referring to the three Dorian tribes, and probably also reflected in *Od.* 19.177 Δωριέες … τριχάϊκες (meaning disputed; cf. *Cat.* fr. 233 Merkelbach-West = fr. 250 Most, on the Dorians, τριχάϊκες καλέονται / οὕνεκα τρισσὴν γαῖαν ἑκὰς πάτρης ἐδάσαντο). See further J. Russo, 'Books XVII to XX' in *A Commentary on Homer's Odyssey* vol. 3 (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992) 3-127, at 83-84; Hall, *Ethnic Identity* (n. 51) 42.

[56] See further R.L. Fowler, 'Achaeans', in M. Finkelberg (ed.) *The Homer Encyclopedia* vol. 1 (Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell, 2011) 2-4, with examples to illustrate the point. G. Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979) 83-93, suspects that the importance of 'Achaea' in Homer is related to the apparatus of cult rather than to migration legends.

[57] Hdt. 1.145, 8.73; Strabo 8.5.5, 8.7.1; Paus. 2.18.4-2.18.8, 7.1.6-7.2.6. So, prior to the Trojan War the Achaeans had migrated from Phthiotis to Laconia (hence Homer's Spartans are Achaean); afterwards, when the Heracleids and Dorians invaded, Orestes' son Teisamenus led the Achaeans north to the region historically known as Achaea, displacing the people who were already living there, who were Ionians (implying that in Homer, Agamemnon's contingent consists primarily of Ionians!) who had come there from Athens; the displaced Ionians were led by the Neleids first to Athens, then across the Aegean to colonise Asia Minor; one of the cities they conquered, Miletus, had previously been occupied by Cretans, who had amalgamated with the original Carian inhabitants; and so on. It is very doubtful whether this material can sensibly be matched up with historical population movements. Most of it is surely the product of layers of efforts to rationalise contradictory legends; and we have good evidence from Hittite sources and archaeological data that Miletus and eastern Ionia generally (both in Asia Minor and in the islands) had been Greek at least as early as 1300 BCE. The sources trace most ethnic groups—the Dorians, the Achaeans, the Pelasgians—back to Phthia so as to accommodate all of their eponymous ancestors within the Deucalionid genealogy. On the central role of the Deucalionid genealogy and its evolution see M.L. West, *The Hesiodic Catalogue of Women* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1985) 138-144; Hall, *Hellenicity* (n. 54) 56-89.

familiar, they were still associated with specific technical functions.[58] So in Greek poetry from

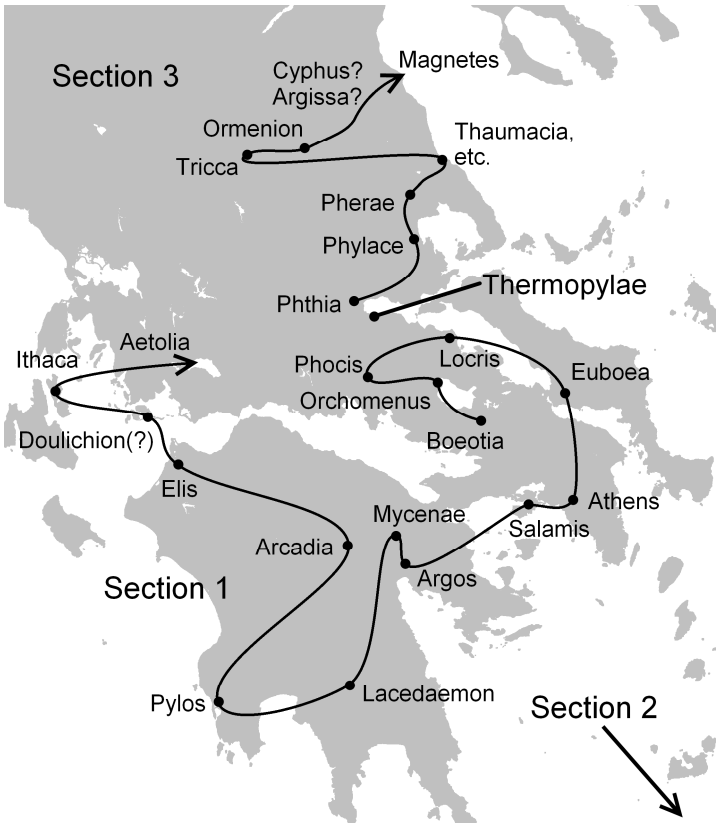

Fig. 1. Route followed by the Catalogue of Ships, Iliad 2.494-759.

