

ON THE THRESHOLD OF THE GLOBAL CONFLICT BETWEEN THE EAST AND THE WEST
*HERODOTUS' STORIES ABOUT THE ASIAN ATTEMPTS TO INVOLVE SPARTA
INTO THE WAR WITH THE PERSIAN EMPIRE*

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ABSTRACT. Before the Greek-Persian wars, the Ionians had tried to engage the Hellenic states of the Balkan Greece in the flaring advance of a group of poleis in Asia Minor against the Persian rule, the Ionic revolt resulted in a large-scale (within the ancient world) conflict between the East and the West and unleashed a half-century's confrontation between the Hellenes and the Achaemenid Empire. In the complex international situation shaped at the turn of the 5th century BC in the Hellenic world — in its European and Asian parts — strong poleis needed not only military power but also the art of diplomacy to maintain their steadfast stance. In the second half of the 6th century BC the states of the Eastern part of the Aegean Sea frequently tried to involve Spartans in their affairs and exploit their military power in fighting Persians. Herodotus gives accounts of several such attempts: Hdt. 1.82–83; 1.152; 3.46–47 and 54–56; 3.148; 5.49–51 and 97; 6.84. Aware of the 'enormity' of the Persian wars in the world history, Herodotus chose a topic of a Homeric scale to be accounted of epically. His historical and ethnographic text is made up of various myths, yarns, legends, anecdotes and amusing and edifying short stories. The tyrant of Miletus Aristagoras sought to engage the Spartans in the conflict with the Persians by using peculiar bronze tablet (χάλκεος πίναξ), which was an archaic geographic proto-map meant to persuade Cleomenes to set out on a dangerous military march (Hdt. 5.49–50). According to the author of the article, the novella of Aristagoras' mission in Sparta and the bronze tablet are presented in the *Histories* as a drama: with dialogues, urgings, attempts made by the protagonist (the tyrant of Miletus) he tried to get King Cleomenes interested and win him over, yet, Aristagoras' designs failed. The role of Gorgo, the young daughter of the King, in this mini-drama is of great importance: she condemns the cunning petitioner, thereby rescuing her father and Sparta. This must be one of the tales that the Father of History could have heard about the wise Spartan Queen. The moral of the Herodotus' parable about Aristagoras, Cleomenes, Gorgo and the 'geographical map' can be interpreted as follows: beware of the Ionians bringing fake tablets. But in Athens everything turned out differently. There Aristagoras' mission was successful. Athenians sent the Ionians 20 ships, which, as Herodotus writes in Homer's language, became "the beginning of the disasters" (ἀρχὴ κακῶν) of all Hellenes and the barbarians (Hdt. 5.97.3) — the beginning of the great conflict between Europe and Asia.

KEYWORDS: Herodotus' *Histories/Muses*, Persian wars, Ionians, Homer, Sparta, Athens, King Cleomenes I, archaic maps, bronze tablet/*halkeos pinax*, Aristagoras, Gorgo, foreign policy, art of diplomacy, global conflict, West and East, Europe and Asia.

1. Introduction

The evolution of mankind has never been smooth, without intermittent controversies and clashes — interstate, international, intercultural, inter-religious, interpersonal... Innermost social laws, like the laws of nature, do not allow for quiescence. It would be naïve to assume that conflicts can possibly be avoided; the point is to contemplate them and find potential ways to resolve them. For everything is in the dialectical unity of war and peace.

The earliest work in European literature, *The Iliad*, speaks about the first great conflict — that of the war between kingdoms of the Mycenaean Greece and Troy during the Bronze Age. The poem starts with the strife between Agamemnon and Achilles, the first word in *The Iliad* being μῆνις ('wrath'): "The *wrath* sing, goddess, of Peleus' son, Achilles..." (Hom. *Il.* 1.1). Homer relates how the quarrel of the two kings brought about 'countless woes' for the very Achaeans fighting at Ilion: the interpersonal conflict in the poem is about the conflict between the East and the West.

The first extant integral prosaic work is devoted to the history of a significant ('global', in the ancient world) conflict — the Greco-Persian wars. It is *The Histories* (or *The Muses*) by Herodotus, whose primary focus was to preserve in the historical memory the "great and marvellous deeds done by Greeks and the barbarians" who were at war (Hdt. 1. Prooem.) Aware of the significance of the Persian wars for the world history, Herodotus chose the theme of a truly Homeric scale. And he produced an epic, by no means less exciting than that of his great precursor who extolled the events of the legendary Trojan War¹.

¹ In a recent paper on Herodotus-Ὀμηρικώτατος (*extremely Homeric*), John Marincola noted: "It was a truism of ancient criticism, as it is of modern, that Herodotus was the historian most like Homer ... Herodotus treated a great war between east and west, just as Homer had. ... Scholars have, moreover, detected numerous Homeric echoes and allusions throughout Herodotus' work, including in his battle narratives. ... Homer, of course, was a poet of war... Battles are correspondingly an important part of Herodotus' narrative, mentioned in every Book beginning with the first..." (Marincola 2018, 3 ff. with numerous examples of the events juxtaposed in Herodotus' *Muses* and Homer's epic). On the influence of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* on the work by the 'Father of History', on Homeric and Herodotus' intertextuality, scores of works have been written; see Bibliography in my articles: Sinitsyn 2017a, 137–138 = Sinitsyn 2019, 84–85; Sinitsyn 2021, 95–96, 104; also, I will refer to articles by Carey 2016; Murnaghan 2021; Zelnick-Abramovitz 2022 (with bibliography) and a new collection "Herodotus — The Most Homeric Historian", prepared by Ivan Matijašić (2022a). In the recent decades, the issues of relations between the "Father of History" and the epic traditions, Homer's influence on Herodotus, and "contests" between the historian of Halicarnassus and "the first poet" have become topical in the world Classics. We find

At the turn of the 5th century BC, the Hellenes of Minor Asia (and not only) kept making attempts to entangle Sparta in the war with the mighty Persian power. This article will consider some of these efforts and dwell upon an interesting episode from Herodotus' *Muses* about the inciting of the Ionian revolt, which marked the first stage of the Greco-Persian wars. Sparta and Athens took a different stand on the issue. Finally, this resulted in a full-scale conflict involving many states and nations of Asia and Europe.

2. The Ionians and other 'Asians' as supplicants to Sparta, and King Cleomenes I's policies

In the complex international situation shaped at the turn of the 5th century BC in the Hellenic world — in its European and Asian parts — strong poleis needed not only military power but also the art of diplomacy to maintain their steadfast stance.

Until the fifth century BC, Sparta often waged wars, some of which decades-old, but, largely, they were conflicts in the Peloponnese (Messenian wars, fight against Argos that ended in the 540 BC, and others, as well as expeditions into Central Greece: to Boeotia (519 BC), against Athens (510 and 508 BC). The aloofness of the Spartan state and, as it were, Lacedaemonians' disapproval of overseas expeditions inhibited them from engaging in military campaigns beyond their peninsula². Yet, in the second half of the 6th century BC the states of the Eastern part of the Aegean Sea frequently tried to involve Spartans in their affairs and exploit their military power in fighting Persians³. Herodotus gives accounts of several such attempts.

When in 547 BC the Lydian King Croesus sent messengers to Sparta to plead for assistance in the fight against the Persians (Hdt. 1.82.1 and 1.83), Lacedaemonians seemed to have responded to the call since they were in league with Lydia (the agreement had been concluded two years prior to these events, see Hdt. 1.69 sq.⁴). According to Herodotus, while the Spartans were busy preparing for the expedition, there came a message to say that Sardis had been taken and that Croesus had

the name of Homeros in articles by many authors in new "The Herodotus Encyclopedia" (Baron 2021a). See in the review: Sinitsyn, Surikov 2023a, 655–656 = Sinitsyn, Surikov 2023b, 1092–1093.

² Lupi 2018, 272.

³ See Pechatnova 2001, 184–194; Sheehan 2018, 8, 162–163; Lupi 2018, 271–273; Kulesza 2022, 178 ff.

⁴ See Asheri 2007a, 131, *ad loc.* Hdt. 1.69.3. As to the Croesus' agreement with the Spartans, How and Wells note: "This is the earliest instance of the recognition of Lacedaemonian headship in Greece" (How, Wells 1912a, 91–92, *ad loc.* Hdt. 1.69.2). Also see below, note 22.

been made prisoner (the siege of the Lydian capital is known to have lasted two weeks), and then the Spartans ceased from their efforts and decided against sending the army to Asia. Were the Spartans eager to assist their allies in earnest or whether their determination to support the Lydians was of a later account (concocted by informers, Lacedaemonians [surely], who offered it to Herodotus, and he, in turn, to his readers) in order to justify the Spartans, yet a fact remains a fact: they stalled over the sailing away to Asia, and Sardis was captured by the Persians. On the “Spartans delays” see comments to Hdt. 1.83 by David Asheri⁵, who, not without irony, notes: “this *second Spartan delay* (italics mine. — A. S.) in Herodotus: cf. [1]70, 3; the third and most famous delay was at Marathon (VI.105–6; 120)⁶”.

