Herodotus, Cretan neutrality and the Peloponnesian War
Revisiting Hdt. 7.169-171[*]
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Abstract: *This article discusses the section on Cretan neutrality in Herodotus'* Histories *(7.169-171). After highlighting some distinctive features of this account regarding its structure, the themes treated and Herodotus' methodology, it proposes an interpretation based on the context of the Peloponnesian War: it suggests, more specifically, that the Cretan account contains hints of the events of the beginning of the Peloponnesian War (431-427 BCE), such as the plague, the opposition between islanders and mainlanders and the first attempts of the Athenians to conquer Sicily.*

Keywords: *Herodotus; Persian Wars; Cretan neutrality; Peloponnesian War; publication date of Herodotus'* Histories

Herodotus and Hellenic (dis)unity

Herodotus has been accused by Plutarch of failing to provide a sufficiently glorifying narrative of the Persian Wars and of insisting instead on the negative side of this struggle.[1] Indeed, one of his most controversial statements is that, had it not been for Athens' perseverance and willingness to resist, the whole of Hellas would have been subjugated by the Persians.[2] This assertion, in line with Athenian propaganda of Herodotus' own times,[3] calls the unity and solidarity of the *hellenikon* into serious question. Herodotus further insists on the fear that Xerxes' expedition aroused[4] and provides information on the

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[1] Plut. *Mal. Her.* 855b5-c6.

[2] 7.139. All references to ancient Greek passages in this paper are from Herodotus, unless otherwise noted. Herodotus describes his view on the prevalence of the Athenian contribution to the Persian Wars as ἐπίφθονος, that is, susceptible to arouse envy (*LSJ*, s.v. 'liable to envy or jealousy, looked on with jealousy, odious'). This word reflects the Athenian ideology of the beginning of the Peloponnesian War (Thuc. 1.75.2, 2.64.5). For Herodotus' relationship to Athens, see Moles 2002 and Thomas 2006.

[3] Cf. the speech of the Athenian ambassadors at Sparta at the beginning of the Peloponnesian War: 'Our claim is that at Marathon *we alone undertook the risk of fighting against the barbarians.* And when the second invasion came, without sufficient forces to resist on land we took to our ships with our whole citizen body and joined in the battle of Salamis...' (Thuc. 1.73.4-5). Translations of Thucydides are from Hammond 2009, sometimes modified. All emphases in italics in this paper are mine.

[4] 7.138.1: 'Though the Greeks knew this far in advance (i.e. the Persian expedition), they did not all take it in the same way. Some of them gave earth and water to the Persian and were confident that they would suffer nothing unpleasant at the hand of the barbarian; but others, who had not given these symbols, *were reduced to great fear* inasmuch as there were not enough ships in Greece to meet the invader, nor were

Thessalians who medized (7.172-174), while he also devotes a large section of his *Histories* to the cities (or nations) which refrained from assisting the Greek cause, either by finding pretexts or by just pretending to help, while not eventually doing so: these were Argos, Syracuse, Corcyra and Crete (7.145-172: this section covers 17 pages of the *OCT* Wilson edition).

The present study will focus on the episode of the so-called Cretan neutrality (7.169-171).[5] The broader narrative into which this episode is inserted again problematizes the dubious unity of the *hellenikon*. Herodotus relates that as soon as the news of the Persian expedition reached Greece, those of the Greeks who possessed the soundest judgment (τὰ ἀμείνω φρονεόντων)[6] gathered and decided to abandon their internal enmities (κατ-αλλάσσεσθαι τάς τε ἔχθρας καὶ τοὺς κατ' ἀλλήλους ἐόντας πολέμους) in order to face the Persian threat; for this reason they sent spies into Asia and messengers to Argos, Gelon (tyrant of Sicily), Corcyra and Crete. In this context, the historian also provides a narratorial comment on the persistence of Greek strife: 'there were such wars stirred up in Greece, and the greatest was that between the Athenians and the Aeginetans' (ἦσαν δὲ πρός τινας καὶ ἄλλους ἐγκεκρημένοι, ὁ δὲ ὦν μέγιστος Ἀθηναίοισί τε καὶ Αἰγινήτῃσι: 7.145.1[7]). He then explains the motivation of the Greek embassies in detail: 'the thought behind all this sending was that the entire Greek people might somehow unite and take common action, since the invaders threatened all Greeks alike' (φρονήσαντες εἴ κως ἔν τε γένοιτο τὸ Ἑλληνικὸν καὶ εἰ συγκύψαντες τὠυτὸ πρήσσοιεν πάντες, ὡς δεινῶν ἐπιόντων ὁμοίως πᾶσι Ἕλλησι) (7.145.2). The emphasis on Greek unity (ἔν, πάντες, πᾶσι) invites readers to weigh the Greeks' perceptions and expectations against Herodotus' previous authorial comment: will the Greeks of sound judgment manage to impose their view on the need for unity? Is the unity of the *hellenikon* an ideal difficult (or impossible) to attain? Will unity or strife prevail?

The ensuing narrative confirms the negative impression: Herodotus presents four different accounts of the reasons why all the above nations refused their assistance to the Greeks. The accounts on the Argives and the Syracusans are the most detailed and elaborate (7.148-152: Argives, 7.153-167: Gelon), while those on the Corcyreans and the Cretans are much shorter (7.168: Corcyreans, 7.169-171: Cretans). In a nutshell, the Argives and Gelon responded that they would be willing to join the Greek forces, but only under specific conditions: the former asked for a peace treaty with the Lacedaemonians for thirty years and to share in the leadership of the Greek alliance, while the latter also promised to help if he were given the leadership of the Greek forces or at least of the naval forces. These conditions not being accepted by the Spartans and Athenians, the Greeks were deprived of the Argive and Syracusan alliances. The Corcyreans, next, feigned willingness to help, but

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many of these people willing to prosecute the war seriously but *were turning eagerly to the Persian interest'*. Translations of Herodotus are from Greene 1986, sometimes adapted. In this paper I follow Wilson's edition (2015) for Herodotus' text.

[5] On the concept of Greek neutrality in the classical period, see Bauslaugh 1991.

[6] Herodotus does not say explicitly who these sound Greeks were, but we surmise from the ensuing narrative that he refers above all to the Athenians and the Spartans, as well as (secondarily) to other people who helped the Greek cause, such as the Corinthians and the Aeginetans. See Vannicelli 2017, *ad loc.*, who notes similar expressions attested in Herodotus (such as οἱ δὲ συνωμόται Ἑλλήνων ἐπὶ τῷ Πέρσῃ: 7.148.1, Ἑλλήνων τοῖσι βουλομένοισι εἶναι ἐλευθέροισι: 7.178.2), which denote the Greeks who resisted the Persians (as opposed to the medizers). Vannicelli also underlines the possible rhetorical use of these expressions by the Spartans, who were presented as the guarantors of Greek freedom.

[7] For the term ἐγκεκρημένοι, which is a conjecture, see Hornblower 2013, 308.

then took no active initiative about it: instead they sent sixty ships to the coast of the Peloponnese and waited to see how the war would go, inventing various excuses both in the case of Persian victory and in that of Greek victory. A similar attitude was adopted by Gelon. Herodotus informs us that 'he sent Cadmus to Delphi with three fifty-oared ships, bringing them money and messages of friendship. Cadmus was to observe (καραδοκή-σαντα) the outcome of the battle, and if the barbarian should be victorious, he was to give him both the money, and earth and water on behalf of Gelon's dominions. If, however, the Greeks were victorious, he was to bring everything back again' (7.163). Finally, the Cretans were dissuaded from joining the Persian Wars by the Pythia, who warned them that their participation would arouse the wrath of Minos.

The common denominator of all these accounts is of course reluctance to assist the Greek cause. However, the degree and sophistication of the reasons for rejection vary. In what follows, I will first provide a summary of the account of Cretan neutrality, presenting the main angles from which it has been approached by critics. I will then demonstrate its distinctive features in relation to relevant accounts of Greek neutrals, highlighting, moreover, its elliptic, loose and at times even seemingly incoherent character. Finally, I will offer a new reading of this section, based on the context of the Peloponnesian War. I will argue, more precisely, that the narrative of Cretan neutrality contains hints of the political situation at the beginning of the Peloponnesian War and that (part of) Herodotus' intention in this section could be to invite the Athenians of his own time to consider the risks of imperialism, and especially of sailing to Sicily.

