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## The Formation of a Hellenic Identity: The Impact of Herodotus on the Ancient Greek and the Reception of his Histories

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**The Formation of a Hellenic Identity:  
The Impact of Herodotus on the Ancient Greek  
and the Reception of his *Histories***

by  
**Conor James**  
**CLA 492 Honors Thesis in Classics**

**Department of History and Classics  
Providence College  
Spring 2023**



For Mah and Pops who give me constant support, Dr. Greene who has given me indispensable guidance, and any poor soul that asked me how my thesis was going.

## CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 1. Pieces of Identity: Development of Hellenic Identity Throughout the Archaic Era.....	4
CHAPTER 2. Herodotus' Hellene: Portrayal of Hellenic Identity in the <i>Histories</i> .....	24
CHAPTER 3. Uncertain Praise: The Reception of Herodotus Throughout History .....	45
CONCLUSION.....	59
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	60

## Introduction

The Archaic era, spanning from the eighth to the fifth century BCE, was a pivotal time in the development of the 'Hellene,' providing the basic elements that will come to define the figure that we now recognize as the ancient Greek. The Hellenes did not see themselves as a united community at this time, but an immense population explosion accompanied by the advent of the polis formed an environment in which the separate *poleis* began to form individual identities. This era is also the time in which the groups that would later become the Hellenes began to turn to one another, create relationships, and identify common practices, sewing the seed of an ethnic identity that would come later, in the Classical era. A mythical genealogy was formed at this time so that the poleis could lay claim to different territories on account of their descent, but its fabrication also served to create a perceived genealogical link that the Hellenes would later come to identify as a marker of ethnicity. This genealogy, alongside a common language and religious worship that played an immense role in daily life, served as indicium of an ethnic identity that the ancient historian Herodotus draws upon in his account of the Persian Wars, describing how he believes the ancient Hellene should be remembered.

Herodotus provides within his work, the *Histories*, a portrayal of the ancient Greek, whom he dubs the 'Hellene,' providing a record of self-identification that was missing in the previous era. At the time, the impetus for the development of a Hellenic identity was the desire to differentiate themselves from the opposing Persians. To do so, Herodotus offers one of the most important pieces of work in the study of ancient Greek ethnicity. He turned to the ethnic markers of language, genealogy, and religious worship that formed in the Archaic era, and built upon them, presenting new aspects of Hellenic life to explain what warrants Hellenic unity and inter-polis allegiance. He accomplished much of this description of the Hellene by describing non-Hellenes

in the *Histories*, painting a picture of the ancient Greek in the negative by explaining what he considered their opposite. His idea of what the Hellene ought to be characterized by was colored by the influence of Athenian thought, as he, himself, was an Athenian citizen. As a result, he took the idea of freedom and made it a quintessential aspect of the Hellene, with democracy being the perfect manifestation. He expresses how fundamentally different the Hellenes and Persians are through stories that highlight the socio-religious tenets that Hellenes subscribe to and Persians scorn. In this way, Herodotus presents the Hellenic superiority that he wants to be associated with his people. Finally, Herodotus presents an episode in Book VIII using the aspects of kinship, language, and religious practices combined with the customs and practices that he has described throughout the *Histories* to create the ethnic identity of the Hellene.

Herodotus inherited many ideas concerning what contributed to a Hellenic ethnic identity before he built upon those concepts and added more. Aside from the discussion of ancient Hellenic ethnicity, the reception of the *Histories* throughout history and what value scholars of the following generations believed it held is a complicated issue. It is an incredibly unique piece of work and, as such, received the attention of many critics who made claims that severely impacted Herodotus' reputation. Arguing that Herodotus was accurate in his description of the wars, the people, and practices of the ancient world is a difficult feat that few have attempted. The discovery of the New World eventually helped Herodotus' name as Renaissance era scholars encountered descriptions of people and practices that elicited a sense of incredulity that had only been associated with the *Histories*. These events did not clear his name entirely, but the *Histories* continue to be an invaluable source that conveys the Hellenic sense of self in a proclamation of ethnic identity that reveals how an ancient Greek understood his own ethnicity.

The following chapter analyzes the environment of Archaic Greece, prior to the Persian Wars, to consider what aspects of life contributed to the development of Hellenic identity. It cannot be claimed that the 'Hellene' existed at this time, as there are no extant documents that attest to a Pan-Hellenic identity dated to the Archaic, but this time fostered the formation of several of the ethnic indicia that Herodotus later presents as warranting a common ethnic identity. Herodotus' presentation of how he wants the 'Hellene' to be remembered is examined in Chapter 2 before an acknowledgement of Herodotus' complicated reputation in Chapter 3. Herodotus provided an invaluable contribution to the study of the Hellenic ethnic identity in the *Histories* and, despite a history of skepticism concerning the veracity of his work, it remains to be an expression of self-identity from a true Hellene of Halicarnassus.



## **Chapter One:**

### **Pieces of Identity:**

#### **Development of Hellenic Identity Throughout the Archaic**

The development of a Hellenic identity occurred over the span of a thousand years and culminated in an idea quite foreign from what may be gathered from a surface level investigation of the ancient Greeks. The term “ancient Greek” is, in and of itself, vague and often used erroneously to refer to a cohesive unit of people who lived in and around the Aegean Sea three thousand years ago but who never truly existed in any simple sense. The many groups of people developed separately in unique ways and united on rare occasion, first and foremost, in the wars against the Persian Empire in the beginning of the fifth century, an event that shaped the way these people would think of themselves for the rest of their existence. Herodotus’ *Histories* is a rich source for gathering how these people thought of themselves and how a sense of unity and allegiance was recognized in the context of the Persian Wars. The environment of the Archaic era before the Persian Wars supported the individual development of poleis and produced societies with many similarities that Herodotus would later recognize as those which allowed them to work together and form an idea of a common peoplehood.

It was not until the Classical era that there was a self-identification of the ancient Greeks as a part of a larger community in which the poleis are connected, and a sense of allegiance is present. It was outside events and pressure from those on the exterior of this budding community that warranted a proclamation of their identity. However, the recognition of ways of life common to the different poleis was made possible through the events prior to the Classical era, events that shaped these communities into similar entities despite such separation. Although much emphasis is placed on later history when discussing what it means to be Greek, specifically that of

Athenian thought and theatre, the Archaic era of ancient Greece was undoubtedly integral to the formation of Greek identity by being the environment in which the people built the groundwork for their ethnicity. In the Archaic era, the Greeks developed their societies quickly, entering a way of life entirely different from the Dark Age beforehand. Despite very little change in the years prior, the social landscape of Greece advanced rapidly, and the revolutionary introduction of the polis occurred at this time. As will be discussed in this chapter, the introduction of this new structure provided societies an opportunity to isolate and develop themselves before looking towards one another and recognizing the similarities in their advancement that would later allow them to define a Greek, or Hellenic, identity.

Early Archaic Greece was a time defined by the emergence from a relative dark age for those living in Hellas in the beginning of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE. “Hellas” was the term used in a portion of the ancient Greek world to indicate the piece of land at the tip of the Balkan Peninsula and around the Aegean, along the coast, to the most eastern parts of modern-day Turkey. Hellas housed groups of people whose relationships and views of one another reflected its own geography. Its rugged landscape, characterized by sharp mountains that erupt between areas suitable for civilization, and its vast coastline nurtured societies in which groups of people near one another felt very little connection. Travel by foot was rarely the most practical option, and so the ancient Hellenes brought forth societies heavily dependent on sea travel. A strong affinity for sailing and a port suitable for commerce became the attributes that often deemed a group of people strong and later resulted in the many islands in the Aegean becoming a part of the Hellenic community.

However, prior to the Archaic period, a civilization stretched across almost all of this same area for hundreds of years. This sea-going civilization, the Mycenaeans, was both extensive and

advanced, but its drastic population decline was one of the most impactful events that lead into the period of regression from which the archaic Greeks emerged. In the eighth century, the reemergence was thrust into action by a population explosion.<sup>1</sup> As with any "dark age," characterized by a decline in preserved written records, this period is poorly documented. However, the discovery of archaeological remains, especially burial sites, offers insight into the general acceleration of the population decline.<sup>2</sup> Anthony Snodgrass estimates that the number of graves attributed to each generation skyrocketed from 950 to 700 BCE. Whereas the average number of graves associated with each generation from 950 to 800 was found to be fewer than 29, it was 234 per generation by 700 BCE.<sup>3</sup> The drastic increase in population evidently pushed the Hellenes out of their relative dark age and into a new era in which societies would reinvent themselves.

The sudden change in population did not, by itself, usher in the Archaic period, but the resulting environment did. The Dark Ages were a time heavily defined by a lack of literary documentation aside from that of Homer and Hesiod, who tend to be dated to the intersection of the Dark Age and early Archaic period. However, evidence found in funerary sites and provided by environmental analyses reveals much about the nature of daily life at the time. Sites of funerary feasts indicate the consumption of domesticated animals, and pollen counts indicate a reduction in arable farming throughout the eleventh, tenth, and ninth centuries BCE.<sup>4</sup> This is evidence of a pastoral society in which inhabitants were using the less populated land to raise large herds. In contrast, sites dated to the early Archaic period contain pollen counts that suggest a return of arable

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony M. Snodgrass, *Archaic Greece: The Age of Experiment* (London: J.M. Dent, 1980), 24.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 22.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 35.

farming.<sup>5</sup> This arable farming indicates that people were staying in a fixed location, building settlements that would eventually develop communication amongst themselves and exchange ideas with each other.<sup>6</sup> The Archaic era seems to have been ushered in by the phenomena of a return to arable farming and establishment of settlements that built a network for sharing ideas, both of which came with the sudden increase of human population.

The accomplishments of the ancient Greeks are generally discussed in the context of the Classical era, during which time revolutionary thinkers, ingenious statesmen, and brilliant playwrights created the reputation that is now associated with Greek, and particularly, Athenian, civilization. However, the Archaic era brought forth aspects of life that would fundamentally alter the practices of the Greek. The population explosion led to expansion throughout the Aegean world, and even beyond it. The newly established settlements, as well as those that continued to advance at this time, transformed throughout the Archaic era with the gradual development of the polis.

The polis was the form of civilization that became common throughout ancient Hellas. It was the city-state, consisting of an established city as a center of commerce, worship, and policy as well as the surrounding area that was subject to the rule of this city. These poleis became the center of ancient Greek life, and one's unity, as well as each citizen's loyalty to it, was of the utmost importance. This smaller scale of allegiance separated the Hellenes in a very significant way, creating an entity to which an individual devoted themselves. They could now identify themselves as a member of a specific area with a title. However, the opportunity for a more widespread identity also presented itself in this new environment that harbored creativity and the

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 36.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 24.

nurturing of shared ideas. The polis allowed the people to solely understand themselves as a part of their city-state. Yet, simultaneously, it set up the stage of ancient Hellas in which the scattered poleis had the prospect of developing their characteristics in a setting of distinct separation before turning to one another and recognizing their connections. This recognition of shared values led to a growing concept of a widespread community. In turn, we see questions related to ethnicity and ethnic identity take on increased significance.

