

POLITICAL RELATIVISM: IMPLICIT POLITICAL THEORY IN HERODOTUS'
HISTORIES

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ABSTRACT

CORNELIA SYDNOR ROY: Political Relativism: Implicit Political Theory in Herodotus' *Histories*.
(Under the direction of Phiroze Vasunia)

This dissertation argues that Herodotus presents political institutions in a manner similar to the way he presents customs and cultural institutions. That is, he promotes a position of political relativism parallel to his cultural relativism. The dissertation first explores the Constitutional Debate and establishes that Herodotus' political thought is primarily applied thinking that is dependent upon temporal and social context. The second and third chapters establish the close relationship between cultural description and political description. Chapter Two examines this relationship in two ways: semantically and developmentally. Herodotus uses similar vocabulary and syntax in order to talk about political and cultural behavior. The developmental approach examines societies in their early stages of existence. I determine that, at the most basic level, societies seek justice, stability, and cultural representation from their governments. Political practices and institutions closely mirror the customs of the societies that practice the, Chapter Three extends this developmental examination to six more advanced and better defined societies in the *Histories*: Lydia, Egypt, Scythia, Sparta, Persia, and Athens. I show that even these societies have political structures that develop from and are limited by their cultural background. Chapter Four brings together the arguments of the prior chapters by focusing first on the idea of freedom as it is presented in the *Histories*. The text supports freedom in the abstract, but

recognizes that freedom is a subjective experience within the societies presented in the *Histories*. I examine models of political relativism found in the text that are related to this conception of freedom. I conclude by exploring the impact of this kind of thinking on later Greek history and, in particular, the Peloponnesian War. I suggest that Herodotus' political relativism is, in part, a belief that political ideology is a complex issue and not a reason to go to war.

To Mom and Dad

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Introduction

Book One of Herodotus' *Histories* contains a number of important elements and episodes that are meaningful for understanding the *Histories* as a whole. The first sentence indicates the nature and purpose of the work. The next five paragraphs reveal Herodotus' attitude towards mythology and, through the historicizing of myths, suggest that Herodotus is wary of using mythology as a source for history. The Croesus *logos*, including the story of his ancestor Gyges, sets the tone for analyzing future eastern despots and serves as the first interaction between Greeks and barbarians about which Herodotus claims historical knowledge (1.6). The meeting between Croesus and Solon, which has been extensively examined by many students of Herodotus, illuminates many of Herodotus' guiding principles in his text.¹

The story is well known: Solon comes to Croesus' court during his ten years of wandering exile from Athens. Croesus shows Solon his riches and expects him to be impressed with his wealth and to judge him a happy man. When Solon does not do so, Croesus becomes angry with him and demands an explanation. Solon responds with an explanation that contains a number of maxims that are applicable to the entire *Histories*: "look to the end," "happiness does not stay in the same place," and "beware of divine

¹ There is general scholarly consensus that the interaction of Solon and Croesus is programmatic. How and Wells (1912, 49 n. 1), Jacoby (1913, 487-488), Lattimore (1939, 30-31), Immerwahr (1966, 313), Fornara (1971, 18-21), Redfield (1985, 102), Munson (1988, 105), Lateiner (1989, 21), Shapiro (1996, 348-364). A few people argue that Solon's views are not Herodotus' views (Lang [1984, 61], Waters [1985, 104]); they base their position on the fact that not all of Solon's views, and most importantly his concept of divine jealousy, are reflected in the text.

jealousy.” Raaflaub argues that these basic messages are moral, but also political – that is, that they apply to both individuals and societies.² Solon’s comparison between the life of an individual and the life of a society reinforces Raaflaub’s argument: “no country is completely self-sufficient; any country has some things, but lacks others, and the best country is the one which has the most. By the same token, no one person is self-sufficient” (1.32). This comparison between the individual and the society offers an insight into how Herodotus creates a space for analyzing community and political action in the *Histories* while maintaining his focus upon the individual,³ for in Herodotus the community acts in ways similar to the individual.⁴ Also, as Thompson points out, Herodotus “recognizes that particular manifestations of the human spirit take their form according to the distinctive *nomoi* of the community.”⁵ The community, through the influence of common cultural traits, plays a role in determining the actions of the individuals within it. Likewise, an individual can influence a society by changing how it perceives and acts out its own cultural traits. For example, Themistocles radically influences Athenian self-identity during the conference before the battle of Salamis (8.59-63). Adeimantus, the Corinthian commander, tries to

² Raaflaub (1987, 246).

³ Flory (1987, 153): “Although his canvas is gigantic, Herodotus is essentially a miniaturist.” Gould (1984) also emphasizes the multitude of individuals and the importance of the individual and personal motivations. Dewald (2003, 26) suggests that Herodotus’ work reflects a tension between large thematic elements and individual *logoi*.

⁴ Romm (1998, 77) rightly suggests that Solon’s explanation shows how geography and the lands of the earth are analogues for individuals. He interprets the passage as presenting one of many examples of the interconnectedness of the macro- and microcosmic world. The relationship between geography, culture, and individuals has been explored by both Romm and Thomas (2000) and is not the primary focus of this dissertation.

⁵ Thompson (1996, 13).

silence Themistocles by suggesting that he is stateless, since the Persians occupy Athens. Themistocles responds that the Athenians still have a city as long as they have two hundred ships ready for war (8.61).⁶ He claims that Athens is defined by its men and ships rather than by a territory. The Athenian fleet is the vehicle through which Athens is able to realize its democracy.⁷ Themistocles' argument, and his creation of the fleet, shaped the formation of the Athenian democratic *ethos* that citizen strength is more important than geographic location. The influence is bi-directional – Athenian democratic ideology allows Themistocles to make his argument at a critical moment in the war. The two elements of consideration, society and the individual, can mutually define and influence each other to the extent that it is difficult to sort out the motivation of particular events.

Solon's comments function on two further levels. The macro-systemic level encompasses the universal rules that govern the lives of all individuals and societies. The micro-systemic level incorporates the specific narratives and character of an individual or society that affect how they act within the macro-systemic world.⁸ The tension between these

⁶ Themistocles is paraphrasing a maxim attributed to Alcaeus (frag. 476 L.-P.): "cities are not stones or timbers or craft of builders, but wherever there are men who know how to defend themselves, there are walls and cities." By talking about ships, Themistocles makes the maxim particularly Athenian.

⁷ Raaflaub (1998) argues that the fleet is essential for the development of the radical democracy that develops in Athens in the fifth century.

⁸ Redfield (1985, 106), from whom I borrow this terminology, claims that Herodotus' focus is almost wholly macro-systemic: "I should have understood that Herodotus' interests are not micro-systemic, in the internal coherence of particular cultures, but macro-systemic, in the patterned display provided by the range of cultures." Since I apply these terms more broadly than Redfield does, I will provide a brief explanation of how I will use these terms. In the realm of culture, I will refer to individual customs (*nomoi, nomaia*), cultural characteristics (*ethea*), and social memory, primarily expressed through stories, when I am designating micro-systemic elements. The macro-systemic perspective on culture considers the rules governing ideas of culture as a whole, across different societies. Two examples of this, which I will discuss in Chapters 1 and 2, are Herodotus' cultural relativism and his opposing of hard and soft societies. In the realm of politics, the micro-systemic

two levels is manifest in the *Histories*, for the great events narrated have as their causes both the larger rules governing the progress of history and the individuals or societies acting to secure their own interests.⁹ The locus of this tension is typified in Solon's comment on self-sufficiency. No country can be fully self-determining, as can no individual; but both desire to be so. Croesus reveals this desire on both levels. He tries to protect his son Atys from his fate and fails (1.34-43). He also tries to protect his empire from the Persians but the very action he undertakes to do so, attacking Persia, brings about his country's fall (1.46-56, 76-80). Croesus' attempts to save his son and his empire are particular choices that reveal micro-systemic considerations. That he made the attempts and failed each time reveal the macro-systemic processes of fate or history.

This tension between the macro-systemic and micro-systemic is also present in Herodotus' cultural relativism. This moral and ideological position requires the acceptance that different peoples follow the customs and ways of life that seem best to them.¹⁰ The macro-systemic perspective, here cultural relativism, requires recognizing the validity of the micro-systemic world, such as a society's *nomoi*. That is, one must apprehend and accept the

level includes individual laws (*nomoi*), political actions, such as voting or common action, that express the power of the society, and the constitution particular to a given society. The macro-systemic perspective considers the nature of political structures (*isonomia*, *eunomia*) rather than their form, the problem of tyranny, the rise and fall of societies in history, and political relativism.

⁹ Immerwahr (1966, 271 – 272) admits, "we should not overlook the fact that these patterns are based upon the individual character of single events or deeds. These deeds are of an immediate importance regardless of their effects and any other implications." Morgan (2003, xvi) also recognizes the tension between the individual and the system, and warns that we should resist seeing it as a "reflection of Greek individualism *versus* an imagined collectivist eastern mentality."

¹⁰ Munson (2001, 5) recognizes this tension when she argues that "one of the central tasks of Herodotus' work is in fact to promote the paradox that the uniqueness of Greek values also entails respect for the equal worth of non-Greeks."

particular in order to follow the demands of Herodotus' macro-systemic morality.¹¹

After his defeat of Croesus, Cyrus seems to appreciate this problem, for, when he hears about Solon's teachings, he frees Croesus. "He saw he was burning alive a fellow human being, one who had been just as well off as he was; also, he was afraid of retribution, and reflected on the total lack of certainty in human life" (1.86). Cyrus recognizes that Croesus' actions were motivated by his desire for self-determination in a world that is bound by totalizing rules, and he empathizes with him.¹² He is able to appreciate the macro-systemic pressures on Croesus' particular actions. His final advice to the Persians, to remain in Persia and not become soft (9.122), demonstrates that Cyrus is also able to apply his macro-systemic understanding to his own culture. He understands that cultures can and must situate themselves to the best of their ability in the world where macro-systemic forces apply.¹³

This study discusses the nature of societies: how societies express their particular character in the larger world system, and how others perceive that character. In part, these elements have been well examined by scholars who focus on Herodotus' cultural relativism. The focus of this work, instead, is to explore that relationship in the political realm. Herodotus catalogues several types of government: democracy, oligarchy, monarchy, and tyranny. There are general comments one can make about each type of rule as described by

¹¹ Herodotus, by promoting a morality of relativism, overcomes the immediate relativity of moral judgments made by individuals and particular societies, which was and is a big part of the problem of international relations (cf. Low [2007, 29]).

¹² Pelling (2006, 160) suggests the idea of empathy as part of Cyrus' response to Solon's wisdom.

¹³ Cyrus' actions elsewhere in the *Histories* reveal that he may recognize individual autonomy, but he does not recognize the autonomy of any society other than Persia.

Herodotus, for each form of government has particular *nomoi*.¹⁴ The societies that live under each of these types of government develop in their own particular way and their constitutions organize and control the people in modes specific to the societies themselves. Even without the traditional division into types of constitution, all political structures share similarities – the political realm has a set of *nomoi* of its own.¹⁵ I explore the *nomoi* of politics by examining how the political works within societies as well as how Herodotus describes or proscribes societal interaction on the political level. I will show that in the *Histories*, political constitutions seem macro-systemic (one can make generalizations about the different types of government), but must always be considered in the light of particular micro-systems (how each society practices them). This dissertation will address also how the text presents the meeting of different political structures and will offer an interpretation of what kind of insights the text may offer about that interaction. I will argue that the *Histories* provide a model of “political relativism,” analogous though subsidiary to his cultural relativism, which structures Herodotus’ presentation of how societies can understand and respond to political difference. Political relativism recognizes that one can make general statements about types of government, but that any type of government must be analyzed in light of the culture that practices it.

