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HELOTS AT THERMOPYLAE: THE GREEK DEAD AT HERODOTUS 8.25*

ABSTRACT

This article argues for a more diverse approach to the appearance of enslaved persons in Greek historiography through an analysis of the Persian navy's battlefield tour of Thermopylae in Book 8 of Herodotus' Histories. *Previous approaches to slavery in Greek historiography have rightly commented on the cultural awkwardness to Greek authors of slaves' extensive involvement in ancient warfare. However, this is only one aspect of how slaves featured in historiographical narrative. Herodotus continually problematizes the methods of enquiry and many characters within his work engage in enquiry-like activities. Book 8 itself is no different, with much of the action involving errors in human perception. The appearance of helots amongst the heroic dead at Thermopylae is intended both as a narrative reveal, since their presence has not previously been known to the reader, and as a comment on the contestation of Greek identity, which is framed at the start of Book 8 with a series of direct addresses to different groups of Greeks, all of whom take a different approach to their participation in the Persian Wars. Hence what appears to be an incidental detail can in fact be understood in the wider, thematic context of the* Histories *and especially that of the books concerning the Persian Wars.*

Keywords: helots; Herodotus; slavery; warfare; war dead; Thermopylae; Sparta

In Book 8 of the *Histories*, after winning his pyrrhic victory at the pass of Thermopylae, Xerxes attempts to conceal the devasting scale of his own losses, whist exaggerating those of the Greeks.[1] The passage raises a number of interpretative problems. It is not clear why the Persian navy do not recognize the difference between the Spartans, Thespians and helots, nor why Herodotus chose to distinguish the dead at Thermopylae in this way.[2] In common with most Greek authors, Herodotus shows little if any interest in the everyday pattern of slaveholding, as indicated by the total absence of references to helots as agricultural labourers (their main function).[3] We are therefore

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All references to Herodotus' *Histories* follow the most recent OCT: N.G. Wilson (ed.), *Herodoti Historiae*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 2015).

[1] For a previous discussion of this episode see D. Branscome, *Textual Rivals: Self-Presentation in Herodotus' Histories* (Ann Arbor, 2013), 192–224. For a thorough recent account of some further complexities of Book 8 see G. Donelli, 'Truth, fiction and authority in Herodotus' Book 8', in I. Matijašić (ed.), *Herodotus – The Most Homeric Historian?* (London / Edmonton / Tallahassee, 2022), 211–40.

[2] Branscome (n. 1), 198–200. Several scholars have simply rejected the historicity of this episode as a way around this interpretative issue, see R.W. Macan, *Herodotus: The Seventh, Eighth, & Ninth Books* (London, 1908^2), 288; W.W. How and J. Wells, *A Commentary on Herodotus* (Oxford, 1923^2), 2.241; D. Lateiner, 'Deceptions and delusions in Herodotus', *ClAnt* 9 (1990), 230–46, at 233.

[3] For the historical reality of helotage see J. Ducat, *Les Hilotes* (Athens and Paris, 1990), 45–64, 105–28; S. Hodkinson, 'Spartiates, helots, and the direction of the agrarian economy: towards an

justified in supposing that there is some larger purpose at work in the inclusion of the helots in this passage.[4] In this article, I explore the interpretative difficulties of this passage. The appearance of the helots is of acute narrative significance. Their presence amongst the dead at Thermopylae is revealed at the last possible moment and is situated within a complex narrative which problematizes both the nature of Herodotean enquiry and Greek identity. This curious textual gesture is not simply the incidental inclusion of an interesting historical detail, but a deliberate surprise which must be read through the problematization of Greek identity throughout the Persian War books.

I. XERXES' TRICK, ENQUIRY AND PERCEPTION

Xerxes is one of the flawed royal enquirers of the *Histories* whose mistakes are in part a result of his tyrannical failures. Book 8 also deliberately plays with visual criteria and the elements of Herodotean enquiry. Xerxes' trick and the resultant failures of perception directly engage with both themes. The standard book division of the *Histories* is not of course Herodotus', though it did originate from the Alexandrian scholarly milieu.[5] The narrative structure of the early portion of Book 8 is complex; it is a continuation of that of Book 7 and is characterized by alternating perceptions and actions.[6] Asheri and Corcella divide the book into three main *logoi*, the Artemisium *logos* (8.1–23), the Salamis *logos* (8.40–96), and the *logos* of the Persian retreat (8.97–135).[7] Xerxes' deception (8.24–5) comes in between the narrative of the second Artemisium (8.15–22) and the digression on Phocian–Thessalian relations a few years before the Persian Wars (8.27–33). These early portions of the book constantly shift between the Persian and Greek perceptions, with the narrative being consistently interrupted and refocused, often displaying Greek and Persian responses to a situation or decision. After outlining the Greek reaction to Thermopylae (8.19–22), Herodotus describes Xerxes' preparations; his aim is to minimize the size of his own casualties, whilst emphasizing those of the Greek force, burying the majority of his troops under hastily

understanding of helotage in comparative perspective', in E. Dal Lago and C. Katsari (edd.), *Slave Systems: Ancient and Modern* (Cambridge, 2008), 285–320; D.M. Lewis, *Greek Slave Systems in their Eastern Mediterranean Context, c. 800–146 BC* (Oxford, 2018), 142–3.

[4] The significance of slaves and slavery in Greek literature remains underexplored; for some recent discussions, see S. Panayotakis and M. Paschalis (edd.), *Slaves and Masters in the Ancient Novel* (Groningen, 2019); B. Akrigg and R. Tordoff (edd.), *Slaves and Slavery in Ancient Greek Comic Drama* (Cambridge, 2013); K.L. Wrenhaven, *Reconstructing the Slave: The Image of the Slave in Ancient Greece* (London, 2012).

[5] Diodorus refers to a nine-book division (11.37.6), indicating that this was at least in place by the first century B.C. The sole fragment of Aristarchus' third-century B.C. commentary on the *Histories*, preserved on a third-century A.D. papyrus (*P.Amh.* II 12, col. 2, lines 17–20), is described as Ἀριστάρχου / Ἡροδότου / α̅ / ὑπόμνημα, 'Aristarchus' reflections on the first (book) of Herodotus'; see also Luc. *Hist. conscr.* 42; *Her.* 1. *P.Amh.* II 12 seems to confirm that the division was Alexandrian in origin. S. Cagnazzi, 'Tavola dei 28 *logoi* di Erodoto', *Hermes* 103 (1975), 385–423 suggested an alternative division into 28 *logoi*, each book (except Book 5) containing three *logoi*. E. Irwin and E. Greenwood, 'Introduction: Reading Herodotus, reading Book 5', in E. Irwin and E. Greenwood (edd.), *Reading Herodotus: A Study of the* Logoi *in Book 5 of Herodotus' Histories* (Cambridge, 2007), 1–40, at 14 n. 31 point out that the start of each book is still taken as the start of a new *logos* by Cagnazzi.

[6] D. Asheri, A. Corcella and A. Fraschetti, *Erodoto: La Storie, Libro VIII: La vittoria di Temistocle* (Milan, 2003), ix–x.

[7] Asheri and Corcella (n. 6), ix; this division largely follows that of Cagnazzi (n. 5), 403–4.

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dug graves and heaping up the Greek corpses into a large pile (8.24.1–2). After the preparations are complete, Xerxes sends a herald over to Histiaea and invites the navy over to tour the battlefield (8.25.1–2):

ταῦτα ἐπαγγειλαμένου, {μετὰ ταῦτα} οὐδὲν ἐγίνετο πλοίων σπανιώτερον· οὕτω πολλοὶ ἤθελον θεήσασθαι. διαπεραιωθέντες δὲ ἐθηεῦντο διεξιόντες τοὺς νεκρούς· πάντες δὲ ἠπιστέατο τοὺς κειμένους εἶναι πάντας Λακεδαιμονίους καὶ Θεσπιέας, ὁρέοντες καὶ τοὺς εἵλωτας. οὐ μὲν οὐδ' ἐλάνθανε τοὺς διαβεβηκότας Ξέρξης ταῦτα πρήξας περὶ τοὺς νεκροὺς τοὺς ἑωυτοῦ· καὶ γὰρ δὴ καὶ γελοῖον ἦν· τῶν μὲν χίλιοι ἐφαίνοντο νεκροὶ κείμενοι, οἱ δὲ πάντες ἐκέατο ἀλέες συγκεκομισμένοι ἐς τὠυτὸ χωρίον, τέσσερες χιλιάδες.