After Cyrus had conquered entire Lydia, the Ionians and the Aeolians sent their messengers to Sparta pleading them for military support (Hdt. 1.141.4; 152.1). And the Father of History, ironical as he was, describes the way their representative, Pythermos, made a mess of the mission: his speech in the Lacedaemonian Assembly was so long that he was interrupted in the middle. Herodotus mentions the purple cloak (πορφύρεον εἶμα) Pythermos, their supplicant, had put upon him (and he was so dressed up to flatter the Spartans) but his circumlocution had irritated the Spartans so much that they refused to discuss the issue of rendering the Ionians assistance, and the messengers departed empty-handed (Hdt. 1.152.2). And right after that the Lacedaemonians sent a ship of fifty oars, “as I suppose how it fared with Cyrus and Ionia”, explains Herodotus (ibid.). Peter Green commented on the Spartans’ behaviour: “Isolationism, then as now, formed an excellent breeding-ground for megalomania”⁷.

The ironic (almost anecdotal) passage about the Ionic supplicants harkens back to the Spartans, the account of the occasion is found in the Book 3 of the *Muses*. In 525/4 BC the Samians driven out by Polycrates reached Sparta and speaking to the magistrates (here: οἱ ἄρχοντες) pleaded for help (Hdt. 3.46). Yet, their speech was taken with a pinch of salt and the response was not favourable, for the speech was so long that the Spartans said they had forgotten the things which had been spoken

⁵ Asheri 2007a, 140.

⁶ The passages Hdt. 6.105–106 and 120 speak about the Lacedaemonian who came too late to take part in the battle of Marathon. The Athenians pled them to help defend Hellas from the Persian invasion. The Spartans were not unwilling but their two-thousand-strong army was ‘late in the field’: “Albeit they *came too late for the battle*, yet they desired to see the Medes; and they went to Marathon and saw them. Presently they departed back again, praising the Athenians and their achievement” (Hdt. 6.120; A. D. Godley’s translation of: Herodotus 1922, 275). See comments to this place in Herodotus: Scott 2005, 404–405; Hornblower, Pelling 2017, 265. Now, rely on the support from such allies!

⁷ Green 1996, 11; cf. Lupi 2018, 272.

at the beginning and did not understand those which were spoken at the end. Then, when the Samians were received for the second time, they had brought with them an empty bag (θύλακος) and said only this: “The sack wants meal”. The Lacedaemonians appreciated this allegory and prepared a force; though Herodotus explains that they did not do it out of compassion for the Ionians, and provides two different reasons why they responded to their plea for help: in repaying Samians of their former services and on their own (Spartans’) behalf (Hdt. 3.47.1).

Then the historian gives an account of the battle of Samos (Hdt. 3.54–56) and completes this episode with the Spartans sailing back to the Peloponnese after the unsuccessful forty-day siege of the polis. It is of interest that there emerges the theme of the Ionic bribery practice: Herodotus relates a statement about Polycrates bribing the Spartans, with the counterfeit money at that (!); yet, the historian immediately admits that it was unlikely. Whether the bribery story is true or not it is still unclear, but the rumour did reach Herodotus after many decades, and he retold it to point to the cunningness of the Samian tyrant, Policrates, and the simplicity of the Spartans, who were not used to financial transactions. Herodotus ends his account with “This was *the first expedition to Asia* made by Dorians of Lacedaemon”⁸. I shall note that Samos is regarded as part of Asia. The next expedition to the East in which the Lacedaemonians took part was almost half a century later, in 479 BC (see Hdt. 9.96 sqq.), when the Hellenes drove the Persians and their allies across the Aegean Sea into Asia. Noteworthy here is Herodotus’ reference to “Dorians of Lacedaemon”: he remembers the Trojan War — the first conflict between Europe and Asia, in which Lacedaemonians took part, but the Achaean Peloponnesians fighting at Ilion were not of Dorian descent, so the historian disregards *that* expedition to Asia and he regards the expedition to Samos as πρώτη στρατιή ἐς τὴν Ἀσίην⁹. The first eastern campaign brought nothing beneficial for the Spartans, but apparently they had learned a lesson or two.

Yet another attempt to involve Sparta in ‘Asian’ affairs was made by Cleomenes I (reigned c. 522 to c. 490 BC), who, according to Herodotus (3.148), resisted being bribed by Maeandrius. In 517 BC this former ruler of Samos, who had fled from his native polis to Lacedaemon, tried to entice Cleomenes to join him to counter Syloson, his enemy of those parts. Maeandrius offered the King silver and gold cups (ποτήρια ἀργύρεά τε καὶ χρύσεια), but the latter refused to accept them fearing lest the Samonians should entangle Sparta in the war, and the King banished him from the Peloponnese. This is the first attempt to bribe Cleomenes. As D. Asheri argues, “The anecdote underlines once again the cultural and moral contrast between

⁸ Trans. see Herodotus 1921, 73.

⁹ See comments to Hdt. 3.56.2: How, Wells 1912a, 271; cf. Asheri 2007b, 450–451.

Sparta and Ionia (cf. [I]46,1)...”¹⁰ I shall emphasize that this juxtaposes Ionic/East Greek cunning and profit-seeking with Lacedaemonian rigidity and uprightness. Interestingly, it is Clemeones I who was the epitome of these Dorian “national qualities”, and Herodotus says that Cleomenes “was the most upright of men (ὁ Κλεομένης δικαιοτάτος ἀνδρῶν γίνεταί)”, for “he not only did not think fit to take that which was offered” (Hdt. 3.148.2). This passage introduces Cleomenes for the first time, indicating that he was a son of Anaxandrides’, and the Herodotus’ δικαιοτάτος ἀνδρῶν is a reference (utterly ironic) to what has been already said about the ruler of Samos: Meandrius wished he were the most upright of men, and his wish did not come true ([Μαιάνδριος] τῷ δικαιοτάτῳ ἀνδρῶν βουλομένῳ γενέσθαι οὐκ ἐξεγένετο)” (Hdt. 3.142.1)¹¹. This stylistic (and ethical!) parallel is surely for the benefit of the Spartans, whom Herodotus sympathizes with, while he features his own (the Hellenes of the Eastern Aegean), mildly speaking, in a not so favourable a light. By juxtaposing the Dorians with the Ionians in this way, the historian of Halicarnassus derides the avarice and the hypocrisy of the latter.

Our source tells us about yet another deputation of the ‘Asians’ to Sparta. After Darius I’s army invaded Scythia in 514/3 BC, the Scythians sent messengers to Lacedaemon. The messengers expected that the alliance with the Spartans would allow them to deliver on the plan conceived by the Scythians. Herodotus provides a brief outline thereof: the Scythians will attempt to invade Media while the Spartans will set forth from Ephesos to join their Scythian allies, thereby barring the Persian King’s army (Hdt. 6.84.2). Indeed, the design of the expedition does look grandiose! There again, the commentators of Herodotus are skeptical about the plan of the joint operation, and, in general, about the episode featuring Cleomenes and the Scythians in Hdt. 6.84¹². W. W. How and J. Wells see the account provided by Herodotus as “a spiteful bit of gossip” derived from the later Lacedaemonian legend to the effect that the wretched king Cleomenes I allegedly took to drinking wine in Scythian fashion (unmixed with water and beyond all measure): “This programme of a joint attack on the Persian is even more magnificent than the scheme of Aristagoras (5.49–54)”, followed by: “But it is even less likely to have been conceived by

¹⁰ Asheri 2007b, 521, *ad loc.* Hdt. 3.148.1.

¹¹ Cf. Asheri 2007b, 518–519, *ad loc.* and p. 521. Thus characterizing the Spartan King, Larisa G. Pechatnova notes: “This is an amazing assessment if to consider that Herodotus was lukewarm toward Cleomenes” (Pechatnova 2007, 121). Yet, Herodotus’ attitude toward Cleomenes is far from being lukewarm; rather, it was controversial, in accord with his personality and the policies he pursued. As Ruszard Kulesza, a Polish scholar puts it, “Cleomenes was an outstanding yet extremely controversial personage” (Kulesza 2022, 178). Cf. Cawkwell 2011, 74 ff.; Sears 2020, 180–181; Branscome 2021a, 330; Sears 2024, 95, 103.

¹² See Macan 1895, 341; Scott 2005, 309; Hornblower, Pelling 2017, 200–201.

a Scyth than by the astute Milesian. The whole story looks like a spiteful bit of gossip invented to explain the term ἐπισκυθίζειν¹³. Yet, if the project (Scythians'?) of this military operation did take place, to what extent could it have been enforceable? The chances of success must have been small, which Cleomenes realized all too well. According to Herodotus, the King communicated quite often with the Scythians, but he never provided military assistance and the Spartans did not take part in the overseas military campaigns¹⁴.