Before pursuing an understanding of the concept of identity, it is important to note that many scholars do not view ethnicity as the only form of identity, or even, in many cases, as its most important component. “Common identity” is a term used to express the presence of ties between a people that elicit a relationship amongst themselves and an acknowledgement that they are members of a group.<sup>7</sup> It is a broad expression, describing something derived from common experience and represents an all-encompassing understanding of how a group of people defines itself. The term “ethnicity” often appears in this same discussion and admittedly represents a rather hazy, uncertain idea. It is often associated with territory, history, language, or customs, but its one true constant is a presence of peoplehood.<sup>8</sup> No matter which of these two is being examined, the development of each is influenced in two ways: from within, as in what brings the group together, and from without, meaning what separates them from others. These are two ideas that have become common in the discussion of identity under the names of “aggregative” and “oppositional” formation.<sup>9</sup> The Archaic period is one heavily defined by aggregative formation, because the groups of poleis are beginning to interact at this time and create the foundation of a relationship

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<sup>7</sup> Irad Malkin, ed., *Ancient Perceptions of Greek Ethnicity* (Center for Hellenic Studies, 2001), 4.

<sup>8</sup> Jeremy McInerney, ed., *A Companion to Ethnicity in the Ancient Mediterranean* (Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World), 1st ed. (Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 2.

<sup>9</sup> Jonathan Hall, *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 54.

based upon their similarities. The common way of life, values, and ideas brought a sense of unity that was hitherto nonexistent and sets the stage for the later, more oppositional incidents that take place in the Classical era thanks to the events in the Archaic that began the development of a collective identity.

In the study of ancient Greek identity, certain views are universal, such as the idea that interaction with others was necessary for the Greeks to identify themselves in a particular way and acknowledge that they alone shared certain qualities. Scholars typically point to the establishment and maintenance of colonies as well as trade emporia as the most valuable opportunities for Hellenes to build relationships with others and to identify what separates them.<sup>10</sup> Thus Jeremy McInerney claims that a sense of ethnicity without constant inclusion and exclusion of other ethnicities does not make sense.<sup>11</sup> This notion that includes colonies and trade emporia, however, seems associated more with the oppositional mode of formation, which became more relevant for the Hellenes in the Classical era, beginning with their most impactful interaction with foreigners yet, the Persian Wars. Throughout the Archaic era, before the Hellenes seemed to make much of a lasting impression on the outside world, their identity formed mostly through the aggregative mode, as their initial relations were between their own small, scattered poleis.

Jonathan M. Hall, a leading researcher of the development of Greek identity, addresses the question of what ethnicity is and what aspects of it are relevant when looking into the ancient world. At the core of Hall's argument is the role of mythopoetic tradition. This is the idea that groups fabricated stories about their ancestors and the subsequent relations that are created between themselves and those around them. This type of tradition helps a group of people to create

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<sup>10</sup> Malkin, *Ancient Perceptions*, 9.

<sup>11</sup> McInerney, *A Companion to Ethnicity in the Ancient Mediterranean*, 544.

a perceived genealogy that they use to inspire allegiance. Although mythopoetic traditions are not in and of themselves proof of an ethnicity, they are an essential part of its active creation. Hall insists that the creation of an ethnic identity requires a story of a people's shared ancestry, even if the story is entirely fictitious.<sup>12</sup> To understand a person or group of people as part of an ethnic group, the existence of literary evidence of their self-identification is essential. Material culture is insufficient evidence, in Hall's mind, because without a distinct explanation, it is open to such different interpretations. The material must be accompanied by documentation that a certain Hellene, as it will be in the case of this essay, recognizes themselves as such, acknowledging descent from the ancient King Hellen and therefore kinship with Hellen's other progeny.<sup>13</sup>

Hall's staunch belief in the necessity of literary evidence and his rejection of the relevance of other evidence is not without issues. This includes his claim that archaeological evidence cannot be used as proof of one's ethnicity because the material does not give a sufficient idea of how the associated person or group of people thought of themselves.<sup>14</sup> Author Nino Luraghi brings into the discussion of archaeological relevance a point that does not argue against Hall entirely, but sheds light on the importance of this field. Looking to Classical era evidence, Luraghi identifies the Persian Wars, as many scholars do, as playing a crucial role in the development of Greek identity but explains that Hellenes would never admit the extent to which they had been influenced by the Persians beforehand when forming their own culture prior to the wars.<sup>15</sup> For instance, golden, lion-shaped bracteates, which were clothing attachments made in the Persian Empire, have been found

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<sup>12</sup> Hall, *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity*, 24.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 2.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

<sup>15</sup> McInerney, *A Companion to Ethnicity in the Ancient Mediterranean*, 214.

in different Greek sanctuaries, including Dodona on the mainland.<sup>16</sup> A discovery such as this indicates a possible receptiveness to Persian culture that the proud, anti-Persian Hellenes would refrain from acknowledging in literary form. This example makes a case for the use of archaeology in the study of ancient identity and its formation because it shows an aspect of Hellenic development that they are not likely to have been proud of and would not immortalize through documentation of self-identity. Whereas literary evidence can reveal the group with which a person identified, archaeology can oftentimes play a vital role in explaining what contributes to that particular ethnicity.

Traditionally, scarcity of archaeological evidence has led scholars to rely heavily on literary evidence to the extent that they concluded that shared language was the quintessential expression of Greekness.<sup>17</sup> However, the prevailing attitude of modern scholars in this respect is that collectivities such as the Dorians, Ionians, or Aiolians are not simply linguistic groups, even if their unique dialects are important to their ethnic expression.<sup>18</sup> Straying from the idea that a shared language equates to an ethnicity, this approach has led to a school of thought in which much of the study of ethnicity throughout the history of mankind is entirely ruled out.<sup>19</sup> The uncertainty of proof provided by remnants of ancient Greek life leads to the idea that lineage, language, religion, and even sharing cultural practices are all symbols of an ethnic identity, but the very thing they symbolize would not exist without written and spoken discourse on self-identity.

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<sup>16</sup> Margaret Miller, *Athens and Persia in the Fifth Century BC: A Study in Cultural Receptivity* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 42.

<sup>17</sup> Jonathan Hall, *Hellenicity: Between Ethnicity and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 5.

<sup>18</sup> Hall, *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity*, 153.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 3.



The presence of a document written by any of the ancient peoples that we regard as Hellenes in which they refer to themselves as just that, a Hellene, did not come until the end of the Archaic era and contributed significantly to modern scholars' identification of the shift into the Classical era. The absence of such a document calls into question the existence of a "Hellenic" ethnic identity in the Archaic era, according to scholars such as Hall. However, as Hall himself insists, symbols and markers of an identity can be acknowledged without claiming that any, on their own, construct one. If it took the Persian Wars at the beginning of the fifth century BCE for the poleis within and around the Aegean Sea to put their similarities and budding sense of allegiance into words, the Archaic era that precedes it was when they built relationships amongst themselves, and these common aspects of life began to take form. To explain how contact with others in the fifth century was the final, oppositional formation of identity for Hellenes, the following description of the aggregation that took place in the Archaic era through the acknowledgement of shared lineage, language, and religious practice is essential.

When discussing the aspects of life that contribute to a person's identity, the ethnic indicium of a shared lineage is a topic that comes up repeatedly and is the most important marker for some groups. There is a consensus among many that the presence of a fictive kinship is the *sine qua non* for the development of an ethnic consciousness.<sup>20</sup> It was this idea of a genealogy shared by ancient Greeks that traced them back to the singular figure of King Hellen and, through this, they laid claim to lands, built relationships amongst each other, and later separated themselves from outsiders.<sup>21</sup> In the Homeric poem *The Iliad*, there is mention of "Hellas" as a smaller portion of the Greek mainland that took part in the Trojan War, but at some point the term changed from

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<sup>20</sup> Hall, *Hellenicity: Between Ethnicity and Culture*, 26.

<sup>21</sup> McInerney, *A Companion to Ethnicity in the Ancient Mediterranean*, 4.

referring to a piece of land around Thessaly to the name of the entire geographical area of mainland Greece and more (*Il.* 2.809).<sup>22</sup> Whereas the term “Hellene” was once used to indicate an inhabitant of a restricted area of south Thessaly, it later became a term for all those in ancient Greece who considered themselves a part of the mythical Hellenic lineage.

Hall’s aforementioned idea that mythopoetic tradition is an essential part of an ethnicity’s active creation points to what is now referred to as the Hellenic genealogy, which was first described in the *Catalogue of Women*, an epic poem that survives only in fragments. Very much like Hesiod’s *Theogony*, which describes the origins and genealogies of the Greek gods and other Greek mythological figures, the *Catalogue of Women* describes the descent of mortals of the heroic age, descended from gods.<sup>23</sup> This similarity in intent and style is much of the reason for which the *Catalogue* began being attributed to Hesiod, although this was later disproven, and the fragmentary poem is now regarded as pseudo-Hesiodic. It is within this poem that the lineage of the legendary King Hellen was first presented. Hellen fathered three sons, Aeolus, Dorus, and Xuthus, according to the *Catalogue*. Aeolus and Dorus became more familiar names, as they were the eponymous heroes of two of the four major groups of ancient Hellenes. Xuthus, himself, however, was not directly invoked by later ethnic tradition, but his two sons, Ion and Achaeus, became known as the two other eponymous heroes. Contrary to this account of the mythical Hellenic genealogy, a fragment from Hekataios of Miletos recounts Ion as being the brother of Locris, the eponymous figure of the Locrians, and can be directly traced back to Orestheus, Hellen’s brother, rather than Hellen himself. Despite this and few other descriptions that do not fall in line with the account of

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<sup>22</sup> Homer. *The Iliad*: The Fitzgerald Translation. United States: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998, 2.809.

<sup>23</sup> Ps.- Hesiod, *Catalogue of Women*, “The Descendants of Deucalion”, Edited and translated by Glenn W. Most. *The Shield. Catalogue of Women. Other Fragments*. (Loeb Classical Library 503. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 20180.

the *Catalogue*, such as Euripides' *Ion*, the pseudo-Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women* remains the dominant version of Hellenic genealogy found in the Archaic period.

Once it is understood that the grouping of peoples in ancient Greece was thought to stem from the family of King Hellen, it is not surprising how short a leap it was for the various Hellenes to perpetuate the tribal idea in their construction of identities in their individual societies. The tribal terms that have survived in Greek records show a subsistence of a hierarchy in the rhetoric used, such as in the use of the term *phratry* or 'brotherhood' which insinuated a kinship-grouping.<sup>24</sup> Another term used is *genos*, which indicated related families. Alongside *phratry*, this word was utilized by several states of the same dialect, hinting at possible existence of an earlier stage in which Greeks were still united in mainland Greece and under a more cohesive structure.<sup>25</sup> During the Dark Age and the beginning of the Archaic period, there was a simpler body called the *ethnos* which, at its basis, was a thinly scattered population with no urban centers, united in customs and religion, but governed by periodic assemblies.<sup>26</sup> This *ethnos* should have expressed an ancestral group more so than the later poleis, yet it is in the poleis and not the *ethnos* in which we see the phrasing of *tribe*, *phratry*, and *genos*.<sup>27</sup> There are only two instances in the *Iliad* where *phratry* is mentioned, both being when Nestor advises Agamemnon about the division of men in his military, saying they should be divided *phratry* by *phratry* and *tribe* by *tribe*. (2.362- 363; 9.63-64)<sup>28</sup> Such infrequent use, as well as the fact that Nestor's suggestions are not put into action, or even

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<sup>24</sup> Snodgrass, *Archaic Greece*, 25.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 42.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>28</sup> Homer. *The Iliad: The Fitzgerald Translation*. (United States: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998), 2.362-363; 9.63-64.

addressed later on, is evidence for the theory that the idea of a common genealogy, first instituted in smaller groups, was put in place as an artificial incentive to organize military and minor religious festivals on a small, manageable scale.<sup>29</sup> The rhetoric of ancient Greeks indicates a people heavily reliant on the structure provided by a common lineage and an idea of kinship, but the late period in which the Hellenes began to use these tribal terms suggests the artificiality of the genealogy.

