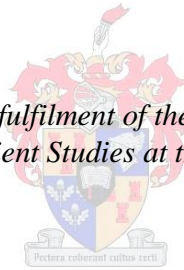


Information-gathering and the Strategic Use of Culture in Herodotus

by
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Declaration

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this thesis is to examine examples of information-gathering and political intelligence in Herodotus' *Histories*. In Herodotus' account, dialogues, anecdotes, and even inserted authorial commentary describe how leaders obtain politically relevant and timely information about other individuals and nations (intelligence). Herodotus links political decisions, based on gathered information, with his presentation of historical causation. In his multi-themed account, Herodotus provides tales of commissioned information-gathering missions, espionage, secret messages, and even disguises as nations and political leaders attempt to find out about their enemies and their allies. While the various anecdotes of information-gathering may not be historically precise, they may, in fact, infer real goals and problems of ancient Greek intelligence practices.

The second purpose of this thesis is to explore Herodotus' use of cultural information within decision-making and statecraft. Herodotus presents *nomos* (culture or custom) as a compelling force for human behavior and military action. By articulating the importance of cultural information to political and military intelligence, Herodotus' work foreshadows modern intelligence theories and practices. This *nomos*-aspect of Herodotus' information-gathering anecdotes is especially relevant to current post-modern trend of culturally-based intelligence solutions to western counter-insurgency efforts.

OPSOMMING:

Die hoofdoel van hierdie tesis is om voorbeelde van inligtingversameling en politieke intellegensie in Herodotus se *Histories* te ondersoek. In Herodotus se verslae, dialoë, anekdotes en selfs ingevoegde ouktoriele kommentaar word daar beskryf hoe leiers polities relevante en aktuele inligting oor ander individue en nasies (intellegensie) verkry. Herodotus verbind politieke besluite, gebaseer op ingewinde inligting, met sy voorstelling van historiese kousaliteitsleer. In sy vertellings met meervoudige temas, verskaf Herodotus verhale van opdragte wat gegee is vir inligtingsinwinningsendings, spioenasiewerk, geheime boodskappe en selfs vermomnings waarmee nasionale en politieke leiers gepoog het om uit te vind oor hul vyande en bondgenote. Terwyl die verskeie anekdotes van inligtinginwinning moontlik nie histories presies is nie, is hulle dalk in werklikheid afgelei van regte doelstellings en probleme van antieke Griekse intellegensiepraktyke.

Die tweede doel van hierdie tesis is om ondersoek in te stel na Herodotus se gebruik van kulturele inligting in besluitneming en regeerkuns. Herodotus stel *nomos* (kultuur of gebruik) as 'n dwingende krag vir menslike gedrag en militêre aksie voor. Deur die belangrikheid van kulturele inligting vir politieke en militêre intellegensie te artikuleer, is Herodotus se werk 'n voorafskaduwing van moderne intellegensie teorieë en praktyke. Hierdie *nomos*-aspek van Herodotus se inligtingsinwinningsanekdotes is veral relevant vir die huidige post-modernistiese neiging van kultuur-gebaseerde intellegensieoplossings vir westerse teen-insergensie pogings.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The thesis

Herodotus' *Histories* was written in the middle of the fifth century BC and explores the causes and events surrounding the Graeco-Persian wars of 490 and 480-479.¹ Although not intended as a purely political or military treatise, Herodotus' work demonstrates how ancient Greek city-states (*poleis*) engaged in international statecraft and conflict, especially in response to the encroaching Persian Achaemenid Empire. Through dialogues, anecdotes, and even inserted authorial commentary, Herodotus relates episodes which involve the collection and interpretation of information for political decision-making (intelligence).² Although the ancient Greeks had nothing akin to modern technology-based integrated intelligence systems, nevertheless Herodotus' anecdotes involving information-gathering and its interpretation, while, perhaps, historically imprecise, may subtextually infer real problems and goals associated with how the ancient Greeks evaluated the political information they obtained.

In addition, Herodotus' work is innovative in that it presents culture as a compelling force for human behavior and military action. Thus Herodotus articulates the importance of cultural information and cultural interpretation of gathered information to political and military decision-making in a way which foreshadows postmodern intelligence theories (strategic culture theory), intelligence practices (cultural intelligence), and the culturally-based trends in western counter-insurgency efforts of the twenty-first century A.D.³

¹ All centuries and dates are BC unless otherwise stated. Specific dates of battles, deaths, or other political events will be indicated by (#).

² *The Oxford English Dictionary* (2010) presents one connotation of intelligence as "the obtaining of information, esp. of military or political value; espionage".

For the purposes of this paper, "intelligence", when associated with the ancient world, refers only to gathered information which has been evaluated or interpreted.

³ See 1.2.1 'Culture wars' and cultural intelligence for a definition of cultural intelligence. See 1.2.2 Strategic culture and warfare for a definition of strategic culture.

1.1.1 Outline of thesis

This thesis will initially set parameters of modern-day terms such as ‘culture’ and ‘intelligence’ as they relate to the ancient past. Secondly, it will introduce various Greek cultural and political developments, which not only mitigated the risks associated with the volatile political landscape and the unverifiable intelligence concerning it, but also contributed to Herodotus and his intellectual milieu. Next, this thesis will examine Herodotus’ anecdotal examples of information-gathering techniques and the process of commissioned inquiries, observation, reports and political or military decisions. As information is collected, synthesized and presented, Herodotus’ literary pattern of the wise advisers (and their ignored cultural, strategic, tactical and proverbial advice) emerges within both military and political contexts. The final chapter of the thesis will consider the theme of *nomos* in Herodotus. As *nomos* compels its adherents to follow their own cultural protocols — even to their deaths — it becomes almost impossible for leaders to grasp the cultural compulsions of their enemies’ troops. On the other hand, Herodotus occasionally portrays leaders who, to meet their personal or political ends, transgress cultural protocols. Therefore there is a tragic and unpredictable element to the tyranny of *nomos* as Herodotus associates cross-cultural ignorance to his greater didactic — the dire political consequences of imperial *hubris*.

1.2 Herodotus and the counter-insurgency stalemate

The present trend in western statecraft toward counter-insurgency efforts in the Middle East and Central Asia has resulted in a renewed international debate on East-West conflict and orientalism in western military operations within non-western national powers.⁴ Salient to this debate is Herodotus’ *Histories*, which is the earliest complete and extant work of Greek prose

⁴ Orientalism broadly describes western-based derogatory stereotyping of Eastern / Middle Eastern culture or history (Cartledge 1993:39).

and a historically-themed account of the great political and cultural clashes of Greece and Persia.

It is tempting to view Herodotus' account of Marathon, the 300 Spartans at the Thermopylae pass, Salamis, and Plataea as 'decisive battles' where according to Porter (2009:5) history is "hanging in the balance" and which take on a symbolic significance in that, had the Persians ultimately overcome the Greeks, western civilization would have been doomed. The British classicist Paul Cartledge (2004:9) presents this view succinctly in his introduction to his book *The Spartans*:

The events of 11 September 2001 jolted many of us into rethinking what was distinctive and distinctively admirable – or at least defensible – about Western civilization, values and culture. Those of us who are historians of ancient Greece wondered this with special intensity, since the world of ancient Greece is one of the principal tap roots of Western Civilization. As J.S. Mill put it, the battle of Marathon, fought in 490 BC between the Athenians, with support from the Plataeans and the invading Persians, was much more important than the Battle of Hastings, even as an event in English History.

However, culturally polarized views of historical warfare may, in fact, hinder an accurate assessment of past cross-cultural military conflict and render present-day cross-cultural military policy, diplomacy, occupation, and nation-building goals as unsuccessful.

1.2.1 'Culture wars' and cultural intelligence

Western statecraft has struggled to find successful models of military and political engagement which would not only actively discourage radical and militant Islamic fundamentalism as well as destroy terrorist groups and the governments which harbour them, but also, through military-based nation-building, occupation, and propaganda, promote an acceptance of democratic values in non-western societies (CADS 2006:3; Bush 2003:10). But the United States, although having military superiority, seems continually on the brink of losing this crucial "culture war" (Porter 2009:1). If western-style democracy and free-society cannot find a place in the hearts of the communities within which terrorist enclaves operate, then the

U.S. and its allies will not be able to use their military supremacy, tactical effort, and political influence to their advantage, resulting in a political and ideological stalemate.

As American leaders, generals, and policy-makers contemplate this crisis of ideological and cultural hegemony, they have begun to re-examine the role of culture in conflict. They have acknowledged their ignorance of non-western societies and have turned to cultural solutions to prevent military disaster and to secure political success (Porter 2009:5). Defense-based think tanks have proposed an implementation of cultural intelligence⁵ involving cross-cultural understanding and awareness for more effective information-gathering and successful military operations (CADS 2006:1,3). According to the Center for Advanced Defense Studies (2006:1), as a component of political and military decision-making, cultural intelligence uses “language and interpersonal skills, tuned to the culture-based values and attitudes of other groups or nations” to gather and analyze collective cultural information so as to project probable political or military decisions. As a demonstration of this cultural shift in the U.S.’s counter-insurgency efforts in the Middle East and Central Asia, the introduction of the new *Counterinsurgency Field Manual (FM3-24)* calls for “agile, well-informed culturally astute leaders” while the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review (Department of Defense:78) judges linguistic ability and cultural intelligence as “critical to prevail in the long war and to meet 21st century challenges.”

1.2.2 Strategic culture and warfare

Another result of this modern trend of cultural re-examination is a broader discussion of western identity and warfare. Many modern military strategists have become disenchanted with

⁵ Cultural Intelligence (CULTINT) in a military or political context ought not to be confused with CQ (cultural intelligence quotient) which Earley (2003:4) defines as a measurable “construct of intelligence that reflects adaptations to varying cultural contexts”. This construct is associated with other assessments such as IQ (intelligence quotient) and EQ (emotional quotient).

the theories of Clausewitz (1.24), whose famous maxim declared that “war is policy by other means” and who espoused that warfare could be systematically analyzed and scientifically explained within the contexts of power struggles, hostility, and opportunity. In a post-modern response to Clausewitz, the historian John Keegan (1997:387) has presented “war as culture by other means”. Concurring with Herodotus (3.38) who alludes to Pindar that “custom is king of all”, Keegan (1997:387) proposes that there is a distinctly “western way of war”, entrenched in the ancient Greek *hoplon* and *phratry* system of military training.⁶

As military historians reflect on western warfare, modern military analysts have embraced the notions of culture-driven warfare. This, in turn, has given rise to the study of strategic culture theory, which, according to Porter (2009:10) holds that culture is “critical to the central questions of strategy, such as how resources are translated into military power, how decision-makers think, how nations prepare for war, and how material things and ideas affect one another”. Perhaps this ‘cultural’ turn may provide solutions to the 21st century counter-insurgency goals of western nations.

1.2.3 Herodotus in a new light

Herodotus framed his historical inquiry into Persia’s confrontation with the Greeks within an epic tradition and in doing so he laid emphasis on the cultural differences between the national powers. In his introduction to his inquiries, Herodotus (1.1) describes his literary goals:

Herodotus of Halicarnassus here displays his inquiry, so that human achievements may not become forgotten in time, and great and marvelous deeds – some displayed by Greeks, some by barbarians – may not be without their glory; and especially to show why the two peoples fought with each other.

⁶ For the purposes of this thesis all Herodotean references will be identified by (Hdt.#.#) and, unless otherwise noted, from the 2003 revised Penguin edition with translation by Aubrey de Sélincourt and introductory notes by John Marincola.

Drawing from Greek concepts of polarity, Herodotus, having grown up in Persian-occupied, Ionian-influenced, Doric Asia Minor, used cross-cultural constructs both to examine Greek self-perception and to emphasize the *hubris* of imperialism (Cartledge 1993:62). Although given the title of “Father of History” Herodotus certainly does not apply a systematic political analysis to his narrative. According to Marincola (2003:xiv), “The variety of wares at the Herodotean bazaar is truly staggering...and his work ranges over many fields and includes geography, anthropology, ethnology, zoology, even fable and folklore”. Herodotus couched his inquiry and observations in literary devices, rhetoric, anecdotes and fictional dialogues, which have led scholars throughout the centuries to consider him the “Father of Lies” for his exaggeration of numbers and bizarre stories.⁷

At present the academic use of Herodotus’ *Histories* as a source for reconstructing the ancient past is regarded as tendentious on account of the partisan nature of the material. Iranianists and Ancient Near East historians view Herodotus as one of many Greek authors who doggedly portrayed imperial Persia with such broad and biased strokes that their stock characters and settings — the spoiled, superstitious, lascivious, yet brutal potentate; the lavish, romantic, and sinister royal court; the obsequious advisers; the inhuman barbarian hordes — have been continuously reproduced throughout western history along with its cultural prejudices against the Far and Middle East. Kuhrt (1995:648), in her treatment of sources for Achaemenid Persia, cautions that “all Greek writers” were entranced by Persia’s wealth and power, that their presentation of anecdotes recounting the moral decadence, unlimited luxury and effeminacy of the Persian king were intentional inversions of Greek society; and that these impressions of imperial Persia’s political system were “fundamentally flawed”. Brosius (2006:2-3) declares that serious Persian scholarship has been beset by a “hostile press which is embedded in the

⁷ See Marincola 2003: xxix for Herodotus’ later reception.

European tradition, but which ultimately originates in antiquity...[where] Greek freedom was contrasted with Asian despotism.”⁸

Classicists defend Herodotus’ historicity by pointing his even-handed treatment of Greeks and non-Greeks alike — Plutarch even criticized Herodotus for being biased in *favor* of the Persians (Marincola 2003:xxix). There are some aspects of Herodotus’ account, which have been confirmed by archaeological record. According to Roaf (1998:206), Herodotus’ description of Darius’ accession to the Achaemenid dynasty seems to generally follow the official royal version, which had been inscribed in cuneiform on the rock face at Behistun and disseminated throughout the empire.⁹ Aspects of Herodotus’ account, which have been contradicted by the archaeological record, may be explained by his use of oral traditions, which were the principal sources of non-official information transmission within both Greek and ancient Near Eastern civilizations (Hornblower 2002:374).

Herodotus’ spirit of inquiry was fostered by the Milesian intellectual revolution, which was initiated in the early years of the sixth century and focused on a rational inquiry into the nature of the cosmos (Raaflaub 2002:153). As Herodotus (8.468) asserts “my business is to record what people say, but I am by no means bound to believe it- and that may be taken to apply to this book as a whole”. Herodotus curiously fuses his rational inquiry with a decidedly didactic approach to his theme of imperial *hubris*. While Herodotus’ didactic-style narrative may hinder a precise account of Persian history, he may not have been as biased against the East as modern

⁸ Brosius does not even deign to refer to Herodotus in her source-matters, introductions, indexes, references, or bibliographies. A Herodotus-free reconstruction of the Achaemenid empire during the time of the Graeco-Persian War, while perhaps more palatable to anti-orientalist preferences, is not a luxury historians can afford.

⁹ See **2.2.2 Intelligence services in the ancient Near East** for another Herodotean reference to Achaemenid civilization which is corroborated by the Persepolis Texts...the royal roads.

historians of the ANE and Iranianists suppose.¹⁰ Herodotus was not neutral, but he was observant and more subtle in his analysis than his tall-tales and morality stories belie. In spite of his anecdotes, which sometimes patronizingly and negatively emphasize the ‘otherness’ of non-Greek nations, Herodotus nevertheless demonstrates a keen and objective insight that, for all nations, customs (*nomoi*) shape political culture, which, in turn, produce decisions concerning statecraft and military conflict (Forsdyke 2006:225). In his work, Herodotus also seems to acknowledge that there are limits to such cultural compulsions. Leaders, who are ultimately responsible for interpreting and using cross-cultural information, are not above their own biases, and although they may be motivated within their cultural contexts, they can override cultural protocols and do precisely what is required to gain the political or military upper hand.

In his account, Herodotus anecdotally relates examples of rudimentary forms of information-gathering and cultural information within political and military decision-making in a way that foreshadows modern-day strategic culture theory and culturally-focussed military intelligence practices. Through anecdotes, dialogues, and commentary, Herodotus not only relates instances of cross-cultural information obtained and analyzed for political or military purposes, but also integrates misinterpreted or ignored cultural information with his theme of imperial *hubris*.

1.3 Conclusion

As the modern West gropes for cultural solutions to understand itself and its enemies, it may be instructive to re-examine Herodotus’ treatment of the Persian Wars. Centuries of reception, interpretation, criticism, and archaeological attestation have led to Herodotus’ dismissal as both historically inaccurate and hazardously biased. However, as Harrison

¹⁰ See Munson 2009 for an article which presents an alternative interpretation of Herodotus’ historical integrity—Iranian orality.

(2002:575) aptly puts it, the modern academic Herodotean criticism “need not be...in all cases motivated by partisanship”. By evaluating Herodotus in his own words, a clearer picture emerges that the author, in spite of his biases and didactic agenda, attempts to evaluate causes and actions of military conflict within political, religious, economic and cultural factors. Herodotus filters his gathered information for his audience and as he presents his findings, he peppers his account with entertaining tales, compelling narrative, and juicy behind-the-scenes details of the political machinations of the Greek city-states and the Persian Empire.

Herodotus’ account and its subtexts infer real opportunities and problems for ancient Greek information-gathering and its role in statecraft. Herodotus’ genius is that, to support his didactic, he emphasizes cultural differences in Persian and Greek statecraft and warfare, and links it with political and military intelligence. In doing so, Herodotus is the first western author to articulate the principles of what is now known as strategic culture theory, an approach which is increasingly being employed in the modern-day U.S.-led counter-insurgency and nation-building efforts.

2. HERODOTUS' CONTEXT

Before examining Herodotus' text for examples of information-gathering and cultural intelligence, it is essential to qualify the use of modern-day terms associated with intelligence practices and to examine the externally attested historical developments of ancient Greece. Since Herodotus' *Histories* is the first complete extant historiography offering a general framework for real historical events, it is extremely important to examine his account along with other attested political and cultural developments in ancient Greece and the archaeological record of the ANE in order to avoid circular reasoning or argumentation. When Herodotus and his work are properly contextualized, then his anecdotes of information-gathering can infer real issues in ancient intelligence practices and supplement the picture of Greek statecraft and warfare.

2.1 Parameters of describing culture and intelligence in the ancient world

Beyond his initial goals of recording great deeds and inquiring what precipitated the Graeco-Persian Wars, Herodotus (1.1) also investigates how a few disunited Greek states synergized the force, skill, and strategic wherewithal to defend mainland Greece against a powerful Persian advance in the early fifth century. Herodotus presents himself as an author who, in his role as investigator (*histor*), makes his own thorough inquiry to provide answers to his literary objectives (Dewald 2002:268,278). In his work, Herodotus presents shared culture as one of the factors which validates the tenuous Greek alliance and which casts the Persian imperial advance as a major threat, not only to Greece's political independence, but also to its very cultural survival (Hdt.7.138-139). As Herodotus attempts to define Greek-ness (*to Hellēnikon*) in opposition to the non-Greek speaking world of the "barbarians", he includes themes of cultural identity and intercultural conflict (Cartledge 1993:39). But the term 'culture' can be defined in myriad ways by those in various ancient and modern fields.

2.1.1 Culture

According to Liddell & Scott (1995:535) the Greek word, *nomos*, can refer to “anything assigned or used, a custom, a law, or ordinance”. Homer’s *Odyssey* (17.487) alludes to the *nomos*-concept when it refers to the gods’ control over *eunomia* (good order) or *hybris* (arrogance). As legislative changes and codification took place in ancient Greece in the 7th and 6th century, *nomos* took on the additional connotation of legalized social or customary law but retained its older meaning of regional custom or tradition (Vitelli 2002:799). Herodotus often employs this non-legal connotation of *nomos* and since the Oxford English Dictionary (1993:568), describes ‘culture’ as “the distinctive customs, achievements, products, outlook, *etc.* of a society or group”, it is appropriate to acknowledge that Herodotus’ *nomos* generally falls within the modern concepts of culture.¹¹

Related to *nomos* is the concept of Greek-ness and shared culture in the Hellenic world. As Cartledge (1993:4) aptly explains, the concept of homogenous Greek-ness is a construct which was not only employed by Herodotus (and subsequent historians) but also acknowledged, to some extent, by the ancient Greek-speaking world. Herodotus’ portrayal of a pan-Hellenic homogeneity within the various Greek-speaking states on the mainland, in the Aegean islands, and along the west coast of Asia Minor, as Cartledge (1993:3) points out, omits radically differing political institutions, ideological allegiances, dialects, and forms of religion, all of which are nuanced in modern (even post-modern) definitions of culture. For the purposes of this thesis, the standard modern definition will be used to explain Herodotus’ *nomos*-related themes and a further examination of the literary role of *nomos* will be presented in the fifth chapter.

¹¹ See the notes of Porter (2009: 207) on various modern developments of definitions of culture. For a thorough discussion of connotations of all Herodotus’ uses of *nomoi* see Evans 1965:143-147 and Humphreys 1987:21, who defines Herodotus’ *nomos* as law, custom or culture.