During the two last decades of the 6th century BC, the Lacedaemonian interventional policies were conducted under King Cleomenes I. There again, I shall note that the performance of this leader of Sparta was confined to the Peloponnese and the surrounding areas¹⁵. According to Matthew A. Sears, (here his remark relates to the events of the last quarter of the 5th century BC and Brasidas' role in the Peloponnesian Wars): "The Spartans, however, for the most part still preferred to win their glory closer to home, without risking a major part of their forces on distant campaigns"¹⁶. So sometimes the Spartans' policies are regarded as policies of both isolationist and imperial tendencies¹⁷. Since Cleomenes' reign, such duplicity has been reigning supreme.

Yet, in the first years of the 5th century BC, when trouble was brewing in Manor Asia, the Ionians launched a revolt, and the Spartans did not seem to avoid their involvement into the imminent 'world' conflict.

¹³ How, Wells 1912b, 97–98.

¹⁴ Cf. Kulesza 2022, 178.

¹⁵ Thus, for example, while talking about Cleomenes' policies "aimed at foreign expansion", Igor E. Surikov writes: "...we encounter the energetic Cleomenes in command of the army *far away from the Peloponnese* (*sic!* — italics mine. — A. S.), namely, in Boeotia" (Surikov 2005, 247). To be more specific: Boeotia is separated from the Peloponnese by a 40km-long isthmus, that is, this area is within the army's day's march (see numerical computation: Sinitsyn 2009; Sinitsyn 2016).

¹⁶ Sears 2024, 152. On Brasidas, the Spartan commander, as a pioneer in strategy and tactics of military science, who undertook a risky venture to the northern parts of Greece (the Chalcidic-Thracian expedition), see in my works: Sinitsyn 2009; Sinitsyn 2016; Sinitsyn 2017b; Sinitsyn 2020 (with literature). On the contrary, M. A. Sears in his papers tries to prove that even before Brasidas, in earlier times of the history of Sparta, there were many Spartans who demonstrated the Brasidian audacity (Sears 2020; Sears 2024, 119–120, 130–133, 137–140); Sears classes King Cleomenes I among such intrepid 'Brasidians' (Sears 2024, 95, 103, n. 2).

¹⁷ Roobaert 1985; cf. Lupi 2018, 272, 280, 283; Sears 2024, 34, 96, 152.

3. Herodotus' novella about Aristagoras, Cleomenes
and mysterious *χάλκεος πίναξ*

As long as two generations, Ionia had owed obedience to the mighty power of the Achaemenids. In 500/499 BC the assembly of Ionic poleis convoked on the initiative of Aristagoras, the Milesian tyrant, and by the vote of a majority took a decision to set forth against the Persian rule (Hdt. 5.36). As Herodotus shows (5.31–37), apart from political and economic reasons, the instigators of this revolt pursued their personal intents arising from quarrels, offences, intrigues, and venal ambitions¹⁸. Histiaeus and Aristagoras, who just yesterday were zealous in serving King Darius I, now advocated a struggle against the Persian conquerors.

Herodotus speaks about the Hellenes' revolt in Manor Asia as either *Ἰωνίην τε ἀποστήναι ἀπὸ Δαρείου* (5.65.5)¹⁹, or *Ἰωσι ... ἀπεστάναι ἀπὸ Περσέων* (5.117), or *Ἰωνίην ἀποστήσας* (6.1.1, 2); cf. Hdt. 5.35.2, 3, 4; 5.98.2 [*Ἰωνίη πάσα ἀπέστηκε ἀπὸ βασιλέως*]; 5.104.1, 2; 5.113.2, *et al.* At the beginning of his account, the Father of History calls these events 'disasters' (*κακά*) that befell the Ionians *Ἰωσι γίνεσθαι κακά* (Hdt. 5.28)²⁰.

Hoping to enlist support from their mighty ally, Aristagoras set out on a diplomatic mission to Balkan Greece, and our source emphasizes that it was Lacedaemon where he headed for (Hdt. 5.38.2: *αὐτὸς [sc. Ἀρισταγόρης] ἐς Λακεδαίμονα τριήρει ἀπόστολος ἐγίνετο*). The Ionian messenger had planned to entice the Spartans into engaging in a head-on clash with the Persian king. Here Herodotus supplies a brief excursion into the political history of Sparta (5.39–48) which ends with a story about Dorieus' death and the reign of Cleomenes I. The historian says that Cleomenes was *ἄπαις* ('sonless')²¹, but he had a daughter, Gorgo (5.48), who at that time (499 BC) was eight or nine years old (5.51.1).

¹⁸ Debatable literature on the origins of the Ionic revolt against the King of Kings of the Achaemenid Empire Darius I and about Aristagoras and Histiaeus' resolve includes: Blamire 1959; Evans 1963; Lang 1968; Waters 1970; Chapman 1972; Evans 1976; Manville 1977; Murray 1988; Keaveney 1988; Walter 1993; Green 1996, 19 ff., 45 ff.; Briant 2002, 146–156; Thomas 2004; Cawkwell 2005, 61–86; Evans 2006, 101–116, 143–152; Munson 2007; Henderson 2007; Borukhovich 2009; Kuhrt 2010, 211–214; Greaves, Knight, Rutland 2018; Nudell 2023, 13–17. See reviews of contemporary scholars' views on historic problems: Scott 2005, 37 ff., esp. 52–73; Sheehan 2018, 153–179; Baron 2021; Rhodes 2022.

¹⁹ As for the definition in Hdt. 5.65.5 of this Minor Asia' Greek outburst, Lionel Scott, commentator, notes (loosely referring to this passage in *The Muses* — *sic!*), that the Ionic Revolt is not "strictly Herodotus' phrase" (Scott 2005, 37, n. 121). See also Powell 1960, 42, s.v. *ἀπόστασις*.

²⁰ Cf. Nudell 2023, 15.

²¹ See Hornblower 2013, 162, *ad loc.* Hdt. 5.48.

In his speech the Ionic supplicant stresses that a powerful state must help its poor enslaved relatives, and this is what Lacedaemonians may and should do since they are the most powerful in Greece²².

“Wonder not, Cleomenes, that I have been so zealous to come hither; for such is our present state: that the sons of the Ionians (Ἰώνων παῖδας) should be slaves and not free men is a shame and grief to ourselves in especial, and of all others to you, inasmuch as you are the leaders of Hellas. Now, therefore, we beseech you by the gods of Hellas, save your Ionian *kinsmen* from slavery (ῥύσασθε Ἴωνας ἐκ δουλοσύνης ἀνδρας ὁμαίμονας)” (Hdt. 5.49.2–3)²³.

It is interesting that the phrase ὁμαίμονες ἄνδρες — “kindred”²⁴ occurs but once in the passage Hdt. 5.49.3, which sounds even richer in the Russian version by Fyodor G. Miščenko: “братья ваши по крови (*your blood brothers*)”²⁵. The supplicant addresses the King on behalf of his enslaved *fellow countrymen*, calling the Spartans “his kindred” (ὁμαίμων)²⁶. Undoubtedly, this move was ingenious! As Reginald Walter Macan, the publisher and commentator of Herodotus, noted referring to ὁμαίμονες ἄνδρες, “The assertion of a relationship, a consanguinity, between Sparta and Ionia is not to be overlooked... The national pedigree had already been invented... (here with references to other passages from Herodotus’ work — A. S.)”²⁷.

²² Reference to the Spartan *προστασία* (‘authority, supremacy’) see How, Wells 1912b, 20, *ad loc.* Hdt. 5.49.2; also How, Wells 1912a, 91–92, *ad loc.* Hdt. 1.69.2, where commentators point to Herodotus’ passages in which the Spartans of Hellas were acknowledged as superiors: 1.69.2; 1.152; 3.148; 5.49; 6.84; 6.108.

²³ Trans. by A. D. Godley: Herodotus 1922, 51, 53.

²⁴ See Powell 1960, 264, *s.v.*; cf. Cary 1843 [s.p.], *s.v.* ὁμαίμων: “consanguineous, of kindred, related to” (loosely referring to Hdt. 5.49 c ἀνδρας ὁμαίμονας, likewise in *Lexicon Herodoteum* Schweighaeuser 1824, 266).

²⁵ Gerodot 1888, 23.

²⁶ Cf. Hdt. 1.151 and 8.144; discussion about τὸ Ἑλληνικόν... ὁμαίμῶν: Figueira 2020 (with bibliography). See Thomas Figueira’s article in the collection “Ethnicity and Identity in Herodotus” (Figueira, Soares 2020) on the language as a marker of ethnicity in Herodotus. The author speaks about the importance of the language criterion for ethnic identity, first and foremost, surely, about Herodotus’ definition of “Greekness”, τὸ Ἑλληνικόν в Hdt. 8.144.2 (Figueira 2020: 43 ff., 47 f., 52). See the review of new collection: Sinitsyn, Surikov 2021 = Sinitsyn, Surikov 2022; also: Sinitsyn 2023.