A genealogy is constructed through myth so that it may create a sense of order. Many of the figures in Greek myth for whom the Hellenes named themselves, such as Dorus or Achaeus, did not have any heroic exploits, but simply served as faceless figures of leadership. Genealogy can serve several purposes, but it was especially used for elevating a claim to a status or a certain authority that part of a family may have had over their ethnically related peers.<sup>30</sup> There are several examples that demonstrate a people inventing their own lineage. In southern Italy in the seventh century BCE, territorial claims between the city of Metapontion and the Ionian city of Siris resulted in the Achaeans forging this mythical identity to bolster their assertions of ownership.<sup>31</sup> To rival the claim in the regions of contention, the group that would become the Achaeans inserted themselves into the family of the Ionians, making it so they could draw on the same claim. Through this event, the idea of the Achaeans came to be in a foreign land, and their identity transferred back to where they truly considered home in Peloponnesian Achaea.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, in the eighth century BCE, a contest for the city of Smyrna in Asia Minor promoted a climate of differentiation and self-identification between the Ionians and Aeolians that led to the creation of their identities and the

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<sup>29</sup> Snodgrass, *Archaic Greece*, 25.

<sup>30</sup> Hall, *Hellenicity: Between Ethnicity and Culture*, 26.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

adoption of the Hellenic titles.<sup>33</sup> Tracing back the first invocations of Hellenic identification reveals insight into the events that triggered the Hellenes to adopt their lineages to serve their needs in those moments.

In an ode to an Olympic games champion at the very beginning of the Classical era, the lyric poet Pindar reveals the sentiments behind associating oneself with the mythical figures who are said to be representative of one's home. Whereas Pindar typically made reference to the victor's family as an attempt to trace their inherited skill, in *Olympian 9* he does not reference the family of the victor, Epharmostus, at all. In place of the family, Pindar references the story of Deucalion and Pyrrha, a son of Prometheus and a daughter of Pandora, who were the sole survivors of a flood sent by the gods to cleanse the earth.<sup>34</sup> Coincidentally, these are the parents of the King Hellen, but the inclusion of this story is to explain the establishment of what would later come to be Epharmostus' home, Opus. The close descendance of Deucalion and Pyrrha founded Opus and the story seems to substitute his true, genealogical family with his mythical family which is traced back through his citizenship. Pindar's choice to include this myth in the place of the victor's family shows the Greek regard for ancestors. The presence of the story is influenced by Pindar's view that Epharmostus inherits his skill and greatness from such important figures as Deucalion and Pyrrha simply because of how he identifies himself, a citizen and representative of Opus. Pindar's *Olympian 9* is a prime example of how an individual in ancient Greece is viewed, and views themselves, as a descendant of their mythical founders and, as such, inheritors of their prominence.

Throughout the Archaic era, the idea of King Hellen's lineage became more prominent and served as an essential, aggregative form of developing identity. The mythical genealogy of the

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Pindar, and Kimon Friar. *Pindar's Odes*. Translated by Roy Arthur Swanson. (The Library of Liberal Arts. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill. 1974).

Hellenes was formed gradually, over hundreds of years, and was artificially constructed by the groups inhabiting the small part of the Mediterranean in and around the Aegean Sea. Due to the nature of this era of limited outside interaction, the Hellenic genealogy initially served to differentiate many of the poleis, yet it also became a crucial stepping stone to the sense of Hellenism that erupted with the beginning of the Classical era. The lineage of the mythical King Hellen through his sons and grandsons, Aeolus, Dorus, Ion, and Achaeus, was one of the most identifiable and important markers of the Hellenic identity and its fabrication in the Archaic era served as a tool for unification in the years to come.

Spoken and written language is claimed to be another critical form of unity amongst the Hellenes outside of their perceived lineage. The alphabet served to both unite the people inhabiting Hellas in the Archaic and provide enough variation between groups to distinguish them as separate entities. Philologists agree that the alphabet in use was a modified form of the North Semitic or Phoenician alphabet.<sup>35</sup> This alphabet was introduced to the region near the end of the Dark Ages and the beginning of the Archaic, around the middle of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE. Despite the modern acknowledgement of the alphabet's origin, the Hellenes, harboring a common belief in their divinities and shared mythology, understood the alphabet to be an invention of various pan-Hellenistic figures including Hermes, Prometheus, Palamedes, and Kadmos, who made the alphabet available to those who spoke these similar dialects of the same language.<sup>36</sup>

It remains difficult to gauge levels of literacy in the earliest periods of Greek history. However, scholars have made some headway in understanding the different ways in which written language was utilized and its various purposes in different regions of ancient Hellas. In Attika, the

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<sup>35</sup> Hall, *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity*, 144.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 143.

number of discoveries of personal inscriptions are much more than that of official inscriptions provided by a governmental body.<sup>37</sup> The personal evidence appears in the form of graffiti, dedications, and tombstones, as opposed to codified laws. Other regions of mainland Greece, such as Euboea, Corinth, the Argolid, and Laconia have presented evidence that suggests a similar use of written language. The earliest inscriptions found on the island of Crete, however, are mostly codified laws and the presence of personal use is limited.<sup>38</sup> It is important to recognize these and other such patterns in order to obtain an accurate idea of how relevant language was in the process of uniting Hellenes and how it may have served as an indication or a marker of a cultural identity.

Creating maps with boundaries marked by differences in linguistic features in the presentation of literacy in Greece has allowed the identification of areas that have unique dialects and a classification of four major dialects.<sup>39</sup> These four are West Greek, Attic-Ionic, Aiolic, and Arkado-Cypriot.<sup>40</sup> Language is not restricted by physical boundaries, and so it is impossible to assign dialects to particular poleis with total certainty, and these four dialects can be broken down into even smaller groups. However, these broad terms can be loosely assigned to general regions of Hellas, as the Arkado-Cypriot is to central Peloponnesian Arkadia and the island of Cyprus.<sup>41</sup> The distribution of dialects is often understood as being a result of the migrations found in literary tradition, and further research on the differences in dialect give a hint as to the chronology of migration.<sup>42</sup> For example, phonetic innovations of the Doric dialect, which falls under the West

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 145.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 155.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 156.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

Greek classification, can be understood as a result of its very late arrival and its similarities to more northern dialects may relate to proposed Dorian migrations.<sup>43</sup> The examination of ancient linguistics allows for a vague grouping of Hellenes by their dialect and can be used to gain a certain insight into the development of Hellenic societies.

The analyses of the application of written language and the differing forms of ancient Greek in the Archaic era are irrelevant in the discussion of their relationship with identity without a reference to how the people of this time understood the dialectical differences. Most attempts to answer this question are based on the presentation of interactions between different groups of Hellenes in ancient Attic plays. There are acknowledgements of the fact that other inhabitants of Hellas spoke differently from Athenians in the Classical era, but in the descriptions written by Plato and Aristophanes in particular, the dialect of each character was altered primarily to show where they were from, but it did not hinder any other character's ability to understand them.<sup>44</sup> These examples are not in the Archaic era, however, and so cannot be taken as fact for the relationships formed in this time, but an argument from silence can be formed when looking at the more ancient sources such as Homer's *Iliad*, in which there is no hint of any problems that the characters from the various poleis throughout Hellas had when communicating verbally.<sup>45</sup> Although sources such as Thucydides argue about intelligibility, they were writing at a much later date, and the example cannot provide much to this conversation.<sup>46</sup> The most convincing stance on the intelligibility between different dialects of Ancient Greek is that there are different levels of

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 156.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 172.

<sup>45</sup> Homer. *The Iliad: The Fitzgerald Translation*. (United States: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998).

<sup>46</sup> Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 3.94.5; Plato, *Protagoras*, 341, apud Hall, *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity*, 173.



understanding between different poleis and that dialects are likely most similar when regions are closer, geographically. Based on a study of ancient Greek linguistics, there was likely a recognition of a dialectical barrier, the extent of which varied depending on the poleis involved, but the basic similarity of alphabet which becomes more evident as literacy increased throughout the Archaic, and the ability to still understand other dialects can be recognized as an indicium of ancient Greek identity, albeit not a criterion.<sup>47</sup>

Alongside the kinship shared by the Hellenes and the linguistic similarities, there was a significant presence of a common way of life that the Hellenes recognized. There is much to be said about the values that many poleis developed and how similar they were, but it is also important to understand that these similarities were limited. The disciplined, militaristic, traditional lifestyle that the Spartans created was, in many, if not most, ways very different from the politically progressive, outward looking one of the Athenians. The lives of the citizens in different poleis could look very different, and, throughout their history, such starkly different ways of life reinforced disunity and competition amongst the Hellenes. However, the common pantheon of gods and similar outlooks on how the divine played a role in their lives serves as another marker of a Hellenic ethnicity. The Hellenes were a superstitious group of people, understanding random, mundane daily events as spiritual revelations about how favorable the outcomes of various parts of life would be.<sup>48</sup> Much of what can now be explained by science was attributed to divine intervention and normal life was thought to be heavily dependent on how pleased the gods were.<sup>49</sup> Living lives that were so intertwined with the divine, worship of the gods was at the heart of life

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<sup>47</sup> Hall, *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity*, 173.

<sup>48</sup> Chester Starr, *The Ancient Greeks*, 1st ed. (Oxford University Press, 1971), 15.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, 24.

in the poleis of ancient Greece. With religious worship at the center of existence, seeing the same practices of sacrifice and reverence in each other's poleis was an invaluable method of unification for the Hellenes.

The deep religious spirit became interwoven with all aspects of life. It encouraged the Greeks in the arts, letters, and, very importantly, athletics.<sup>50</sup> The athletic lifestyle that was common amongst the poleis brought about one of the most tangible events of unification in the Archaic period in the form of the Olympic games, beginning in 776 BCE. The competitions that were established became events in which people from all over the Greek world had the opportunity to come together and represent their polis. The games became a time to share ideas and bolster the reputation of one's home through athletic victory. It offered the Greeks a stage to interact and build relationships, even if it was based on competition and opposition. By coming together on a regular basis and having structured interaction, the Greeks had tangible evidence of a growing peoplehood, and by making it so only certain people and areas could take part, they created a perceptible community where a sense of allegiance existed between the smaller groups.

Thus the Archaic era of ancient Greece was a time in which the people of Hellas set the groundwork for an identity that would take on a more noticeable form later on in their history. Before the general term of "Hellenes" came into use, relationships were formed slowly, and ideas of a community were fabricated in the form of myth. Although these people exited the Dark Ages in isolation and had no concept of what it meant to be a part of a larger community, the end of the Archaic produced a massive population with a common perceived lineage, language, and religious practices that proved them to be very similar societies. Although they did not view themselves as one definitive unit that stretched throughout the Aegean Sea, there was a recognition of a shared

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 28.

life that was essential to the cooperation that ensured their survival in the years to come. Blood, language, and religion were the markers for an ancient ethnicity that the Archaic period of ancient Greece nurtured from the 8<sup>th</sup> century until the Persian Wars in the early fifth century BCE, acting as the foundation of what would come to be the Hellenes.