2.1.2 Military intelligence

Like Herodotus before them, modern classicists and historians also grapple with the Greek victory over Persia within the context of the development of warfare and statecraft. Apart from the metaphysical explanations of divine intervention, fate, or moral superiority, what military and diplomatic developments could have fostered a Greek victory, or, conversely, what failures in Persian leadership or strategy precipitated the imperial defeat in Greece? How could the Greek alliance have anticipated which *poleis* would fall to Persia, remain neutral, or defect from Persian hegemony and rally behind the Greek cause? How could the allied Greek military leaders evaluate important information about the Persian advance in time to maximize the use of their topography, as the positions taken at Thermopylae and Salamis seem to indicate? In short, did the Greeks use a form of information-gathering, espionage, or military intelligence to inform their strategic, tactical or logistic decisions in the Graeco-Persian wars?

Many scholars deny that the ancient Greeks had any form of political intelligence or a reconnaissance element attached to their military forces. Pritchett (1971:127) cites historiographical examples in which Greek armies are completely unaware of their enemies' proximity – an avoidable situation had they implemented scouting parties.¹² However this positional ignorance does not prove that Greeks military leaders did not practice reconnaissance and such glaring mistakes may even demonstrate the *mishandling* of collected information rather than its non-use. Others regard the Greek collective or democratic ethos as a hindrance to intelligence practices. For instance, Dulles (1963:15) argues that abhorrence of “wiles and stratagems” deterred democratic Athens from using espionage and subterfuge. But it is

¹² Pritchett cites Thucydides' account of the battle of Mantinea (Thuc.5.66) where both Agis' forces and their enemies remain unaware of each other despite an unobstructed distance of five kilometers, and Herodotus' account (Hdt.8.76.3) of the Persians' secretive navigation into the Salamis straits with less than a mile of sea between them and the Greeks.

extremely difficult to prove that the democratic values, expressed and entrenched in the public *agora*, had any direct bearing on how individual Greek leaders gathered information about their allies or opponents.

Starr (1974:1) expresses a compelling argument against transposing modern intelligence systems onto ancient Greek statecraft, warfare, and international relations:

There is little use of viewing classical statecraft, information-gathering, and military decision-making through the lens of our modern-day intelligence structures such as the CIA or KGB, with its centralized command, its massively funded bureaucracies, its sourced and trained specialists like linguists, scientists, and political analysts, its competition for technological edge for communication, transmission, and information-gathering.

The technological capability to collect and transmit data quickly and systematically, a capability upon which modern military intelligence hinges, really only became possible in the middle of the nineteenth century AD with the advent of real-time communication between commander and troops (Handel 1990:5). Modern intelligence assumes high levels of technological support: electricity, engines, motors, mechanical power, radio and satellite transmissions, telecommunications, and data-handling mechanisms for accurate record-keeping and recovery. This technical capacity allows for what is known as the C3I of command, control, communication, intelligence – the infrastructural management system which enables military forces to function, and for which there is no ancient counterpart (Handel 1990:5).

2.2 The intelligence cycle and its ancient counterparts

Even if no real-time communication technologies exist, the need for useful and timely information concerning others' motives and movements is universal and instinctual (Dulles 1963:9). Modern intelligence systems need not be imposed on the study of ancient Greek warfare or statecraft to discover what the Greeks **did** use to gather and assess information about

their allies and enemies. While not systematically, the ancients employed commissioned inquiries, collected information, and received reports (verbal, oral, and written) to aid their political decision-making in a way which, according to Sheldon (2005:1), reflects the general principles of the modern-day intelligence cycle. The modern-day intelligence cycle involves direction, collection, processing, analysis and dissemination (CIA 2007). In ancient times, a military leader or a governing body could, for instance, order a religious inquiry, a reconnaissance operation, or a diplomatic mission to gather information. After the information was obtained, it was filtered or analyzed in a timely manner and submitted to those who commissioned the inquiry — this, then ‘closed’ the cycle. The decision of the leader or group to either use or disregard the processed information is outside of the intelligence cycle, but is equally important to process of statecraft. In ancient Greece, this kind of proto-intelligence cycle was not desired for its own sake as it is today. Russell (1999:8) explains that the intelligence cycle was initiated *ad hoc* and at the discretion of various leaders as the political or military situation dictated. Information could be gathered by emissaries, diplomats, and exiles as well as scouts and mercenaries.¹³ In light of the absence of systematic or centralized structures, the elements of the intelligence cycle can offer a benchmark for identifying ancient intelligence practices, in spite of their differing political, technological and cultural contexts (Sheldon 2005:5).

2.2.1 Ancient religious intelligence cycles

The most ancient form of the intelligence cycle can be observed in divination. Sheldon (2005:14) argues that “intelligence at its oldest and most basic level consisted of religious revelation” and Dulles (1963:9) identifies the earliest sources of intelligence not as spies or scouts, but as prophets, seers and oracles. In order to predict the future – a power relegated to

¹³ See Russell (1999: 10-102) for a thorough discussion of reconnaissance and espionage practices.

the supernatural realm – an individual or community could access divine foreknowledge through dreams, oracles, prophecies, astrology or other natural portents. This religious intelligence cycle of seeking out, inquiring, interpreting, and disseminating vital information, revealed by the supernatural or divine, is primordial and transcends cultural boundaries (Sheldon 2005:14). Oracles had immense influence over the ancient Greek psyche and played a role in everyday life. For instance, in Parker (2001:261), numerous sixth-century lead inscriptions at the shrine of Zeus Dodona reveal the mundane and personal nature of some oracular inquiries: “Cleotas asks whether it would be beneficial and advantageous for him to keep sheep”.

In addition to this role in practical religion, divination and oracles were extremely important in collective state-related decision-making and warfare. In the Greek worldview and, indeed, throughout the ancient world, religion and politics were indivisible. Deliberate religious consultations were eventually institutionalized and incorporated into the secular decision-making process. With so many lives and resources at stake, decisions relating to conflict and war are naturally conducive to the intelligence cycle – and in the ancient Greek context, since it was crucial for any war plan to be met with divine approval, missions were sent to inquire and solicit divine favor (Rawlings 2007:182).

If the *Iliad* reflects the outlook of eighth-century Greeks as it attempts to recall an earlier Heroic age, then an episode in its opening scene provides a glimpse into the crucial role diviners and seers had in collective decisions.¹⁴ As the camp is beset by plague, Achilles initiates the intelligence cycle:

¹⁴ See Taplin 2001:44-71 on the dating, authorship, and historicity of the Homeric epics. While the narrative superstructure of the plot is not historical, nevertheless many underlying structures (social, institutional, or moral) were based on objective and observable reality. As Taplin (2001:69) concludes, “There must have been an occasion for the creation of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. The very fact that they came into existence says a lot about the concerns and sensibilities of Homer’s own audience [Ionian Greeks circa 700 BC].”

Let us ask some priest or prophet, or some reader of dreams (for dreams, too, are of Jove) who can tell us why Phoebus Apollo is so angry, and say whether it is for some vow that we have broken, or hecatomb that we have not offered, and whether he will accept the savour of lambs and goats without blemish, so as to take away the plague from us.

With these words he sat down, and Calchas son of Thestor, wisest of augurs, who knew things past present and to come, rose to speak. He it was who had guided the Achaeans with their fleet to Ilius, through the prophesyings with which Phoebus Apollo had inspired him. (*Il.* 1. 61-71)

When it is revealed that Agamemnon's seizure of Chryseis is the cause of the plague, the king grudgingly gives up his prize, exclaiming "I would have the people live, not die" (*Il.*1.118). Though he abuses the old seer for being a malcontent, Agamemnon never questions Calchas' ability to interpret Apollo's will. Agamemnon's release of Chryseis is evidence of his belief not only in Apollo's destructive power, but also Calchas' oracular integrity and a source of intelligence for decisions.

2.2.2 Intelligence services in the ancient Near East

The Achaemenid Persian Empire, was founded on Near Eastern imperial precedent. The civilizations of the Ancient Near East fostered developments in seals and royal record-keeping, the earliest examples of which come from the Uruk period in the third millennium. Examples from that time involve either small clay tokens placed inside sealable hollow clay spheres or cylinder seals, and were used to seal legal documents, classified treaties, and even entire royal or religious store-rooms (Roaf 1998:70). In the late eighth century, Neo-Assyrian foreign policy shifted from administration and defense of a powerful city-state to controlling numerous imperial dominions. There is documentary evidence that the Neo-Assyrian kings established efficient road systems, which were maintained by the royal governors and equipped with stations where messengers with royal authorization could get fresh horses (Kuhrt 1995:535). The Persians adopted this system of guards, supply points, and governmental control – a network which

Herodotus (5.52-54; 8.98) admiringly describes and which, according to the Persepolis texts, was in operation from east to west throughout the entire empire (Kuhrt 1995:692).

Many Greek writers, including Herodotus, refer to a Persian institution called the “eye of the king” or the “eyes and ears of the king”, now taken to mean a corps of royal spies. While there is no Achaemenid attestation to such a practice, Briant (2002:344) notes that the necessity to exercise control and oversee the Persian satraps was indisputable. In spite of the Greek historiographers’ voyeuristic fascination with the clandestine nature of the Persian royal courts, given the vast imperial resources to command and manage, an efficient and highly patrolled communication system, and a cultural and political ethos which supported centralized command, it is highly likely that some kind of royal secret service existed in the Achaemenid Empire.¹⁵

2.3 Greek developments and the quest for verifiable information

If the imperial Persian administration had mechanisms for intelligence, how could the ancient Greeks (or rather the numerous *poleis*) observe, interpret, and swiftly act upon important information to avoid calamity? How could leaders verify and respond to political or supernatural threats in a timely manner? In tracing the elements of political intelligence in ancient Greece, Starr (1974:5) encounters real problems of verification, noting that most of the Greek historians “simply present information as ‘known,’ to serve as a base for a specific action”.

The methods and means of how raw information became “known” in the ancient Greek world are extremely problematic with only a few fleeting hints in literature and the historical record. Russell (1999:4) attempts to answer this question by inferring intelligence goals through a survey of Greek usage of ‘learning’ verbs. Over half of the usage pertains to military

¹⁵ For objections to Greek views of the Persian court, see **1.2.3 Herodotus in a new light.**

operations and geographical knowledge for tactical purposes, although Russell (1999:xx) acknowledges that the distribution of the data may be uneven because of historiographers' tendency to focus on war and conflict.¹⁶ Another way to examine Starr's question — the way in which political information became known and verified — is within the context of Greek political, religious, and cultural development. Within these developments were mechanisms to minimize the risks afforded by the uncertainty of unverifiable information, and it is within these developments that Herodotus, his work, and his literary themes can be contextualized.

2.3.1 Emigration, colonization and law-giving

The environment of the emerging Greek city states was extremely volatile and uncertain. The cyclical and stressful *mélange* of war, emigration, exploration, colonization, civil strife, and exile necessitated stabilizing efforts. This ubiquitous threat of internal strife, coupled with promising opportunities for land-holding and mercenary military service, produced a second and much greater wave of emigration in the eighth century from the Greek mainland, from Ionia and the islands (Forrest 2001:17). The elements of colonization were so salient to the eighth-century Greeks, that the *Odyssey* reads as a sort of oral — or aural — tutorial on settlement and nation-building as Odysseus and his men practice reconnaissance, diplomacy, oracular inquiry and conflict resolution to minimize the risks of life in fantastical lands and uncharted territories (Russell 1999:12).

In the seventh century, there was a shift in Greek consciousness from a mythological past to an era of tyrants and lawgivers such as Cypselus in Corinth, Draco in Athens, and Lycurgus in Sparta, who codified accepted political practices into laws and constitutions (Forrest 2001:21-22, 25). But in the Greek worldview, these developments did not simply arise out of political or

¹⁶ See Russell (1999:236) for an Appendix of 'knowing' verbs and their usage.

economic necessity. The decision to send out colonists and where to send them, the proper action in a national emergency, and even legal and constitutional questions, were all, on occasion and according to oral traditions, influenced by oracular consultation (Russell 1999:88). In the case of Sparta, for instance, her laws were ascribed to Apollo of Delphi. Xenophon calls the Spartan constitution ‘Delphic-oracle-given’, and even Plutarch believed that the Spartan law document was a prose form of the Delphic oracle’s words to the Spartan hero, their lawgiver Lycurgus (in Cartledge 2004:64).

2.3.2 Oracles and their religious centers

The responsibility given to seers and diviners seems far-fetched to modern sensibilities.¹⁷ Greek priests and seers were not organized into a priestly class and had no direct political authority.¹⁸ In Greek literature and drama, the seer glimpses and understands the divine, but only the ruler is empowered with decision-making. This dynamic supplies the relationship with tragic potential precisely because the seer cannot enforce his or her view (Parker 2001:254). Herodotus (6.27) also notes the tragic (though not causal) role of the metaphysical in national security: “It seems that there is nearly always a warning sign of some kind, when disaster is about to overtake a city or a nation”.

Although mentioned in the *Iliad* (8.79), evidence of a Mycenaean-era religious center at Delphi remains elusive. It now seems likely that the establishment of the pan-Hellenic Delphic and Olympic religious centers surrounding the oracular shrines were concurrent with other Greek orientalizing trends of the seventh century (Jones 1976:i). As various city-states were emerging with unique solutions for lasting political stability, pan-Hellenic mechanisms such as religious

¹⁷ It would be an interesting academic exercise in text and subtext to conjecture why Homer’s audience accepted the plausibility of blind Calchas literally navigating the Greek fleet by divine inspiration.

¹⁸ See Rawlings 2007:182 for state appointments, honorary citizenship, and other formal honors bestowed on various seers throughout Greek historiography and literary record.

centers, religious-cult treasuries, festivals, and competitive games fostered a temporary peace and galvanized a shared cultural ethos. Additionally these religious sites provided another more centralized and institutionalized basis for the religious intelligence cycle. According to Dulles (1965:12), the Delphic oracle evolved over time from a supernatural phenomenon to a more secular institution:

The priests apparently had networks of informants in all the Greek lands and were thus often better apprised of the state of things on earth than the people who came for consultation. Their intelligence was by no means of divine origins, although it was proffered as such.

Herodotus' account of the corrupting of the Delphic oracle, along with examples of Persian propagandizing techniques, has given rise to the modern controversy over the extent to which the oracle at Delphi 'Medized' before, and during, Xerxes' invasion of Greece (Rawlings 2007:183). Even so, this assumes that the Delphic oracle had a real influence on the foreign policy formulations of the Greek states and was used as a verification mechanism.

2.3.3 Political developments: collective deliberation, statecraft and diplomacy

The gradual and distinctive re-emergence of various *poleis* from a proverbial Dark Age was not uniform or in response to a collective notion of Greek-ness.¹⁹ However, in spite of various linguistic, religious and cultural differences, the Greek *poleis* (as opposed to the Near Eastern city-states) generally shared some similar features, as Forrest (2001:14) explains:

There had to be one focal point, religious, political, administrative, around which usually grew up (Sparta was a notable exception) a city, the *polis* proper, usually fortified, always offering a market (an *agora*), a place of assembly (often the *agora* itself), a seat of justice and of government, executive and deliberative.

¹⁹ See **2.1.1 Culture** for parameters and limits to Greek cultural homogeneity and the construct of Greek-ness.

Athens, as the central city in Attica, became the site of reforms intended to address the inherent inequalities of an essentially share-cropping system throughout the Attic countryside. According to Forrest (2001:23), this system was maintained and defended using the *phratry*, the basic military unit of the aristocratic land holder and his dependants.²⁰ Democratic developments added the enfranchisement of the citizen body as a check to the aristocratic *Areopagos*, and the poet-politician Solon's reforms freed the people from the debt-based share-cropping system (Forrest 2001:26). The political problems afforded by the tyrants in subsequent years only served to cement Athenian commitment to consensus and collective action (Forrest 2001:27). Democratic deliberative bodies in centralized Athens closed the communication gap between the decision-makers and the citizen fighting force. This, in turn, facilitated collective preparation in the face of national threats.

In Sparta, however, maintaining the oppression of the *helots*, the slave population, was its political *raison d'être*. The mythic reformer Lycurgus introduced the *agoge*, a compulsory educational cycle to turn young Spartan boys into crack cohorts of hoplites, the primary purpose of which was to terrorize the *helots* into submission (Cartledge 2004:32). Because Sparta had the only professional standing army in Greece, decisions concerning how and when to take the field were extremely cautious and conservative. In Sparta, the *helot* enemy was a threat from within, and many ancient writers attribute to the Spartans the use of spy masters, covert intelligence, and ciphers (Sheldon 1988:195-197; Cartledge 2004:70). Through diplomatic action and delay, Sparta could often defer using its massive army in open aggression beyond its borders. By keeping their army in the heartland, the Spartans reduced the risk of a *helot* uprising, which they perceived as a great threat to national security (Forrest 2001: 30).

²⁰ The agricultural influence on the hoplite ethos cannot be denied, but there is still considerable debate concerning its extent. See Rawlings 2007:48 and Hanson 1995:252-3.

Starr (1974:4) ties the unstable inter-*poleis* political environment to his theme of intelligence problems and the lack of verification:

Any survey of the relations simply of Sparta, Corinth, Athens and Thebes alone across the two centuries ... will illustrate the frequent diplomatic and military reversals of alliance which took place. The instability of international relations was so obvious that Sophocles [used] it as an example of the inevitability of change in human history: “The same spirit is never steadfast among friends, or betwixt city and city”.

With an intricate and diaphanous network of alliances, guest-friendship (*xenia*) extended to exiled tyrants, trade relations, rivalries, and open aggression, the uncertainty afforded by the instability of Greek city-states in the sixth through the fourth centuries was considerable and a reality which Herodotus’ account supports.

2.3.4 Warfare and Greek military culture

The most obvious way to protect the *polis* against such uncertainty and possible threat was to develop and maintain a standing army. The Greeks were familiar with all manifestations of conflict and believed that war was a regrettable but almost unavoidable fact of life (Rawlings 2007:4). The Greeks saw themselves as a war-ready people, and much has been written on the ways, means and development of Greek military force, and its famous agrarian-based hoplites (Cartledge 1993:99). The image of perfectly symmetrical phalanxes of hoplite soldiers standing uniformly on cleared fields or open plains is a bit of propaganda, anchored in truth, but severely oversimplified to boost morale and to give Greek authors such as Herodotus dramatic literary set pieces (Rawlings 2007:68). However, as Keegan (1997:6) points out, “war is not what the war historian portrays it to be”, and even though Greek writers tended to highlight the elements of pitched battle for their literary purposes, their fleeting references to the Greeks’ use of “low-level operations” such as raids, skirmishes, deception and ambush, indicate, according to Rawlings

(2007:64), a familiarity with and necessity for such tactics.²¹ The Greeks also took hostages and prisoners of war and used them to obtain and to verify information (Amit 1970:134). Indeed, the word *helot* means “captive” and the subjugation and exploitation of the *helots* was done within the context of the treatment of prisoners of war (Cartledge 2007:72). In spite of a tradition of uniformity, it is likely that Greek methods of warfare and military technologies were more flexible and adaptable than previously portrayed.

The development and use of various Greek fighting forces is awash in literary veneering and propaganda, but this, too, was a way to combat intelligence problems. The mid-seventh century Spartan poet Tyrtaeus (in Miller 1996:17) exhorts: “Stand near and take the enemy, strike with long spear or sword, set foot by foot, lean shield on shield, crest upon crest, helmet on helmet”. The lyric poet Archilochus seems defensive as he relates in a poem how he abandoned his shield – an easily identifiable marker of a coward, since the *hoplon* shield was heavy and unwieldy in flight (in Rawlings 2007:47). Indeed, according to Rawlings (2007:205) leaving the ranks (*lipotaxia*) could be met with post-battle recriminations and “socially constructed shame”. Sacrifice in the form of martyrdom was not desired in itself, but only when the military situation demanded.²² By eulogizing and reinforcing an ethic of fraternal bravery, extra-military social ties and obligations, and shoulder-to-shoulder formation, the Greeks attempted to promote a dependability and predictability in their infantry forces, upon which a commander may rely in tactical and even strategic decisions.

Another way for the ancient Greeks to anticipate the unknown in war was to foster in their leaders courage, intuition, enterprise and, at times, self-sacrifice to achieve strategic goals

²¹ Following, Hanson 2000, fewer military historians are taking phalanx and hoplite fighting ‘at face value’. Rawlings (2007:65) questions how such ‘gentlemen’s arrangements’ could meet the expectations and goals of armed conflict in the orientaling and archaic periods, when it seems a variety of combat arrangements were needed.

²² This is not unlike modern-day terrorist groups who, although perhaps religiously motivated, nevertheless turn to suicide bombing for primarily strategic purposes. Porter (2009:164) argues that “instead of being a liability in combat, these fighters are directed towards another form of violence which is strategically more rewarding”.

as evidenced by the encouragement of military genius in Greek oratory and literature.²³ Homeric examples of the wily Odysseus and the manic bloodthirsty Achilles present dualistic expectations of military leadership. According to Porter (2009:77):

Greek strategic culture could sustain conflicting ideas about grand strategy. It shifted between Achillean ‘traditionalists’ who saw the world as an anarchic place where only power could ensure security, and Odyssean ‘modernists’ who stressed multilateralism and cooperation.

In a situation with a dearth of good intelligence, sheer cunning and sometimes sheer bloody force had to do.²⁴

It is in war that leaders can earn military glory (*aretē*) by fighting bravely and even dying for the state. But it is also in war that leaders can make strategic and tactical decisions to win the day. The post-tyranny shift toward allowing generals more latitude precipitated the flourishing of tactical treatises and handbooks in the late fifth and fourth century, and in this Herodotus was a precursor to Aeneas Tacticus and Xenophon (Hornblower 2001:137). Within Herodotus’ tales of military engagements and warriors’ derring-do, there is a moralizing tone which stresses the need for cunning, bravery, and unselfishness in military leadership. Of the Spartan leaders at Thermopylae, Richard Gabriel (in Padrusch:2007) remarks:

The [Thermopylae] pass was memorialized in the same way we [in the modern day] tend to remember those men and women who die while performing heroic sacrifice and win the Medal of Honor. And we hold it up as an example to the next generation, “if this happens to you, this is what we expect you to do.”