This dissertation explores the micro-systemic expression of politics in individual societies as seen through their particular constitutions and laws, and examines its relationship

¹⁴ For example, Evans (1961, 111) notes that “absolute monarchy itself is a *nomos*. Before Herodotus, Heraclitus had already pointed this out.”

¹⁵ Meier (1990, 212) notes that, for Herodotus, the world was unchanging – individuals and empires consistently rise and fall – which makes it possible to see the changes in political configurations against the backdrop of the unchanging whole.

to macro-systemic political and cultural rules. I use Herodotus' presentation of culture as a model for this examination, in part because the political aspects of societies are integral to their culture.¹⁶

Chapter 1 provides a review of the scholarship on both cultural and political thought in the *Histories* that will set the stage for this inquiry. This review is followed by an analysis of the Constitutional Debate in Book Three. I privilege the Constitutional Debate because it is one of the clearest examples of apparently abstract macro-systemic consideration of political forms. The analysis will provide a basis from which to understand the different rules that may govern democracy, oligarchy, monarchy, and tyranny. This section will also highlight the difficulty that comes from considering these forms too abstractly. In bringing out this difficulty, I show why the political constitutions discussed should be approached on a society-by-society basis, rather than abstractly across the *Histories* – they are not fully macro-systemic.

Chapter 2 explores the connection between politics and culture. I first take a semantic approach and show how political and cultural descriptions share a specific vocabulary. Most of these terms, at their most basic level, serve to define and differentiate societies into particular entities; these terms bring out the micro-systemic relationship between politics and culture. I then take a developmental approach and argue that political structures grow out of a society's cultural characteristics. In doing so I show the relationship between politics and culture on a macro-systemic level. Finally, I examine how politics can affect culture. This

¹⁶ Lateiner (1989, 210): “[Herodotus’] contribution includes the central observation that governments of all types make policy on the basis of past political history, present political pressures internal and external, and often ruthless self-interest. Further, he recognized that national character often (and occasionally individuals) can determine a nation’s survival.”

last element is less common in the *Histories*; but when it does occur it emphasizes the close connection between the cultural and the political. The whole chapter demonstrates that questions of politics and questions of culture can be examined using similar methodologies.

Chapter 3 presents a detailed examination of six societies in the *Histories* from a micro-systemic perspective. Therein, I explore how Herodotus presents the ways in which Lydia, Egypt, Scythia, Sparta, Persia, and Athens solve the problem of political organization in manners specifically reflective of their cultural characteristics. Having established in Chapter 2 how Herodotus talks about culture and political concerns in general, I use the six societies examined in this chapter to provide specific and defined examples of societies in history. This adds a new layer to the focus of Chapter 2, for it explores what role cultural concerns have in determining the political structures of a society and how this role manifests itself over time, especially in regard to a society's relationship to the law.

Chapter 4 analyzes the tension between the micro-systemic and macro-systemic understanding of culture and politics. I present a new macro-systemic mode of analysis in the *Histories*: Herodotus is a political relativist who accepts that societies develop unique solutions to the problem of political organization, and who confines, for the most part, his micro-systemic evaluations of political structures to the societies that practice them. The consideration of his political relativism creates a new basis for understanding how Herodotus presents the ultimate victory of the Greek states over the invading Persian army. The alliance of the Greeks, although uneasy, creates a space for the exercise of political autonomy of each state which makes the Greek alliance stronger than the Persian army, for the Persian Empire does not accommodate fully the cultural and political identities of its subject states.

In the conclusion, I relate Herodotus' political relativism to his idea of history.

Herodotus, like Solon, views history as cyclical: great cities and great individuals rise and fall. There are different methods open to societies for dealing with the cycle of history through political organization, but no single method guarantees stability or lasting strength.

This dissertation seeks to explore the relationship between culture and politics as Herodotus presents it, without introducing preconceived political ideologies on specific constitutional forms. I will not take it for granted that Herodotus has a predefined position on democracy or tyranny in general,¹⁷ but rather I will explore how he presents political institutions and actions in each particular society.

¹⁷ I examine the scholarly discussion on Herodotus' political positions in Chapter 1.

Chapter One: Defining the Debates

In this chapter, I will first provide a review of relevant scholarship that has influenced my research, attempting to establish the history of the ideas that I build upon as well as those with which I disagree. My dissertation engages two broad areas of research on Herodotus – his ethnographic elements and his political thought – that have developed independent of each other for the most part. I will thus focus my literature review on the scholarship pertaining to these two areas; the analysis in later chapters will, in large part, be an effort to combine them. After the literature review, I will analyze an episode significant for considering Herodotus’ political thought: the Constitutional Debate. I do so for two reasons: it is one of the few passages where Herodotus seems to be “doing political theory” and my analysis of the passage will provide a frame of reference for later discussions.

For many years, Herodotus’ ethnographic sections were interpreted as separate from the more historical second half of the *Histories*. Jacoby (1913) argued that Herodotus began writing an ethnographic treatise that developed into a history of the Persian wars. This developmental view of the *Histories* held great weight until Pohlenz (1937) and Immerwahr (1966), among others, began arguing convincingly for the unity of the work as a whole, the unitarian view. Immerwahr’s impressive book details the coherence of the text from the level of the sentence to the *Histories* as a whole. He argues that Herodotus’ text reveals an underlying view of a world system, in which certain aspects are more pronounced in the East

or the West.¹ The ethnographic sections illustrate the variety of cultures and make clear Herodotus' problem with the Persian Empire and what it creates: excessive unification.² Immerwahr's work provides a good foundation for understanding Herodotus' concept of a world system – his macro-systemic understanding. My work, however, will be more focused upon how this world system operates at the institutional and societal level.

Fornara (1971) attempts to unite the developmental and unitarian views of the *Histories*. He argues that how the work came about does not contradict interpretations of the work we have now. He suggests that the ethnographies were originally the subject of the *Histories*, and that Persia was a useful organizing principle for these ethnographies. As the *Histories* developed, however, it turned into a unified discussion of Persian expansion and its halt when it came up against the Greek resistance. This interpretation does not allow either the first half of the *Histories*, which describes the beginning of Persian expansion and has more ethnographic sections, or the second half, which tells the narrative of Xerxes' invasion, to take precedence, but rather gives equal weight to both. Fornara also shows how the themes and morals developed in the first half relate to the interpretation of the text as a whole.³ Fornara's work, while providing a brilliant reading of the *Histories*, also warns against over-generalizing about the cultures and *logoi* that Herodotus relates.⁴ This dissertation will explore the concern Fornara highlights by examining the tension between particular

¹ Immerwahr (1966, 148).

² Immerwahr (1966, 188).

³ Fornara does not relate all the ethnographic sections of the first half to the work as a whole; he allows Egypt to stand alone.

⁴ "The fact that all these pragmatic explanations [of Persian operations], some defined, others left vague, can be taken together as individual examples of the same phenomenon, Persian imperialism, merely shows that we have the capacity to generalize from particulars. Herodotus' text does not substantiate the opinion that he did the same." Fornara (1971, 30).

individuals, events, and societies and more general thematic elements such as narrative tropes or the cycles of history.

The works mentioned above incorporate the ethnographic sections into an interpretation of the *Histories* as a whole. My own work will focus upon the ethnographies because they provide a basis for understanding how Herodotus defines societies in the *Histories*. A major concern about the ethnographies is that they are too subjective, too defined by Greek cultural concerns. For example, Redfield (1985) takes up the subject of Herodotus as an ethnographer in an influential article, "Herodotus the Tourist." In this article he denies that Herodotus writes "good" ethnographies. He claims that Herodotus does not understand societies as cultural systems in and of themselves, but rather uses his description of societies to satisfy his curiosity and express his love of symmetry and analogy; that is, Redfield views Herodotus as an historian who structures his history from a macro-systemic rather than micro-systemic perspective. He goes on to argue that the *Histories* are useful, not for the ethnographies of other peoples, but rather for revealing modes of Greek thought. The work is one of "good, Greek patriotism" that illuminates the text's inherent Greek bias.⁵ Redfield's article is convincing in his analysis of the themes that Herodotus may touch upon in his ethnographies and, in particular, for his elucidation of the hard/soft polarity that plays throughout the text. In his analysis, however, he allows the larger themes of the *Histories* (and Herodotus' conception of a world system) to overcome the variety of cultures Herodotus presents. Second, Redfield attacks Herodotus' anthropological methods as if Herodotus writes his *Histories* as an academic in the well-defined field of history who is attempting to appropriate anthropological methods. This is an anachronistic simplification of the first work of history.

Redfield's article was published at the time of a major shift in anthropology's ethnographical theory, marked particularly by the publication of James Clifford's edited volume: *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (1986). The authors in this volume recognize the power of narrative in writing effective ethnography and the impossibility of objective observation; they discuss the power dynamics that emerge from observing and recording. This shift in ethnographical theory away from the belief that ethnography can be objective has, in part, redeemed Herodotus' ethnography because it highlights both the impossibility of truly objective description and the power of narrative in producing good ethnographies. I will work from the position that, although the ethnographies are subjective, this does not hinder examining them as systematic.

Hartog (1988) also addresses the problem of Herodotus' subjective ethnographies in *The Mirror of Herodotus*. He argues that the ethnographies employ a "rhetoric of otherness" which provides a systematic method of understanding Greek thought. He shows how Herodotus presents information in terms of binary oppositions, most predominantly Greek and Other. The first half of the book focuses upon Herodotus' depiction of the Scythians. Hartog provides an extensively detailed analysis of this ethnography; he points out the places where Herodotus may be correct or at least correctly representing recognized traditions, but primarily he focuses upon the selections Herodotus makes and the underlying assumptions that govern those selections. The second half of the book develops the theoretical implications of the rhetoric of otherness for interpreting the *Histories*. The first half of *The Mirror of Herodotus* reveals the systematic complexity of Herodotus' ethnography of the Scythians; but the second half, while offering a groundbreaking interpretation of how the rhetoric of otherness works, fails to do justice to the variety of Herodotus' ethnographies.

⁵ Redfield (1985, 117).

Hartog, like Redfield, concludes by focusing upon the macro-systemic perspective of the *Histories* rather than the complexity of the micro-systemic world that he elucidates in the beginning. Hartog's work coincides with E. Hall's book on Greek tragedy (*The Invention of the Barbarian*, 1988), which also eloquently argues that the depiction of the other as defined by Persia produces Greek self-identity in the fifth century. I accept that the *Histories* are Hellenocentric and strongly defined by the Greek/barbarian polarity, but I argue that Herodotus reveals an ability to record and transmit ethnographies that are still revelatory of the cultures they describe. This dissertation will develop the argument that the ethnographies are not simply vehicles of Greek identity formation (although they do participate in that process) but that their primary function is the presentation of systematic portraits of other societies.

One way to develop this argument is to show that the Greeks do not simply think in the monolithic terms of Greek and Other. Vasunia (2001) complicates the Greek/barbarian polarity by showing the influence of Egypt upon Greek identity and thought. He argues for a triangulation of influence among Persia, Greece, and Egypt. Persia remains the focus of Greek identity-formation as it is opposed to an aggrandizing empire. Egypt fills the role of an older, more learned, and more civilized society. He shows that the Greeks are drawn to and repelled by Egypt in ways different from their relationship to Persia. In the two chapters that focus on Herodotus, Vasunia shows how Herodotus incorporates and reinterprets Egyptian concepts of space and time. Although I recognize that Persia and Egypt are oppositional concepts for Greek thought that may be more influential than other societies,⁶ I believe that

⁶ In his *Philosophy of History*, Hegel (1879, 115) suggests, "If Persia forms the *external* transition to Greek life, the internal, *mental* transition is mediated by *Egypt*." He views it as the singular Greek accomplishment to have harmonized the Egyptian and Persian modes of political life.

