

## Alexander of Macedon: An Early Biography

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*Claims that Herodotus reveals himself as a proto-biographer are not yet widely accepted. To advance this claim, I have selected one man, Alexander I, who finds himself and his kingdom caught in the middle of the Greco-Persian Wars and whose activities are recounted in the Histories. It is to a near contemporary, Heraclitus, to whom we attribute the maxim—character is human destiny. It is the truth of this maxim—which implies effective human agency—that makes Herodotus’ creation of historical narrative possible. He is often read for his off-topic vignettes, which colour-in the character of the individuals depicted without necessarily advancing his narrative. But by hop scotching through five of the nine books of the Histories, we can assemble a largely continuous narrative for this remarkable individual. This narrative permits us to attribute both credit and moral responsibility for his actions. Arguably, this implied causation demonstrates that Herodotus’ writings include much that amounts to proto-biography.*

### Proto-Biography

Herodotus has long been recognised as the first Western historian, but his *Histories* are also read for his lively biographic anecdotes and character vignettes. Although Herodotus writes history, many of his anecdotes do not extend his historical narrative at all, and when not an outright digression often colour-in something of the character and values of selected notable individuals. He selects short, seemingly off-topic *stories* about the deeds, and conduct or misconduct of his heroines and heroes that eloquently reveal much about their character, but which seemingly without judgement often also provide what might become a *defining moment* for each individual.

Just as Homer and Hesiod stand at a crossroads where oral myth is set down in writing, Herodotus stands at another crossroads a few hundred years later where selected stories about great heroines, heroes, and scurrilous hounds are taken out of the oral tradition and set down in writing. Albeit writing prose rather than epic poetry, Herodotus regards himself as a contemporary Homer, but also as a storyteller with the ability to assign credit and with it, moral responsibility.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Re-discovered in 1994 on the harbour wall of Halicarnassus, the modern Aegean resort of Bodrum in Turkey, the *Salmakis Inscription*, possibly early second century, describes Herodotus as (Ἡρόδοτον τὸν πεζὸν ἐν ἱστορίαισιν Ὅμηρον ἤροσεν,) *Hêródoton ton pezon en historiasin Homêron êrosen*, “[Halicarnassus] engendered Herodotus, the prose Homer of history” Signe Isager, “The Pride of Halikarnassos,” *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie*, 123 (1998): 7-8; and, Jessica Priestley, *Herodotus and Hellenic Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 187.

It is to Herodotus' near-contemporary, Heraclitus, to whom we attribute the maxim (ἦθος ἀνθρώπων δαίμων) “*êthos anthropôi daimôn*” translations for which include the commonplace *character is destiny*.<sup>2</sup> Neither *êthos* nor *daimôn* are easily translated, and *anthropôi* is often ignored. But the maxim is senseless if any part of it depends on powers outside of the individual.<sup>3</sup> It is the truth of this maxim—which presupposes effective human agency—that makes the creation of historical narrative, rather than divine myth or heroic epic, even possible.<sup>4</sup> Hesiod, Homer, and to a certain extent Plutarch many centuries later, want to argue that it is primarily ancestry or pedigree that will determine destiny. Undeniably in the fifth century the well-born will often have greater autonomy, authority, and agency.

Claims that Herodotus reveals himself as a proto-biographer are not yet widely accepted. In an article lamenting the gap between Herodotus and Xenophon—Helene Homeyer makes the claim that Herodotus is also the father of biography.<sup>5</sup> To advance this claim, I have selected one exceptional individual, prince Alexander, later king Alexander I of Macedon. An individual, who participated in the Hellenic-Persian Wars, but one not found among those notables recognised by Plutarch in his *Parallel Lives*. By hopscotching through five of the nine books of Herodotus' *Histories*, even if the entries fall short of a cradle to grave depiction, we can assemble a reasonably continuous narrative for Alexander, and thus through his exploits, gauge his character against the epic heroines and heroes described by Homer.<sup>6</sup> Emulating Tomas Hägg, I let Herodotus speak for himself through long in-text quotations from the Purvis translation.<sup>7</sup>

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2. Andre Laks and Glenn W. Most, *Early Greek Philosophy*, Part 2 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 194-195.

3. Miroslav Markovich, *Heraclitus: Greek Text* (Mérida, Venezuela: Los Andes University Press, 1967), 502.

4. Heraclitus of Ephesus, a near contemporary of Herodotus, and one of the Presocratic philosophers, was active in the late sixth- and early fifth-centuries shortly before Herodotus was born. We have no evidence either way about Herodotus' familiarity with Heraclitus' works, but their notions of human causality or agency concur.

5. Helene Homeyer writes, “So ist Herodot nicht nur der Vater der Geschichte, sondern zugleich auch der Schöpfer eines Zweiges der biographischen Darstellungsweise geworden, die bis zu Plutarch reicht.” This can be roughly translated as “So Herodotus is not only the father of history, but also the creator of a branch of biographical representation which extends up to Plutarch” Helene Homeyer, “Zu den Anfängen der Griechischen Biographie,” *Philologus: Zeitschrift für antike Literatur und ihre Rezeption* 106, no. 1 (1962): 75, 81.

6. In this respect Alexander is not unique. By a similar hopscotching exercise we can paint pictures of a number of individuals ignored by Plutarch: Artemisia, Gorgo, Atossa, Cleomenes, Miltiades the Elder, Miltiades the Younger, and many others.

7. Tomas Hägg comments, “The idea that [someone] knows the texts sufficiently well in advance, or has them at hand to consult continuously is a pious illusion: it is better to

### Late Sixth-Century Macedon

Herodotus gives us part of the life story of only one ruler of Macedon, but even these fascinating, chronologically isolated, stand-alone, episodes about Alexander I are scattered over five books of his *Histories*.<sup>8</sup> Large in area and undeveloped, but neither wealthy nor populous, this northern Aegean kingdom's importance late in the sixth and early in the fifth century is determined entirely by its geography. Not landlocked, it has direct access to the sea through the Thermaic Gulf, and hence the intense interest of the Persian rulers Darius and his son Xerxes. This kingdom, which during the late sixth and the early fifth centuries does not yet include the Chalcidian Peninsula, lies north of Thessaly but east of Thrace. Therefore it is situated along the strategic route that any invading land armies with designs on mainland Greece—Attica and the Peloponnese—would take when advancing west from either the Black Sea or from the south after crossing the Straits from the Anatolian peninsula into Europe. But neither Alexander nor his people are true Asian/Near Eastern *barbaroi* either: Far from it.<sup>9</sup> Whatever Alexander's true ethnicity, there is considerably less doubt about his people. At this time the Southern Greeks (Athens and Sparta) do not regard the Macedon peoples as true *Hellenes* at all—despite some shared religious beliefs, if not similarities in culture—they are not Doric, Aeolian, or Ionic, let alone Attic Greek-speaking. Some scholars have suggested that their language was more an uneducated backward Greek brogue. Given its military and economic insignificance, Macedon's ruler finds himself in a similarly perilous position to his contemporary in the nearby Chersonese, Miltiades son of Kimon.<sup>10</sup> They are both

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bring the texts physically into the discussion" Tomas Hägg, *The Art of Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), ix. The block quotations from Herodotus are from the Andrea L Purvis translation found in Robert B. Strassler, *The Landmark Herodotus* (New York: Random House, 2007).