²³ As Clausewitz (I.22) says, “with uncertainty in one scale, courage and self-confidence must be thrown into the other to correct the balance”.

²⁴Plutarch (*De Glor.Ath.347d*) presents the mythological tale of the Marathon runner almost half a millennium after Herodotus’ account. Nevertheless it is interesting to note the subtext of how a lack of transmission technologies can be overcome by sheer physical exertion and death.

To compensate for their lack of verifiable information, the Greeks enforced an ethos of combat valor, radical self-sacrifice and ingenuity to assist tactical and strategic decision-making.

2.4 Herodotus in context

2.4.1 The Ionian intellectual revolution

Another result of the quest for verifiable information was fomented in the Ionian intellectual revolution, with its epicenter in Miletus (Ure et al 1996:980). Long before the conflict of the Graeco-Persian war, trade, artistic influence, immigration, and political contact with the ancient Near East served, in varying degrees, as a counterpoint to the political and cultural development of ancient Greece. There is archaeological evidence that the Greeks were familiar with the people and ideas of the Near East through direct contact and through Phoenician trade as early as the Bronze Age Minoan and Mycenaen periods of the fourth and third millennia (Boardman 1999:36). As the Greeks moved outward from the mainland, the fall of Nineveh in 612 left a power vacuum, which resulted in Babylonian, Lydian, and Egyptian states vying for domination of the Near East. The seventh-century Greeks living in the newly-founded cities on the eastern Greek frontier had direct contact with Lydia and the Medes in the north-east and Egypt to the south. The Greek port of Naucratis in Egypt, for instance, was founded at the beginning of the seventh century. According to Forrest (2001:30) in Egypt the Greeks encountered “wealth and civilization at a level they could not have imagined” and in the Near East, “power and organization”. The expansion of the Greek horizon in the sixth and early fifth centuries fostered not only Greek *wanderlust* and its fascination with the marvelous (*thōmastōn*), a penchant already visible in the *Odyssey*, but also a spirit of critical inquiry (Murray 2001:182; Raaflaub 2002:155).

In terms of religion and spirituality, the Ionian intellectual movement generally rejected the notion of anthropomorphic deities. In his *Genealogies*, the Milesian Hecataeus strongly objects to the Greek myths which support such anthropomorphic portrayals of the gods (Murray 2001:182). Another aspect of this intellectual movement was that it also rejected direct divine interference as a principle of natural causation. As Parker (2001:266-267) explains, implicit in the works of pre-Socratic Ionian philosophers is the notion that “all observable phenomena [can be explained] in terms of natural or metaphysical laws”.

With the spheres of Lydian and Median influence expanding, the Ionian intellectual revolution was marked by geographic exploration, ethnography and cross-cultural relativism. According to Parker (2001:266), in the spirit of the culturally relativist approach taken by the Ionian intellectuals, Xenophanes, the pre-Socratic philosopher conjectured that since Ethiopians portray their gods like themselves, then cows, if they could make idols, would represent their own gods as cows (Parker 2001:266). While Anaximander of Miletus described the components of the physical world and mapped both heavens and earth, Hecataeus, fifty years later, took the dualistic presentation of the natural world further in his *Description of the Earth*, and presented two separate books, one for Europe and one for Asia (Murray 2001:181). In the Ionian intellectual revolution, the political, philosophical, and literary stage had been set for Herodotus’ examination of the conflict between the seemingly culturally antithetical Persians and Greeks in an account replete with tales of travel, natural wonders, and cultural curiosities. In the face of uncertainty, rational deductions based on observation presented an avenue of ontological certainty in the Greek worldview.

2.4.2 Herodotus the historiographer

Herodotus, indeed, had precursors in the Milesian and Ionian philosophers of the sixth and fifth century, but his work, the earliest extant unfragmented Greek book in prose, is much

more than a philosophical treatise. Herodotus not only applied a critical eye to the causes and events of war, but also presented various nations and their unique cultural practices. The ethnographic focus, especially of the earlier books, have led some scholars such as Raaflaub (2001:181) to muse that Herodotus began his work as a traditional Hecataeus-like scholar but concluded it as a historian. Murray (2001:183) points out that this unique Herodotean integration of political causation and ethnographical cultural relativism in his historical narrative resulted in “a total picture of the known world, which makes Herodotus more modern than any other ancient historian in his approach to the ideal of total history”.

As Herodotus presents historical explanations or interpretations of myths, stories or phenomena, he buttresses them by his own observations, eyewitness accounts, or alternative oral traditions.²⁵ Herodotus’ account includes two distinctive, though idiosyncratic, voices as narrator and as investigator (*histōr*), which serve separate functions (Dewald 2002:276). In his introduction, Herodotus (1.1) expresses his twin goals of both remembering great deeds and showing why the Greeks and barbarians fought each other. To achieve his goals, the author initiates his own intelligence cycle and as he sifts through his collected raw data, he synthesizes them into a thematically consistent and structured narrative. By expressing critical comments about the truth or likelihood of some phenomenon, Dewald (2002:279) concludes that Herodotus can “provide an authorial rhetoric of assurance, authority, and control over the data”. In choosing which pieces of his (supposed) collected information were accurate, useful and important to the audience, and by formulating methods and criteria for historiography, which Russell (1996:6) acknowledges are akin to those of the intelligence process, Herodotus is a predecessor to modern-day information analysts.

²⁵ For Herodotus’ sources and reliability see Hornblower 2002:373-386 and Murray 2001:183-186.

2.4.3 Herodotus' audience

Handel (1990:28-29) remarks that an intelligence officer is more like a historical scholar than a professional military man. Herodotus' historical inquiry process differs from the intelligence cycle in one crucial way. Although he initiates his own inquiry, ultimately Herodotus' audience is to judge the result of his analysis. Although by the time of his public career there was trend of increased literacy, Herodotus, influenced by Ionian tradition, probably presented his work through orations of his written texts (West 2001:108).

Gauging the audience's receptivity and presenting collected data in a compelling way is especially salient to the intelligence process. Handel (1990:30) concurs with Deutsch in painting a sobering picture of modern-day intelligence:

In the average intelligence situation one must assign about a third share to the intelligence community's tendency to tailor to measure. At least another such share must be allocated to whatever tendency to ignore, twist, elaborate or accept there may be at the top. It is probably optimistic to grant the remaining third to the content of the intelligence message itself.

A modern example of the way intelligence is presented to fit its audience can be seen in the memoirs of General de Guigand, Field Marshal Montgomery's intelligence adviser during World War II. According to Handel (1990:29-29), he and his associates were forced to develop special showmanship techniques, a sort of 'Monty language', to present intelligence packaged to suit Montgomery's taste and therefore receive his serious consideration. In the same way, by introducing lively story-telling, humorous, or bizarre tales of foreign wonders, and an action-packed war story, Herodotus entertains his audience while presenting them with a sobering morality-tale of imperial pride and democratic selflessness.

Popular Ionic folk-tales, Delphic morality tales, and elements of Athenian tragedy developed independently from Herodotus but can be traced in his work (Murray 2001:185).

Herodotus' audience was certainly pan-Hellenic but there are hints that some of his performance pieces might have been tailored for an Athenian or Athenian-influenced audience and it is not surprising that part of the traditional Herodotean biography conjectures a sojourn in Athens (Marincola 2003:x). Herodotus' comments on imperialism, tyranny, and *hubris* would have been heard by an audience well-aware of the causes and pretexts surrounding Athenian aggression in the Peloponnesian War (van Wees 2002:343). If moral censure against Athenian imperialism was one of Herodotus' unspoken objectives, it was lost on an audience more preoccupied with the relationship between the *polis* and the populace than with the morality of its expanding hegemony (Murray 2001:185). Indeed, the *terminus ante quem* of Herodotus' publication is based on the date of Aristophanes' comedy *The Acharnians* (425), which parodied Herodotus' account of the causes of the Persian Wars (Murray 2001:185).

With further Athenian democratic reforms after the Greek victory over the Persian invasions, statecraft and decision-making came increasingly into the hands of the enfranchised (Hornblower 2001:130,137). Roles of military and political leadership were given to the respectable middle classes, which is the most likely constituency of Herodotus' audience. In his narrative of Greek and Persian generals, political leaders and kings, Herodotus presents a wartime parable for a wartime audience and portrays leaders who disregarded intelligence – political, military, or religious – as prideful and provoking individual or even collective destruction.

2.5 Conclusion

As the “Father of History”, Herodotus made the first attempt to explain the causes and ways of war in non-mythical terms through systematic inquiry. Herodotus' work was innovative, but it was also the product of various developments in Greek political and

philosophical culture – developments which, in themselves, were mechanisms to cope with the uncertainty of the emergence of competitive and volatile city-states. As an heir of the Milesian intellectual revolution, Herodotus attempted to interpret historical and anecdotal oral information and present it to his audience in a thematically consistent way. As Herodotus presents and account which stresses the political causation of war, elements of information-gathering and commissioned inquiries are shown to be a factor in statecraft and conflict.

3. INFORMATION-GATHERING STRATEGIES AND TRADECRAFT IN HERODOTUS

3.1 Introduction

Herodotus' *Histories* prefigures modern intelligence theories in that it presents the crucial role political information and intelligence plays in statecraft.²⁶ By the time archaic Greek *poleis* crystallized into specific, encroaching, and competitive city-states, their development and use of rudimentary political intelligence helped to mitigate, at least in part, the internal and external instability which threatened their national security (Starr 1974:2). Although political intelligence would have occasionally facilitated national stability in ancient Greece, nevertheless it is challenging to find concrete examples of the assumption that intelligence needs were articulated and met by specific methods of information-gathering (Starr 1974:5). There is evidence that vital intra-state information was known among the ancient Greek *poleis*, but not often **how** this information was obtained and verified. The Homeric epics prefigure some problems and modes of intelligence, but a conscious treatment of intelligence does not occur in Greek literature until the fourth century. Both Xenophon's theoretical treatment of intelligence in his larger works and Aeneas Tacticus' strategic handbooks addresses how to operate successful intelligence missions through ciphers, disguise, espionage and codes, the art of which may be encompassed by the modern term "tradecraft."²⁷

Herodotus' account with its politically-focused themes bridges the tenuous Homeric references to information-gathering and the strategic manuals of the late classical era. Everyone loves a good spy story and as he presents the origins and events of the Graeco-Persian Wars,

²⁶ For a definition of intelligence see **1.1 The Thesis** footnote 2 and **1.2.1 'Culture wars' and cultural intelligence**. For limitations and definitions of intelligence and information-gathering see **2.1.2 Military intelligence**. Starr (1974:8) roughly defines political intelligence as "the general methods of discovering the capabilities and intentions of other states".

²⁷ "Tradecraft" is broadly defined as the methods used by intelligence officers to conduct analysis, or the techniques of espionage (United States Government 2009; Sheldon 1989:189).

Herodotus' thrilling tales of espionage, counter-intelligence, conspiracies, disguises, secret messages, signaling systems, informants, and disinformation entertain his audience (and readers) throughout his digressions and intricate narrative.

Herodotus' information-gathering anecdotes support his dualistic presentation of the political cultures of the Near East and Greece. Spies and envoys on cross-cultural missions fumble and fail as they attempt to navigate foreign cultures' different political protocols. Herodotus often associates the need for covert operations and secret communication with centralized imperial political contexts, and the use of open sources, diplomacy, trickery and even deliberate misinformation with political leaders of autonomous *poleis*. Herodotus' contemporary audience would have been familiar with both covert and overt methods of information-gathering as the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War had prompted debate about Athenian democratic values and the need for national security.²⁸ As Russell (1999:2) points out, “democratic Athens had the same ambivalence between fascination and fear of the secret world [of spies] that democratic states do today”. Although Herodotus' tales of tradecraft – let alone the anecdotal narratives to which they are connected – are unlikely to be historically precise, nevertheless Herodotus' references to information-gathering practices provide subtexts from which real intelligence needs, opportunities, and problems can be inferred (Russell 1999:2; Gray 2002:316).

²⁸ The debate in imperial Athens concerning national security and the open society can be demonstrated by Thucydides (2.39) in his account of Pericles' funeral oration. Russell 1999:8 notes a condescending tone when Demosthenes contrasts the cowardly nature of a fact-finding mission concerning Philip of Macedon to openness.

3.2. Covert information-gathering in Herodotus

3.2.1 Spies and espionage

Long before the Persian War or Herodotus' account of it, the ancient Greeks did use both spies and scouts — terms generally encompassed by the Greek word *kataskopoi*— and the scanty references to their *ad hoc* employment seem to infer priorities of internal security or low-context surveillance but not of international defense (Russell 1999:12-13,24). The Homeric epics describe both espionage and reconnaissance in stories such as the night-watch of Odysseus and Diomedes and the capture of Dolon, the Trojan spy.²⁹ These episodes imply an audience cognizant of scouting and spying as plausible activities in war.

In Herodotus it seems that spies are generally caught out, but especially when they are in *terra incognita*.³⁰ Herodotus' first example of a “spy detected” (albeit a peeping Tom) provides the first of many anecdotes with prurient or sexual overtones. Persuaded by his royal master to spy upon the naked queen in the royal bedchamber – a place where he most certainly does not belong – bodyguard Gyges awkwardly steals away, but is observed by the queen, who later persuades him to usurp the Lydian throne (Hdt.1.10-12). In Herodotus' work, espionage generally and cross-cultural missions specifically are fraught with danger and are met with only marginal success. Spies captured in hostile territories and envoys sent to unknown lands not only provide dramatic tension as diplomatic disaster may result in open war, but also echo one of Herodotus' overarching themes: the transgression of natural limits (Marincola 2003:xxv). Herodotus portrays the military transgression of natural boundaries such as oceans, lakes, and mountains, as a risky business and often associates it with imperialistic *hubris*. In the same way spies who, for the purpose of supplying information, transgress cultural boundaries of language,

²⁹ *Il.*10.314; *Od.* 9.88-89;10.100-102.

³⁰ In fairness, an undetected spy with an undetected mission has very little dramatic or literary use.

political ideology, and religious protocols are not only more likely to be caught but also more likely to affront the targeted nations' leadership. By highlighting the disasters which can result from placing agents in unknown territories and cultural situations, Herodotus links cross-cultural missions to his theme of transgressing limits.

Herodotus' account of Darius' fact-finding mission to Greece highlights the real problems associated with cross-cultural and international information-gathering. As a favor to the Crotonian doctor, Democedes, for curing her of a breast abscess, the Persian queen cajoles Darius to undertake a campaign against Greece. Herodotus (3.134) records that instead of initially pursuing his Scythian campaign, Darius relents:

As you think Greece should be my first objective, I had better begin by sending a party of Persians over to Greece to reconnoiter, together with the man you mentioned. They can then bring me back a full report of everything they see and hear. After that, when I have the information I need, I will begin the war.

Herodotus (3.136) then shifts his narrative focal point from Darius to Democedes:

Democedes and the Persians, having received their orders from Darius, were now sent down to the coast. At Sidon in Phoenicia they lost no time in fitting out two triremes, and a merchant vessel which they loaded with a rich assortment of goods; then, when all was ready for sea, they got under way for Greece, made a written record of the results of a careful survey of most of the notable features of the coast, and finally arrived at Tarentum in Italy.

When the Persians disembark, the king of Tarentum disables the triremes and arrests the Persians "as spies" while Democedes escapes to Croton (Hdt.3.136). The king eventually releases both the boats and the spies, but when they finally catch up with Democedes in the market-place of Croton, the inhabitants protect him. Thus the Persians are forced to abandon their ship, their Greek guide, and their mission (Hdt.3.137). The Persians are subsequently shipwrecked, taken as slaves, ransomed, and eventually returned to Darius (Hdt.3.138). The Persians are indeed spies and their mission, although aborted, is extremely significant to Herodotus' cross-cultural

theme, for he (3.138) reiterates, “these Persians of whom I have just written were the first who ever came from Asia to Greece; their object was to collect information”. Herodotus’ depiction of the perils of travel, the need for local and loyal guides, and the inability to disguise spies’ national origins make the discovery of foreign spies and their missions an almost foregone conclusion. However treacherous and however prompted, Herodotus seems to present Darius’ fact-finding mission as a natural political step in the progression of his expanding empire and links information-gathering to the inception of cross-cultural contact between the Persians and the Greeks.

Another way to address problems associated with cross-cultural missions was to use neighboring allies who were more familiar with the language and customs of the target nation. The Greeks institutionalized this practice with the use of *proxenoi*, men who, according to Russell (1999:76) “were chosen by a *polis* to represent its interests in another state”.³¹ Herodotus’ account of the Fish-Eaters, selected because of their knowledge of the Ethiopian language and sent on an intelligence mission to the king, seems to reflect such a practice, although it is set within a Persian context (Hdt.3.19). In spite of their gifts and language skills, the Ethiopian king easily and correctly identifies the Fish-Eaters as spies sent by Cambyses (Hdt.3.21). Like Darius’ Persians, the Fish-Eaters return to Cambyses with a report, but with their cover blown.³²

Even the Greeks in Herodotus’ account find cross-cultural missions challenging. Before Xerxes’ invasion of the mainland, the Greek alliance sends spies to Sardis in Asia Minor. Although they discover all they need to know about the disposition and size of the Persian

³¹ Hornblower 1996:1268 explains that the ‘proxeny’ system developed from the earlier practice of guest friendship. See **2.3.3 Political developments: collective deliberation, statecraft and diplomacy *xenia*-alliances.**

³² For the gratuitous nature of Cambyses’ intelligence mission to Ethiopia see **3.4.2 Illegitimate motivations for inquiry: selfish or gratuitous intelligence missions.**

forces, Herodotus (7.146) relates that they are eventually discovered, tortured and sentenced for execution.³³

Herodotus' account shows that both Greeks and Persians attempt to ameliorate the problems associated with running agents and spies on cross-cultural missions into enemy territories. However, in many instances such missions are inherently risky and not often fruitful. In Herodotus, the difficulties of cross-cultural missions reflect his broader topic of cultural relativism and natural boundaries. How could an intruder or foreigner gather information without detection in a location or cultural context where he (or she) did not belong? In Herodotus' account, just as crossing natural defensive boundaries is a risky strategic decision smacking of imperial *hubris*, so also are cross-cultural information-gathering missions — bold but generally ineffectual for gaining political intelligence (Marincola 2003:xxiv).

3.2.2 Secret communication

Secret or coded transmission is another method to mitigate the risks of an agent being discovered with classified communication. Herodotus' recurring anecdotes of secret messages seem to follow a narrative pattern that points to a tradition of culturally embedded and influential oral storytelling (*logoi*). The pattern reflects the following scenario: under the thumb of some potentate, a leader (foreign tyrant, general, or client-king) sends a cunningly disguised secret message, that relates information detrimental to his overlord.³⁴ In Herodotus' account, the innovative methods taken to ensure secrecy heighten the importance of the message and imply grim consequences if it is detected.

³³ For a more thorough discussion of Xerxes and his attitude toward the Greek spies see **4.2.2.3 Xerxes' *hubris* and flawed strategies.**

³⁴ See Boedeker 1987:191-192 for a concise list of exiled or alienated Greeks who, for their own purposes, solicit Persian assistance against their fellow-citizens.

The first example of secret messages is introduced in Herodotus' Book One in his description of the Median Empire. Herodotus (1.99-100) relates how Deioces executes a strict administration and royal protocol to protect himself against any plot of his colleagues, including restricting royal audiences and placing spies "in every corner of his dominions". Later, but still within this Median 'police-state', General Harpagus, confined at court and seeking revenge for the horrific murder of his son by King Astyages, plots to assist the Persian Cyrus in a *coup d'état*. Having garnered support from some of the Median nobles, Harpagus sends word to Cyrus:

But, as Cyrus lived in Persia and the roads were guarded, there was only one way he could think of to get a message through to him: this was by slitting open a hare, without pulling the fur off, and inserting into its belly a slip of paper on which he had written what he wanted to say. He then sewed up the hare, gave it to a trusted servant, together with a net to make him look like a huntsman, and sent him off to Persia with orders to present the hare to Cyrus, and tell him by word of mouth to cut it open with his own hands, and to let no one be present while he did so (Hdt.1.123).

Cyrus unquestioningly acts upon Harpagus' advice to rally the Persians against the Medes. With the help of Harpagus, whom Astyages foolishly places in charge of his forces, Cyrus is victorious (Hdt.1.127). In a reversal of fortune, it is now Astyages who is held at the royal court, unmolested but open to Harpagus' taunts (Hdt.1.129). Herodotus concludes his narrative on the demise of the Median Empire: "That, then, is the story of the birth and upbringing of Cyrus and how he seized the throne". While his closing remarks do not unequivocally prove that his story was supplied by a recognized (though possibly historically inaccurate) oral tradition, nevertheless it demonstrates its integrity as a narrative set piece which can be compared to other *logoi* of secret information.

In a similar incident, which becomes the catalyst for the Ionian revolt, Herodotus (5.35) relates how the Milesian tyrant, Histiaeus, incites his deputy, Aristagoras, to rebel against their Persian overlords so that he may escape from the Persian court.