Vasunia's work opens up the possibility for more than a triangulation of influence.

Herodotus' audience may also account for his apparent subjectivity. Fornara emphasizes the importance of considering the audience of Herodotus' *Histories* when attempting to analyze his shortcomings as historian and ethnographer.⁷ Herodotus was writing to Greeks and this Greek audience helps explain Herodotus' lack of explicit ethnographies of Greek city-states, save a brief description of Spartan kingship. His text assumes a level of knowledge about Greek culture and politics and provides new and unique information in the ethnographies. The fact that Herodotus and his audience are Greeks means that Greek interest may limit how Herodotus presents other societies and the interpretations he offers of them.

As a case in point, Harrison (2000) offers a good argument that Herodotus' Greek perspective limits his ability to provide a complete portrait of non-Greek religious practice. In *Divinity and History*, he shows how Herodotus makes many assumptions about the underlying meaning of religious practices in his description of them. Harrison argues that Herodotus presents superficial differences such as strange practices or variations in the divine pantheon, but does not reveal more fundamental differences in the perception of the relationship between the human and the divine. Harrison's argument brings out the limitations of Herodotus' text that are created by the problem of translating cultures. Herodotus is sensitive to superficial differences, but may not even think to notice other, more fundamental oppositions. I believe this means that Herodotus' ethnographies are not comprehensive by modern standards; but, again, this does not imply that he does not see cultural systems. Rather, Herodotus' understanding of cultural systems is highly informed by

⁷ Myres (1953, 11) also argues that the text implies an Athenian audience.

the concerns of Greeks. He is compelled to translate difference – for himself and his audience – but despite what is lost in translation, the descriptions of other societies reveal in Herodotus a systematic understanding of their cultures.⁸

I agree with the argument that Herodotus often makes an effort to present other cultures as he observes them, rather than as motivated by Greek ideological constructs; that is, that Herodotus is a cultural relativist. Many other scholars have also argued that Herodotus is a cultural relativist and have explored the motivation for such a position. Lateiner (1989) accepts that Herodotus presents a more balanced view of the Mediterranean world than one might expect of fifth-century Greeks. He argues that Herodotus may have a program of cultural relativism, which he inherited from contemporaries such as the Sophists. Lateiner's work aggressively seeks to incorporate the ethnographic sections into Herodotus' historical program. He believes that Herodotus' main message is one of recognizing cultural relativism – that *nomos* is king of all. “The arbitrariness and diversity of *nomoi* do not in themselves invalidate them, as Herodotus understood better than some Sophists, because each set functions admirably for its community.”⁹ Lateiner picks up the larger themes in the *Histories* and shows how Herodotus' ethnography supports these greater themes.

Munson (2001) also accepts that Herodotus has a program of cultural relativism in response to cultural chauvinism and that this position is a guiding force for Herodotus' historiography. Both Munson's and Lateiner's arguments rest on the idea that Herodotus has a conception of a world system, even if he does not completely define individual cultural

⁸ In his analysis of the role of the scientist, Weber offers an insight into this discussion. Weber suggests that tension arises in scientific inquiry because the scientist initially brings his own values to his inquiry. A true scientist must accept that his findings may contradict his presuppositions. A similar tension is apparent in Herodotus' Greek perspective. He is willing to be surprised by his findings and to report evidence that is contradictory to a Greek perspective to his audience.

⁹ Lateiner (1989, 51).

systems.¹⁰ Some values and lessons work cross-culturally for every individual regardless of society, both Greek and barbarian. That means that the *Histories* provides lessons for its readers (primarily Greeks) but it draws those lessons from several cultures' activities. I work from the idea that Herodotus' cultural relativism is an ideological position and, unlike Lateiner and Munson, I focus my analysis of the text on how his cultural relativism relates to his presentation of political practices and political thought. I address this connection in part through an examination of the term *nomos*, which Herodotus uses in both cultural and political description.

Many of the debates about Herodotus' cultural relativism center on the term *nomos*. Redfield argues that once Herodotus explains that a people do something because of *nomos*, he intends the reader to inquire no further, for *nomos*, in essence, is "merely different."¹¹ For example, the Callitiae eat their dead, the Greeks do not (3.38). Redfield interprets this comparison as simply an example of the difference between the two cultures that fills out a systematic opposition.¹² This relegates the individual *nomoi* to a position of lesser importance than other thematic elements in the text. Humphreys (1987), on the other hand, argues that the investigation of *nomos* provides an insight into the central methodology of Herodotus' *Histories*. She suggests that investigation does not end with the identification of *nomoi*, but rather it ends at the understanding of cultural difference that follows the presentation of the *nomoi*. She argues, on the example given above, that one can infer that

¹⁰ Rood (2006, 301) also suggests that Herodotus presents societies somewhat systematically.

¹¹ Redfield (1985, 99).

¹² Redfield (1985, 105).

funeral *nomos* is a significant defining principle when considered with other *nomoi*.¹³ While Redfield argues that *nomos* marks an endpoint that one accepts and moves on from, Humphreys argues that *nomos* is interesting as an end point and as the limit to investigation but not to understanding.¹⁴ Humphreys' argument inspires my own position, which I will develop in more detail in Chapter 2. I suggest that *nomos* can also work as a starting point to investigation. After tracing an individual's behavior to *nomos*, one can use *nomos* to illuminate our understanding of institutions and group behavior in the *Histories*. That is, the specific differences in treating the dead may reveal attitudes toward other aspects of the culture, such as how they organize themselves as a community. Although *nomos* is not the sole or sufficient cause for human action,¹⁵ it can be a good concept through which to think about historical causation.¹⁶

Thus, to sum up, my work develops from the position that the ethnographies are significant factors in understanding the larger themes of the *Histories*, in particular, cultural relativism as a moral and ideological position. One concern with both the ethnographies and Herodotus' cultural relativism is the bias towards Greek modes of thought, whether generated by his personal preferences or the demands of his Greek audience. I believe that Herodotus can be both Hellenocentric and a cultural relativist. He does not privilege Greece *per se*, but rather his work is imbued with Greek modes of thought. These modes shape his description and analysis of societies. I will show how Herodotus' macro-systemic

¹³ Humphreys (1987, 218).

¹⁴ Humphreys (1987, 219–220).

¹⁵ Lateiner (1989, 159-160).

¹⁶ This idea resonates with Lang's argument about how Herodotus structures his stories. He looks at results to posit how those results came about. Lang (1984, 29).

understanding of the world mediates his Hellenocentricity and explains his promotion of cultural relativism. The strongest supporting argument for this position is presented by R. Thomas (2000) who shows that Herodotus' thought is grounded in that of his intellectual milieu. Herodotus mirrors the ideas and methodology of the natural scientists, philosophers, and medical writers contemporary to the composition of the *Histories*. Thomas brings out elements of Herodotus' text that reflect his knowledge of the discussions of his day and also testifies to his attempts to assert his own opinions. She shows that Herodotus is not bound by conventional intellectual approaches. Where Thomas focuses on Herodotus' involvement in the scientific community in general, I focus on how Herodotus' cultural and political thought is particular to his research and not subject to the general political ideologies of the Greeks. Here too he is willing to assert his own opinions.

I will now provide an overview of the major trends in the analysis of Herodotus' political thinking. I first discuss how political institutions or issues relate to the broader field of *nomos*. Modern historians of ancient Greece have argued in favor of a *de facto* difference between Greeks and non-Greeks, attributing to the Greeks a more developed form of political thought.¹⁷ They assume that when Herodotus attributes political thought to people in other societies, he is transposing a Greek concern onto a barbarian character.¹⁸ Regardless of whether or not barbarians are more or less political than the Greeks, Herodotus does bring a Greek interest in politics to his text. This means that Herodotus may be wrong or misguided when he discusses politics in other societies, and especially when he focuses on the individual's role in politics. But my goal is to draw out how Herodotus thinks about and

¹⁷ Meyer (1991), Cartledge (2000).

¹⁸ I believe that this reveals an uncompromising attitude about barbarians among these scholars rather than offering a fair assessment of how Herodotus presents political thinking among non-Greeks.

constructs relationships among people (both as individuals and as members of nations), *nomos*, and political structures. He uses many cultures to do so; and, although he may be mistaken in the details regarding those cultures, that does not affect the value of looking at the text's internal logic.

Herodotus' conceptions of different cultures overlap with his ideas about political interactions. A significant line of scholarly inquiry has been inquiry into the trope of the tyrant king as an important political paradigm. After discussing that, I will examine both Herodotus' attitude toward democracy and Athens and Athenian rhetoric opposing democracy and tyranny. Finally, I will outline the debate about whether Herodotus is a political thinker or not.

There has been extensive analysis of Herodotus' portrait of kings.¹⁹ Scholars tend to view Croesus as a good foil for analyzing later (especially Persian) kings.²⁰ For example, Pelling (2006) uses the Croesus *logos* to discuss the nature of tyrannical power and how subjects must negotiate with it. He shows how communicating with kings often skews discourse. The kings provide good examples of how power is viewed in the text and may even provide a model for Herodotus' own position as historian. For example, kings in Herodotus can determine custom,²¹ measure space and time,²² control writing,²³ and, in

¹⁹ See, for example, Immerwahr (1966), Waters (1972) Gammie (1986), Flory (1986), Christ (1994), and Dewald (1997).

²⁰ Marg (1953) *inter alia*.

²¹ See Dewald (1997), also, in Herodotus, Darius at 3.38.

²² See Vasunia (2001) on the Egyptian pharaohs.

²³ See Steiner (1994).

general, determine the value of people, events, and materials.²⁴ Not only do the kings rule their subjects, they also engage in cultural projects in a manner similar to the historian's project of categorizing, describing, and valuing actions and entities. I do not disagree with the idea that the image of the king is a narrative trope in Herodotus, but I argue that this trope should not allow us to ignore the particulars of each monarchy – how each functions, how each king overextends his powers over his subjects, how that over-extension is experienced in a particular way by the king's subjects, and the possibility that good kings exist.

Dewald (2003) argues that Herodotus presents a predominantly negative attitude towards monarchy and tyranny in the *Histories* as developed in what she calls the “despotic template.” She claims that despotic power is a theme of the *Histories* that Herodotus defines and qualifies, although his template is consistently negative. She argues that tyrants fall because tyranny is structurally destined to fail.²⁵ I believe that tyranny may be presented as structurally flawed, but monarchs are not necessarily tyrants. I will distinguish between monarchs and tyrants and the situations in which rulers exercise tyrannical power without fully being tyrants.²⁶ Flory (1987) argues that Herodotus prefers one-man rule as a form of government. When monarchs or tyrants fall, it is because of individual flaws rather than structural ones. Dewald's and Flory's disagreement brings out an important tension I will explore in my dissertation: is the problem the political structure of one-man rule or the individuals who fill the role?

In part, Munson (1994) explores how one-man rule in a single society can

²⁴ See Kurke (1999).

²⁵ Dewald (2003, 28). Otanes (3.80) makes the argument that one-man rule has structural flaws. The tyrant will turn bad because of his position of power, not because of his character.