Homer until well into the fifth century, geography is mapped out through descriptions of linear paths from point A to point B to point C, etc., describing a route through the physical geography. These 'maps' take the form of detailed descriptions of journeys, or catalogues that list locations one after the other.[59] The most authoritative Homeric 'map' of Greece's geography is laid out in the Iliadic Catalogue of Ships.[60] It comes in three sections: Section 1 is the mainland south of the Malian Gulf (*Il*. 2.494-644); Section 2, the Dorian islands from Crete eastward to the Dodecanese (2.645-680); Section 3, northern Aeolian/Thessalian Greece (2.681-759).

If these sections are plotted on a modern map, as in Figure 1, it is obvious that a definite route is

[58] The earliest use of maps is attributed to Anaximander (Strabo 1.1.11; Diog. Laert. 2.1); cf. Herodotus' story of Aristagoras' use of a map in his failed attempt to persuade the Spartans to campaign against the Persians (Hdt. 5.49), on which see D. Branscombe, 'Herodotus and the Map of Aristagoras' *ClAnt* 29 (2010), 1-44. Maps appear in Ar. *Clouds* 201-217 as something conceptually familiar (to Aristophanes' audience) but technical (used for land surveying), and Herodotus' comments on maps in his own time (Hdt. 4.36.2) show that they are conceptually familiar to him.

[59] Descriptions of journeys: *h.Ap*. 216-286 (Apollo's journey from Olympus to Delphi); A. *Ag*. 281-311 (the route of Clytemnestra's beacons). Catalogues: *h.Ap*. 30-49 (places visited by Leto; really a journey, though not explicitly stated as one); *Catalogue of Women* fr. 197-fr. 204.65 Merkelbach-West = fr. 154-fr. 155.65 Most (the catalogue of Helen's suitors), on whose route see West, *Hesiodic Catalogue* (n. 57) 114-119; *Od*. 11.225-332 (the catalogue of heroines), on whose route see M.D. Northrup, 'Homer's Catalogue of Women' *Ramus* 9 (1980), 150-159.

[60] As the bibliography on the Catalogue of Ships is very extensive, the best place to begin investigation is the standard commentaries; and E. Visser, *Homers Katalog der Schiffe* (Stuttgart/Leipzig, Teubner, 1997). Note that for the present discussion it does not matter whether the Catalogue itself is based on the political geography of the Bronze Age or the contemporary Iron Age (both views are widely held).

followed within each section, but with big jumps between the individual sections.[61] Section 1 spirals clockwise out from Boeotia, up to Euboea, down to the Peloponnese, and up to the Ionian islands and Aitolia. Section 2 goes from west to east through the Dorian islands. Section 3 begins at the northern limit of Section 1, in Phthia, and moves around the coast as far as Mount Ossa before moving inland to the river Peneius. In the last section the route is not so clear, as two contingents cannot be placed with certainty.[62]

This early, and paradigmatic, representation of Greece's geography is very far from complete. The Catalogue of Ships covers the inland Peloponnese only sparsely (the Arcadian towns that are named are in the east, near Mycenae); and it completely ignores north-west Greece beyond Aetolia, and most of the Aegean. The focus of attention is not on *exhaustiveness* but on *the route*. Furthermore, its division into three sections implies some kind of conceptualisation of these three regions as discrete. In the case of Section 2 the reason for its distinctness is obvious: in historical times, all of the islands named (Crete, and some of the islands of the south-east Aegean) were specifically *Dorian* territory. The poet even presents Heracleids as leaders of two of the relevant contingents. The reason for the division is less obvious in the cases of Sections 1 and 3. Section 3 is entirely Aeolian in its ethnic make-up; but it probably does not represent 'Aeolian Greece' *per se*, as Boeotia, in Section 1, is also Aeolian (at least in historical times; though cf. Thuc. 1.12.3).

But for our purposes, the most important point is that Thermopylae is exactly on the dividing-line between two of these conceptual geographical divisions. This does not in itself give the place a specific geographical significance, except inasmuch as any pass is important; but it does add weight to the conception of Thermopylae as a place that, in a sense, belongs to all Greeks. It is a pan-Hellenic space in an entirely unique way. Its character, as a narrow passage between larger geographical entities, is comparable to that of the Isthmus—but even more pronounced: the Isthmus was surrounded by Dorian territory in classical times. To celebrate the geographic uniqueness of the Isthmus, there are the Isthmian games; for the boundary between Sections 1 and 3 of the Iliadic Catalogue, there is the battle of Thermopylae. The perfection of Thermopylae as a location for a mythological moment becomes even clearer when one considers that the Greeks' original plan was to meet Xerxes' invasion force in the Tempe valley—again resonating with the imaginary

[61] On the Catalogue's route see Kirk (n. 43) 183-186, with discussion of various explanations for the division into three sections and the route followed.