When [Xerxes] had commanded these things, {after this} nothing was scarcer than boats, since so many people wanted to view the battlefield. Once they had been ferried over, they gazed at the corpses, looking at them in detail; all [that is, the sailors] of them thought that the men lying there were all Spartans and Thespians, (but) they were also looking at their helots. Xerxes did not deceive those men going across (the field) in doing these things concerning the corpses of his own men, for it was really quite ridiculous. A thousand of the Persian corpses were plainly lying there, whilst the Greeks were all heaped up in a mass in the same place, numbering four thousand.

Despite his many preparations, Xerxes is not successful in his intended deception but does cause an unintended one.[8] Whilst he fails to conceal the scale of his own losses, he is successful in exaggerating the size of the hoplite force, when the sailors fail to recognise light-armed helots amongst the hoplites from Sparta and Thespiae. It is uncertain how many helots are being referred to here.[9] The list of allies (7.202), listing only hoplites, gives us a figure of 4,200 men, the majority (3,100) of which were drawn from the Peloponnese with the remainder from Boeotia (1,100).[10] We know that of these allies only the 700 Thespians and 400 Thebans stayed to fight with the Spartiates (7.222), the Thebans later defecting to the Persians (7.233). The figure of 4,000 reported in the passage cited above is also repeated earlier in one of the Thermopylaean epigrams (7.228.1). Hunt has therefore suggested that we could assume that the ratio of Spartiates to helots at Plataea (1:7) should be applied to Thermopylae, meaning we should add 2,100 helots to the 300 Spartiates, 700 Thespians, and 1,000 additional Lacedaemonian *perioikoi* mentioned by Diodorus Siculus (11.4.4–5).[11] As van Wees has noted, Isocrates appears to demonstrate that a tradition about there being 1,000 fighters at Thermopylae was already circulating in the early fourth century B.C. (*Paneg.* 90; *Arch.* 99–100) and perhaps represents a more expansive alternative tradition.[12]

[8] Macan (n. 2), 389–90.

[9] For a detailed discussion of the number of helots at Plataea, see P. Hunt, 'Helots at the Battle of Plataea', *Historia* 46 (1997), 129–44.

[10] Hdt. 7.202 ἦσαν δὲ οἵδε Ἑλλήνων οἱ ὑπομένοντες τὸν Πέρσην ἐν τούτῳ τῷ χώρῳ· Σπαρτιητέων τε τριηκόσιοι ὁπλῖται καὶ Τεγεητέων καὶ Μαντινέων χίλιοι, ἡμίσεες ἑκατέρων, ἐξ Ὀρχομενοῦ τε τῆς Ἀρκαδίης εἴκοσι καὶ ἑκατὸν καὶ ἐκ τῆς λοιπῆς Ἀρκαδίης χίλιοι· τοσοῦτοι μὲν Ἀρκάδων, ἀπὸ δὲ Κορίνθου τετρακόσιοι καὶ ἀπὸ Φλειοῦντος διηκόσιοι καὶ Μυκηναίων ὀγδώκοντα. οὗτοι μὲν ἀπὸ Πελοποννήσου παρῆσαν, ἀπὸ δὲ Βοιωτῶν Θεσπιέων τε ἑπτακόσιοι καὶ Θηβαίων τετρακόσιοι, 'These were the Greeks who fought against the Persian at this place: 300 Spartiate hoplites, 1,000 Tegeans and Mantineans, half from each place, 120 from Orchomenus in Arcadia and 1,000 from the rest of Arcadia, and as well as these Arcadians, 300 from Corinth, 200 from Phleius, and 80 from Mycenae. These were the Peloponnesians who were present, but from Boeotia there were 700 Thespians and 400 Thebans.'

[11] P. Hunt, *Slaves, Warfare and Ideology in the Greek Historians* (Cambridge, 1998), 31–2.

[12] H. van Wees, 'Thermopylae: Herodotus versus the legend', in L.W. van Gils, I.J.F. de Jong and C.H.M. Kroon (edd.), *Textual Strategies in Ancient War Narrative: Thermopylae, Cannae and Beyond*

We should therefore be sceptical of the figures which appear in Herodotus. The language of the first epitaph, as a number of scholars have noted, does not necessarily mean that all those referred to died at Thermopylae (7.228.1), μυριάσιν ποτὲ τῇδε τριηκοσίαις ἐμάχοντο ἐκ Πελοποννάσου χιλιάδες τέτορες, 'Here four thousand from the Peloponnese once fought against three million'.[13] How and Wells suggested that this could be read as applying to the 3,100 of the original allies who fought at Thermopylae before their dismissal by Leonidas.[14] It is this figure which the narrator is trying to rationalize when he repeats it once again at 8.25.2. We know from references to helots elsewhere in the Thermopylae *logos* that each Spartiate had at least one helot attendant (7.299.2, discussed further below). If we accept that we do not need to be bound by the figure of 4,000, then we might take 300 as the most conservative possible estimate of the number of helots at Thermopylae, which would give a minimum figure of 1,300 Greek dead. This evidently does not match the figure given at 8.25, but this may not matter. Numbers represent an important source of epistemological authority in the *Histories*,[15] and the 4,000-figure may be a product of Herodotus' rationalization of the Thermopylaean epigrams.[16] Moreover, the 19,000-figure attributed to the Persian dead at Thermopylae has not received the same level of scrutiny, the assumption being that this figure has been exaggerated.[17] We can say for now that within Herodotus' narrative the number of slaves on the battlefield was great enough for their lack of recognition to be significant.[18]

This passage, as Christ argues, highlights aspects of Herodotean enquiry in characters within the *Histories*.[19] At the beginning of Book 8, Herodotus adds support to his own account of Thermopylae by presenting Xerxes as a flawed enquirer, in part as a result of his royal hubris. There is a mismatch between Xerxes' intentions and the outcome of his scheme, a theme which is also present in Croesus' oracular experiment (1.46–9) and Xerxes' test concerning his vision about his motivation to invade Greece (7.12–18). In the present passage, however, Xerxes' interest lies not in testing the veracity of information but rather in simply manipulating its reception. His identity as an enquirer is also significantly modified by his frequent recourse to laughter which

(Leiden and Boston, 2018), 19–53, at 29–30. He further suggests at 31–2 that Herodotus' counting was based on his reading of the Spartan monument to the Thermopylaean dead in Sparta itself, a monument which only included the names of the 300 Spartiates (7.224.1; see also 3.55.2 for Herodotus' visit to Sparta).

[13] A.M. Bowie, *Herodotus: Histories Book VIII* (Cambridge, 2007), 117.

[14] How and Wells (n. 2), 2.230, to which they also add the 1,000 *perioikoi* mentioned by Diodorus. See also the discussion of J. Haywood, 'The use(s) of inscriptions in Herodotus' *Histories*', *AJPh* 142 (2021), 217–57, at 245–7, who notes how the epigrams are incorporated into Herodotus' narrative.

[15] P. Keyser, '(Un)natural accounts in Herodotos and Thucydides', *Mouseion* 6 (2006), 323–51; C. Rubincam, 'The "rationality" of Herodotus and Thucydides as evidenced by their respective use of numbers', in D. Lateiner and E. Foster (edd.), *Thucydides and Herodotus: Connections, Divergences, and Later Reception* (Oxford, 2012), 97–122.

[16] Cf. van Wees (n. 12), 30–1.

[17] Commentators on Herodotus have generally been both sceptical and cautious of numbers in the *Histories*, see Bowie (n. 13), 116; M.A. Flower and J. Marincola (edd.), *Herodotus: Histories Book IX* (Cambridge, 2002), 22, 163–4.

[18] Hunt (n. 11), 32.

[19] M.R. Christ, 'Herodotean kings and historical inquiry', *ClAnt* 13 (1994), 167–204, at 193–7. On meta-enquiry more generally, see N. Luraghi, 'Meta-*historiē*: method and genre in the *Histories*', in C. Dewald and J. Marincola (edd.), *The Cambridge Companion to Herodotus* (Cambridge, 2006), 76–91.