²⁶ Immerwahr (1966), Waters (1972), Davie (1979), and Flory (1987), *inter alia*, make this distinction.

accommodate extremely opposed individuals. She shows how various Spartan kings partake in tyrannical behavior (Cleomenes) or act as good hero kings (Leonidas). She continues her work of detailing the variety of types of kingship in her book *Telling Wonders* (2001). Munson's work highlights a difficult question in talking about monarchy in the *Histories*: who are kings and who are tyrants? Herodotus tends to refer to the Greek tyrants, who share qualities with Eastern kings, as *tyrannoi*, but he is fluid in his use of *tyrannos*, *basileus*, or *mounarchos* with the many eastern kings he discusses. Also, as Davie (1979) points out, for Herodotus, a one-man rule does not mean the negation of freedom when it is examined in terms of successful societies rather than in the context of the Greek tyrants.²⁷ I will discuss Davie's argument further in Chapters 3 and 4. In this aspect, Herodotus may be bucking a predominant trend in Athenian literature and art of opposing one-man rule to democratic freedom.²⁸ Anderson (2005) points out that the attitude of Herodotus (as well as fifth-century Greeks in general) toward tyrants may be more complex and even positive than the dominant rhetoric permits, for Herodotus' text makes many allowances toward tyrants and the good practices they follow.²⁹ I suggest that when analyzing the various examples of kings and tyrants, we should be aware of the general negative attitude towards monarchy and tyranny but take each example as Herodotus presents it without immediately pre-judging it through that negative attitude or without applying a macro-systemic perspective to a specific constitutional form. Narrative tropes in the tales of kings can distract a reader from the particulars of their rule and the kind of kingship they embody.

²⁷ Davie (1979, 161).

²⁸ Baragwanath (2008, 149-150 n. 79) reviews scholarly arguments about Herodotus' use and complication of this opposition.

²⁹ Dewald supports this position in her analysis, but argues that the "despotic template" overpowers the positive portrayals of kings.

Kings are powerful individuals in Herodotus and have their own story lines. Sometimes the life-cycle of a particular king or tyrant is bound with the political life of the society and its government. At other times, these cycles diverge: a king may meet his end in a moment of political failure, but that does not mean that the whole monarchy falls. For example, Cyrus dies during a failed campaign against the Massagetae. The narrative of the campaign is fraught with events that readers of Herodotus will recognize as signs of *hubris*, such as the crossing of rivers and the use of wine to put the Massagetae at a disadvantage.³⁰ Cyrus, however, has ensured his succession and the Persian monarchy continues even after his individual fall (1.205-214). We must tease out the institution of monarchy from individuals and their compelling narratives.

Just as scholars often view Herodotus as anti-tyrannical, there is a complementary trend in Herodotean scholarship that involves looking for and finding a pro-democratic or even a specifically Athenian bias in Herodotus. Both of these assumptions are examples of attempts to make macro-systemic claims about subjects that merit micro-systemic consideration. The pro-Athenian bias has been argued in two ways: that he structures his whole history in a pro-Athenian way or that his text reflects and reproduces particularly Athenian and democratic values.³¹ J. Hall (2000), however, argues that Herodotus' seemingly pro-Athenian bias is actually a response to the anti-Athenian environment in the rest of Greece during the mid- to late-fifth century. Other scholars point out that Herodotus often shows Athens' democracy at its low points.³² I take the position of Saxonhouse (1994):

³⁰ Tomyris' reaction to this trick indicates its hubristic nature.

³¹ Forsdyke (2001).

³² Baragwanath (2008, 192-202) explores the many negative motivations ascribed to the Athenian democracy.

Herodotus admires the values of the Athenian democracy, and in particular the practice of *isēgoria*.

Saxonhouse shows how Herodotus privileges institutions that create equality in a group of people.³³ She rightly identifies that the focus on equality is associated with democracy, but is not peculiar to democratic societies. This does not necessarily make Herodotus' analysis of other political institutions suspect. I will show that this focus does suggest that his preference should serve as an indicator of *how* he analyzes other political structures – in terms of freedom and equality. His praise of *isēgoria* in Athens at 5.78 is a result of the subjective experience of *isēgoria* – that each man *felt* free and hence was a better fighter. Serving a *despotēs nomos* allows the Spartans freedom as well. Munson (2005) also hints at the idea that Herodotus recognizes that freedom may be a subjective term in her discussion of how Herodotus provides culturally specific translations for key terms. My examination of various political structures will suggest that Herodotus recognizes the subjective experience of freedom in other societies and it will take into account his preference for equality in societies.

Another argument for Athenian bias appears in Herodotus' possible use of Athenian ideology, such as his focus on freedom, as an interpretive mechanism in the *Histories*. Forsdyke (2001) argues that Athenian democratic ideology infiltrates and dictates Herodotus' political theory. She begins by analyzing Herodotus' use of traditional vocabulary to support her claim, and then shows how Demaratus' argument with Xerxes in Book 7 reflects democratic rather than Spartan ideology. She argues that the Athenians co-opted Persian war imagery to strengthen their democratic propaganda as they built their empire in the later fifth

³³ Moles (2002, 39) echoes this argument.

century (see also Murray (1988), Hall (1989), Cartledge (1993) and (1995)). The dearth of texts from other Greek *poleis* (and specifically Sparta) does not allow for an extensive comparative analysis of the vocabulary used elsewhere to oppose Persian oppression with Greek freedom. Athens is a major locus of literary and epigraphic production and thus also of historical knowledge. I believe that Forsdyke's analysis reflects her underlying assumption that Herodotus was already biased towards Athens. Ober (2002), however, shows how Athenian ideology is spread throughout Greece and may be used in ways particular to the societies that adopt it. I think we should be wary of assuming a primarily Athenian audience when this interpretation is based upon a lack of materials from other areas of the Greek world.

The identification of Herodotus' Athenian bias may also be reflected in the now mostly rejected or highly qualified view that the *Histories* are aimed at an Athenian audience. In part, this idea stems from Plutarch's story that a young Thucydides heard Herodotus lecture in Athens. However, as J. Hall points out, there is also a tradition of Herodotus' lecturing at Olympia – which should widen our imagined contemporary audience of the *Histories*.³⁴ Fornara (1971) posits a Greek (and perhaps specifically Athenian) audience and Raaflaub (1987) and Moles (1996) view Athens as the primary focus of Herodotus' indictment of Persian expansionism. Yet, as Munson suggests, it is much easier for Herodotus to make the connection between Persia and Athens if he is *not* in front of an Athenian audience.³⁵ A lesson for and about the Athenians is not the same as speaking to the Athenians. In this dissertation, I assume a Greek audience familiar with Athenian political

³⁴ J. Hall (2000).

³⁵ Conversation with R. Munson (10/2008).

thought.³⁶

Raaflaub argues that Herodotus plays on accepted depictions of the Athenian empire in his description of Persia and some of the actions of Athens.³⁷ Through his depiction of the universal processes of history Herodotus shows that what happened to Persia could happen to Athens. Moles' article "Herodotus Warns the Athenians" makes the claim that Herodotus' primary intention in the text is to warn the Athenians about the dangers of empire. I do not deny that Herodotus' indictment of the Persian Empire is applicable to Athens, the current rising imperial power. Rather, I argue that since Herodotus criticizes the Persian Empire from a basis of universal principles developed in the narrative, his warning is not directed at Athens alone. Herodotus' Sparta and the historical Sparta contemporary with the composition of the *Histories* also exert hegemonic power.³⁸ I claim that Herodotus' problem with empire goes beyond Persia, Athens, and Sparta to any future power that begins to act imperially and oppressively.

Herodotus' attitude toward tyrants, his attitude toward Athens and the Athenian democracy, and his concern over empire provide various means for identifying themes that suggest political thought in Herodotus, yet evaluating Herodotus as a specifically political thinker has always been controversial. The text contains only two abstract evaluations of politics: the Constitutional Debate in Book 3 and the praise of democracy in Book 5. Yet, as Pelling (2002) points out, the argument in the Constitutional Debate is deeply embedded in immediate Persian concerns. A great problem with much scholarship on the Constitutional

³⁶ Even if Herodotus has a bias towards Athens, it may affect his presentation but not necessarily the historical facts. *cf.* footnote 7 above.

³⁷ Raaflaub (1987, 227).

³⁸ The Spartans desire to expand after their constitutional reform (1.60). See also their debate before invading Attica (5.91).

Debate is that one question often asked is “who wins?” If you think that Herodotus prefers democracy, Otanes wins; if you think he prefers monarchy, Darius wins. This discussion proves important if one views the Constitutional Debate as the best source of abstract political thought in the *Histories*; but I, with Pelling, think that the Persian context makes problematic the transfer of political thought expressed within the debate to general assumptions about how Herodotus views systems of government. I will discuss the Constitutional Debate in greater detail below. For the time being, I argue that, although the Constitutional Debate is one of the more abstract discussions of politics in the *Histories*, it should not be the only source for determining Herodotus’ political thought.

The dearth of abstract statements has caused many scholars to argue that Herodotus does not have a theory of politics, and that he does not express much political thought; but this view is slowly changing. One trend may be found in Lateiner, echoing Fornara: “however deficient Herodotus’ political history may be, he invented it, and he explains major events with it.”³⁹ In criticizing this kind of thinking about Herodotus’ political thought, Gould argues that Herodotus merely extends the model of personal relationships, and that “we need to consider the possibility that we have been misled by a formal resemblance between Herodotus’ generalizations and the language of theory.”⁴⁰ Gould’s work continues Immerwahr’s arguments about the narrative unity of the work, but he sees Herodotus as a master storyteller whose connections mirror archaic modes of thought. This argument reflects the negative opinion of Herodotus’ narrative, informed by a positive valuation of

³⁹ Lateiner (1989, 210).

⁴⁰ Gould (1984, 81). The concern over narrative compulsion in Herodotus may find its roots in the connections between Herodotus and Homer. These connections have been discussed (*inter alia*) by Erbse (1992), Boedeker (2002), Marincola (2006) and Baragwanath (2008).

Thucydides' more abstract theorizing, that is prevalent among many scholars.⁴¹ Gould privileges narrative patterning as a motivating factor in the description of individuals, societies, and events. He rejects the possibility that narrative can reveal underlying political assumptions and he ignores the fact that modes of interpretation and representation were in flux throughout the fifth century. At that time, there is an awareness of the power of narrative, but also a growing appreciation of abstract argumentation.⁴² I believe that the approaches of Lateiner and Gould are both productive, and so I will take a fluid approach: sometimes the demands of narrative take precedence; sometimes historical fact and political institutions are more influential on the progress of the text.

As mentioned in the introduction, Raaflaub (1987) has argued that Herodotus' political theory is also moral. Herodotus' messages about the sequence of rise and decline, that human happiness does not stay long in one place, that one should not overstep bounds, are moral but are also essentially political.⁴³ The difference between the view of Gould and Lateiner or Raaflaub is how one views the application of individual morality to the political level. Gould emphasizes that the focus upon the individual is not political and that narrative governs Herodotus' description. Lateiner and Raaflaub believe that the narratives of individuals, as well as nations, do allow for political interpretation.

In recent years, the argument about stories of individuals has shifted in the direction of interpreting such messages as political thought. Forsdyke explains: "scholars have begun to view politics as implicated in the totality of social practices and norms."⁴⁴ Kurke develops

⁴¹ G. E. M. de Ste. Croix (1977) provides a good example of this opinion.

⁴² See R. Thomas (2000) for her analysis of the changing intellectual climate of the fifth century.

⁴³ Raaflaub (1987, 246).

⁴⁴ Forsdyke (2006, 225).

the idea of implication and suggests that it is possible to sort out political thought from the full portraits of society that Herodotus provides: “perhaps with coinage, as with democratic ‘theory’ itself, we perceive only absence because we’ve been looking in the wrong places. We need to look at the ‘embodied’ discourses of imagery and anecdote, and at lived practices.”⁴⁵ At 1.5, Herodotus claims that he will look at both large and small cities, because fortunes change. I suggest that his practice may be a good guideline for students of Herodotus: what seems unimportant, such as a single *logos* or custom, may turn out to be especially significant for understanding a society or major event. Political thought in Herodotus is revealed through his narrative and particular episodes. A good example of this may be found in Solon’s story of Tellus of Athens, who Solon claims is the happiest man he knows because he was survived by his children and got to die a glorious death for his city (1.30). Solon uses the narrative of Tellus to illuminate a larger idea – look to the end – that may be applied both to the individual and to the state, for Solon’s focus is both Croesus and the Lydian people.