8. Referring to the works of a contemporary of Herodotus, Anne Geddes comments, "In a literate world, biography attempts to provide a broad understanding of the experience of a lifetime; literacy is a prerequisite for true biography. In an oral society, biography can hardly amount to anything more than anecdote, which had the potential to reveal and interpret character, but is likely to be trivial in content and designed for entertainment or for pointing a moral Anne Geddes, "Ion of Chios and Politics," in *The World of Ion* (Leiden, The Netherlands; Boston, MA: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2007), 114–115.

9. Barbarians (Βάρβαροι *Barbaroi*) is now a pejorative term, implying primitive, savage, uncivilized, crude, and uncultured; but rather like the Gaelic word *sasunnoch* or *sassanach* (originally meaning Saxon) it should really be translated as *outsider* in the mildly xenophobic sense of *not one of us*.

10. During the late sixth- and early fifth-century Miltiades, the scion of a wealthy and influential Athenian family, was appointed tyrant of the Thracian Chersonese—a region better known now as the Gallipoli Peninsula.

far too weak to resist Persia's territorial expansion ambitions and yet too far away to solicit meaningful support from either Athens or Sparta.

Although Alexander's Macedon people are not recognised as *Hellenes*, young Alexander—having successfully petitioned the *Hellanodikai* for permission to compete in the Olympic Games—regards himself not only as a true *Hellene*, but as Hellenic royalty with an uncontested lineage stretching back in time beyond the Trojan War.<sup>11</sup> Once again, Herodotus shows his fascination with genealogy, a fascination which fits well with the Heraclitean maxim: *character is destiny*, and his own Homeric echoes of heroic deeds. Thus Alexander's privileged high-birth potentially gives him the opportunity to exercise independent agency, and these are opportunities usually denied those of less than noble birth. For all their bleats about democracy, the *Hellenes*, and the Athenians in particular, are still a long way away from creating a functioning meritocracy. Agency alone is never going to be enough; it must be coupled with autonomy and authority—and in the early fifth-century all three are most readily secured through pedigree.

### A Kingdom in Harm's Way

At the end of the Persian's stalemated Scythian expedition of 513 Darius the Great withdraws west along the northern shores of the Black Sea slowly making his way through Thrace to Sestos on the Chersonese peninsula where he ferries his army back over to Anatolia, leaving behind one of his generals, Megabazos, and eighty-thousand troops on the European side of the waterway (Hdt. 4.143).<sup>12</sup> This particular East-West conflict, directed by Darius, is by no means over. Megabazos' orders are to subdue every city throughout Thrace (Hdt. 5.1–5.3), and under special orders given a year or so later he also is to capture and entirely uproot the Paionian people moving them to new settlements in Anatolia (Hdt. 5.12–5.15). After this conquest of Paionia, Megabazos sends seven of his most distinguished men south as emissaries to neighbouring Macedon demanding that their king swear fealty to Darius (Hdt. 5.17.1). Herodotus' first mention of Alexander's father, King Amyntas, is when, perhaps as late as the year 510, he is hosting these Persian dignitaries at a state banquet held in the royal court at Aegae (Hdt. 5.18.1). Doubtless the nearby presence of eighty-thousand Persian

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11. The (Ελληνοδίκαι) *Hellanodikai* are the elected Elean officials from the ruling families of Elis charged with maintaining the standards and traditions of the games, including determining who may and who may not compete. Given the religious significance of the celebrations they take their duties very seriously and are virtually incorruptible.

12. One suggestion is that Byzantium was in revolt against the Persians and Darius stays on the European side rather than returning the way he came W.W. How and J. Wells, *A Commentary on Herodotus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912), 1.4.143.

troops heavily influences King Amyntas' unhappy and humiliating but unhesitating acquiescence—he accepts the only alternative to certain annihilation. His large, not quite impoverished, but minor kingdom is far too weak to effectively resist Persian aggression or territorial expansion, let alone pose a military threat to anyone. And so Amyntas is able to retain a measure of authority and autonomy to avoid his kingdom becoming just part of another large Persian satrapy.

### The Seeds of Pan-Hellenism

Whether events at the state banquet unfold exactly as Herodotus recounts is immaterial. And regardless of any bias stemming from his Macedonian sources, he is creating a discourse distinguishing Hellenic freedom from Persian despotism.<sup>13</sup> Herodotus next spins a lurid tale of a clash of courtly customs and expectations that ends in the murder and complete disappearance of the seven Persian emissaries, along with all trace of their attendants, servants, baggage, and carriages (Hdt. 5.18.2–5.21.1). The Persians, who have been drinking, complain to their host that it is their custom to bring their concubines and wives to sit beside their guests at a feast. Herodotus is continuing his contrast or catalogue of differences. Non-Greeks, or barbarians are those “who lacked Greek virtues and exhibit all non-Greek vices, such as luxury, effeminacy, despotism, and lack of self-control.”<sup>14</sup> King Amyntas reluctantly brings in the women as demanded, but the Persians insist that they sit beside not opposite them and immediately commence taking liberties. Clearly Persian and Macedonian customs and culture are as diverse as they are irreconcilable;<sup>15</sup> and although the Greeks do not yet regard Macedonians as Hellenes nor are they Barbarians.<sup>16</sup> Young Alexander,

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13. I am indebted to another for the phrase; “Oriental despotism” which the originator admits is an oversimplification of the polarity and conflict between Greece and what he calls the Near East. Kostas Vlassopoulos, *Greeks and Barbarians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013) 321.

14. He lists what he calls all non-Greek vices, but I would hesitate ever to put any degree of ethnical ownership on a vice Vlassopoulos, *Greeks and Barbarians*, 8. They are universal. It is during the late archaic and early classical period that the Hellenes are *inventing themselves* and at the same time inventing *not-themselves*, or the *barbarian*. Ideologically this leads to the simple adage that it is always a good thing to be a Hellene—and you might wish to thank the gods for that—and a very bad thing to be a Barbarian—and you might really wish to thank the gods for that, too.

15. Ross Scaife, “Alexander in the *Histories* of Herodotus,” *Hermes* 117 (1989): 117.

16. Barbarian is now a pejorative term, but the term *barbarophonoi* is used by Homer when describing the Trojans' Carian allies from the western coast of Anatolia:

Nastes led the Carians wild with barbarous tongues,  
men who held Miletus, Phthires' ridges thick with timber,

who is outraged at this lewd, ungracious behaviour, asks his father to retire, and suggests that if the Persian guests insist that it is their right to casually fornicate with these young women—the wives and daughters of their hosts—the women should at least be permitted to bathe first.<sup>17</sup> Alexander's outrage that the Persians should even ask is only exceeded by the anguish of witnessing his father's powerlessness and humiliating acquiescence in reducing Macedon's younger attractive female courtiers to little better than *pornai* (πόρναι)—noblewomen dragooned as substitutes for Persian army camp followers. Here Herodotus reveals one of the more insidious and invidious aspects of foreign dominance—when you are deprived of the freedom to boldly act on, or perhaps more strictly to exercise, the courage of your convictions, whether these be right or wrong, you are effectively reduced to a slave. Slaves either have no choice at all, or are at best obliged to select what they perceive as the least bad from among a number of evils.<sup>18</sup> And this is what the Persian emissaries are doing, while rubbing it in with pleasure.