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prefigures his tyrannical failure.[20] In his conversations with Demaratus, Xerxes' response to the very idea that one Spartiate was worth ten of his own men is to laugh, such as at 7.103.1 ταῦτα ἀκούσας Ξέρξης γελάσας ἔφη, 'Upon hearing these things Xerxes laughed, saying…' and 7.105.1 ὁ μὲν δὴ ταῦτα ἀμείψατο, Ξέρξης δὲ ἐς γελωτά τε ἔτρεψε, '[Demaratus] answered in this way, and Xerxes turned away laughing'. Later in Book 7, crucially after the Greeks have resisted just as Demaratus said they would, Herodotus writes (7.209.1) ἀλλ' αὐτῷ γελοῖα γὰρ ἐφαίνοντο ποιέειν, 'But these things appeared ridiculous to him'. Xerxes rejects Demaratus' information on Sparta despite the fact that these are things the deposed king had personally observed and that he himself says he is trying to be truthful about (7.209.2) ἐμοὶ γὰρ τὴν ἀληθείην ἀσκέειν ἀντία σεῦ, ὦ βασιλεῦ, ἀγὼν μέγιστός ἐστι, 'For my greatest aim is to furnish you with the truth, my King'. It is a response to another Spartan, an anonymous herald, which prompts Xerxes' last laugh; acting upon a Delphic oracle the Spartans send a herald to ask Xerxes for compensation for the killing of Leonidas (8.114.2):

"ὦ βασιλεῦ Μήδων, Λακεδαιμόνιοί τέ σε καὶ Ἡρακλεῖδαι οἱ ἀπὸ Σπάρτης αἰτέουσι φόνου δίκας, ὅτί σφεων τὸν βασιλέα ἀπέκτεινας ῥυόμενον τὴν Ἑλλάδα". ὁ δὲ γελάσας τε καὶ κατασχὼν πολλὸν χρόνον, ὡς οἱ ἐτύγχανε παρεστεὼς Μαρδόνιος, δεικνὺς ἐς τοῦτον εἶπε· "τοιγάρ σφι Μαρδόνιος ὅδε δίκας δώσει τοιαύτας οἵας ἐκείνοισι πρέπει".

'King of the Medes, both the Spartans and the Heraclidae from Sparta [that is, the Kings] request justice for the murder of their king whom you killed whilst he was rescuing Greece'. Xerxes laughed at this and after a long time pointed at Mardonius, who happened to be standing at his side, and said, 'Well, in that case, Mardonius here will give those men the sort of justice they deserve!'

Xerxes is dismissive of both the gods, in the form of a divine instruction from Delphi, and of the Spartans, whom he is confident will be defeated by Mardonius.[21] Therefore, laughter, as Lateiner argued, is not intended to be funny but 'is a symptom (though not a cause) of impending catastrophe'.[22] Herodotus' comment on the trick, καὶ γὰρ δὴ καὶ γελοῖον ἦν, 'for it was really quite ridiculous', serves both to bolster his own account of the Thermopylaean *logos* whilst also emphasizing that the attempted deception is a product of Xerxes' tyrannical arrogance.

This trick must also be seen in the context of the sustained problematization of visual and oral information. Throughout the *Histories*, Herodotus includes several explicit statements of method (1.1.1; 2.99.1; 7.152.3) or expresses scepticism about stories included in his work (for example at 5.32). The methodological statement from the Egyptian *logos* has been taken as programmatic (2.99.1):

μέχρι μὲν τούτου ὄψις τε ἐμὴ καὶ γνώμη καὶ ἱστορίη ταῦτα λέγουσά ἐστι, τὸ δὲ ἀπὸ τοῦδε Αἰγυπτίους ἔρχομαι λόγους ἐρέων κατὰ τὰ ἤκουον· προσέσται δέ τι αὐτοῖσι καὶ τῆς ἐμῆς ὄψιος.

Up to this point my own observation, judgement and enquiry have formed the basis of what I have said, but from this point onwards I shall continue to relate stories of the Egyptians on the basis of what I have heard, to which will be added some of my personal observation.

[20] D. Lateiner, 'No laughing matter: A literary tactic in Herodotus', *TAPhA* 107 (1977), 173–82, at 178–80.

[21] Cf. Lateiner (n. 20), 179–80; Bowie (n. 13), 207–8; the latter suggests that this is a κληδών, 'a chance utterance that turns out to be prophetic in a way not intended by the speaker'.

[22] Lateiner (n. 20), 180.

The implication of this passage is that observation, judgement and enquiry form the most epistemologically sound aspects of Herodotean method, whilst oral testimony is of a less reliable character (thus necessitating the qualification). Elsewhere either characters (1.8.2) or Herodotus himself comment on the unreliability of what one hears (2.123.1; 7.152.3).[23] In addition to the flaws fundamental to the components of enquiry, the perceptival as opposed to cognitive criteria listed above are continuously problematized and manipulated. Book 8, as Donelli argues, is particularly characterised by a focus on the flaws of human perception and the implications for historical truth.[24] Characters frequently misinterpret what they see (8.79–80), refuse to believe eyewitness testimony (8.79–82), are deceived by tricks or ruses (8.27–8) or engage in clandestine meetings which are deliberately concealed from other characters (8.4–5, 57–8, 75, 79–80, 110).[25] The preoccupation with the visual is not a purely Herodotean one. Especially through the technique of *enargeia*, Greek historiography tended to problematize and emphasize the use of visual criteria through inserting spectators into their narratives.[26]

At 8.25, therefore, Herodotus deliberately emphasizes the language of perception. There is a contrast between both close looking (θεήσασθαι, ἐθηεῦντο) and more incidental seeing (ὀρέοντες), which is further contrasted with the perceptions of the sailors (ἠπιστέατο). Deliberate manipulation is also pointed towards when we learn that Xerxes 'did not deceive' (οὐ … ἐλάνθανε) his men, which we have seen is only half true. The use of θεάομαι and ὁρέω relate to the visual senses, whilst λανθάνω and ἐπίσταμαι relate to the judgement and interpretation of sensory information. In narratological terms, this is a *mise en abyme*, whereby the internal audience, here our naval spectators, form part of larger scene only perceived by the external audience.[27] The theme and language of perception is thus pronounced throughout Book 8 and the use of language here is easily paralleled. The narratological structure of the *mise en abyme* is also replicated, both introducing viewers into the narrative whilst simultaneously problematizing sight through the construction of a wider scene (8.10.1, 27.3–4). Just before our main passage, Xerxes is plainly attempting to manipulate the perception of Thermopylae within his own army (8.24.1):

Ξέρξης ἑτοιμασάμενος τὰ περὶ τοὺς νεκροὺς ἔπεμπε ἐς τὸν ναυτικὸν στρατὸν κήρυκα. προετοιμάσατο δὲ τάδε· ὅσοι τοῦ στρατοῦ τοῦ ἑωυτοῦ ἦσαν νεκροὶ ἐν Θερμοπύλῃσι (ἦσαν δὲ καὶ δύο μυριάδες), ὑπολιπόμενος τούτων ὡς χιλίους, τοὺς λοιποὺς τάφρους ὀρυξάμενος ἔθαψε, φυλλάδα τε ἐπιβαλὼν καὶ γῆν ἐπαμησάμενος, ἵνα μὴ ὀφθείησαν ὑπὸ τοῦ ναυτικοῦ στρατοῦ.

Xerxes, having made certain preparations in relation to the corpses, sent a herald to the navy. For he had made the following preparations beforehand. As many corpses as there were of his army at Thermopylae (there were in fact 20,000), he left around 1,000 of them where they fell, while he buried the rest in trenches which he had dug, concealing them with leaves and earth so that they would not be seen by the navy.

[23] Luraghi (n. 19), 79.

[24] Donelli (n. 1), 216–23. See also H.-G. Nesselrath, 'Opsis bei Herodot. Ein Beitrag zu Anspruch und Zuverlässigkeit antiker Historiographie', in C. Landmesser and R. Zimmermann (edd.), *Text und Geschichte: geschichtswissenschaftliche und literaturwissenschaftliche Beiträge zum Faktizitäts-Fiktionalitäts-Geflecht in antiken Texten* (Leipzig, 2017), 183–202, at 194–5.

[25] Bowie (n. 13), 93; Donelli (n. 1), 216.

[26] A.D. Walker, '*Enargeia* and the spectator in Greek historiography', *TAPhA* 123 (1993), 353–77, a study which draws particularly on examples from Thucydides (e.g. 7.71) and Dionysius of Halicarnassus.

[27] Walker (n. 26), 362–3.