N. Thompson (1996) argues that the tendency to denigrate Herodotus for his lack of abstraction is inherited from Aristotle. Her book seeks to pull out a political theory from Herodotus, and she, like many before her, emphasizes that Herodotus focuses on the individual and the particular. In her interpretation, Herodotus presents a varied world in which everyone must seek out his own attitude toward politics. “Thus exists the requirement of political activity. So Herodotus proceeds to reveal that each tribe, culture, society, or nation of the human world organizes itself in its own way. The human project is political

⁴⁵ Kurke (1999, 333). Van der Veen (1996) also argues that seemingly insignificant information can provide a fuller understanding of significant themes in the *Histories*.

theory and the assessment of the ensuing practice.”⁴⁶ She argues that Herodotus presents a world where historical forces are nearly insurmountable, and the rules that work for the individual apply on all levels. Thompson’s view is reminiscent of Benardete’s argument in *Herodotean Inquiries* (1978). He proceeds through the *Histories* culture by culture and argues that Herodotus’ *Histories* is about the nature of man and how he fits into the larger world.⁴⁷ Raaflaub’s argument (mentioned above) also ties into this view of Herodotus. He argues that Herodotus’ moral messages carry over to the political sphere: what applies for the individual also applies for the state. Because he presents individuals and particular episodes as revelatory of larger truths, Herodotus’ lack of abstraction is a reasoned position.

My argument with Benardete, Raaflaub, and Thompson (*inter alia*) is that they claim that Herodotus’ thought and the organization of his text are primarily individual and moral and secondarily political. For them, Herodotus may be thinking politically on some level, but they do not credit him with concrete political thought as a primary concern. It is not enough to point out that Herodotus has a macro-systemic ideological perspective that is intended to be applied on the local or individual level. I explore how this works on the level of the group or institution. Are there differences, protections or special dangers to the state that the individual does not have? Forsdyke has argued that Herodotus does not consider politics from the institutional perspective.⁴⁸ I do not think, however, that this has been well supported or explored, and I intend to show that Herodotus does provide descriptions of how groups work culturally and politically. For each society, the risk of tyranny is the same, but the mechanisms by which a society may lapse into tyranny are different.

⁴⁶ Thompson (1996, 155).

⁴⁷ Benardete (1978, 87).

A fruitful way of exploring this question may lie in understanding how Herodotus presents power, to be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4. Dewald (1994) claims that Herodotus is not impressed by power. I agree, and will argue that Herodotus presents power as an abstract concept. He separates the abstract notion of power from the different and particular political structures that all, in some way or other, utilize and express power. That is, democracy and monarchy may represent two opposing views on how to organize power. There may be variety even within democracy and monarchy. In her discussion of the power of writing, Steiner (1994) identifies writing with tyrannical power, yet she acknowledges that writing also enables democracy (and isonomic societies in general). What Steiner's work suggests but does not argue, and what I will pursue closely, is that one should consider power as connected to – but essentially an abstract concept separate from – the various political realities Herodotus presents. The question of power is macro-systemic; the various organizations of power are micro-systemic.

The next section of this chapter will examine a particular event in which the Persians discuss the organization of power: the Constitutional Debate. This debate is a rare example of political discussion by characters in the *Histories* who do not have the pressure of speaking before an authority figure, be it the Persian king or the Athenian demos. The three speakers offer positions that can all be distinguished from the narrator's voice. The multiplicity of positions available once the pressure of power is removed will prove to be significant for understanding Herodotus' own position towards political thinking.

The Constitutional Debate

Before I begin my broad exploration of the relationship between culture and politics in the *Histories*, I would like to provide an in-depth analysis of one specific passage: The

⁴⁸ See Forsdyke (2006, 236).

Constitutional Debate (3.80-3.82). The debate stands out for a number of reasons. First, it offers a seemingly abstract discussion of political constitutions in the *Histories*. As such, the debate offers a distraction from the normal course of political description in the text, which is usually embedded in cultural description. Second, the debate shows how a form of constitution might be chosen, rather than evolve, which is what happens in most societies in the *Histories*, as I will discuss in both Chapters 2 and 3. The element of discussion and choice of constitutions makes very clear the institutional aspect of political structure. It allows the reader some access to understanding how constitutional forms such as democracy, oligarchy, and monarchy have *nomoi* of their own that are independent of the society that chooses them. This leads to my final argument about the debate: it makes the separation of politics and cultural concerns seem easy – on the face of it, three individuals put forth arguments for three types of government and a vote follows. A close consideration of the debate reveals that the passage should not be read so simply. The analysis that follows will demonstrate that Herodotus, while presenting what seems to be abstract argument, maintains the connection between the Persian participants in the debate and their culture. This connection illuminates a central point of my larger argument about Herodotus' political thought – it is always intertwined with his cultural understanding of different societies.

In the following examination, I shall discuss the debate in terms of its intellectual context and aetiological role in the *Histories*. I will then offer an analysis of the debate focusing on three elements. I will first discuss the individual motivations of the speakers, prompted by how they construe Persian custom and their personal histories. I will then examine the political ideology that underlies each of the three speeches. Finally, I will analyze the role Persian culture plays in the discussion of the political choices and the final

decision of the conspirators.

The debate is unusual for a number of reasons. First, its abstract nature has led some to argue that it must be imported from another source.⁴⁹ Second, it occurs among Persians and is about Persian rule. Herodotus himself highlights the unbelievable nature of the debate by addressing his imagined audience's disbelief: "there are those in Greece who are not convinced of the authenticity of the speeches that were delivered there, but they really were said" (3.80.1). The idea of importation of this debate stems from the unusual setting because constitutional debates are viewed as quintessentially Greek events.⁵⁰

The setting of the debate in Persia may be Herodotus' contribution to a tradition of constitutional discussion."⁵¹ The setting makes the discussion more distanced from the Greeks and thus more abstract because it is not applied in a Greek context.⁵² But if we leave our interpretation of the debate here, it casts the Greek audience in a specific role – that of political analysts. The role of the audience in the *Histories*, however, is not only to analyze politics, but also to remember and to marvel at miraculous events, people, and things and

⁴⁹ Bleiken (1979); De Ste Croix (1977).

⁵⁰ Cartledge (2002), de St. Croix (1977), Meyer (1990), Hartog (1988), and Hammond (1951) see the constitutional debate as essentially Greek. Ostwald (2000) believes the debate to be a Greek invention, but grants that there may have been some kind of discussion amongst the Persians. Pelling (2002) argues that the debate is Persian (if not in origin, than in intent). Lateiner (1989) and Benardete (1979) suggest that the setting of the debate is unimportant, rather it is the schematic aspect of the debate that gives it significance for interpreting the work as a whole.

⁵¹ Thomas (2000, 18), Grant (1997) *inter alia*.

⁵² Friedman (2006) traces the importance of dislocation for the practice of *theorie* in the *Histories* through Solon, Arion, and Democedes. I suggest that a similar process is at work here; with the dislocation of an idea rather than individual people, the whole audience dislocated and impelled to theorize. His argument is the converse of Weber, who argues that the impetus to rationalize and theorize gives rise to dislocation and estrangement. Herodotus uses rationalization to disturb his audience, most notably in the historicizing of Greek myths (1.1-5).

understand the causes of the Persian War.⁵³

A significant example of the pre-history of constitutional debate may be found in Pindar's *Pythian* 2.85ff. In this section, Pindar discusses how a "straight-talking man" will succeed in any form of government – in a tyranny, when violent people rule, or when wise people govern. Pindar provides a juxtaposition of constitutional forms; it is not an example of debate or choice. Later debates also seek to explore the merits of different constitutions, not decide on a constitution that will be applied to a society. Herodotus presents this debate not as a primarily philosophical or poetic exercise but rather as an historical episode applicable in a particular setting. Here the three forms are described and voted upon by Persians. Herodotus has individual speakers take up the merits and flaws of each constitution and then decide. The debate is both an example of real-world decision-making among the Persians and a philosophical reflection on different political constitutions. The reader may use the debate to consider what choices she would have made, but she also must accept that the Persians chose what seemed best to them.

To reiterate, I suggest that Herodotus' othering of the debate serves two purposes. First, since the debate is strange for his Greek audience, it thereby encourages a different kind of abstract consideration. Second, it invites his Greek audience to consider the political discussion from a different point of view – a Persian point of view – that may allow the Greek audience to understand how political considerations may work differently in other societies. Given the same options and the same format, how do Persian nobles debate the issue of politics in a different way from the Greeks? The debate is both a marvel for political analysts to consider and an explanation of Persia and Persians because it reveals, however

⁵³Herodotus states his purpose in the introduction of the *Histories*: "The purpose is to prevent the traces of human events from being forgotten, and to preserve the fame of the important and marvelous achievements of

faultily, how the Persians think about their culture and history, and how they relate these thoughts to their political choices. The debate contributes to Herodotus' portrait of Persian society – his Persian ethnography.

Herodotus' ethnographies go hand in hand with his cultural relativism. Through the debate, Herodotus reveals that different societies may develop different solutions to universal questions, such as how power ought to be organized. By setting the debate among the Persians, Herodotus induces his audience to think of how the Persians would answer the problem of political structure based on Persian culture, individual Persians and their response to past events. These three factors are connected because they all relate to Persian *nomos*.

In order to make the role of *nomos* clear, I first want to accentuate the presence and absence of *nomos* in this debate. Both Benardete and Lateiner view the debate as remarkably free from local conditions and “the ubiquitous despotism of *nomos*.”⁵⁴ This may be true for Otanes, who speaks of *nomos* in general terms as something violated by tyrants. Yet, as I will show, Darius uses specific Persian *nomoi* successfully and thereby wins the debate.⁵⁵

Lateiner claims that, “we conclude, first, that Herodotus ‘shares’ Otanes’ views, not because he endorses the ideology of democracy, but because Otanes’ propositions most clearly favor the preservation of political and social *nomoi*, government by institutions, not undependable or absurd individuals. Otanes’ proposal best promotes individual autonomy within a political context.”⁵⁶ Yet Otanes’ argument does not uphold one significant preexisting political *nomos* of the Persians: that they have a monarchy. Rather, Otanes’

both the Greeks and the barbarians, and to discuss the causes of their hostilities” (1.1).

⁵⁴ Lateiner (1989, 165). Benardete (1978, 87).

⁵⁵ Although in a discussion preceding the debate (3.72.4) Darius seems comfortable breaking with the Persian custom of truth-telling (1.136.2).

⁵⁶ Lateiner (1989, 185).

argument is against *tyranny*. It is only in his discussion of tyrants that Otanes brings up violation of *nomaia*, and even then he does not specify which *nomaia*.

Lateiner argues that “Darius’ brittle argument is as notable for what it omits as for what it includes. He pointedly equates monarchy with ancestral customs (*nomoi*), while Otanes had claimed that the monarch violates ancestral customs (*nomaia*).”⁵⁷ Lateiner privileges Otanes’ argument over Darius’, but I suggest that both employ valid examples of the importance of *nomos* in their arguments. Otanes is concerned with the more general idea that *nomos* and tyrants do not mix and mentions Cambyses and the usurping Magus as his examples. Darius ignores this argument and emphasizes a specific *nomos* – Persian kingship – and the benefits monarchy has brought to Persia. He claims, “In my opinion, since we gained our freedom thanks to a single individual, we should keep to this way of doing things. And I would add that we should not abolish our ancestral customs, which serve us well” (3.82.5). Otanes takes a broad view of power in the hands of the individual; it does not matter how great the man, power corrupts. Darius looks at monarchy from the perspective of the individual in power; a great man can be a great king.