Histiaeus...was in difficulty about how to get a message safely through to him, as the roads from Susa were watched; so he shaved the head of his most trustworthy slave, pricked the message on his scalp and waited for hair to grow again. Then, as soon as it had grown, he sent the man to Miletus with instructions to do nothing when he arrived except to tell Aristagoras to shave his hair off and look at his head (Hdt.5.35).

Herodotus (5.36) does not disclose what Histiaeus' message actually says, but the information is enough to prompt Aristagoras to convene a council and prepare for rebellion against Persia.

The 'secret message' pattern appears again in connection with the Spartan King Demaratus, who is a more willing attendant at the Persian royal court than Histiaeus and even accompanies Xerxes on his march into mainland Greece.³⁵ In a curious epilogue to the battle of Thermopylae, Herodotus (7.239) relates how the Spartans had been the first Greeks who were made aware of Xerxes' invasion plans by a palimpsest sent by Demaratus:

As the danger of discovery was great, there was only one way in which he could contrive to get the message through: this was by scraping the wax off a pair of wooden folding tablets, writing on the wood underneath what Xerxes intended to do, and then covering the message over with wax again. In this way the tablet, being apparently blank, would cause no trouble with the guards along the road.

Gorgo, the daughter of King Cleomenes, Demaratus' rival, divines the secret and the message is passed on to the other Greeks. While Demaratus' true motives may never be known, Herodotus' anecdote of Demaratus' palimpsest highlights the real problem of how Greek leaders would stay informed of and participate in political developments at home, if their communication and travel were restricted in imperial Persia.

³⁵ On Demaratus' motives see Boedeker 1989:187,194.

Of course, secret communication always runs the risk of discovery and Herodotus records an amusing way in which a hidden message was uncovered in his narrative of the aftermath of Salamis (Sheldon 1988:198). As a defeated Xerxes retreats to Asia, General Artabazus is left to re-conquer the Greek territories, which are rebelling against their Persian overlords (Hdt.8.126). The Greek commander from Scione, Timoxenus, betrays the Potidaeans and communicates with Artabazus using secret messages attached to arrows. The arrows are meant to hit the same predetermined spot, but Herodotus (8.128) relates how, when Artabazus misses and accidentally strikes down a Potidaean citizen, their plot is discovered.³⁶ According to Herodotus (8.128), the Potidaeans refrain from incriminating Timoxenus, ostensibly to spare Scione from the embarrassment of being labeled as traitors. Artabazus eventually encounters further setbacks, which, Herodotus inserts (8.129), the Potidaeans associate with a previous impiety. Herodotus' reference to the Potidaeans' assessment of Artabazus may indicate their role as his source for the anecdote of the secret arrow communication.

The thematic patterning, stock characters, and Herodotus' concluding insertions indicate that the 'secret message' anecdotes have a basis in the oral traditions of Greek and Persian *logoi*, which, according to Gray (2002:316) used recognized literary features to "reflect contemporary concerns". As a testimony to their staying-power, some of the 'hidden message' *logoi* mentioned in Herodotus are, in fact, re-introduced in the works of later strategists like Aeneas Tacticus and Polyaeus (Sheldon 1988:190,195). The stock settings and characters of the 'secret message' *logoi* — a politically explosive situation, a watched road, a leader's cunning — provide a subtext for the real political and personal consequences of Greek tyrants who enter into a

³⁶ ³⁶ Aeneas Tacticus (XXXI.27) suggests that the wind or an incorrectly feathered arrow may account for the missed shot (in Brown 1981:387).

reciprocal relationship with Persia. This relationship was fostered not only by the Achaemenid institutionalization of client-kings, but also by the Greek precedent of using foreign intervention to install and maintain tyrannies or despotic rule (Austin 1990:291). Additionally these anecdotes also reflect the measures, which the Persians and their predecessors may have taken to safeguard against treacherous tyrants and rebellious client-kings: gift-giving, political support, devastating reprisals, political entrapment, and close observation.³⁷

3.2.3 Deception and disguise

Deception and disguise is (and was) another method to prevent the detection of spies in cross-cultural settings and to gain information and the political (or strategic) upper hand. This method works best when a plausible cover story is presented (Russell 1999:187). Pretending to be a political exile, an escaped prisoner of war, a soldier fleeing the battlefield, an invalid, a hunter, or a beggar, affords not only legitimate interactions with the enemy but also opportunities to observe and obtain information. In addition, a disguised agent can provide prolonged surveillance or, at some point, facilitate a secret ambush. There is a Homeric precedent for such deception and disguise and much of it is associated with Odysseus both in the military context of the siege of Troy and in his wandering travels.³⁸

Herodotus portrays the Athenian tyrant Pisistratus, like his wily Homeric predecessor, as cunning, shrewd, and politically savvy. Although not a spy in a strict sense, Pisistratus uses deception and disguise to achieve his political goals. In a ruse to take the Acropolis and assert his supremacy, Pisistratus disfigures himself and pretends to have escaped his enemies, the people of the coastal and inland Attic territories (Hdt.1.59). Pisistratus is later expelled from

³⁷ An extreme measure was taken after the Ionian revolt when, according to Herodotus (6.43), Mardonius promotes democracies to foster stability in Ionia – presumably in reaction to the untrustworthy nature of the Ionian tyrants.

³⁸ *Od.* 4.244; *Od.* passim, esp. 13.256, 14.199, 19.165, 24:266, 24.303, quoted by Russell 1999:188.

Athens, but he returns, using both an alliance with his former rival, Megacles, and in Herodotus' estimation (1.63) "the silliest trick which history has to record". By disguising a giantess as the goddess Athena and persuading the Athenians to allow him back into the city, Pisistratus once again asserts his control. After he is ousted again due to his mistreatment of Megacles' daughter, he returns triumphant to Athens for a third time, having utilized both prophetic advice and a "clever stratagem" to route the Athenian forces, which are advancing to repel him but which are now dispersing (Hdt.1.63). The anecdotes relating to Pisistratus' political wiles do provide some insight into Herodotus' contemporary perceptions of the historical realities of the sixth century: the instability afforded by competitive tyrants, despots, aristocratic families, and their potentially dangerous sway over the populace (Forrest 2001:30).

Another example of cunning and correct oracular interpretation as well as disguise follows shortly after Herodotus' account of Pisistratus' political schemes. Herodotus (1.67) explains how the Spartans finally conquer their long-established neighbor-foes, the Tegeans, when they obey the Delphic priestess, who promises them success if they return Orestes' bones to Sparta. According to Herodotus (1.67) the oracle gives the Spartans a cryptic clue as to the location of the bones:

In Arcady lies Tegea in the level plain,
Where under strong constraint two winds are blowing;
Smiting is there and counter-smiting, and woe on woe;
There earth, the giver of life, holds Agamemnon's son.
Bring him home, and you will prevail over Tegea.

Lichas, a Spartan special agent, enters Tegea, learns that a local smith has discovered a giant coffin in the yard of his forge, and correctly interprets the Delphic riddle (Hdt.1.68). When Lichas reports his findings, the *ephors* (elder-council) stage a mock trial and banish him, and he returns to Tegea as a pseudo-exile. He then rents the Tegean's yard, digs up the bones, returns

home with them and lays them to rest. The oracle is fulfilled and the Spartans defeat their Tegean neighbors at last (Hdt.1.68).

In Herodotus' account, real periods of conflict and the uncertainties of war tend to provide the best opportunities for deception and lend authenticity to tales of tragedy or survivalist treacheries.³⁹ Herodotus' tales of deception and disguise provide particular insight into the historical record, because in order to succeed, cover stories must be plausible to the audiences of both the author and his characters.

3.3 Overt opportunities for information-gathering in Herodotus

With the enormous effort to maintain secrecy and to minimize the political consequences of detection, ancient clandestine cross-cultural operations which produced poor intelligence were unsustainable. According to Starr (1974:19), since efforts of secrecy were spasmodic and not very successful, the Greeks' use of open sources, recognized institutions, and a rhetoric of political transparency provided opportunities for intelligence-gathering, which was more suitable to their political strengths and circumstances. With a few notable exceptions, Herodotus generally attributes the strategies of overt information-gathering tendency to the Greeks.⁴⁰ It is important to stress here that Herodotus' treatment of either method seems to be without moral judgment, but rather is linked to his political causation and the theme of political instability.

³⁹ See Hdt.3.134 for Zopyrus' willingness to inflict bodily harm upon himself in order to trick the Babylonians.

⁴⁰ Although Xerxes' openness toward the Greek spies may be seen as a strategy to dissuade the Greeks from opposing him, nevertheless his tendency for transparency and magnanimity toward the Spartan volunteers and the Greek supply ships is a result of his imperial *hubris* – not his political cunning (Hdt.7.136, 146-147). For Xerxes' mismanagement of crucial intelligence see **4.2.2.3 Xerxes' *hubris* and flawed strategies.**

3.3.1 Envoys and heralds

In the ancient world, diplomatic missions afforded legitimate opportunities to openly enter and observe foreign territories. Greek heralds (*kerukes*) and envoys (*presbeis*) were commissioned to communicate with other states and to secure treaties and alliances (Russell 1999:63-64). While there, they could naturally observe and report information, which may be useful to their commissioning nation (Starr 1974:20). Although immunity was generally extended to heralds, both heralds and envoys faced unique challenges not only from their sending nations but also from their potentially hostile audiences (Russell 1999:63).

Herodotus (7.136) links the assault of a herald with the need for restorative justice. When Cambyses sends a Persian envoy in a Mytilenean ship to the Egyptians walled-up in Memphis, they kill the envoy and destroy the ship and its crew (Hdt.3.13). For their transgressions, the Egyptians are later sentenced to render up for execution the Pharaoh's son along with two thousand youths (Hdt.3.14). Similarly, according to Herodotus (7.134) when the Spartans throw the Persian heralds down a well at the Persian request for "earth and water", they eventually learn through divination that they must absolve their guilt and send two volunteers to Xerxes for execution.⁴¹ Herodotus (7.133) notes that the Athenians, as far as he is aware, make no retribution for their assault on the Persian envoys, but records an episode when the wrath of Talthybius, the cult-hero of heralds, is later aroused by the Athenians, who murder Spartan envoys to Asia during the Peloponnesian War. Russell (1999:71) argues that Herodotus calls the envoys "*angeloi*", the generic term for messengers, to absolve them of guilt and thus satisfy his pro-Athenian tendencies.

⁴¹ The term "earth and water" appears only in Herodotus and according to Bowie (2007:135-136) seems to constitute a long-term loyalty-oath to the king not a gesture of land transfer.

If Herodotus absolves the Athenians of collective guilt toward the Spartan heralds, he does not hesitate to relate an instance of Athenian diplomatic incompetency. In the narrative background to the Ionian revolt, Herodotus reveals that in the midst of the inter-state feuding between Athens and Sparta, Athenian envoys are sent with a message to enter into an alliance with Persia. Herodotus (5.73) relates that the Persians will only agree to an Athenian alliance if the envoys agree to “earth and water” as suppliants. The envoys take the initiative and agree to the terms (Hdt.5.73). Although they are severely censured upon their return to Athens, Herodotus relates nothing else about the botched mission of the so-called liberators of Greece. Kuhrt (1988:91) points out that even Herodotus (1.136) recognizes the binding nature of Persian oaths, and that the Athenians’ subsequent betrayal of such an agreement would have justified Persian military reprisals.⁴²

The use of heralds and envoys to openly obtain vital state-related information during their legitimate diplomatic missions was one way the ancients addressed the problems associated with high-risk covert information-gathering. In spite of a general protection afforded heralds, these agents were often sent just before or during the outbreak of war and faced real problems: potential hostility from their host and suspicion and doubt from their own commissioning government. For Demosthenes (19.5 in Starr 1974:20), in addressing the doubt surrounding ambassadors’ reports, argues their importance: “You reach a right decision if they are true, a wrong decision if they are false”.

3.3.2 Disinformation

Another strategy to overcome the problems associated the presentation of unverifiable information is disinformation. Russell (1999:216) describes disinformation as “entailing both

⁴² In Marincola 2003:659.

outright falsehood and the presentation of the truth in a way that compels the listener to draw an erroneous conclusion". Similar to the principles of deception and disguise, disinformation allows the speaker to control the information which others obtain. Using elements of truth and manipulation, disinformation increases the element of surprise and lulls its recipients into a false sense of security. There are certainly Homeric precedents for disinformation not only in the schemes of wily Odysseus but also in Hermes' pseudo-oath to Zeus in the *Hymn to Hermes*.⁴³ Apart from fleeting references to Persian nobles like Cyrus, the royal pretender Smerdis, and Darius, who lie to ensure their royal accession, Herodotus places disinformation, especially relating to statecraft, within a Greek provenance.⁴⁴

In Herodotus' account, disinformation occurs at politically crucial moments and generally through persuasion or manipulation. For disinformation to be properly administered, the informant must correctly assess the intelligence needs and goals of his target, for if his disinformation is irrelevant to its hearers, it cannot be effective (Russell 1999:217). This aspect of disinformation is particularly helpful because it can provide insights into the subtexts of Herodotus' political narrative. For instance, according to Herodotus (5.97), after being refused aid from Sparta, Aristagoras convinces the Athenians about the Persians' ineffective forces, the wealth of Asia, and "everything that came into his head" to persuade the Athenians to supply ships to the Ionian cause. Although Aristagoras is in a desperate situation, his presentation of the Persian disposition and assets needs to be plausible to the Athenians, even if it is not strictly true. The Athenians agree to assist Miletus against Persia causing Herodotus (5.97) to grimly reflect upon the dangers of persuasive rhetoric upon the masses, ominously declaring, "These [promised] ships were the beginning of evils for the Greeks and barbarians".

⁴³ *Il.* 4.274-277; 368-386, quoted by Russell 1999:216, where Hermes obfuscates the truth by providing a hypothetical situation which is, in fact, true.

⁴⁴ Cyrus falsifies documents which he presents to the Persian nobles as Astyages' commission for his generalship (Hdt.1.125); Darius ensures that the royal accession lot will fall to him by a ruse (Hdt.3.86).

Themistocles is perhaps the most prolific in his use of disinformation. From his speeches persuading Athens to invest the Laurium silver in establishing a navy (Hdt.7.144) to his deceptive message about the true disposition of the Greek naval forces at Salamis (Hdt.8.75), Themistocles' disinformation is gutsy and reckless, but just effective enough to give the Greeks the upper hand over the Persians at crucial points in Herodotus' plot. However, later in Herodotus' narrative, Themistocles' success turns to greed and his cleverness to personal gain. Having already communicated with Xerxes before Salamis, Herodotus (8.110) records that Themistocles convinces the Athenians not to pursue the Persian fleet as they retreat toward the Hellespont:

Themistocles' idea in saying this was to lay the foundations for a future claim upon Xerxes, in order to have somewhere to turn to in the event – which did in fact occur – of his getting into trouble with the Athenians. But whatever his ulterior motives, the Athenians were ready to take his advice.

Themistocles secretly sends word to Xerxes about his actions and then proceeds to ask for protection money from the pro-Persians islands, pretending that he alone can hold off military reprisals for their treachery (Hdt.8.112).

Since the oracle at Delphi was highly influential in Greek statecraft and decision-making, its corruption can be seen within the context of political disinformation. Herodotus' account of the corruption of the Delphic oracle highlights the fine line between deception and greed and between disinformation and corruption. Herodotus cites two instances of Delphic corruption, both of which involve rivalries of Greek despots and their families. The exiled Athenian Alcmaeonidae obtain a contract to build the Delphic temple and use their leverage to bribe the oracle into advising the military-backed deposition of their rivals — the Pisistratid clan (Hdt.5.63). Another instance involves the intense rivalry between the dual kings of Sparta, Cleomenes and Demaratus. King Cleomenes, attempting to discredit Demaratus and install the

latter's rival as fellow-king, directs the influential Cobon to persuade (read bribe) the Delphic prophetess Perialla into maligning Demaratus' parentage (Hdt.6.66). Eventually both treacheries are discovered, but not before the disinformation is collected and disseminated, resulting in real political consequences.

The role of the Delphic oracle is highly significant, not only in Herodotus' account, but also in the study of ancient intelligence opportunities and practices for, in spite of the possibility of corruption, the pan-Hellenic religious institutions at Delphi afforded exchange of information and oracular consultations for numerous Greek city-states. Citing the oracle's tendency to produce excellent practical advice, Dulles (1965:12) concedes that an influential leader "could have picked up information about his rivals and enemies which the latter had divulged when they consulted the oracle". If, as Mikalson (2002:191) asserts, Herodotus regards the Delphic oracle as the religious focal point of the allied Greek resistance, then his portrayal of its corruption engenders the destructive, petty, and even profane disunity among the Greek city-states that follows. The use of the Delphic religious centers addressed, in a satisfactory way, many of the ancient Greeks' intelligence needs, but these centers were neither infallible nor unsusceptible to corruption.

3.4. Cycles of intelligence: collective and individual motivations

In the ancient world, the process of commissioning inquiries, making observations, and synthesizing interpretive reports reflected state needs as they related to decision-making, governance, and war, and can be associated with aspects of the modern-day cycle of intelligence.⁴⁵ When conflicts occurred and collective stability was threatened, intelligence goals

⁴⁵ See 2.2 The intelligence cycle and its ancient counterparts.

were set and inquiries commissioned. In keeping with his tone of political causation, Herodotus often elucidates the motivations behind many secular (and religious) inquiries.

Herodotus' extensive allusions to the Delphic oracle indicate his use of their records and oral histories as a source for his work (Hornblower 2002:379). Although Herodotus is careful not to attribute direct political causation to oracular utterances, nevertheless his narrative portrays the Delphic oracle as extremely active in ancient Greek politics.⁴⁶ According to Russell (1999:88):

In addressing the characteristics of recorded oracles given at Delphi, [Fontenrose] noted that almost a quarter of extant historical responses concerned *res publicae* – questions of rulership, legislation, city foundations, interstate relations, and war.

The pan-Hellenic religious centers were not unknown to non-Greeks, however, and Herodotus conscientiously describes the interactions of foreign kings with Delphi through oracular inquiries, gifts, and even military assault. In his work, Herodotus does not seem to discriminate against foreigners who interact with the oracle *per se*, but rather applies his moral judgment both to the motivations for oracular inquiry and to the suppliants' piety towards the Delphic religious precinct.⁴⁷

Information-gathering missions were time-consuming and costly in terms of human and financial resources.⁴⁸ Although most of Herodotus' examples of commissioned inquiries refer to legitimate matters of statecraft, nevertheless he does record examples of frivolous and wasteful commissioned inquiries. Since Herodotus' historical narrative is infused with his moralizing didactic, he portrays leaders who commission selfish or unnecessary intelligence missions as individualistic, greedy and full of *hubris* (Fisher 2002:199-200).

⁴⁶ An exception would be the actions resulting from their corruption i.e. Demaratus' exile (Hdt.6.66), or Spartan involvement in the restoration of the Alcmaeonidae (Hdt.5.63). See **3.3.2 Disinformation** for the corruption of the Delphic oracle.

⁴⁷ See Mikalson 2002:193 for a catalogue of desecrations to religious sanctuaries in Herodotus.

⁴⁸ Some would say they still are.

3.4.1 Legitimate motivations for inquiry

Herodotus' account is resplendent with foundation-tales of both archaic mainland *poleis* and their colonies. The records of these origins were most likely held by the servants of Apollo at Delphi, upon whom, it seems, Herodotus relies extensively for his material (Hornblower 2002:378). Thus Herodotus' account of Greek colonization efforts often involves oracular inquiries. *Logoi*, such as the Spartan Lycurgus-myths, the Tegean affair, and the agonizingly drawn-out Odyssean-like naval treks of the Theran colonists of Cyrene, highlight the conscientious inquiry, the laborious effort, and the religious imperative which legitimized and protected colonialists' land-claims (Hdt.1.65-68;4.150). Occasionally in Herodotus' account, the oracular colonizing directive (as well as unatoned desecrations, blood-guilt, or shirked religious duties) are only discovered after crises, inexplicable phenomena, or portents prompt the initiation of legitimate oracular inquiries and thus religious intelligence cycles (Hdt.4.150;6.139; 1.67;1.24).

In Herodotus, real political threats to national security such as succession battles, civil strife, military embroilment, or foreign attacks prompt both secular and religious inquiries and cycles of intelligence. According to Herodotus (6.66, 4.163) both the Spartans and the Cyrenean tyrant, Arcesilaus, consult the oracle concerning succession disputes.⁴⁹ In Herodotus, the Delphic oracle, when not corrupted, often functions as a mediator between feuding *poleis*. When the Thebans, wishing to take their revenge on Athens, consult the oracle, they are told to postpone their aggression (Hdt.5.79). The Delphic priestess even becomes a pro-active oracular informant during the Persian invasions, when she urgently (though still cryptically) advocates

⁴⁹ Arcesilaus ignores the oracular advice for leniency toward his enemies, many of whom he pursues to their deaths, and is killed by the Cyrenean refugees in the market-place of Barca (Hdt. 4.164). The Spartans consult the oracle concerning Demaratus' parentage, but Cleomenes bribes the oracle and Demaratus flees for Susa (Hdt.6.66).

evacuation from the Acropolis, the strategic necessity for Athenian naval forces, and even the need to pray for destructive winds against the Persian fleet (Hdt.7.139-144, 178).