## Chapter Two:

### Herodotus' Hellene:

#### The Portrayal of Hellenic Identity in the *Histories*

In the *Histories*, Herodotus presents an image of the Hellenic community in the years leading up to the Persian Wars and until their eventual victory. This image is not always offered to the reader in the form of a straightforward description of the different poleis and the community with which they eventually identify, but oftentimes through the description of other societies outside of the Hellenic world. Herodotus details certain aspects of foreign communities in a way that makes it clear how these attributes are meant to be associated solely with foreigners and understood as non-Hellenic. Being under the influence of one polis in particular, Athens, Herodotus shares many of the insights that became the norm there after the Persian Wars, and his *Histories* tend to convey an idea of what should characterize a Hellene from this standpoint, presenting Athenian ideas as superior. Herodotus portrays the 'Hellene' as having an ethnic identity that develops primarily as a result of a desire to differentiate itself from the Persians and characterizes this identity by emphasizing common ways of life and ideas that have grown to become prominent and relevant in late fifth century Athens.

Herodotus identifies aspects of Hellenic life that were present in the Archaic era, but attributes them more significance and presents them in a new way. These qualities of the life of a Hellene are no longer isolated examples of similarities between poleis, but fragments that combine into a whole; a Hellenic ethnic identity. As will be discussed later in this chapter, Herodotus presents these aspects that he breaks down as the building blocks of an identity, accompanied by a proclamation of self-identity in the form of the label 'Hellene' in Book VIII of the *Histories*. Before this description of what a Hellene is and what parts of their lives bring them together and

warrant a widespread community with a title, Herodotus describes the character of the Hellene through the many anecdotes presented throughout the *Histories*, through direct descriptions of Hellenes as well as his presentation of the ‘other.’

Herodotus’ depiction of non-Hellenic peoples reveals much about the Hellenes themselves by showing what he, as a Hellene, associated with a group that was primarily understood as being the ‘other.’ Herodotus describes the Hellene not by merely showing what practices and beliefs they did not want to be associated with but also what they considered to be the exact opposite of themselves. Despite Herodotus’ comparatively balanced attitude towards the barbarian that often revealed itself in non-critical descriptions, his methods of relating other cultures through individual, oftentimes disconnected stories, as well as the very likely possibility that he did not travel to many of the lands he describes, led to potentially unreliable, fantastical accounts. It seems that Herodotus’ intent in adding these excerpts was not to relay the customs of barbarians with complete accuracy, but to show what he considered to be different from the Hellene. With this view in mind, one can consider how historically inaccurate many of the representations of barbarians are and recognize that the *Histories* may actually be used to learn more about the Hellenes themselves than any barbarian civilization that is described.

Despite the epic tone and grandiose narrations of events and customs that are likely not true to life, the possibility that Herodotus’ main intent was to entertain the masses must be brought into question on account of the sheer size of the work. This is not to insinuate that the Hellenic community was illiterate at the time, or that illiteracy was the norm, but the fact that the *Histories* is thirty times the length of any popular tragedies of the time suggests an alternative intent.<sup>51</sup> This is, of course, comparing two very separate genres, but the fact remains that these tragedies were a

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<sup>51</sup> Sara Forsdyke, “Athenian Democratic Ideology and Herodotus’ *Histories*.” (*The American Journal of Philology* 122, no. 3 (2001): 329–58. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1562032>), page 26.

dominant form of entertainment in the public sphere. Herodotus was committing himself to an extremely unfamiliar project and, had he been intending it as a piece of public entertainment, a work of this length would seem particularly bold, though of course, parts of it may have been excerpted for public performance. Geographers had attempted to describe parts of the world before him, but his choice to write in prose, include citations, and attempt to provide reasons for historical events set his *Histories* apart and suggest an intention to reach an audience separate from the general public, as a tragedy would.<sup>52</sup> Whatever the case may be, Herodotus makes it clear that he wrote the *Histories* “so that human events do not fade with time”.<sup>53</sup> The inclusion of this intention in the very first line emphasizes that this account reveals what ought to be remembered concerning the Hellenic community from a Hellene of Halicarnassus himself.

Herodotus’ initial insistence that the events he will recount be shared and celebrated is accompanied by an acknowledgement that “great and wonderful deeds” are brought forth by both of the two groups that he presents: the Hellenes and the barbarians.<sup>54</sup> This acknowledgement and the often-evenhanded depiction of the barbarians throughout the *Histories* is what later earned Herodotus the title of *φιλοβάββαρος* or “lover of barbarians.”<sup>55</sup> Yet his opening reduction of the groups of men to either Hellene or barbarian introduces the idea at the very heart of the *Histories*

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<sup>52</sup> Catherine Connors, “Eratosthenes, Strabo, and the Geographer’s Gaze.” *Pacific Coast Philology* 46, no. 2 (2011): 139–140, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41851022>. Apud Currie, Frances B., “Poetry to Prose: The Influence of Herodotus on Written History” (2022), page 3.

<sup>53</sup> Herodotus. *The Landmark Herodotus: The Histories*. Edited by Robert B Strassler. Translated by Andrea L Purvis. (First Anchor booksed. Landmark Series. New York: Anchor Books, 2007), page 1. All quotations from Herodotus in this paper will be from this same edition.

<sup>54</sup> Herodotus, and Rosalind Thomas. *The Landmark Herodotus: The Histories*. Edited by Robert B Strassler. Translated by Andrea L Purvis. 1st ed. Landmark Series. (New York: Pantheon Books, 2001), 1. All following citations of Herodotus’ *Histories* will be from this edition.

<sup>55</sup> *De Herodoti Malignitate*, 857 A. Plutarch, and Edward N O’Neil. *Moralia*. Translated by Frank Cole Babbitt, Harold F Cherniss, Paul A Clement, Phillip De Lacy, Benedict Einarson, Harold North Fowler, W. C Helmbold, et al. Loeb Classical Library, 197, 222, 245, 305-306, 321, 337, 405-406, 424-429, 470, 499. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1927.

that these two groups are fundamentally distinct. Herodotus presents ‘the Hellene’ in his inquiry into the Persian Wars during a time in which the Greek speaking members of the original poleis were first understanding themselves to be a part of a larger community, however turbulent it may have been. Herodotus describes ‘the Hellenes’ throughout his *Histories* in a way that delineates them as a member of a large group with an identity that develops in the context of the Persian Wars, setting them, alone, apart from the barbarians. Herodotus chooses certain aspects of Hellenic life to present as their main, common attributes. He also presents qualities that he believes Hellenes should incorporate into their identity based on his contemporary influences, as I will describe in this chapter. He intends these distinctions to be understood through his presentation of the two groups and celebrated in the years that followed the publication of the *Histories*.

Herodotus’ choice to present the barbarians, consisting of all foreigners, as a collective opponent of the Hellenes is a result of the times in which he wrote. In fact, it is a result of the very topic of his *Histories*. The Persian Wars were a seminal event in the representation of the Persians and how they are portrayed in the Hellenic world henceforth. The rise of so great an empire and their expansion throughout so much of Asia, the Middle East, and Africa is what led to the heightening of Hellenic self-consciousness that would remain with the Hellenic community in some way for the rest of the existence of any poleis.<sup>56</sup> Prior to this rise, however, the term ‘barbarian’ would not have been used as the broad term for the non-Hellenic world that it would later come to be. Language was an integral part of inter-poleis relationships throughout the Archaic era and into the Classical era, as was mentioned in chapter 1. Before the sixth century, βάρβαρος was used in Homeric poetry only once in the compound adjective βαρβαρόφωνοι, in reference to

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<sup>56</sup> Edith Hall. *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition through Tragedy*. (Oxford Classical Monographs. Oxford England: Clarendon Press, 1989), 9.



the Carians in the Trojan Catalogue, identifying them as ‘of foreign speech.’<sup>57</sup> Its presence is used only to generally identify the language, and the rarity of its use indicates a pre-classical time in which the Hellenes had very little way of, or even interest in, identifying larger groups throughout the ancient Hellenic world and beyond. While the term also appears in later archaic poetry, it is only in the time leading up to and after the Persian Wars that it becomes invested with a consistent and clear meaning.

The Persian Wars prompted the differentiation between the Hellenic and non-Hellenic, and Herodotus’ *Histories* clearly perpetuated such an idea for coming generations. The question of what Herodotus identifies as the fundamental ethnic differences and what his reasons may have been requires a deeper analysis of his work, as well as an understanding of Herodotus’ life. Although Herodotus was originally from Halicarnassus, he lived and worked in Athens and later the Athenian colony of Thurii for much of his adult life, and the influence of Athenian thought is evident in the *Histories*. Much of the presentation of Hellenic ideas at this time came in the form of entertainment for the public, and so theater was extremely influential in the mid fifth century of Athens alongside the works of storytellers and orators. Herodotus had been exposed to these different forms of Hellenic expression and had an idea of what it is about the way Hellenes illustrated themselves that separated them. The *Histories* are an expansion upon many ideas that were already in circulation in the fifth-century ancient Greece and Herodotus’ account is how he strove to have the Hellenes understood and remembered in the years to come.

The major works of entertainment prior to the Persian Wars came in the form of Homeric poetry: the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. In the setting of Homeric literature, democracy had not yet been invented, but that is not to say that the characteristics that would lead to this establishment were

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<sup>57</sup> Il. 2. 867 apud Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian*, 9.

not present. Although democracy was not extant as a societal structure, descriptions of the states in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* present the people as honoring and taking commands from the Achaean heroes, serving as kings, who provided them with protection and leadership.<sup>58</sup> These heroes were respected and deserving of their position, such as Agamemnon, who was “pre-eminent among all the warriors, because he was the noblest, and the people he led was far the largest in number.”<sup>59</sup> The reciprocal obligation between the people and their *basileus*, pre-eminent by nature, was a far cry, in the eyes of the Hellenes, from the tyrannical establishments of foreign nations whose corrupt, power-hungry despots held total control over their subjects, who were thought of as less than Hellenic and naturally suited to this enslaved position.<sup>60</sup> There was a sense of freedom in Homeric times that was common amongst the Hellenes that was not to be found, according to them, in the members of foreign nations, who were practically, if not literally, enslaved by tyrants.<sup>61</sup> When Athens instituted democracy, the established distinction of the Hellene based on freedom becomes more prevalent in this new form, allowing the Athenians to present themselves as being steeped in this quality that is associated with the Hellenes. This is a distinction between the communities that would come to be Hellenes and those that would not which Herodotus would be familiar with his entire life. Evidently, Herodotus is heavily influenced by the idea that freedom is a very positive attribute at the core of Hellenic identity and presents it as such in his *Histories*. As far back as the initial circulation of Homeric poems, there existed a sense of freedom in the ancient Greeks that distinguished them from the members of the world around them and Herodotus makes it clear that it is still present in the time of the Persian Wars.

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<sup>58</sup> Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian*, 14.

<sup>59</sup> *Il.* (2.579-80) apud Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian*, page 15.

<sup>60</sup> Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian*, 14.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

Herodotus reveals the tendency to share Athenian ideas in his first book where he recounted a story in which the King of Lydia, Croesus, prepared to meet the Persians in a war himself. Upon the words of an oracle that he understood to be favorable, Croesus sought to learn about the various Hellenes in order to choose allies in his endeavor.<sup>62</sup> In his presentation of the state of Athens at the time, Herodotus narrates: “Croesus learned that those in Attica were currently being oppressed and divided in political strife by Pisistratus son of Hippocrates, who was ruling Athens as a tyrant at the time.”<sup>63</sup> Herodotus did not simply address Athenian oppression and tyranny in the same breath, which would, on its own, insinuate an unfavorable view of such an institution, but he was straightforward about attributing that oppression to Peisistratus. In this excerpt, Herodotus begins to discuss an idea that the rest of the *Histories* is rife with: the power of a free man or group of free men is far greater than that of one under the control of another who lives a life of obedience by force.<sup>64</sup>

The events in Book V give multiple examples of the idea that Herodotus presents from the beginning, that a freed man is superior to a subjugated one. Prior to the Persian Wars, the scattered poleis were by no means a part of a single political community and so battle over territories was frequent throughout their history. In 5.78, Herodotus very clearly takes a pro-democracy stance, explaining what caused the increase in Athenian political and military strength:

The Athenians had increased in strength, which demonstrates that an equal voice in government has beneficial impact not merely in one way, but in every way... Thus it is clear that they were deliberately slack while repressed, since they were working

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<sup>62</sup> Herodotus, *Histories*, 1.56.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, 1.59.