One criticism of Darius is that he has a short-term perspective. In her general analysis, Kurke suggests that Darius is consistently presented as a *kapelos*, a merchant. He focuses upon short-term profit rather than the “customs and institutions on which the social

⁵⁷ Lateiner (1989, 169). Pelling (2002, 145) suggests that Darius is “assuming points which have already been cast into decisive doubt [by Otanes].” Could this not be Darius *correcting* Otanes, rather than overlooking his argument? Both of these scholars use rhetoric to influence their arguments about who wins – Lateiner translates “monarch” although Herodotus has Otanes speak against tyrants (*tyrannoi*). Pelling presents a very balanced view of the debate; save for one important distinction. When he discusses Otanes’ argument, he reflects Otanes’ use of the words *mounarchia* and *tyrannos*. In his section on Darius, however, he consistently uses the term *tyranny*, even though Darius only ever uses *mounarchia* in his argument. He notes Darius’ usage in his article (148); but does not get away from using tyranny himself. In this way, he subtly undermines Darius’ argument in favor of Otanes, even though that may not be his intention.

and cosmic order depend.”⁵⁸ She claims that Darius’ insistence upon looking at specific *nomoi* rather than considering the general idea of *nomos* or Otanes’ idea of tyranny’s institutional problems reflects his tendency to think in the short term or on the particular situation. Darius will gain from the outcome of the debate, but, as king, Darius ensures the continuation of the institution of monarchy by re-asserting it as a *nomos*: he designates a successor (7.3.4), as does his model Cyrus (1.208). Darius suggests a long term solution that is in keeping with the institutions of Persia, although it may be short-sighted in its failure to take into account the institutional flaws of the current system. Darius’ success with an argument based upon Persian *nomos* reveals that the debate has significance for understanding Persia.

This debate adds depth to Herodotus’ ethnography and political biography of the Persians. Hence, it combines into one the two lines of discussion that are the focus of this work: politics and culture. The debate reinforces Herodotus’ assertion that the Persians are a society that debates and discusses. In his earlier ethnography, Herodotus presents the Persian custom of debate in rather flippant terms. He explains how the Persians debate issues while both sober and drunk (1.133.4). This information, presented as an amusing anecdote in the ethnography, is made serious by the constitutional debate in part because the debate is strikingly normal from the Greek point of view. The ethnography presents the Persians as very different from the Greeks, but the debate makes the Persians seem similar to the Greeks. Other instances of discussion or debate among the Persians work differently. In those cases, the Persian king puts an option on the table and directs the debate primarily to his choosing. For example, Xerxes announces his decision to invade Europe and *then* has his advisors

⁵⁸ Kurke (1999, 80).

discuss (7.7-18). Xerxes' debate is influenced by the consideration of how one speaks to power, which is problematic in the *Histories*.⁵⁹ Yet the constitutional debate is a discussion about how to shape power, it is not an example of speaking to power. Therefore, it comes closer to Herodotus' portrait of Persian debate at dinner parties than it does to other instances of political discussion among the Persians. The constitutional debate is, however, just as important as the debate Xerxes calls in Book 7, for the results will shape Persian history.

On the surface, the debate is about different forms of constitutions – different institutions of government possible in Persia. Yet the debate of these constitutional forms is complicated by the considerations of the Persians as a group and the individual conspirators. The seven conspirators had previously met to discuss the ousting of the usurping Magus. Otanes originated the meeting, but it was Darius who urged immediate action. Several events forced the conspirators to act immediately to kill the Magus and his brother. The Persian people followed the conspirators' example and began to kill all the Magi they could find. Herodotus explains that this day, the Magophonia, is now celebrated as the most important holiday in the Persian calendar (3.79.3). The parallel actions of the Persian people and seven conspirators suggest that the conspirators can be interpreted as representative of all Persia.⁶⁰

A few days after the Magophonia, the conspirators meet again to discuss what should happen next. Their immediate concern is the resolution of the *anomia* created by the Magi themselves and their removal. In this light, the debate is aetiological and hence revelatory of Persian customs in that it explains how the Persians chose monarchy through a group of representative individuals.

⁵⁹ Pelling (2006) discusses the problem of speaking to power in the *Histories*.

⁶⁰ A similar logic is at work in Athens with the tyrannicides Harmodius and Aristogeiton. Wohl (2002) and Ober (2006) both discuss how the ideal democratic citizen is a tyrant killer.

Pelling brings out the aetiological character of the debate by comparing Herodotus' version of Darius' ascent to the throne with Darius' own version in the Behistun inscription.⁶¹ The versions are at odds (the Behistun makes no mention of a debate, but does mention the conspirators), but both are accounts whose purpose is to explain how Persia regained the monarchy after a period of uncertainty. Pelling shows how both narratives are constructed to the same purpose, which underlines the importance of the aetiological function of the story. Immerwahr also reads the debate as aetiological. He compares it to the stories of Deioces and Spartan kingship. He claims that "the debate explains how it came about that Persia had only external, but not (like the Greeks) internal, freedom."⁶² This narrative explains why national rather than individual freedom is important for the Persians; a group of Persians, representative of the Persian people as a whole, kill the Magus and return Persia to self-rule.⁶³

This importance of national freedom skews the debate towards Persian interests and values and reinforces one element of the Persian ethnography (to be discussed in more detail in chapter 3) – their hierarchical society, which imagines Persia as the center of the world and the Persian king as the center of Persia (1.132.2; 1.134). Thus, an important element of Persian ethnology is a factor in stimulating the conspiracy and the debate. Each speaker will need to speak to Persian customs and values and the central role of Persians in the governments they suggest. The two main actors in the debate, Otanes and Darius, separately

⁶¹ Pelling (2002, 127-129).

⁶² Immerwahr (1966, 101 n. 71).

⁶³ The whole narrative of the overthrow and the debate is comparable to the tyrannicides and the aftermath of their actions in Athens. Herodotus recognizes that the story of the tyrannicides and the Athenian people's identification with them reveals how the Athenians define their freedom in terms of individuals acting against despotic power.

recognized that the man acting as king was not Cambyses' brother Smerdis. Their shared but separate response to this fact and their opposing views on what should happen next bring me to my next point – how the conspirators' individual motivations, colored by cultural values, influence the arguments about Persia's political structure.

Benardete claims that the speeches of the debate “lay the basis ... for Herodotus' undertaking a parallel inquiry: the nature of man as man both in himself and within the context of the whole.”⁶⁴ I will take this as a starting point for considering the debate: first, in terms of the individual and second, whether the individual's arguments fit in to the Persian whole. I emphasize individual motivation because I believe that, as Greif suggests, “a necessary condition for an organizational change is that those able to initiate it expect to gain from it. Their expectations depend on their cultural beliefs, and hence diverse cultural beliefs lead to a distinct trajectory of organizational development.”⁶⁵ Thus, I will examine the debate in terms of *advantage*; advantage both to the individual and the society.

Otanes feels personally insulted that the usurping Magus is sleeping with his daughter (through whom he confirms that the usurper is not, in fact, Smerdis the brother of Cambyses). He also argues against tyrannical power, and relates his argument back to his daughter's situation – tyrants violate women (3.80.5). This situation motivates Otanes' argument against monarchy, his complete association of monarchy with tyranny, and his argument for *isonomia*, which he primarily defines as accountable government (3.80.6). It is accountable because it is the most extreme method of dividing up power, which Otanes believes inherently corrupts. Otanes' argument for placing power in the hands of the people

⁶⁴ Benardete (1978, 87).

⁶⁵ Greif (1994, 916).

does not reflect the Persians' deference to rank. Otanes' proposal emphasizes equality, but it is not applicable in the Persian context because it defines equality in a way unfamiliar to Persians (they may have their own definition of equality). Otanes' motivation becomes clearer if one recalls that he is, as Herodotus describes him, one of the wealthiest and noblest Persians (3.68.1) and so expects to be treated as an equal. He concluded that the king was not Smerdis because he did not call any other leading Persians before him (3.68.2). Otanes reacts to being made to feel unequal by proposing extreme equality.

Thompson points out that “spokesman though he is for something as revolutionary as rule by the many, Otanes does not offer a captivating image for his listeners. His chronicle is without the requisite narrative. Primarily, he seems to want an assurance that the ruler will leave him alone.”⁶⁶ Otanes reminds the others of the viciousness of Cambyses and the Magus; the motivation of that reminder is that he personally has suffered under Cambyses and his daughter has been insulted by the false Smerdis.⁶⁷ He wants power in the middle because then such things will not happen. His negative argument against tyranny is motivated by personal experience. Otanes' concern for customs is included in his argument but does not strongly correlate with the customs Herodotus describes for the Persians in Book One. Rather, Otanes mentions customs in the abstract, perhaps because he anticipates the argument Darius will make for monarchy in terms of Persian customs. As I noted above, Otanes does not directly relate his argument for democracy to customs. He uses argument by negation, for he mentions that tyrants ignore customs. Otanes' overriding concern is not for the

⁶⁶ Thompson (1996, 73).

⁶⁷ Pelling (2002, 135) points this out. He also argues that Otanes may be motivated by the horror of the false Smerdis not being a Persian (and sleeping with his daughter). Thus his motivations are also to restore rule of Persia to Persians (134). I would point out that in this instance Otanes' position is similar to Darius' argument: both want Persia to be ruled by Persians.

preservation or representation of customs in government, but rather his concern is for accountability – he wants redress of ills or the avoidance of them altogether.

Otanes' personal motivation and concern is reinforced by his request at the conclusion of the debate. When the conspirators decide on monarchy, he removes himself from consideration for the kingship and from the political community of Persia. He says he will not challenge any of them for the throne, but rather wishes to reserve freedom for himself and his descendants. The conspirators agree to this condition. Herodotus sums up this element of the debate by saying “to this day the house of Otanes is the only house in Persia which remains free and, while obeying the laws of the Persians, is subject to the king only to the extent that it wishes to be,” (3.83.3). Herodotus' summary of the results for Otanes and his family may reflect Herodotus' admiration of Otanes' foresight. Yet Otanes' withdrawal shows that he spoke not out of concern for the whole, but for himself and his family. He seems more closely wedded to his personal freedom than he is to Persia, for even though the conspirators engaged in a democratic process of choosing a constitution, Otanes does not accept the result. Otanes' action reinforces a downside of democracy - sometimes the majority does not choose the best option – and undermines his position in the debate.

Megabyzus' argument for an aristocratic oligarchy is the least discussed and the most difficult to put into context, because he does not really feature elsewhere in the *Histories*, nor can many states be classified easily as oligarchies. The closest examples may be Corinth and Sparta. Megabyzus reveals his values in his speech quite clearly. Megabyzus expresses an aristocratic disdain for the masses and argues against their ability to govern intelligently as a group. Megabyzus describes the method of rule by the masses as “like that of a river swollen with rain” (3.81.2). His use of a Homeric simile to express his dislike reflects further his

identification with the learned, wealthy few (even though Megabyzus uses a very Greek method of doing so).⁶⁸ His solution, an oligarchy, allows for this personal preference, serves his own interests, and should flatter all the conspirators involved. It may also reflect historical Persian society most closely, for, as I will discuss in Chapter 3, Persian nobles appear to exercise almost complete power in their provinces. Before Darius, the Persian king is the first among equals rather than an absolute ruler.⁶⁹

Megabyzus does not withdraw from Persian society after the debate because he appreciates the rule of a brutal but clever man over the rule of an ignorant mob (3.81.2). This preference may also reflect Megabyzus' aristocratic leanings, for, as Kurke has argued, the typical aristocratic *ethos*, which competes with a more "middling" approach throughout Herodotus' text, has a complicated but often admiring attitude towards eastern tyrannies.⁷⁰ Given that he is currently part of a group of aristocrats discussing a new political regime in Persia, it serves his own interests and should, he hopes, appeal to his listeners as a solution in which everyone present wins, and control remains in the hands of Persians.⁷¹ Megabyzus' argument suits Persian customs. An aristocratic oligarchy reflects the Persian deference to rank more than a democracy does. Whereas Otanes speaks of an accountable government that will have to pay for its mistakes, Megabyzus speaks of an aristocratic and thus also informed government, which will not make mistakes.