Not yet enthroned and likely still a teenager well short of his majority, this incident becomes Alexander's *one defining moment*. He might even have vowed never to be forced into a similar powerless position himself, where his choices are limited to either bad or worse. He immediately dresses an equal number of lightly armed, smooth-skinned, young men in women's clothing and brings them back into the banqueting room, where seated beside their amorous drunken guests—and with shades of book 22 of the *Odyssey*—they put the guests to death for their grotesque violation of the most paramount of Greek virtues—*xenia*. Very much unlike late sixth- and early fifth-century Athens where prostitution was rampant, one might here interject the notion that in Macedon, as in Sparta—although for very different reasons—casual heterosexual intercourse was simply

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Maeander's currents and Mount Mycale's craggy peaks (*Iliad* 2.979-981).

Some scholars argue that Homer uses the term specifically for the Carians not because they did not speak Greek, but because they spoke an almost unintelligible Greek dialect. David Dueck, Hugh Lindsay and Sarah Pothecary (Eds.), *Strabo's Cultural Geography: The Making of Kolossourgia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 47-48. However, according to Herodotus, the Egyptians call any who do not speak their language "barbarians" (Hdt. 2.158.5). The Gaelic notion of *not one of us* will suffice, and it has that Pan-Hellenic seed.

17. The astute will note that any question of consent never arises—their monarch, Amyntas, has ordered the palace womenfolk to let his Persian guests have their way with them. Likely Alexander had several motives in play and will not follow in his father's footsteps.

18. Part of the justification for a monarchy is that the strong will always protect the weak—king Amyntas fails his country-women in a spectacularly miserable way.

not part of their culture.<sup>19</sup> Herodotus is showing that it is the barbarians who can do no better than turn a state banquet into an excuse for drunken debauchery.<sup>20</sup> If money is the root of all evil, then Spartan xenophobia coupled their reluctance to monetise gold and silver bullion explains why prostitution did not flourish there until the Hellenic era.<sup>21</sup>

Proving once again that nothing beats plausible deniability, coupled with the offer of a princess-bride and palm oil, Persian inquiries about their vanished emissaries come to nothing. Herodotus credits the young Alexander, rather than the king, with arranging the marriage of his sister Gygaia to Boubares, Megabazos' son and the Persian general responsible for the—quickly dropped— inquiry (Hdt. 5.22.2). Whether the tale is true or not is immaterial; Herodotus is carefully establishing that despite all outward appearances Macedon is only paying forced lip-service to Darius and that the future Macedon king is anxious to be free of the Persian yoke.<sup>22</sup> Herodotus is also highlighting significant cultural differences—Hellenes do not get paralytically drunk and Hellenes do not expect

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19. Fifth-century Athenian society is unashamedly patriarchal with an already well-developed, state sponsored, and thriving sex trade of varying degrees of salubrity employing countless slaves and non-citizens.

20. The Persians display their most boorish and toxic behaviour. Wealthy and influential Athenian men may hold drinking parties, *symposia*, but the only women present are *hetairai* and perhaps a better class of *pornai* provided by the host and where non-reproductive, recreational intercourse is *de rigueur*. Athenian men will not bring their *gynaikai*, let alone their *pallakai*.

21. See 1 Timothy 6:10 although the argument from Scripture is not the economic one. See also Sarah Pomeroy, *Spartan Women* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 98. The archaic and classical Spartan economy was agrarian and trade facilitated by barter—but there will always be a limit to the number of laying hens or sacks of barley the residents and keepers of such houses of pleasure can accept in exchange for services rendered. Carnal access to these foreign women likely also required access to foreign money.

22. A number of scholars have dismissed this story as apocryphal—perhaps it is even pro-Macedon propaganda fabricated by Herodotus. Joseph Roisman and Ian Worthington, *A Companion to Ancient Macedonia* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 136. But one of the flaws in their logic is that because Herodotus, or his sources, are unable to provide the necessary synchronicities, not only are we unsure of when this medizing first occurred—and was it by Amyntas or Alexander—we do not know the ages of either Alexander or Gygaia. There is no evidence that Gygaia is considerably younger than her brother, Alexander, and so pushing her marriage to Boubares to early in the fifth-century when she will be in her thirties creates other credibility challenges. The point of the digression is to reveal Herodotus' assessment of Alexander's sympathies, not the whereabouts of the Persian emissaries' bones.

to be invited to fornicate in public with their host's servants, let alone seek pleasure with their host's wives and daughters.<sup>23</sup>

In a long historical digression Herodotus describes how in the mid-seventh century three brothers: Gayannes, Aeropos, and Perdiccas, flee from Argos into exile in Illyria and then move eastward into northern Macedon and after deposing the local ruler eventually conquer the whole region (Hdt. 8.137-8.138). Herodotus gives the genealogy of Alexander I stretching back six generations.

And it was from this Perdiccas that Alexander was descended; for Alexander was the son of Amyntas, who was the son of Alcetes, whose father was Aeropos son of Philippos, the son of Argaios, who was the son of that Perdiccas who acquired the rule of this land (Hdt. 8.139).

Herodotus gives no source for this king list, but it is clearly a proud Macedonian tradition as likely as not carved in stone.<sup>24</sup> Also worth mention is that Macedon is a vast region, and the royal palaces at Aigai (Aegae) in the south are not a city-state but more a ceremonial meeting place. But what is critical here is that Alexander believes that it was important for his ruling family, the Argeads (Ἀργεάδαι), if not his subjects, to be accepted as *Hellenes* with Hellenic values and not be dismissed as Barbarians.<sup>25</sup> Further reinforcing Alexander's claim of

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23. Greek culture should be emulated, and a culture that eschews *xenia* is boorish beyond decadence. Herodotus does not say it directly, but falconry or wild boar hunting is a more appropriate recreational pursuit for visiting diplomats than catering to their preference for drunken fornication. Again, only slaves please others by acting against their convictions.

24. The Argead dynasty spans five centuries from 808 to 305 and includes twenty-seven monarchs—one of whom ruled for all of four days. Alexander I is the tenth in this line, whereas Alexander III, better known as Alexander the Great, is the twenty-fifth. Why Herodotus should defer revealing details of Alexander's genealogy until book 8, rather than introduce it early in book 4 or 5, is puzzling. If, as suggested by several scholars, Herodotus never got around to final revisions of his *Histories*—a draft extending over as many as fifty book rolls—likely he only set down this version of the Macedonian king list when a copy from what he regarded as a reliable source first came into his hands. Stewart Flory, *The Archaic Smile of Herodotus* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987), 15; and, Roisman and Worthington, *A Companion to Ancient Macedonia*, 81.

