

## **Agamemnon in Herodotus and Thucydides: Exploring the historical uses of a mythological paradigm**

*Dr. Vasiliki Zali, University College London, [v.zali@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:v.zali@ucl.ac.uk)*

### ***Abstract***

This paper explores the use of the myth of Agamemnon in Herodotus and Thucydides. I argue that the deployment of Agamemnon in their works is shaped by, and sheds additional light on, the historians' attitude toward myth (and its use in rhetoric), their narrative aims and historical outlook. Herodotus' readiness to embrace myth in both narrative and speeches, his representation of complex motivation, his description of the conflict between the Greeks and the Persians, and his panhellenic outlook, influence the function of Agamemnon: as king of Sparta and the leader of the Greeks in the Trojan War, he reflects the idealistic and pragmatic motivation of the Spartans in the context of the Persian Wars. Agamemnon's function in Thucydides is different since it is affected by the general avoidance of mythological argument – especially in rhetoric – and its merely relative significance, the description of a war between the Greeks, Thucydides' pragmatism, and his writing for posterity: aptly replaced by Sparta's Dorianism in the context of the war against Athens, Agamemnon becomes a contemporary tyrant king who may represent any city or individual yearning for power and empire.

**(Key words: Agamemnon, history, rhetoric, politics)**

Myth and history are closely interrelated;<sup>1</sup> so closely that not even Thucydides provides a clear-cut distinction between the two. Myth is part of the past and mythical stories were the kind of stories the first historians ventured to set down in writing. Despite the different focus and nature of their accounts, ancient historians consistently used myth as an essential part of their historiography and were thus required to take a stance toward myth, adopt, reject or even rationalize it.<sup>2</sup> The features that made myth so popular are its authority

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<sup>1</sup> See especially the volume edited by Buxton, *From Myth to Reason?* (1999), which questions that Greek thought progressively developed from myth to reason, an idea most famously put forward by Nestle in his influential book *Vom Mythos zum Logos* (1940).

<sup>2</sup> On myth and history/historiography see Saïd (2007); Dowden (1992) 45-7; Dougherty (2009); Calame (1999), (2003); Marincola (1997) 117-27; Brillante (1990).

as an act of collective memory, and its flexibility, that is its ability to dynamically transform, develop and adapt to changing historico-political circumstances, attested by variant versions of the same story. At least from the fifth century onwards, myth is consistently employed for political purposes, particularly in order to buttress territorial and ethnic claims, and define or create relationships between different cities – frequently on the basis of kinship bonds through mythical connections – especially in a world as fragmented as the Greek world.<sup>3</sup> Around the same period, myth starts to feature in epideictic speeches to forward certain political agendas, notably in Athenian funeral speeches to praise Athens and justify its hegemony.<sup>4</sup> Hence myth, used in both narrative and speeches, made an excellent tool in the hands of the historians.

The use of myth in historical texts is a vast and much discussed topic. In this article, I shall focus on one aspect of this topic, the use of the mythical king Agamemnon in the works of Herodotus and Thucydides. Agamemnon provides a particularly interesting mythical example on account of his connections with both the Greeks in general and the Spartans in particular. On the one hand, the myth of Agamemnon carries panhellenic connotations: in the *Iliad* he is the leader of the Greek alliance in the expedition against the barbarian Trojans. On the other hand, the Spartans, from the sixth century B.C., associated themselves with Agamemnon, who was made king of Sparta, in order to justify their rule over the Peloponnesians and subsequently the rest of the Greeks. In Herodotus' *Histories*, Agamemnon features as an argument in the mouth of the Spartan envoy Syagrus in the meeting of the Greeks with the Syracusan tyrant Gelon, when they ask for his help against the Persians (7.157-62). Gelon wants the leadership of the Greek forces and the Spartans call upon Agamemnon's loud groan if he learned that Gelon took the leadership away from the Spartans (7.159). In Thucydides' *History*, Agamemnon is mentioned in the introductory part of the work which refers to the distant past, the so-called *Archaeology* (1.9-12). Agamemnon belongs to a series of thalassocrats, both men and cities, which culminates with Athens.

The references to Agamemnon in both historians have received considerable scholarly attention, especially with respect to the Homeric background and, in Thucydides in particular, to his survey of the causes of power. Here I wish to suggest that the ways in which the two historians employ Agamemnon in their narratives are relevant to, and further highlight, their treatment of myth, their narrative purposes and historical outlook. In the case of Herodotus, I

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<sup>3</sup> On the relationship between myth and politics see Hall (2007); Jones (1999): specifically on diplomatic appeals based on kinship claims ('kinship diplomacy'); Buxton (1994) 193-8.

<sup>4</sup> See below pp. 6-7 and n. 31.

will argue that his keenness for marvellous stories and eagerness to admit myth in rhetorical argument, his presentation of complex motivation, his description of the war of the Greek coalition against the barbarian Persians and consequently his panhellenic viewpoint, influence his deployment of the myth of Agamemnon. On the other hand, I will show that the deployment of Agamemnon in Thucydides' *History* is affected by the historian's pragmatic outlook, his different theme (a war between the Greeks), his general reluctance to use myth as rhetorical argument, and his desire for his work to be 'a possession for all time' (1.22.4). In what follows, I shall be dealing first with Herodotus and then with Thucydides, starting from their general attitude toward, and use of, myth and then moving to the factors that affect the use of Agamemnon and to its specific implications in both works. My discussion will shed additional light on the narrative techniques of Herodotus and Thucydides, put forward for consideration aspects that may have an impact on their overall use of myth, and offer a new angle from which to interpret the function of the myth of Agamemnon.

## Herodotus

Herodotus' fondness for storytelling, digressions and marvellous accounts is well-known. His *Histories* encompasses a great variety of both historico-politically valuable and charming material (cultural, folkloric, ethnographic, anthropological).<sup>5</sup> Hence his fostering of myth is anything but surprising. Herodotus does not only make use of legendary stories but also of mythical and other traditional and tragic motifs (e.g. reciprocity, revenge, rise and fall of rulers) by means of which he interprets historical events. Many of his stories blend history with myth,<sup>6</sup> while he often gives recent historical events mythical proportions (heroization). This narrative strategy of heroization is mainly pursued in battle narratives, via connecting the characters to mythical heroes or via the use of epic patterns, but it also affects the scope of Herodotus' account of the Persian Wars which are frequently related to the Trojan War.<sup>7</sup>

Myth is then an integral part of Herodotus' historical narrative. This is further demonstrated by the absence both of a strict dividing line between myth and history and of a specific term for mythical stories. Concerning the myth-history distinction, there is

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. the opposing titles 'father of history' (Cicero *Laws* 1.1.5: *pater historiae*; in modern times see e.g. Lateiner 1989) and 'father of lies' (Plutarch *On the Malice of Herodotus*; in modern times see Armayor 1985; West 1985; Fehling 1989) attributed to Herodotus on account of these contrasting qualities of his work.

<sup>6</sup> E.g. the stories of Gyges and Candaules' wife, Croesus, Cyrus, Polycrates, Demaratus.

<sup>7</sup> On myth in Herodotus see West (2002); Gray (2002); Boedeker (2002) 109-16; Saïd (2002) 117-47 (specifically on tragic patterns); Stadter (2004) 31-46.

essentially no gap between the two in Herodotus but there is continuity between past and present instead.<sup>8</sup> The proponents of such a distinction base themselves mainly on the celebrated passage 3.122.2, where Herodotus talks about Polycrates' dominion of the sea: 'for Polycrates was the first Greek we know of to plan the dominion of the sea, unless we count Minos of Cnossus and any other who may possibly have ruled the sea at a still earlier date. But of what is called the human race, Polycrates was the first'.<sup>9</sup> As much as this passage might be open to competing interpretations, it does not however seem to advocate discontinuity between the human and the mythical; Herodotus merely demonstrates here that his measure is knowledge.<sup>10</sup> Turning to terminology, there is no language of myth in Herodotus and the several myths in the work are very often called *logoi*,<sup>11</sup> just like Herodotus' own narrative (7.152.3).<sup>12</sup> The word *muthos* is only used twice in the work, interestingly enough for stories that seem to be improbable and difficult to verify: the stories about Ocean (2.23) and Heracles (2.45). In both cases *muthos* is used as a derogatory reference, in 2.23 to Homer and the earlier poets while in 2.45 to the Greeks collectively. However, if we adopt Saïd's<sup>13</sup> suggestion – based on Nickau's<sup>14</sup> argument that in both passages Herodotus criticizes Hecataeus – then the word *muthos* might be merely meant as 'an ironic echo of Hecataeus' *mutheítai*' at the beginning of his *Genealogies*.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> On the division between mythical and historical times in historiography, some scholars argue for (e.g. Edmunds 1990a; Shimron 1973), while others against it (e.g. Brillante [1990]; Calame [2003] 19-22). Saïd (2007) 78-80 argues for continuity, also in Herodotus and Thucydides, and attributes the introduction of the division to Diodorus. Raaflaub (2002) 159 n. 36 provides useful bibliography on the topic. On continuity between *spatium mythicum* and *spatium historicum* in Herodotus, see Cobet (2002) 405-11; Brillante (1990) 102; Saïd (2007) 78-9; Boedeker (2002) 109-16 (esp. 110 and n. 43 [with helpful bibliography]); Hunter (1982) 50-115 (esp. 86-90, 103-7); cf. West (2002) 38 n. 60: 'I doubt the usefulness of the alleged distinction between *spatium mythicum* and *spatium historicum*'.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. the age of heroes in the Myth of the Ages in Hes. *Op.* 159-60. On the problem of Minos' thalassocracy in Herodotus and Thucydides, see Williams (2002) 149-71 (esp. 155-61); Irwin (2007) esp. 213-19; cf. also Hornblower (1996) 125. Translations of Herodotus are based on de Sélincourt 2003 (as revised by Marincola) and Waterfield 1998.

<sup>10</sup> See von Leyden (1949/50) 95; Saïd (2007) 79.

<sup>11</sup> E.g. the story of Helen at 2.120.2

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Hecataeus' interesting use of the verb derivative of *muthos* for his own work and *logos* for the ridiculous stories of the Greeks at the start of his *Genealogies*: 'Hecataeus the Milesian speaks thus (*mutheítai*). I write these things as they seem to me to be true. For many and ridiculous are the stories (*logoi*) of the Greeks, as they appear to me' (*FGrHist* 1 F 1a). This observation has also been made by Saïd (2007) 77.

<sup>13</sup> See Saïd (2007) 77-8.

<sup>14</sup> See Nickau (1990) 85-7.

<sup>15</sup> See above, p. 3 n. 12.