⁶⁸ Podlecki (1966, 365). He lists line parallels with *Iliad* 4.452, 5.88, 11.493, 13.138.

⁶⁹ I owe this insight to conversations with Rosaria Munson. Otanes' reaction to his treatment at the hands of the false Smerdis also hints at this kind of social and political structure in Persia.

⁷⁰ Kurke (1999).

⁷¹ Pelling (2002, 142) also points out that self-interest plays an important role in Megabyzus' speech, but he compares that self-interest with Darius', not Otanes'. In fact, Megabyzus' choice works out well for him and his family. Megabyzus' son Zopyrus was responsible for taking Babylon for Darius, and Herodotus reports that Darius valued Zopyrus more than any other Persian and gave him Babylon to be his own domain (3.160).

Darius' motivations become clear in hindsight – he argues for monarchy and he intends to be king. Even presuming an audience ignorant of Persian history, the text has already presented Darius as king at 3.38, where Darius orchestrates a cultural comparison between the Greeks and the Callatiae. Also, in Book One, the text records how Cyrus had a dream in which the eldest son of Hystaspes grew wings which overshadowed both Asia and Europe. Cyrus assumes that this means that Darius is conspiring against him (Darius, an Achaemenid, was home because he was too young to fight). He confronts Hystaspes and sends him home to watch over his son until he can return to deal with him. Herodotus tells us that the dream actually foreshadowed Cyrus' death and the eventual devolvement of the throne to Darius. Hystaspes wishes death upon anyone conspiring against Cyrus and hurries home to deal with his son (1.209-210). This early episode could have affected Darius by making him wary of kings, but he is not treated in a tyrannical fashion (i.e. he is not killed) and he would have been given the chance to defend himself should Cyrus have survived to question him. Rather, it may provide an explanation of Darius' readiness to join the conspirators (although he was not initially invited) and Otanes' hesitance about him. Thus, readers of the *Histories* are already aware of the outcome of this debate in favor of Darius, both in his constitutional argument and his bid for the kingship.

Darius' argument for monarchy plays into the Persian custom of deferring to rank and to their ancestral custom of kingship (1.134.1; 3.82.5).⁷² He also accentuates the notion of Persian freedom, freedom defined nationally, rather than individual freedom.⁷³ Darius'

⁷² It is important to separate Darius' argument from Darius' behavior in the *Histories*. He is willing to break Persian customs, such as the rule against lying (1.136.2), when it suits him. This example is one of many that shows how individuals can be aware of their society's customs but not directed by them.

⁷³ Barker (Forthcoming, 209). Pelling (2002, 146), Immerwahr (1966, 101).

implied definition of freedom, an autonomous Persia under a monarch, better reflects Persian traditions and history than Otanes' definition. As I will argue in Chapters 2 and 4, stability at home, granted by a monarch in Persia's case, promotes national freedom because it hinders outside influence and enables external aggression should the society choose to expand. Darius' position favors a consideration of Persia as a whole, rather than individual Persians. He makes Persians equal *under* a king, a position contrary to Otanes' suggestion, which makes every individual equal under the law. Herodotus' *Histories* depicts multiple manifestations of societies that experience *eunomia*, sometimes under democracy, more often under a monarchy.⁷⁴

Individual motivations and consideration of Persia influence the arguments in the debate; but they are not the only influences. Political ideologies, and Greek political ideology in particular, are at play in the first two speeches of the debate. Otanes argues for *isonomia* in opposition to tyranny. He uses the term *isonomia*, but he is clearly arguing for democracy. I follow the interpretation that Herodotus has Otanes avoid the direct use of the term democracy because it may have negative connotations for the Greek audience.⁷⁵ Rather, he uses the term *isonomia*, which is the concept behind democracy, if not the name of it.⁷⁶ The details of Otanes' description – government by lot and decision-making in common – indicate that he is describing a democracy. Otanes, however, structures his argument not so much as an argument *for* democracy but rather as an argument *against* tyranny. In so doing, Otanes reflects the strong ideological opposition especially prevalent in Athens and in

⁷⁴ A strong example of this is Egypt under the pharaoh Mycerinus (2.129).

⁷⁵ Pelling (2002).

⁷⁶ Vlastos (1964, 8) suggests “[*isonomia*] is more of a banner than a label.”

Athenian foreign policy.⁷⁷ As I discussed above, the tyrannicides heavily influenced the Athenian dichotomy; in Persia, this opposition does not exist and this leaves Otanes' argument weak in relation to the other Persian nobles.

Otanes' speech in favor of putting power in the middle is primarily an indictment of tyranny. In his speech, he uses *mounarchia* or *mounarchos* four times, and *tyrannia* only once. Otanes does so in order to imply the correlation between *mounarchia* and *tyrannia* and hence the ideological connection between tyranny and the constitutional form monarchy. He does not forcefully argue for *demokratia*, which may be offensive to Herodotus' non-Athenian audience, but rather he argues for the idea behind it, *isonomia*, which appears in more forms than the politics of Athenian-style democracy.

Otanes' concern for personal advantage does not necessarily speak against his argument for democracy. Rather, as Herodotus argues at 5.78, democracy functions well *because* everyone is looking out for his own advantage. "This goes to show that while they were under an oppressive regime they fought below their best because they were working for a master, whereas as free men each individual wanted to achieve something for himself" (5.78). Otanes emphasizes that *isonomia* will bring freedom from the excesses of the tyrant, but he does not fully promote the more positive results for the whole country from such a system. This may be because Herodotus' praise of the democracy in Athens focuses more upon the effects of freedom from oppression rather than their specific democratic freedom.

Megabyzus argues for an oligarchy with the ideology of an aristocratic oligarch. His speech reflects the ideological opposition of democracy and oligarchy prevalent in the latter half of the fifth century and made significant by the rising conflict between Athens and

⁷⁷ For a discussion of the democracy/tyranny dichotomy in Herodotus, see Forsdyke (1996).

Sparta. His suggestion that a tyrant would be a better end result than the brutish mob reflects the extreme distaste for democratic government and speaks to the end result of many an oligarchy in Greece – the rise of a tyrant after strong aristocratic competition (see Corinth or Athens).⁷⁸ Raaflaub points out that the Constitutional Debate is one of the first examples of the opposition of democracy and oligarchy.⁷⁹ If this is so, and both positions are made strange and unattractive in the mouths of Persians, it may make even better sense to say that the third option presented, monarchy, seems a viable one in contrast to democracy or oligarchy.

Herodotus' fifth-century Greek audience would be well trained to hear opposing arguments about democracy and oligarchy; thus, they might be susceptible to a third solution. Raaflaub suggests that "the ideological contrast between the two political systems [democracy and oligarchy] is fully developed in the pamphlet of the Old Oligarch and in Herodotus' Constitutional Debate. Both documents present them as fundamentally irreconcilable and presuppose the possibility of replacing one by the other."⁸⁰ If that is so, Darius' argument for an enlightened monarch, which resembles Plato's to follow,⁸¹ may come across more powerfully than the prior two because they may balance each other out.

In his speech, Otanes presents the ideology of tyranny in contrast to the ideology of democracy. This argument is so strong that it has led some to suggest that the debate is about tyranny in opposition to democracy, rather than the relative merits of the different

⁷⁸ Both Anderson (2005) and Gray (1997) argue this.

⁷⁹ Raaflaub (2004).

⁸⁰ Raaflaub (2004, 213).

⁸¹ Dewald (2003, 30): "Darius' argument for monarchy is to the point only if one can, anticipating Plato, pick the best human being possible as king."

constitutional forms.⁸² Megabyzus' speech represents an oligarchic or aristocratic ideology, strongly opposed to democracy. Darius, however, completely re-frames the discussion. He begins by agreeing with Megabyzus about democracy, but also criticizes oligarchy. He does not follow the template of the two earlier speakers. His speech in favor of monarchy contains in itself a three-part discussion of constitutions (he begins "let us consider the best form of each..." 3.82.1). Darius crafts a speech that is, on the surface, more ideologically free and focused on a more practical element of politics: the need for stability. He shows how both democracy and oligarchy eventually devolve into one-man rule. His whole argument thus far speaks to a concern for stability in government and the absence of *stasis*. Thompson claims that "Darius appeals to the quintessential Persian creed that strength in government is generated by eliminating all possibilities of dissent."⁸³ This argument is problematic for at least two reasons: one, the Persians are not opposed to dissent and debate, and two, as I suggest below, Darius wants to prevent the breakdown of the society into *stasis*, and nowhere does he suggest that the way to do this is to suffocate discussion.

In Darius' speech, he does not present democracy and oligarchy in opposition to each other or tyranny; rather, they are all susceptible to the same flaws. Monarchy is the end result, so why not also the beginning? Darius presents monarchy as the most stable and best form of government. Darius, however, deliberately confuses monarchy and tyranny. As Davie points out, the first two speakers used both *tyrannos* and *mounarchos*. Darius only uses the word *mounarchos* in his argument.⁸⁴ His avoidance of the term *tyrannos* may speak

⁸² Pelling (2002).

⁸³ Thompson (1996, 76).

⁸⁴ Davie (1979, 163).

to his desire for everyone not to conflate the two, but rather think of monarchy as a form of rule with the risk of tyranny, as the other forms also carry with them that risk. This argument is a modification of Dewald's argument that tyrannies are destined to fail,⁸⁵ for Darius recognizes the instability in all forms of constitutions. Hartog suggests that Darius does not refute Otanes' argument that a monarch is a tyrant because he believes that monarchy is the best regime.⁸⁶ I would argue that Darius' language is a subtle correction of arguments of Otanes and Megabyzus, and that it is not to his advantage to even raise the concept of the tyrant before the debaters.⁸⁷ The fact, however, that Otanes and Megabyzus use "tyranny" negatively, and Darius does not use it at all, implies that the term has negative connotations in the text. Darius reinforces his argument for monarchy with a cultural one: that it would be a subversion of ancestral custom to not have a monarchy, and that freedom has come and will continue to come from a monarch (3.82.5).

It is difficult to prove that Herodotus prefers Otanes' argument, or that the Persians failed in this debate because they did not choose democracy, or that monarchy comes out as the clear winner in the debate. I suggest instead that Herodotus includes the Constitutional Debate in part to demonstrate how political problems are difficult or perhaps even impossible to discuss in the abstract; they must be discussed in light of particular situations.

Herodotus reveals the difficulty in making any kind of abstract argument by showing how a particular individual or circumstance can undercut the best or winning argument (as Otanes' withdrawal reveals as well). Institutional considerations can only go so far against

⁸⁵ Dewald (2003).

⁸⁶ Hartog (1988, 327).

⁸⁷ Just as Otanes attempts to elide the concept of *mounarchia* into the pejorative *tyrannia*, so Darius incorporates *tyrannia* into *mounarchia* and hides the pejorative connotations of *tyrannia* behind the legitimate *mounarchia*.

the actions of powerful individuals. Yet powerful individuals can also be overcome by institutions – as the story of Intaphernes shows.⁸⁸ The Persians attempt to modify their monarchy by giving the conspirators power within the regime. Intaphernes attempts to assert that power and is overcome not only by Darius but more generally by the institution of monarchy he helped to shape.⁸⁹

The Constitutional Debate reveals that the discussion of political institutions is influenced by a concern for culture, the motivation of individuals, and political ideologies. Individuals react particularly to situations because of their own characters and political and cultural experiences. Sometimes there is a nexus of experience, in which characters share a common understanding of their culture or political experience, but often there is not. The Constitutional Debate provides an important example of the difficulty of interpreting political or social institutions in the *Histories*: each speaker speaks primarily to his own advantage and then to the considerations of the group (and different sub-groups at that). Debate, however, is still possible although it is constantly tinted by individual concerns.