25. Geographic and ethnic boundaries in this region have changed numerous times over the last two and one-half millennia and it would be naïve if not absurd to ignore how these changes have impacted Greek and Slavic/Balkan cultural identity. The modern Balkan Republic of North Macedonia is landlocked and roughly corresponds to the ancient kingdom of Paeonia. Consequently, the existence of a Macedonian ethnicity is still bitterly contested, especially after the break-up of the former Yugoslavia in 1991-92. When Josip Broz Tito, who had held the country together since the end of WWII, died in 1980 the country slowly morphed back into the eight-former nineteenth-century constituent Slavic states. Alexander I's Macedon kingdom, which is not landlocked, has been part of



Hellenic (Temenid) heritage, Herodotus notes that he petitioned for and was permitted to compete in the Olympic Games.<sup>26</sup>

Furthermore, even those who preside over the Olympic games of the Hellenes have come to recognise that this is the case. [2] For when Alexander chose to compete in the games and entered the lists to do so, his Greek competitors tried to exclude him, by claiming that the contest was for Greek contestants only, and barbarians were not allowed to participate.<sup>27</sup> But when Alexander proved that he was of Argive ancestry, he was judged to be a Hellene, and proceeded to compete in the footrace, in which he was tied for first place (Hdt. 5.22.1-2).

Herodotus gives us his own definition of what it means, to be a *Hellene*.

And second it would not be fitting for the Athenians to prove traitors to the Greek people, with whom we are united in sharing the same kinship and language, with whom we have established shrines and conduct sacrifices to the gods together, and with whom we also share the same way of life (Hdt. 8.144.2).

In another digression Herodotus mentions the silver mine located between Lake Prasias and Mount Dysoron from which Alexander I will later derive an income of a talent of silver—6,000 to 8,000 drachmas—per day (Hdt. 5.17.2).<sup>28</sup> The kingdom's other source of revenue is forestry and the export of timber and pitch used in shipbuilding throughout the eastern Mediterranean. No matter, Herodotus' narrative establishes that thirty years before the second Greco-Persian

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mainland Greece for millennia. Accordingly I have referred to Alexander's homeland as Macedon. Alexander's subjects are described as Macedonians if only to avoid the grammatically clumsy Macedon peoples or peoples of Macedon.

26. Temenos (Τήμενος) is a great-great-grandson of Heracles who helps lead the fifth and final attack on Mycenae in the Peloponnese where he becomes king of Argos. He is the father of Karanos (Κάρανος) who in some traditions is the first king of Macedon and the founder of the Temenid or Argead dynasty. In other earlier traditions, including the one adopted by Herodotus, Perdikkas, Temenos' great grandson, founds the dynasty.

27. Alexander, as the king of Macedon or perhaps still just a prince of Macedon, most likely makes an honoured guest appearance at the seventy-first Olympiad in 496, or possibly at the games held in 500 or 504, and competes in the furlong (stadia) race. Neither Herodotus nor any other contemporary sources indicate which games nor how old he was, but we can surmise—if there is any truth to the earlier hospitality story—that he was then aged about thirty and had only recently assumed the throne.

28. Unlike the Scythian people who are nomadic, the agricultural community in Macedon practice transhumance—they keep their livestock grazing in sheltered lowland areas during the winter, but move them to upland areas during the spring and summer. Efficient land use results, as this livestock migration also lets the Macedon farmers grow crops for winter feed in their lowland fields. However, in the event of invasion this transhumance makes it particularly difficult to quickly muster defensive troops no matter whether infantry or cavalry.

war, Amyntas I is coerced into accepting Persian sovereignty, but notably without a resident Persian satrap and garrison; and, that later his son Alexander I reluctantly accepts the status quo while recognising that the continued independence and prosperity of Macedon is also dependent on the continued independence of the city-states within mainland Greece.

### **First Greco-Persian War**

Herodotus makes no further reference to Alexander until the summer of 480. We know that Alexander succeeds to his father's throne in 498 and from Herodotus' silence we may surmise that Macedon plays no role in the Ionian revolt and does not hinder Mardonios' forces during what turned out to be a disastrous foray into Thrace and Macedon in 493–492 when Darius seeks retribution for Athenian and Eritrean participation in the Ionian raid on Sardis in 498 (Hdt. 6.44). It is when taking his fleet from the Strymonic Gulf around the Chalcidian Peninsula that Mardonios loses some three-hundred ships from his fleet and some twenty-thousand soldiers before reaching Macedon territory west of the peninsula (Hdt. 6.44.2-3). With these crippling losses punitive raids on Athens and Eretria, let alone permanent subjugation, are no longer feasible and Mardonios ignominiously withdraws to Asia (Hdt. 6.45). Since Mardonios fails so miserably, next year in 491, Darius appoints two other generals, Datis and Artaphrenes with instructions to enslave both Athens and Eretria (Hdt. 6.94.20). Partly because of the unpredictable storms in the northern Aegean and a desire to subjugate a number of city-states on islands in the Aegean Sea the new strategy is one of which can best be described of island-hopping over the Cyclades Islands.

Alexander will doubtless have viewed this new strategy with a mixture of relief and apprehension—relief that another land army would not be crossing over from the Hellespont to Thrace—and apprehension that a large amphibious force routed safely through the Cyclades might successfully invade Attica and continue on through to the Peloponnese with some city-states medizing without a fight. As things turn out Eretria is betrayed from within and razed to the ground, but the Athenians, with Miltiades as commanding general and without Spartan assistance, defeats Datis at Marathon in the summer of 490. Furthermore, the promised betrayal from within Athens never materialises—the Persian invasion fleet gets as far as anchoring off Phaleron only to see the victors at Marathon waiting for them. They never land and return to Susa with only the conquest of a few small islands in the Aegean Sea, the sack of Eretria, and some hapless Eritrean prisoners to show for their efforts.

## Second Greco-Persian War

It will be a decade before the Persians try again. In the meantime Darius is succeeded by his son, Xerxes. In the aftermath of Marathon, leaders in mainland Greece argue over whether the Persian menace is over and whether a victory such as Marathon could ever be repeated. When Athens starts to build a significant navy—doubtless with timber and pitch purchased from Macedon—Alexander would be fully aware that the Greco-Persian conflict is far from over. Herodotus does not say when Alexander is recognised by Athens as a *proxenos* and *euergetes*, it might well have been before his succession to the throne. What is important is that Alexander has earned and subsequently been awarded these significant honours on proven merit and that the Persian commanders know so. But we can surmise that just as Alexander knows something of what is happening in Athens and in Sparta, he will also be fully aware of what is afoot in Susa.<sup>29</sup>

Following the sack of Sardis in 498, Darius resolves to subjugate all of Hellas once and for all (Hdt 5.105.1). Later, goaded by his mother, Atossa, for yet another invasion of the Greek mainland Darius dies in 484 in the midst of his preparations (Hdt. 7.4). His heir, Xerxes, inherits these preparations and one of his generals, Mardonios, is anxious to argue for revenge and perhaps covets the appointment as the satrap of all Hellas himself (Hdt. 7.6.1-2). It is in 484 that Xerxes assembles the Persian nobility to discuss his plan for the invasion of Hellas and tells them (Hdt. 7.8).

“I intend to bridge the Hellespont and lead my army through Europe to Hellas, so that we can punish the Athenians for all that they did to the Persians and to my father. [2] Now you saw how even Darius had his mind set on marching against these men, but that he died and did not have the opportunity to exact vengeance upon them. I, however, on his behalf and that of the rest of the Persians, shall not give up until I conquer Athens and set it on fire, since it is they who began the offenses against me and my father” (Hdt. 7.8β 1-2).