Herodotus' attitude toward what we call myth varies. He accepts<sup>16</sup> or rejects myths.<sup>17</sup> On occasion, he intervenes in his text, in his familiar fashion, and decides between different versions while rejecting others as implausible. At other times he attributes the stories to his informants, distances himself and passes no judgment – just as he does with the stories of the abductions of women in the prologue. Often, he rationalizes mythical stories, merges myth with history, and gives his own version, adding different dimensions to the stories.<sup>18</sup> He thus shows understanding of the limits of myth, which cannot respond to every situation. Therefore, the comparison with and the help of history is always useful as it helps to better understand the present.

The stories of mutual abductions of women at the start of the *Histories* already provide us with the necessary background to understand Herodotus' stance toward myth as cautious and critical. The historian reports how the enmity between the Greeks and the barbarians, or else between West and East, started as a series of unpunished seizures of women. These mythical stories about Io, Europa, Medea and Helen are evidently rationalized. There is no Zeus, no bull, no cow, no Golden Fleece, no Aphrodite; every indication of the supernatural is wholly removed. At the same time, the collection of several conflicting stories told by the Persians, the Greeks, and the Phoenicians about Io also testifies to Herodotus' historical method, his careful inquiry. A further proof of this careful inquiry is the authorial comment that Herodotus will not judge or decide on the truthfulness of these accounts but will instead move on to the one whom he knows that he first initiated the enmity between Greeks and barbarians (1.5.3), the Lydian Croesus. As with Polycrates and Minos (3.122.2), Herodotus' proof of inquiry (ιστορίης ἀπόδειξις) is based on knowledge. On the other hand, the three different versions of the Io story, each of which supports its agent, bring to the fore the manipulation of the past for one's own interests.<sup>19</sup> This carries particular importance for two reasons: first, because it stresses the difficulty of the historian's task; second, because it shows how the flexibility of myth serves self-centred motives of different groups and thus anticipates other political usages of myth to follow.

This last observation must be borne in mind since the myth of Agamemnon under consideration here underwent significant adjustments to suit the purposes of the Spartans, who, in Herodotus, employ it as rhetorical argument with rich political subtext. But before we

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<sup>16</sup> E.g. the Trojan War at 7.20, Protesilaus at 9.116-20.

<sup>17</sup> E.g. Heracles at 2.45.

<sup>18</sup> E.g. the story of Helen, the story of Minos.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Dewald (1987) 168-9; (1999) 225-6 (note also p. 226: 'The unspoken Greek version, we may note, is every bit as self-justifying as the two Persian and Phoenician stories that precede it'), 232-3; (2002) 270-1.

turn to Agamemnon, let us first explore how common the use of myth as political argument is in the *Histories*. Apart from myth used in the narrative, frequently in the form of digressions, and mythical patterns which run through several stories or even the whole of the work, Herodotus consistently exploits myth as an argument in the dealings between Greeks and between Greeks and barbarians in different political and military contexts. A distinctive example of myth used in territorial claims is the argument of the Athenians, in their war with the Mytilenaeans over Sigeum, that ‘Aeolians had no more right to the land of Troy than themselves or any other Greeks who had helped Menelaus avenge the abduction of Helen’ (5.94).<sup>20</sup> The fate of Decelea is a case when myth is given as a reason for exemption from attack: Decelea received privileged treatment by the Spartans and was not ravaged during the Archidamian War on account of the help the Deceleans offered the Tyndarids when they revealed to them where Theseus had hidden Helen (9.73).

Mythological arguments are also commonly employed in the context of setting up leagues. There is a story told around Greece that Xerxes, before setting out on his expedition against Greece, asked the Argives to remain neutral on the grounds that Argives and Persians were both descended from Perseus, through their ancestor Perses who was a son of the Argive hero Perseus and Andromeda (7.150).<sup>21</sup> The Cretans follow the advice of the oracle at Delphi and refuse to participate in the Greek alliance because the Greeks did not help them to take revenge on the murder of Minos, although the Cretans helped the Greeks to avenge the abduction of Helen (7.169). In an attempt to convince the Athenians to aid the Ionians in their revolt against the Persians, Aristagoras refers to the Athenian myth of Ionianism, and more specifically the Athenian colonization of Miletus (5.97.2). The Athenian herald Philippides appeals to the mythical Athenian autochthony, when he is sent to ask for Spartan help against the Persians before Marathon (6.106.2). Later at Artemisium, Themistocles carves a message on the rocks of Euboea to remind the Ionians that they are fighting against their fathers and to urge them either not to fight well or to remain neutral, or even to fight on the Greek side (8.22). After Mycale, the Athenians use their mythical kinship with the Ionians to claim the right to decide about the future of Athenian colonies and form a defensive league with the Ionians against the Persians (9.106.3). A dispute about protocol is another case when mythical argument proves handy. In a long debate scene before Plataea, both the Tegeans and the Athenians argue for precedence in the battle line, each employing a list of mythical

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<sup>20</sup> Early sixth century (600-590 B.C.).

<sup>21</sup> Cf. A. *Pers.* 79.

exploits (9.26-7). Myth also features in the exchanges between Gelon and the Spartan and Athenian envoys who ask for his help against the Persians (7.157-62).

The value of arguments from myth and the sincerity of the individuals or communities which employ them, however, are usually contested by elements interspersed in Herodotean narrative. Accordingly, the historian invites his readers to engage in a complex procedure of juxtaposition, which is additionally part and parcel of his complex technique of presenting motivation.<sup>22</sup> Thus, while at one point we see Xerxes state that the Argives and the Persians have a common ancestor, Perseus (7.150), at another point we read that the Persians believe that the Argives were really of Egyptian descent (6.54). When Themistocles deploys the colonial relationship between the Athenians and the Ionians in his carved message at Artemisium, he does so purposefully, as Herodotus points out, in order to either take the Ionians on to the Greek side or slander them to Xerxes, were he to learn about it (8.22). When Aristagoras invokes the kinship bonds between Athens and Miletus, that is their special relationship of metropolis and colony respectively, and manages to obtain Athenian help, Herodotus openly states that the Athenians were deceived by Aristagoras (5.97.2).<sup>23</sup> The Athenians were certainly carried away by Aristagoras' exaggerated rhetoric into believing that the whole enterprise would be much easier than it actually turned out to be,<sup>24</sup> but there is also one further possibility: another way in which the Athenians were tricked could be that Aristagoras himself did not actually believe in the kinship argument as his aims in stirring up a revolt were chiefly self-centred (5.35.1-2).

These examples demonstrate the blurred nature of motivation behind mythical claims in Herodotus. And one might already suspect that this is also the case with Agamemnon, especially given his aforementioned both Spartan and Greek/panhellenic identity. Before focusing on Sparta, however, it would be worthwhile for my argument to consider briefly the ways in which the use of myth by another powerful Greek city reflects complex motivation,

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<sup>22</sup> For a detailed study of Herodotus' representation of complex motivation, see Baragwanath (2008).

<sup>23</sup> Herodotus uses the word διαβάλλειν (5.97.2), which I variably translate as 'deceive', 'trick' or 'persuade'. Pelling (2007) 179-87 discussing the subtleties of the word, suggests that there is nothing indicating that Aristagoras is lying here and argues for a meaning more complex than merely 'trick'; taking the word to signify 'throw words around in such a way as to wrong someone' (184), Pelling translates διαβάλλειν as 'put one across'.

<sup>24</sup> In Hdt. 5.97.1 Aristagoras claims that the Persians are *easy* to beat (5.97.2: ὥς...εὐπετέες τε χειρωθῆναι εἶησαν). The use of the optative mood with the conjunction ὥς adds to the subjectivity of the claim. The ensuing authorial comment echoes the same word in the comparative neuter form (5.97.2: εὐπετέστερον) in a way that finely stresses the delusion of the Athenians: the Persians might be *easy* to beat but the Athenians are *easier* to persuade. On ease as one of Aristagoras' cliché arguments and its further associations, see Pelling (2007) 179-83 and n. 3.

the city of Athens which regularly resorts to myth in the *Histories*.<sup>25</sup> The use – or else abuse – of myth by the Athenians to conceal ulterior motives or express a combination of pragmatic and ideal incentives will help us better understand the attitude of Sparta toward myth and also the value of myth for Sparta.

When Athenians bring forward mythical arguments in the *Histories*, the context is significantly one of strife and competition between the Greeks. The Athenians employ a full-blown list of mythological *topoi* (Trojan War, Heraclids, Amazons, burial of the Argive corpses, followed by their historical victory at Marathon)<sup>26</sup> notably in their debate with the Tegeans and in answer to their claim over precedence in the battle line (9.26-7). Despite the rejection of the mythical past in favour of Marathon and the present, the extensive use of Athens' legendary exploits is well suited in a context of both claiming the honour over another Greek state and contributing to the common cause. The negotiations of the Greeks with Gelon also take the form of a power struggle, this time between Athens and Sparta (7.157-62) – and I will come back to this shortly. The Athenians again throw their aboriginality<sup>27</sup> at the face of the Spartans, when they are asking for Spartan help against the Persians before Marathon (6.106.2). Moreover, Herodotus reports how the Athenians both shrewdly and successfully play the kinship card to point out to the Peloponnesians that it is not their place to decide about Athenian colonists, to claim responsibility for the Ionians, and to set up an alliance with them, allegedly for protection from the Persians (9.106), which developed into the Athenian empire. The Athenians not only use such arguments themselves, but they are also receptive to them when employed by the scheming Aristagoras. As mentioned above, in order to embroil the Athenians into the Ionian revolt, Aristagoras handily deploys the Ionianism of the Milesians, and tellingly that aspect of Ionianism that would most satisfy Athenian vanity: the colonization of Ionia, and specifically of Miletus, and not the fact that the Athenians were themselves Ionians. Then again, the fact that

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<sup>25</sup> The use of myth by Athens in Herodotus is a particularly stimulating topic which I intend to explore in detail elsewhere.

<sup>26</sup> On these *topoi*, which are some of the standard motifs of the late fifth- and fourth-century epideictic speeches, see Loraux (1986) 67-9; Thomas (1989) 207-13 (esp. 211-12). On the similarities between this speech and epideictic speeches, particularly Athenian funeral orations, see Maass (1887) 589-90 n. 1; Meyer (1899) 219-21; How and Wells (1912) 297; Solmsen (1944) 248; Walters (1981) 206; Flower and Marincola (2002) 152-4. On Herodotus' familiarity with epideictic topics, see Burgess (1902) 198; Flower and Marincola (2002) 152-3. Particularly on the influence of Pericles' funeral oration on Herodotus, see Meyer (1899) 221-2; How and Wells (1912) 198; Bury (1958) 63. On the relation between Herodotus and specifically Lysias and Isocrates, see Nouhaud (1982) 118-20.