<sup>64</sup> Forsdyke, *Athenian Democratic Ideology*, 333

for a master, but that after they were freed, they became ardently devoted to working hard so as to win achievements for themselves as individuals.<sup>65</sup>

This is stated in the context of inter-poleis fighting, and so is more of a testament to the improvement that democracy made on Athenians specifically than to the fact that freedom from tyranny helped all Hellenes and their states to prosper, democratic or otherwise.

Soon after this scene in Book V, Herodotus again presents the superiority of democracy in a situation of military conflict between Greek poleis, this time between Spartans and Athenians. Herodotus describes how the Spartans recognized that “when repressed by tyranny, [Athens] would be weaker and willing to submit to the authority of others” instead of having political strength and motivation as they do in a state of freedom.<sup>66</sup> When addressing the Athenian tyrannical past, Herodotus presents it as something that held the people down and divided the state, making sure that the *Histories*, the main topic of which is a struggle between free, independent poleis and a despotic empire of great magnitude, is filled with depictions of how tyranny stifles prosperity.

The decision by Herodotus to present these praises of democracy in the context of Hellenic communities fighting each other is very significant because it leads to favorable depictions of one polis over the other. He is writing at a time in which success in the wars has already been attributed to Athenian democracy. This propaganda, in turn, has insisted that the Athenians held a superior status and a right to rule over other poleis because of this democracy. Herodotus includes these excerpts that paint democracy in such a positive light to contribute to the conversation to say that he agrees: democracy is what strengthened Athens so much that they could attain their position in

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<sup>65</sup> Herodotus, *Histories*, 5.78, apud Forsdyke, *Athenian Democratic Ideology*, 333.

<sup>66</sup> Herodotus, *Histories*, 5.91.

the Hellenic world and attain victory against the tyrannical Persians. Herodotus presents the Athenians as the preeminent polis because it is characterized by this developed version of the freedom that the Hellenes *all* share, turning the *Histories* into a part of the Athenian propaganda that insists that Hellenic civilization should be characterized by this democracy and remembered as such in the years to come.

When the Hellenes finally thwarted the Persians, who fled mainland Greece and returned home, the alliance later called the Delian League was created to help ensure the safety of the Hellenes against future threats of tyranny from the east. The city states in the most immediate danger were those Hellenic communities in Asia Minor, as well as those on the Aegean islands. This was a democratic league in which all members had a vote, but Athens began to take control. Athens was given leadership of military forces and was also responsible for collecting dues in the forms of ships or tribute to be kept on the island of Delos before Athens moved the treasury to their own territory in 454 BCE.<sup>67</sup> Athens became more overbearing, however, getting more involved in the dealings of independent poleis and essentially bringing them under their own control.<sup>68</sup> Feeling a sense of entitlement due to their essential role in the Persian Wars and having control of the greatest navy in the Mediterranean, the Athenians essentially created an empire, imposing their influence on the other poleis of the league.

Athens encouraged the other poleis to begin to view themselves as Hellenes, democrats, and supporters of Athens, the center of Hellenic thought.<sup>69</sup> With this influence becoming more widespread, the goal of the Delian League seemed to become less of a specifically anti-Persian

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<sup>67</sup> Lee L. Brice, *Greek Warfare: From the Battle of Marathon to the Conquests of Alexander the Great*. (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, 2012), 46.

<sup>68</sup> Brice, *Greek Warfare: From the Battle of Marathon to the Conquests of Alexander the Great*, 47.

<sup>69</sup> Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian*, 16.

institution and became more concerned with the institution and protection of democracies.<sup>70</sup> Therefore, the evident separation of barbarian and Hellene in the minds of those in the community at the time became more closely associated with Hellenic sense of freedom than ever before, and Athenian and Panhellenic propaganda became near impossible to distinguish.<sup>71</sup> Although Herodotus is not writing about the Delian League itself, nor the aftermath of the wars, he lived in a community in which Athenian ideas have been presented as being ‘Hellenic’, and his exhibition of what a Hellene should be identified as has been influenced accordingly, as is evident in the way he addresses democracy.

Herodotus does not by any means consider the Hellenic sense of freedom to be the only factor that distinguishes Hellenes and offers a common set of beliefs that can be grasped through an analysis of the philosophies that motivate Hellenes and non-Hellenes. These beliefs were a set of unwritten laws, passed down from ancestors regarding the decent behavior and the proper code of conduct.<sup>72</sup> These were in many cases more sacred to the Hellenes than the strict observances of religious practices. For example, there were certain taboos that related to everyday life that were to be avoided at all costs. The most integral of such taboos included the killing of a guest by the host or the host by a guest.<sup>73</sup> They also included the killing of family members or suppliants, while also forbidding incest and insisting on proper burial of the dead.<sup>74</sup> These laws were essential for guiding daily life for the Hellenes and directed their actions to such an extent that they were able to recognize a common set of beliefs amongst themselves that contributed to a sense of identity,

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 163.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 184.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

specifically in the time of the Persian Wars, when they encountered a people with whom they associated a very different set of values.

The simple acknowledgement that groups of people can foster sets of beliefs different from one's own is obviously essential to the understanding that one has a different viewpoint from another. As is fitting for a piece of work that rests upon the conflict of two very different cultures, Herodotus provides his audience an elementary example of such conflicting perspectives and of his cultural relativism. This anecdote compliments his many accounts in which foreign kings or suppliants act in ways that seem so foreign to Hellenes by presenting the cultures as simply, fundamentally distinctive. This famous story narrates a scene in which King Darius summoned the Hellenes and the Indian tribe called the Kallatai in order to express this understanding that different cultures groomed different values and belief systems.<sup>75</sup> In this story, Darius asks how much money they would need to eat the bodies of their dead parents, something that appalls them and so they insist that no money would convince them to do such a thing. The Kallatai were asked if they would burn their dead, something that appalled them just as much, because it was their practice, passed down from their ancestors, to eat their dead. Although it is notable to acknowledge that the two groups are similar in thinking that respect for and proper treatment of the dead is important, the two customs are starkly different, and their adherence is so valued that the idea of straying from their norm invites disgust. Herodotus admits that if anyone were asked what custom was the greatest amongst all existing institutions, they would undoubtedly choose that of their own people, even after thorough consideration.<sup>76</sup> It is this simple, yet essential belief that socio-religious tenets are subjective that allows the Hellenes to observe the aspects of life that vary so

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<sup>75</sup> Herodotus, *Histories*, 3.38.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, 3.38.

much between themselves and others, specifically the Persians, and reach a sense of superiority, believing their own custom is best.

Although the Hellenes held their set of tenets sacred, Herodotus does not omit a series of events in which they act against this code; more specifically, the Hellenes violate the law of safe conduct for foreign ambassadors. Heralds were sent by Darius in 491 BCE to collect earth and water from Sparta and Athens as signs of Hellenic subjugation to the Persian Empire.<sup>77</sup> However, the two poleis refused, throwing the heralds into a pit and a well, insisting that they “take their earth and water to the King from there.”<sup>78</sup> The murder of such men is a serious violation of their code, and to further emphasize the irreverent actions of the Hellenes, Herodotus admits that when the Spartans sent two men to Darius so that he may enact retribution, the Persian King refused. Darius stated that “he would not act like the Lacedaemonians, who had violated laws observed by all humanity when they killed the heralds,” and through this, Herodotus reveals that in the passionate acts of defiance to a tyrant, the Hellenes went so far as to momentarily act more ‘barbarous’ than the barbarians themselves.<sup>79</sup>

The significance of such a backwards portrayal of Hellenes and Persians lies in the depiction of what resulted from the actions of Spartans and Athenians. Herodotus presents a lesson in this portion of the *Histories*, making it known that no one is safe from the wrath of the gods when violating their sacred codes of conduct, including the Hellenes themselves. Herodotus does not present the resulting punishments as immediate repercussions, but the threat of disaster loomed over the heads of the Hellenes for some time before it eventually befell them. Two Spartan men

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 7.133.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 7.136.



were killed many years later during the war between Peloponnesians and Athenians, long after the Persian Wars were won. They were brought to Attica and condemned to death, but the reason that Herodotus gives for this being the result of clear divine intervention and the final exhibition of the gods' wrath is that these two men were the sons of the two men who approached Darius to give up their lives.<sup>80</sup> The result of divine interpretation can be understood as having taken place in respect to the Athenians in a much more evident way, as all of Athens is razed before the completion of the war, a punishment that more clearly reflects the infidelity of murdering foreign heralds that should be protected by divine right. Herodotus insists that the Hellenes do not go unpunished for their actions, for although they may abide by a set of tenets that brings honor and even a sense of civilized superiority, defying them makes the Hellenes as low as any barbarian, and the gods will treat them as such.

Despite this admission that non-Hellenes subscribe to the view that visitors are to be treated with respect and protected, there are other values that Herodotus presents as being uniquely Hellenic. As an essential theme in his *Histories*, Herodotus incorporates something that he believes to be a distinctly Hellenic view which "prescribed that excessive prosperity and satiety lead first to hubris and then to destruction."<sup>81</sup> It is an ancient idea that the Hellenes upheld from the poetry of Solon down through fifth century literature that the gods would cut down the great and punish the proud. Herodotus undoubtedly writes the *Histories* having it in mind that the Persians, specifically King Xerxes, represented excess and a willingness to offend the gods with his desire for honor and uninterrupted success while the disciplined Hellenes were noble and free.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 7.137.

<sup>81</sup> Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian*, 70.

<sup>82</sup> Jayoung Che. "Socio-Political Significance of Herodotus' Hybris and Phthonos and Thucydides' Rule of Power and Tyche." *Athens Journal of History* 1, no. 1 (2015): 7.

This idea that that man falls as a result of moral depravity is now identified by the phrase ‘hubristic principle.’<sup>83</sup> The idea was common for Hellenes and was present not only in mythology and tragedy, but even history, as Herodotus shows in several scenarios. The concept is influenced by the ideas that are associated with Koros, Hubris, Nemesis and Ate, which can, in very simplified terms, be understood as a state of excess, the resulting insulting behavior, the divine retribution that is sent upon the perpetrator, and the irrational behavior that brings about such a disaster.<sup>84</sup> Herodotus’ presentation of Xerxes should be understood as being what he associated with tyranny and the people linked to such an institution. The noble Hellenes, on the other hand, were superior through their understanding and adherence to the natural order of the world.

To depict the hubris that he associates with the tyrant, Herodotus shares a story in which Xerxes asks for council, and his uncle, Artabanos, who has been presented as a very wise man in Xerxes’ court, insists that Xerxes end the council and avoid going to battle with the Hellenes.<sup>85</sup> Artabanos says, “the god strikes with his thunderbolt those creatures that tower above the rest, and does not permit them to be so conspicuous, while those who are small do not at all provoke him.”<sup>86</sup> This is the very concept that Herodotus seems to put forward as a significant reason for Hellenic victory. In this story, Artabanos espouses this wisdom, acting—not without some irony—as the voice of Hellenic wisdom and an understanding of the proper code of conduct. Artabanos serves as the character with which the Athenian audience would connect and whom they would appreciate as giving good council. However, by dismissing, and even ridiculing the advice that, to the

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<sup>83</sup> Richard Cudjoe, Peter Grant, and Jonathan Otchere. 2011. “The Fall of the Tragic Hero: A Critique of the ‘Hubristic Principle.’” (UJAH: Unizik Journal of Arts and Humanities 12 (1). <https://doi.org/10.4314/ujah.v12i1.1>), page 2.