²⁷ Macan 1895, 189. T. Figueira concludes, exclaiming: “The only other appearance of the term in Herodotus is strikingly in another appeal to the Spartans that is made by Aristagoras of Miletos before Kleomenes on behalf of the subjugated Ionians (5.49.3). This may

But the Spartan king did not fall into this semantic trap with genealogical overtones. At the audience with the Spartan King, Aristagoras summons all his eloquence to cajole Cleomenes in the hope of winning him over. Aristagoras says that the Spartans have outgeneraled everyone in their military valour, and the barbarians are not particularly courageous, so the Lacedaemonians will find it easy to defeat them²⁸. To get Cleomenes even more interested, the tyrant of Miletus rhapsodizes over the riches of the Eastern peoples, noting that ‘Should you wish, everything will be yours’. It is here that he produces the *bronze tablet* (χάλκεος πίναξ) he has brought from Miletos²⁹.

The academic literature questioned the content of the Herodotus χάλκεος πίναξ (the masculine gender in Greek) and what it could look like, of the possible maker of πίναξ, of the very existence of such a proto-map engraved on a metal tablet, and the extent of knowledge of geographical maps the historian of Halicarnassus possessed. The story about the Aristagoras’ tablet is even more tangled because the only source offers but scant information. Elton Barker argues, “because Herodotus studiously avoids describing the χάλκεος πίναξ himself. After the briefest introduction — a map of the whole world with all its rivers and seas — he shifts attention instead on to its reader, Aristagoras, and what he does with it. We simply don’t

suggest that the stress on the characteristic of ‘same-bloodedness’ may be designed to overcome Spartan or Dorian prejudices about the Hellenicity of east Greeks” (Figueira 2020, 61, n. 4). See also Hornblower 2013, 164, *ad loc.* Hdt. 5.49.3.

²⁸ Tim Rood, commenting on the passage Hdt. 5.49.8, which speaks about a prospect of an easy conquest for the Spartans τῆς Ἀσίνης πάσης, explains: “Aristagoras’ total representation of space seems in turn to be linked with his appeal to a total imperialism” (Rood 2012, 132). On the Hellenic-Barbarian polarization in the Greek literature and culture of the 5th century BC, see Rung 2009, 109–145 (with a review of the available historiography of the problem); also here: on the image of the Persians as barbarians in Herodotus (Rung 2009, 126–137). Narrating numerous occasions of the polarization of the Greeks and the Persians in *The Muses*, Eduard V. Rung (2009, 136) refers to Hdt. 5.49: “In particular, the speech of Aristagoras of Miletus to the Spartans in Herodotus may serve as a good illustration of direct juxtaposition of the barbarian Persians with the Hellenes”.

²⁹ See Hornblower 2013, 162–168, *ad loc.* Hdt. 5.49. There many studies devoted to this subject, of recent publications are: Steiner 1994, 147–150; Ruggiero 1999; Bichler 2000; Armayor 2004; Rood 2006; Harrison 2007; Bichler 2007, 74 ff.; Pelling 2007; Purves 2010, 118–158; Branscome 2010; Dueck, Brodersen 2012, 107–109; Rood 2012; Branscome 2013, 105–149; Bichler 2013, 81–84; Ceccarelli 2016; de Bakker 2016; Barker, Pelling 2016; Romney 2017; Sheehan 2018, 161–164; Bichler 2018; Clarke 2018; Lupi 2018, 271–273; Clarke 2019, 190–193; Almagor 2020; Battistoni 2020; Romm 2021; Barker 2021, 97–102, 106–108; Baker 2022, 148–151; Blankenship 2022, 91–93.

know what form the map takes”³⁰. But I am interested in the use of this archaic map in diplomatic talks and the role that Herodotus assigns to this object (that is, the role which, according to the messenger’s design, the πῖναξ was to play) to engage the Spartans into an armed conflict.

The historian reports that Aristagoras “had audience of the king (so the Lacedaemonians say) he brought with him a bronze tablet on which the map of all the earth was engraved, and all the sea and all the rivers” (Hdt. 5.49.1: ἔχων χάλκεον πῖνακα ἐν τῷ γῆς ἀπάσης περιόδου ἐνετέτμητο καὶ θάλασσά τε πᾶσα καὶ ποταμοὶ πάντες³¹; and further: Hdt. 5.49.5: ἐς τῆς γῆς τὴν περίοδον). Herodotus’ presentation of Aristagoras’ πῖναξ as περίοδος τῆς γῆς relegates to the *World Survey* (Περίοδος γῆς) by a writer and scholar at the turn of the 5th century, Hecataeus of Miletos, one of the ‘fathers of history’ since this senior contemporary of Herodotus has a right to bear the title of *pater historiae*. It is not fortuitous that Herodotus at the beginning of his account of the Ionic revolt mentions his great predecessor: at the assembly of the Ionians, the historian of Miletus (in Herodotus: Ἐκαταῖος ὁ λογοποιός)³² was the only one (according to Herodotus) who expressed a ‘dissenting opinion’ doubting the feasibility of the overt actions to be taken by Hellenic poleis in Asia Minor against the Persian rule (5.36.2–3). According to the historian of Halicarnassus, Hecataeus, in an attempt to talk Aristagoras out of the intended enterprise, “recounts to them the tale of the nations subject to Darius, and all his power” (ibid.)³³.

Herodotus recounts Aristagoras’ arguments with which he tried to enlist the Spartan King Cleomenes as a friend: he tried to evoke compassion and played on the ethnic feelings of the Spartan King; the Milesian begged the Spartans on everything they held sacred to deliver their kindred from slavery: he resorts to flattery; he excited Cleomenes’ curiosity by the Asian riches: gold, silver, copper, luxurious garments, beasts of burden, slaves: “This is a thing that you may easily achieve; for the strangers are no valiant men, and your valour in war is preeminent”. The historian, on behalf of the Ionic tyrant, briefly recounts the content of the map pointing out the images engraved on the bronze tablet saying ἦδε, οἶδε, etc.³⁴ (as if Aristagoras himself were indicating the places that he was showing to Cleomenes): ‘this one’, ‘the one here’, ‘next’, ‘as you may see’, ‘next this land’, etc., and, summing up, he ends the passage: ‘that is what Aristagoras would say’ (Hdt. 5.49.4–7).

³⁰ Barker 2021, 101.

³¹ Trans. by A. D. Godley: Herodotus 1922, 51.

³² See also Hdt. 2.143.1; 5.125. Powell 1960, 209, s.v. λογοποιός: “maker of λόγοι”.

³³ Herodotus 1922, 39. See West 1991; Armayor 2004; Pelling 2007; Surikov 2024, 287–293; Surikov 2025, 37–95.

³⁴ Cf. Hornblower 2013, 163, *ad loc.* Hdt. 5.49.1; also Dueck, Brodersen 2012, 107.

By all accounts, it was for the first time that Cleomenes saw such an eastern curiosity. Herodotus, keen on the psychological nature of his heroes, says nothing about the response of the Spartan king. But Cleomenes seems to take an interest in the map in the hands of the Ionian: he follows his presentation, listens to his recitations, and asks questions. In all likelihood, over half a century after the visit of the messenger from Miletos to Sparta, the readers of Herodotus' accounts (at the time he was writing his work) were as fascinated by the story about *χάλκεος πίναξ* as they were by any evidence of Egyptian, Scythian and other Eastern curiosities. The author of *The Muses* states that his aim was to speak about amazing things (*θωμαστά*), which he indicates in the first sentence of his introduction to the *Histories* (Hdt. 1. Prooem.)³⁵.

Yet, Herodotus says not a word about Cleomenes' reaction to *πίναξ*. It seems that the Spartan King remains aloof, almost indifferent towards the yarns about the riches of Asia and the amazing tablet of bronze that the tyrant of Miletus spins. After Aristagoras' stories about King Darius' treasures and the map Cleomenes asked the petitioner to wait three days (and three nights) before he takes his final decision.

4. Do maps tell the truth?

Aristagoras' manipulations and the smart Gorgo

Thus, here we have an interesting story about the image of the telescoped world (visualized space) used to show to the other party an easy opportunity to conquer Asian lands and to convince him of the feasibility of a prospective campaign. In the written tradition, it is the first record of the use of a geographic map in diplomacy.