<sup>27</sup> On Athenian autochthony, see Rosivach (1987) 294-306; Parker (1987) 187-214. On autochthony as one of the epideictic *topoi*, see Loraux (1986) 148-50, 193-4, 277-8; Thomas (1989) 212, 217-18. On Herodotus' treatment of the autochthony myth, see Pelling (2009) 479-82.



Aristagoras tries hard to convince the Athenians, may be an indication that they did not value the ethnic argument over their own interests either. Alternatively, the fact that the Athenians were then openly enemies of the Persians (5.96.2) may play a greater role in persuasion than kinship.

Herodotus' text often points at the materialistic and relative character of arguments from myth. Herodotus undermines Athenian claims to autochthony by giving the Athenians earlier Pelasgian, that is non-Greek, in other words barbarian, origin (1.145-7). All the more so, the ambivalent and rather opportunistic attitude of the Athenians toward the Ionians in the *Histories* makes us doubt the validity of kinship arguments: for example, the Athenians were ashamed of the name 'Ionian' (1.143.3); Cleisthenes renames the Athenian tribes (5.69.1); the Athenians, after the first difficulties, abandon the Ionians in their revolt and reject Aristagoras' repeated requests for additional help (5.103.1).

All this is paired with a tendency to support the common cause, when Herodotus calls the Athenians 'the saviours of Greece' (7.139), or when he relates how they resigned from the claim over the leadership of Greece, at the start of the Persian Wars, in favour of unity (8.3.1). Herodotus' Athenians are also the ones to articulate for the first time the definition of Greek ethnicity in their reply to the Spartans, when the latter, alert at the prospect of an Atheno-Persian pact, proposed by Alexander of Macedon on behalf of the Persians, send envoys to Athens. The preceding narrative outlines base motives: the Spartan motivation was all but idealistic (8.141.1); the Athenians deliberately delayed their reply to Alexander, so that the Spartans had enough time to send ambassadors to Athens, in front of whom the Athenians were intending to show off their resolution. All this casts doubts on the genuineness of the famous definition of Greek ethnicity by the Athenians. This definition comes second, after they talk about the need to take revenge for *their* burnt temples and statues of the gods, and is squeezed between self-centred and self-asserting pretensions (8.144).<sup>28</sup> The speech thus looks more like a eulogy of Athens as the defender of Greek unity. Even if the speech is meant to be read as a call for unity,<sup>29</sup> its framing definitely blurs its motivation.

Myth carries both romantic and down-to-earth qualities. Myth is revered, as seen, for example, in appointing Melanthius as the general of the Athenian forces in Ionia (5.97.3) –

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. Hohti (1976) 70; Solmsen (1982) 165; Bowie (2007) 235-6.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Konstan (2001) 34.

his name recalls Melanthus, the mythical father of Codrus whose descendants ruled Ionian (1.147.1; 5.65.3).<sup>30</sup> Myth is authoritative, useful and handy, flexible and twisted. Athenian myths,<sup>31</sup> designed to paint a positive picture of Athens as benefactor of Greece while also establishing Athenian superiority and justifying the empire, flourished particularly in the fifth century after the Persian Wars, when Athens was in the process of transforming its league into an empire.<sup>32</sup>

The use of the myth of Agamemnon by the Spartans is then in line with Herodotus' favouring myth in his narrative and his rhetoric, and, as we shall see, it is also compatible with myth's function in the *Histories* to convey a blend of pragmatic and high-minded motivation, very often in cases of power struggles and feuds which involve at least one of the two greatest Greek cities. Agamemnon is produced as an argument by the Spartan envoy in the context of the debate between the Greek embassy and Gelon, the tyrant of Sicily (7.157-62). The Greek messengers approach Gelon with an appeal for help against the Persians. Gelon appears willing to support them on the condition that he will be the leader of the Greeks against the barbarians (7.158.5). To this request the Spartan Syagrus replies that Agamemnon, descendant of Pelops, would groan out loud had he known that the Spartans yielded command to Gelon and the Syracusans (7.159). If Gelon is not willing to be their subordinate, then they do not need his help. A last alternative offered by Gelon is that he commands either the army or the navy. The reference to the navy rings a bell with the Athenians, who may now conveniently enter the discussion: if Sparta does not want the command of the fleet, this belongs to the Athenians, who have built the finest navy in Greece, are autochthonous, and sent to Troy the best army-leader (7.161). Faced with such an arrogant and uncompromising attitude, Gelon denies any help.

Both powerful Greek cities turn to mythological arguments to corroborate their claims to leadership. The extent to which their attitude is legitimate, especially when they have come to seek for Gelon's help and they evidently need him, is questionable. Both arguments are carefully manipulated so as not to reveal naked self-interest, but subtler claims to domination

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<sup>30</sup> See Hornblower (1991) 507.

<sup>31</sup> Especially the four myths of Athenian identity (Ionianism, autochthony, the suppliant motif, and the gift of the grain), on which see further Hornblower (2011<sup>4</sup>) 132-5.

<sup>32</sup> At the end of fifth and in the fourth century, these myths become some of the standard epideictic motifs and are systematically and deftly exploited in oratory and rhetoric: the emphasis on the Athenian service to Greece is combined with the exaltation of Athens above all other Greeks to corroborate Athenian hegemonic claims. On the exploitation of Athenian myths after the Persian Wars to the fourth century, see Loraux (1986) 56-76, 79-98; Thomas (1989) 206-13.

underpinned by noble motivation. Our point of interest here is Agamemnon: his importance for Sparta, how his use as an argument establishes at the same time Spartan dominion and dedication to the common Greek cause, and how this fits Herodotus' elaborate depiction of Spartan motivation and as well as his panhellenic views.

If the Athenian myths are part of their propaganda to secure their prevalence over the other Greeks, Agamemnon is the key to a similar Spartan propaganda. In their effort to legitimize their claim to the leadership of the Peloponnese, the Spartans, already in the sixth century, associated themselves to the Achaean Agamemnon. Agamemnon was considered king of Sparta and his tomb was thought to be located at Spartan Amyclae, where there was also a cult of Agamemnon and Cassandra,<sup>33</sup> while his son Orestes was presented as a Laconian.<sup>34</sup> The links with the Achaean king Agamemnon, who in Homer was the leader of the alliance of the Greeks at the Trojan War, served as a justification for the dominant position of Sparta not only in the Peloponnese but also, subsequently, in the whole of Greece. The leading role of Sparta among the Greeks was thus presented as inherited from heroic times.

An integral part of this policy and closely linked to the allegations about Agamemnon, was the transfer of Orestes' bones from Tegea to Sparta, around 560 B.C.<sup>35</sup> Herodotus gives a detailed description of the story. It all started when the Spartans wanted to conquer Arcadia and consulted the oracle at Delphi. However, they misinterpreted the oracle which they received, attacked Tegea only and ended up severely defeated (1.66). From then on they always lost their battles against the Tegeans until they sent to Delphi again and were told that, in order to be victorious, they should bring back home the bones of Orestes the son of Agamemnon. After they had searched and were not able to locate his tomb, they asked the

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<sup>33</sup> Dated by most scholars to the sixth century B.C. (see e.g. Hall [1997] 92; [2007] 334; Cartledge [1979] 112, 139; Antonaccio [1993] 54, 57). *Pace* Boedeker ([1993] 166) and Osborne ([1996] 289) who date it around 700 B.C.

<sup>34</sup> See Stesichorus fr. 39 *PMG*; Pindar *P.* 11.16, 31-2; *N.* 11.34; 8.12. There might even be some evidence of this tradition in Homer, when in *Odyssey* 4.514-20 Agamemnon is described as sailing around Cape Malea in the southern Peloponnese on his way home from Troy (cf. also *Il.* 9.149-53). On these allusions in Homer, see Boedeker (1993) 167; Hall (2007) 335; Malkin (1994) 31. It is also worth mentioning that of the Atreids Agamemnon, Orestes, and also his son Teisamenus, were consistently used for political purposes whilst Menelaus was not. The bonds between Sparta and Menelaus, the brother of Agamemnon and the king of Sparta in the Homeric epics, predated the sixth century but were then strengthened in the context of a philachaeon agenda (cf. the cult of Menelaus and Helen at Sparta as well as the importance of Menelaus for Spartan colonialism, on which see Malkin [1994] 46-66).

<sup>35</sup> On this kind of Spartan propaganda see Forrest (1968) 74-6; Cartledge (1979) 138-9; Alty (1982) 13; Hooker (1989) 129-31; Murray (1993<sup>2</sup>) 263; Parker (1998) 4-6. Note that the Spartans also transferred to their city the bones of Orestes' son Teisamenus, who died in a battle against the Ionians and was buried at Helice in Achaea (Pausanias 7.1.8).

oracle but got an ambiguous response. Finally, a certain Lichas, one of the Spartan officials called ‘benefactors’, managed to grasp the meaning of the oracle, found Orestes’ bones at Tegea and took them back to Sparta.<sup>36</sup> Thereafter, the Spartans always won their fights with the Tegeans and, by the time Croesus was looking for the best Greeks to ally with, they controlled the greatest part of the Peloponnese (1.67-8).

It has been suggested that this transfer was the hallmark of a change in Spartan external policy from hostility and subjugation (especially after the conquest and helotization of Messenia in the late eighth and seventh centuries) into friendship and alliance.<sup>37</sup> But this need not imply the turning over of a new leaf in Sparta’s foreign policy. It is better interpreted as a clever diplomatic move, which not only helped the Spartans befriend the non-Dorians of the Peloponnese by emphasizing the Spartans’ ‘Achaean’ status, but also and most importantly, like the connection with Agamemnon, corroborated their rule in the Peloponnese in the form of an alliance of most Peloponnesian cities under Sparta.<sup>38</sup> To buttress these claims even more effectively, the transfer was presented as the ‘return’ of the bones of a former Spartan king to their rightful place.

The bonds with the Achaeans, and therefore the right to the hegemony of the Peloponnese, were also pursued via another line: the association to Heracles through the Heraclids. The Spartans and, particularly the Spartan royal families, were considered to be descendants of the Heraclids. Such a connection could further justify a philachaeon policy in the sixth century and it did not mean the abandonment of the Dorian past. The Heraclids and the Dorians were closely connected<sup>39</sup> and Sparta was the leading Dorian city entitled by right

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. other Herodotean stories of heroes’ transfer for political or military purposes: the transfer of Melanippus (Adrastus’ most bitter enemy) from Thebes to Sicyon by Cleisthenes of Sicyon to replace the Argive hero Adrastus (5.67); after the Thebans’ request, Aegina sends the Aeacids to Thebes to help them take revenge on Athens (5.79-80). What Herodotus means by ‘the Aeacids’ in 5.80 is a vexed question, but scholars generally speculate – and I also agree – that he means cult statues: see e.g. Nenci (1994) 276; cf. also How and Wells (1912) 45 (images of Aeacus and his sons); *pace* Nagy (2011) 76-8 who argues that these Aeacids were Aeginetan aristocrats, who were considered ancestors of the mythical Aeacids. On which Aeacids Herodotus specifically refers to here, see the note on passage 5.80 in Hornblower (forthcoming) who argues for Telamon and Peleus.