[62] The conjectural route shown in Fig. 1 takes it that the route after Mount Ossa goes to the head of the Peneius and follows its course downstream. Much of the uncertainty is caused by a reference to Dodona, far to the west across the Pindus mountains, in Gouneus' contingent (*Il*. 2.750). This is very distant not only from the rest of Section 3, but also from the other locations named in that contingent: the river Peneius is in Thessaly; the Perrhaebi and Enienes belong there too, near Mount Olympus (cf. *h.Ap*. 216-218: both lie *en route* between Olympus and Iolcus); the river Titaressus (Titaresius) is identified by Strabo (9.5.19-20) as the Europus, coming down from the Titarus mountains. Fig. 1 interprets 'Dodona' as a minor settlement in Thessaly, following Cineas, Philoxenus, and Strabo (*BNJ* 603 F 2b = Steph. Byz. s.v. Δωδώνη; sch. H on *Od*. 14.327; Strabo 7a frr. 1a, 1b). A contrary view: Visser (n. 60) 721-735 takes it that Dodona refers to the famous oracle, and that it is the Perrhaebi and Enienes that have been moved across the mountains; and that this is to be explained either by historical migrations or by a poetic fiction. Either interpretation requires disregarding some of Strabo's testimony.

geography of the Catalogue of Ships, since it lies on the *northern* boundary of Section 3 of the Catalogue—; and that Thermopylae lies between two regions that, within Homer, are both considered to be entirely non-Dorian. Such a setting for a confrontation between Greeks and the eastern powers—a confrontation, to boot, where the Dorians join a pan-Hellenic alliance for the first time—cements the battle's status as a mythological moment. For the Spartans it is especially fortuitous, since it cements Sparta's status as the foremost state among the Dorians.

There are, however, some caveats. It would be a mistake to insist on this interpretation of the relationship between fifth-century Dorians and their Trojan War predecessors to the point of supposing that fifth-century Spartans wished to identify their legendary heritage *only* in the Dorian/Heracleids legends and *not* in the Trojan War legend. Poets writing shortly after the Persian Wars undoubtedly do celebrate the Spartans' Dorian/Heracleid heritage; a fragment of Simonides' Plataea ode contains the following lines:

> to [drive] off the Mede[s' army …]
> and the Persians', and Dorus' […]
> sons and Heracles' […][63]

And six or seven years later, in 472 BCE, Aeschylus' *Persians* portrays the ghost of Darius foretelling the Persians' defeat 'in the land of the Plataeans, beneath a Dorian spear' (*Pers*. 816-817). But as we saw earlier, these and other fifth-century authors are perfectly happy to mythologise the Spartans' role in the Persian Wars with references to Trojan War heroes too. Simonides cites Menelaus and the Tyndareids, as we saw in part I; Herodotus cites Agamemnon and Talthybius, as we saw in part II. In one of Pindar's *Pythian* odes, sung in 470 in honour of the Sicilian tyrant Hieron (also of Dorian heritage), we find alongside allusions to the battles of Salamis and Plataea (*Pyth*. 1.75-78) a strophe that deals with the Dorian migration as follows (*Pyth*. 1.62-66):

> … the descendants of Pamphylos
> and of Heracles, too,
> dwelling beneath Taygetus' slopes, wish
> to remain always within Aigimios' institutions
> as Dorians. They settled Amyclae, fortunate ones,
> after they set out from Pindus: [they became]
> the white-horsed Tyndareids' famous
> neighbours. Their spear flowered with glory.