The Cretans refuse to help (Hdt. 7.169-171)

The Cretan narrative contains four sections. In the first section, Herodotus relates the Pythia's response to the Cretans:

> Ὦ νήπιοι, ἐπιμέμφεσθε ὅσα ὑμῖν ἐκ τῶν Μενέλεω τιμωρημάτων Μίνως ἔπεμψε μηνίων δακρύματα; ὅτε οἱ μὲν οὐ συνεξεπρήξαντο αὐτῷ τὸν ἐν Καμικῷ θάνατον γενόμενον, ὑμεῖς δὲ ἐκείνοισι τὴν ἐκ Σπάρτης ἁρπασθεῖσαν ὑπ' ἀνδρὸς βαρβάρου γυναῖκα.[8]

> You fools, are you not satisfied with the tears that Minos sent you in his wrath for the help you gave Menelaus, because the Greeks would not help avenge his death in Camicus, but you helped them take vengeance for a woman stolen away from Sparta by a barbarian (7.169).

The second section (7.170.1-2) is introduced by λέγεται (it is said) and constitutes a flashback to mythical times, clarifying the meaning of the oracle: according to the tradition recorded by Herodotus, Minos went to Sicily in search of Daedalus and met a violent death (βιαίῳ θανάτῳ) there in Camicus; so, some years later, all the Cretans, except for the people of Polichne and Praesus, undertook an expedition against Sicily in order to avenge Minos' death. They besieged Camicus for five years, but, unable to conquer it, they left for Crete.

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[8] Wilson 2015 opts for Δαρδάνου rather than βαρβάρου. However, the depiction of the Trojans as barbarians is current in the fifth century (see Said 2002), and Herodotus himself points to this association in his proem, since he views the Trojan War as an antecedent of the war of the Greeks against the barbarians (Persians).

However, due to a great storm which destroyed their vessels, they were compelled to stop at Iapygia, where they founded a colony and changed their name to Messapian Iapygians.

The third section is a prolepsis of future events which took place in the mid-fifth century BCE (7.170.3-171.1). Herodotus continues his narrative by recounting that the Cretans then founded other colonies, 'from which, long afterwards, the Tarentines tried to drive them, and in so doing, endured a terrible defeat'[10] and further comments that 'this was the greatest slaughter of Greeks of all that we know both of the Tarentines themselves and the people of Rhegium' (τὰς δὴ Ταραντῖνοι χρόνῳ ὕστερον πολλῷ ἐξανιστάντες προσέπταισαν μεγάλως ὥστε φόνος Ἑλληνικὸς μέγιστος οὗτος δὴ ἐγένετο πάντων τῶν ἡμεῖς ἴδμεν, αὐτῶν τε Ταραντίνων καὶ Ῥηγίνων...). He then provides an additional explanation about the people of Rhegium and their governor, Micythus: he had forced the people of Rhegium to come to the aid of the Tarentines and three thousand of them died, whereas the number of the Tarentines who died remains unknown. Herodotus closes this section by noting that 'Micythus was the man who was banished from Rhegium and settled in Tegea, in Arcadia, and dedicated all these statues at Olympia'.[11] He then calls the information on the people of Rhegium and Taras an excursus in his narrative (Ἀλλὰ τὰ μὲν κατὰ Ῥηγίνους τε καὶ Ταραντίνους τοῦ λόγου μοι παρενθήκη γέγονε, 7.171.1) and returns to the previous account of the Cretans.

In the fourth and final section (7.171.1-2), Herodotus reveals his source of information: 'according to the story of the Praesians' (ὡς λέγουσι Πραίσιοι). He explains what happened to Crete when the Cretans left for Camicus. The island was emptied, so another population, chiefly Greeks, came and settled it. It was this population which, three generations after the death of Minos, participated in the Trojan War. However, when the Cretans returned from this war, famine and sickness befell them, so for the second time Crete was emptied of her people. Herodotus states that those who dwell there now are the third nation of Cretans, along with the remnants of the second (Ἐς δὲ τὴν Κρήτην ἐρημωθεῖσαν, ὡς λέγουσι Πραίσιοι, ἐσοικίζεσθαι ἄλλους τε ἀνθρώπους καὶ μάλιστα Ἕλληνας, τρίτῃ δὲ γενεῇ μετὰ Μίνων τελευτήσαντα γενέσθαι τὰ Τρωικά, ἐν τοῖσι οὐ φλαυροτάτους φαίνεσθαι ἐόντας Κρῆτας τιμωροὺς Μενέλεω. Ἀντὶ τούτων δέ σφι ἀπονοστήσασι ἐκ Τροίης λιμόν τε καὶ λοιμὸν γενέσθαι καὶ αὐτοῖσι καὶ τοῖσι προβάτοισι, ὥστε τὸ δεύτερον ἐρημωθείσης Κρήτης μετὰ τῶν ὑπολοίπων τρίτους αὐτὴν νῦν νέμεσθαι Κρῆτας, 7.171.1-2). The Cretan narrative concludes in ring composition, returning to Pythia's words: 'it was by reminding them of these things that the Pythia prevented the Cretans, although they were willing to help the Greeks' (Ἡ μὲν δὴ Πυθίη ὑπομνήσασα ταῦτα ἔσχε βουλομένους τιμωρέειν τοῖσι Ἕλλησι, 7.171.2).

The account of Cretan neutrality has been approached from three main angles:

a) From a historical perspective, which investigates whether the mission of the Cretans to the Pythia was genuine or a *post eventum* fabrication intended to justify their non-participation in the Persian Wars. Scholars who believe that the mission actually took place further explore to what extent the oracle might have been authentic and so on.[12] A related

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[10] The conflict is dated c. 473/2 BCE. See Vannicelli 2017, *ad loc.*

[11] For Micythus, see Luraghi 1994, 224-229.

[12] Van Effenterre 1948, 27, accepts the story of the mission as plausible. Cf. Vannicelli 2017, *ad loc.* The common mission to Delphi emphasized by Herodotus (κοινῇ) also poses problems, given the conflicting relationships between Cretan cities. See Guizzi 2014, 391, and Vannicelli 2017, *ad loc.* (with bibliography). Wallace 2010, 363, highlighting the diversity of Cretan poleis and the Cretan identity as a construction by non-Cretans, notes: 'the emphasis on a single "Cretan" identity in these external perspectives partly echoes

historical issue is whether the Cretan archers actually fought at Salamis. This information is not provided by Herodotus, but by Ctesias (*FGrHist* 688 FI 3).[13]

b) From the perspective of the formation of traditions about Crete and Sicily: since the section on Cretan neutrality provides ample information on Crete and Sicily, it has attracted the attention of scholars working on the history and archaeology of these islands. These scholars analyze some distinctive elements of Herodotus' version, such as the fact that he reports hostile relations between the Cretans and the Sicilians (whereas, according to another tradition, the Cretans had important ties and a continuous presence in Sicily[14]), the motif of divine punishment after the Trojan War (contrasting with a well-known Homeric tradition according to which Idomeneus and Meriones returned to Crete), and the motif of the emptying (ἐρήμωσις) of the island, which again is incompatible with the image of Crete as it is presented in the Homeric epics.[15] These features have been interpreted in the context of rivalry between Praesus and Cnossos in the fifth century BCE: Herodotus would seem to follow the version of the Praesians, who do not represent the dominant (Cnossian) ideology regarding the Cretans, according to which the Cretans always lived in Crete, participated in the Trojan War, and their leaders (Idomeneus and Meriones) returned home peacefully. The Praesians and the Polichnitans considered themselves 'true Cretans';[16] the version of the Praesians confirms this view, since the two people are depicted as the only autochthonous populations which remained on the island (and then merged with the newcomers). By using the version of the Praesians, the 'true Cretans', Herodotus would wish to add authority to his narrative.[17]

c) From the perspective of Greek history and historiography: some critics have linked the Cretan narrative to Greek historical events of the fifth century BCE. Didier Viviers, relying

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the case of the *ethnos* states of contemporary central Greece'. Cf. Wallace 2010, 369-370, 373-375. For the authenticity of the oracle, see Parke and Wormell 1956, 179-180, Crahay 1956, 324-325 who do not consider it authentic; *contra* How and Wells 1975, *ad loc.*, Guizzi 2014. Federico 1999, 224, puts forth the hypothesis that the Praesians may have invented the Delphic oracle. Cf. Federico 2011, 171, for another hypothesis, according to which the oracle may have been invented by the Cnossians.