The first offence, in Xerxes’ mind, is the raid on Sardis, but he also regards the defeat at Marathon as an “offence” to be avenged (Hdt. 7.8β 3). And in due course, that is exactly what Xerxes does. Once the Athenians and Spartans know that Xerxes has crossed the Hellespont into Thrace and is moving toward Macedon and Thessaly they decide to act (Hdt. 7.172). In response to a Thessalian

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29. A *proxenos* is a citizen of a state (in this case Macedon) appointed by another state (namely Athens) to host its ambassadors and to represent and protect its interests there (Athens’ interests in Macedon). Another term applicable to Alexander I is *euergetes*: a benefactor and therefore a title of honour in ancient Greece granted to those notables who have done the state some service. Both titles have a hereditary element. (Hdt. 8.143.3); Roisman and Worthington, 141.)

request, they send an army by sea to Halos in Achaia where they disembark and march toward Tempe and the pass between Mount Olympus and Mount Ossa which leads from Macedon into Thessaly. But this very bold strategic move—bottling up the huge Persian force in Macedon—is very poorly planned and based on faulty, or grossly misleading local knowledge. Herodotus writes that in the early summer of 480, it is messengers from Alexander who point out their precarious position.<sup>30</sup>

They remained there for only a few days, however, for messengers soon arrived from the Macedonian Alexander son of Amyntas, telling them of the number of troops and ships the enemy had and advising them to depart, lest by remaining at the pass, they would be trampled under by the invading army. The Hellenes thought that this was sound advice and, recognizing that the Macedonian was thus displaying his goodwill toward them, they followed it (Hdt. 7.173.3).

Herodotus' story here shows the fragility of any slowly emergent early fifth-century Pan-Hellenism. It is the Thessalians, who do not want to be overrun by Xerxes' hordes, who persuade the Spartan and Athenian commanders, who were then assembled near Corinth, to travel north to help them defend the pass at Mount Olympus (Hdt. 7.172.2). The Thessalians must have known that there was more than one mountain pass that an army advancing south from Macedon into Thessaly might take, and that all of the passes would have to be defended. A naval force to prevent the defenders being by-passed and attacked from behind is also necessary.

The existence of such an alternative route soon becomes evident. Herodotus' readers will be thinking of the similar situation soon to be revealed at Thermopylae. Perhaps also Alexander does not want the Persians fighting against the Greeks within his kingdom, where Xerxes is certain to demand that Macedonian levees would be active participants. A minor military point, but the best way to defend a pass is at the entrance where you have a narrow front and with small numbers can prevent your enemy even entering it. To do this Euainetos son of Karenos and Themistocles would have to enter Macedon territory leaving Alexander in an invidious position regarding Xerxes' advance.

But in my opinion, what really convinced them to leave was fear, which arose when they learned that another pass into Thessaly led from northern Macedon through Perraiibia, by the city of Gonnoi, which was the pass that the army of Xerxes actually

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30. The military advice is not entirely altruistic; Alexander will have every reason to hope that the Persian hordes and their allies pass through his kingdom as peacefully and as quickly as possible.

did take. So the Hellenes returned to their ships and sailed back to the isthmus<sup>31</sup> (Hdt. 7.172.4).

Certainly this allied retreat from Thessaly, agreed by the two commanders, Euainetos son of Karenos from Sparta and Themistocles son of Neokles from Athens, leaves their former allies the Thessalians little choice but to submit to Xerxes and grant him unimpeded passage south toward Attica and the Peloponnese.

### **Thermopylae and After**

This invasion of Europe occurs during the summer of 480. Herodotus may have his facts right and yet be in error over the motivation. Herodotus does not say whether Macedonian forces commanded by Alexander—probably cavalry—were present at the battle of Thermopylae in August or September of 480. However, just prior to that battle when the Persian forces assemble near Cape Sepias, Herodotus lists the men in the forces recruited from Europe.

Land forces were provided by the Thracians, Paionians, Eirdians, Bottiaians, the nation of Chaldicians, Brygoi, Pierians, Macedonians, Perraibians, Ainianes, Dolopians, Magnesians, Achaeans, and all who inhabited the coastal region of Thrace (Hdt. 7.185.2).

In the aftermath of the Spartan defeat at Thermopylae, the Persians, gleefully guided by the Thessalians, overrun the entire country of Phocis freely burning, pillaging, and raping their way south (Hdt. 8.32–8.33). However, the entire population of Boeotia, who pragmatically medize after the battle of Thermopylae, are protected by Macedonian troops from the threat of unsanctioned Persian ravages. Herodotus writes.

After leaving Parapotamioi the barbarians came to Panopereos, and there Xerxes sorted out his army and divided it in two. The largest and strongest part continued with Xerxes to invade Boeotia through the territory of Orchomenus and march toward Athens. The entire population of Boeotia were medizing, and their cities were being protected by some Macedonians who had been appointed and sent to them by Alexandros. The purpose behind this move was to make clear to Xerxes that the Boeotians were taking the side of the Medes (Hdt. 8.34).

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31. Herodotus does not say which isthmus, but the Isthmus of Corinth is the most likely possibility for the various contingents of the combined fleet and army to re-assemble and later disburse toward home.

Perhaps this is an instance of Alexander I earning the title *euergetes*? He would not have forgotten the Persian's behaviour toward women at his father's palace thirty years earlier and now he appears to be challenging Xerxes to insist that his own troops and allied levees act honourably. The simple presence of a handful of Macedonian cavalymen in each Boeotian settlement would deter undisciplined marauders from preying on the defenceless civilian population no matter whichever part of Xerxes' empire—Asia or Europe—they came from. Clearly the Macedonians were not involved in the ill-omened Persian raid on Delphi, a grotesque act of impiety that would appall any ruler claiming Hellenic values.

Whether Macedonian troops take part on the sack of Athens, Herodotus does not say, nor do we know whether Macedonian troops assemble at Phaleron. Perhaps they were too busy with their garrison duties in Boeotia and only rejoin Mardonios when he withdraws to Thessaly after the naval disaster at Salamis? Herodotus makes no further mention of Alexander until the winter of 480/479 when the Persian general Mardonios withdraws his troops from Attica and is encamped in Thessaly. Here, taking advantage of Alexander's status as both *proxenos* and *euergetes*, Mardonios seeks to break up the Hellenic Alliance with a deal. We must not forget that in whatever capacity she or he may act ambassadors—are essentially very noble but obedient messengers.

After Mardonios had read the oracles, he sent Alexander of Macedon, the son of Amyntas, as a messenger to Athens, because the Persians were related to Alexander by marriage; Gygaia, who was the daughter of Amyntas and Alexander's sister, was the wife of Boubares of Persia. . She had given birth to Amyntas of Asia, who bore the name of his maternal grandfather and to who the King had given the large Phrygian city of Alabanda from which to draw revenues. Moreover, since Mardonios had heard that Alexander was a *proxenos* and a benefactor of Athens, [2] he thought that by this move he could best succeed in winning over the Athenians to his side. Because he had learned that they were a populous and warlike people, and he knew that the disaster that had befallen the Persians at sea had been accomplished mainly by the Athenians, [3] he fully anticipated that if they were on his side, he would easily gain control over the sea which was certainly a correct assumption (Hdt. 8.136.1-3).