Where could the historian have learnt about the curiosity which the Ionic had brought to Sparta 60 (or about it) years before? Herodotus is vague about the sources, referring to the evidence obtained from the Lacedaemonians: "so the Lacedaemonians say" (Hdt. 5.49.1: *ὡς Λακεδαιμόνιοι λέγουσι*)³⁶. It is unknown who these

³⁵ On *ἱστορέειν* и *θωμάζειν* in Herodotus' *Muses* see S. Nikolaidou-Arabatzi 2018, though some assertions made by the scholar beg the question (see Sinitsyn, Surikov 2019a, 204–205 = Sinitsyn, Surikov 2019b, 374–375). On the Egyptian curiosities and Oriental exotica in Herodotus, see, for example: Sinitsyn 2006.

³⁶ Cf.: "the Spartans are the source for this part of the narrative" (Peek 2018, 80). An interesting note in Heinrich Stein to this point: "Das bedächtige *ὡς Λακ[εδαιμόνιοι] λέγουσι* zielt weniger auf die Tafel selbst als auf ihren allumfassenden Inhalt" (Herodotos 1963, 44).

unnamed Λακεδαιμόνιοι were³⁷. The historian must have been well aware of who the heroine of this episode was: Princess Gorgo, Cleomenes' young daughter, so the commentators supposed that the story may have come (surely, indirectly) from her³⁸.

At the very end of Herodotus' Book 7, there is an interesting story about Gorgo (at the time, a young woman, spouse of King Leonides and the Queen of Sparta), who in 480 BC cracked the secret of the eastern tablet delivered to Lacedaemon (Hdt. 7.239). Gorgo appears but twice in *The Muses*, and each time she proves to be a code breaker, a wise counsellor, in fact, the one who makes those who would listen follow her advice. Gorgo, according to D. Branscome, "serves as an adviser and code breaker" in Herodotus' understanding³⁹. Oliver R. Baker, a young Canadian classic, is more reserved in assessing Gorgo's ability of Enträtselung (with critical notes regarding the 'father of history'): "To claim Gorgo as the first female cryptanalyst overstates the case as she is not deciphering Demaratos' message, just revealing it. But in closing book 7 of his 'Histories' *Herodotus goes out of his way to make the case that where a roomful of men — supposedly Sparta's brightest and best — are utterly flummoxed, she is not* (italics mine. — A. S.)"⁴⁰.

Carol Attack notes that it is typical of Herodotus to present princely women as counsellors and commentators of political and ethic matters, which is how he regarded court cultures of non-Greek Orient⁴¹. Some of the Oriental women are ruling queens, but most of the characters in *The Muses* are kinswomen of eastern overlords or otherwise relating to the court. According to Mathieu de Bakker, "In some

³⁷ A fuller one, and with variants, see R. W. Macan: "The phrase seems to carry 'Lakedaemonian' authority for the whole account of Aristagoras' visit to Sparta, i.e. (1) the exhibition of the pinax, (2) the interview, or interviews, with the Eurysthenid (Agid) king, (3) the speech and arguments of Aristagoras. But the historian's art must also be reckoned with. The dialect is certainly his: but is that all?" (Macan 1895, 188).

³⁸ See: "The story of the exhibition of the map and of the private interview with Cleomenes may perhaps come indirectly from Gorgo herself, since Herodotus seems specially well informed about her..." (How, Wells 1912b, 20, *ad loc.* Hdt. 5.49.1).

³⁹ Branscome 2021b, 625. Of recent papers on the legendary Gorgo I shall give, selectively, the following: Bradford 1986; Paradiso 1993; Millender 1999; Pomeroy 2002, 57–58; Millender 2009; Chapman 2011: 48–50; Mitchell 2012; Kulesza 2013: 14–15, 30; Myszkowska-Kaszuba 2014; Millender 2018: 500, 512–515; Branscome 2021b; Kulesza 2022, 178, 185–186; Baker 2022.

⁴⁰ Baker 2022, 154.

⁴¹ Attack 2024, 126–127 (with references to the works of V. Azoulay and E. Baragwanath).

cases, their words have a decisive impact upon the course of history”⁴². M. de Bakker classes the wife of Candaules among “women whose speeches change the course of history” (1.11.2–3), Nitocris of Babylon (1.187.2; 5), Tomyris of the Massagetae (1.206.1–3; 212.2–3; 214.5), Atossa (3.134.1–3), Artemisia of Halicarnassus (8.68; 102), Artaynte (9.109.2) and Amestris (9.110.2)⁴³. As for the Greek women, the Spartan Queen Gorgo is a paragon in *The Muses*. M. de Bakker lists her among the ladies whose advice had an impact on the course of history. Herodotus’ Gorgo of Sparta has something about her that likens her to Oriental women, and this is not fortuitous that both episodes involving the queen/princess of Sparta (Hdt. 5.51.3 and 7.239.3) relate to the messages and messengers from Asia bringing various eastern curiosities: Aristagoras’ *χάλκεος πίναξ* and *δελτίον δίπτυχον* sent by Damaratus from Susa. And Oliver R. Baker is of the same opinion: “...we can make the claim that Gorgo, just to name one remarkable woman, earns her own place in Greek history on her own merits and not just upon those of the Spartan ruler to whom she is married or on those of her father”⁴⁴.

Scholars have made assumptions that the passage Hdt. 5.51 about Gorgo (and maybe the whole account of Aristagoras’ visit to Lacedaemon?) was influenced by the Ancient-Oriental narrative⁴⁵. I shall not be a judge on the oriental sources of this novella, but they really are poetic and exotic, revealing the established patterns and motifs encountered in the epos and tales. Here Herodotus had three heroes: the Prince, the outlandish tempter with his promises of riches, and the smart child exposing the venal alien, thereby saving his father and the home land. In the story, the supplicant and the king meet three times and they talk in three different places⁴⁶; after listening to Aristagoras during their first encounter, Cleomenes asks

⁴² de Bakker 2022, 199.

⁴³ de Bakker 2022, 199, nn. 9 and 10.

⁴⁴ Baker 2022, 154–155.

⁴⁵ See Paradiso 1993, 112–114; cf. Ruggiero 1999, 24: “recano tracce di una fonte biografica orientaleggiante”.

⁴⁶ Reference to the three-part structure of this novella can be found in Simon Hornblower’s comments: “H[erodotus]’s story of Aristagoras is in three stages of ascending seriousness and insistence...” (Hornblower 2013, 168, *ad loc.* Hdt. 5.51.1). About “spatial levels” in Herodotus’ account of Aristagoras and Cleomenes see T. Rood: “What is the setting for Aristagoras’ speech to Cleomenes? Herodotus reveals nothing — except that it is in Sparta... Again, when the day for Cleomenes’ reply arrives, Herodotus reports only that the two men came together ‘to the agreed place’ (*es to sugkeimenon*, 5.50.1)... He [Herodotus] first mentions that Cleomenes, after bidding Aristagoras leave Sparta, returned ‘to his house’ (*es ta oikia*, 5.51.1) — allowing us to infer that the earlier conversation had not taken place there. He then reveals that Aristagoras went ‘to Cleomenes’ house’...” (Rood 2012,

him to wait three days (ἐς τρίτην ἡμέρην, Hdt. 5.49.9), while the journey from the coast to the capital of the Persian King takes three months (ὧν τριῶν μηνῶν, Hdt. 5.50.2 and ἀπὸ θαλάσσης τριῶν μηνῶν ὁδὸν ἀγαγεῖν, *ibid.* 3)⁴⁷. It seems that the alien coming from the overseas speaks about a wonderful land – ‘a far-off land’ that is light years away, but this kingdom is bound with the sun and gold, it is the *land of plenty*. All these elements of a fairy far-off land are treated in detail by Vladimir Propp, the Russian scholar of folklore, epos and fairytales⁴⁸.

There may be yet another inter-contextual link with Homer, who in Book 18 of *The Iliad* tells about the map of the world on Achilles’ shield wrought by the famous artisan Hephaestus (Hom. *Il.* 18.478–609). None of the authors in the above-mentioned collection of articles points to this interesting similarity with the Poet of Poets, but, in my view, such a parallel stands to reason. And what is depicted on the objects — the entire content of the map-shield in *the Iliad* by Homer and the bronze tablet in *the Muses* by Herodotus, and the principle of description (the listing of visual images). Homer’s description of the beginning of the process of making the shield: “Therem he (the god Hephaestus. — A. S.) wrought the earth, therem the heavens, therem the sea...”⁴⁹ (Hom. *Il.* 483: Ἐν μὲν γαίαν ἔτευξ’ ἐν δ’ οὐρανόν, ἐν δὲ θάλασσαν...); cf. the above-cited description of the *bronze tablet* in Herodotus: ἐν τῷ γῆς ἀπάσης περιόδου ἐνετέμνητο καὶ θάλασσά τε πᾶσα καὶ ποταμοὶ πάντες (5.49.1). Here, surely, “extremely Homeric” Herodotus (Ὀμηρικώτατος) does not cite the epic poem, but both the monuments have something in common. The historian accounts are devoid of celestial bodies (the sun, the moon, stars, etc.: Hom. *Il.* 484 sqq.) since in Homer the divine master depicts the Hellenic cosmos (world order), while the small Ionic tablet represents only geo- and hydro-features. When presenting the map, Aristagoras emphasizes the riches pertaining to the places he indicates, not the distances between them⁵⁰.