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Xerxes' intention is plainly stated with the use of the purpose clause and the dense verbiage relating to concealment emphasizing his method. In the passage just below this, when the Persian κήρυξ, 'herald', is sent over to Histiaea, he announces (8.24.2):

ἄνδρες σύμμαχοι, βασιλεὺς Ξέρξης τῷ βουλομένῳ ὑμέων παραδίδωσι, ἐκλιπόντα τὴν τάξιν, ἐλθόντα θεήσασθαι ὅκως μάχεται πρὸς τοὺς ἀνοήτους τῶν ἀνθρώπων, οἳ ἤλπισαν τὴν βασιλέος δύναμιν ὑπερβαλέεσθαι.

Men of the allies, King Xerxes grants permission to any one of you who wants to, to leave your post, and go to gaze at those who are so foolish as to fight against us, those who hoped to overthrow the power of the King.

This is evidently an invitation which many of the navy take up; the fact that the dead are described as foolish (ἀνόητοι) obviously carries a certain irony, since this section of Book 8 is sandwiched between the battles of Artemisium and Salamis. The theme of sight and deception is also explored in the digression dealing with enmity between the Phocians and Thessalians (8.27–33).[28] Some years before Xerxes' invasion, we are told, when the Phocians were besieged on Mount Parnassus, they repulsed the Thessalian invasion through a trick devised by a seer named Tellias of Elis (8.27.3–4):

ἐνθαῦτα ὁ Τελλίης οὗτος σοφίζεται αὐτοῖσι τοιόνδε· γυψώσας ἄνδρας ἑξακοσίους τῶν Φωκέων τοὺς ἀρίστους, αὐτούς τε τούτους καὶ τὰ ὅπλα αὐτῶν, νυκτὸς ἐπεθήκατο τοῖσι Θεσσαλοῖσι, προείπας αὐτοῖσι, τὸν ἂν μὴ λευκαθίζοντα ἴδωνται, τοῦτον κτείνειν. τούτους ὧν αἵ τε φυλακαὶ τῶν Θεσσαλῶν πρῶται ἰδοῦσαι ἐφοβήθησαν, δόξασαι ἀλλοῖόν τι εἶναι τέρας, καὶ μετὰ τὰς φυλακὰς αὐτὴ ἡ στρατιὴ οὕτω, ὥστε τετρακισχιλίων κρατῆσαι νεκρῶν καὶ ἀσπίδων Φωκέας, τῶν τὰς μὲν ἡμισέας ἐς Ἄβας ἀνέθεσαν, τὰς δὲ ἐς Δελφούς.

At this point, this Tellias devised a cunning plan of the following sort for them. (He had) 600 of the best Phocian fighters rub themselves in chalk and these men with their arms attacked the Thessalians at night, and he told them that if they saw anyone who was not whitened, then they were to kill them. First, the Thessalian sentries and after them the main army were frightened upon seeing these men, thinking that this was something strange and supernatural. The Phocians thus captured 4,000 corpses and shields, half of which they dedicated at Abai, and the other half at Delphi.

Here the successful manipulation of the visual is key to the trick's success. Each of the Phocian fighters is told to rely on their sight to distinguish between friend and foe, helped by their frightening disguise. When their attack begins, they successfully deceive the Thessalians who are tricked into thinking they are witnessing something supernatural (τέρας).[29] This successful trick, accomplished to the disadvantage of a future Persian ally, mirrors Xerxes' unsuccessful one. Tellias' plan is well-executed and cunning, as indicated by the use of σοφίζομαι, 'devise cleverly'.[30] The Phocians, having adorned themselves in a distinctly un-Greek fashion, have to interpret a simple piece of visual information for the larger deception to work. Xerxes on the other hand is attempting a complicated deception with elaborate preparations. In spite of his superior resources, he is unable to manipulate the visual in the way he intended, with the besieged Phocians, who through nocturnal theatricality overcome their disadvantageous

[28] See J. McInerney, *The Fold of Parnassos: Land and Ethnicity in Ancient Phokis* (Austin, 1999), 175–80 for wider context.
[29] Bowie (n. 13), 121.
[30] The verb appears to be reserved for digressions: 1.80.4, 2.66.2, 3.111.3.

position.[31] In one final example, we can examine an instance of visual misinterpretation closely paralleled with that at 8.25.2, when the Persians assume that the small size of the Greek fleet will spell an easy victory for them (8.10.1):

ὁρέοντες δέ σφεας οἵ τε ἄλλοι στρατιῶται οἱ Ξέρξεω καὶ οἱ στρατηγοὶ ἐπιπλώοντας νηυσὶ ὀλίγῃσι, πάγχυ σφι μανίην ἐπενείκαντες ἀνῆγον καὶ αὐτοὶ τὰς νέας, ἐλπίσαντές σφεας εὐπετέως αἱρήσειν, οἰκότα κάρτα ἐλπίσαντες, τὰς μέν γε τῶν Ἑλλήνων ὁρέοντες ὀλίγας νέας, τὰς δὲ ἑωυτῶν πλήθεΐ τε πολλαπλησίας καὶ ἄμεινον πλωούσας. καταφρονήσαντες ταῦτα ἐκυκλοῦντο αὐτοὺς ἐς μέσον.

When Xerxes' generals and the other soldiers saw the small number of ships bearing down upon them, they were certain that the Greeks had gone mad. They themselves put to sea, confident of an easy victory, which was not an unreasonable thought, since they could see that their own ships far outnumbered the few Greek ones and were more manoeuvrable also. And so, they confidently set about encircling the Greek fleet.

The outcome of the encounter (8.15.1) shows that the Persians were clearly mistaken in their perception that the Greek fleet was entirely inferior.[32] Therefore, the manipulation or unreliability of the visual is pronounced in Book 8 both as a fundamental flaw in human perception and a facet of Herodotean method. Whilst we should not over-reify the book divisions, it is clear that this is consistent with a narrative section of the *Histories* dominated by the confusing and fast-paced naval engagements at Artemisium and Salamis. In this context, the reminder of the defeat at Thermopylae refers back to the previous *logos* and foreshadows further disasters for the Persians. This provides a fruitful context for the wider interpretation of this passage. We can interpret the sailors' lack of recognition as yet another problematization of the visual. However, there are other potential frames through which we can interpret this error.

II. THE UNRECOGNIZABLE DEAD? BODIES, SLAVES AND HELOTS

Therefore, why is it that the sailors do not recognize the helots? Branscome, in his work on 'rival enquirers' in the *Histories*, provides a historical reading. He argues that the Persian navy cannot distinguish between Spartans, Thespians, and helots because the bodies would have had no distinguishing clothing or equipment, had been stripped naked, and were suffering from the effects of decomposition.[33] He also claims that Herodotus divided the dead into Spartans and Thespians on the one hand and helots on the other to reflect a distinction between hoplites and ψιλοί, 'light-armed troops'.[34] Whilst there is nothing inherently wrong with applying a historical reading to the text here (leaving to one side the issue of whether the entire episode has any credibility), there are problems with this reading. There is no suggestion in the Thermopylae narrative that the Greek dead were stripped after the battle. At the end of Book 7, we are informed of Xerxes' own battlefield tour (7.238.1):

[31] On this latter point, Bowie (n. 13), 120 suggests the Thessalian–Phocian episode engages with the wider anxieties northern Greeks experienced during the invasion.

[32] Cf. Donelli (n. 1), 217; for further examples of this sort of misinterpretation in Book 8, see 8.27.4, 87.2–4, 88.2.

[33] Branscome (n. 1), 202–3.

[34] Branscome (n. 1), 203–5. While he is not clear on the point, it appears that he supposes the corpses would appear naked to the internal audience, but that the difference in battlefield function would be apparent to an external audience.

ταῦτα εἴπας Ξέρξης διεξήιε διὰ τῶν νεκρῶν καὶ Λεωνίδεω, ἀκηκοὼς ὅτι βασιλεύς τε ἦν καὶ στρατηγὸς Λακεδαιμονίων, ἐκέλευσε ἀποταμόντας τὴν κεφαλὴν ἀνασταυρῶσαι.

After saying this Xerxes went through the corpses and the body of Leonidas. Upon hearing that Leonidas was both the king and general of the Spartans, he ordered his head to be cut off and erected on a spike.