<sup>37</sup> See e.g. Dickins (1912) 21-4; Murray (1993<sup>2</sup>) 263. On the significance of Orestes’ bones for Sparta, see Boedeker (1993): a reading based on the link between the cultic and the political aspect; Hall (2007) 333-8; Malkin (1994) 26-9.

<sup>38</sup> See Hall (2007) 336-8.

<sup>39</sup> The close connection between Dorians and Heraclids appears as early as the seventh century in Tyrtaeus fr. 2.13-15 West (‘Zeus gave this city to the Heraclids together with whom we [i.e. the Dorians] leaving windy Erineos, came to the broad island of Pelops’); cf. fr. 11.1 West (‘you [i.e. Spartans] are the descendants of undefeated Heracles’). Cf. also Th. 1.12.3. On the association of the Spartan kings with the Heraclids, see Hall (1997) 59-60; Malkin (1994) 42-3.

to the hegemony of the Peloponnese via Achaean links. Both agendas astutely served the same cause and were played up or down according to the circumstances. That Herodotus is aware of the propagandistic policy may be inferred from 5.72.3, where the priestess of Athena's temple on the Acropolis forbids entrance to the Spartan king Cleomenes for 'No Dorian is permitted to come in' and Cleomenes replies 'I am not a Dorian but an Achaean'.<sup>40</sup>

The deployment of Agamemnon by Syagrus as a mythological argument then functions at multiple levels and is heavily charged with political colours. Let us see what Syagrus is actually saying:

"This was too much for Syagrus and he burst out: 'Agamemnon, son of Pelops, would groan aloud in his grave if he heard that Sparta had been robbed of her command by Gelon and his Syracusans! Let us hear no more of our giving you command. If you wish to help Greece, you must understand that it will be under Spartan leadership. If you dislike the idea of a subordinate position, then you need not help'"(7.159).

Syagrus obviously considers Agamemnon a Spartan and calls him 'son of Pelops'. The reference to Agamemnon recalls Spartan propagandistic policy and the earlier Herodotean passages about Orestes' bones and Cleomenes' reply to the Pythia. Even the choice of the adjective Πελοπίδης for Agamemnon is well considered,<sup>41</sup> as it directly hints at the Spartan rule over the Peloponnese,<sup>42</sup> the 'island' which was named after Pelops. Long before the time of the Persian Wars, we are told by Herodotus, Sparta had under its control most of the Peloponnese (1.68.6). However, at the eve of the Persian Wars, Agamemnon is still a suitable mythological example, precisely because his influence goes beyond the Peloponnese. The connection to the Achaean Pelopids does not only allude to Sparta's rightful leading position among the Peloponnesian cities but also extends to Spartan leadership of the Greeks. The Spartan Agamemnon, the lord of the Peloponnese, was the leader of the Greeks against the Trojans, and he thus serves as a precedent for Spartan leadership over the whole of Greece against the Persians. Sparta has received the leadership from the mythical king Agamemnon and therefore there is no question of taking away what

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<sup>40</sup> Also a word-play on his brother's name (Δωριεύς = Dorieus/Dorian), for which see already Macan (1895) 217. For a comprehensive discussion of this incident see Parker (1998).

<sup>41</sup> Pace Griffiths ([1976] 22): Πελοπίδης 'has nothing to contribute to the point that Syagrus is making'.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Hornblower (1994) 66.

traditionally belongs to Sparta. Given all this, the Spartans make it clear to Gelon that his only option is submission to their command.

Syagrus' reply seems to be exaggerated, aggressive, arrogant and self-centred. But we can also read a milder and rather diplomatic strategy in the use of Agamemnon. Agamemnon was the leader of the Greek alliance in Homer; the Greeks offered their help willingly and were not forced in any way; the Trojan War was a collective and successful enterprise. Like a second Agamemnon, Sparta claims the leadership of a coalition of Greek states willing to contribute to a common cause, another war against the barbarians of Asia, this time the Persians. Sparta thus assumes the role of the leader of a panhellenic enterprise, a role which, according to Herodotus, was keenly assigned to her by all the Greek allies (8.2.2-8.3.1). The unanimous decision of the Greeks (panhellenic decision) to hand over the general command to the Spartans additionally sanctions the Spartan status. And, if history indeed repeats itself, Sparta's leadership may again lead to a panhellenic triumph<sup>43</sup> and the war against the Persians may be as successful as the Trojan War. Moreover, in the speech of Syagrus, the salvation of Greece is inextricably related to Sparta (7.159: 'If you wish to help Greece, you must understand that it will be under Spartan leadership'). Along these lines, the use of Πελοπίδης may add further panhellenic colouring as Pelops was also associated with the establishment of the panhellenic Olympic Games.<sup>44</sup> But diplomacy may equally point in another direction. By invoking the reaction of the dead Spartan king Agamemnon, Syagrus presents Spartan rule as an obligation to that king or as a way of paying tribute to him. In light of passages 8.2.2-8.3.1, yielding command to Gelon could further be interpreted as a betrayal of the Greeks who entrusted the rule of the expedition to the Spartans.

Agamemnon thus sheds light on the complex network of Spartan motivation: a mixture of both particular, Spartan and ideal, panhellenic incentives. The context of the embassy scene further illuminates the ambiguity of Spartan motivation. On the one hand, Herodotus intends to attract our attention to the panhellenic resonances of Syagrus' words through the frequent use of what we could call 'panhellenic' language. Right from the start,

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<sup>43</sup> On the connection between Agamemnon and panhellenism see Malkin (1994) 27-33.

<sup>44</sup> Also noted by Grethlein (2006) 494 n. 23. The founding of the Olympic Games was primarily attributed either to Pelops (e.g. Pi. *O.* 1.89-96) or to Heracles (e.g. Pi. *O.* 10.24-77). For traditions about other founders, see Burkert (1983) 95 n. 7. If one presses the potential allusion to the Olympic Games further, then the panhellenic colour might start fading slightly: the games, albeit promoting panhellenic spirit, were still a contest between cities which competed against each other; the same spirit of competition is felt throughout the embassy scene in Herodotus and Syagrus' use of Πελοπίδης could perhaps be taken as a further indication of agonistic feeling. This might seem a bit far-fetched but is worth contemplating and is further suggestive of ambiguous uses of rhetoric as well as of ambiguity of motivation.

the Greek envoys insist on the unity required in such circumstances, the common danger threatening the whole of Greece even Sicily, Gelon's shared Greekness, and the common fight for the freedom of Greece (7.157). The emphasis on the mutual danger and the collective nature of the deed is also demonstrated by the repetition of the word 'Greece' eight times. And, when the Greek envoys declare that they were sent by *the Spartans* and their allies (7.157.1), it becomes quite clear that the fate of Greece is primarily the concern, or even duty, of the Spartans.

The context of the scene also encourages a pragmatic reading of Sparta's motivation. When the Athenians join the discussion, the negotiations with Gelon turn into a fight for leadership both between Gelon and the Spartans and Athenians and between the Spartans and Athenians themselves. To Gelon's request for the command of either the army or the navy, the Athenians respond with a long speech claiming the command of the navy for themselves, if the Spartans wish to give it to someone else. Apart from them having the largest fleet in Greece, they bring up their aboriginality and the past of the Trojan War. Despite the need for unity, emphasized initially by the Greek messengers, neither the Athenians nor the Spartans are obviously willing to negotiate leadership. All the more so, the Athenians claim autochthony as a uniquely Athenian privilege which separates them from all the other Greeks. Albeit incorrect given that other Greeks were also autochthonous,<sup>45</sup> autochthony at least in this case secures the Athenians precedence over both the Dorian Spartans and the Syracusans who were colonists of the Corinthians.<sup>46</sup> When drawing on the example of the Trojan War, the Athenians respond to the Spartan reference to the same past via the use of Agamemnon, claim a share to this heroic past,<sup>47</sup> and again single themselves out from all the rest of the Greeks by quoting Homer's words that they offered the best leader. Moreover, the Trojan War motif has wider implications not only for the particular scene but also for the Persian Wars in general. Not only does it stress the need for Greek unity by providing a successful mythological precedent but it also marks the lurking danger of Greek disunity: whereas back then the Greeks collaborated and won, there now seems to be a quarrel over the command which might potentially fragment the common Greek cause. At the same time, this quarrel over leadership issues resonates well with the past one between Agamemnon and Achilles

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<sup>45</sup> E.g. the Arcadians (Hdt. 8.73.1; Th. 1.2.3), the Thebans and the Aeginetans (Hellanicus *FGrH* 4 F 161).

<sup>46</sup> See Hornblower ([2008] 21-2 and n. 27) on the 'youth' of colonial Syracuse.

<sup>47</sup> There are, however, hardly any significant references to the role of Athens in that war in Homer. They are only mentioned with their leader Menestheus in the Catalogue of Ships (*Il.* 2.546-56) and a few other places.

that seriously endangered the common cause, and this may also provide a useful example to be avoided by the Greeks at the time of the Persian Wars.<sup>48</sup>

Trying to prove themselves superior to each other and to the rest of the Greeks, the Spartans and the Athenians jeopardise the unity of the Greeks forces. But this was not a one-off. Their attitude alludes to other such episodes in the *Histories*, notably Sparta's denial to share equally the command of the Greek forces with the Argives, thus resulting in the Argives refusing to help the Greek cause (7.148-9), and principally the dispute between the Tegeans and the Athenians over the command of the left wing just before the battle at Plataea (9.26-7). The audience is further invited to project this fight for leadership both with and in front of Gelon beyond the scope of the *Histories* to the time of the Peloponnesian War and the clash between the two hegemonies of Greece, Athens and Sparta.

Gelon's speeches additionally elucidate Spartan, and Athenian, motivation. He calls the words of the Greeks selfish (7.158.1: 'Men of Greece, have you the face to come here and urge me with your selfish arguments to help you resist a foreign invader?') and Syagrus' response insulting (7.160.1), while he finds their attitude highly egotistical (7.162.1: 'you obstinately refuse to give anything away, but want it all'). Another indication of egocentrism on the part of the Greeks is that they refused Gelon help against the Carthaginians some time before but have now come to him in their hour of need (7.158.2-3). Gelon's comment 'it looks as if you have the commanders, but you will not have any men for them to command' (7.162.1) is a direct response to the Athenian reply 'we do not need commanders but an army' (7.161.1), and gives the punch line not only of the episode but also of the relationships between the Greek states, especially between Sparta and Athens.