[13] Cagnazzi 2003 suggests that the Greek messengers sent to Crete requested the assistance of Cretan archers specifically. She further assumes that Herodotus suppressed information on the Cretan participation at Salamis, because he wished to exalt Athens' role in the Persian Wars. This interpretation would entail that the section on Cretan neutrality is Herodotus' own fabrication, an idea towards which Angelos Chaniotis is also inclined (personal correspondence). Federico 1999, 227, suggests that perhaps *some* Cretans agreed to assist the Greek cause, which seems plausible given Cretan disunity.

[14] D.S. 4.79.5. See Federico 1999, 212, and Sammartano 2011, 233-237.

[15] For the motif of ἐρήμωσις, see Federico 1999, 210, according to whom it exalts the piety of the Cretans, while it also justifies the scarcity of Eteocretans in fifth-century Crete; for the Homeric/Cnossian tradition, see Federico 1999, 217-219. Federico 2011, 164, notes that Crete in the Homeric epics is characterized by a political and ethnic-demographic continuity guaranteed by Cnossos and that it is perceived as part of the *hellenikon*.

[16] For the Eteocretans, see Hom. *Od.* 19.170-176, D.S. 5.64.1, Strabo 10.4.12, Eustathius, *ad* Hom. *Od.* 19.176. See further Wallace 2010, 365-366.

[17] For the Praesians as conveying authority, see Federico 1999, 204-207, who also notes that the notion of 'Eteocretanness' is employed as a rhetorical strategy. Cf. also Guizzi 2014, 398. Federico 1999, 218-219, further suggests that the version of the Praesians justifies their lack of participation in the Trojan War: he highlights the connection of the Cretans with the Lycians and the Carians, in particular, who were Trojan allies, and further maintains that the 'true Cretans' could not have participated in a war against people with whom Crete had close ties. According to this version, the divine punishment is inflicted because the Cretans fought against their relatives.

on the alliances between Athens, Argos and Crete in 462 BCE and between Argos, Knossos and Tylissos around 450 BCE attested in inscriptions, suggests that the narrative of Cretan neutrality reflects the political situation of the mid-fifth century and thus reveals an anti-Spartan flavor: the oracle presents the Trojan War as an expedition against the 'barbarians' in favor of a Spartan man; in a similar vein, the Persian Wars are conceived as a fight against the barbarians on the initiative (and with the guidance) of the Spartans.[18] Elizabeth Irwin has also briefly commented on the Cretan narrative, proposing a different contextualization. She inscribes it into Herodotus' overall presentation of Minos, which she views as a response to the Thucydidean presentation of Minos.[19] She also proposes a connection with the Sicilian expedition by associating the expression κατὰ ζήτησιν Δαιδάλου with the Athenians' *zetesis* in Sicily. She further interprets the expression φόνος Ἑλληνικὸς μέγιστος (which is reminiscent of Thucydides 7.85.3: πλεῖστος γὰρ δὴ φόνος οὗτος καὶ οὐδενὸς ἐλάσσων τῶν ἐν τῷ [Σικελικῷ] πολέμῳ τούτῳ ἐγένετο) as Herodotus' allusion to Thucydides.[20]

The interpretation proposed in this paper will expand and qualify Irwin's approach. In fact, reading Herodotus' narrative against the background of the Peloponnesian War seems a more fruitful approach than linking it with the political relationships between Crete and the rest of Hellas, not least since these relationships were far from stable;[21] consequently, it is extremely difficult to detect which specific aspect of these relationships Herodotus' narrative might reflect. In what follows I will offer a historiographical analysis of the Cretan episode: first, I will comment on some distinctive features of this narrative in relation to the surrounding narratives of the Greek neutrals and highlight the issues they raise; then I will interpret Herodotus' historiographical choices, considering the experiences and expectations of his audience. I hope to demonstrate that the narrative of Cretan neutrality should not be viewed only from the perspective of Cretan (or Sicilian) history; it would also be worth examining whether this narrative might contribute to the con-temporary debates of Herodotus' own time.

The Cretan episode in its Herodotean context

Herodotus mentions that the Greek messengers reached the Argives first, then Gelon, and lastly the Corcyreans and the Cretans. This list may correspond to the importance the Greeks attached to these potential allies or even to the amount of information Herodotus had gathered about them: given that his accounts of the Argives and the Sicilians are much more detailed, it could be surmised that the historian either had more information on

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[18] Viviers 1995.

[19] Irwin 2007. In Herodotus Minos is a liminal figure (3.122), whereas Thucydides considers him the prototype of the Athenian naval empire (Thuc. 1.4.8). Cf. Munson 2012.

[20] Irwin 2007, 220-221 (see also below). *Contra* Hornblower 2008, 737, who sees a reverse process (Thucydides being influenced by Herodotus): 'a reminiscence, at some level of consciousness, of Hdt. 7. 170.3, also in a western context'.

[21] For instance, the inscriptions employed by Viviers demonstrate friendly relationships between Cnossos and Athens during the Pentakontaetia. However, some years later, during the Peloponnesian War, there is evidence that the Athenian empire was hostile to certain Cretan cities. See Thuc. 2.85.3, for an Athenian attack on Polichne, with Huxley 1969, Herman 1989. Cf. Erickson 2005, who suggests that the Athenian empire may have placed a ban on Cretan products. For Crete in the classical period, see in general Kirsten 1942.

these people or, alternatively, that he minimized or suppressed (additional) information on the Corcyreans and the Cretans.

We can now look at some distinctive features of the Cretan account. First, concerning Herodotean methodology. The Cretan account is characterized by a methodological originality: it is the only account in which the term παρενθήκη (excursus) occurs in Herodotus' own words.[22] Moreover, contrary to Herodotus' usual tendency to insert flash-backs as digressions for the explanation of events,[23] the παρενθήκη in the Cretan account is a proleptic *narrative* of (not a simple reference to) future events.[24] Furthermore, contrary to the accounts of the Argives and Gelon, for which Herodotus offers various different versions,[25] the Cretan account does not present alternative versions of the facts. Finally, the Cretan account contains two source-citations: a general one, introduced by λέγεται in the first section of the narrative, and a more precise one, in the last section, referring to 'the story as told by the Praesians' (7.171.1: ὡς λέγουσι Πραίσιοι). These source-citations, however, do not concern the actual events described, but refer to traditions about the Cretan mythical past. It has been suggested that the whole Cretan narrative may represent a Praesian tradition, which seems plausible, since the inhabitants of Praesus and Polichne are mentioned in the first section, too (7.170.1: 'After a time, the Cretans, all *except for the people of Polichne and Praesus*, were bidden by the god to sail with a great fleet to Sicania'). Another hypothesis is that the first section introduced by λέγεται concerns information that Herodotus may have gathered at Thurii.[26] Whatever the truth, this presentation creates an impression of looseness (or even incoherence[27]): the sections of the Cretan account appear as autonomous entities not tightly connected with each other. Herodotus' presentation thus raises some questions: why doesn't Herodotus mention his sources for the events of the Persian Wars? Why did he choose to privilege such a specific (and marginal[28]) version of the Cretan past? Might this mean that there was no Ἑλληνικὸς λόγος on these events, that Herodotus wished to suppress alternative versions, or that he was just not interested in (or aware of) them? Why does he include this digression on future (and irrelevant) events? Why is this excursus so detailed?