122); cf. also “...Aristagoras follows Cleomenes home. The inference is that their first meeting is in some public place, perhaps with several *ephors* or members of the Generous in attendance. He also uses the word home rather than palace...” (Baker 2022, 149).

⁴⁷ Even though Herodotus offers his timing (5.52–53 and 54), confirming the correctness of the words uttered by the Ionic messenger: “Thus Aristagoras of Miletus spoke the truth to Cleomenes the Lacedaemonian when he said that the journey inland was *three months long* (τριῶν μηνῶν)” (Hdt. 5.54.1; Herodotus 1922, 61) and the specification at the end of the same chapter: οὕτω τρισὶ ἡμέρησι μηχανύεται ἢ τρίμηνος ὁδός (Hdt. 5.54.2). See Branscome 2010, 31–35; Branscome 2013, 139–144; Hornblower 2013, 168–171; Almagor 2020.

⁴⁸ For example: Propp 2000, 242–257.

⁴⁹ Trans. by A. T. Murray: Homer 1925, 323, 325.

⁵⁰ See Dueck, Brodersen 2012, 107–108; Rood 2012, 121–123.

According to Herodotus, during the audience, Aristagoras had a chance to convince Cleomenes with *χάλλκεος πίναξ*⁵¹. The Ionic ‘map’ could show only a limited size of geographic information, and the former sought to convince the latter of the smallness of Asia. Reinhold Bichler in his article *Herodotus the geographer* published in the collection “Herodotus — Narrator, Scientist, Historian”, speaks of the canny effect the scale of *χάλλκεος πίναξ* could produce. The Austrian scholar, pointing to the “political aspect of Herodotus” geographical interest, notes that Aristagoras’ tablet was capricious⁵². The map provides a conditional projection of the geographical reality, so it may well be used for personal gains. Aristagoras tried to rouse the curiosity of the Spartan King by showing him the prospects of gaining riches in Asia. The Ionic messenger, by all tokens, relied on the cartographic perspective which ‘squeeze’ space, thereby ‘cutting’ the time needed for the excursion, as Aristagoras’ aim was to show that Susa was a ‘stone’s throw’ from Lacedaemon⁵³. In fact, the Milesian used the Ionic curiosity as a means of manipulation in the negotiations⁵⁴.

But Cleomenes rejected Aristagoras’ request since the long journey into a foreign land seemed to him a wild-goose chase (Hdt. 5.50.3). Herodotus is ironic when responding to the Ionian’s behaviour:

“Till now, Aristagoras had been cunning and fooled the Spartan right well; but here he made a false step (ἐὼν σοφός καὶ διαβάλλων ἐκεῖνον εὖ, ἐν τούτῳ ἐσφάλῃ);

⁵¹ The discussion about whether the tablet brought by Aristagoras can be regarded as “a diplomatic document”, see in the recent article by Filippo Battistoni (2020). And Kai Brodersen considers Aristagoras’ tablet in connection with the issue of “maps in the service of the state” (Dueck, Brodersen 2012, 107–108).

⁵² Bichler 2018, 154–155. Cf. “Es scheint mir nur wichtig, herauszustellen, dass diese *ominöse Karte* in Herodots Erzählstrategie *als ein trügerisches Instrument* (italics mine. — A. S.) erscheint, trügerisch im doppelten Sinn. Aristagoras setzt sie als Instrument der politischen (Selbst-)Täuschung ein, mit der er den leichten Erfolg eines höchst riskanten Unternehmens verheißt. Trügerisch aber ist sie auch in substantieller Hinsicht, da sie ein in Herodots Sinn verfehltes Konzept der Raumerfassung illustriert” (Bichler 2007, 82).

⁵³ Cf. Wells 1923, 172, which compares the Aristagoras’s ‘map’ to Aristophanes’ cartographic jest in *The Clouds* (Aristoph. *Nub.* 206 sqq.); also see Hornblower 2013, 163. Cf. Dueck, Brodersen 2012, 118: “Hints at such graphic representations (Strepsiades in Aristophanes, Aristagoras in Herodotus)...” About the world map in Socrates’ ‘thinkery’ (phrontisterion) in *Clouds* of Aristophanes see Podosinov 2024 (but without comparison with the Ionian map of Aristagoras and without mentioning the passage Hdt. 5.49).

⁵⁴ Bichler 2018, 154: “Aristagoras’ tablet of bronze was treacherous... Aristagoras’ use of his map as a means of political manipulation was a dirty trick”.

for if he desired to bring the Spartans away into Asia he should never have told the truth; but he did tell it, and said that it was a three months' journey inland"⁵⁵.

When asked by Cleomenes how many days the journey from the coast to the capital of the Persian Kingdom would take, Aristagoras replied: three months. The straightforward answer foiled the talks in Sparta. As Filippo Battisoni notes, "Aristagoras beguiles with geography, Cleomenes calls his bluff with time"⁵⁶. According to Herodotus, if Aristagoras did reckon upon luring the Spartans into this affair, it would have been more reasonable to conceal the actual state of affairs and trick him into achieving the desired result. In this, the magic tablet would have done the trick: it telescoped the route across the lands inhabited by various peoples that they would need to take to reach the 'far-off kingdom' of Darius. Yet, this time the cunning Ionian (Herodotus calls him here σοφός) failed as a diplomat. This is how the historian deliberates⁵⁷.

The final words in Chapter 51 "and could find no occasion for telling further of the journey inland to the king's place"⁵⁸ sound as a justification (undiplomatic as it is!) of Aristagoras' sincere answer⁵⁹, and Herodotus launches himself into a detailed geographical excursion: specifying the stages of the journey measured in parasangs and days this would take, resting places and other details of the long journey (Hdt. 5.52–54).

The Muses tells the story about the Ionian χάλκεος πίναξ as a short drama where Aristagoras tries to bring home the blood brotherhood of the Spartans and the Ionians to Cleomenes, to convince him of the necessity to protect the weak by the strong, to sell the idea of potential gains and even to try to bribe the King. But the result was the opposite: a total breakdown of the Milesian design. And his attempt to bring into the loop the trump card — πίναξ — failed. After Aristagoras had failed to either convince or outsmart the Spartan King, he began to plead using the symbolic and sacral elements to be granted yet another audience (Herodotus points to Aristagoras' resort to the olive bough of a suppliant — λαβών ἰκετηρίην⁶⁰), finally,

⁵⁵ Herodotus 1922, 55.

⁵⁶ Battisoni 2020, 143.

⁵⁷ See Branscome 2010; Branscome 2013; Bichler 2018; Battisoni 2020.

⁵⁸ Herodotus 1922, 57.

⁵⁹ See Ruggiero 1999.

⁶⁰ Suppliants with boughs wrapped in wool could expect to be listened to; they were deemed to be under gods' protection, that is, untouchable. Cf. Hdt. 7.141.1; Sophocl. *OT*. 3; Andoc. 1.110; Aristot. *Ath. Pol.* 43.6; see *ad loc.* Hdt. 5.51.1: How, Wells 1912b, 21; Hornblower 2013, 168. "For Christians, the cross or bible could function similarly", — the American commentator explains (Peek 2018, 82).

he tried to bribe Cleomenes offering him larger sums of money. It was then that — like in Anderson’s tale — it was a child who unmasks the cunning supplicant, thereby rescuing her king-father and the army of Sparta. As the saying goes: From the mouths of babes come words of wisdom!

As Marcello Lupi comments on Aristagoras’ failed attempt to bribe Cleomenes, “The above anecdote reflects two *topoi* associated with Sparta in Herodotos’ own day: the corruptibility of its kings and an inward-looking community reluctant to undertake expeditions outside the Peloponnese”⁶¹. I fully subscribe to the second thesis on the aloofness of the Spartan society⁶²; as for my Italian colleague’s first speculation on the corruption of the Spartan kings, I cannot agree with it (but the research literature shows that many experts tend to think as Marcello Lupi does). But does Herodotus hint here at the Spartans’ propensity to take bribes? Just the contrary, in this episode the writer from Halicarnassus stresses that Cleomenes wouldn’t stay tête à tête with Aristagoras though the supplicant had asked for it (the King must have suspected what the Ionic cunning supplicant was driving at, and decided that they should meet in public, be it only a child, as Herodotus puts it). The historian notes that the King kept his daughter, Gorgo, in the room: “Cleomenes bade him say what he would and not let the child’s presence hinder him”⁶³. But Aristagoras, one may assume, was ill-pleased about that, for he had counted on being left alone with Cleomenes to be able to bribe him. The Ionian did not hesitate to offer a bribe to the King urging him to answer his plea, and kept offering him larger sums of money, but the King remained unmoved, and when Gorgo warned her father, “Cleomenes *was pleased with the child’s counsel* (italics mine. — A. S.) and went into another room”. So what corruptibility of kings can we speak of? — Nothing of the sort! Herodotus shows that the devious and corrupted Ionians thought that they could win the Spartans over with bribes, but this, as was already said, was the problems of the Ionians themselves. Moreover, it is not the first time that the Father of History mentions this “Ionic (Asian) style”⁶⁴.