I hope that it has by now become clear that the paradigm of Agamemnon, closely interacting with the context of the scene and creating forceful Homeric resonances, also combined with the Athenian mention of the Trojan War, presents a calculated rhetorical choice which highlights both ideal and self-interested motivation for the Spartans. The specific Homeric echo in Syagrus' phrase ἥ κε μέγ' οἰμώξειε ὁ Πελοπίδης Ἀγαμέμνων, which resonates with Nestor's words in *Iliad* 7.125 ἥ κε μέγ' οἰμώξειε γέρων ἱππηλάτα Πηλεΐδης,<sup>49</sup> brings the ambiguity of motivation to the fore even more expressly. The Homeric

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<sup>48</sup> On the Homeric overtones of the episode, see Pelling (2006a) 89-92; Grethlein (2006) 485-98; (2010) 161-7.

<sup>49</sup> See How and Wells (1912) 197; Pelling (2006a) 90; Grethlein (2010) 162; (2006) 489-90; Boedeker (2002) 101 suggests that this might neither be Homeric nor refer to a specific Homeric passage but it could perhaps be a



language contributes to recalling more vividly the Homeric background and Agamemnon's role in Homer while also establishing a sharper analogy between the embassy scene and the quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilles.<sup>50</sup> Far from being an ideal leader in Homer, Agamemnon is essentially depicted as an inadequate leader, and he is responsible for the start of the fight between himself and Achilles, whom he offended as he acted in an exceedingly selfish way. Agamemnon makes mistakes and often acts impulsively – something that he himself also self-reflexively admits.<sup>51</sup> What about Agamemnon's motive when campaigning against Troy? Homer refers to both taking back Helen and her wealth,<sup>52</sup> which represents a mixture of ideal and pragmatic motivation, while Herodotus' text also reinforces an ambiguous reading of Agamemnon's motivation when in the story of Helen he mentions that, when the Greeks arrived at Troy, they sent an embassy to ask for Helen and the treasure which Paris had stolen (2.118.3).<sup>53</sup> These associations put the use of the mythological paradigm in question and blur Spartan motivation. Even if, later, Xenophon's Socrates (*X. Mem.* 3.2) and Isocrates (*Pan.* 72-89) found in Agamemnon an excellent example of leadership, these positive presentations should be seen as rhetorical usages to achieve certain authorial purposes – to promote Xenophon's theory of leadership<sup>54</sup> and Isocrates' idea that Greece must unite in an expedition against Persia<sup>55</sup> and do not in effect subvert Homer's unflattering picture of Agamemnon.

The complexity of Spartan motivation is a recurrent theme in the *Histories*, where the Spartans are often seen to act in a self-interested, sometimes even despotic, manner, or even to work together with tyrants. The Spartans offer distinguished services during the Persian Wars, lead the Greeks, fight to the death at Thermopylae and win the fairest victory with Pausanias at Plataea. But they are also the first Greeks to ally with a barbarian, the Lydian Croesus (1.6, 69) – hardly a selfless move – and they were on good terms with the Egyptian king Amasis (3.47.1). They decide to help the Samian exiles against the tyrant Polycrates, but the reason for this is not gratitude for previous Samian service, but rather to avenge the

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'rhetorical commonplace'. See also Hornblower ([1994] 66) who additionally finds in the phrase an almost perfect Homeric hexameter which could be restored by replacing Πελοπίδης with Τανταλίδης; Griffiths (1976) also argues for a hexameter but suggests Πλεισθενίδης instead.

<sup>50</sup> Grethlein ([2006] 488-96; [2010] 161-6) draws further similarities between the Herodotean and Homeric contexts of the utterance.

<sup>51</sup> E.g. praised at *Il.* 2.482-3; apology at *Il.* 19.137-8; blaming the gods at *Il.* 19.86-90; disrespectful at *Il.* 1.24-32. On Agamemnon's depiction in the *Iliad* see Taplin (1990).

<sup>52</sup> E.g. *Il.* 3.70; 7.350.

<sup>53</sup> See Neville (1977) 5 and n. 13.

<sup>54</sup> See Gray (2011) 124-6.

<sup>55</sup> See Norlin (1929) 418-19.

robbery by the Samians of valuable gifts (3.47). Spartan interference in Athenian politics is most interesting in that it plainly showcases swift change of sympathies dependent on private gain. At the instigation of the oracle, the Spartans help the Athenians to expel the Peisistratids who were good friends of the Spartans (5.62-5); *Ath. Pol.* 19.4 though points to Spartan expediency as well: the Spartan attack on Hippias in 510 B.C. was also prompted by his friendly bonds with Argos. Later, the Spartans realize that they have been tricked by false divinations, but most importantly they see that Athens has grown disconcertingly powerful under democracy and emerges as a considerable threat to their rule; hence they intend to restore Hippias back to power in Athens. This plan never materializes as it is met with the objection of the allies (5.90-3), but the course of events is particularly revealing of Spartan self-interest and competition between them and the Athenians.<sup>56</sup> Sparta is not only working together with Hippias, but it has also worked with Isagoras, albeit unsuccessfully, to set him up as tyrant in Athens (5.70-6), and it would readily accept the aid of Gelon, tyrant of Sicily, upon conditions.

When the Persians, via Alexander of Macedon, offer the Athenians alliance, the Spartans send their own ambassadors to Athens (8.140-4). This could indeed be motivated by genuine concern for the threat to the Greek cause. But, as mentioned earlier, the narrative points to self-centred incentives on both the Spartan and the Athenian side. The Spartans want to protect their own interests as they remember a prophecy that the Dorians would one day be expelled from the Peloponnese by the Persians and Athenians. Even their use of ‘freedom’ is manipulated: whereas at 5.93.2 the Spartans want to deprive Athens of its freedom, at 8.142.3 they appeal to the same freedom and the Athenians’ reputation as ‘liberators’ – which alludes to Athens’ mythical role as benefactor of Greece – to dissuade them from allying with the Persians.<sup>57</sup> Ironically, the Spartans advertise themselves as liberators, this time from tyrannical Athens, at the time of the Peloponnesian War in Thucydides’ text.<sup>58</sup> Thucydides also refers in his own voice to that reputation of the Spartans before the Persian Wars: the Spartans’ role in bringing down tyrannies in Greece was instrumental (Th. 1.18.1). But it was also during the Peloponnesian War when Sparta too looked to Persia for an ally. Herodotus himself already considers the possibility that the Spartans – just as well as the Athenians – might have medized at the time of the Persian Wars

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<sup>56</sup> Hooker ([1989] 128-9) is talking about Spartan propaganda, insisting on the practicality of the motives of their intervention to depose tyrants especially in Athens.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. also Hooker (1989) 129 (concluding ‘So while it is true that Sparta had never been ruled by a tyrant, it cannot be true that she hated tyranny on principle’); Pelling (2006b) 113 and n. 37.

<sup>58</sup> E.g. Th. 4.85.1; 2.8.4.

(7.139.4). And, despite the Spartan haste to send messengers to Athens when Alexander was there presenting them with the Persian offer, their delaying to dispatch help to Athens points to cold pragmatism (9.6-11). Reassured by the Athenians' rejection of a Persian alliance, preoccupied with the celebration of the Hyacinthia<sup>59</sup> and with the wall across the Isthmus nearly completed, the Spartans shirk their duty to Greece and allow the Persians to invade Attica. Herodotus explicitly states what he thinks was the reason for the delay: when the wall was nearly ready, the Spartans were protected and thought they did not need the Athenians any more (9.8.2). Interestingly enough, and perhaps unsurprisingly, expediency is again the reason which prompts the Spartans to finally aid the Athenians: the Tegean Chileus points out to them that, as the Athenian messengers implied (9.7α.2),<sup>60</sup> if Athens allies with Persia, Sparta will be in great danger and the wall will be useless (9.9.2).<sup>61</sup>

What are we to make of all this? Herodotus is showing how the Greeks managed to forge unity against the common enemy. Albeit, or together with, expressing panhellenic sentiments,<sup>62</sup> the *Histories* is a portrait of the Spartans painted in rich and interesting colours: idealism and pragmatism go hand in hand. To this end myth offers Herodotus an excellent tool on account of its flexibility and ability to reconcile conflicting feelings – moreover, myth is perfectly at home in a narrative which indulges in storytelling. Agamemnon serves exactly this function. He is part of the panhellenic rhetoric of the Trojan War, he brings in the panhellenic perspective of the Homeric epics, and his name sits very well with slogans of unity. But Agamemnon appears also as the dominant royal figure in Spartan history, a figure on account of which the Spartans legitimate their rule over the Greeks. His appropriation by Sparta provides a prototype of hegemonic alliance in the Peloponnese and in Greece. His usage is essential in the period before and at the time of the Persian Wars when Sparta wished to expand its sphere of influence. Agamemnon helps Sparta meet a panhellenic challenge. That he is employed as an argument in the context of a debate between the Greeks and Gelon which soon turns into a contest of power, a fight over leadership between Sparta, Athens and Gelon, emphasizes the self-serving attitude of the Greeks and the sensitive nature of the

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<sup>59</sup> Cf. the similar attitude of the Spartans at the battles of Marathon and Thermopylae: they cannot send an army at Marathon until the moon is full (6.106.3) and so they arrive too late (6.120), while the festival of the Carneia prevents them from sending a full army at Thermopylae (7.206).

<sup>60</sup> The matter of an Atheno-Persian pact is directly addressed in the next speech of the Athenian messengers (9.11), but then the Spartans have already set plans in motion. This Athenian threat may be 'simply a negotiating trick' (Pelling [2006b] 112-14; *pace* Munson [1988] 101 and n. 31), but the complexity of Athenian motivation in the *Histories*, touched upon here briefly, may also cast doubts on the purely diplomatic nature of the threat.

<sup>61</sup> On Sparta's underhand motivation in these chapters see Baragwanath (2008) 231-4.

<sup>62</sup> On panhellenism in Herodotus see Flower (2000) 69-76 (as Greek conquest of Asia); Friedman (2006) (as dislocation and nostalgia for what had been lost at Herodotus' own time).

Greek alliance, while it also anticipates the later intra-Hellenic conflict. On the other hand, in view of the contemporary Peloponnesian War, the mention of Agamemnon, the panhellenic Homeric leader, may be also construed as a call to unity – and that could be another way in which Herodotus’ work may be read as panhellenic.