When Croesus inquires about the Persian threat, he is given some practical, if non-committal, advice to make his own (human) inquiry (Hdt.1.53). Although this anecdote is a useful literary device to introduce Herodotus' discourse on Athenian and Spartan history, nevertheless it demonstrates that, in spite of the religious influence on ancient statecraft, even the ancients distinguished between sacred and secular information and recognized the value of human intelligence.⁵⁰ Herodotus (3.134-138; 7.145-147) records that both Persians and Greeks send spies to collect information regarding the terrain and military assets of their enemies. Though both sets of spies are captured and eventually released, there is nothing in Herodotus' account to indicate that they do not return to their commissioning leaders with a full report.⁵¹

3.4.2 Illegitimate motivations for inquiry: selfish or gratuitous intelligence missions

As oracular consultations and secular fact-finding missions in Herodotus' account are primarily used by leaders for state-related matters, unusual inquiries are conspicuous in Herodotus' account. According to Herodotus (1.27), Croesus is the first eastern potentate to have both contact with and hegemony over the Asiatic Greeks. Concerned about the rise of Persia, he initiates a twofold intelligence cycle: the first to test the reliability of various oracular centers and the second to ask if he should launch a pre-emptive campaign against Cyrus (Hdt.1.46). The Delphic oracle proves accurate and Croesus sends gifts to the Delphic treasury, asking which alliances would be the most advantageous and whether his campaign against the Persians would be successful. His Delphic inquiry yields a twofold response:

⁵⁰ HUMINT is a modern-day acronym for human intelligence – a category of intelligence derived from information collected and provided by human sources (Department of Defense 2001). Although it is assumed that with such a limited use of technology, all ancient intelligence was HUMINT, nevertheless the oracle's response to Croesus differentiates supernatural from human sources for intelligence.

⁵¹ Curiously, Herodotus implies that Darius' initial motives for his mission to Greece are not strategic but emotional, as he succumbs to Atossa's wiles. See Blok 2002:235 on women's active and passive roles in Herodotus.

Both oracles returned a similar answer; they foretold that if Croesus attacked the Persians, he would destroy a great empire, and they advised him to find out which of the Greek states was the most powerful, and to come to an understanding with it (Hdt.1.53).

Croesus is overjoyed and because, as Herodotus (1.55) inserts, “one true answer had made him greedy for more”, he sends another oracular inquiry — this time egotistically inquiring if his reign will be a long one.⁵² The oracle’s response that Croesus must flee for his life when a mule is enthroned in Media, assures him of his own unassailable position (Hdt.1.55). Although Croesus assumes that his personal security is assured, nevertheless the oracle proves correct when Cyrus (the half-Persian, half-Median ‘mule’) marches victoriously into Sardis and takes the capital. Herodotus uses Croesus as a stock character, a foil to Solon’s popular wisdom, and a hubristic imperial forerunner of the Persian potentates and their presumptuous imperial campaigns (Marincola 2003:xxv). Croesus’ abuse of legitimate avenues of inquiry for personal, rather than collective, protection indicates his *hubris* and presages his inevitable downfall.

Another curious example of abused oracular consultation is the disdain the Pharaoh Amasis holds for many of the local Egyptian oracular shrines. As Lloyd (2002:423) points out, “Herodotus goes much further in his history of Egypt than attempting to lay down a historical framework...he ascribes character and motivation to the [Egyptian] kings”. Herodotus (2.174) relates how, Amasis, in his wild youth, steals to support his drinking habit. If he is accused and brought before the oracle, Amasis shows disdain for the oracles that do not correctly convict him.⁵³ Though Herodotus (3.38) describes Amasis as devoted to *Greek* religious institutions, his abuse of Egyptian oracular consultations is contrary to Herodotus’ own hypothesis of cultural relativism – that each nation, in the face of other ideologies and norms, holds its own culture in

⁵² See **4.2.11 Croesus and Solonic wisdom**, and Lateiner 1977:177 for Herodotus’ use of joy and laughter as an indicator of imperial *hubris*.

⁵³ Hdt.2.172 details Amasis’ irreverent use of a golden foot-bath re-cast as an Egyptian dedicatory statue and is further testament to his disdain of Egyptian religious institutions.

the highest esteem (Hdt.3.38). According to Herodotus (3.14), Amasis dies during Cambyses' invasion of Egypt, and although his reign is marked with "no serious disaster", nevertheless shortly after his death, Cambyses conquers Egypt and eventually commits even more appalling sacrileges than his Pharaonic predecessor. Amasis' nonchalant, and even profane, attitude toward Egyptian religion underlies a pride in his own judgment and foreshadows Egypt's imperial downfall.⁵⁴

Throughout his treatment of the Ionian revolt and the Persian invasion of Greece, Herodotus depicts the often deadly competition between Persian governors and Greek tyrants. When Oroetes, the Persian governor of Sardis, wishes to trap his rival Polycrates, he pretends that Cambyses is out for his blood and tricks Polycrates into aiding his escape with a (false) bribe (Hdt.3.122). According to Herodotus (3.122), Oroetes convinces Polycrates of his good faith, and adds, "If you have any doubts about my wealth, send whoever it is you most trust, and I will show him what I have". Since Polycrates is "very fond of money", he quickly sends a secretary to verify Oroetes' claim (Hdt.3.123). The greedy motivation behind Polycrates' inquiry causes him to establish a faulty intelligence mission, focusing on Oroetes' claim to ready money – not on the veracity of Oroetes' entire story (Hdt.3.123).

Oroetes cleverly fills chests with stones and covers the top layer with gold (Hdt.3.123). Polycrates' secretary returns and presents him with a favorable report (Hdt.3.123). The tyrant immediately sets out to meet Oroetes, and Herodotus (3.124) gloomily informs his audiences that "in spite of many attempts by his friends and by professional soothsayers to dissuade him...all warnings were lost upon Polycrates". According to Herodotus (3.124-125), when Polycrates comes to Oroetes in Magnesia, he is shamefully crucified, and his foreign entourage and servants

⁵⁴ Perhaps Amasis' disdain is warranted. Russell (1999:88) reflects how, much later in the Roman imperial era, the satirist Lucian in his work, *Alexander the False Prophet*, paints a delightful portrait of what happens when an unscrupulous con-man takes up the lucrative business of running an oracle.

taken as prisoners of war. Polycrates' avarice prompts a misdirected inquiry and Oroetes' bait-and-switch provides the perfect ruse to trap the greedy king. According to Herodotus (3.125), although Oroetes releases Polycrates' Samian escorts, he tells them that they should "be grateful to him for their freedom", implying that they ought to remain prisoners of war.⁵⁵ Once again, the selfish motivations of a leader's decision usher in potential national and collective disaster.⁵⁶

Another misdirected inquiry occurs in Herodotus' treatment of Cambyses' Egyptian campaign and his subsequent descent into hubristic madness. After his success in Egypt, Cambyses, in an attempt to create buffer zones in the surrounding areas, initiates campaigns against Carthage, Ethiopia, and Ammon (Hdt.3.16). According to Herodotus (3.17), Cambyses decides to send spies to Ethiopia to collect information, but with an odd primary objective: to discover if the so-called 'Table of the Sun' really exists.⁵⁷ Although this remark may be Herodotus' literary construct to introduce his digression about the wondrous 'Table of the Sun', Cambyses' mismatched priorities for his information-gathering mission can be inferred from it (Hdt.3.18).

Upon their arrival, the Ethiopian king recognizes the envoys and their proffered Persian alliance for what they are. According to Herodotus (3.21), the Ethiopian king exclaims:

You have come to get information about my kingdom; therefore, you are liars, and that king of yours is unjust. Had he any respect for what is right, he would not have coveted any other kingdom than his own.

Although the spies' inquiry is satisfied – they personally see the Table of the Sun – nevertheless they return to Cambyses' wrath, angered at the Ethiopian king's bold challenge (Hdt.3.25).

⁵⁵ Polycrates' assassination is avenged when Darius ascends the Persian throne and orders Oroetes' assassination (Hdt.3.128).

⁵⁶ Herodotus (3.39-43) uses Pharaoh Amasis' concern of Polycrates' success to foreshadow the tyrant's demise.

⁵⁷ Herodotus (3.18) describes that the "Table of the Sun" is situated outside the city and continuously supplies the inhabitants with meat.

Herodotus (3.25) relates that Cambyses immediately launches a march against Ethiopia without any planning or regard to logistics:

If Cambyses, when he saw what the situation was, had changed his mind and returned to his base, he would, in spite of his original error, have shown some sense; but as it was, he paid not the least attention to what was happening and continued his advance.

Cambyses' troops suffer horribly for his decision. The lack of provisions causes them to resort to cannibalism (Hdt.3.25). His impetuous march to Ethiopia with no regard to logistical implications is evidence for his madness. While Cambyses' commissioned inquiry to Ethiopia is almost assuredly a fictitious literary construct, nevertheless Herodotus uses Cambyses' misdirected inquiry to highlight his *hubris* and the disastrous military setbacks which can result from faulty and self-indulgent decision-making.

Herodotus, influenced by popular morality, lends his analysis to leaders' political decisions, and hence their motivations for commissioning both religious and secular intelligence missions (Fisher 2002:216). Leaders who act for the good of the community commission useful and legitimate inquiries, while leaders who are hubristic use intelligence missions to secure their personal safety, enrichment, or amusement and eventually cause destruction to themselves and their people.

3.5. Conclusion

The numerous techniques used by the ancient Greeks to assess the disposition and intentions of enemy (and allied) states had advantages, but also associated problems. Long before the fourth-century handbooks of Greek strategy, both Persians and Greeks had precedents of tradecraft – the skills, methods and tools used to facilitate successful information-gathering

missions.⁵⁸ However, in the sixth and fifth centuries, examples of tradecraft or diplomatic missions were not addressed in treatises, but rather in various local stories and oral accounts (*logoi*), which, although steeped in myth, moralizing didactic, and nationalist propaganda, nevertheless provide the modern-day historian with subtexts which often reveal the values and concerns of their contemporary hearers (Gray 2002:317). Herodotus' work includes examples of clandestine and overt strategies which addressed Greek, Near Eastern, and Persian intelligence goals. In keeping with his dualistic presentation of Greek and Persian political cultures, Herodotus tends to associate covert intelligence methods with the Persian imperial system and overt methods with the Greek *poleis*. Although Herodotus does not lend his moralizing tone to tradecraft narratives or the foibles, mishaps, and dangers of information-gathering missions, he does, however, associate leaders who misuse or ignore intelligence as *hubris*-bound and destined for failure.

⁵⁸ See **3.1 Introduction**.

4. IMPERIAL *HUBRIS* AND THE NEGLECT OF ADVICE, INTELLIGENCE, AND CULTURAL INFORMATION

4.1 Introduction

Another way in which ancient Greeks could mitigate national instability was to stress the function of leadership, both on and off the battlefield (Hornblower 2002:132-133). Ancient Greeks placed high expectations upon leaders to properly handle intelligence and maintain national security through statecraft and warfare. As Starr (1974:37) reflects:

It was men like Themistocles, the elders who had sat in the Council, and more generally across Greece, the aristocrats who held in their minds the information which made intelligence useful.

However, ancient (and modern) leaders do not always properly evaluate intelligence or bring their political or cultural knowledge to bear on it (Handel 1990:20; Starr 1974:7).

Herodotus examines both Greek and Persian leaders as they manage their domestic and international affairs in the build-up to the Persian invasions of the Greek mainland. Herodotus presents key moments in both political and military contexts, where imperial leaders are presented with crucial advice or culturally relevant information. Herodotus associates the neglect of such advice with both his examination of political causation and his theme of *hubris*. Herodotus' advice dialogues and anecdotes involving the dismissal of crucial intelligence read like an Aesop's fable for a politically active Greek audience, inferring morals and lessons to consider in state-related decision-making and expectations for Greek leadership. For although many of Herodotus' leaders experience personal and political setbacks, Herodotus often highlights those whose *hubris* and self-serving motivations result in their downfall or destruction (Lateiner 1977:176). In stressing Herodotus' Greek audience as the target of his morality-lessons, Cartledge (1993:61) remarks:

Time and again, implicitly and explicitly, Herodotus draws a polar contrast between what we might call Greek republican freedom and self-government and Persian...despotism. Again, it is through emblematic story or parable that Herodotus most forcefully drives his point home.

Herodotus' anecdotal references to leaders and neglected advice, intelligence, or relevant cultural information are not presented in isolation. While Herodotus links misused or ignored intelligence to his historical causation, nevertheless he also associates it with his moralizing didactic, imperial *hubris*, and political destruction.

4.2 Cross-cultural information: advisers at court and at war

Applying his principles of causation to his moralizing didactic, Herodotus often implies the underlying cultural or ideological causes for leaders' destructive *hubris* (Marincola 2003: xvi). Herodotus frequently uses the recurring literary device of the 'the wise adviser' to counter and confront such underlying perceptions and ideologies.⁵⁹ Many of Herodotus' advisers come from different national and cultural backgrounds and already have, or had, a degree of authority or a role in collective decision-making and statecraft. These (often Greek) leaders have important experiences and useful information about their own country and about the political developments or tactical assets of other *poleis*. As Starr (1974:2) points out:

For the leaders of each state it was vital to know what the other constituents of the Hellenic state system – and outsiders as well – could do, and intended to do at any critical point.

Herodotus uses wise advisers not only as literary foils to prideful rulers and to voice Herodotus' perspective on the instability of human fortune, but also as sources of valuable political information. Since their culturally-based strategic and even tactical advice heightens the dramatic effect of royal individuals' political decisions, Herodotus places these leader-advisers and their advice dialogues in the two main settings most appropriate for ancient imperial

⁵⁹ See Lattimore 1939:23-35 for his catalogue of both 'practical' and 'tragic' advice in Herodotus.

decision-making: the royal court, and the war-councils of military campaigns. In these settings, the decisions reached by imperial leaders have the most immediate effect and provide a stage for national disaster.

4.2.1 Cross-cultural information at court

In the latter half of the 6th century, the Achaemenid Empire, anchored in the long-standing imperial precedence of the Mesopotamian, Neo-Assyrian, and Babylonian Empires contrasts with the political ebb and flow of emerging *poleis* on both the mainland and the coastal territories. During the Achaemenid Persian Empire, the bulk of regional administration was left to Persian satraps, but foreign aristocrats, who held power under former regimes and who supported their Persian conquerors, were recruited into the king's entourage — with diminished authority, of course (Kuhrt 1995:700). Herodotus uses the historical realities of the royal court, its resources, and its protocols for his didactic purposes. Herodotus' depiction of the royal court, full of unlimited luxury and moral decadence, was a purposeful portrayal of an inverted Greek society, and was, in many respects, aimed at his Greek (not Persian) audience as a warning against imperialism (Kuhrt 1995:648). Herodotus portrays the royal court as a world in which the royal potentate is the human apex. Flattery, indulgence, and obedience toward the king are expected and firmly upheld (Grant 1994:44). Herodotus uses the setting of royal courts primarily to show the height of human success, prosperity, and security. Although Herodotus' literary portrayal of imperial courts associates them with immorality and luxury, nevertheless the royal centers at Memphis, Babylon, Assyria, Susa, Persepolis, and Ecbatana were, in fact, the political, ideological, and financial hubs of established city-states and the effort taken to present imperial wealth and power is archaeologically attested (Roaf 1998:198-219).

These centralized royal centers, located within the vast imperial territories were ideal for commissioning and receiving intelligence reports, and consulting satraps and client-kings on matters of state. In Herodotus' account, as many Greek leaders appear at imperial courts in less than auspicious circumstances (at best as vassal leaders; at worst as political exiles or prisoners), they are below par to the imperial dynast in terms of human success and political hegemony. For Herodotus, these former leaders make ideal advisers in two ways: their experiences provide them with proverbial wisdom about the instability of human fortunes and their political involvement imparts to them crucial cross-cultural and military information. As the Greek leader-adviser navigates the protocols and rivalries of the royal court, he finds that his advice may, on the whole, be utterly ignored. The seeming stability of the royal courts instills a false sense of security in their kings and heightens the ideological clash between the over-confident and prideful rulers and often unfortunate cross-cultural leader-advisers.

4.2.1.1 Croesus and Solonic wisdom

Herodotus uses his first book to establish his primary purposes, themes, and historical contexts for the conflict between the Greeks and the Persians. Herodotus (1.16) begins by examining the rise and fall of the Lydian Empire and in doing so introduces King Croesus (560-546) as the last Lydian dynast and the first 'foreigner' who not only exercises military and political hegemony over the Greeks in Asia, but also forges alliances with Greek coastal and mainland nations. From the usurping Mermnadae dynasty, Croesus, the son of Alyattes, continues his predecessors' military policy of engulfing various Greek territories of Asia Minor (Hdt.1.16,26). Herodotus' narrative of Croesus' imperial expansion is fast-paced, and quickly covers his royal ascension and his imperial climax. Herodotus (1.27-28) not only relates how Croesus quickly forces "all the Asiatic Greeks" to pay tribute and to recognize his authority but even recites a catalogue of Croesus' imperial territories and subject nations.

Herodotus describes Sardis at the height of its wealth and influence and in doing so emphasizes its position as the power center of the Lydian Empire. He recounts (6.125) how Croesus delights in his wealth, and, wishing to bestow favor upon the Athenian Alcmaeon for a previous assistance, summons him to Sardis. Croesus (almost giddily) offers Alcmaeon as much gold as he can carry from his treasury, and upon seeing the Athenian crammed with gold in his tunic and hair, the king bursts out laughing at the ridiculous sight (Hdt.6.125). Croesus' unwitting jollity is a sign of his absolute security and ease in his political and economic position. According to Lateiner (1977:177), "power, which frequently finds prosperity a concomitant, lessens human fear, and in Herodotus, laughter is almost a royal prerogative or, perhaps, a royal disease".

Herodotus (1.29) explains that, at the height of Sardis' glory, "all the great Greek teachers of that epoch, one after another, paid visits to the capital". Herodotus (1.29) introduces Solon as "most distinguished" of these teachers, and goes on to describe Solon's career, Athenian political contributions, and his unfortunate, though self-imposed, exile.⁶⁰ After giving Solon a tour of his treasuries and luxurious holdings, Croesus asks the wise philosopher to tell him who is, in his experience, the happiest man (Hdt.1.30). Croesus, thinking it is himself, expects Solon to affirm and flatter him and is nonplussed when Solon recounts the top two happiest of men as ordinary Greeks who perished nobly. Croesus is flustered and asks the Athenian to explain himself (Hdt.1.32). Herodotus carefully sets the stage for a dialogue, which has been accepted as the paradigm for wisdom in his entire work (Shapiro 1994: 350). He places his naïve imperial potentate, Croesus, at the height of his wealth and power, and Solon, the embodiment of Greek philosophical and political achievements, in the setting of the lavish Lydian court. The Greek philosopher and constitutionalist, unaffected by the king's prosperity,

⁶⁰ Harrison 2009:378 makes an interesting point that Solon represents a kind of alter ego of the Herodotean narrator.

declares his honest opinion. In essence, Solon's advice is neither political nor strategic, but typical of Greek popular morality and reflective of Herodotus' didactic (Marincola 2003:xxv). Solon argues that current success may turn to failure due to divine jealousy, that good fortune is not the same as happiness, and that it is prolonged prosperity (not temporary success) which not only makes a man truly happy but also cannot be reckoned until his death (Hdt.1.32). In conclusion Solon warns:

Look to the end, no matter what it is you are considering. Often enough God gives a man a glimpse of happiness and then utterly ruins him (Hdt.1.32).

Croesus not only rejects this advice, but also considers Solon foolish for not regarding his own present prosperity as an indicator of his happiness (Hdt.1.33).

Just as swiftly as he relates Croesus' rise to power, Herodotus (1.34) begins to delineate his downfall, for *nemesis* falls upon Croesus "presumably because God was angry with him for supposing himself the happiest of men". In entrenching his motif of pride and retribution both as a literary theme and as a source of historical causation, Herodotus is explicit in his judgment of Croesus' fate. In the face of personal loss and potential political disaster at the hands of the encroaching Persian Empire, Croesus continues to make decisions based on his pride, his ignorance of Solonic wisdom, and his false sense of security. Bolstered by his erroneous interpretation of the Delphic oracle and an alliance with Sparta, Croesus ignores the advice of his own countryman, Sandanis, and begins his disastrous Cappadocian campaign to drive away the Persian encroachment (Hdt.1.55,69,71). Upon a stalemate at Pteria, Croesus marches back to Sardis, disbands his mercenaries, and delays the addition of allied troops, for, as Herodotus (1.78) relates, "he did not for a moment suppose that Cyrus after so close a fight would venture to advance on Sardis". All at once, Croesus' support structures fail — his oracles and portents are misinterpreted, his tactical decisions are presumptuous, and his allies are delayed. Cyrus

advances upon Sardis and besieges it (Hdt.1.80,83,86). The Fall of Lydian Sardis (545 BC) ushers in the Persian Achaemenid dynasty as not only the imperial successors to the Medes, but also the imperial overlords of Asia-Minor.

Although fictitious, Herodotus' dialogue between Solon and Croesus establishes a narrative pattern of advice proffered, advice arrogantly ignored, and subsequent political calamity.⁶¹ This pattern connects Herodotus' *hubris* theme to his more systematic treatment of political causation. If a leader ignores advice or interpreted information essential to political, strategic, or tactical decision-making, then collective disaster can result.