Questioning the chronology established by Herodotus, Oliver R. Baker writes “...*Herodotus exaggerates Gorgo’s youth* in this anecdote from 499, perhaps to make her appear exceedingly precocious and her father rather doting. She is already married to her uncle on her father’s death in 490/489 and since her son comes out of regency in 479, we can surmise that she married Leonidas a year or so after this bribery incident, *putting her year of birth around 516 as was Artemisia’s* (italics

⁶¹ Lupi 2018, 272.

⁶² See below, Part 6 Conclusion.

⁶³ Herodotus 1922, 57.

⁶⁴ For other occasions, see above in Part 2.

mine. — A. S.)⁶⁵. That is, according to O.R. Baker, in 499 BC Gorgo was a young girl, not a child, and she was not 8–9 years old, as Herodotus believes her to be (he seemed to have deliberately diminished the Princess's age), she must have been twice as old — about 17 (*sic!*). But Herodotus found it important to show that Gorgo, laying bare the cunning designs of the Ionian, was then but a precocious child (such Wunderkind!).

The clever Princess unmasking the Ionic supplicant, thereby saving her father from being entangled in the conflict in the East. At times, commentators seem to ignore that earlier (during the second audience granted by Cleomenes to Aristagoras), the Spartan King had already refused the entreaty from the Ionic cunning supplicant: “Cleomenes seems less proof against corruption that fifteen years before (III.148), but Gorgo's precocious cleverness has its counterpart in her later wisdom (7.239)⁶⁶. But all this stems from various yarns Herodotus had heard about the wise Gorgo, the daughter of King Cleomenes, the wife of King Leonidas (as he admits himself in the Passage 7.239.4: ὡς ἐγὼ πυνθάνομαι). The instructive story is wrapped in the narrator's irony)⁶⁷. The story about the brave and smart girl who saved her native polis from a military venture that their overseas messenger had tried to drag it in, does remind us of the tale about the ‘naked’ emperor and his unmasking: *The emperor has no clothes!*

Later on, this exciting tale about Gorgo was recounted in other ancient sources; see, for example, Plutarch's *Sayings of Spartan Women* (Plut. *Mor.* 240d–e). The wise wife of King Leonidas also appears in Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* (Plut. *Lyc.* 14.5)

⁶⁵ Baker 2022, 146, n. 5.

⁶⁶ How, Wells 1912b, 21, *ad loc.* Hdt. 5.51.2. R. Bichler also writes (trusting Herodotus), that but for Gorgo, Aristagoras may have achieved his aim: “In the end he might almost have achieved his objective by bribing the King of Sparta *had not the king's little daughter intervened in time* (5.51) (*italics mine. — A. S.*)” (Bichler 2018, 154); cf. Bichler 2013, 82: “Fast wäre es Aristagoras noch gelungen, den König zu bestechen, doch dessen kleine Tochter vereitelte den Versuch (V. 50–51). Was indes in Sparta ein kleines Mädchen verhindern konnte...” (*sic!*). Cf. Kuhrt 2010, 216, n. 5; Lupi 2018, 272: “The intervention of Kleomenes' daughter Gorgo... saved Kleomenes from Aristagoras' attempt at corruption”. Similarly, Peter John Rhodes: “though, to be fair, Cleomenes too *might have succumbed* (to Aristagoras, who offered the King an enormous bribe of 50 talents; *italics mine. — A. S.*) if his resolve had not been stiffened by his daughter Gorgo” (Rhodes 2022, 31). The citation of such statements could go on. But it is not so! Earlier, Herodotus had told (5.50) that Cleomenes had refused to assist the Ionians, and the King's further entreaties (about them in Hdt. 5.51) could have hardly been successful. And this is under the condition that we can admit the truth of this story, which was so interestingly related by the wonderful historian of Halicarnassus.

⁶⁷ On irony in Herodotus, see the recent paper: Rutherford 2018.

as well as in his *Sayings of Spartans* (Plut. *Mor.* 225a, 227e). Speaking of the licentiousness (and even reckless looseness) of Spartan women, David Phillips adduces examples of such feminine behaviour that was deemed abnormal in the masculine world of the Ancient Greeks. The scholar names Gorgo a paragon of the “freedom of speech” of Spartan women; in the same place in the Note: “the precocious Gorgo”, with references to the records in ancient sources, including Plato’s dialogue *Protagoras* (342d), where Socrates speaks about the philosophy and rhetoric of the Lacedaemonians⁶⁸.

Herodotus jeers at the bizarre attempts made by his fellow cartographers making maps of the earth (περίοδος τῆς γῆς) (4.36). Hecataeus’ geographic ethnography is the main target of criticism in the episode under consideration⁶⁹, though the ‘Father of History’ of Miletus is not named in the passages Hdt. 5.49–51 and 5.52–54 which speak of Aristagoras’ notorious map and narrate the King’s journey to the Persian capital. This is also confirmed by the polemic nature of *The Muses*: Herodotus joins the agon with his colleagues (predecessors and contemporaries), first of all, with the Ionic forefather of history, Hecataeus of Miletus⁷⁰.

The episode of χάλκεος πίναξ shows the attitude assumed by the Father of History toward cartography, which must have been in vogue in the Greek Orient. Herodotus shows that the Ionic maps tell lies, that they can be used in political manipulations, so they must be treated with caution. The moral of the Herodotus apologue about the Aristagoras pro-map may be interpreted in the following way: beware of the Ionian bringing false tablets!

5. The way it was done in Athens Ships as ἀρχὴ κακῶν in Hdt. 5.97

After the mission in Sparta had fallen flat, Aristagoras headed for Athens. And there he was a success. “Coming before the people, Aristagoras spoke to the same effect as at Sparta...” The arguments he produced were the same as those with which he had tried to persuade the Spartan King Cleomenes, but “he did not promise in the earnestness of his entreaty, till at last he overpersuaded them (the Athenians)” (Hdt. 5.97.2)⁷¹. At first Aristagoras had stressed that the conquest of the Asia of King Clemeones would be ‘easy’ (Hdt. 5.49.3, 4 and 8), now this argument was

⁶⁸ Phillips 2022: 25, n. 14.

⁶⁹ In his new work on archaic historians (*The Forefathers of History*, vol. 1) I. E. Surikov positively admits that for him “it is almost certain that Aristagoras took with him precisely the map of Hecataeus” (Surikov 2024, 293).

⁷⁰ Bertelli 2001; Prontera 2001; Branscome 2010; Branscome 2013; Romney 2017; Zali 2018, 126–127.

⁷¹ Herodotus 1922, 117, 119. See comments *ad loc.* Hdt. 5.97: Hornblower 2013, 274–278.

used to convince the Athenian citizens (cf. εὐπετής and εὐπετέστερον in Hdt. 5.97.1 and 2)⁷².

When speaking before the National Assembly at Athens, Aristagoras managed to win most of the citizens over to his side. Just as in Sparta, he emphasized the ties of kinship: Milesians were colonizers having come from Athens at one time (ὡς οἱ Μιλήσιοι τῶν Ἀθηναίων εἰσι ἄποικοι)⁷³. Here a stroke of diplomacy — ὁμαίμονες ἄνδρες [Ἀθηναῖοι]! – worked like a charm. To convince the Athenians gathered on the square, the Ionic envoy did not have to use any ‘creative resources’, he got by with words, without ἱκετηρίη, bribery or any manipulations with his bronze curiosity.

In all likelihood, Aristagoras brought this notorious tablet back from Sparta. Yet Herodotus says nothing about its use in Athens, and this χάλκεος πίναξ is never found anywhere. It is strange that the Father of History should have said so little about this Ionic artefact: as a writer collecting information about various oddities, he could not have been left indifferent about such a thing. That πίναξ must have never been seen by Herodotus’ informers who told him about the meeting of Aristagoras and the Spartan King. Herodotus’ Athenian informers had never seen it or heard about it. Aristagoras, diplomatically, may have never mentioned it remembering his failed attempt at Sparta; by the way, he did not have to at the Athenian National Assembly because everything was settled favourably. But it still hard to believe that Aristagoras-σοφός never boasted of this curiosity (?!). I think that the presumptuous Ionian might well have boasted about his rare object, so χάλκεος πίναξ was to have been the talk of the whole city of Pallas. Yet there are no allusions to anyone mentioning it. And this is amazing for us, readers of *The Muses*...