<sup>84</sup> Cudjoe, Richard, “The Fall of the Tragic Hero,” 3-7.

<sup>85</sup> Herodotus, *Histories*, 7.10.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

Athenians, is so clearly appropriate, Xerxes is portrayed as even more arrogant and hubristic. Herodotus makes Artabanos the wise adviser so that his audience can understand that Xerxes had the right advice, “the god will not tolerate pride in anyone but himself,” right under his nose.<sup>87</sup>

Artabanos serves as the “tragic warner,” or the adviser that is entirely correct but always ignored.<sup>88</sup> The choice by Xerxes to instead heed the words of Mardonios, the other adviser who insists that Xerxes attack Hellas, in and of itself suggests some divine intervention, but the dreams that follow are undoubtedly formulated by Herodotus to reflect the traditional Hellenic view that gods intervene to punish hubris. The dreams that come to Xerxes, and later Artabanos, do not lie at all about the fate of the Persian Empire. One dream comes with a message for Xerxes, saying “if you do not lead this campaign at once, then here is what will happen as a result: as high and mighty as you have become in a short time, so low will you fall again and just as quickly.”<sup>89</sup> This claim by the gods cannot be disproven, as Xerxes chose to obey, but otherwise the dreams seem to insist on the attack without claiming there will be anything gained.<sup>90</sup> It seems, however, that some deity addressed Xerxes to insist that he undertake an expedition that would lead to defeat as a punishment for the extravagance of his life, but more importantly, the audacity he had to attempt to expand his power from Asia, past the Hellespont, and into Hellas, to “make the boundary of the land of Persia border on the lofty realm of Zeus.”<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Herodotus, *Histories*, 7.10; 7.11.

<sup>88</sup> Andrew Fulham, *From the Gates of Ivory: The Dreams of Agamemnon, Xerxes and Artabanos in Homer and Herodotus*, (Faculty of Humanities, Brock University, St. Catharines, Ontario, 2014), 59.

<sup>89</sup> Herodotus, *Histories*, 7.14.

<sup>90</sup> Herodotus, *Histories*, 7.15 apud Andrew Fulham, *Dreams in Homer and Herodotus*, 43.

<sup>91</sup> Herodotus, *Histories*, 7.8γ.

The *Histories* reflects a Hellenic ethnicity in an even more straightforward way when Herodotus presents the relationship that has developed amongst the poleis in the context of the Persian Wars. At the end of Book VIII, he explains the events leading to the final stage of the Persian Wars in 479 BCE. Here, a critical scene takes place in Athens as the Persian and Spartan envoys meet with the Athenians. Both parties entreat Athens to join them. The Persian Alexandros shares Mardonios' message which offers forgiveness for the aggression that Athens has already shown as well as additional lands, among other benefits, so long as the Athenians submit to Persia.<sup>92</sup> He speaks of the enormity of the Persian expedition, which is far greater than any force put together by the Hellenes, and the "superhuman" power of the king, a claim that, from the Greek perspective, clearly invites the wrath of the gods that seeks out the proud and prosperous.<sup>93</sup> The Persians insist that the benevolence of the treatment they propose is far preferable to the utter destruction that they can exact on the Athenians. They are incredulous as to why the Athenians insist on fighting, a justified disbelief, especially considering the much feebler offer that the Spartans propose. Whereas the Persians threaten annihilation, the Spartans insist that joining the Persians would not be the just or decent thing to do, a rather unconvincing argument considering the circumstances. They offer to support any Athenians that are unable to partake in this military endeavor and assert that the Athenians must not trust "the advice of barbarians, knowing ... that they are neither trustworthy nor truthful."<sup>94</sup> The words of the Spartans are driven by the idea behind the aforementioned oppositional development of identity, in that the Spartans insist that the barbarians are this distinct conglomeration of the 'other' and are, as such, untrustworthy, as

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<sup>92</sup> Herodotus, *Histories*, 8.140.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

opposed to themselves. This is the dismal situation that the Athenians find themselves in before Herodotus recounts a speech that articulates the most explicit extant definition of a comprehensive Hellenic ethnic identity.

Upon the entreaties of both the Persians and the Spartans, the Athenians first turn to Alexandros, the Persian representative. In their response, they are clear that they will simply never subject themselves to Persian rule and will come to no agreement.<sup>95</sup> They insist that they know their own dire situation and the massive disparity in military size, but they will choose to defend themselves nonetheless. To explain the idea at the center of their decision, the Athenians say, “we shall defend ourselves however we can in our devotion to freedom.”<sup>96</sup> This sense of freedom, now at the core of Hellenic identity, keeps them from making the safer and more practical decision in the face of the powerful Persian Empire. The desire for freedom and the intrinsically Athenian urge to defend their own is the first reason that Herodotus presents for the Athenian rejection of Persian clemency.

Next, they address the Spartans, asserting that that there is no reward in existence that would entice them to medize and enslave Hellas.<sup>97</sup> However, they insist there is much more to the decision, for even if they would allow such a thing, it would require that they abandon the opportunity to exact revenge on the people that burned and demolished images and buildings of their gods.<sup>98</sup> With this statement, the Athenians designate their determination to get revenge for the destruction of their temples a secondary motivation to oppose the Persians, behind their mission

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<sup>95</sup> Herodotus, *Histories*, 8.143.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> Herodotus, *Histories*, 8.144.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

to defend freedom. They offer the following reasons for why they would feel that, if they Medized, they would be betraying the other Hellenes.<sup>99</sup>

(I)t would not be fitting for the Athenians to prove traitors to the Greek people, with whom we are united in sharing the same kinship and language, with whom we have established shrines and conduct sacrifices to the gods together, and with whom we also share the same way of life.<sup>100</sup>

In these lines, Herodotus depicts one of the most significant moments in the study of Greek ethnicity and expresses a central idea of the *Histories*. It is the culmination of the development of a sense of identity that had been taking place for hundreds of years through the development of aspects of ethnicity in the Archaic Period. In the value that the Athenians assign to kinship, language, religious practices and customs, Herodotus is relaying what makes them—the *Hellenes*—a people.

The emphasis on language as a primary reason for the Athenian sense of allegiance and connection to their fellow Hellenes reveals how much the significance of language has changed throughout the Persian Wars. As I established in the previous chapter, the stem of *βάρβαρος* was in use as far back as the time in which the *Iliad* was in circulation, before the ability to document the epic.<sup>101</sup> The term *βαρβαρόφωνοι* existed to identify those speaking other languages, characterized by the undistinguishable “bar-bar-bar” noises that they made. In the time of the Persian Wars, we see that form of identification for an outsider be repurposed and given new meaning, so that the concept plays as great a role in unifying the Greek-speaking Hellenes as it

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, 2.684.

had been for separating the non-Greek speakers. The idea of language has become more significant because the Hellenes see it as something that brings them together and the transformation of what 'barbarian' means, from something with no negative connotation to a negative title for the 'other,' reflects this phenomenon. The concept of language behind the word 'barbarian,' although not the word itself, is now used to describe the Hellenes as much as it is to describe the barbarians themselves. The simple onomatopoeia which originally carried no derogatory connotations was transformed in the context of the Persian Wars when the Hellenes came face to face with the Persians and grasped at their commonalities, especially that of their language, to create a sense of what separated them from their enemy.

The kinship, language, religious practices, and customs that the Athenians invoke to explain a sense of loyalty to Hellenes are all things that can be found in some form in the Archaic era, prior to the Persian Wars. The kinship comes from the ideas that gave many different Hellenes their names based on their varying paths of descent from the mythical King Hellen. The language was present, but only in the time of the Persian Wars was it grasped onto in the search for a definition of the Hellene. Common forms of sacrifice and a deep religious spirit that was heavily involved in day-to-day life can both be identified in the Archaic, but the passage cited above shows an allusion to these aspects as parts of life that should incite a sense of loyalty complimented by the Athenian quest for vengeance on account of the destruction of their places of worship. The customs that Herodotus presents in his definition of a Hellenic ethnic identity is the aspect that he most successfully describes throughout the *Histories* even before this passage, providing tangible facets such as freedom and a collective set of beliefs. These aspects of the Hellenic identity existed before the Persian Wars, but this conflict introduces an environment of differentiation that

necessitates a definition that will invite unity. Herodotus uses the *Histories* to document such a definition and attach it to the title of self-identification that is the ‘Hellene.’

Herodotus’ *Histories* explain more than just what happened within the Persian Wars; they also define the people that were involved. As a Hellene himself, Herodotus was essentially explaining who his people were and what characterized them as such, although the influence of Athenian value undoubtedly colored this explanation and inspired an aspect of this revelation that can only be described as Herodotus showing what he thought should be a part of Hellenic identity. Anecdotes that explain the beliefs that led to the actions of both Hellene and barbarian are used to reveal the collective character of the Hellene, defined by a sense of freedom and moral superiority that marks them as more noble than others. It is these aspects of a common way of life that Herodotus presents alongside kinship, language, and religious practices as that which demands a loyalty within their community, effectively creating and labeling the ethnic identity of the ‘Hellene.’





## Chapter Three

### Uncertain Praise:

#### The Reception of Herodotus Throughout History

Herodotus produced a groundbreaking piece in his *Histories*, creating a new genre and offering a work that would set the stage for future historians and ethnographers in the ancient world. His discourse on the ethnic identity of the Hellene is invaluable and has contributed much to the study of ancient ethnicity, acting as a true self proclamation of ancient identity. The many facets of the *Histories* that are admired today, however, were discussed at length for over two millennia. For much of that time, Herodotus' contributions to history, ethnography, and entertainment were not without criticism. The critiques come in different forms, in different times, and are presented with different levels of fervor, but the various evaluations of the uncertain value of the *Histories* have led to a complex reception history. This chapter will address the different receptions of Herodotus years after his initial publishment, specifically by Renaissance-era scholars who encountered his depiction of the 'self' vs the 'other' at the same time as a "New World" in the west was being discovered.

Herodotus' *Histories* is much more reminiscent of the original ancient Greek meaning, 'inquiries,' than it is of our own general meaning of 'history'. Although Herodotus is indebted to the long tradition of Greek logography and chronography, both his scope and methodology constitute a new approach for inquiring into history. To learn about the Hellenes, Persians, Lydians, Scythians, Egyptians and many more, Herodotus relies heavily on his own experiences through travel when addressing geological, cultural, and biological elements. He also interviews people throughout the Mediterranean, basing much of the *Histories* on the words of the very 'barbarians' that he depicts.

A significant aspect of Herodotus' undertaking that characterizes his method and much of the quality of the information he gathered is that Herodotus wrote his *Histories* many years after the Persian Wars. The Persian Wars culminated in 479 BCE when Herodotus was just a child, and he is thought to have written about it nearly a generation later, towards the end of his life.<sup>102</sup> The span of time between historical events and his recording of them played a large role in the quality of Herodotus' work, because he was obviously reliant on spoken word. Many subsequent ancient historians and critics found fault with his work on account of what they perceived as the fallibility of oral tradition. Herodotus' form of historiography was, in many ways, new to ancient Greece, but even in the ancient world, members of Herodotus' audience did not hold back from criticizing his subject choice, research, and the overall amount of historical objectivity in the *Histories*.