Believing an oracle that suggests that the Persians should ally with the Athenians, Mardonios decides to send Alexander to Athens to present an offer that purports to come from Xerxes (Hdt. 8.136.3).<sup>32</sup> Herodotus reports Alexander's speech to the assembled Athenians, an assembly which includes some messengers from Sparta, as follows:

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32. Mardonios needs the Athenian navy (ships and crews), but he may be unaware that Themistocles has threatened to relocate the entire Athenian population to Siris in Italy. This would deny either side his triremes and troop transports (Hdt. 8.62.2).

Men of Athens, Mardonios has this to tell you: 'A message has arrived from the King [Xerxes], saying: I will forget all the wrongs done to me by the Athenians [2] so now, Mardonios, you must do as I say. First give them back their land, and let them have another land of their choice in addition, which they may govern independently (Hdt. 8.140α 1-2).

Alexander also offers his own addendum to the Xerxes/Mardonios message:

That, Athenians, is what Mardonios instructed me to tell you. As for myself, I shall say nothing of my own goodwill toward you (since now would not be the first time you could recognize that), but I do entreat you to follow the advice of Mardonios. [2] For I can see that you will not be able to wage war against Xerxes forever—if I had observed that you were capable of doing so, I would never have come to you with this advice. The fact is, the King's power is superhuman, and his reach extends far and wide. [3] And so if you do not immediately come to an agreement with the Persians while they are offering you such generous conditions, then I fear for you indeed, because you alone of all the allies dwell along the most beaten track of this war and constantly suffer devastation, and the land you possess is often chosen as the disputed ground on which battles are waged. [4] So, then, do heed my advice, since you have such a precious opportunity, insofar as the great King wishes to become your friend and to forgive you alone of all the Hellenes for the wrongs done to him (Hdt. 8.140β 1-4).

The astute listener will note that it is Alexander's Macedon that lies along the most beaten track of this war. But, no matter, the Spartan response is immediate, self-serving, and predictable and includes an *ad hominem* attack on Alexander.<sup>33</sup>

Do not let Alexandros of Macedon win you over with his polished version of Mardonios' message. [5] For he really must act this way: he is, after all, a tyrant who is assisting another tyrant. But if you have any sense at all, you must not follow the advice of barbarians, knowing as you do that they are neither trustworthy nor truthful (Hdt. 8.142.4-5).

Strictly, Alexander is not a tyrant, but he has claimed Temenid ancestry—which means Argos—and for any Spartan that would be enough to put him beyond the pale. Herodotus reports both the Athenian response first to Alexander and then their response to the Spartans.

Report back to Mardonios that the Athenians say: 'As long as the sun continues on the same course as it now travels, we shall never come to an agreement with Xerxes.

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33. Arguably the Spartans are disingenuous. Long ago they had threatened Cyrus the Great, but more recently they had abused Persian heralds (diplomats) adding injury to insult. W. W. How and J. Wells, *A Commentary on Herodotus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912), 2.8.142.2.

Trusting in the gods and heroes as our allies (for whom he showed no respect when he burned their homes and images) we shall advance against him and defend ourselves' (Hdt. 8.143.2).

The Athenian response to the Spartan messengers is more measured, but includes a plea that the Spartans do not simply defend themselves and other cities of the Peloponnese behind the fortifications they have constructed across the isthmus at Corinth (Hdt. 8.144.1-5).

Do send out an army as quickly as possible, [5] for it is our conjecture that before long, indeed as soon as the barbarian hears that we have refused to do as he asked, he will be here invading our land again and so now before he reaches Attica, is the time for you to hasten to battle in Boeotia (Hdt. 8.144.4-5).

As expected, after Alexander relays the Athenian response to the Xerxes/Mardonios offer, the Persian armies again prepare to move south toward Attica. Having occupied a deserted Athens for a second time (Hdt. 9.3), Mardonios tries again to separate the Athenians from their Spartan allies by repeating the earlier offer conveyed by Alexander and soundly rejected (Hdt. 9.4.1).

### **Defeat at Plataea**

This diplomatic ploy also fails, and when Mardonios learns that the Spartans under Pausanias are marching out of Sparta he sacks Athens for a second time and destroys everything in his path as he withdraws north from Attica into Boeotia. It is here, just south of Thebes along the Asopos River that Mardonios decides is the right terrain where his can use his cavalry to advantage when engaging the Hellenic Alliance in a decisive battle (Hdt. 9.13.3). From Herodotus we learn that "Mardonios also positioned the Macedonians and the inhabitants of the region surrounding Thessaly so that they faced the Athenians" (Hdt. 9.31.5).

The two armies face each other for ten days, neither attacking the other because the omens each receives after offering sacrifice are always unfavourable (Hdt. 9.38.2). One of Mardonios' advisers, Artabazos, even suggests that the Persians should abandon their present positions and retreat behind the walls of Thebes—where their cavalry would be useless—but to use the treasure stored there to bribe leaders of the Alliance into accepting Persian sovereignty on very favourable terms (Hdt. 9.41.2). Mardonios, who craves the glory of a military victory, rejects this advice and gives the signal for the battle to be joined on the following day (Hdt. 9.42.4). It is at this critical moment that Alexander, whose forces are positioned directly opposite the Athenians, decides to secretly help the Alliance as much as he can. Herodotus writes of what takes place at one outpost of the Greek camp:



The night was well advanced; all was quiet throughout the camp, and most of the men were asleep when Alexander son of Amyntas rode up on horseback to a guard post of the Athenians, seeking to speak to their generals [2] While most of the guards remained at their posts, some ran to their generals, and when they found them they told them that someone on horseback had arrived from the camp of the Medes, and that he would say nothing more than he wished to speak to some of their generals, whom he named (Hdt. 9.44.1–2).

Although Herodotus does not speculate, Alexander may not have left the Persian lines without the acquiescence of the Persian generals—what the Persians might have expected him to say is another matter.<sup>34</sup> Herodotus has already indicated that there were levees from Macedon under Alexander’s command in Mardonios’ army, but Alexander is not visiting the Hellenes’ camp to lend direct military assistance, although his secret forewarning reveals which side he is really on.<sup>35</sup>

Alexander said to them, “Men of Athens, I entrust you with what I am about to say, charging you to keep it an absolute secret and to tell no one but Pausanias, lest you utterly destroy me. You must know that I would not be speaking to you if I did not care greatly about all of Hellas, [2] for I myself am a Hellene of ancient lineage and would not wish to see Hellas exchange its freedom for slavery.<sup>36</sup> And so I am here to tell you that Mardonios and his army are unable to obtain from their sacrifices. The omens they desire. Otherwise you would have fought a long time ago. Now, however, Mardonios has resolved to dismiss the oracles and to engage in battle beginning at the break of day; my guess is that he is very worried that more men will come here to join you. So you should prepare your selves for this. If it turns out that Mardonios delays the encounter and does nothing, you should remain and persevere, for they have enough food left for only a few days. [3] And if this war ends in your favor, then you must remember me and my quest for liberation, for it is on my own initiative that I have performed this dangerous feat as a service to the Hellenes; I wish to reveal the intent of Mardonios to you so that the barbarians will not be able to fall upon you suddenly and unexpectedly, I am Alexander of Macedon.” After saying this he rode away, back to his camp and his own post (Hdt. 9.45.1-3).

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34. Alexander might well not know which Greek commanders are present, several may well be with the Hellenic fleet at Mycale. How and Wells, 2.9.44.1-2.