By no means do I deny that Aristagoras did have the map, on the contrary, I believe that the engraved tablet brought from the East had to be a wonder of wonders for both the Lacedaemonians and the Attic Greeks, which encouraged the Ionic envoy to be bluffing all along in the diplomatic negotiations (this is what Herodotus says). But where could this damned thing go during Aristagoras’ visit in the Attic? Herodotus must have been aware of this visit from the Athenian old timers who had been witnesses of the events of the past half a century. Yet, the sheer omission of the fact by the Father of History makes it clear that nobody in the polis remembered χάλκεος πίναξ.

⁷² Powell 1960, 152, s.v. εὐπετής. See also de Bakker 2022, 210.

⁷³ Vladimir G. Borukhovich (2009, 202) noted: “That Athens and Eretria supported the rebellious Ionians was largely predicated on their ethnic origin”. Cf. Hornblower 2013, 276, *ad loc.* Hdt. 5.97.2.

The Athenians, exited by Aristagoras, provided the Ionians with all possible assistance. Herodotus gives an exact number of ships which were to be dispatched to Asia Minor (20 ships from Athens and 5 triremes from Eretria on Euboea: Hdt. 5.97.3 and 5.99.1); he also knew the name of the Athenian citizen, Melanthios, to command the fleet. This Melanthios is mentioned but once, but he is thought of highly: “a citizen of Athens in all ways of good repute” (Hdt. 5.97.3); nowhere else is he mentioned. He must have perished in that ill-fated expedition, and here he is singled out to reinforce the point.

This episode about Aristagoras at Athens ends with a symbolic dictum: “These ships were the beginning of troubles for Greeks and the barbarians (αὐταὶ δὲ αἱ νέες ἀρχὴ κακῶν ἐγένοντο Ἑλληνί τε καὶ βαρβάροισι)” (Hdt. 5.97.3)⁷⁴. Earlier, in comments by How and Wells (resonating with *The Muses*, Homer’s epic poem and Thucydides’ historical work: “For the formula cf. [Homer] *Il.* V.62, XI.604; Thuc. II.12; also ch. 28 and VI.67.3. Plutarch’s criticism (*De mal. Her.* 24) of this dictum is for once just as well as patriotic...”⁷⁵

The historian clearly juxtaposes the two episodes about Aristagoras’ missions in Lacedaemon and Athens. “Truly it would seem that it is easier to deceive many than one”, — the psychologist of Herodotus speaks ironically (5.97.2)⁷⁶. The clever Spartan King did not rise to the bait from the Milesian messenger: Cleomenes listened to the supplicant, spent three days thinking it over, considered everything, pose more questions and, finally, banished Aristagoras from the polis; yet, the Athenians were reckless in agreeing to render assistance to their kindred Greeks (ὀμαίμονες) from Asia Minor, who rose against the Persian dominance. Herodotus shows the contrast between Athens and Sparta, he condemns the Athenians who succumbed to the Ionic diplomat’s persuasions and sent ships that became the beginning of troubles⁷⁷.

⁷⁴ On the function of ἀρχὴ κακῶν “as Homeric echo” see de Bakker 2007, 114, n. 1, with references to works by Philippe-Ernest Legrand (1932) and Christopher B. R. Pelling (2006). Cf. also about ἀρχὴ κακῶν: “a Homeric echo: *Il.* 2.234, 5.63, 11.604” (Scott 2005, 29, n. 91); “this important and recurring Homerism” (Hornblower 2013, 277, *ad loc.* Hdt. 5.97.3); “a very likely Homeric echo”, and also “this Homeric parallel” (Matijašić 2022b, 22).

⁷⁵ How, Wells 1912b, 57–58, *ad loc.* Hdt. 5.97.3: ἀρχὴ κακῶν.

⁷⁶ R. Bichler (2018, 155) summed up: “There is a bitter irony in this account, and it represents a vivid example of the political dimension of Herodotus’ geographical interest”.

⁷⁷ Cf. “This clearly demonstrates that Herodotus was extremely indisposed toward the Ionic revolt” (Borukhovich 2009, 213).

6. Conclusion

With hindsight, Herodotus accounts of the decades-long efforts made by the Greeks from Asia Minor to engage the Spartans into conflict in the East, as is shown in episodes 1, 3 and 5 in the Books of his work, which testify to the acknowledgement by the Hellenic world of the Lacedaemonians' military might and their prudent use of that power. The *Histories* contain four occasions recounting the attempts of the Ionians to compel the Spartans to render them assistance; to ensure success in bringing the Spartan King to their side the Asian supplicants devise certain tricks: either by impressing the King with certain objects and/or by bribing him. In Hdt. 1.152.1 Pythermos, the orator, dons a purple cloak (πορφύρεον εἶμα) to attract attention of the Spartans; in Hdt. 3.46.1 the Samian exiles bring a bag in want of meal (θύλακος); in Hdt. 3.148.1–2 Meandrius of Samos tries to entice Cleomenes by offering him cups of silver and gold; and, finally, in Hdt. 5.49.1 sqq, Aristagoras, the Ionian supplicant, shows Cleomenes χάλκεος πίναξ, the fateful tablet map, which he had brought with a view of manipulating Cleomenes into assisting the insurgents⁷⁸. Of all these passages in the *Histories* the last one is the most important, the most vivid and the lengthiest (Hdt. 5.38, 49–55.1, 97). As Herodotus shows, Aristagoras' visit had become not just another but also the most significant trial for the Spartan King and the Spartans.

Although the Spartans were hostile to Persia (which Herodotus frequently mentions), King Cleomenes I's policy was that of noninterference into direct confrontation with the great Asian Empire. The Lacedaemonian unfortunate experience in the Samian expedition a quarter of a century before Aristagoras' mission must have taught them a lesson, and the foresighted Cleomenes did not want to repeat the venture.

The Father of History adduces controversial opinions of the Spartan King; hostile and favourable, plausible and far-fetched (and at times outright fictional). V. G. Borukhovich, when referring to Herodotus, notes: "Aristagoras had all but convinced Cleomenes the Spartan King, a man, generally speaking, not very bright, even erratic, as Herodotus describes him⁷⁹. Is it so? Herodotus wrote his book in the second half of the 5th century BC, when, by the tradition established after the

⁷⁸ Cf. de Bakker 2022, 206: "In three specific Ionian pleas for help in Sparta, Herodotus mentions items in his attributive discourse that the speakers bring along to persuade their audience". Here the Dutch scholar ignores the case of the peculiar gifts from Meandrius of Samos (Hdt. 3.148).

⁷⁹ Borukhovich 2009, 212.

death of the Spartan King, the role Cleomenes I had played was deemed unfavourable⁸⁰.

I agree with those scholars who believe that on the whole the state strategy pursued by Cleomenes at the turn of the 5th century BC had determined the Spartan further politics for the whole 5th century; the policies that allowed this polis to achieve hegemony in Hellas⁸¹. An incorruptible politician, having his state's best interests at heart, right-minded person and gifted general, Cleomenes proved to be a 'tough nut' for supplicants pursuing their aims; each time he managed to refuse help asked for by messengers from the East and avoid dragging his polis into war with Persia. Affairs in the eastern part of the Aegean Sea seemed too far to them. Engaged in the consolidation of their dominance in this peninsula, they tried to avoid sending their army to Asia Minor.

Of all the occasions of Asian attempts to draw the Spartans into armed conflict with Persia Aristagoras' bronze tablet story is described most thoroughly with lots of interesting ethnic, geographical details. This story about the diplomatic stance maintained by the Ionian looks like a tale, allegedly, no gifts and wonders can induce the Lacedaemonians to be drawn in conflict in a far-away land, unless they find it feasible. It is not fortuitous that Hdt. 5.51.2 gives about the approximate age of Gorgo: a child of about eight or nine years old; and it is of no importance whether she was still a very young girl or O.R. Baker is right that Herodotus deliberately plays down her age. The Father of history shows that even the Spartan children are reasonable and they protect their land from aliens' crafty designs, that not only boys but also Spartan girls fight for their own hand.

Could the dispatching of the fleet to assist the insurgent Ionians have been a challenge for the prudent Spartans? Yet they did their best to avoid plunging into "Ἴωσι κακὰ. Though, several years later both the hegemonic poleis – Athens and Sparta – would become actors in the 'global' conflict, the very same that Herodotus would glorify in his *Muses*, the work that would bring glory to Herodotus establishing him as *pater historiae*⁸².

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⁸⁰ See Forrest 1968; Parker 1998; Surikov 2005: 211–269; Pechatnova 2006; Pechatnova 2007, 82–141; Welwei 2007; Cawkwell 2011, 74–94; Branscome 2021a; Kulesza 2022, 178–186.

⁸¹ Ste. Croix 2004, 421–440; Pechatnova 2006, 61 f.; Pechatnova 2007; Lupi 2018.

⁸² See van der Dussen 2016.

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