Thucydides, a slightly younger contemporary, spent almost thirty years documenting the Peloponnesian War, making his own inquiry into the events that took place before his eyes. Thucydides saw his *History of the Peloponnesian War* as a more competent piece of work than that of Herodotus on these grounds, insisting that an accurate work must be on a contemporary topic so that the writer has a first-hand account of the event being discussed, rather than relying on what has been passed down by word: "I have found it impossible, because of its remoteness in time, to acquire a really precise knowledge of the distant past or even of the history preceding our own period."<sup>103</sup> Thucydides also compares his *History of the Peloponnesian War* to former works by saying,

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<sup>102</sup> Strassler, *The Landmark Herodotus*, ix.

<sup>103</sup> Arnaldo Momigliano. "The Place of Herodotus in the History of Historiography." (History 43, no 147, 1958), 3; Thucydides. 1972. *History of the Peloponnesian War*. Edited by M. I Finley. Translated by Rex Warner. Revised ed. The Penguin Classics. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1.

I do not think that one will be far wrong in accepting the conclusions I have reached from thorough evidence which I have put forward. It is better evidence than that of... the prose chroniclers, who are less interested in telling the truth than in catching the attention of their public, whose authorities cannot be checked, and whose subject matter, owing to the passage of time, is mostly lost in the unreliable streams of mythology.<sup>104</sup>

Although he is not mentioned by name, Herodotus' approach was unsafe according to Thucydides because of how far-removed Herodotus was from his content. In his reception of the *Histories* and the presentation of his own history, Thucydides set up parameters that influenced many historians thereafter and, most relevant to this discussion, the view of Herodotus' *Histories* in terms of veracity. Thucydides' standards of historical reliability narrowed what was a suitable subject to that which was happening before the author's eyes, a sentiment that heavily impacted the way in which Herodotus would be viewed.<sup>105</sup>

Thucydides' critical view of Herodotus set the tone for much of the reaction to Herodotus for thousands of years. Often, historians would subsequently be very critical of their sources, narrating contemporary political events.<sup>106</sup> When aspects of more ancient history were deemed necessary to these narrations, summaries of past historians and reinterpretations of their accounts were utilized to fall in line with this stricter method of inquiry that became the norm.<sup>107</sup> By offering this stricter sense of what can be viewed as a subject of history, and how one ought to obtain their information, Thucydides did not quite exclude Herodotus from the conversation of ancient historiography but presented him as the erroneous precursor. Thucydides' strict ideas were not

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<sup>104</sup> Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*. Edited by M. I. Finley. Translated by Rex Warner, 1.21.

<sup>105</sup> Momigliano, "The Place of Herodotus", 4.

<sup>106</sup> Jessica Priestley and Vasiliki Zali *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Herodotus in Antiquity and Beyond*. 2016. Boston: BRILL, 215.

<sup>107</sup> Arnaldo Momigliano. "The Place of Herodotus in the History of Historiography." *History* 43, no 147 (1958), 4.

entirely imposed on coming historians, but he did discourage inquiries into the past and the foreign subjects that were now seen as ‘Herodotean’ endeavors. Herodotus wrote his *Histories* with the bright idea that to understand oneself, one must look at others.<sup>108</sup> In that attempt, he sought to travel in both space and time. The manner chosen most often throughout ancient Greece to attain this knowledge of the self, however, became to study oneself all the more, a result of Thucydides’ critiques that set Herodotus aside and vulnerable to condemnation.<sup>109</sup>

To offer more insight into the view of Herodotus in antiquity, a reference made by Cicero in *De Legibus* offers a valuable example of how people in the ancient world regarded Herodotus in the light that was first suggested by Thucydides yet continued to read and share his work. When considering what could motivate a poet as compared to a historian, Cicero insists that accuracy was something that only historians must concern themselves with.<sup>110</sup> In this conversation, Cicero dubs Herodotus the “*patrem historiae*,” a title that is still associated with the author almost two thousand years later.<sup>111</sup> This is undoubtedly an honor given to Herodotus in these lines, yet immediately afterwards Cicero insists that the *Histories* are wrought with legends.<sup>112</sup> Cicero even offers parts of Herodotus’ work that he believes to be fabricated, such as the oracle that spoke to Croesus of Lydia.<sup>113</sup> Cicero’s evaluation demonstrates his admiration of Herodotus’ subject, research, and style, while still holding reservations concerning his accuracy. Cicero critiques

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<sup>108</sup> John Howland Rowe. “The Renaissance Foundations of Anthropology.” (*American Anthropologist* 67, no. 1, 1965), 5.

<sup>109</sup> Rowe. “The Renaissance.” (*American Anthropologist* 67, no. 1 1965), 2.

<sup>110</sup> J. A. S. Evans. “Father of History or Father of Lies; The Reputation of Herodotus.” (*The Classical Journal* 64, no. 1. 1968), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3296527>. 11.

<sup>111</sup> Cicero, *De Legibus*, 1.5 apud Momigliano, Arnaldo. “The Place of Herodotus in the History of Historiography.” *History* 43, no 147 (1958), 1.

<sup>112</sup> Evans, “Father of History or Father of Lies,” 11.

<sup>113</sup> Cicero, *De Legibus*, 2.116.

Herodotus' use of fables and blatantly rejects the verity of some parts of the *Histories*, yet still acknowledges Herodotus as the first historian, accurate or otherwise. Such a divided view of Herodotus would become even more popular in later ages.

An analysis of the reception of Herodotus in antiquity would be incomplete without mention of Plutarch, the famous philosopher, historian, and biographer whose influence reached the medieval and Renaissance figures that will be discussed later in this chapter. Plutarch had strong feelings towards Herodotus and expressed them at length in his essay *De Herodoti Malignitate*. Generally translated as "On the malice of Herodotus," this essay presents Plutarch's main quarrels with the historian which include a favoritism for the Athenians over the other Greek city states that leads to some very unfavorable depictions of non-Athenian Hellenes.<sup>114</sup> A particular part of Herodotus' *Histories* that Plutarch finds especially objectionable is the depiction of the battle at Thermopylae in which Herodotus explains that the Thebans were held against their will by the Spartans, as they were suspected of having the intent to medize.<sup>115</sup> It is also in this work that Plutarch first dubs Herodotus *φιλοβάββαρος*, ("lover of barbarians").<sup>116</sup> This comes as a result of the way that Plutarch sees Herodotus' slanders of some city-states of Hellas while presenting barbarians in a way that was more even-handed, especially considering the xenophobic attitude that thrived in post-Persian Wars Hellas. Plutarch understood the *Histories* to be an unreliable account characterized by too favorable a view of the Athenians that led to great Greek city-states being scorned and an over-fondness of barbarians that discredited Herodotus as an historian.

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<sup>114</sup> Momigliano, Arnaldo. "The Place of Herodotus", 6.

<sup>115</sup> Herodotus, *Histories*, 7.222; *De Herodoti Malignitate*, Plutarch, 864D, apud Jackson P Hershbell. "PLUTARCH AND HERODOTUS - THE BEETLE IN THE ROSE." *Rheinisches Museum Für Philologie* 136, no. 2 (1993), 159.

<sup>116</sup> Plutarch, *De Herodoti Malignitate*, 854E.

Although the common consensus among writers in antiquity is that Herodotus was not a reliable source for the Persian Wars and that his marvelous descriptions of foreign practices, people, and animals were untrustworthy, there were still some ancient sources that provide praise. The praise for Herodotus' *Histories* is based on the content and style. Herodotus' grace in describing the many different types of scenes in the *Histories* does not go unnoticed by his readers. Ancient scholars such as Theopompus, Aristarchus, Dionysus of Halicarnassus, and Lucian praise him, showing that there was a part of his ancient audience that appreciated him for his skill as a storyteller.<sup>117</sup> His work remained a classic, and scholars looked to him as a fascinating writer who could draw all types of audiences into his work through his descriptions of foreign wonders.

It is the audience's incredulity with Herodotus' depiction of these wonders that defined the way that Herodotus was regarded for almost two thousand years. He was not seen as a respectable historian that properly conveyed the truths of ancient Greece. He was not understood to be a credible source of information about the Persian Wars. Rather, he was considered one of the very limited number of informants on non-Hellenic areas. Even those ancient scholars who praised his style as superior to all other historians never stood up for Herodotus as a historian and claimed that he truthfully portrayed the world around him. The surplus of sources that attest to Herodotus' shortcomings and the paucity of any that defend his credibility led to a future in which any student of the classics in the Mediaeval and Renaissance eras who failed to read and scrutinize Herodotus for themselves were fed criticisms that deemed Herodotus a liar.

These students of the Middle Ages were in a unique situation when looking to a writer of the ancient past such as Herodotus, because the upper echelons of educated people of the Middle

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<sup>117</sup> Momigliano, Arnaldo. "The Place of Herodotus", 7.

Ages did not understand themselves to be very different from their classical predecessors.<sup>118</sup> The cultural tradition of Greece and Rome continued on for hundreds of years into the era that we consider the Middle Ages, distinct from antiquity.<sup>119</sup> The language of scholarship continued to be Latin, and although literature became scarce, the elite were not entirely cut off from classical works. Knowledge of ancient Greek, however, became incredibly rare in what had been the Western Roman Empire, and the ability to read Herodotus nearly disappeared there. In antiquity, the influence of Herodotus' critics was strong, but the Middle Ages was characterized by generations who *only* knew of Herodotus via the scathing remarks of the likes of Plutarch. The *Histories* were merely seen as a handful of exotic stories that offered nothing but shallow entertainment.<sup>120</sup> What we now consider the Middle Ages was accompanied by a rise in scholasticism and the High Gothic style. In this time, much of the classical tradition was abandoned and ancient literature was no longer viewed as the archetype.<sup>121</sup> The following century served as a reaction to this deviance from classical culture. In this era, the early luminaries of the Renaissance began to look again to the minds of ancient Greece and Rome, revitalizing the study of ancient Greek as a language and the literature that it offered, an event influenced by Byzantine scholars.<sup>122</sup> This revival of ancient Greek as a part of the Renaissance movement in a time in which Europe encountered the New World allowed Herodotus to be introduced in a new light.

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<sup>118</sup> Rowe. "The Renaissance." *American Anthropologist* 67, no. 1 (1965), 8.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> Jessica Priestley, and Vasiliki Zali, *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Herodotus*, 211; Michal Habaj "Herodotus' Renaissance return to Western-European culture," *Studia Antiqua et Archaeologica* 22, no.1 (2016), 84.

<sup>121</sup> Rowe. "The Renaissance." *American Anthropologist* 67, no. 1 (1965), 9.

<sup>122</sup> Habaj, *Herodotus' Renaissance Return to Western-European Culture*, 84.