35. The Persian commanders must have very short memories about Alexander—they should know that nothing very good happens to a Persian after midnight—especially when it comes to Macedon and Macedonians.

36. See Hdt. 8.137.1-8.139 where Herodotus goes through the genealogy and migration of the Argead royal house as mid-seventh-century refugees from Argos in the Peloponnese—Herodotus’ Macedonian sources want to establish that Alexander and many of his nobles are *Hellenes* not *Barbaroi* but of Argive rather than Dorian or Ionian descent.

Evidently Macedon is still obliged to supply Mardonios with troops, but whether they winter with the Persian forces in Thessaly or travel home to Macedon at the end of the 480-campaign season and reassemble the spring of 479 Herodotus does not say. Clearly, Herodotus is going well out of his way to show that at a crucial moment Alexander of Macedon is only paying lip service to the Persians and wants to help the Hellenes.

This, Herodotus' last mention of Alexander I, ends with his account of this Greco-Persian battle in the summer of 479—a stunning Persian defeat, closely followed by another defeat on the Anatolian coast at Mycale. Herodotus leaves his readers to determine what influence this timely forewarning has on the outcome of the battle of Plataea and to assess Alexander's motives in approaching the Athenian generals and the Spartan commander Pausanias in particular.<sup>37</sup> Remember, Herodotus' first mention of Alexander is at least thirty years earlier, well before the Ionian revolt at the beginning of the fifth century and at a time when Alexander is still only a minor and just a prince of Macedon. From other sources we know that Alexander remains on the throne for another quarter-century, and that neither he nor his countrymen are held to account for their medism. With others the Hellenes were not so charitable, Thebes and a number of wealthy aristocratic Thebans come to mind.

### Pan-Hellenism Takes Root

Few have not heard of the late fourth-century military prodigy Alexander-the-Great, or more properly, Alexander III of Macedon; in fact he is a direct descendant of the comparatively very little-known Alexander I of Macedon. Even fewer will have ever heard of Alexander I's father, King Amyntas I, yet Alexander I is the only Macedonian given any prominence by Herodotus in his *Histories*. Following the inconclusive naval engagement off Artemision, messages are left on the shore at all the sites that might provide drinking water—these exhort Xerxes' Ionian allies not to help the Persians and to ask the Carians not to

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37. But as the Spartans lament so bitterly after being instrumental in driving Hippias, the last of the Peisistratid tyrants, out of Athens and into exile at the close of the sixth century—the Athenians are a thankless people (Hdt. 5.92.2). Never made clear in this well-known Herodotean quotation is who in Sparta said it—perhaps a member of the *Gerousia*—and to whom the Spartans were referring—the privileged and wealthy Athenian aristocrats—or those *others* who several millennia later in a similar context are quite foolishly and contemptibly—citizens with only just enough to get by, Athenians not wealthy enough to equip themselves and train as hoplites, let alone own slaves.

help them either (Hdt. 8.22.1-3).<sup>38</sup> Identity is often bitterly contested whichever side of the fence we chose, one historian writes:<sup>39</sup>

Macedonians—irrespective of origin, dialect, or religious proclivities—were citizens of Macedonian civic units, and their country, the kingdom of the Macedonians (ἡ Μακεδόνων βασιλεία) was a state, whereas Greeks were citizens of more than a thousand states, and Greece was at best, a cultural concept with hazy and variable contours, and at worst, a slogan.

Shortly after Alexander I's death and some thirty or forty years after the battle at Plataea, Herodotus is still researching, revising his writing, and more than likely entertaining crowds with excerpts from his not yet complete *Histories*. It is fair to ask whether his generally favourable view of Macedon and the Macedonian monarchy is not directed toward some Pan-Hellenic goal—the fifth-century Macedonians are not yet regarded as Hellenes, but encouraged by their Argead dynasty myth a slow process of Hellenization arguably has its beginnings during the late sixth century. During the Second Greco-Persian War Macedon medizes and supplies Xerxes with troops, but what are the realistic alternatives for this small nominally independent kingdom—a kingdom always in harm's way if the Persians pursue their ambitions to expand their empire into Europe?

Geography is always important to Herodotus and is important here; had Alexander's kingdom been only a little further north neither the Persians nor the Hellenes would have cared one way or the other. For both sides, Macedon would have remained strategically insignificant and out of mind. Whether Macedon joins the Delian League after Xerxes' defeat and withdrawal in 479 and Xanthippus' siege of Sestos in 478, Herodotus does not say. But it is difficult to imagine that somehow Herodotus' writings are sponsored propaganda directed toward preserving an independent and autonomous Macedon against Athenian expansion in the wake of Xerxes' unsuccessful invasion and the decline of Persian military power.<sup>40</sup> Perhaps Herodotus' principal sources are from Macedon and

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38. Herodotus' wording is unambiguously Pan-Hellenic, Ἴωνες, οὐ ποιεῖτε δίκαια ἐπὶ τοὺς πατέρας στρατευόμενοι καὶ τὴν Ἑλλάδα καταδουλούμενοι. Roughly translated as "Men of Ionia, you do not do what is right by going to war against [the land of] your fathers and reducing Hellas to slavery." One of Herodotus' constant themes is that if a people are to be truly Greek then they must first be free.

39. Miltiades B. Hatzopoulos, *Ancient Macedonia* (Berlin; Boston, MA: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2020), 122.

40. The Athenians take a dim view of medizing—but under what circumstance might it be an acceptable political or military ploy and a pragmatic matter of Hobson's choice? Alexander saw at first-hand what happened in Phocis and what might well have happened in Boeotia had he not intervened—when your city-state or rural kingdom is on the route of an invading army you let them pass through and trust that under their commanders the invading hordes will remain sufficiently disciplined to eschew rape and pillage.

these are anxious to show their late king in a good light? We know from other sources that Alexander I rules Macedon until his death in 454, when he is succeeded by his eldest son, Alcetas II, who rules for about six years before being assassinated; he in turn being succeeded by a younger brother Perdiccas II who rules from 448 to 413; and, of course, it is this same Argead royal house that in the latter half of the fourth century will produce Philip II of Macedon and his son, Alexander III—Alexander the Great. But it is Prince Alexander who insists that drunken fornication is a grotesque violation of *xenia*—the most enduring and endearing of Homeric and therefore foundational Pan-Hellenic values—and doubtless much else beside. For good reason Athenian values and practices are not adopted *holus-bolus*. Ross Scaife concludes his article with the judgement: <sup>41</sup>

Thus Herodotus portrays in Alexander a leader whose cultural marginality presented a stark choice between heroic resistance and compromise. While the king could prove his Hellenism in a genealogical sense to the satisfaction of Herodotus and the Olympic judges, he did not support that heritage in a consistent, dependable manner.

Daniel Gillis adopts a less critical and more pragmatic approach to the reactions of Greek city-states [and others] facing imminent Persian invasions: <sup>42</sup>

But ideology played remarkably little role in those critical times—certainly less than later Greeks would care to admit—and options were limited. Survival was the goal, and the methods chosen to attain it differed. One should hardly expect otherwise from a people as factious as the Greeks. They acted under pressure, according to their lights. Few were noble. All were vulnerable.