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[22] For the term παρενθήκη, see *LSJ*, s.v.: 'something put in beside, addition; in completion of others, by way of parenthesis'. See further Hdt. 1.186.1 (for an additional work in a river), 6.19.1 (for an additional response of an oracle), 7.5.3 (for an additional argument in a speech). Cf. also the term προσθήκας (4.30.1). Cf. Asheri/Lloyd/Corcella 2007, 12, n. 35: 'digression, secondary section, accessory addition'.

[23] For digressions in Herodotus, see Lateiner 1989, 19, 31, 225.

[24] See, for instance, 7.33.1, 8.75.1, 9.64.2, 9.73.3, for proleptic references to future events. For proleptic narratives, see 6.72.1-2, 8.3.2, 7.137.1-3.

[25] In the Argive account, Herodotus gives four different versions of the facts. 7.148.1: Ἀργεῖοι δὲ λέγουσι, 7.150.1: ἔστι δὲ ἄλλος λόγος λεγόμενος ἀνὰ τὴν Ἑλλάδα, 7.151.1: συμπεσεῖν δὲ τούτοισι καὶ τόνδε τὸν λόγον λεγουσί τινες Ἑλλήνων. 7.152.3: ἐπεὶ καὶ ταῦτα λέγεται. Concerning Gelon, after describing the facts without mentioning any source, he mentions two different versions by the inhabitants of Sicily (7.165, 166) and the Carthaginians (7.167.1).

[26] See Federico 1999 for the Cretan account as following a Praesian tradition, and Federico 2011, 179, for λέγεται as representing a tradition from Thurii.

[27] For the Cretan account as presenting incoherencies and contradictions, see Federico 2011, 170, 175.

[28] Federico 1999, 205, talks about 'a local and marginal dimension' of the Praesian version, as opposed to the majority version represented by Cnossos.

Second, the Cretan account is elliptical in several respects. Herodotus does not provide any background information on important issues.[29] For example, we know from Diodorus that, according to legend, Minos went to Sicily in order to find the famous craftsman Daedalus, who had escaped from Crete, and that Minos was killed in Camicus by Coccalus.[30] The background concerning the association of Minos with Daedalus, as well as the relationship between the Cretans and the Sicilians, is missing from Herodotus' narrative. Perhaps Herodotus assumed that his audience was aware of these traditions; however, given the conflicting accounts about almost every mythical figure and Herodotus' tendency to list divergent accounts, it would be fair to admit that some additional information would not have been redundant here. Equally elliptical is the narrative surrounding the Cretan request for Greek help. Herodotus provides no information on the relationship between the Cretans and the Greeks: why did the Cretans appeal to the Greeks in order to avenge Minos' death? Why did they expect their help on that occasion? Scholars have again attempted to fill in this information,[31] but still the problem remains that Herodotus is silent on this issue.

Finally, and more importantly perhaps, Herodotus does not provide sufficient explanations of the Cretans' motives in not assisting the Greek cause. He states rather prosaically that 'when the Cretans heard the Pythia's response, they decided to refrain from assisting' (Ταῦτα οἱ Κρῆτες ὡς ἀπενειχθέντα ἤκουσαν, ἔσχοντο τῆς τιμωρίης, 7.169-170); he repeats this phrase at the end of the Cretan account, adding that the Cretans initially wanted to help the Greeks (Ἡ μὲν δὴ Πυθίη ὑπομνήσασα ταῦτα ἔσχε βουλομένους τιμωρέειν τοῖσι Ἕλλησι, 7.171.2).[32] This description is again opposed to all previous accounts, which suggest multiple and complex motivations for the actions of Greek neutrals: the Argives request the peace treaty with the Lacedaemonians *because they do not tolerate their greed and prefer to be subdued to the Persians rather than yield in anything to the Lacedaemonians* (Οὕτω δὴ Ἀργεῖοί φασι οὐκ ἀνασχέσθαι τῶν Σπαρτιητέων τὴν πλεονεξίην, ἀλλ' ἑλέσθαι μᾶλλον ὑπὸ τῶν βαρβάρων ἄρχεσθαι ἤ τι ὑπεῖξαι Λακεδαιμονίοισι, 7.149.3); or, according to a second version, they were persuaded by Xerxes, who appealed to their common ancestry, and therefore requested the treaty *because they knew that the Spartans would not accept this condition and, on this pretext, they might remain in peace* (οὕτω δὴ ἐπισταμένους ὅτι οὐ μεταδώσουσι τῆς ἀρχῆς Λακεδαιμόνιοι μεταιτέειν, ἵνα ἐπὶ προφάσιος ἡσυχίην ἄγωσι, 7.150-151); or, following a third account, they even asked the Persians to invade Greece, because, after the negative outcome of their conflict with the Lacedaemonians, *they wanted to have anything rather than a continuation of the trouble in which they lived* (πᾶν δὴ βουλόμενοι σφίσι εἶναι πρὸ τῆς παρεούσης λύπης, 7.152.3).[33] Concerning Gelon, Herodotus again explains his motivation in detail:

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[29] As he does, for instance, with Gelon: he provides much background information on how he rose to power (7.153-157).

[30] D.S. 4.79.5.

[31] Federico 2011, 224, suggests that possible arguments could be the participation of the Cretans in the Trojan War or the traditional ties between Sparta and Crete.

[32] Cf. Baragwanath 2008, 213: 'This statement is made straightforwardly, without the inclusion of rival versions: we are given no reason not to accept that the Cretans really were βουλομένους τιμωρέειν'.

[33] The account of the Argives' motivation is so complex that it aroused Plutarch's indignation (Plut. *Mal. Her.* 863d-863e): 'Deceitful are the phrases, deceitful the figures of Herodotus' speeches; as being perplexed, unsound, and full of ambiguities ... For as painters set off and render more eminent the luminous part of their pictures by adding shadows, so he by his denials extends his calumnies, and by his dubious speeches makes his suspicions take deeper impression'. Translation Goodwin 1874.

Γέλων δὲ πρὸς ταῦτα δείσας μὲν περὶ τοῖσι Ἕλλησι μὴ οὐ δύνωνται τὸν βάρβαρον ὑπερβαλέσθαι, δεινὸν δὲ καὶ οὐκ ἀνασχετὸν ποιησάμενος ἐλθὼν ἐς Πελοπόννησον ἄρχεσθαι ὑπὸ Λακεδαιμονίων, ἐὼν Σικελίης τύραννος, ταύτην μὲν τὴν ὁδὸν ἠμέλησε, ὁ δὲ ἄλλης εἴχετο·

But Gelon *feared* for the Greeks, that they would be unable to beat the barbarians; *Yet he also treated his going to the Peloponnese under orders of the Lacedaemonians as a thing terrible and insupportable*, inasmuch as he was monarch of Sicily; so he disregarded the road he had travelled before and took to a new one' (7.163).

The same applies to the Corcyreans:

καραδοκέοντες καὶ οὗτοι τὸν πόλεμον τῇ πεσέεται, ἀελπτέοντες μὲν τοὺς Ἕλληνας ὑπερβαλέεσθαι, δοκέοντες δὲ τὸν Πέρσην κατακρατήσαντα πολλὸν ἄρξειν πάσης τῆς Ἑλλάδος.[34]

They, too, were craning their necks to see which way the war would go; for they *had no hope that the Greeks would win, but thought that the Persians would win a big victory and would come to rule all Greece* (7.168.2,3-4).