After the king has reviewed the corpses, he orders the mutilation of Leonidas' body. There is no indication of other orders Xerxes gave at this point.[35] As shown above, the Greek corpses were (8.25.2) πάντες … ἀλέες συγκεκομισμένοι ἐς τὠυτὸ χωρίον 'all heaped up in a mass gathered together in the same place'. Branscome infers on the basis of these passages that Xerxes, apparently complying with Greek norms, would have had the corpses stripped of their armour and clothing.[36] While it is clear that the Persian and Greek dead are arranged differently, both the Greek and Persian corpses left *in situ* are described as κείμενοι.

Stripping corpses completely naked does not, however, seem to have been normal practice. There are examples of corpse-stripping (e.g. Thuc. 5.10.2). There are also Classical examples of Greek armies moving the enemy dead so as to deny them to the opposing force, as Konijnendijk has argued, so that the enemy would have to ask for a truce to collect them and admit defeat (Xen. *Ages.* 2.15, *Hell.* 7.1.19).[37] While it was certainly possible to strip and loot the dead, it is not clear that this always took place. In her study of the retrieval of the dead, Vaughn points to their looting and stripping as a likely occurrence rather than an established element of Greek battlefield practice.[38] Konijnendijk assumes that the looting and stripping of the bodies was an aspect of warfare that followed the rout of the enemy and preceded the setting-up of a trophy, though he does not suggest that it always or usually occurred.[39] Turning back to Herodotus, σκυλεύειν, 'to strip (an enemy)', is uncommon in the *Histories* (1.82.5–6; 9.80.2), not necessarily forming a part of its battlefield narratives.[40] The only context

[35] In fact, one could perhaps read the battlefield tour entirely as an excuse for a *post hoc* confrontation between Leonidas and Xerxes.

[36] Branscome (n. 1), 202.

[37] R. Konijnendijk, *Classical Greek Tactics: A Cultural History* (Leiden and Boston, 2018), 206–14.

[38] P. Vaughn, 'The identification and retrieval of the hoplite battle-dead', in V.D. Hanson (ed.), *Hoplites: The Classical Greek Battle Experience* (London, 1991), 38–62, at 47; her claim that 'By the time the defeated force was allowed to retrieve its own men, virtually all possible identifying tokens of any value […] would surely have been stripped by the other side; the dead, then, were usually returned to the losing army absolutely nude, and thus apparently without specific identifying markings' is supported by a single reference at p. 61 n. 23 to Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.19 καὶ τὰ μὲν ὅπλα ἔλαβον, τοὺς δὲ χιτῶνας οὐδενὸς τῶν πολιτῶν ἐσκύλευσαν, 'whilst they seized their arms, they did not strip off the *chiton* of any citizen'. This use of χίτων may well denote an undergarment, but this is insufficient proof that the dead were usually stripped naked.

[39] Konijnendijk (n. 37), 211.

[40] These usages are all Spartan in one way or another. Two concern the actions of the Spartan Othryades after the 'Battle of the Champions' (1.82.5) ὁ δὲ τῶν Λακεδαιμονίων Ὀθρυάδης σκυλεύσας τοὺς Ἀργείων νεκροὺς καὶ προσφορήσας τὰ ὅπλα πρὸς τὸ ἑωυτοῦ στρατόπεδον ἐν τῇ τάξι εἶχε ἑωυτόν, 'The Spartan Othryades stripped the Argive corpses and carried the arms back to the Spartan camp before taking his up his position'. The second occurrence in this chapter encapsulates the potential significance of stripping the dead (1.82.6) οἱ δὲ τοὺς μὲν ἀποφαίνοντες πεφευγότας, τὸν δὲ σφέτερον παραμείναντα καὶ σκυλεύσαντα τοὺς ἐκείνων νεκρούς '… while [the Spartans] pointed out that the Argives had fled (the battlefield), whilst their man had remained in place and stripped the enemy corpses'.

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where what was taken is explicated is in the narrative after the Battle of Plataea (9.80.2, discussed further below), where the helots:

ἀπό τε τῶν κειμένων νεκρῶν ἐσκύλευον ψέλιά τε καὶ στρεπτοὺς καὶ τοὺς ἀκινάκας, ἐόντας χρυσέους, ἐπεὶ ἐσθῆτός γε ποικίλης λόγος ἐγίνετο οὐδὲ εἷς.

From the dead lying there they stripped armlets, twisted armour, and gold daggers; when the elaborate clothing was mentioned it was set aside.

Earlier in the *Histories*, when Aristagoras is seeking to persuade Cleomenes to join in the Ionian revolt, he identifies ἐσθὴς ποικίλη, 'elaborate clothing', as one of the tempting signs of Asian wealth to be held in contrast to the customs of the Peloponnese.[41] It is therefore significant that only precious metals are taken from the dead at Plataea.[42] Instances in both Thucydides and Xenophon, which are relatively few in number, appear to suggest that in these authors too the use of σκυλεύω usually indicates stripping of arms and armour, not of clothing.[43] There are surely cases where stripping of the dead (of either armour or clothing) did occur and was simply unrecorded. Nevertheless, considering our evidence for Greek practice, it is unlikely that a naked mass of corpses was the intended sight for the internal audience, nor a likely assumption on the part of the contemporary, external audience. To be clear, whether they were stripped in reality or not is not the issue. It is rather the case that there is no indication that Herodotus regularly included stripping the dead in his battlefield narratives and there is no indication of this in his otherwise detailed description of the logistics following Thermopylae. Therefore, a purely practical explanation for the unrecognized helots is not especially convincing when taken alongside the other significant, narratological complexities.

Another possible explanation is that the inclusion of the helots alongside the free Spartans and Thespians is a deliberate inversion of the expected position of slaves in Greek battlefields and culture more widely. The Herodotean helots are not presented as being particularly different from any other slaves in the *Histories*. As noted above, historical accounts and reconstructions of the Spartan economy suggest helots were mostly agricultural labourers. However, as Harvey points out, this does not feature

[41] 5.49.4 ἔστι δὲ καὶ ἀγαθὰ τοῖσι τὴν ἤπειρον ἐκείνην νεμομένοισι ὅσα οὐδὲ τοῖσι συνάπασι ἄλλοισι, ἀπὸ χρυσοῦ ἀρξάμενα, ἄργυρος καὶ χαλκὸς καὶ ἐσθὴς ποικίλη καὶ ὑποζύγιά τε καὶ ἀνδράποδα, 'For the inhabitants of that continent possess more fine things than all other men together, beginning with gold, but also silver, bronze, elaborate clothing, pack animals, and slaves.'

[42] Flower and Marincola (n. 17), 248 suggest that emphatic οὐδὲ εἷς could be an expression of surprise or disbelief.

[43] In Thucydides, the verb always takes τοὺς νεκρούς as its object (4.44.3), often specifying that these were the corpses of the enemy (4.97.1; 5.11.1). One notable usage is Thuc. 5.74.2 οἱ δὲ Λακεδαιμόνιοι προθέμενοι τῶν πολεμίων νεκρῶν τὰ ὅπλα τροπαῖον εὐθὺς ἵστασαν καὶ τοὺς νεκροὺς ἐσκύλευον, 'The Spartans laid out the arms of the enemy corpses and immediately set up a trophy and stripped the corpses'. The fact that the stripping of the corpses appears to follow the laying out of arms, which must have already been taken from the dead, might suggest that more than arms and armour were taken from them. The verb is rare in Xenophon and takes as its object those items which were stripped from the bodies as opposed to the corpses themselves (*Hell.* 2.4.19 τοὺς δὲ χιτῶνας; *Anab.* 6.1.6 τὰ ὅπλα). The potential alternative γυμνόω is rare in all three authors, never occurring in Xenophon. Thucydides uses the passive to refer to early competitors in the Olympic Games (1.6.5) and Herodotus to the unusual Scythian practice of meat preparation whereby (4.61.1) γυμνοῦσι τὰ ὀστέα τῶν κρεῶν, 'they strip the bones of meat'.

prominently in Herodotus' portrayal of helots or of slaves more generally.[44] Helots are the object of several well-worn tropes concerning slaves in Greek literature. They are cowardly (6.75, 7.229), dishonest (9.80), and subservient to their masters (6.58, 6.80.1, 6.81.1). In a telling example from the Cleomenes *logos* in Book 6, Herodotus appears to make explicit the nature of their social position. When Cleomenes asks his helot guard for a dagger, we learn (6.75.2):

οὐ βουλομένου δὲ τὰ πρῶτα τοῦ φυλάκου διδόναι ἀπείλεε τά μιν λυθεὶς ποιήσει, ἐς ὃ δείσας τὰς ἀπειλὰς ὁ φύλακος (ἦν γὰρ τῶν τις εἱλωτέων) διδοῖ οἱ μάχαιραν.