I believe that Scaife misinterprets both Herodotus' text and Herodotus' intent in writing about early fifth-century Macedon and their Argive monarch.<sup>43</sup> Athens, which as a city has been burned, razed, and looted twice during the Second Greco-Persian War, has a credible alternative to medizing—the citizens can abandon their Attic homeland and with it their ever-unreliable allies and sail en

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41. Scaife, "Alexander in the *Histories*," 137.

42. Daniel Gilles, "Collaboration with the Persians," *Historia-Einzelschrift: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*. Heft 34 (Weisbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag GmbH, 1979) iii.

43. Given his Argive/Argead heritage Alexander doubtless sees himself as a Homeric hero and one who, if necessary, will indulge in copious *Iliadic bloodshed*—ideally largely that of his enemies. But he owes it to his subjects—principally shepherds and foresters—to come up with a pragmatic resolution of the conflict between his personal Pan-Hellenic convictions and his very practical political obligation to avoid his adult countrymen becoming both *good and dead* and *dead and good* with their children similarly butchered or the young boys emasculated and packed-off with their female siblings by marauding Persians to the Mediterranean slave markets.

masse to Siris in southern Italy and start afresh: something they have already threatened to do.<sup>44</sup>

Alexander does not have the luxury of such an escape with safe relocation to a distant colony for his Macedonian countrymen—they are simple shepherds and foresters tied to their land base. Compromise can be a dirty word; but sober if unexciting pragmatism always trumps foolhardiness. Even in Homer's epics heroic resistance—often understood as valour—has never been an interchangeable term with pointless mass suicide. While there is no reason to believe that Herodotus consults only Macedonian sources about Alexander's role during the First and Second Greco-Persian Wars there is another aspect to Herodotus' observations. Pan-Hellenism is the only certain antidote to medizing and Herodotus' sympathetic portrait of Alexander points the Athenians away from unequal alliances based largely on coercion, exorbitant fines, military and naval dominance, and often punitive retribution.

### Conclusions

One objective of this study is to demonstrate that one way or another Herodotus is a proto-biographer. He writes when the genre of history is ill defined beyond the obvious—that the subject matter is not entirely myth, or by how much must we suspend our disbelief. Just naming an individual, and closely associating her or him with an historical event, has the effect of granting that individual agency and therefore some responsibility or credit if things go rather well, and some culpability if the desired outcome is not obtained. But as Anne Geddes writes, "Biographies might contain anecdotes, but they should not consist [solely] of them."<sup>45</sup> Indeed that is why I use the term proto-biographer—not quite there yet.

This brings us back to the: who, what, where, why, and when of story-telling. By just giving a name—a unique being "far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife"—Herodotus grants a measure of identity and verisimilitude to this individual.<sup>46</sup> But if Heraclitus is right about character and destiny—then exactly what deed, why, and perhaps with what and then when this individual assumes autonomy, exercises authority, putting agency into action—this places the

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44. See Themistocles' speech to his allies just before the battle off Salamis (Hdt. 8.62.2). Siris, a long-established Ionian colony, was a port city on the Gulf of Taranto in southern Italy. This mass relocation is something the Spartans cannot even remotely consider. As a warrior society they rely on their virtually captive helots (slaves) to fuel their isolationist agricultural economy. Unless it is to feed hay to his favourite race-horse, a Spartan male likely will never touch a pitchfork in his lifetime.

45. Geddes, "Ion of Chios and Politics," 115.

46. With apologies to Thomas Gray and his *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*.

selected individual right in the front row of history. In short, Herodotus makes sure that story remains part of history. Although he is blissfully unaware of a new and important literary genre to come; this amounts to proto-biography.

Although the focus of this study is on one exceptional individual, all of the foregoing is written with an acute awareness of the narrative issues lurking behind non-fiction literary genres. In the proem to his *Histories*, Herodotus claims that he is interested in the cause of the Greeks and Persians warring against each other (*Hdt.* 1.1). Perhaps: but not solely.<sup>47</sup> In his quest for causation Herodotus cannot resist delighting himself and therefore his audiences by weaving into his historical narrative all manner of fascinating digressions, including material that literature scholars might—almost two and a half millennia later—want to classify as biographical sub-narratives. But Herodotus does not stop there. He might now be recognised as the first Western historian, but in the mid-fifth-century this non-fiction literary genre is very new. It is not that the genre boundaries are ill-defined; there were none. Consequently the author of the *Histories* can segue in his book-rolls from fanciful meteorology, to the geography of far-away places with strange-sounding names, to a discussion of dowries, and then to the sometimes very different matrimonial customs adopted by other peoples.

Notions of Pan-Hellenism are evident throughout the life of Alexander I. His Macedon people may not yet be even faintly accepted by others as true Hellenes, but the Macedonian inclusion quest has to start somewhere. And it starts with Alexander. Of course, if he is eligible, then doubtless his ancestors were also eligible. Perhaps they were far too busy with other matters. Then there are practical issues to consider: travelling 600 to 700 kilometres, plus the expenses and extended absence from the kingdom. Because of geographical realities his autonomy and agency are constrained. Alexander cannot pursue meaningful membership in any formal Hellenic military alliance until the existence of such an alliance itself poses a formidable and credible deterrent to any potential aggressors.

Nevertheless, Herodotus' interest in Pan-Hellenism is evident in his choice of words, a choice that is dramatically different from the choices made by Homer.<sup>48</sup> What Herodotus' contrast shows is that the trident of three A's—agency, autonomy, and authority—can be used for good or ill and that possession of great

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47. Herodotus' expression "μήτε ἔργα μεγάλα τε καὶ θαυμαστά" is translated in the proem as "great and wonderful deeds" alternatives include "marvelous exploits"—neither word signals any degree of disbelief; but irrespective of whether these are deeds or exploits we still infer human agency.

48. The term *Achaeans* (Ἀχαιοί) is used 598 times in Homer's *Iliad*. The other common names are *Danaans* (Δαναοί) used 138 times, and *Argives* (Ἀργεῖοι) used 182 times in the *Iliad*; while for *Pan-Hellenes* (Πανέλληνες) and *Hellenes* (Ἕλληνες) each appears only once. All of these terms were used synonymously to denote a common Greek civilizational identity. All references to the *Iliad* in translation are to Robert Fagles, *The Iliad: Homer* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1990).

power is not enough—the holder has to know how and when to use it wisely—the difference between (μητις) *metis* and (βία) *bie* becomes critical when resort to Herculean displays of strength are not an option.<sup>49</sup> Although it is not a question that Herodotus addresses directly, we might well ask whether Alexander meets any of Solon's *only happy when dead criteria*.<sup>50</sup> Perhaps a corollary to Solon's happiness criterion should read, "You are only judged happy when your enemies are dead" and here his happiness is assured.<sup>51</sup>

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49. The Greek word (μητις) *metis* —meaning cunning or crafty like a fox, or like Odysseus—is not pejorative and often contrasted with (βία) *bie* brute force. Ajax comes to mind.

50. Alexander lives into his early seventies, a ripe old age at that time, and dies in 454. The reversals of fortune of many as outlined in the *Histories* spectacularly illustrate Solon's maxim that "no one can be judged fortunate until they are dead" (Hdt. 1.43.7). Neither Herodotus nor other sources tell us how he died, but if it was anything other than peacefully surely someone would have said.

51. Back to Gray's *Elegy*; it is the sexton who has the pleasure of digging the graves for those parishioners for whom he has the least regard.

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