I would like to add one further observation. The ways in which Herodotus deals with Agamemnon – as well as with other myths and notably Athenian myths, briefly discussed earlier – as rhetorical argument might say something about his views on the use of myth in rhetoric in particular or even the use of rhetoric in general. We have seen that the versatility of myth makes it easy to manipulate; the purely noble and altruistic motivation signalled by myth is undercut and shown also to combine ulterior motives. The value of myth as an argument is equally corroborated and challenged in Herodotus’ narrative. Herodotus might be thus flagging the dangers of rhetoric and prompting us to be sceptical about the validity of mythical arguments. In consequence, in their debate with the Tegeans over the command of the left wing at Plataea (9.26-7), the preference of the Athenians for recent deeds instead of mythical ones may be some kind of meta-historical statement.<sup>63</sup> Not that this is unproblematic either, since the Athenians in the same speech are seen to manipulate even recent history when they claim that they fought alone at Marathon. But at least in this case the audience can easily check their statement against Herodotus’ narrative which mentions that the Plataeans fought alongside the Athenians at Marathon (6.108.1).

## Thucydides

The competition between Athens and Sparta, which is alluded to in Herodotus, is realized in Thucydides as a proper military conflict. It is interesting to explore how this internal war, different in nature from the Persian Wars, Thucydides’ realistic interpretation of this war, his stance toward myth and rhetoric, and the purpose of the *History* influence the use of Agamemnon as mythical paradigm. Just like with Herodotus, let us begin with Thucydides’ attitude toward myth. His stance seems to be at variance with that of Herodotus. But is it? Thucydides famously professes his intention to exclude τὸ μυθώδες from his history, because his work is not a piece of competition (ἀγώνισμα) to be heard for the moment, but a timeless possession (1.22.2). His foremost concern is truth and clarity rather than pleasure which comes with distortion, and in any case it is very hard to confirm the truth of events which happened so long ago (1.21.1, 22.4). τὸ μυθώδες, it has been suggested,

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<sup>63</sup> On the meta-historical dimension of the debates between the Greeks and Gelon and between the Athenians and Tegeans before Plataea, see Grethlein (2010) 158-87.

implies not only the storytelling elements<sup>64</sup> but also patriotic stories<sup>65</sup> of poets and logographers (which may well include both prose authors and speech writers, that is orators). Such patriotic stories included myths *par excellence*. Accordingly, this interpretation shows Thucydides' disapproval of stories and speeches which exaggerate the importance of previous wars and cultivate ethnic pride and is clearly linked with his conviction that the Peloponnesian War was the greatest of all wars (1.21.2).

Despite the fact that Thucydides is the first literary source which uses a derivative of myth with clearly negative connotations,<sup>66</sup> he does not, however, condemn myth or remove it from his narrative altogether, nor does he categorically distinguish between mythical and historical times. With reference to the limits between myth and history, there is continuity in Thucydides also<sup>67</sup> and, not unlike Herodotus, he equally bases himself on knowledge when talking about remote times and the history before his own time, about which it is not possible to obtain precise information, against the history of his own period (1.1.3). It is also true that in his effort to explain the present using the remote past, Thucydides is often using his poetic predecessors as evidence.<sup>68</sup> At the same time, he often distances himself from the stories he reports as he ascribes them to unspecified sources.<sup>69</sup>

Moreover, in the *History*, one comes across traditional patterns from epic and tragedy,<sup>70</sup> myths especially in the *Archaeology* but also at other points in the text (albeit rationalized and shaped from a contemporary viewpoint),<sup>71</sup> other colonial and foundation myths,<sup>72</sup> or myths of possession connected to cultic control.<sup>73</sup> The explicit or implicit use of myth in the context of kinship diplomacy also occupies a particularly important position in

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<sup>64</sup> See Saïd (2007) 78.

<sup>65</sup> See Flory (1990); Grethlein (2010) 207-9 (based among other things on the interpretation of *muthodes* as 'patriotic fiction' extends Thucydides' criticism of logographers to orators).

<sup>66</sup> See Saïd (2007) 78.

<sup>67</sup> E.g. 1.4: 'Minos, according to tradition, was the first person to organize a navy'; 2.15.2: 'From him [i.e. Theseus], dates the feast of the Union of Attica which the Athenians still hold today in honour of Athene and pay for out of public funds'. See Jones (1999) 9 (note especially: '...like Herodotus, he [i.e. Thucydides] rejected the embroidery with which the poets had embellished Greek myth, but not the historicity of myth itself'); Dowden (1992) 47: 'Thucydides displays superb handling of evidence, but not even he challenges the basic historicity of myth'; Calame (2003) 21; Hunter (1982) 93-115 (esp. 103-7); Saïd (2007) 79.

<sup>68</sup> E.g. 1.5.2; Homer in 1.3.3.

<sup>69</sup> E.g. 2.102.5; 4.24.5.

<sup>70</sup> On tragedy see e.g. Cornford (1907); Macleod (1983) 140-58. On epic influence see e.g. Smith (1900); Mackie (1996); Allison (1991); Zadorojnyi (1998); Rengakos (2006); Kallet (2001) 97-115.

<sup>71</sup> E.g. Minos (1.4, 8), Agamemnon and the Trojan War (1.9-12), Tereus (2.29.3).

<sup>72</sup> E.g. 1.25.4; 6.2.1.

<sup>73</sup> E.g. 4.97-9; 3.68.3. On Thucydides' excursuses referring to the past see Hornblower (2004) 307-16 (esp. on their mythical and Pindaric character). On historical claims based on myth in Thucydides see Hornblower (2004) 103-28 (discussed vis-à-vis choral lyric poetry).

Thucydides.<sup>74</sup> We should not forget either that kinship ties play a prominent role in the disputes over Corcyra and Potidea, which led to the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War.<sup>75</sup>

The use of Agamemnon in the *History* then does not seem to be out of place. He features in the *Archaeology*, the most fitting part of the work since it refers to the remote past and is heavily loaded with mythical material. Unlike his Herodotean usage, however, Agamemnon is not explicitly connected to Sparta, as one might expect, nor is he employed as an argument in politics. In what follows I would like to discuss why this is the case with Agamemnon and, then, turn to the importance and meaning of his actual usage in the *Archaeology*. In order to showcase that the general avoidance of mythical arguments and their merely relative importance when they are mentioned is part of Thucydides' strategy and serves certain purposes, as with Herodotus earlier, I shall first trace this attitude in the treatment of Athens, the dominant city with the explicitly realistic attitude.

Thucydides uses myth generally more frequently in narrative rather than speeches.<sup>76</sup> Also, by contrast to Herodotus' depiction of convoluted motivation, Thucydides' pragmatic outlook leads him to persistently undermine arguments from myth and noble claims based on myth in the immediate context. Athenian myths are very rarely and sparingly used in speeches delivered by, or addressed to, Athenians. Thucydides mentions Athenian autochthony only in the *Archaeology* and the Funeral Oration. In the *Archaeology* he attributes autochthony merely to the poverty of the soil of Attica (1.2.5), thus undercutting any claims of pride arising from this *topos*, or in other words rationalizing it. Pericles,<sup>77</sup> although rejecting the institution of funeral speeches on the grounds that it is hard to believe in their truth, still conforms to the custom when selected to deliver one (2.35.2); his speech, nevertheless, serves a novel function. Passing very briefly over the praise of the ancestors and their autochthony – omitting the legendary Athenian exploits typical of epideictic speeches – Pericles focuses on the fact that the ancestors delivered the city in freedom to future generations. There follows the more important praise of the listeners' fathers who created the empire, and then Pericles turns to those who are present, who extended the empire and made it self-efficient in both war and peace, implying that they themselves deserve the utmost praise (2.36.1-3). Autochthony is then useful only to the extent that it is connected with

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<sup>74</sup> E.g. 1.71.4, 95.1, 124.1.

<sup>75</sup> On kinship in Thucydides see Hornblower (1996) 61-80; (2004) 115-19 (in association with choral lyric poetry); Jones (1999) 29-31; Curty (1994).

<sup>76</sup> See Hornblower (2004) 308: 'There is certainly very little exploitation of past or myth as paradigm in Thucydidean speeches'.

<sup>77</sup> On Pericles' speeches in Thucydides see Price (2001) 171-89.

freedom, hence democracy, thus anticipating the content of the speech: an ideal portrayal of the democratic institutions and the Athenian way of life. Even the citizens' burial is detached from autochthony: they can die anywhere so long as it is for their city as the whole earth is their grave. As Pelling<sup>78</sup> observes, 'it is as if Athens has grown too big for its own autochthony, not rejecting it, but enhancing it and moving beyond it'. Since the facts – the present greatness of the city – speak for themselves, Pericles also rejects the Trojan War motif when declaring that they do not need the praises of a Homer; nor do they need the praises of anyone else 'whose words may delight us for the moment, but whose estimation of facts will fall short of what is really true' (2.41.4).<sup>79</sup> Myth is adapted to the present circumstances, and the effect is ingenious: the ideal of present replaces the ideal of myth. In this hegemonic present, the panhellenic resonances of the Trojan War are clearly out of place.

In a similar vein, the Athenians in their speech at Sparta omit the mythical stories and only refer to the Persian Wars – although they admit that the audience should be by now tired of listening to the same story over and over again (1.73.2) – but with an interesting twist as they end up describing how they received and expanded their empire. Fine words, that is both the mythical *topoi* and the Persian Wars, are rejected by the Athenian Euphemus (6.83.2), and also by the Athenians in the Melian Dialogue, as 'a great mass of words that nobody would believe', and tellingly in a passage in which they reject justice too, or rather redefine it as the right of the powerful (5.89).

Athenian Ionianism has in addition an important place in Thucydides' kinship diplomacy. It is employed in the form of the Ionian-Dorian distinction in speeches by Dorians<sup>80</sup> but never by Athenians. It is attributed to Athenians in the narrative, but even then its gravity is weakened. In the *Pentekontaetia*, Thucydides relates that the hegemony passed from the Spartans to the Athenians when the Ionians, also displeased with Pausanias' arrogance, asked for Athenian protection on account of their kinship, and the Athenians happily agreed as this served their interests (1.95.2). In his *Sikelika* (6.2-5), Thucydides refers extensively to colonial relationships, but then he emphasizes that kinship was just the pretence for the expedition, the real reason being Athenian expediency (6.6.1, 24.3). Racial kinship is employed as propaganda in the field of politics during the Peloponnesian War, and kinship claims are either questionable or empty. The Syracusan Hermocrates twice pins down and reproaches the attitude of the Athenians toward their kinsmen: although they are helping

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<sup>78</sup> See Pelling (2009) 477.

<sup>79</sup> Translations of Thucydides are based on Warner 1972 (as revised by M. I. Finley) and Hammond 2009.