A third distinctive feature of the Cretan account is that the Cretans are the *only* people for whom Herodotus seems to offer an apology. However, this apology does not form the thematic core of the section, but appears incidentally at the end of his narrative. Moreover, Herodotus does not provide further explanations (e.g. he implies that the Cretans initially wished to help but were prevented from doing so by the Pythia, but does not further specify: did *all* the Cretans wish to help? Was there a debate in Crete concerning participation in the Persian Wars? Or was it an easy and unanimous decision?[35]) On the contrary, he shows he is aware that the Argives' action is reprehensible, when he states that they did not commit the most shameful things (οὕτω [δὴ] οὐδ' Ἀργείοισι αἴσχιστα πεποίηται, 7.152.2), but then distances himself when he adds in this context his famous principle that 'my task is to record what is said, but I am not at all bound to believe it and this principle holds about my whole history' (Ἐγὼ δὲ ὀφείλω λέγειν τὰ λεγόμενα, πείθεσθαί γε μὲν οὐ παντάπασιν ὀφείλω (καί μοι τοῦτο τὸ ἔπος ἐχέτω ἐς πάντα τὸν λόγον), 7.152.3). This statement suggests that the historian does not wish to take a position either in favor of or against the Argives. Similarly, he gives three different accounts about Gelon, but does not clearly take a position in favor of one of them (though he seems perhaps more inclined to privilege the first version, which he relates in more detail, the two others appearing as secondary[36]). Finally, he appears rather more critical towards the Corcyreans: he employs the phrase ἄλλα νοέοντες (thinking otherwise, 7.168.2) and the word σκῆψις (excuse, usually for a cunning action, 7.168.4) which are not very flattering, pointing to treachery and deception.[37] He further concludes the Corcyrean account by noting that in this way the Corcyreans avoided replying to the Greeks (Οὗτοι μὲν οὕτω διεκρούσαντο τοὺς Ἕλληνας,

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[34] For the motivation of the Greek neutrals, see Baragwanath 2008, 210-222.

[35] For the complex connotations of the term κοινῇ, see *supra*, n. 12.

[36] Cf. Baragwanath 2008, 219: 'yet the first version, in being reported in Gelon's own direct speech without the qualification of a source reference (and so leaving the impression of authorial omniscience), retains a persuasive quality...'.

[37] Cf. the word καραδοκήσαντα for Gelon's spy (7.163).

7.168.4). The verb διακρούομαι means 'drive from, get rid of';[38] this phrase has also been translated as 'tried to fool the Greeks'.[39]

Overall, then, the Cretan account leaves much to be desired: we learn quite a lot about Cretan colonization in Sicily, as well as about the various peoples who inhabited Crete over the centuries, but we are left wondering why Herodotus chose to provide all this information which seems at times distracting, why he did not dwell a bit more on the motives of the Cretans for not joining the Greek cause, and why he privileged only one (and quite marginal) version of the Cretan past. A possible explanation could be that he might simply not have had enough information on the Cretans' motives and actions in the Persian Wars. However, the overall structure and main themes of this narrative suggest that Herodotus in this section seems *more inclined to insist on* the past/mythical and future events than on providing details, multiple accounts and motivations for the actual events described. The looseness in the references to his informants further indicates that the historian does not adopt a rigid methodology in this section. So, what is the function of the Cretan narrative? The use of the past has a pedagogical function in ancient historiography and ancient Greek literature more generally: it does not simply provide factual information, but may also present examples to imitate or avoid. References to the future, on the other hand, invite reflection on contemporary events by prompting comparisons between past and present.[40] The next section will attempt to unravel the pedagogical dimension of the Cretan account, proposing a connection with the context of the Peloponnesian War.

Reading the Cretan account in the light of the Peloponnesian War

The association of Herodotus' *Histories* with the context of the Peloponnesian War usually entails taking a position on the controversial issue of Herodotus' date of publication. According to the orthodox view, Herodotus published his *Histories* between 430 and 425 BCE. Charles Fornara has famously challenged this view, proposing a later date (414 BCE),[41] while Elizabeth Irwin has also recently revisited the issue, suggesting that Herodotus' *Histories* display awareness even of the events of the end of the Peloponnesian War (404 BCE). All these suggestions rely on the contextualization of Herodotus' narrative, e.g. in relation to contemporary drama and, more importantly, Thucydides.[42] In particular, scholars like Fornara and Irwin employ evidence on the Peloponnesian War provided by Thucydides and alluded to by Herodotus, which, in their view, proves Herodotus' awareness of the events of the Peloponnesian War. A corollary of this interpretation is that Herodotus is at times even considered to be *reacting to* Thucydides.[43] This is a novel idea, which finds some support if we accept that part of Thucydides' *History* may have been

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[38] *LSJ*, s.v.

[39] Greene 1986, *ad loc.*

[40] See on these issues especially Grethlein 2010 and 2013 and the essays collected in Barawanath and De Bakker 2012 and in Lianeri 2016.

[41] Fornara 1971.

[42] The main passages which have become an object of debate are from Ar. *Ach.* 68-92, *Av.* 1124-1138, Eur. *El.* 1280-83, which have been interpreted as allusions to Herodotus. Hdt. 6.98.2, 7.235.2-4 and 9.73.3 have been interpreted as alluding to events narrated by Thucydides: see Fornara 1971, 32-34.

[43] Irwin 2007 and 2013.

recited and thus known to a large audience even from the beginning of the Peloponnesian War.[44]

The controversy surrounding the dating of Herodotus' *Histories* notwithstanding, there is a scholarly consensus that part of Herodotus' intention was to participate in contemporary political debates[45]: for instance, his statement that a civil war is worse than a defensive war (8.3) gains much weight and significance if it is interpreted against the background of the great civil war between Athens and Sparta which Herodotus had experienced; in a similar vein, his presentation of the Persian Empire (with features such as a tyrannical profile, tribute, drive for imperialism, etc.) invites comparison with the contemporary Athenian empire.[46] From this perspective, it has also been suggested that Herodotus wished to issue a warning to the Athenians: their imperialistic plans could fail, like the Persian plans.[47] If warning seems too strong a term, it is much more probable that Herodotus intended to present to all Greeks (not only the Athenians) various perspectives and scenarios, positive and negative, in order both to contribute to their historical knowledge and, perhaps more importantly, to instruct them, making them reflect on political matters and possibly even rethink their policies. Overall, as amply demonstrated by recent burgeoning scholarship on Herodotus, Herodotus' narrative exposes us to many layers of interpretation;[48] the task of detecting and interpreting them is a fascinating and rewarding one.

The analysis proposed in this paper will build on these trends in Herodotean scholarship. I will argue that the narrative of the Cretan account largely resonates with the context of the beginning of the Peloponnesian War, especially the period 431-427 BCE. My interpretation may thus reinforce the orthodox view concerning Herodotus' date of publication. That said, this essay is not intended to solve this issue. After all, Herodotus' various narratives may correspond to different chronological periods.[49]

I start with some preliminary observations. The Cretan narrative contains two elements which encourage readers to consider it in the light of contemporary events. First, there are two authorial references to Herodotus' own time:

> Λέγεται γὰρ Μίνων κατὰ ζήτησιν Δαιδάλου ἀπικόμενον ἐς Σικανίην τὴν νῦν Σικελίην καλεομένην ἀποθανεῖν βιαίῳ θανάτῳ. Ἀνὰ δὲ χρόνον Κρῆτας θεοῦ σφέας ἐποτρύναντος, πάντας πλὴν Πολιχνιτέων τε καὶ Πραισίων, ἀπικομένους στόλῳ μεγάλῳ ἐς Σικανίην πολιορκέειν ἐπ' ἔτεα πέντε πόλιν Καμικόν, τὴν κατ' ἐμὲ Ἀκραγαντῖνοι ἐνέμοντο.

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[44] See Hornblower 1991, 31, for the idea that the Sicilian narrative might have been recited, and Hornblower 2008, 440, for the tyrannicides excursus as a recitation piece. Cf. Fragoulaki 2013, 162-179, who suggests that the Melian dialog could have also been performed.

[45] The extent of this participation is again a debated issue. In Tamiolaki 2010, 73-75, I inclined towards the minimalist view. However, the more I study Herodotus, the more I am convinced about the close(r) association between his *Histories* and contemporary events.

[46] See on these issues especially Raaflaub 1987 and 2002. Cf. now Grethlein 2018.

[47] Moles 1996.

[48] Baragwanath 2008, 20, talks about a 'variety of perspectives' and 'active promotion of each reader's deliberation and response'. Cf. Pelling 2019, 46: 'fantasy world of alternative scenarios'.