The reintroduction of the *Histories* as a significant work of the ancient world that should be studied roughly coincided with the discoveries of new lands. Herodotus' work in turn has an especially complex and fascinating relationship with the systematic observation of new land and cultures in the New World. This is because the observation of the past and the acknowledgement of the differences that had developed over the years from Classical to Middle Ages and Middle Ages to more modern times allowed western Europeans to observe the contemporary differences between themselves and the new civilizations that they met through exploration.<sup>123</sup> The systematic way in which the explorers and scholars who I will present in this chapter chose to study and describe the new places, people, and animals they encountered is very reminiscent of, and sometimes directly influenced by, the methods presented in Herodotus' *Histories*. In this respect, the work that depicts the differences between the Hellenes and the barbarians ironically encourages Renaissance era scholars and explorers to come into contact with their own foreign neighbors. Renaissance Europeans' admiration for Greek literature and culture encouraged their study of the linguistic and cultural differences that could be found in other peoples of their present day, now separated by sea.<sup>124</sup>

Part of why the Renaissance is so involved in the development of interest in the New World is that the scholars in this time acknowledged the separation between themselves and the ancient Greeks and Romans. It was a temporal separation, but the fact that this movement recognized the ancients as the great masters of art and culture meant that there could be no claim to exclusive excellence and a sense of supreme superiority by contemporary societies.<sup>125</sup> There was an immense

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<sup>123</sup> Rowe. "The Renaissance." *American Anthropologist* 67, no. 1 (1965), 8.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

amount of racism and xenophobia present at the heart of interactions with new cultures, but recognition of their own differences from those of the past incited a European interest in those different from themselves in their own time. In Herodotus' *Histories*, the foreign ideas of different cultures were presented to those in Hellas who were shocked by how strange, and sometimes even disturbing, they were. Herodotus was intent on showing the way different cultures could develop such starkly different worldviews and insist on the superiority of their own practices, as Herodotus shows in the textbook example of cultural relativism that is King Darius' observations of the cultural differences between the Hellenes and the Kallatai. In The Renaissance, a new era of exploration, we see such ideas becoming relevant once again. Pietro Martire d'Anghiera, who reported extensively on others' accounts of what was found in the New World in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, documented the presentation of Mexicans to the Spanish court in a manner extremely reminiscent of Herodotus' Darius anecdote. Upon viewing the lip plugs that several of the captives being presented wore, d'Anghiera wrote,

I do not remember ever having seen anything more repulsive; they, however, consider that there is nothing more elegant under the orb of the moon, an example which teaches us how absurdly the human race is sunk in its own blindness, and how much we are all mistaken... It is clearly a reaction of the emotions and not a reasoned conclusion that leads the human race into such absurdities, and every district is swayed by its own taste.<sup>126</sup>

An account of the extraordinary practices of an outside community accompanied by the author's exclamation of its absurdity, while also acknowledging the ability for the other community to have their own values and cultural lens is eerily reminiscent of the *Histories*. This is not to say that Pietro Martire d'Anghiera was directly influenced by Herodotus through the reading of his work

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<sup>126</sup> Decade 4, bk. 7; Anghiera 1892, 2:4142 apud Rowe, John Howland "The Renaissance," 13.

and a desire to emulate him. However, the movement of exploration and the academic interest the New World created an ideal environment for a reevaluation of Herodotus as an historian as his ways of thinking were filtering into modern scholarship. The new interest in ethnography led to a systematic documentation of new tribes that lived in ways that were, to the Europeans, absurdly different. Anghiera was notably objective in his documentation of the interviews that he conducted with explorers and his insistence on proper record-keeping of what he considered the most interesting event in his lifetime- the discovery of the New World. In turn, his work gathered public interest and encouraged discoverers to keep notes of their endeavors.<sup>127</sup> Herodotus is different from Anghiera in the sense that he was more involved in participatory observation, but the *Histories* are certainly an ethnography in part and Anghiera's works are contributions to the field that Herodotus helped pioneer. In objectively recording peoples so unfamiliar to western Europeans, Pietro Martire d'Anghiera displays how the fervor for extraterritorial knowledge in his time reflects a Herodotean sensibility.

In short, a focus on the past that helped identify separations of cultures by time led to the Renaissance encouraging the study of cultures separated by space. Learning to apply this interest to contemporary cultures revealed differences as bewildering as the customs and animals that Herodotus recorded. As the Renaissance movement grew and the revival of ancient Greek prompted a new ability to read Herodotus firsthand (as well as a circulation of translations), these similarities and the mindset of scholars who were more aware of how vast and diverse their world was led to arguments that fought for Herodotus' reputation as a historian.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Rowe, John Howland. "The Renaissance." *American Anthropologist* 67, no. 1 (1965), 13.

<sup>128</sup> Lucas, F. L. "Greek and English" - J. A. K. Thomson: *The Classical Background of English Literature* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1948) *The Classical Review* 63, no. 2 (1949), 167.

The first argument for Herodotus that carried weight centered on the aforementioned renewal of a taste for incredible tales that pushed the limits of what people would believe truly existed in the world outside of their own. As critics such as Thucydides said, the nature of Herodotus' endeavor in making an inquiry into the past was untrustworthy. Thucydides believed that the role of the historian was to observe contemporary events and document what they could see developing before their eyes. The removal of Herodotus from his subject in time is what led to the inaccurate accounts of battles and events that led to them, but accounts of the New World seemed to serve as proof to many that one could travel and inquire into the past without being viewed as a liar.<sup>129</sup> They also recounted aspects of the New World that were so far-fetched that Herodotus' massive ants that dig for gold in the Bactrian desert, for an example, seemed almost plausible, and even this claim has been proven substantial in modern day.<sup>130</sup> These seemingly fantastical accounts reminded classicists of the *Histories* and the stories that led to Herodotus being dubbed a liar. People then began to recognize that unfamiliar practices might always seem unbelievable when the audience is steeped in their own ethnocentrism.

In the ancient world, part of why Herodotus continued to be a celebrated author who was in constant circulation is that history was viewed as a *magistra vitae*, as Cicero described it, meaning a teacher of life.<sup>131</sup> In this sense, history had the function of relaying actions that were deemed morally upright and worthy of imitation. This was part of the reason that some historians did not feel the need to include all aspects of the past, so long as what they were relaying was accurate to real events. Herodotus' *Histories* remained a relevant work of literature because of the

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<sup>129</sup> Momigliano, "The Place of Herodotus in the History of Historiography," 10.

<sup>130</sup> Herodotus, *Histories*, 3.102; Habaj, Michal, *Herodotus' Renaissance Return to Western-European Culture*, 90.

<sup>131</sup> Cicero, Marcus Tullius, E. W. Sutton, and H. Rackham. 1942. *De Oratore*. The Loeb Classical Library. London: W. Heinemann, 2.36 apud Priestley, Brill's *Companion to the Reception of Herodotus*, 126.

message it relayed in the defeat of everything the Persian Empire stood for by everything that the Hellenes stood for. As is explained in chapter two, the Persian Empire represented an overreaching hubris that was manifested in the actions of tyrants that sought too much, offending the gods. It was composed of a people represented as backwards who did not live by the ways that Herodotus presents as proper. The Hellenes, on the other hand, were generally a noble people that were suited for freedom. Herodotus presents them as respecting the proper order of nature, living without insult to the gods, and portrays this way of life as admirable by way of associating it with victory over the Persians. This aspect of his work helped maintain its relevance even when the historian was not considered accurate, but this sentiment was not always held by scholars later in the Renaissance.

The Europeans in later times were hesitant to trust the moral worth of the *Histories* based on the information that they had been given by the ancient scholars who commented on Herodotus.<sup>132</sup> Whereas the *Histories* had remained relevant as a *magistra vitae* in antiquity, many scholars in the Renaissance would not look past the fact that Herodotus' stories seemed unlikely and they remained under the influence of figures who had condemned him, such as Thucydides, Cicero, and Plutarch. For example, Petrarch, who is considered the father of the Renaissance movement, was not ready to find any worth in Herodotus' *Histories*, even for the moral lessons that can be found within, because of his familiarity with the works of Cicero.<sup>133</sup> Petrarch did not have a sufficient knowledge of ancient Greek to read Herodotus for himself, yet the admonition by Cicero on the point of a historian's duty to be truthful when referencing Herodotus led to one of the most influential figures of the Renaissance relaying this aspect of the ancient view of the

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<sup>132</sup> Priestley, *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Herodotus*, 126.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid*, 125.

*Histories* while leaving out any recognition of the value to be found in Herodotus' writing.<sup>134</sup> As can be seen in the judgement passed by Petrarch, the view of Herodotus and his *Histories* was distorted from the beginning of the Renaissance and led, if only in some cases, to scholarly disregard for the *Histories*.

The unfavorable view of Herodotus that reached the Renaissance incited a phenomenon in which translations of the *Histories* began to be accompanied by prefaces that addressed Herodotus' reliability and the lens through which these more modern scholars believed Herodotus should be seen. Giovanni Pontano wrote an unreleased preface for the translation of Lorenzo Valla that insisted that the standard for truth in Herodotus' time was not the same as it was in the time in which Pontano was writing, and so Herodotus could not be judged using contemporary standards of criteria.<sup>135</sup> He argues Herodotus was truly partaking in an inquiry rather than what should be considered a history. This is a difficult argument to make in light of the observations provided by Thucydides about what aspects of an historian's subject might invite inaccuracies as well as Cicero's insistence on veracity. However, Pontano's preface remains a defense of Herodotus to some extent, and the mere existence of this defense in a preface shows that the sentiments behind the critiques of these earlier figures are still very much in circulation during the time he wrote, in 1460.

A famous defense of Herodotus was written by Henri Estienne in his 1566 *Apologia pro Herodoto*. In this work, Estienne backs Herodotus by claiming that the argument that so often condemns the historian, that his stories have no verisimilitude, is entirely unsound.<sup>136</sup> What the

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<sup>134</sup> Momigliano, "The Place of Herodotus," 2.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>136</sup> François Hartog. *The Mirror of Herodotus: The Representation of the Other In the Writing of History*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), <https://hdl-handle-net.providence.idm.oclc.org/2027/heb04837.001.001:307>.

critics who advocate for this mean is that there exists nothing within their own lives that seems similar enough to the customs that Herodotus describes that makes them trust the descriptions. Estienne admits his frustration at such a flawed and illogical argument and refers to the striking differences amongst neighboring peoples in his own day that should seem similarly incredible if not for an exposure that forces people to believe in such disparities.<sup>137</sup> Another argument that Estienne offered is that Herodotus had a religious soul that was too pious to knowingly falsify his *Histories*, an argument that seems less logical and speaks more to the immense admiration that Estienne had for Herodotus.<sup>138</sup> However, the vindication of Herodotus through the comparative method of ethnography presented by Henri Estienne in his *Apologia* is, in general, a sound argument that made many readers much more sympathetic to Herodotus and more open to the possibility that his *Histories* relayed customs and events much more accurate to real life than previously believed, effectively altering the light in which Herodotus was viewed by the public from then on.<sup>139</sup>

Throughout the many years since Herodotus published his *Histories*, he was never safe from critics. The veracity of his accounts has always been in question since the fifth century BCE when Thucydides proclaimed what he considered the proper subject of a history. Herodotus came under attack for more than just the accuracy of his work, also being dubbed a malignant barbarian lover, but he also maintained many fans throughout the years. He was praised for his prose, and the grace with which he described fantastic events and unbelievable practices, and few could claim that they found his work dull. He was even considered a *magistra vitae*, teaching moral lessons

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<sup>137</sup> Henri Estienne, *Apologie ou L'introduction au Traité de la Conformité* (Paris, 1879), vol. 1, p. 11 apud Hartog, François. *The Mirror of Herodotus: the Representation of the Other In the Writing of History*, 308.

<sup>138</sup> Estienne, *Apologie pour Herodote*, 16. Apud Habaj, Michal, *Herodotus' Renaissance Return to Western-European Culture*, 89.

<sup>139</sup> Momigliano, "The Place of Herodotus," 12.

through his account of the Persian Wars. However, even during the Renaissance Era when authors were constructing passionate defenses of his intents and explorers had encountered real life cultures of an Herodotean incredulity, no one argued that he was accurate. Herodotus remains an invaluable source for the ancient world, the Persian Wars, and the development of a Hellenic sense of self, and the *Histories* can still be hailed as an incredibly skilled, breathtaking work, but thousands of years of critiques of the work's veracity remain a blemish on Herodotus' name.



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