Since the guard at first did not want to give it to him, Cleomenes threatened him with all the things he would do to him when he was freed, and so frightened by these threats the guard (who was after all just a helot) gave him a dagger.[45]

Hornblower and Pelling convincingly suggest that the γάρ here implies that helots were particularly susceptible to this sort of threat; indeed, they were expected to acquiesce to it.[46] A little earlier on Herodotus recounts two other occasions when Cleomenes used the helots to do his dirty work, once when he (possibly accidentally) burnt the sacred grove of Argos (6.80.1) and when he whipped the priest of the Argive Heraion after he refused to grant him entry to the sanctuary (6.81.1). On both occasions, it is the helots themselves who perform the sacrilegious act on the instructions of Cleomenes.[47] These examples are no doubt underpinned by the inherent violence of Spartiate–helot social relations, as suggested by a number of historical episodes (Thuc. 1.101, 128, 4.80).[48] Elsewhere, helots are presented as fundamentally un-Spartiate in their actions. Leonidas sent two Spartiates, Eurytus and Aristodamus, away from Thermopylae since they were suffering from an unspecified eye infection. However, Eurytus decides to rejoin the fighting, having put on his armour (7.229.1):

… ἄγειν αὐτὸν κελεῦσαι τὸν εἵλωτα ἐς τοὺς μαχομένους, ὅκως δὲ αὐτὸν ἤγαγε, τὸν μὲν ἀγαγόντα οἴχεσθαι φεύγοντα, τὸν δὲ ἐσπεσόντα ἐς τὸν ὅμιλον διαφθαρῆναι, Ἀριστόδημον δὲ λιποψυχέοντα λειφθῆναι.

… he ordered his helot to lead him into the fighting, and his helot therefore led him there, but having done so, he ran away, whilst Eurytus fell upon the mêlée and was killed, whilst Aristodamus, in excruciating pain, stayed put.

Lateiner suggests that Eurytus' helot performs a sort of dual focalization function in this passage; his cowardice is fundamentally un-Spartiate in comparison to that of his heroic

[44] F.D. Harvey, 'Herodotus and the man-footed creature', in L.J. Archer (ed.), *Slavery and Other Forms of Unfree Labour* (London, 1988), 42–52, at 47.

[45] The threat of violence of king against helot (probably entirely acceptable within Spartiate–helot relations) is preceded by illegitimate acts of violence by Cleomenes against Spartiates: S. Hornblower, 'Sticks, stones, and Spartans: the sociology of Spartan violence', in id. (ed.), *Thucydidean Themes* (Oxford, 2011), 250–74, at 255–6.

[46] S. Hornblower and C. Pelling (edd.), *Herodotus: Histories Book VI* (Cambridge, 2017), 188.

[47] Hdt. 6.80.1 ἐνθαῦτα δὴ ὁ Κλεομένης ἐκέλευε πάντα τινὰ τῶν εἱλωτέων περινέειν ὕλῃ τὸ ἄλσος, 'Cleomenes then ordered all the helots to pile up wood around the grove'; 6.81.1 ὁ δὲ Κλεομένης τὸν ἱρέα ἐκέλευε τοὺς εἵλωτας ἀπὸ τοῦ βωμοῦ ἀπαγαγόντας μαστιγῶσαι καὶ αὐτὸς ἔθυσε, 'Cleomenes ordered the helots to drag the priest away from the altar and whip him, whilst he conducted the sacrifice.'

[48] Hornblower (n. 45), 267–9.

(if foolish) master,[49] yet there is also the implication that in not sacrificing himself Aristodamus is no better than a helot.[50] As Hunt has demonstrated, the extensive involvement of slaves in warfare is a problem for a hegemonic ideology which appears in Greek historiography, where slaves are absent from, if not explicitly unsuited to, citizen-like activities.[51] In this sense, the appearance of helots amongst the dead in Book 8 acts as a revealing gesture, indicating that the helots did not desert *en masse* but remained at Thermopylae with the Spartiates and Thespians.[52] It is also telling that earlier on in Book 7, Herodotus allows the cowardly behaviour of Eurytus' helot to stand for the activities of the whole.

While there are clearly therefore differences of both characteristics and temperament, there are some indications that a physical difference between free people and slaves is being referred to. The first point to note is a non-physiological one. The helots were, as has already been mentioned, most probably acting as light-armed troops at Thermopylae, and so we might imagine there to be some differences in their underclothing or armour. We might even suggest that the Persian army did not bother to strip armour which would have been of comparatively low value. If we turn to the physiological, Herodotus was influenced by the intellectual concerns of the Hippocratic writers, as shown by his occasional focus on environmental determinism, even if he did not simply transpose Hippocratic doctrines into the *Histories*.[53] Slavery (either actual or ideological) is often taken as the source of physical differences throughout the work. Harrison has recently shown that many of Herodotus' comments on slavery are framed though an ethnographic lens.[54] This consideration is not unidirectional, such as when the narrator attempts to reflect Scythian conceptions of Greeks in an ethnographic frame (4.142):

ὡς ἐόντας Ἴωνας ἐλευθέρους, κακίστους τε καὶ ἀνανδροτάτους κρίνουσι εἶναι ἁπάντων ἀνθρώπων, τοῦτο δέ, ὡς δούλων Ἰώνων τὸν λόγον ποιεύμενοι, ἀνδράποδα φιλοδέσποτά φασι εἶναι καὶ ἄδρηστα μάλιστα.

As free people, the Scythians judged the Ionians to be the worst and most slavish of all men, but in advancing the opinion of the Ionians as slaves, they say they are most loyal to their masters and the least inclined to run away.

Whilst the passage deliberately inverts the normal focus of ethnographic enquiry, it is easy to see the mentality of the slave owner reflected in these words. Elsewhere, he notes (1.151.2) τὴν γὰρ ἕκτην ἐν τῇ Λέσβῳ οἰκεομένην Ἀρίσβαν ἠνδραπόδισαν Μηθυμναῖοι ἐόντας ὁμαίμους, 'The Methymnans enslaved the sixth settlement on Lesbos, Arisba, despite being of the same blood'. The use of ὅμαιμος echoes the description of Greekness (*Hellênikon*) offered by the Athenian ambassador at the end of Book 8 (144.2) αὖθις δὲ τὸ Ἑλληνικόν, ἐὸν ὅμαιμόν τε καὶ ὁμόγλωσσον, καὶ

[49] Cf. P. Vannicelli, A. Corcella and G. Nenci (edd.), *Erodoto: Le Storie, Libro VII: Serse e Leonida* (Milan, 2017), 583.

[50] D. Lateiner, 'The style of Herodotus: a case study (7.229)', *CW* 95 (2002), 363–71, at 368–9.

[51] Hunt (n. 11), 19–25; the author defines 'ideology' at 19–20 as 'a system of intellectual and emotional judgements that make up a model of the world according to which raw experience is interpreted'.

[52] Cf. M. Whitby, 'Two shadows: images of Spartans and helots', in S. Hodkinson and A. Powell (edd.), *The Shadow of Sparta* (London, 1994), 87–126, at 94.

[53] R. Thomas, *Herodotus in Context: Ethnography, Science and the Art of Persuasion* (Cambridge, 2000), 69–74.

[54] T. Harrison, 'Classical Greek ethnography and the slave trade', *ClAnt* 38 (2019), 36–57, at 49.

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θεῶν ἱδρύματά τε κοινὰ καὶ θυσίαι ἤθεά τε ὁμότροπα, 'Therefore, Greekness is common blood and common language, in addition to sanctuaries to the gods, common religious rites, and a common way of life'. Herodotus' statement in Book 1 prefigures Plato's much fuller prohibition against the ἀνδραποδισμός, 'enslavement', of Greek by Greek (*Resp.* 5.469bc).[55] Thucydides writes that the Messenians, some of whom were former helots, who had earlier deserted the Peloponnese were ὁμοφώνους, 'speaking the same language', as the Spartans (4.4.3, 41.3).[56] The existence of a single Laconian–Messenian dialect appears to be confirmed by the linguistic evidence.[57] The economic and social divisions of Laconia and Messenia existed within a single speech community, which itself implies 'major differences in structural organization and strategies of slave supply'.[58] The situation in Sparta therefore inspired and informed fourth-century theories of slavery, as shown by discussions in Plato and Aristotle of possessing slaves who speak the same language.[59] Spartan helots were both a proto-type and a warning for Greek theorists of slavery. Helotage facilitated the leisure for which Spartiates were widely revered (e.g. Xen. *Lac.* 5.8–9), but the complicated ethnic and social politics rendered it inherently unstable. In the *Histories*, where an ethnographic understanding of slavery persists, the uncertain position of the helots would make them a curious if peripheral subject in a discussion of Greek identity.