<sup>80</sup> E.g. Brasidas, Hermocrates, Gylippus.

the Chalcidian Leontinians by virtue of their shared Ionian origin, they subjugated the colonizers of the Leontinians, the Chalcidians of Euboea (6.76.2; 4.61.2-4).<sup>81</sup>

Myths, with all their ambivalent connotations and justifications, helped Athens to turn the alliance into an empire, but are now irrelevant. Only fear, honour and self-interest justify the Athenian empire in both the speech of Euphemus and the Athenian envoys at Sparta. In the Funeral Oration, Pericles hints at the suppliant motif but strictly applies it to the relationships between Athenian citizens (2.37.3: ‘we obey the laws themselves, especially those which care for the protection of the oppressed’). Even the so-called ‘myth’ of the Persian Wars with its specifically panhellenic connotations receives only minor treatment in the *History*: the Persian Wars are dismissed by Thucydides in one brief sentence (1.23.1), and when Pericles in his first speech invites the Athenians to live up to the standards of their ancestors who fought the Persians, he rather stresses that they are in a better position and better prepared (1.144.4).

Corruption of values, lack of any moral principle and disregard for any racial connection become apparent throughout Thucydides’ narrative and are particularly reflected in the attitude of Athens, the tyrant city.<sup>82</sup> Sparta, the rival city, falls into very much the same category as Athens. Just as the Athenians minimize the importance of the ‘myth’ of the Persian Wars, the Spartans consider the Persian Wars an irrelevant argument when brought forward by both the Plataeans and the Thebans (3.53-68). The Spartans generally shun the use of myth as political argument in their speeches. They only employ their Dorianism, but this again reveals materialistic rather than idealistic motivation. When the Dorians refer to Ionians, they draw heavily on the Ionian and Dorian stereotypes as these were formed in the fifth century B.C.: the Ionians are cowardly and weak, soft and effeminate,<sup>83</sup> while the Dorians are brave and strong.<sup>84</sup> That this distinction is only employed for rhetorical purposes and there is but little truth in it, if any, is plainly shown in the case of Brasidas. At 5.9.1, when Brasidas encourages his troops, he says the following: ‘Peloponnesians, there is no need for me to do more than just mention the facts that we come from a country where courage has always preserved freedom and that you are Dorians about to fight with Ionians, whom you are in the habit of beating’. The preceding narrative however undercuts his claims:

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<sup>81</sup> On the pragmatic character of Athenian speeches in Thucydides see Price (2001) 161-9.

<sup>82</sup> E.g. Th. 6.76.3-4.

<sup>83</sup> Qualities also attributed to the influence of the Asian climate on human nature: Hdt. 1.142.1-2; Hp. *Aër.* 12. Cf. also Cyrus’ advice to the Persians in the concluding passage of the *Histories*: ‘soft lands tend to breed soft men’ (Hdt. 9.122.3).

<sup>84</sup> On the role of the Dorian-Ionian distinction in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C. see Alty (1982).



‘He [i.e. Brasidas] did not come out of the town and draw up his army to face the Athenians because he lacked confidence in his own forces and thought them inferior, not in numbers (they were about equal), but in quality, since the Athenians on this expedition were first-rate troops and with them were the best of the Lemnians and the Imbrians’ (5.8.2). In light of this passage, it is hard to take at face value what Gylippus says in book 7: ‘they must remember, he said, that so far as material resources went they would be at no disadvantage, and as for morale, it would be an intolerable thing if Peloponnesians and Dorians could not feel certain of defeating and driving out of the country these Ionians and islanders and rabble of all sorts’ (7.5.4).<sup>85</sup>

Another case which casts additional doubts on the validity of arguments from kinship is that of the Dorian Hermocrates who plays up different ethnic ties in different circumstances. Hermocrates gives priority to the unity of all the Sicilians when speaking in the Sicilian conference (4.61.2-3), while in his speech at the assembly of the Camarinaeans he dwells on their Dorian ethnicity (6.77.1). Besides this, although the Melians hope for the help of the Spartans against the Athenians on account of their kinship (5.104, 106), they never receive any aid. Even the Athenians point out to the Melians that what motivates Spartan actions is strictly expediency and not their sense of honour deriving from their kinship with the Melians (5.105.4) – although, as we have seen already, the Athenians themselves are also demonstrating a similar attitude in the text.<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, the founding of Heraclea by the Spartans is attributed to their wishing both to help the Trachinians and, their own relatives, the Dorians, and to benefit themselves in the war against Athens since the new city would be in a strategic position (3.92).

Thucydides himself comments on the opportunistic behaviour demonstrated by both sides during the war, also emphasizing the baseness of any racial claims: ‘The following were the states on the two sides, for and against Sicily, who came and fought at Syracuse to help either in the conquest or the defence of the island. They stood together not because of any moral principle or racial connection; it was rather because of the various circumstances of interest or of compulsion in each particular case’ (7.57.1). In the same catalogue of allies, Thucydides also observes that both Dorians and Ionians fought on both sides (7.57-8);<sup>87</sup> in effect kinship was violated. The comment of the Athenian Euphemus, although it primarily refers to the Athenians, very neatly summarizes the utilitarian attitude of both sides in the

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<sup>85</sup> On ethnic arguments employed by Peloponnesians in Thucydides see Price (2001) 151-61.

<sup>86</sup> See e.g. Hermocrates’ comments at 6.76.2 and 4.61.2-4.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. 8.25.5: ‘Ionians prevailed over Dorians on both sides’.

war: ‘when a man or a city exercises absolute power, the logical course is the course of self-interest, and ties of blood exist only when they can be relied upon; one must choose one’s friends and enemies according to the circumstances on each particular occasion’ (6.85.1).

This is the kind of Spartan pragmatism which runs through the whole of Thucydidean narrative and suits super-powers or potential rulers. In this context, arguments need to be likewise realistic and myth is clearly mismatched. Myth was useful in the past as it could provide a justification for expanding power and control, cleverly vested in romantic and heroic hues. Sparta has by now grown big and powerful, hence myth cannot offer much. All the more so, in a war against the Athenians, it would not be fitting for the Spartans to use their Achaean past to buttress their supremacy over their opponents. Yet, there is one aspect of myth which can serve the Spartans in this war, their Dorianism. In Herodotus we have already seen signs of the Ionian-Dorian distinction as well as contempt for the Ionians, perhaps played up due to the influence of Herodotus’ times, but the distinction becomes sharper after the Persian Wars to justify their fight against each other. Nevertheless, the validity of the ethnic argument is still seriously compromised in both speeches and narrative. Consequently, in Thucydides Dorianism is rather used as a ploy, dissociated from the mythical past and focused on the immediate needs of the present. The hostility between the Dorians and the Ionians becomes more powerful rather than just mythical; it becomes natural.<sup>88</sup> And while Ionianism becomes synonymous with Athens, Dorianism becomes synonymous with fight for the freedom of Greece from Athens.

The distinction between Dorians and Ionians could be exploited by the Spartans during their war against the Athenians, but the Achaean Agamemnon could not practically help the Spartans. In conjunction with Thucydides’ treatment of mythical arguments, the cold pragmatism which permeates his work and also specifically characterizes the Spartans, provides some explanation as to why Agamemnon is not employed as a mythological paradigm by the Spartans. To these, one may add Thucydides’ distrust toward rhetoric which is closely linked to his general avoidance of mythical arguments. By reducing the strength of arguments from myth and pointing to their strictly realistic political usage, Thucydides further stresses his concerns about both the potential of myth to deceive and the seductive power of rhetoric as this is explicitly laid out by Cleon in the Mytilinean debate (3.38). His

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<sup>88</sup> E.g. Hermocrates at 6.82.2.

speeches may be read as a meta-historical commentary on the use of the past in general and myth in particular in rhetoric.<sup>89</sup>

What is Agamemnon then used for – or useful for? His role can be defined by one of the most frequently cited functions of the *Archaeology* in the *History*: it deals and familiarizes us with themes that pervade the narrative and that Thucydides will develop later in his work. The most important of these themes is the factors of power, and particularly the importance of sea power.<sup>90</sup> This is one reason why Thucydides rationalizes the story of Agamemnon in the way he does, interprets it from a vantage point which is evocative of many aspects from his own time, and emphasizes Agamemnon's naval power. Agamemnon thus becomes a tool of Thucydides' rhetoric in his effort to explain the present based on the past – a past which has been significantly and anachronistically recast – and consequently discuss and analyze the nature of power.

Naval power is the theme charged with the most urgent contemporary allusions. To see what other contemporary aspects are there, let us briefly go through the myth of Agamemnon as Thucydides relates it. After the thalassocrat Minos, Agamemnon was the most powerful ruler. He acceded to the empire of his Pelopid ancestors. Pelops brought with him from Asia great wealth and settled in a poor country where he obtained great power and his offspring became even wealthier and more powerful. After Eurystheus' death, his uncle Atreus, who was powerful and popular with the people, became the ruler of Mycenae and of all the land that Eurystheus had ruled. All this went to Atreus' son, Agamemnon, who also had the strongest navy, and hence controlled many islands. His navy, wealth and power inspired fear, which made the Greeks follow him in his expedition against Troy. Loyalty (the oaths the suitors of Helen had sworn to Tyndareus), Thucydides says, was a factor less decisive than fear (1.9). This expedition was the greatest of those before it, but not as great as the Peloponnesian War mainly due to deficiency of expenditure,<sup>91</sup> which is why it took the Greeks so long to conquer Troy (1.10-11). After the Trojan War, however, Greece fell into a state of turmoil with regular relocations of population and internal strife that for many years ruled out any hope for peaceful development, until movements of population ceased and colonization started (1.12).

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<sup>89</sup> On the meta-historical aspect of the Funeral Oration and the Plataean Debate in Thucydides see Grethlein (2010) 220-40.

<sup>90</sup> On the themes and purposes of the *Archaeology* see de Romilly (1956) 240-98; Hornblower (1991) 3; Hunter (1980); (1982) 17-49; Kallet-Marx (1993) 21-36 (from a financial perspective).

<sup>91</sup> The word used by Thucydides is ἀρχηματα. For a discussion of this word and the connection of χρήματα to financial resources, see Kallet-Marx (1993) 28-30, 35-6.