[49] See Sansone 1985.

It is said that Minos, when he sought for Daedalus, went to Sicania and there met a violent death. After a time, the Cretans, all except for the people of Polichne and Praesus, were bidden by the god to go with a great host to Sicania; and for five years they besieged the city of Camicus, *which in my day the Agrigentines occupied* (7.170-171).

These two references to Sicily within seven lines of the *OCT* text reflect Herodotus' interest in contemporary Sicily and could thus invite readers to think about this island.[50]

Second, in the Cretan narrative, Herodotus employs the term Ἕλληνες (Greeks) in a fluid and anachronistic way. He describes the colonization of Crete during the Trojan expedition as follows: '...into Crete, left thus desolate, there came and settled, according to the story of the Praesians, another population, chiefly Greeks, (Ἐς δὲ τὴν Κρήτην ἐρημωθεῖσαν, ὡς λέγουσι Πραίσιοι, ἐσοικίζεσθαι ἄλλους τε ἀνθρώπους καὶ μάλιστα Ἕλληνας, 7.171). As scholars have observed, this narrative largely corresponds to the colonization of Crete by various populations such as the Mycenaeans and the Dorians.[51] Herodotus also seems interested in highlighting the relationship of Crete with the rest of Hellas: Crete participates in the joint Greek expedition (the Trojan War) and is considered a potential ally of the Greeks during the Persian Wars.[52] This presentation is opposed to the image of the Cretans as marginal or even barbarians which we find in other parts of Herodotus' *Histories*.[53] The phrase φόνος ἑλληνικὸς μέγιστος, finally, illustrates that Herodotus intends his narrative to have a Panhellenic character and message.[54] These elements taken together are pointers that Herodotus is not so much worried about providing clarifications regarding the different populations which inhabited Crete over time, or about the many complex aspects of the relations between Crete and the rest of Hellas; rather, he encourages his readers to associate his narrative with contemporary concerns. I would further like to suggest that the loose structure of the Cretan account also contributes to the enhancement of these associations: each section can be read as an autonomous entity, triggering reflection on specific contemporary issues.

We can begin with the first section, which focuses on the expedition of the Cretans against Camicus. Herodotus describes this expedition as follows:

ἀπικομένους στόλῳ μεγάλῳ ἐς Σικανίην πολιορκέειν ἐπ' ἔτεα πέντε πόλιν Καμικόν, τὴν κατ' ἐμὲ Ἀκραγαντῖνοι ἐνέμοντο· τέλος δὲ οὐ δυναμένους οὔτε ἑλεῖν οὔτε παραμένειν λιμῷ συνεστεῶτας, ἀπολιπόντας οἴχεσθαι. Ὡς δὲ κατὰ Ἰηπυγίην γενέσθαι πλέοντας, ὑπολαβόντα σφέας χειμῶνα μέγαν ἐκβαλεῖν ἐς τὴν γῆν· συναραχθέντων δὲ τῶν πλοίων (οὐδεμίαν γάρ σφι ἔτι κομιδὴν ἐς Κρήτην φαίνεσθαι), ἐνθαῦτα Ὑρίην πόλιν κτίσαντας καταμεῖναί τε καὶ μεταβαλόντας ἀντὶ μὲν Κρητῶν γενέσθαι Ἰήπυγας Μεσσαπίους, ἀντὶ δὲ εἶναι νησιώτας ἠπειρώτας.

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[50] Cf. also Thuc. 6.1-2.

[51] Federico 1999, 205, n.3: 'corrisponde in maniera sostanzialmente fedele al quadro di sequenze, attualmente operante nella storiografia sul popolamento di Creta, Minoici-Micenei-Dori'. Cf. Federico 1999, 214, for the problematic and anachronistic use of the term Ἕλληνας.

[52] Federico 2011, 171.

[53] 1.173.1-2, 4.45.5 and Federico 1999, 207.

[54] Cf. Munson 2006, for the image of Italy in Herodotus as problematizing the relationship between Greeks and barbarians.

> After arriving with *a great fleet* in Sicania, they besieged for five years the city of Camicus, which in my days the Agrigentines occupied. *At last they could neither conquer it nor stay there any longer because of lack of food, and so they left the siege and went away.* As they sailed, they were near Iapygia when a great storm overtook them and forced them on land. Their vessels were shattered and they had no way of conveyance back to Crete. So they founded there the city of Hyria and remained there, and instead of Cretans, they became Messapian Iapygians, and instead of islanders, mainlanders (7.170).

This is a vivid narrative which could perfectly well have been condensed. However, Herodotus chooses to provide details on the Cretans' failed attempt to conquer Camicus, emphasizing the difficulties of this endeavor. This failed attempt may have reminded Herodotus' audience of the Athenians' first failed attempts in Sicily. Thucydides narrates that the Athenians first sailed to Sicily under the general Laches in 427 BCE, in order to assist the Leontinians against the Syracusans (Thuc. 3.86). But these attempts were not crowned with success. Thucydides underlines the Athenian failures, using the motif of unsuccessful conquest and abandonment (note also the similar phrasing in the accounts of Herodotus and Thucydides: οὐ δυναμένους οὔτε ἑλεῖν ~ καὶ ὡς οὐκ ἐδύναντο ἑλεῖν; ἀπολιπόντας οἴχεσθαι ~ ἀπῆσαν[55]):

> Οἱ δ' ἐν τῇ Σικελίᾳ Ἀθηναῖοι τοῦ ἐπιγιγνομένου χειμῶνος ἐπελθόντες μετὰ τῶν Ἑλλήνων ξυμμάχων καὶ ὅσοι Σικελῶν κατὰ κράτος ἀρχόμενοι ὑπὸ Συρακοσίων καὶ ξύμμαχοι ὄντες ἀποστάντες αὐτοῖς [ἀπὸ Συρακοσίων] ξυνεπολέμουν, ἐπ' Ἴνησσαν τὸ Σικελικὸν πόλισμα, οὗ τὴν ἀκρόπολιν Συρακόσιοι εἶχον, προσέβαλον, *καὶ ὡς οὐκ ἐδύναντο ἑλεῖν, ἀπῆσαν.*

> In the following winter the Athenians in Sicily made an attack on the Sicel town of Inessa, where the acropolis was held by the Syracusans. In this they were joined by their Greek allies and by those of the Sicels who had revolted from their enforced subjection to Syracuse and were now fighting on the Athenian side. *The attempt to conquer the place failed, and they turned back* (Thuc. 3.103.2; cf. 3.115: defeat of the Athenians at the Locrian fort).

The Sicilian leader Hermocrates also describes the risks of great expeditions in foreign lands (note again here the same wording as Herodotus: στόλῳ μεγάλῳ ~ στόλοι μεγάλοι):

> ὀλίγοι γὰρ δὴ στόλοι μεγάλοι ἢ Ἑλλήνων ἢ βαρβάρων πολὺ ἀπὸ τῆς ἑαυτῶν ἀπάραντες κατώρθωσαν. οὔτε γὰρ πλείους τῶν ἐνοικούντων καὶ ἀστυγειτόνων ἔρχονται (πάντα γὰρ ὑπὸ δέους ξυνίσταται), ἤν τε δι' ἀπορίαν τῶν ἐπιτηδείων ἐν ἀλλοτρίᾳ γῇ σφαλῶσι, τοῖς ἐπιβουλευθεῖσιν ὄνομα, κἂν περὶ σφίσιν αὐτοῖς τὰ πλείω πταίσωσιν, ὅμως καταλείπουσιν.

> *Rarely has any great fleet, Greek or barbarian, sent out far from home met with success.* The invaders never outnumber the local inhabitants and their neighbors, who all combine under the threat, and if the attempt fails for lack of supplies in a foreign land, even though the failures are largely self-

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[55] Although here and below (concerning the words λοιμός, λιμός, and ἐρήμωσις) I highlight the same wording in Herodotus and Thucydides, *I do not treat this as evidence that Herodotus is alluding (or reacting) to Thucydides.* Rather, I take the events described by Thucydides as a background against which Herodotus' narrative can be interpreted.

inflicted, the intended victims still reap the glory (Thuc. 6.33.5; cf. also Nicias' speech: 6.21.2).