4.2.1.2 Cyrus, Croesus, and the Spartan delegation: underestimating political culture

Herodotus smoothly shifts his literary spotlight from the Lydian to the Persian Empire and thus from Croesus to Cyrus. From this point in Herodotus' narrative, Cyrus and his extraordinary military campaigns take center-stage, while Croesus becomes a supporting literary figure and a cross-cultural adviser within his former capital. Although Herodotus maintains Sardis as a setting for Croesus' advice dialogues with Cyrus, nevertheless the political context has changed: Sardis is now the fortified headquarters of Cyrus' Asian campaign.

Croesus, now under the authority and beneficence of Cyrus, sits next to the king and is deep in thought (Hdt.1.88). As the Persian forces ransack Sardis, Croesus, given royal permission, points out to Cyrus that the plundering Persians are, in fact, destroying royal (Persian) property (Hdt.1.89). Croesus suggests a system whereby a tenth of the plunder is used as a dedicatory offering to Zeus — in this way, Cyrus will both prevent any Persian from acquiring enough wealth to initiate a rebellion and appear fair and just (Hdt.1.89). According to

⁶¹ According to Marincola 2003:627, the encounter between Croesus and Solon is rejected on chronological grounds since Croesus' reign ends in 546 and Solon's travels after Pisistratus' rise to power are dated c.594/3 or at the latest 580-570.

Herodotus (1.90), Cyrus is “delighted with this [excellent] advice”, and implements it immediately. Thus begins a new dynamic in the relationship between Croesus and Cyrus. Although Cyrus initially pities Croesus’ misfortune, he later becomes impressed by both Croesus’ wisdom and his willingness to serve a new royal master (Hdt.1.90).

In this setting of the newly acquired Persian city-center of Sardis, Herodotus relates one of the first encounters between mainland Greeks and imperial Persia. As the Lydian empire and all its territories are being engulfed by Persian hegemony, the Ionians, having been denied favorable terms with Cyrus, scramble to defend themselves (Hdt.1.141). They send envoys to Sparta asking for assistance but their request is rejected (Hdt.1.152). In a postscript to the Ionian delegation’s failure, Herodotus (1.152) adds the following:

The Spartans dispatched a fifty-oared galley to the Asiatic coast, in order, I suppose, to watch Cyrus and what was going on in Ionia. The vessel put in at Phocaea, and the most distinguished of the men on board...was sent to Sardis to forbid Cyrus, on behalf of the Lacedaemonians, to harm any Greek city or they would take action.

According to Herodotus (1.53) when Cyrus receives the envoys, he asks some Greeks who, “happened to be with him”, about the Lacedaemonians, their numbers, and their audacity. After Cyrus is informed about the state of affairs in Sparta, he responds:

I have never yet been afraid of men who have a special meeting place in the centre of their city, where they swear this and that and cheat each other. Such people, if I have anything to do with it, will not have the troubles of Ionia to chatter about, but their own (Hdt.1.53).

Herodotus’ curious and fleeting anecdote holds several repercussions for the rest of his treatment of Persian-Spartan relations. In terms of strategic planning, Herodotus establishes that long before Greek spies are sent to Xerxes’ Sardis (7.146-147) and long before Demaratus’ palimpsest (7.239), the Spartans, having dispatched a surveillance-vessel for observing the Ionian coast, are

thoroughly aware of Persia's threat and capabilities, and they anticipate the likelihood of Persia using Ionian territories as an entry-point to the Greek mainland (Hdt.1.152).

In terms of cross-cultural awareness, Cyrus displays his ability to be informed about the culture and politics of Greece. Cyrus has access to relevant information concerning the political environments of many Greek city-states. However, in his disdain for the Greek open market system (associated with the collective assemblies in the city *agora*), Cyrus displays his cultural bias against Greek political customs, which he erringly links to their political insignificance or military impotence.⁶² Cyrus is apparently aware of the differences between Spartan and Persian governance, but Herodotus stresses his underestimation of the efficacy of Sparta's political process and uses this chronic underestimation as a dramatic enhancement in his presentation of the battles of Thermopylae and Salamis.

4.2.1.3 Darius and Histiaeus: the pitfalls of reciprocal relationships in the Persian Empire

Although Herodotus uses Solon and Croesus to establish a literary pattern of leader-advisers and the potentates who ignore or reject proffered advice, nevertheless he uses the adventurous account of Histiaeus, the tyrant of Miletus, to explore the interactions between the Ionian Greek tyrants, the Persian king, and his other imperial advisers. In Histiaeus, Herodotus portrays a client-king who is stripped of his leadership, restricted in his advisory capacity, and entrapped at the royal court. He is certainly atypical in his advisory role and is, in fact, not even

⁶² Referring to Alcaeus' lyric fragment (7.Fr.130b in Miller 1996:43) Cartledge (1993:92) remarks:

The word means literally 'a place of gathering', and so for example it became the usual Greek term for a market. But for [Alcaeus], it had a specifically political connotation, meaning the space where political assemblies were held and decisions and struggles affecting governance were enacted.

listed in the extensive and influential catalogue of advice and advisers in Herodotus' work by Lattimore (1939: 25-28). Yet Herodotus makes it clear that Histiaeus' influence over King Darius is such that it garners jealousy and contempt from his Persian generals and governors (Hdt.5.23, 6.30). Although many of Herodotus' leader-advisers become wise through tragedy or their own misfortunes, Histiaeus seems to learn his diplomatic art 'on the job' as he straddles both Greek and Persian political spheres, serving Darius and seeking individual (and possibly national) liberation from Persian authority.

After his disastrous Scythian campaign, Darius summons Histiaeus to Sardis, rewarding him for having shown good service in leading the Ionian contingent (Hdt.5.11;4.137). Darius grants Histiaeus' request to found Myrcinus and dismisses him to begin his project (Hdt.5.11). Although Histiaeus arrives at Sardis to receive a reward, nevertheless his position is one of a vassal with no individual or national authority. In spite of the lavish resources and provisions of Sardis, it is only the king who can enjoy and dispense this wealth in freedom. Cook (1987:132) indicates that as Darius strove to establish himself as the rightful heir to the Achaemenid dynasty, he promoted himself as a cult-hero figure and distanced himself from his subjects by regal honor and rigid court protocols – protocols which, to a Greek tyrant, might be restrictive.

The power differentiation between the Persian king and the Greek client-king is even more obvious when the Persian commander, Megabazus, upon seeing Histiaeus fortifying Myrcinus and gaining local support and wealth, advises Darius to keep him on a tight leash (Hdt.5.23). Herodotus (5.24) recounts that Darius, thus advised, again summons Histiaeus to Sardis for some "important enterprise" and upon his arrival requests him both to forgo his duties in Miletus and Myrcinus, and to serve him as a counselor at Susa. Histiaeus is in no position to refuse and accompanies Darius, who proceeds to Susa (Hdt.5.25).

Herodotus uses the setting of the court to contrast the personal and political autonomy of the leader-adviser and the potentate. Herodotus' account makes it clear that although Darius calls upon Histiaeus to be an adviser, he is not interested in his advice (Hdt.5.24). The king is under no compulsion to listen to the adviser. The king may ask for advice, but he often has already made up his own mind, and wants the adviser merely to confirm his decision. Although Histiaeus is not brought to Susa in chains, Darius and court protocol all but strip him of his personal and political freedom as well as his authority as a leader-adviser.

Herodotus (5.35) quickens his narrative pace as Histiaeus' deputy, Aristagoras, becomes embroiled in a naval fracas between Persian and Ionian leaders, and Histiaeus frantically pins his hopes of liberation on his deputy by urging him to revolt in his cunning scalp-tattoo message.⁶³ Aristagoras engages in open rebellion and the Ionian Revolt begins in earnest. After the Greek attack on Sardis (498 BC), Darius calls Histiaeus to account, but the tyrant vehemently denies his involvement, and requests permission to return to Miletus, promising to turn over both Aristagoras and the island of Sardinia to Darius (Hdt.5.99-100,106). Once again, Herodotus (5.107) inserts his analysis that Histiaeus' "real purpose was to take over command of the Ionians in their war against the king".

Herodotus' account of Histiaeus' final years is full of adventures and setbacks. The Persian governor of Sardis, Artaphernes, accuses Histiaeus of complicity in the Ionian revolt and, fearing for his safety, the tyrant flees to the Ionian coast (Hdt.6.2). When he returns to Miletus, he is rejected by his citizens, who are reluctant to receive another tyrant (Hdt.6.2-5). Histiaeus vindictively sends false and implicating letters to various Persians in Sardis, whom Artaphernes erroneously executes (Hdt.6.4). Histiaeus then joins forces with a small Lesbian fleet, becomes a

⁶³ See 3.2.2 **Secret communication**.

pirate, and generally takes advantage of the instability of the coastal territories (Hdt.6.5,26).

When Harpagus eventually captures the wily Histiaeus, Herodotus (6.30) inserts his opinion:

Now if after his capture he had been taken to Darius, he would not, in my opinion, have found himself in serious trouble, but Darius would have pardoned him; but as it was, for this very reason – to prevent him, that is, from rising once more to a position of influence in Darius’ court – Artaphernes, the governor of Sardis, and Harpagus, his actual captor, resolved upon his death.

When Histiaeus’ decapitated head arrives in Susa, Darius is furious with his generals and buries it with full honors (Hdt.6.30).

According to Evans (1963:114), scholars have given various interpretations to explain Histiaeus’ disinformation, deception, and inconsistent motives.⁶⁴ Even though Histiaeus is an atypical leader-adviser, Herodotus does not discard his thematic precedent, but augments it by introducing other dynamics of the leader-adviser relationship at court. With its restrictive nature, the royal court can become a prison where, bound by protocol and his overlord’s wishes, Histiaeus is denied freedom. In addition to the loss of freedom, Histiaeus must face the dangerous conflict and rivalry of other royal advisers, native-born generals, and governors. Grant (1994:45) argues that Herodotus draws upon foreign and native advisers’ different opinions to augment his themes of slavery and freedom and his perceived differentiation between Greek ‘freedom’ and Persian ‘despotism’.⁶⁵ Finally, Herodotus is clear that Darius’ initial request for Histiaeus’ advisory service is not for counsel but for control. The king is under no compulsion to listen to, accept, or act upon an adviser’s recommendations. When Herodotus uses this ‘royal prerogative’ of ignoring advice in subsequent dialogues to emphasize the ruler’s *hubris*, it is rooted in his assumed unerring decision-making capacity. Herodotus’ account of

⁶⁴ Herodotus generally disapproves of the Ionian revolt and also seems to contrast his historiographic ancestor, the wise Ionian Hecataeus, with the wily Histiaeus and Aristagoras (West 1991:155-156).

⁶⁵ See Herodotus’ anecdote at the “Banquet at Thebes” (Hdt.9.16) and **5.3 Nomos compulsions and collective tragic choices**.

Histiaeus reads like a primer for Greek tyrants or despots about the benefits, problems and dangers arising from exiled leaders using Persian protection.

4.2.2 Cross-cultural information: at war

In an account of the warring Greek colonists in Libya, Herodotus (4.159) inserts the following tale. The Egyptian army under Pharaoh Apries defends its interests in Libya against the encroachment of the Greek colonists at Cyrene. When the Greeks march out and defeat the Egyptians so severely that few of them return home alive, Herodotus (4.159) inserts this comment: “[This defeat] was doubtless due to the fact that the Egyptians had had no previous experience of Greek fighting and were not prepared to treat it seriously”. This anecdote illustrates the significance of cultural and militaristic differences in war and Herodotus associates the ignorance of such differences with real political consequences.

As Herodotus uses war and its causes and events as the framework for his analysis of human behavior, it is natural that he sets advisers in campaigns and battles to heighten the dramatic effect of imperial, prideful, and tactical decisions (Grant 1994:27). Military marches and strategic movements increase Herodotus’ narrative pace and as they advance, adding imperial dominions, they often transgress natural or cultural boundaries. Herodotus suggests that boundary transgression is one of the signifiers of the inevitable downfall of many far-reaching empires (Marincola 2003:xxv). Russell (1999:55) explains that on such campaigns advisers were often on hand to provide the king with crucial information such as “geographic information (most importantly routes), but also natural and agricultural resources, military activity and dispositions, and local relationships, customs and lore”. In Herodotus, the imperial potentate often ignores such information and develops flawed attitudes and strategies toward both his enemies and the inhabitants of his conquered territories. As the king engages his enemies, the

tragic influence in Herodotus' work becomes evident. With potential loss of lives, territories, and wealth, war is where divine vengeance can most dramatically exact its penalty. Imperial futures are often decided in war and Herodotus uses leader-advisers' practical but oft-ignored advice on the battlefield as another tragic form of oracular pronouncement, portent or dream, which foreshadows impending disaster and divine retribution (Lattimore 1939: 33).

4.2.2.1 Cyrus and Croesus: physical boundaries and tactical decisions

Like that of Croesus, Herodotus delineates Cyrus' rise, pride and destruction, as well as his decisive victories, which include those over Asia, some Ionian territories, Assyria, and Assyrian-held Babylon (Hdt.1.171,191). After such overwhelming military successes, Cyrus turns his attention to the region of the Massagetae, who live on the far eastern reaches near the Caspian Sea and who are ruled by Queen Tomyris (Hdt.1.201,205). Herodotus (1.204) describes Cyrus' motivations:

... the two most important [motivations] being his belief in his superhuman origin and the success of all his previous campaigns; for it was a fact that till then it had been impossible for any nation to escape, once he had marched against it.

Herodotus makes it clear that this specific military undertaking, stretching beyond a territorial limit, is Cyrus' final act of *hubris* (Marincola 2003:634). After having been refused his proffered marriage alliance with Queen Tomyris, Cyrus reaches the banks of the Araxes with his forces and prepares to build a bridge to cross it (Hdt.1.205).

Just before Cyrus crosses the Araxes, a message from Queen Tomyris arrives, advising him to abandon his enterprise, and implying that he is, indeed, crossing a divinely established border (Hdt.1.206). Since it is likely that Cyrus will continue in his military undertaking, she suggests that he should cease the bridge-works and engage in battle on either side of the river (Hdt.1.206). When Cyrus calls a war council, only Croesus suggests that Cyrus should go over

to the territory of the Massagetae. Here Croesus' advice, like Tomyris' message, is conditional, practical, and foreboding (Lattimore 1939:29). Before Croesus explains the gist of his strategy, Herodotus (1.207), using Croesus' voice, inserts a tragic proverb:

Doubtless, if you think that you and your men are immortal, there is little point in my telling you my opinion; but if you recognize the fact that both you and the troops under your command are merely human, then the first thing I would tell you is that human life is like a revolving wheel and never allows the same people to continue long in prosperity.

After this Solon-like advice, Croesus does offer a practical strategy, namely that Cyrus should cross the river so that, in case of defeat, the Persian imperial territories will be unaffected. Cyrus accepts this suggestion and prepares for the crossing, but places Croesus under the protection of his heir Cambyses and sends them both back to Persia (Hdt.1.208). It appears that, in spite of his hubristic belief in his own superhuman nature, Cyrus is aware of the personal and political dangers of military combat. His preparations are followed by yet another portent in which Cyrus dreams that Darius usurps the throne.⁶⁶ Cyrus is, indeed, killed in the ensuing battle and Queen Tomyris places Cyrus' decapitated head in a wineskin full of blood (Hdt.1.214). Although sympathy and understanding of human fortune leads Cyrus to be merciful to Croesus, his inexperience of human misfortune keeps him oblivious to true wisdom (Shapiro 1994:353). Cyrus' military successes are unchecked and contribute to his belief in his own immortality.

Herodotus' cross-cultural advisers have limitations — they can warn and advise, but they cannot save the potentate from misfortune. Croesus provides essential information for Cyrus' administration in Sardis and, in spite of his tactical error in the Massagetae campaign, suggests a clever and successful ruse to entrap the Massagetae at an earlier point in the expedition (Hdt.1.207). Much has been written about whether or not Croesus' advice was wise since, in

⁶⁶ Lattimore (1939:33) asserts, "the tragic warner supplements the other warnings, dreams, portents, oracles, and inspired prophecies, which foreshadow the future of kings and nations alike, so that no catastrophe takes place until its principals have been fairly showered with warnings".

part, it leads to Cyrus' death.⁶⁷ Although in reality Cyrus' death was not the result of a crossed boundary, but rather of a dangerous military campaign, nevertheless Herodotus uses Cyrus' Massagetae campaign to demonstrate the disaster resulting from imperialist expansion.

4.2.2.2 Cambyses in Egypt: imperial occupation and cultural transgressions

Herodotus uses the encroaching Persian Empire in the first three books as a backdrop to his ethnographically-focused treatment, taking note of the various peoples and lands that come into contact with the Persian expansion. As his second book is almost exclusively devoted to cataloguing Egyptian culture and topography, Cambyses' Egyptian campaigns and his subsequent descent into madness are examined within this culturally-focused context.⁶⁸

After the death of Cyrus (530 BC), Cambyses succeeds to the throne and, thanks to the numbers of amassed forces and the resources gained by Cyrus' victories, immediately continues his father's expansionist policies by mounting an Egyptian campaign (Hdt.2.1;3.1). Cambyses wins a victory at the Pelusian mouth of the Nile, and pursues the Egyptian king, Psammenitus, to Memphis, where the king eventually surrenders (Hdt.3.13). Cambyses encounters his first bit of proverbial wisdom when the captive King Psammenitus sees a former noble friend begging for food. According to Herodotus (3.14), Psammenitus weeps and shows outward signs of distress and when questioned, the defeated king explains:

My own suffering was too great for tears, but I could not but weep for the trouble of a friend, who has fallen from great wealth and good fortune and been reduced to beggary on the threshold of old age.

⁶⁷ See Shapiro 1994:350 for Croesus' dialogues and suffering. It is important to point out that Cyrus was warned of impending doom through various means, one of them being Tomyris' advice that Cyrus should withdraw completely – a suggestion which Cyrus never even considers.

⁶⁸ Egyptian contemporary texts do not bear out Herodotus' description. Quite the contrary, the texts reveal Cambyses portraying himself as legitimate Egyptian Pharaoh (Kuhrt 1995:664).

When Croesus and the Persian entourage hear this, they also weep, and, according to Herodotus, (3.14), Cambyses, feeling a “touch of pity”, gives orders for the crown-prince to be saved, and Psammenitus to be brought to the court. Psammenitus’ grief and Cambyses’ response closely parallel the encounter between Croesus and Cyrus — the imperial sovereign acknowledging the misfortune of the former ruler.

Although Cambyses feels pity, nevertheless he cannot achieve wisdom because he lacks personal experience of tragedy or misfortune (Shapiro 1994:353). Unfortunately, the Persian guards are too late to save the prince, and Psammenitus himself commits suicide when his plot to overthrow Cambyses is eventually discovered (Hdt.3.15). Herodotus (3.16) implies that, in revenge for this treachery, Cambyses burns the body of Psammenitus’ father King Amasis — a desecration according to both Egyptian and Persian custom. Herodotus (3.27-29) continues to describe Cambyses’ *hubris* and madness, for, after his failed attempts to subdue Carthage, Ethiopia, and Ammon, Cambyses continues to desecrate Egypt when he kills their sacred Apis calf and forbids its festival worship.⁶⁹ Herodotus (3.30,33) confesses that he is unsure whether Cambyses’ madness is brought about by this sacrilege or is the cause of it.

Cambyses’ emotional and mental instability unleashes itself on his own family and countrymen. Herodotus sensationally heaps atrocity upon atrocity to prove Cambyses’ violence and madness. Croesus’ wisdom contrasts with Cambyses’ madness and, consistent with Herodotean precedent, Croesus’ advice foreshadows impending doom. Herodotus records two advice dialogues between Croesus and Cambyses.

At one time, Cambyses asks his council to compare him to his father, Cyrus. At the time Croesus does not concur with the typical Persian flattery of Cambyses’ as being superior to his

⁶⁹ See 3.4.2 **Illegitimate motivations for inquiry: selfish or gratuitous intelligence missions.**

father. He tactfully points out that Cambyses had not left a son behind as his father Cyrus had done. This response is agreeable to Cambyses, who praises Croesus' judgment (Hdt.3.35). At another time, when Cambyses' counselor enrages him, he shoots an arrow into the heart of Prexaspes' son to prove his sanity – reasoning that, if he was insane, he would miss (Hdt.3.35). After the incident, Cambyses executes twelve high-ranking Persian officials by burying them alive. Herodotus (3.36) relates Croesus' ensuing advice to Cambyses:

Do not always act on the passionate impulse of youth. Check and control yourself. There is wisdom in forethought and a sensible man looks to the future. If you continue too long in your present course of killing your countrymen for no sufficient cause – and of killing children too – then beware lest the Persians rise in revolt.

In a rage, Cambyses reminds Croesus of his own responsibility in losing the Lydian empire and in Cyrus' death (Hdt.3.36). Although this accusation seems surprisingly lucid, nevertheless it is the antithesis of Herodotean wisdom, which dictates that personal experience of human misfortune allows a leader to become wise and therefore an ideal adviser.

Cambyses' reign does not end well in Herodotus' account. Impostors usurp Cambyses' throne and the king accidentally and mortally wounds himself with his own sword (Hdt.3.64-65). He recovers his senses enough to confess to his fratricide and to charge his countrymen with protecting the empire from the Medes (Hdt.3.66). He bitterly laments his fate and dies a few days later, childless and without an heir (3.66).