Navy, money, islands, fear, self-interest, subjugation, power and control, as well as internal strife and decay, all of which will play a prominent role in the *History*, are present in this story. All these aspects closely echo the situation of Athens, the growth of its power, its development into an empire and its decline, and it has been suggested that Agamemnon – very much like Minos – is a precedent for Athens.<sup>92</sup> Along similar lines, the Trojan War has often been considered as a motif for the Sicilian expedition.<sup>93</sup> The connection of Agamemnon with Athens is a valid one and is certainly worth pursuing, but it is neither flattering nor meant as praise of Athens. I have already discussed the ambiguous and rather negative representation of Agamemnon in Homer, especially as an example of inadequate leadership, and Thucydides himself refers in addition to the mismanagement of the Trojan War. Hence further similarities which have been specifically noted between the depiction of Nicias in Thucydides and of Agamemnon in Homer<sup>94</sup> serve to reinforce the negative associations deriving from the link between Athens and Agamemnon.

What about the collective character of the Trojan War mentioned by Thucydides time and again? One might wonder whether this insinuates approval of Agamemnon and through him of Athens' hegemony. Indeed Thucydides brings up a few times that the Trojan War was the first collective enterprise of the Greeks (1.3.1, 3.4, 10.5). Yet the emphasis lays on the fact that fear rather than goodwill motivated the Greeks to partake in the Trojan campaign, the fear generated by Agamemnon and his great power. This observation significantly weakens the importance of unity in that enterprise, while fear is also the key word in Thucydides' description of the true cause of the Peloponnesian War: the Spartans feared the growth of Athenian power (1.23.6). We should keep in mind, too, that despite the eventual success of Agamemnon's enterprise, after the Trojan War Greece again fell into disorder; so the unity established by Agamemnon's rule was only fleeting.<sup>95</sup>

Agamemnon is fittingly associated with Athens, the greatest power in Greece at the time of the Peloponnesian War. But, being part of Thucydides' exploration of power, Agamemnon further becomes a kind of allegory that Thucydides employs for other cities too:

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<sup>92</sup> See Woodhead (1970) 12-13; Hunter (1980); (1982) 38-45; Rabel (1984): on Agamemnon; de Romilly (1956) 240-98 (*passim*). On Minos and Athens specifically see Kallet (2001) 24-6; Hornblower (1991) 20-2; (2004) 316; Irwin (2007) esp. 193-204.

<sup>93</sup> See Hunter (1973) 165; (1980) 203-4; (1982) 40-1; Kallet (2001) 95-112; Grethlein (2010) 257-61.

<sup>94</sup> See Zadorojnyi (1998); Kallet (2001) 178-80; Allison (1991) 509-10. Cf. also Grethlein (2006) 495-6.

<sup>95</sup> On the problems of empire as displayed in the *Archaeology* and the story of Agamemnon see Hunter (1982) 42-5; Foster (2010) 8-43 (esp. on Agamemnon 26-34). Price (2001) 333-44 argues that Thucydides neither condemns nor endorses the idea of the empire (as a combination of weak states under a strong one) or the Athenian empire itself, but rather observes that 'in every example of noteworthy accomplishment by united Hellenes in the *Archaeology*, weaker Hellenic states line up behind the stronger one' (343).

Agamemnon serves to set up a pattern which may apply to any other Greek city which cherishes imperialistic ambitions. Such cities could be Corinth which very early had money and a navy, Syracuse whose power gradually increases in the *History*,<sup>96</sup> or Sparta. The case of Sparta is perhaps more straightforward as Sparta is the other main protagonist of the *History* and an important focus of attention. Some of the themes in the story of Agamemnon – such as power, self-interest, control – equally apply to Sparta. It is also significant that both Athens and Sparta are mentioned in the context of the Trojan War, when Thucydides argues that this war was the greatest of the wars before it and talks about the misleading power of appearance: judging from the buildings and the layout of the city, one would mistakenly think that Sparta is not that powerful; the opposite would be the case with Athens, since ‘one would conjecture from what met the eye that the city had been twice as powerful as in fact it is’ (1.10.2). By drawing these two cities into his text at the point where he discusses Agamemnon and the Trojan War, Thucydides intends to strengthen the connection between the mythical ruler and both Athens and Sparta. An additional link between Agamemnon and Sparta is their being leaders of the united Greek forces against the Trojans and the Persians respectively, and Thucydides mentions in the *Archaeology* that the next collective Greek enterprise, the Persian Wars, happened under Spartan command (1.18.2).

If Thucydides is making general observations about the nature of power and empire, then the ruler Agamemnon reflects any Greek state which aspires to rise to power and create an empire, including the two ruling states, Athens and Sparta. We could go even further than that and argue, based on Thucydides’ profession that his work is a ‘timeless possession’ (1.22.4) beyond any temporal and spatial limits, that Agamemnon also stands out as a timeless paradigm which negotiates the idea of power and it will be useful for the future because human nature remains the same (1.22.4). Agamemnon may therefore represent any imperialistically- or power-oriented city or individual.

It is also particularly thought provoking that Agamemnon’s story already introduces into the narrative one of the major themes that permeate Thucydides’ text and one which is in addition linked to the undercutting of arguments from myth: ideal motivation is overwhelmed by self-centred motivation. The Greeks campaigned with Agamemnon not so much of goodwill and loyalty to their oaths as of fear of Agamemnon’s power (1.9.1, 9.3). Self-interest and the relative character of allegedly idealistic motivation that feature in this story neatly point to the way these motives are dealt with in the rest of the work: pragmatism is

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<sup>96</sup> On Syracuse as Athens’ successor see Hunter (1980) 206-7; (1982) 45-6.

valued over emotion or any other ideal.<sup>97</sup> We have seen how Athens and Sparta act out of expediency and how Thucydides subverts any high-minded claims with respect to these two cities. This is the case with other cities as well as individuals and it is all part of Thucydides' description of moral corruption and degradation of values during the Peloponnesian War.

The mythological example of Agamemnon is thus used by Thucydides to establish a wider pattern of human behaviour which applies to people and cities yearning for power. He is a valuable example in that he shows the consequences of the concentration of power in the hands of a single man – or city: he compelled the Greeks to follow him, he needed ten years to defeat the Trojans due to inadequate preparation and planning and, after the return of the Greeks from the campaign, Greece went back to its previous state of upheaval. Power and empire are plainly problematic and Agamemnon is rather set up as an example to be avoided, or at least intended to cause the readers to be sceptical about emulating him.

Agamemnon's image, linked with the leadership of the Peloponnese and a panhellenic force against the Trojans, served Sparta well in the Persian Wars but does not suit Sparta's profile in the *History* and its war against Athens. Sparta's Dorian ethnicity is much more applicable to highlight the differences between the two opponents, but even such ethnic claims are adroitly exploited and stripped of anything mythical or honourable. The Spartan connections to Agamemnon were still there but the historical circumstances made them politically inexpedient. The example of Agamemnon became relevant again later, when the Spartan king Agesilaus, before departing for his expedition against the Persians, wanted to sacrifice at Aulis, just as Agamemnon had done before he set out for Troy (X. *HG* 3.4.3). Agamemnon was the perfect mythical paradigm for Agesilaus to both advertise his campaign as panhellenic and present himself as a legitimate ruler of the Greeks.

Although Thucydides' universe is different, the question still arises whether Thucydides' Agamemnon, historically transformed and turned into a general pattern of human behaviour as he is, could possibly have any panhellenic resonances. This is of course linked to the wider issue of Thucydides' panhellenism, and on this I would agree with Price<sup>98</sup> who is reluctant to identify Thucydides as a panhellenist, but finds it plausible that panhellenism might be one of the themes which Thucydides considers in his text. Price lays

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<sup>97</sup> See also Hornblower (2004) 316 and n. 32 (although he takes 1.9.1 to refer to Agamemnon's, and not the suitors', motivation in participating in the expedition, this does not affect his conclusion ['We are surely meant to bear in mind this programmatic mythical exemplar when considering other such competing sentimental and realistic motives in the history']; his interpretation attributes to Agamemnon a more personal motivation which nevertheless comes second, his kinship with Helen).

<sup>98</sup> See Price (2001) 371-7.

weight on unity which made Greece capable of noteworthy things (in the Trojan and Persian Wars) and suggests that Thucydides describes how everything that had made Greece great – including ethical, moral values and political unity – fell apart in the internal war. This could be one way of reading any possible panhellenic feelings in Thucydides. Another reading of potential panhellenism could run thus: if Thucydides is problematizing the idea of power and Agamemnon serves as a negative or highly ambiguous example, designed to imbue the readers with scepticism, then perhaps Greek unity based on equality, and not – like in the case of Agamemnon – on the model of one dominant power with many weaker cities under its control, is offered as an alternative. This may be corroborated by the fact that the *History* shows the dreadful consequences of internal war caused by the alarming increase of the power of one city.

## Conclusion

Both Herodotus and Thucydides allow myth in their narratives and use the mythical paradigm of Agamemnon. I have suggested here that the particular ways in which they make use of Agamemnon depend on and also reflect their theme, their historical outlook, their narrative aims, their use of myth in general as well as their stance toward rhetoric. Herodotus is keen to encompass mythological material and favours mythological argument which serves his purpose of attributing complex motivation and painting the picture of a panhellenic alliance whose cohesion is quite delicate. Agamemnon represents a combination of panhellenic and materialistic motivation for Sparta, and is therefore very useful in the context of the Persian Wars.

There is a shift in the use of Agamemnon in Thucydides. Thucydides does not favour mythological argument much, especially in his speeches, and when it is deployed it is all too often proved to have little or no meaning at all. Moreover, his pragmatic outlook, his interest in hard facts and the intra-Hellenic nature of the war he describes render the use of myth as political argument hardly relevant and highly questionable. The same goes for Sparta's Dorianism which, in the context of a war against Athens, has not only fittingly replaced the Achaean Agamemnon but has also been transformed into one of the parts, the best one at that, of a natural dichotomy between Dorians and Ionians. Agamemnon is here radically transformed into a contemporary tyrant king very much like Athens, but also Sparta, or any other city or individual avid for power and full of ambition, thus further serving the usefulness of the *History*.

Despite the differences, the way Herodotus does and Thucydides does not use Agamemnon show comparable understanding of and concern about the power of rhetoric as well as scepticism about the use of myth in rhetoric. And, although the panhellenic colouring of Herodotus' Agamemnon seems to be absent from Thucydides, if we admit the possibility that perhaps Thucydides might be also concerned with panhellenism to some degree, then the problematic nature of Agamemnon's rule could be a suggestion for Greek equality and unity. One way or the other, Agamemnon and his Homeric background still remain meaningful for the works of Herodotus and Thucydides. Gelon finds the reference to Agamemnon insulting and refuses to support the Greek cause, but Sparta manages to secure the command of the Greeks and lead them to victory. Pericles proclaims that Homer's praises are redundant for the Athenians and the Spartans prefer to advertise their Dorianism and natural superiority over the Ionian Athenians, but Thucydides thought that Agamemnon could still provide a lesson for future generations as an important precedent for power and empire.<sup>99</sup>

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