Herodotus' narrative could be read against this background: Herodotus mentions that the Cretans sailed with a great fleet and that they were compelled to abandon their efforts due to lack of supplies. Herodotus' emphasis on issues such as the great fleet, the lack of supplies, the difficulties of conquest and the abandonment of the efforts to conquer the Sicilian city could of course remind Herodotus' audience of the Persians' expedition against Greece; but these elements may well also reflect, I would like to suggest, contemporary concerns about the challenges and risks of sailing to Sicily.[56]

The second element of Herodotus' narrative that deserves some scrutiny is the description of the Cretans' transformation. Herodotus states that the Cretans, upon settling in Iapygia, became Iapygian Messapians instead of Cretans, and mainlanders instead of islanders (μεταβαλόντας ἀντὶ μὲν Κρητῶν γενέσθαι Ἰήπυγας Μεσσαπίους, ἀντὶ δὲ εἶναι νησιώτας ἠπειρώτας). Various interpretations have been proposed for the verb μετέβαλον and for the Cretans' change of name, which points to the formation of a new identity: it has been suggested that this transformation points to the Cretans' 'de-culturation' (due to their loss of Minoan identity)[57] or, alternatively, that the Cretans retained their (barbarian) cultural traits.[58] Less attention has been paid to the opposition between νησιῶται and ἠπειρῶται. This opposition is barely attested in Herodotus' *Histories*,[59] whereas it has a key function in Thucydides' *History*: being an islander is a debated issue during the period of the Peloponnesian War. On the one hand, it is considered a great asset and a sign of superiority compared to mainlanders. For instance, Thucydides comments on Agamemnon: 'Now, as a mainland ruler Agamemnon could not have controlled any islands other than the relatively few close by, if he did not possess a substantial navy' (1.9.4: οὐκ ἂν οὖν νήσων ἔξω τῶν περιοικίδων (αὗται δὲ οὐκ ἂν πολλαὶ εἶεν) ἠπειρώτης ὢν ἐκράτει, εἰ μή τι καὶ ναυτικὸν εἶχεν). In a similar vein, Pericles states: 'Consider: if we were islanders, could anybody be more invulnerable than us?' (σκέψασθε δέ· εἰ γὰρ ἦμεν νησιῶται, τίνες ἂν ἀληπτότεροι ἦσαν; Thuc. 1.43.5).[60] On the other hand, insularity is also linked to weakness and submissiveness. The Athenian Euphemus characterizes the islanders as 'easily subdued' (εὐλήπτους: Thuc. 6.85.2), while Thucydides states about the Cephallenians and Zakynthians that they were 'independent, but, as islanders, they were under some pressure (κατὰ δὲ τὸ νησιωτικὸν μᾶλλον κατειργόμενοι) to take part in the Sicilian expedition be-

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[56] The war of the Cretans was a revenge war and not (exactly) an imperialistic war like that of the Athenians, but the wording of the Camicus expedition points to imperialism, too (πολιορκέειν, ἑλεῖν) and this reinforces the analogy between Cretans sailing to Sicily and Athenians sailing to Sicily.

[57] Sammartano 1992, 218-219.

[58] Federico 2011, 177. Cf. Federico 1999, 213, who further suggests that the motif of *metabole* was particularly emphasized by the Iapygians, who wished to imagine themselves as 'true Cretans', descendants of the Minoan Cretans. Herodotus has a broader interest in the dynamics of change (μεταβολή), as Emily Baragwanath points out to me (cf. 1.56-58).

[59] People in the time of the Delian League, when Herodotus was writing his work, were also probably conscious of this contrast. However, it is interesting that Herodotus himself does not emphasize it in his *Histories*. For example, passage 7.170 is the only one in which the opposition between islanders and mainlanders occurs in Herodotus. In all other passages only the one term is attested (ἠπειρώτας and cognates: 1.151, 1.171, 6.49, 7.109, 7.22; νησιῶται: 1.27, 4.35, 5.30, 6.49, 8.46, 7.95). This does not mean, of course, that Herodotus' contemporaries were not conscious of this contrast.

[60] Cf. Thuc. 3.91.2, 4.120.3, and 5.99.1, for the islanders as having a (greater) spirit of freedom and resistance. Another aspect of island discourse is that the islanders are subjects of Athens, but this discourse does not emphasize the opposition with mainlanders. On these issues, see especially Constantakopoulou 2007.

cause the Athenians controlled the sea' (Thuc. 7.57.7). So Herodotus' comment could be interpreted in this historical context: the historian points to an opposition which rings a bell with his contemporaries. Herodotus' audience is encouraged to assess whether the transformation of the Cretans turns out to be a sign of weakness or a sign of power.

There follows the famous excursus, which is very loosely (if at all) connected with the previous narrative. In this digression, Herodotus chooses to narrate the civil strife between the Iapygians, on the one hand, and the Tarentines and Rhegians on the other. Why would he do so? Wasn't he worried that his narrative might appear boring or inconsistent? One could concede that several of Herodotus' digressions are loosely connected with the main narrative. However, an additional angle of interpretation could be added if we consider the role of Taras and Rhegium during the Peloponnesian War: Taras was an important strategic base and a famous ally of the Syracusans. Hermocrates states:

> Σικελιῶται γὰρ εἰ ἐθέλοιμεν ξύμπαντες, εἰ δὲ μή, ὅτι πλεῖστοι μεθ' ἡμῶν, καθελκύσαντες ἅπαν τὸ ὑπάρχον ναυτικὸν μετὰ δυοῖν μηνοῖν τροφῆς ἀπαντῆσαι Ἀθηναίοις ἐς Τάραντα καὶ ἄκραν Ἰαπυγίαν ... μάλιστ' ἂν αὐτοὺς ἐκπλήξαιμεν καὶ ἐς λογισμὸν καταστήσαιμεν ὅτι ὁρμώμεθα μὲν ἐκ φιλίας χώρας φύλακες (ὑποδέχεται γὰρ ἡμᾶς Τάρας) ...

> If all Sicilian Greeks together, or at least as many as will join us, were prepared to launch our entire existing fleet, with two months' rations onboard, and *take up position at Taras* and the promontory of Iapygia to oppose the Athenians ... that would be the best way to confound them. We would force them to take into account that our advance guard has a base in friendly territory (*Taras is sympathetic to us*) ... (Thuc. 6.34.4; cf. 6.104.1-2: the Spartan Gylippus reaches Sicily via Taras).

The people of Rhegium, on the other hand, were linked to the Athenians, since they were tied by kinship with the Leontineans, Athens' allies (Thuc. 6.44.3-4: καὶ πρός [τε] τοὺς Ῥηγίνους λόγους ἐποιήσαντο, ἀξιοῦντες Χαλκιδέας ὄντας Χαλκιδεῦσιν οὖσι Λεοντίνοις βοηθεῖν).[61] Moreover, Athens had contracted an alliance with Rhegium in 433 BCE.[62] Consequently, the phrase φόνος ἑλληνικὸς μέγιστος (again with the problematic use of the term 'Greek') should not be seen as being written *after* the Sicilian disaster, but rather as (ironically perhaps?) predicting it:[63] Herodotus invites his audience to consider the

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[61] Fragoulaki 2013, 217: 'the moral argument for the repeated Athenian interventions in Sicily since 427 until the massive expedition of 415-413 was their *xyngeneia* ties with the inhabitants of the Sicilian city of the Leontinoi, who were descendants of Chalkis in Euboia, and thus Ionians'.

[62] Meiggs-Lewis 1988, 171-175. This alliance is not mentioned by Thucydides. For possible reasons of Thucydides' omissions of inscriptions, see the master thesis of my student, Tsilimparis-Makridis 2020 (with previous bibliography).