III. GREEK IDENTITY AND HELOT IDENTITY

The helots are therefore presented in reveal at the beginning of Book 8 because the early portions of this section of the *Histories* are acutely concerned with the question of what it means to be Greek, especially in the context of the Persian Wars. Their presence is revealed in a moment of acute narrative and perceptival complexity, as has already been argued, but also in the context of extremely charged, identity-focused discussions. We must therefore consider the identities of both the viewers and the viewed. Slave identity has been relatively underexplored with some recent studies proposing new

[55] Cf. Harvey (n. 44), 51.

[56] For this passage in the context of archaic state formation, see T. Clements, 'Unfixed boundaries: Regions, evidence and models in archaic Sparta', in M. Rönnberg and V. Sossau (edd.), *Regions and Communities in Early Greece (1200–550 BCE)* (Rahden, 2022), 104–22, at 114. For Messenian identity formation, which tends to cut against this construction, see T.J. Figueira, 'The evolution of Messenian identity', in S. Hodkinson and A. Powell (edd.), *Sparta: New Perspectives* (London, 1999), 211–44; N. Luraghi, 'The imaginary conquest of the helots', in N. Luraghi and S.E. Alcock (edd.), *Helots and Their Masters in Laconia and Messenia* (Washington DC, 2003), 109–41; N. Luraghi, *The Ancient Messenians: Constructions of Ethnicity and Memory* (Cambridge, 2008), 173–208. Note the objections of J.M. Hall, 'The role of language in Greek ethnicities', *PCPhS* 41 (1995), 83–100 concerning the role of language and dialect in the construction of identities.

[57] M. del Barrio Vega, 'À propos de quelques formes du laconien et du messénien', in I. Hajnal and B. Stefan (edd.), *Die altgriechischen Dialekte: Wesen und Werden* (Innsbruck, 2007), 1–17, at 13–16.

[58] Lewis (n. 3), 146, though these are not necessarily the only differences: T. Clements, 'Lakedaimon: territory, economy, and society in the southern Peloponnese, *c*.800–371 BC', (Diss., University of Manchester, 2021), 94–9.

[59] In the *Laws,* Plato (6.777c) points to the Messenians as an example of restless societies and the danger τῶν ἐκ μιᾶς φωνῆς πολλοὺς οἰκέτας κτωμένων, 'for those who acquire many slaves of the same tongue'. He comments later on in the same passage that a country should not be enslaved together and that the enslaved should be ἀσυμφώνους, 'not speaking the same language' (6.777d). Aristotle suggested that agricultural labourers should be slaves if the ideal mode of living were to be implemented, with the important caveat that (*Pol.* 1330a25–8) μήτε ὁμοφύλων πάντων <ὄντων> μήτε θυμοειδῶν, 'neither all of the same ethnic group nor spirited'.

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theoretical frameworks.[60] Helot identity most likely had a complex and uncertain relationship with wider Spartan identities, potentially reflected in the idea that they shared a dialect with the Spartiates and *perioikoi*. Book 8 always returns to the theme of Greekness, concluding with the famous debate at Athens between Alexander of Macedon, the Spartans and the Athenians (8.140–4).[61] The earlier portions of the book contain a less commented upon series of addresses, namely three direct addresses to groups of Greeks or groups which included Greeks. Themistocles inscribes an address to the Ionian sailors in the Persian navy (8.22.2–3),[62] the Persian herald addresses Xerxes' allies, including Ionians (8.24.2), and the Thessalians, Persian allies, address the rebellious and troublesome Phocians (8.29.1–2). Each address begins with a vocative plural (8.22.1 ἄνδρες Ἴωνες; 8.24.2 ἄνδρες σύμμαχοι; 8.29.1 ὦ Φωκέες). The phase ἄνδρες σύμμαχοι is ambiguous.[63] To suggest, as some indeed have, that this is referring only to the Greeks in the Persian navy would be a strained reading,[64] and it is more likely the intended internal audience is the entire Persian navy.[65] However, to the external audience, it is not improbable that Herodotus is drawing attention to the Greeks within the navy. The triad of addresses discuss a range of Greek perspectives on the Persian encounter. We have a Greek attempting to enlist the support of fellow Greeks (Themistocles to the Ionians), the Persian king boasting to his Greek and non-Greek allies (Xerxes to his allies, including Ionian Greeks), and Greeks urging fellow Greeks to support the Persians (the Thessalians to the Phocians). When this is all taken together it becomes clear that to an external audience attention would be drawn to the Greek members of the Persian navy. This is further emphasized in the subject matter of each address. Themistocles 'inscribes' to the Ionians a warning (8.22.1–2) ἄνδρες Ἴωνες, οὐ ποιέετε δίκαια ἐπὶ τοὺς πατέρας στρατευόμενοι, καὶ τὴν Ἑλλάδα καταδουλούμενοι, 'Men of Ionia, you are acting unjustly in marching against your forebears, and reducing Greece to slavery.' The language here emphasizes descent, by referring to the ties of kinship between Athens and the Ionian Greeks,[66] and referring to their alliance with the Persians as the enslavement of Greece.[67] Perhaps at least in part

[60] K. Vlassopoulos, *Historicising Ancient Slavery* (Edinburgh, 2021), 98–112 proposes, based on the views of R. Brubaker and F. Cooper, 'Beyond "identity"', *Theory and Society* 29 (2000), 1–47, at 14–21, that slave identities are most fruitfully conceptualized in a tripartite division as consisting of categorization (externally-assigned identities), self-identification (personally-understood identities), and groupness. This framework, he suggests, permits the simultaneous analysis of both external and internal perspectives on the identities of marginalized persons.

[61] For discussion see V. Zali, *The Shape of Herodotean Rhetoric: A Study of the Speeches in Herodotus'* Histories *with Special Attention to Books 5–9* (Leiden and Boston, 2014), 217–27.

[62] Even though these are things Themistocles (8.22.3) ἔγραψε, 'wrote', it is unlikely these inscriptions ever existed, Macan (n. 2), 386; S. West, 'Herodotus' epigraphical interests', *CQ* 35 (1985), 278–305, at 286–7. Bowie (n. 13), 113 notes that they represent a 'blending of genres' and are unlike Greek prose inscriptions, which very rarely indicate addressees. According to Haywood (n. 14), 235–6, even if some more abbreviated inscription was made, Herodotus did not subject the Themistoclean texts to his recognized process of autopsy and enquiry.

[63] Branscome (n. 1), 195–8.

[64] For this reading, see B. Shimron, *Politics and Belief in Herodotus* (Stuttgart, 1989), 66; Lateiner (n. 2), 233; A. Masaracchia, *Erodoto, La battaglia di Salamina: Libro VIII delle Storie* (Milan, 1977), 169.

[65] P. Vannicelli, 'To each his own: Simonides and Herodotus on Thermopylae', in J. Marincola (ed.), *A Companion to Greek and Roman Historiography* (Malden, 2007), 315–21, at 320; Branscome (n. 1), 196–8.

[66] Bowie (n. 13), 114.