Herodotus uses Cambyses' responses to Psammeniut's proverbial wisdom, the political intelligence obtained by his spies in Ethiopia, and Croesus' moral advice to support his theme of prideful destruction. Cambyses' Egyptian campaign and subsequent descent into rashness, cultural impropriety, religious sacrileges and madness provide a sort of book-end for the

ethnographically-focused section of Herodotus' work. Herodotus (3.38) relates Cambyses' cultural indignities in Egypt with a discourse on the universality of cultural protocols:

I have no doubt whatever that Cambyses was completely out of his mind; it is the only possible explanation for his assault upon, and mockery of, everything which ancient custom has made sacred in Egypt. For if anyone...were given the opportunity of choosing from amongst all the nations in the world the beliefs which he thought best, he would inevitably choose those of his own country...It is unlikely that anyone but a madman would mock at such things.

Herodotus' Ionian-influenced cultural relativism is evident. For, in the same way that Cyrus transgresses a physical boundary leading to his demise, Cambyses, in his madness, transgresses sacred and cultural boundaries, not only contributing toward his unhappy end but also needlessly endangering the lives of his countrymen and his troops (Marincola 2003:xv,xiv).

4.2.2.3 Xerxes' *hubris* and flawed strategies

Since Herodotus narrative apex is the Persian Invasions of 480-479, he places the embodiment of *hubris* onto Xerxes, who Cartledge (1993:61) describes as Herodotus' "climactic incarnation of *hubris*". For although Darius plans an attack on Athens in revenge for the Athenian-led attack on Sardis and the humiliating Persian defeat at Marathon (490), nevertheless he dies before he can mount the expedition (486) and Xerxes is the successor to the Persian throne and its imperialist mandate (Hdt.7.1). Xerxes' Greek campaign is the thematic and historical climax of Herodotus' narrative and his literary crafting is at its best.

Herodotus (7.8) uses the Persian invasions as the embodiment of his thematic concept of imperial (territorial) *hubris*, which he voices through Xerxes' speech to his leaders:

Do not suppose, men of Persia, that I am departing from precedent in the course of action I intend to undertake. If we crush the Athenians and their neighbor, we shall so extend the empire of Persia that its boundaries will be God's own sky, so that the sun will not look down upon any land beyond the boundaries of what is ours.

In spite of his imperial *hubris*, Herodotus' Xerxes is not a caricature but rather a complex and multi-dimensional leader, who is influenced by a variety of ideas and attitudes, and who influences (but not entirely determines) important political and military decisions. As Sancisi-Weerdenburg (2002:584) explains:

Xerxes, like the other characters in the *Histories*, are pieces on Herodotus' chessboard that he moves according to the rules, but the resulting game is Herodotus' own.

To extend Sancisi-Weerdenburg's metaphor, Herodotus places the Spartan leader, Demaratus, as another chess piece in counterpoint to Xerxes' imperial autonomy. Already established as an adviser close to the king, Herodotus uses Demaratus to voice his presentation of the cultural and ideological differences between Persia and Greece (specifically Sparta). Xerxes' inability or unwillingness to understand his enemies' disposition is underscored by Demaratus' valuable information pertaining to the culture, geography and politics of the Greek *poleis*. This cultural misunderstanding leads to flawed decisions on strategic and even tactical levels and contributes to the eventual Persian withdrawal from Greece.

Although it is introduced after his narrative of Xerxes' initial preparations, Herodotus relates an anecdote which emphasizes the *hubris* of Xerxes' imperial goals. Upon hearing that Xerxes and his forces are stationed in Sardis, the newly-formed Greek alliance sends spies to the Lydian capital to gather information (Hdt.7.144). Herodotus relates that while in Sardis the spies are caught, tortured and sentenced to death, but just before their execution, they are summoned by Xerxes:

Having satisfied himself about the reason for their presence in Sardis, [Xerxes] instructed his guards to take them round and let them see the whole army, infantry and cavalry and then...let them go without molestation to whatever country they pleased. [He] was confident that their report on the magnitude of the Persian power would induce the Greeks to surrender their liberty before the actual

invasion took place, so that there would be no need to go to the trouble of fighting a war at all (7.145-147).

Since Xerxes is hell-bent on his imperialist dominion over mainland Greece, he plans to terrify the Greeks into surrendering without the expense of a campaign, deliberately giving them correct information as to the size of the army (Dulles 1963:14). Herodotus adds another similar encounter when, confronted with provision cargos sailing for the Greek allied territories, Xerxes allows them to pass through the Hellespont unmolested, reasoning that the ships are, in fact, supplying future rations to the Persians upon their inevitable military success. This Herodotean anecdote is placed within Xerxes' Greek campaign, and demonstrates how Xerxes' strategies support his imperial goals, and subtextually, how military goals dictate intelligence needs.⁷⁰

It is to this same Hellespont, the natural boundary between Asia and Europe, that Xerxes' expedition forces, having set out from Sardis, finally amass (Hdt.7.20-23). Xerxes bridges the Hellespont using a pontoon bridge of discarded ships, winters at Sardis, and then assembles and reviews his forces at Abydos (Hdt.7.44). The king prides himself on the expanse of his wealth and power, personified by his forces, but then unexpectedly weeps, realizing the frailty of human life and its misfortunes (7.45). This revelation, echoing the experiences of Cyrus at Croesus' Sardis and Cambyses in Psamennitus' Egypt, reflects Herodotus' didactic purpose, but the flicker of Xerxes' Solon-like wisdom is snuffed out by his unfamiliarity with personal or military disaster (Flory 1978:145).

⁷⁰ As an academic exercise Dulles (1963:14) suggest that if Sun-Tzu, the great ancient Chinese strategist, had been consulted (ought we to read Dulles himself?), he would have advised the opposite:

Sun Tzu would have recommended that Xerxes bribe the spies and send them home to report that his army was far smaller and weaker than it really was. When the Persians later invaded, Sun Tzu would have expected the three men to report to [Xerxes] what was going on in the Greek camp.

4.2.2.4 Xerxes and Demaratus: ignored cultural and political intelligence

Once Xerxes crosses the Hellespont Herodotus' enhances the dramatic build-up by his catalogue of Persian and foreign military forces (Hdt.7.55,60-100). After this catalogue, Xerxes calls Demaratus both to boast about his army and to inquire about the potential Greek response to his military power (Hdt.7.101). It is interesting to note that Xerxes asks Demaratus' advice as a Greek, but the leader-adviser responds as a Spartan. At first, Demaratus asks permission to speak in truth. Once this is granted, Herodotus (7.102-3) presents a dialogue which supports not only his didactic purpose but also his culturally dualistic presentation of Persia and Greece:

By her valour Greece keeps both poverty and despotism at bay. I think highly of all [Dorians] but what I am about to say will apply not to all Dorians, but to the Spartans only...they will not under any circumstances accept terms from you which would mean slavery for Greece; secondly they will fight you even if the rest of Greece submits.

Xerxes laughs and questions Demaratus' statement:

But if you Greeks, who think so much of yourselves, are all of the size and quality of those I have spoken with when they have visited my court – and of yourself, Demaratus – there is some danger of your words being nothing but an empty boast.

Again, Herodotus (7.104) relates that Demaratus does not admit to being an expert on Greece, but on Sparta, and he counters:

As you demanded the plain truth and nothing less, I told you how things are with the Spartans... They are free-yes-but not entirely free, for they have a master, and that master is Law, which they fear much more than your subjects fear you...It is never to retreat in battle, however great the odds, but always to remain in formation, and to conquer or die.

At this Xerxes laughs again and good-naturedly dismisses Demaratus, either because he disbelieves or because he misunderstands the reality of Spartan ideology and military protocol. According to Lateiner (1974:179), "Xerxes laughs at the plain truth, a truth which contributes significantly to the utter failure of his western imperialist enterprise". Herodotus' dialogues

between Demaratus and Xerxes reflect more than a thematic contrast between western freedoms with eastern imperialism. When Xerxes' points out the hypocrisy of Greek leaders, espousing democratic notions but making full use of the Persian imperial court, could it be that Herodotus is using Xerxes as a mouthpiece, to condemn contemporary Greek leaders who relied heavily on Persian strength to achieve their political aims?

In the dramatic build-up to the battle of the Thermopylae pass, Herodotus inserts a now famous anecdote which prompts another dialogue between Xerxes and Demaratus. When one of Xerxes' scouts observes the Spartan sentries who are guarding the pass, exercising and combing their hair, he reports this strange behavior to the king who, bewildered, sends for Demaratus (Hdt.7.208-209). Demaratus explains that this behavior indicates the Spartans are preparing for their burial, implying that they are intent on defending the pass and will fight regardless of military disadvantage.⁷¹ At this crucial moment, Demaratus does not provide Xerxes with proverbial advice, but with proper culturally-related intelligence. This raw information pertaining to cultural behavior is collected by a commissioned scout, analyzed and interpreted by an expert, and presented to the leader for strategic and even tactical decision-making. Because Xerxes cannot comprehend the Spartans' motivations to die holding the pass, he grossly underestimates the time and force it will take to achieve entry through the guarded pass. In fact, Herodotus (7.213) inserts his belief that, were it not for a spy who betrays the secret of the small mountain track, Xerxes' attempt to enter the Attic territories through Thermopylae might have ended in a stalemate. Eventually the Persians swarm all over the Spartans and the small contingent of Thespians, but after two days of sallies the Greeks have gained the necessary delay (Hdt.7.213).

⁷¹ In a bit of dramatic literary manipulation, Demaratus' explanation of the Spartan's behavior is presented in conjunction with Leonidas' sacrificial tactical proposal in the Greek-alliance's war council (Hdt.7.207).

In an epilogue to the battle of Thermopylae, Xerxes once again consults Demaratus (Hdt.7.234). The King recognizes the truth of Demaratus' previous advice and begins to understand the differentiation between Greeks (including Ionians) and Spartans. He asks after the Lacedaemonians, with whose courage and skill he seems impressed. Demaratus points out that it is in Sparta that the king will find men similar to those who held the pass. When Xerxes asks him how to defeat the Spartans, Demaratus suggests using the island of Cythera as a naval base and engaging the Spartans in the Peloponnese. By doing so, the Spartans will rush homeward and leave the rest of the Greek forces unaided and vulnerable to Persian conquest (Hdt.7.235). Demaratus' advice is countered by the Persian naval commander, Achaemenes, who maligns Demaratus' character and warns against detaching more naval forces for another mission (Hdt.7.236). Although Xerxes takes Achaemenes' advice, nevertheless Herodotus (7.237) indicates that Xerxes upholds Demaratus' friendship and wisdom.⁷²

Although some anecdotes subtly question Demaratus' true sympathies, nevertheless his advice to Xerxes presents complex layers of Herodotus' *hubris* theme. Although Herodotus gives some room (one chess piece to extend Sancisi-Weerdenburg's metaphor) in his *Histories* to non-specific divine retribution, nevertheless at the climax of the Persian Wars, the author underscores a logical and non-metaphysical cause for the Persian defeat. Xerxes' royal upbringing, his lack of personal or political setbacks, and his continued success contribute to his pride and pre-condition him to misunderstand both proverbial advice and practical military intelligence. In Herodotus' account, it is not divine wrath which exclusively contributes to the Persian defeat in Greece, but Xerxes' *hubris* and unwavering imperialist agenda which blind him

⁷² This confidence is oddly misplaced in the light of the fact that Herodotus (7.239;8.65) reveals Demaratus' assistance to the Greek cause — the palimpsest to Sparta and Demaratus' silence after observing a portent foreshadowing the Persian defeat at Salamis.

to the cultural disposition and political climate of his enemies. This, in turn, causes him to apply inappropriate military strategies and at Salamis (480), Xerxes and his forces are defeated and the tide of war turns.

4.2.2.5 Xerxes and Artemisia: strategic assessment of one's own forces

As Herodotus shifts his focus from land to sea battles in his climactic description of the Persian Wars, he uses the brave Queen Artemisia as another cross-cultural leader-adviser in Xerxes' naval campaigns. She is introduced within Herodotus' catalogue of Xerxes' naval forces as the Queen of Halicarnassus (Herodotus' hometown) and the author describes her as a marvel.⁷³ Herodotus (7.99) notes her "spirit of adventure and manly courage" as the commander of five confederate ships and boasts that "not one of the confederate commanders gave Xerxes sounder advice than she". Herodotus uses Artemisia for several thematic and literary functions not only in the build-up to Salamis, but also in the aftermath of Xerxes' cataclysmic naval defeat. It is no coincidence that Artemisia's advice occurs immediately following Demaratus' proposed strategy in the epilogue of Thermopylae. According to Harrison (2002:568), in presenting his historical causation of the Persian defeat, Herodotus intentionally highlights the fact that the Persians consistently fail to take advantage of Greek disunity or to drive a wedge in the Greek camp.

Artemisia is present at the Persian naval council at Phaleron when Mardonius takes a poll of the commanding officers and their opinions of engaging the Greeks at sea (Hdt.8.67). Artemisia's voice is the only quiet dissent in a cacophony of unanimity, and she strongly advises Xerxes against engaging the Greeks in naval battle, pointing out that if the Persian forces hold

⁷³ According to Munson (1988:92), "Artemisia represents a remarkable exception in the historian's selectivity; she contributes to the expedition only 5 ships out of 1,207 in Xerxes' fleet, and yet, on the whole, she receives more coverage in the narrative of that expedition than any other individual fighting on the Persian side, after Mardonius".

their present course, the Greeks will most likely concede defeat (Hdt.8.68). If, however, the Persians suffer any damage to their fleet, their infantry will be unsupported and vulnerable (8.68a-b). She concludes with a scathing assessment of Xerxes' allied forces:

You, then, being the best master in the world, are ill served; these people who are supposed to be your allies – these Egyptians, Cyprians, Cilicians, Pamphylians – are a useless lot (Hdt.8.68).

Although he continues with his own plans, Xerxes is highly pleased with Artemisia's strategy, much to the chagrin of her jealous rivals, and tacitly concurs with at least one of her assessments because, according to Herodotus (8.69), "Xerxes believed that in the battles of Euboea his men had shirked their duty because he was not himself present — whereas this time he had made arrangements to watch the fight with his own eyes". Artemisia's advice at the naval council is tolerated but generally ignored in favor of Xerxes' pre-held assessment of his troops and the likelihood of their success. Xerxes' dismissal of Artemisia's advice is not simply another instance in the thematic pattern of ignored advice and proposed strategies. Herodotus has reached a critical point in the account of the Graeco-Persian conflict where he expends enormous literary effort and orchestrates a veritable grand finale of interrelated literary devices, thematic didactic, and his astute grasp of the tactical factors influencing military conflict.

In his book on modern intelligence strategies, *Intelligence and Military Operations*, Handel (1990:3) points out that in the fog of war, a commander has a dearth of intelligence about the disposition of his own forces, let alone those of his enemy. As an Ionian, Artemisia would have been well aware of not only Greek disunity, but also the readiness of Ionian territories to throw off Persian rule. Herodotus uses Artemisia's strategic information pertaining to the **Persian forces**, not only to highlight Xerxes' *hubris*, but also to bring to a climactic tenor the thematic contrast of slavery and freedom. This contrast, inferred in previous leader-adviser situations, is brought to the forefront by Demaratus before the battle of Thermopylae, and to a

decisive head by Artemisia before and during the battle of Salamis, where Herodotus answers his previously rhetorical question — whether slavery or freedom makes for a better fighting force. At Salamis, many of Xerxes' allies defect, and though many try their best for fear of the king, Herodotus' only hero is Artemisia herself, who fights on her own terms and by her own free will. It is in reference to her bravery, that Herodotus (8.88) uses Xerxes' exclamation, “my men have tuned into women, my women into men”.

Herodotus' account of Artemisia highlights her as a marvellous female leader, whose sound strategic advice, Xerxes dismisses. This, in turn, leads to flawed strategies and assumptions about his enemies and his own forces. Herodotus has introduced all of these aspects of the leader-adviser in various forms, throughout his account, but in Artemisia, Herodotus uses this heroine of his home town as the last voice of tactical advice, Herodotean didactic, and tragic warning just before Xerxes' disastrous unequivocal imperial setback at Salamis.

4.3 Conclusion

Herodotus concludes his work with a curious advice-dialogue. Herodotus resurrects Cyrus from his literary grave to provide advice to the Persians, wishing to resettle. Herodotus (9.122) relates that Cyrus warns his people that if they expand their dominions and looked for greener pastures, “they must prepare themselves to rule no longer, but to be ruled by others”. In this case, the Persians actually heed Cyrus' warning. One wonders if the lesson was lost on Herodotus' contemporary audience. Although the Greek victory at Salamis is secured by both Athenian naval contributions and Persian tactical failures, nevertheless Herodotus does not whitewash the Greeks' disunity and their leaders' failures to act in the interests of collective security. As the voices of Demaratus and Artemisia fade from the narrative, one wonders if, through his duplicitous and wily dealings, Themistocles is poised to become the latest Greek

political leader or demagogue searching for Persian assistance in his political affairs. It is in relation to his *hubris* theme that Herodotus' portrayal of Persia is so scathingly dismissed as biased. However, it is essential not to view Herodotus' account as an extension of Aeschylus' self-celebratory *Persae*. Herodotus' account is decidedly anti-imperialist and his lessons on leadership, strategic and political advice, and foreign policy are addressed to a Greek audience (Marincola 2003:xvii,xxv).

The neglect of advice and crucial cross-cultural information becomes the catalyst, and, in some cases, the direct cause for personal or political reverses and imperial losses. As the first fully extant western historiographer, Herodotus may not have been cognizant of what the moderns call cultural intelligence, nevertheless he identifies its use, and presents a historical (though perhaps not accurate) scenario where cultural information can be used to better understand the disposition, tactical assets, and even warfare ideology of other nations.

5. THE TRAGEDY OF *NOMOS*?

5.1 Introduction

Herodotus' cultural advice dialogues, often highlighting imperial *hubris*, are the result of the application of the *nomos*-theme to his principles of historical causation (Evans 1965:149). Since custom is an outward manifestation of collective values, *nomos* is a powerful determinant for groups' responses and, in Herodotus' narrative, *nomos* often compels people to act in certain ways despite imminent threats, feasible alternative actions, or an awareness of differing cultural norms. As Herodotus (3.38) states in his 'cultural thesis' of Book Three:

[Anyone] would inevitably, after careful consideration of their relative merits, choose those [beliefs] of his own country. Everyone without exception believes his own native customs, and the religion he was brought up on, to be the best ... One can see by this what custom (*nomos*) can do, and Pindar, in my opinion, was right when he called it 'king of all'.

Since much of Herodotus' work details aspects of war, conflict, imperial loss, and death, it is natural that he should present his *nomos*-theme through the prism of tragedy. Herodotus' tragic elements, along with his 'cultural thesis', have led scholars to assert that Herodotus presents *nomos* as an inescapable tyrant, despot, or slave-master, driving its followers to their often tragic ends.⁷⁴

But curiously, Herodotus also relates examples where leaders (who ultimately influence collective decisions) are not compelled by culture, but rather override cultural norms to achieve their own self-serving political ends. Herodotus uses this cultural determinism in two ways. Firstly, Herodotus creates an atmosphere of tragic pathos as culture-bound groups respond collectively (and sometimes selflessly) to various political threats. Also, by inverting his cultural determinism, Herodotus highlights the greed (*pleonexia*) or self-interest (*ophelia*) of some Greek tyrants and despots who, prompted by instability, conflict or individualism purposefully

⁷⁴ For a thorough discussion of cultural compulsion in Herodotus see Evans 1965 and Humphreys 1987.

transgress, manipulate, re-construct or override *nomos*. Such characters and their actions contribute to Herodotus' overall vision of political history, which is not so much tragic as unpredictable. This unpredictability may reflect Herodotus' response to his contemporary political culture and his audience-focused didactic moral: the immorality of cunning and self-serving individuals and imperialist overreaching. This chapter will explore how Herodotus uses tragic elements (pathos and irony) in his presentation of collective and individualistic responses to cultural compulsions.

5.2 Herodotus' fusion of *nomos* and tragedy

Humphreys (1987:211) regards Herodotus' cultural thesis as proof of Herodotus' rightful place as "the father of (cultural) anthropology" because he presents culture as an often tragic predictor of human behavior. While Herodotus' account includes descriptions of the culture of the Lydians, Persians, Babylonians, Massagetae, Egyptians, Ethiopians, Indians, Libyans, Thracians, and to a lesser extent the Spartans, his allusions to archaic pan-Hellenic customs are indirect or implicit (Cartledge 1993:80). Reconstructed precepts of popular Greek morality (honoring one's word, upholding guest-friendship, a male-dominated society, religious respect for Delphi, etc.) have been used to contextualize Herodotus' presentation of *to Hellēnikon* (Fisher 2002:206-208). In his examination of *nomos*, Herodotus seems to be influenced by the sophistic philosophers when he connects it with nature (*phusis*), as Raaflaub (2002:161) points out:

[The Sophists] were interested in political problems such as the nature and organization of power, constitutional theory, the contrast between *nomos* (convention, law) and *phusis* (nature), the mechanisms unleashed by *pleonexia* (greed, desire for more) or *ophelia* (self-interest, advantage), and various aspects of 'right based on might.'

In the opening phrases of his work, Herodotus (1.1) divides his literary attention to great and marvelous deeds dualistically between “the Greeks (on the one hand) and Barbarians (on the other)”. However, typical of Herodotus and his narrative, he cross-pollinates the sophisticatedly-based *nomos / phusis* dichotomy with elements of tragedy to present a compelling account of the political and ideological conflict between cross-cultural opponents: Greece and Persia.