[63] Irwin 2007, 220, is confident that Herodotus is alluding to Thucydides and not vice versa: 'I, for one, find it extremely difficult to accept that Herodotus' *parenthekē* could have been written prior to the Athenian disaster in Sicily, and likewise find it implausible that Thucydides would risk describing his momentous event ... in terms that would evoke this apparently throwaway event in Herodotus' *Histories* had he had Herodotus' *parenthekē* to read. If the relationship between the two texts should be construed as one of allusion, it must be that Herodotus is alluding to Thucydides, and again the allusion would carry a polemic tone consistent with that demonstrated to prevail throughout Herodotus' treatment of Minos' thalassocracy'. Irwin's interpretation is ingenious; however, if Herodotus really had experience of the Sicilian disaster when writing this passage, he would have known that the Sicilian disaster was indeed much greater than the conflict between the Iapygians and the Tarentines/Rhegians; so his polemic would make no sense, it might even appear ridiculous.

destructive impact that civil strife would have in Sicily. Herodotus' audience should catch this allusion, since the first Athenian attempts to conquer Sicily took place on the occasion of civil strife.

The last section of the Cretan account relates the depopulation of Crete after the Cretans' participation in the Trojan War. Herodotus mentions that upon their return from Troy the Cretans suffered from illness and pestilence and that the island was emptied (Hdt. 7.172.1: ἀντὶ[64] τούτων δέ σφι ἀπονοστήσασι ἐκ Τροίης λιμόν τε καὶ λοιμὸν γενέσθαι καὶ αὐτοῖσι καὶ τοῖσι προβάτοισι, ὥστε τὸ δεύτερον ἐρημωθείσης Κρήτης…). Again, it is hard to avoid an association with the context of the Peloponnesian War. Thucydides states that the Peloponnesian War exceeded all previous ones, because during it illnesses and the famous pestilence befell Athens:

> τά τε πρότερον ἀκοῇ μὲν λεγόμενα, ἔργῳ δὲ σπανιώτερον βεβαιούμενα οὐκ ἄπιστα κατέστη, σεισμῶν τε πέρι, οἳ ἐπὶ πλεῖστον ἅμα μέρος γῆς καὶ ἰσχυρότατοι οἱ αὐτοὶ ἐπέσχον, ἡλίου τε ἐκλείψεις, αἳ πυκνότεραι παρὰ τὰ ἐκ τοῦ πρὶν χρόνου μνημονευόμενα ξυνέβησαν, αὐχμοί τε ἔστι παρ' οἷς μεγάλοι καὶ ἀπ' αὐτῶν καὶ λιμοὶ καὶ ἡ οὐχ ἥκιστα βλάψασα καὶ μέρος τι φθείρασα ἡ λοιμώδης νόσος·

> The phenomena in the old stories, more often told than attested, now became credible fact: earthquakes, which affected large areas with particular intensity; eclipses of the sun, occurring more frequently than in previous memory; *major droughts in some parts, followed by famine; and, one of the most destructive causes of widespread death, the infectious plague* (Thuc. 1.23.3).

The two words (λοιμὸς and λιμὸς) also appear as possible explanations for the Delphic oracle when the plague struck Athens:

> ἐν δὲ τῷ κακῷ οἷα εἰκὸς ἀνεμνήσθησαν καὶ τοῦδε τοῦ ἔπους, φάσκοντες οἱ πρεσβύτεροι πάλαι ᾄδεσθαι 'ἥξει Δωριακὸς πόλεμος καὶ λοιμὸς ἅμ' αὐτῷ.' ἐγένετο μὲν οὖν ἔρις τοῖς ἀνθρώποις μὴ λοιμὸν ὠνομάσθαι ἐν τῷ ἔπει ὑπὸ τῶν παλαιῶν, ἀλλὰ λιμόν, ἐνίκησε δὲ ἐπὶ τοῦ παρόντος εἰκότως λοιμὸν εἰρῆσθαι·

> In this time of trouble, as tends to happen, they recalled a verse which the old men said was being chanted long ago: 'A Dorian war will come, and bring a pestilence with it'. People had disputed whether the original word in the verse was *limos* ('famine') or *loimos* ('pestilence'): but not surprisingly in the present situation the prevailing view was that pestilence was the word used (Thuc. 2.54.3).[65]

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[64] Another reading is ἀπό, which, according to the anonymous reader of this article, would show that Herodotus did not disapprove of the Cretans supporting the Greeks against the Trojans. I think that the reading ἀντὶ, (opted for by all Herodotus' editors), is preferable, since it is in tune with the Pythia's response as it is described in Herodotus 1.169.2: the Pythia clearly states that the Cretans were punished by Minos precisely because they assisted with the Trojan War (ὅσα ὑμῖν ἐκ τῶν Μενέλεῳ τιμωρημάτων Μίνως ἔπεμψε μηνίων δακρύματα…).

[65] See Demont 2018, 83-86, for the common usage of both words in oracles.

Finally, the motif of emptiness (ἐρήμωσις) recalls the cities which were emptied during the Peloponnesian War. Thucydides states:

> οὔτε γὰρ πόλεις τοσαίδε ληφθεῖσαι ἠρημώθησαν, αἱ μὲν ὑπὸ βαρβάρων, αἱ δ' ὑπὸ σφῶν αὐτῶν ἀντιπολεμούντων (εἰσὶ δ' αἳ καὶ οἰκήτορας μετέβαλον ἁλισκόμεναι).

> Never before were so many cities captured and desolated, some by barbarians, others through internal conflict (and in some a change of population followed their capture) (Thuc. 1.23.2).[66]

So, according to the version privileged by Herodotus, the Cretans were divinely punished because they made a wrong political decision, joining in a 'wrong' alliance (with the Greeks). The Sicilian War of Herodotus' times also began with alliances: the Athenians responded to the request of the Leontinians in 427 BCE (and later to the people of Egesta). Herodotus' narrative about the Cretans could thus point *to a religious interpretation of the Peloponnesian War*: if the Athenians of Herodotus' time have suffered from the pestilence, or if they have failed (and probably will fail in the future, too) in Sicily, they should reflect whether these vicissitudes could be (partly) viewed as a kind of divine punishment.

I will conclude with Herodotus' apology. Why does he add this incidental apology? Later Herodotus openly criticizes the Greek neutrals of the Peloponnese, expressing the opinion that neutrality is identified with medism (8.73: εἰ δὲ ἐλευθέρως ἔξεστι εἰπεῖν, ἐκ τοῦ μέσου κατήμενοι ἐμήδιζον). Why doesn't he reveal a similar opinion in the Cretan narrative? One possible explanation might be that he simply considers the Cretans' justification (obedience to the Delpic god) quite persuasive. An additional interpretation, supported by the analysis offered in this paper, could be that the highly pedagogical dimension of this narrative prevents him from doing so. Herodotus' interest in this narrative, as previously shown, is not so much to offer a thorough historical explanation (with causation links, motivation, various versions etc.) of Cretan neutrality; this section rather serves to encourage Herodotus' audience to reflect on contemporary thorny political issues. [67]

Conclusion

This paper has suggested a reading of Herodotus' narrative on Cretan neutrality during the Persian Wars, interpreting it in the light of the Peloponnesian War and detecting, more specifically, allusions to the events of the beginning of that war (such as the plague, the opposition between islanders and mainlanders, and the difficulties of sailing to Sicily). It has been argued that such an approach can provide explanations for the seemingly odd features of the Cretan account: its loose structure, its focus on the mythical past and on the future rather than on the present, and Herodotus' peculiar methodology. The analysis proposed aims to complement previous analyses of this section by adding an alternative

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[66] Another possible parallel could be the emptiness of Asia. Cf. Harrison 2000, analyzing this motif in Aeschylus' *Persians*. However, the term used by Aeschylus is κενός (119: κένανδρον, 718: κενώσας), while Herodotus and Thucydides employ terms deriving from ἐρημ-.

[67] Baragwanath 2020 has also recently interpreted Herodotus' Libyan *logos* as reflecting contemporary concerns (including contemporary interest in Libya).

vantage point. It thus constitutes further proof of the many and rich layers of interpretation Herodotus' *Histories* give rise to and of the polyphonic character of this marvelous work.

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