[67] καταδουλόω is relatively uncommon in the *Histories* (8 occurrences) and potentially refers back to the Ionians' own ideological enslavement: cf. 6.32 οὕτω δὴ τὸ τρίτον Ἴωνες κατεδουλώθησαν,

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in response to Themistocles' message, the speech of the Persian herald quoted above does not name the dead at Thermopylae, referring to them simply as τοὺς ἀνοήτους, 'foolish men', οἳ ἤλπισαν τὴν βασιλέος δύναμιν ὑπερβαλέεσθαι, 'who hoped to overthrow the power of the King'. The fact that Xerxes' reported command makes no mention of the identity of his opponents serves to construct them simply as idiotic failures. The Thessalian address to the Phocians, also reported through a herald (8.29.1), betrays the perspective of an ally boastful of their closeness to Persia while also continuing to expound the themes of identity, freedom and enslavement. In a truly berating address, the herald declares (8.29.1–2):

ὦ Φωκέες, ἤδη τι μᾶλλον γνωσιμαχέετε μὴ εἶναι ὁμοῖοι ἡμῖν. πρόσθε τε γὰρ ἐν τοῖσι Ἕλλησι, ὅσον χρόνον ἐκεῖνα ἡμῖν ἤνδανε, πλέον αἰεί κοτε ὑμέων ἐφερόμεθα, νῦν τε παρὰ τῷ βαρβάρῳ τοσοῦτον δυνάμεθα ὥστε ἐπ' ἡμῖν ἐστι τῆς γῆς ἐστερῆσθαι καὶ πρὸς ἠνδραποδίσθαι ὑμέας· ἡμεῖς μέντοι τὸ πᾶν ἔχοντες οὐ μνησικακέομεν, ἀλλ' ἡμῖν γενέσθω ἀντ' αὐτῶν πεντήκοντα τάλαντα ἀργυρίου, καὶ ὑμῖν ὑποδεκόμεθα τὰ ἐπιόντα ἐπὶ τὴν χώρην ἀποτρέψειν.

Phocians, you must now give way and confess that you are not our equals. For before among the Greeks, in the time when we were on their side, we were always better regarded than you, and now we have such sway with the barbarian that we have it in our power to have you deprived of your land and have you enslaved. However, even though we are in complete control, we bear you no ill will for past wrongs, but if you give us fifty silver talents for your past wrongs, then we promise to turn away from that which (we are threatening) to inflict upon your land.

The request of the Thessalians echoes the language of both Themistocles' and Xerxes' appeals, emphasizing that their influence, entirely dependent on Persian patronage, gives them power (δυνάμεθα) to enslave the plucky Phocians (ἠνδραποδίσθαι), referring back to Xerxes' description of his own power (δύναμις) and Themistocles' accusation, albeit with different verbiage, of characterizing medizing as the enslavement of Greece. There is an ironic note to the Thessalians' statement of their own power in light of their earlier warning to the other Greek allies (7.172.3) οὐδαμὰ γὰρ ἀδυνασίης ἀνάγκη κρέσσων ἔφυ, 'there is no compulsion which is stronger than powerlessness'.[68] Further ironic usage can also be detected in the use of ὁμοῖος referring back as it does to the dead Spartiates at Thermopylae. Demaratus tells Xerxes that in Sparta there are 8,000 men (7.234.2) καὶ οὗτοι πάντες εἰσὶ ὁμοῖοι τοῖσι ἐνθάδε μαχεσαμένοισι, 'who are all the equals of the men who fought here' and that the *perioikoi*, the 'other Spartans', are οὐκ ὁμοῖοι, ἀγαθοὶ δέ, 'not equal to them, but still fine'. Here the language of equality is not deployed to imply a hierarchy or class

πρῶτον μὲν ὑπὸ Λυδῶν, δὶς δὲ ἐπεξῆς τότε ὑπὸ Περσέων, 'Therefore, the Ionians were reduced to slavery for the third time; the first time by the Lydians, and then for the second and third times successively by the Persians.'

[68] E. Baragwanath, *Motivation and Narrative in Herodotus* (Oxford, 2008), 223–5. There is evidence of Herodotean sympathy with, or at least understanding of, Thessalian medism. At 7.174 he writes αὕτη ἐγένετο ἡ ἐς Θεσσαλίην στρατιή, βασιλέος τε μέλλοντος διαβαίνειν ἐς τὴν Εὐρώπην ἐκ τῆς Ἀσίης καὶ ἐόντος ἤδη ἐν Ἀβύδῳ. Θεσσαλοὶ δὲ ἐρημωθέντες συμμάχων οὕτω δὴ ἐμήδισαν προθύμως οὐδ' ἔτι ἐνδοιαστῶς, ὥστε ἐν τοῖσι πρήγμασι ἐφαίνοντο βασιλέϊ ἄνδρες ἐόντες χρησιμώτατοι, 'The army went into Thessaly, and the King intended to cross into Europe from Asia since he was already at Abydos. The Thessalians, who had been deserted by their allies, thus medized so enthusiastically and without any doubts that they turned out to be the most useful men to the King in this matters'; cf. Macan (n. 2), 249; Baragwanath (n. 68), 225. On the other hand, he expresses some amusing doubts about the genuineness of Phocian resistance citing their famous hatred for the Thessalians as the only possible reason they had for resisting them (8.30.1).

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structure, but rather to suggest a sharp contrast between Phocian cowardice and Thessalian valour, both of which are further rendered ironic by the Thessalians' medism and the eventual Phocian defeat. Therefore, with this triad of speeches, all relatively short, all spoken to their internal audience indirectly, two through heralds, one through inscription, we have a series of speeches which attempt to frame the politics of Graeco–Persian relations in microcosm. Xerxes' trick, therefore, an attempt to manipulate information, appears in the narrative in this deeply charged and discursive context, when what it means to be Greek is at stake.

An explicit consideration of the role of helot identity therefore adds a further dimension to this meditation. The Ionians' identity as Greeks is continually impeached throughout the *Histories* (8.22.2) and they are earlier judged by the Scythians and possibly the Persians as the κακίστους τε καὶ ἀνανδροτάτους, 'worst and most slavish' of the Greeks (4.142, see above). In failing to recognize the presence of the helots therefore they are being accused of a category error. The helots were present on the battlefield only as light-armed troops and so cannot be counted properly amongst the ranks of free citizen hoplites. Their incidental inclusion can be accounted for by the ambivalence or even embarrassment on the part of the external audience that slaves played such a role in a historically contingent moment.[69] However, from the narrative perspective, the emergence of the helots amongst the dead serves as a reveal, coming in the context of a series of passages designed to question and problematize Greek participation in the Persian Wars. Viewed from this perspective, we are not dealing with a deliberate exclusion of slaves from the narrative; rather, their presence is withheld from the reader until its revelation could be most effective. Within this reveal is the irony that Greeks who fought against their kinsman fail to recognise important distinctions within Greek societies, especially the central distinction between freedom and slavery, and are embarrassed by the (albeit partially concealed) bravery of the helots who have a greater claim to being true Greeks than those who fight with the Persian king.

IV. CONCLUSION

From this reading, a polyvalent discourse emerges. In one sense, the helots are clearly incorporated into the existing topos of the slave in Greek literature. They are rarely incorporated into Herodotus' narrative, and when they are, they can be clearly pigeonholed into one of several stereotypes: the cowardly helot, the frightened helot, the subservient helot, and the dishonest helot. Alongside these other passages, the reveal of the helots at Thermopylae is more ambiguous. Hunt's observation that Greek historians deliberately minimized the role of slaves on the battlefield is still a valid one. However, this only gets us so far. Greek historiography of the fifth and fourth centuries can be treated as a literary and therefore, in some sense, an ideological unity. In the same way that slave systems were localized in the Greek world, however, so too are ancient authors' views on and approaches to slavery as a narrative construction.

Therefore, when contextualized both in terms of the portrayal of helots throughout the *Histories* and the narratological and perspectival complexities of Book 8, we can view all of these appearances of the helots as strangely ahistorical. Herodotus' lack of interest in the everyday structure of slaveholding is matched by his keenness on

[69] Cf. Hunt (n. 11), 42–52.

inserting the helots into the major moments of Spartan and Greek history as narrative foils. Rather than acting as simply incidental characters or hastily inserted details, however, they are part of the broader narrative strategy of the Persian books which continually problematize the nature of Greek identity. The construction of Herodotean narrative and the place of helots within it has two key influences. There is an external, cultural understanding about roles which were considered appropriate for slaves and conversely those which were not appropriate. But there is also an internal desire on Herodotus' part to manipulate and elucidate elements of his enquiring methodology; in Book 8 this involves drawing attention to errors in human perception and the contingent effect these have upon the methodology of ἱστορίη and a deliberate manipulation of the perspectives of both viewers and viewed. Therefore, the final and fullest appearance of the helots at Thermopylae represents both an overlap and collision of these historical and narrative views. To disentangle them fully would produce either a decontextualized history or a simplistic understanding of Herodotus' text. This exploration of Herodotean perspectives on the helots demonstrates that a unity of perspectives is surely richer.

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