There are robust debates as to which of Herodotus’ anecdotes are based on real tragic plays and which are simply tragic in tone or subject-matter. While views on the debate may be tendentious, there are certainly attestable tragic elements in Herodotus’ themes: retribution and revenge, a tragic choice, and tragic advisers or seers (Saïd 2002:120-121). It is against the precedent of a tragic seer that Herodotus mainly fashions his *nomos* theme. Just as a tragic seers *know*, but cannot change the course of events, leaders and communities in Herodotus’ narrative may *know* about different values and behavior, but cannot change their *nomos*—even if it is to their own personal detriment. In Herodotus’ account, *nomos* is a force which drives its adherents to their (often tragic) destiny.

5.3 *Nomos* compulsions and collective tragic choices

In a prelude to the battle of Plataea (479), the final repulse to drive the Persians from Greece, Herodotus (9:16) presents his evocative ‘Theban banquet’ anecdote.⁷⁵ As the Greek Thebans and the Persians are sharing a couch and a poured libation, a certain Persian begins to weep and, turning to Thersander, makes an astounding and tragic revelation:

You see these Persians at their dinner and the army we left in camp over there by the river? In a short time from now you will see but a few of all these men left alive.

⁷⁵ Interestingly, this anecdote is one of the few for which Herodotus not only references his source, Thersander of Ochomenus, but also inserts his authorial persona to confirm that he (the author) has heard this anecdote directly from Thersander’s mouth.

Thersander balks at this statement and points out that the proper audience for such a pronouncement ought to be his superior officer(s). Herodotus (9.16) relates the Persian's response:

My friend ... what God has ordained no man can by any means prevent. Many of us know that what I have said is true; yet, because we are constrained by necessity, we continue to take orders from our commander. No one would believe us, however true our warning. This is the worst pain a man can have: to know much and have no power to act.

Marincola (2003:677) notes that many of Herodotus' recurring literary themes, such as dramatic warnings, divine ordinance, and the contrast between freedom and subjection to the will of others, are contained in this speech, which is presented as a prelude to the preparations for Plataea. But beyond this vague and orientalist notion of slavery, what necessity compels and constrains the Persian?

Herodotus (9.41) may shed some light on the Persian's 'constraining necessity' in his explanation of Mardonius' strategy-speech to the Persian commanders just before Plataea, when the general calls for an offensive strategic position, appealing to Persian military tradition: "In his view, the right policy, as the Persian army was far stronger than the Greek, was to force an engagement at once ... in the good old Persian way". Herodotus couples the banqueting Persian's foreboding with Mardonius' articulation of Persian martial *nomos* (maintaining an offensive strategy) to produce a narrative which is not only full of pathos but also echoes other similarly tender and tragic *nomos*-based pre-battle vignettes (Evans 1965:151).

Upon the eve of the Persian offensive at the Thermopylae pass, Herodotus (7.219) recounts that, in spite of inauspicious augury-readings and several messages which confirm the Persian advance streaming into the Greek camp from deserters and scouts, the Spartan Leonidas

dismisses the other contingents knowing that by doing so, he is sealing his fate. Herodotus (7.220) provides a few reasons for Leonidas' behavior:

It is said that Leonidas himself dismissed [the allied Greek forces], to spare their lives, but thought it unbecoming for the Spartans under his command to desert the post which they had originally come to guard. I myself am inclined to think that he dismissed [the allied Greek forces] when he realized that they had no heart for the fight ...; at the same time honour forbade that he himself should go ...; for right at the outset of the war the Spartans had been told by the Delphic oracle that either the city must be laid waste by the foreigner or a Spartan king be killed.

Here, Herodotus' Leonidas, though undoubtedly noble and brave, is compelled to his sacrificial action by various social or cultural norms: his sense of honor for the Spartan contingent under his command, his desire for personal and national glory, and clinching it all, an unflinching religious belief that his act is the fulfillment of the Delphic prophecy. Leonidas faces a tragic choice in which his Spartan culture compels him to face either death in battle or perpetual shame in withdrawing his troops once they had taken the field.⁷⁶

Another example of *nomos*-based response in the face of disaster occurs in Herodotus' account of the sack of the Acropolis in Athens in 480. As the Persians advance to sack and burn the Acropolis, a handful of Athenians barricade themselves against the invaders with planks and timbers (Hdt.8.51). Herodotus (8:52) explains their actions:

It was partly their poverty which prevented them from seeking shelter in Salamis ... and partly their belief that they had discovered the real meaning of the Priestess' oracle – that 'the wooden wall would not be taken'. The wooden wall, in their minds, was not the ships but the barricade, and that would save them.

In the face of the imminent threat, proposals for truce, and even an additional prophecy destining Greece to be overrun by the Persians, the remaining Athenians, instead of fleeing, try desperately

⁷⁶ According to Herodotus (5.75) Spartan fellow-king Demaratus faced a political fracas when he withdrew Spartan troops from Cleomenes' attack on Attica and "this divergence gave rise to a new law in Sparta; previously both kings [going out with the army] was now made illegal".

to defend themselves (Hdt.8.52). When the Persians eventually take the Acropolis, the Athenians piteously leap to their deaths or are slaughtered in the sanctuary (Hdt.8.53).

Herodotus portrays the cultural underpinning of actions (however noble), which result in wartime destruction or death, within a tragic context. In this aspect, Herodotus may have been influenced by Aeschylus' *Persae* of 472, for Levi (2001:156) notes that the playwright uses an innovation in portraying Xerxes as the tragic hero, who ignores advice, makes tragic choices, and suffers retribution. Since, according to Levi (2001:156), in Greek tragedy "only losers can be heroes", Herodotus can portray cultural causation in war as doubly tragic: where participants on each side are not only compelled to fight out of culturally sanctioned necessity, but also, thinking their own culture to be the only proper one, cannot fathom the other side's cultural compulsions (Levi 2001:156). In spite of this tragic element to Herodotus' presentation of the Persian Wars, it does not seem that the author's general outlook is tragic. As Evans (1991:5) concludes, "Herodotus used tragic elements as literary devices designed to catch his audience; they did not inform his historical vision". In fact, in using his *nomos* theme, Herodotus often takes tragic elements and inverts them, presenting individuals and their communities who, when faced with 'tragic choice' scenarios, make bold choices which save them from subsequent destructive outcomes.

5.4 Circumventing *nomos*: self-serving leaders

In his narrative of the Persian invasions, Herodotus presents leaders and their communities who overcome cultural compulsions and escape tragic defeat or destruction. According to Saïd (2002:121), this ability to successfully cope with difficult choices is precisely what prevents Herodotus' work from being entirely tragic. As Herodotus (1.157) relates the transfer of imperial domination from the Lydians to the Persians he describes how the Lydian treasurer, Pactyes, after his failed attempt at an uprising, flees Sardis and escapes to Cyme,

where the inhabitants are torn between their cultural compulsion to protect a suppliant, and fear of the Persian reprisals for harboring a wanted refugee. Even after they seek oracular advice at the Delphic oracle, who advises them to give up their refugee, the inhabitants of Cyme decide on a compromise – they send Pactyes on to Mytilene, where he is eventually picked up by the Persians (Hdt.1.160). The boldness and cunning of the people of Cyme enables them not only to disregard the oracle’s suggestion, but also to override their cultural compulsion to protect their suppliant physically. Their diplomatic choice results in their escape from Persian retribution.

In his account of the Persian campaign of 514 against the Scythians, Herodotus (4.89; 97-98) relates how Darius orders his Ionian contingent to guard the ford at the Danube for sixty days, after which time they are free to abandon their post and return home. Darius crosses to fight the Scythians on the other side of the river. Eventually the Scythians meet the Ionian contingent and, according to Herodotus (4.133), naming themselves freedom-bringers to Ionia, they confirm that the Ionians did, indeed, promise Darius to maintain the sixty-day guard and then return home. When it becomes clear that the Persian forces will retreat via the Ionian-guarded bridge, and with the sixty days having lapsed, the Scythians once again appeal to the Ionians’ sense of freedom:

Hitherto you stayed at your post because you feared the consequences of desertion; but now things have changed – break up the bridge and be off. Good luck go with you, and thank the gods and the Scythians for your freedom. As for your former master, we will settle with him in such a way that his present campaign will prove his last (Hdt.4.136).

Herodotus (4.137-139) inserts a short dialogue between the tyrants Histiaeus and Miltiades (an Athenian who rules the Chersonese on the Hellespont) as they confer. Herodotus (4.137) uses the cunning Histiaeus to point out to the rest of the leaders that “each one of them owed his position as tyrant to Darius, and in the event of Darius’ fall, he himself would be unable to maintain his power at Miletus, nor would any of the rest of them”.

The Ionian contingent eventually decides to maintain their post, but pretends to break up parts of the bridge for the Scythians' sake, telling them: "we are demolishing the bridge and we shall spare no effort to recover our freedom". According to Herodotus (4.142) the Persians are assisted in their retreat and the Scythians have a low opinion of the Ionians:

In consequence of all this: to consider them as a free people, they are, they say, the most despicable and craven in the world; and, considered as slaves, the most subservient to their masters and the least likely to run away.

In spite of the Ionians' duplicity toward the Scythians, nevertheless they escape open hostility from both sides, survive the Scythian Campaign with little loss, and revolt against their Persian overlords at a later time. Herodotus (5.97) is very critical of the Ionians behavior and the subsequent Ionian revolt, which he gloomily describes as "the beginning of evils" for both Greeks and the barbarians.⁷⁷

In addition to leaders who influence collective decisions, Herodotus also presents leaders who, in the face of the instability of war and the need for self-preservation, override cultural protocols and may escape tragic results. Herodotus' narrative presents many leaders (both Persian and allied Greek) who pay lip-service to a cultural ethic, but forgo cultural norms to achieve their personal or military ends as they cross from Greek *nomos* to non-Greek behavior and political allegiance: the Spartan exile, Demaratus, becomes Xerxes' *aide-de-camp* (Hdt.7.101); the warrior Queen Artemisia, while acknowledging female weakness, fights bravely on the day of battle (Hdt.8.68); and the wily Themistocles not only betrays the Greek naval position to the Persians in the hopes of hastening Salamis, but also subsequently communicates with the Persians in anticipation of his eventual expulsion from Athens (Hdt.8.110). The question could be asked: if *nomos* is a determining factor in Herodotus' account, why do so many of his main characters (key Greek leaders) override their culture and do non-Greek things?

⁷⁷ See Marincola 2003:656 for Herodotus' opinions on the Ionians and the Ionian revolt.

5.5 Responses to Herodotus' *nomos* inconsistencies

How ought Herodotus' inconsistencies toward cultural compulsions to be addressed? Cartledge (1993:98) claims that Herodotus' portrayal of Persian inflexibility is a bit of anti-Persian propaganda: the Persians are stolid and eternally unable to overcome their imperialist superiority because they cannot help but being slavish, but their Greek client-tyrants, having a notion of 'freedom', can act outside of cultural constraint. However, Saïd (2002:124) presents a more compelling argument: that Herodotus is not so much tragic in his outlook as ironic, developing from "a tacit dialogue with the audience".

The dramatic irony of Herodotus serves him in two ways. First, since his audience is already aware of the outcomes of major battles, his characters' utter ignorance is played in contrast to the audiences' knowledge, thus heightening the dramatic tension (Saïd 2002:124). Secondly, such irony highlights Herodotus' anti-despotic didactic message, for the very same Greek leaders who are so fearless and appealing in the Persian Wars (Themistocles, Pausanias, and even to some extent, Demaratus) are leaders who, through their later duplicitous relations with Persia, aggravate Spartan-Athenian relations during the Peloponnesian conflict. Citing Fornara and Raaflaub, Saïd (2002:124) points out that

If the *Histories* are addressed to contemporaries well aware of the fall of Themistocles, the lamentable end of Pausanias, and the 'tyranny' of Athenian imperialism ... then one can see as 'magnificently ironic and tragic' not only [Herodotus'] portrayal of Pausanias in Book Nine, but also his picture of Themistocles and his praise of Athens' decisive contribution to saving the freedom of Greece.

However, Herodotus' conflicting presentation of *nomos* compulsion can be viewed in another context – that of wartime culture.

Although Herodotus presented *nomos* in a way akin to the modern traditionalist view of culture, he did so within a context of unstable political interactions, conflict, and war. One may say that Herodotus is far-sighted in his observation of wartime culture because he ascribes to it a fluidity which has only recently been asserted. Lately, revisionist anthropologists and historians have challenged the traditional view of culture as a static entity, stressing its fluidity and adaptability, especially in response to external forces. In his examination of culture and strategy, Porter (2009:15) has noted that modern strategic cultural studies perceive “a dynamic and unstable interplay between structure and practice, ideas and behavior” and he therefore defines culture as “an ambiguous repertoire of competing ideas that can be selected, instrumentalised, and manipulated ... and within which strategy is made”. Perhaps the inconsistency surrounding Herodotus’ presentation of *nomos*-compulsions is the result of his keen insight into the wartime tendency for the general populace to cling to the cultural status-quo, while leaders manipulate cultural norms to achieve political success.

5.6 Conclusion

Far from Aeschylus’s reveling in Greek superiority and the inevitable tragedy of the Persian invasions, Herodotus is confident of neither destruction nor success for his characters and his didactic narrative is more cynical than tragic. Instability is certain, and is not necessarily a harbinger of despair, but rather an opportunity for leaders to choose either to serve the collective or to obtain ill-gotten wealth and achieve political superiority. This leads Saïd (2002:145) to conclude: “[in Herodotus’ work, Aeschylus’] tragedy of Xerxes has been replaced by the tragedy of Persian imperialism, which may be read as a warning addressed by Herodotus to the contemporary representatives of imperialism, that is to say, the Athenians”. Herodotus seems to acknowledge that with the rise of Persian hegemony, the inter-*poleis* mechanisms for Hellenic stability (i.e. exile, guest-friendship, colonization, Delphic consultations), are

vulnerable to manipulation and disregard by selfish Greek despots in their survivalist responses to the Persian threat. Leaders who are in a position to save Greece often overcome *nomos* compulsions (and political allegiances) to achieve their own ends.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1 Thematic contexts and thesis conclusion

Herodotus concludes his final chapter with a short advice dialogue between Cyrus and the Persians. He relates (Hdt.9.122) that after having newly acquired Median imperial territories, the Persians, wishing to resettle in new lands, argue as follows:

It is the natural thing for a sovereign people to do; and when will there be a better opportunity than now, when we are masters of many nations and all Asia?

But Herodotus (9.122) transforms his erstwhile imperial potentate into a wise adviser who warns them, “Soft countries breed soft men. It is not the property of any one soil to produce fine fruits and good soldiers too”.

Herodotus’ final anecdote encompasses his themes of imperial *hubris*, cultural determinism and advice, which are all literary contexts of his examples of information-gathering and cross-cultural intelligence. By qualifying the terminology but extracting the principles of modern-day military intelligence and by examining the historical background of Herodotus’ *Histories* (the competitive Greek *poleis*, pan-Hellenic oracular centers, military culture and the Milesian intellectual revolution), one can use Herodotus’ anecdotes of commissioned inquiries, information-gathering, tradecraft, and cross-cultural advice to infer real goals and problems associated with ancient Greek intelligence practices.

6.2 Herodotus’ place in intelligence history

Although it is only later Greek writers such as Xenophon or Aeneas Tacticus who provide a thorough treatment of ancient Greek information-gathering and intelligence practices, nevertheless Herodotus’ work, while not intended as a purely political treatise, elucidates some

crucial aspects of these practices in the fifth century. His work reflects the role of oracular consultation as an archaic pan-Hellenic institution for the collection and transmission of political information. It also reflects the role of oral traditions involving Greek leaders (Cleomenes, Themistocles, Histiaeus, Demaratus, etc.) who practice cunning tradecraft, override cultural protocols, and tread a dangerous line between advancing their own political interests and maneuvering within a context of subservience to Persia.

In addition, Herodotus employs a *nomos*-themed didactic against hubristic imperialist expansion as his literary focal point. He therefore, applies his *nomos* and *hubris* themes to political causation and articulates the crucial role that relevant cultural information plays in intelligence and decision-making (in a way that foreshadows modern strategic culture theory and goals of cultural intelligence).⁷⁸ Herodotus' expression of culturally-determined behavior as relevant to statecraft is immensely significant to the fields of intelligence history and operational culture theory as they contextualize and examine twenty-first century trends of rapid globalized communication, urban warfare, and low-level conflicts between culturally differing nations. When Professor Paula Holmes-Eber (2010), an anthropologist lecturing at the Marine Corps University in Quantico Virginia, explains, "The goal is mission effectiveness...If [troops] fail because they don't understand the culture, then they didn't [accomplish] what we asked", she is expressing a notion of cultural determinism, which is being integrated into military training — a notion articulated by Herodotus as he applied the *nomos* theme to causation.

6.3 Herodotus' lessons for intelligence

It is tempting but inaccurate to view ancient intelligence practices through the lens of modern centralized intelligence agencies, with their modern technologies, capturing, sifting, and

⁷⁸ See 1.2.1 'Culture wars' and cultural intelligence

synthesizing large amounts of open-source and covert information and communicating with military commanders in real time.⁷⁹ However, Herodotus' work can provide some useful parables for modern-day intelligence practices, including U.S.-led cross-cultural anti-terrorism and counterinsurgency measures.

In his treatment of Cambyses' Egyptian campaign and his subsequent madness, Herodotus stresses the importance of cross-cultural intelligence for military occupation and control.⁸⁰ In turning a critical eye to the postmodern trend of contextualizing war and conflict within culture, Porter (2009:58) points out that "nationalism as a response to unwelcome foreign occupation is not distinctive to [Middle Eastern sentiment]. It is misleading to particularize it as an Arab quirk". While this may be true, affronting local cultural sensibilities can often be the catalyst and the fodder for prolonged grass-roots insurgence.

Another lesson which Herodotus can provide is that while cultural determinism may apply to the general population of a particular area, leaders do not always follow cultural protocols, and in the face of political instability and conflict, they often override or refashion cultural norms to meet their own personal or political ends. This tendency toward cultural fluidity is worth noting as the United States tries to oust the Taliban from regions in Afghanistan and Pakistan by conducting its own operations and networking with tribal and military leaders of both nations.

6.4 "Herodotus Now"?

Herodotean studies have recently experienced a kind of renaissance as they relate to modern political trends and popular culture. The September 11, 2001 attacks and the trend

⁷⁹ See **2.1.2 Military intelligence.**

⁸⁰ See **4.2.2.2 Cambyses in Egypt: imperial occupation and cultural transgressions.**

toward Western counter-terrorism efforts in the former ancient imperial heartlands of Babylon, Assyria, and Persia (and beyond) have facilitated classicists, ancient historians, and cultural anthropologists to re-examine and contextualize Herodotus' account of the Achaemenid Persian invasions and its 'East-West' theme. Fresh discussions surrounding Herodotus' anti-Persian bias, his account of the battles of Marathon, Thermopylae, Salamis, and Plataea, and his imperialistic *hubris* themes have produced academic conferences entitled "Herodotus Now", an action-war film, *300*, based on a graphic novel depicting the Spartan stand at Thermopylae, articles in academic journals with such titles as "Herodotus on the American Empire" in *Classical World*, as well as foreign policy blogs with titles such as "The Classics Rock: eleven reasons Plutarch and Herodotus still matter", which was featured in *foreignpolicy.com*.⁸¹

However almost ten years after the 9-11 attacks, the U.S. war effort is languishing: Osama bin-Laden remains at large, and images of indignities committed by U.S. soldiers at Abu Ghraib prison have undermined America's claim to the moral high ground in nation-building efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan. In addition a crippling global recession has made the war effort that much more economically cumbersome. Three years after *300*, another movie was released in 2010, which may reveal American perspectives having changed since the 'War on Terror' began in 2001. Unlike *300*, with its Euro-centric portrayal of Spartan (read American) valor against evil barbarians (read Middle Eastern-like terrorists) and Xerxes' lascivious imperial terror, *Avatar's* plot involves a former U.S. soldier who is sent on a fact-finding mission to an utterly alien and fantastical culture. As he investigates and earns the trust of the inhabitants, he discovers the greed and imperialist pride of his own commissioning nation, the United States. Could this be a modern twist on the inquiries of a *philobarbaros* (barbarian-lover)?⁸²

⁸¹ See Harrison 2009:383; Grygiel 2010.

⁸² See Flory1987:21 cf. Plut.*Moralia* XI.60.

Herodotus' work is not anti-Persian as much as it is anti-imperialist and there is a strong sense that his didactic was aimed at an exclusively Greek (Athenian-influenced) audience.⁸³ Nevertheless Herodotus demonstrates his keen sense of political causation in the cultural underpinnings of conflict: cultural norms, pretexts, and propaganda.⁸⁴ In spite of his moral censure and his stress on the instability of political fortunes, Herodotus' tone is not tragic but rather engaged and critical. One wonders whether — if U.S. intelligence services could likewise turn a critical eye toward potentially underlying and orientalist-influenced misperceptions of insurgents, and the inhabitants of Central Asia and the Middle East — a more satisfying strategic solution may be envisaged.

⁸³ See **5.6 Conclusion.**

⁸⁴ See **1.2.3 Herodotus in a new light.**

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