The Heracleids are included with Pamphylus and Aegimius, who represent the Dorians; and the Tyndareids represent the Spartans of the Trojan War. The celebration of the Dorians/Heracleids and Tyndareids as 'neighbours' is a celebration of both heritages simultaneously. Deborah Boedeker

[63] Simon. fr. eleg. 13.8-10 W^2 (my translation, to emphasise how fragmentary the text is).

outlines several further examples of early Spartans laying claim to a 'pre-Dorian' heritage along with a Dorian/Heracleid one.[64]

The truth is that classical-era Spartans claimed any and all forms of heritage when it was advantageous to do so. This is exemplified by Herodotus' story of what happened when the Spartan king Cleomenes barged into the temple of Athena in Athens in 507/6 (Hdt. 5.72.3):

> For when he went up to the acropolis intending to occupy it, he was going into the sanctuary of the goddess to pray; but the priestess stood up from her seat before he could pass through the door, and said, 'Lacedaemonian stranger, go back, and do not enter the temple! For it is unlawful for Dorians to enter here.' And he said, 'But woman, I am not a Dorian; I am Achaean.'

The Spartans were forced out shortly afterward, so perhaps Athena disagreed. But it goes to show that an ethnic category like 'Dorian' has fuzzy boundaries. Or, as Jonathan Hall puts it, ethnicity is 'socially constructed and subjectively perceived'.[65] Hall goes on to illustrate the point by showing how the term 'Dorian' was used to describe customs, fashions, and artefacts, not just people.[66] He points out that 'the Sicilian city of Gela adopted "Dorian customs" though the Dorian-Ionian foundation of Himera did not'; and he recalls Herodotus' statement that the Ionians of Kynoura 'became Dorianised' (ἐκδεδωρίωνται) under Argive rule (Hdt. 8.73.3), and Pausanias' account of how Megara became Dorian under Peloponnesian rule (Paus. 1.39.5).

There is certainly a kind of distinctness separating the Spartans at Thermopylae from the Spartans of Trojan War legend. But we should not put undue stress on their separation. If Homer mentions Dorians only once, that does not really demonstrate anything very much: Homer also mentions Ionians only once, and Aeolians not at all;[67] and as we have seen, the Heracleids *do* appear in Section 2 of the Catalogue of Ships. And, to muddy the waters, there are some suggestions of Dorian migration prior to the Trojan War. The most striking is perhaps the story of Tectamus, son of Dorus (i.e. very early in mythical chronology), leading the Dorian colonisation of Crete—using Cape Malea in the southern Peloponnese as a base for his expedition, no less.[68] It is clear that the ancients were worried by the chronological implications of this story, since we also hear of the Heracleids sending out *further* Dorian colonies to replace Tectamus' ones![69] Then there is the fact that the *Catalogue of Women*, an Archaic genealogical poem, associates Dorus' sons with Argos, rather than with Phthiotis or northern Greece; and links Dorus by marriage to Phoroneus, an

[64] D. Boedeker, 'Hero Cult and Politics in Herodotus: The Bones of Orestes' in C. Dougherty, L. Kurke (eds.) *Cultural Poetics in Archaic Greece* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1993) 164-177, especially 166-167.

[65] Hall, *Ethnic Identity* (n. 51) 19.

[66] Hall, *Ethnic Identity* (n. 51) 34-40.

[67] Ionians at *Il*. 13.685; see I.C. Rutherford, 'Ionians', in *The Homer Encyclopedia* (n.56) vol. 2, 415-416, for other possible subtler allusions to Ionians.

[68] Diod. 4.60.2, 5.80.2. On Tectamus see further Hall, *Hellenicity* (n. 54) 84.

[69] Diod. 5.80.3.

early figure in Argive legend.[70] In a similar vein, Plato alludes to a tradition in which the Dorians who invaded under the Heracleids were actually 'Achaeans' who had been ousted from the Peloponnese as a result of the Trojan War (*Laws* iii.682d-e).

There is a great deal of vagueness, and everything is negotiable. Herodotus and Simonides do not draw any clear ethnic distinction between contemporary Spartans and the Homeric generation; but the priestess who confronted Cleomenes certainly did. If Cleomenes could be quick enough to play on these ambiguities over ethnicity while storming onto the Athenian acropolis, then it was a game that anyone could play. No ancient source makes an explicit claim that Thermopylae was the start of a new Trojan War for the Dorians; but it is surely, nonetheless, one reason that the Dorians' heroism at Thermopylae resonated so strongly with fifth-century Greeks.

[70] List of Dorids: *Catalogue of Women* fr. 10(a).1-19 Merkelbach-West = fr. 10.1-19 Most; association with Argos at 3-4. Dorus marries Phoroneus' daughter: fr. 10(b) M-W = fr. 11 Most, supplemented (see West, *Hesiodic Catalogue* [n. 57] 58-59 for the supplement, which is rock-solid). Note that the *Catalogue*'s list of Dorids appears to have no space for Tectamus.