The context in which the arguments are put forth and applied later should also be considered when one is analyzing specific instances of abstract political discussion. Herodotus does not fully develop a preference for one form of government over another, nor does he make generalizations about politics and political structures that can be applied in every particular context. Rather, through the accumulation of evidence, Herodotus

⁸⁸ After Darius became king, Intaphernes, another conspirator, wanted to meet with him. Open access to Darius for all the conspirators had been agreed upon after the debate, except when the king was with a woman. This situation reveals yet again that the Persians may originally have had a monarchy mediated by a strong aristocracy. Intaphernes was prevented access to Darius because he was with a woman, but Intaphernes was convinced that this was not true. When he tried to break into the king's chamber, he was killed by the guards.

⁸⁹ Similar examples: Egypt's transition from twelve kings to one; also, possibly, the tension between the two houses of Spartan kings.

emphasizes again and again the particular situations where theory may be applied. This does not mean that certain societies are doomed to certain political constitutions; rather, social forces influence but do not predetermine how political structures are formed. Perhaps if Otanes had argued for democracy in a different way, the Persians might have chosen democracy. The debate also reveals that ideologies of government applied on the macro-systemic level confuse the matter. This is a point I will return to in my last chapter. The confusion is best revealed by the fact that neither the oligarchy nor the democracy wins in this debate. Rather, Darius turns the discussion towards more fundamental concerns of government such as stability and the traditions and the values of the people and wins. These concerns are also Herodotus' concerns in the *Histories*.

There is great complexity inherent in determining the “meaning” of the Constitutional Debate in Herodotus' *Histories*. It serves, above all else, to explain how the Persians returned to a system of monarchy and how Darius took the throne. The debate also contains many elements suggestive of how we as readers may view political theory and the role of government in the *Histories*. The debate does not provide many indications of Herodotus' preferences. The speaker who argues for equality does not win. Herodotus values freedom, but shows how a definition of freedom different from the Greek one wins. What I would like to propose is that Herodotus includes this debate to show *how* political discussion might happen, but not give guidance as to what political form is the best in absolute, non-relative terms. Many scholars are unsatisfied because the Persians do not choose to create a democracy and because Otanes' arguments seem insufficient,⁹⁰ but perhaps that is the point. The debate is Persian and in a Persian context: the conspirators debate the various forms of

⁹⁰ Thompson (1996, 88); Lateiner (1989, 169).

government more abstractly than in other sections of the *Histories*, but they still debate from specifically Persian cultural and historical perspectives and with contemporary Persia in mind.

The debate reveals some aspects of Herodotus' approach. Abstract consideration is not the primary mechanism by which one can explain and understand cultural and political difference. Rather, when analyzing political structures, Herodotus promotes applied political theory – political relativism – for the practice of which one takes into account the cultural considerations, individuals, and political ideologies accessible to the society at its moment in history.

This chapter first situates the state of scholarship on Herodotus' cultural and political perspective while gesturing towards the arguments that develop in the section on the Constitutional Debate and in the chapters that follow. Herodotus does think politically, but his political perspective is embedded both in his own cultural experience and in the many narratives of societies and their interactions with each other. The particular context of the embedding is of equal importance as the general ideas expressed in the *Histories*.

Chapter Two: The Relationship between Culture and Politics

In order to argue that Herodotus promotes the idea of political relativism that is analogous to cultural relativism, one must first examine the relationship between politics and culture. I begin my examination of this relationship in Herodotus by looking into the overlap between the two concepts semantically and in individual episodes. I first look at how Herodotus designates customs, laws, and political structures. I focus this examination on the broad semantic field of *nomos*. I will argue that the use of the same terms for designating cultural and political concepts indicates a relationship between culture and politics in the *Histories*, for this indicates that Herodotus may structure his presentation of them in the same way. These terms create both cultural and political distinctions within and between societies. I then look at how Herodotus presents societies from what I would term a “developmental” perspective – I examine less-developed or hard societies in order to elucidate how *nomos* is expressed in practice. This examination allows me to differentiate between customary group behavior and actual political institutions – while still showing their relationship – and also to understand better the basic functions of political institutions. I thus show how political structures and cultural characteristics are intimately intertwined in the *Histories*. Both this chapter and Chapter 3 will have an underlying focus on how different societies relate to their laws and customs. This relationship will prove to be an important factor in understanding the ways in which a society’s political structure operates both internally and abroad.

Before the examination of *nomos* and related terms, it will be useful to explore

how societies are defined in the *Histories*, as *nomoi* are primarily offered in descriptions of societies. When Herodotus identifies a society, he does so either by simply naming the people or by marking the society as an *ethnos*, a *genos*, or a *geneē*. These terms suggest that Herodotus, like other Greeks, defines societies by their hereditary connections.¹ That Herodotus often mentions specific founders from whom the people are descended – such as Herakles (Scythia) or Perses (Persia) – supports this inference.

Societies are also defined by their shared customs and geographic proximity. For example, Herodotus will describe a large area, such as Scythia or Libya, and then describe the customs of the societies there, starting with a general picture followed by distinctions between different tribes that depart from that general picture. He will often assert that, although others think that a tribe may be grouped with others around it, a tribe is distinct.² Herodotus also enumerates the similarities between societies but argues that they must be considered separately based upon their distance from one another. For example, Herodotus suggests that the Colchians are related to the Egyptians since they have similar customs of dress and share the practice of circumcision (2.104). But his subsequent assertion that they are distinct implies that Herodotus recognizes that societies can split into one or more well defined groups based upon geographical and temporal separation.³ This recognition suggests that Herodotus understands that cultural

¹ This argument is put forth strongly by J. Hall (2002, 15). He goes on to elaborate that the Greeks used the idea of blood-kin in attempts to persuade one another, even though the Hellenes did not believe that they had a mono-genetic origin (as Herodotus himself makes clear); 35. Munson (2005) claims that, by the end of the *Histories*, the Greeks are many steps towards recognizing a cultural identity that transcends geographical boundaries.

² Cf. 1.201: Some think the Massagetae are Scythian, but they are not.

³ Further examples include the Black Sea Greeks and the Ionians as differentiated from the Athenians. Also, in his description of the Sigynnae, who live north of the Thracians, Herodotus says they wear Median

development follows an evolutionary model.⁴

PART ONE: The Semantic Approach

Herodotus associates and distinguishes societies by means of geography and customs. In his description of the various tribes that inhabit Scythia or Libya, the distinction is primarily cultural – that is, he describes their culture, not their political institutions. The Greeks provide a point of comparison for this approach, for they are, at least as the Athenians identify them, one *ethnos* defined by shared language, religious practices, and way of life (8.144). Yet the differences between the *poleis* are much more noticeable than the similarities. Their specific location within Hellas defines them somewhat, but what sets each *polis* apart is its political allegiances and practices. Among the Greeks, political structure plays a role in determining societal difference even in the face of shared customs and geographic proximity.⁵ Some societies are distinguished more by their culture than their politics, and vice versa. Herodotus, however, will make both cultural and political distinctions between societies using the same set of terms and circumlocutions. As I hope to show, this reveals the relationship between culture and politics because it reveals that the text structures its presentation of culture and politics in a similar way.

While Herodotus uses three terms to describe the customs of a society – *diata*, *ethea*, or *nomos* – he occasionally describes the customs of a society without the use of a

dress and claim to be emigrants from Media. While he is at first skeptical, he resolves his skepticism with the statement: “anything is possible given enough time” (5.9).

⁴ Rood (2006, 303). Societies differentiate from each other over a period of time because of geographical boundaries. The longer the separation, the more distinct these new societies become. This is known as speciation.

⁵ This may be what Redfield (1985, 116) means when he claims that *nomos* is political “for the Greeks.”

specific term. Rather, he simply says, “this is how they bury their dead” or “this is what they eat.” This absence of specific ethnographical terminology pushes the recognition that sometimes a custom is a custom because “you know it when you see it.” Many times, these unmarked statements appear in clearly ethnographic sections, which start with a phrase such as, “I know that the Persians practice these customs” (Πέρσας δὲ οἶδα νόμοισι τοιοισίδε χρεωμένους, 1.131). Herodotus is not always that specific: he also introduces cultural practices with phrases such as “this is how the Libyans live” (4.168.1) or “this happens among the Lydians” (1.10.3). More often, however, Herodotus will use the terms *diaita*, *ethea*, or *nomos*.

Diaita refers to specific practices relating to housing and food. Redfield points out that even animals in the *Histories* have *diaita*. He concludes that this term relates to material needs and is separate from the other custom terms that imply human emotion or cognition.⁶ *Ethea* describes a “way of life” and, as Redfield points out, it often has an emotional component to it.⁷ The examination of *ethea* can illuminate a society’s attitude toward its own customs. For example, if a society is highly religious, then it will be especially protective of its religious practices.⁸ I will return to *ethea* at the end of this section and in Chapter 3. *Nomos* can stand in for either *diaita* or *ethea* (as well as the customs described without terminology) and it even encompass a broader range of behavior. An examination of the multivalent term *nomos* will clarify Herodotus’ view of

⁶ Redfield (1985, 98). *Diaita* occurs nineteen times in the *Histories*. Every usage relates to specific materials needed for maintaining a way of life.

⁷ In Herodotus, *ethea* is always in the plural form.

⁸ The Egyptians are an example of such a society. The Spartan society’s *ethea* are both religious and militaristic.

the connection between cultural characteristics and political practice. In scholarship on *nomos* in the fifth century, a distinction is made between *nomos* as law and *nomos* as custom.⁹ This distinction is said to predate the later argument about *nomos* and *phusis*, which develops during the fifth century and becomes prominent in the late fifth and early fourth centuries. Thomas argues that the *nomos/phusis* debate is emphatically present in the *Histories* as Herodotus follows and reacts to his Ionian predecessors and sophistic contemporaries, although there is not a sign of the extreme antithesis that will develop later.¹⁰ Herodotus' alternating resistance to and agreement with those of his intellectual milieu leave *nomos* only partly defined by the *nomos/phusis* debate. When viewed on the scale of the *Histories* entire, rather than in individual instances, *nomos* retains its broad implications as law and custom. Many scholars argue, and I agree, that *nomos* always carries with it all connotations.¹¹ I will provide a survey of the uses of *nomos* in the *Histories* and will focus my analysis on how this term brings out the interrelation of culture, political practice, and political structure through its multivalence. *Nomos* fundamentally serves to indicate distinction.¹²

Nomos can be highly determined in meaning – specific customs or specific laws – but its underlying function of describing difference indicates that cultural characteristics, laws, and political structures all contribute to the essential identity of a society. “*Nomoi*” is defined as customs, laws or conventions, but is often translated as the singular

⁹ Ostwald (1967, 127) argues that *nomos* initially stood thus: “the validity of *nomos* is absolute and imposes an unchallenged obligation, the recognition notwithstanding that different political or social groups may have different *nomoi*.”

¹⁰ Thomas (2000, 134-135).

¹¹ Ostwald (1967), Humphreys (1987), Lateiner (1989), Raaflaub (2004).

¹² I will show this in greater detail below.

culture.¹³ The need for multiple words in English brings out the different levels to which *nomos/nomoi* can be applied – it may designate a single practice or a group of practices. I will begin my examination with uses of *nomos* that designate individual customs and laws, and then turn to the more complex applications of the term, such as culture or political constitutions.

There are many instances of *nomos* that clearly underline its use as a marker of custom. I will look at clothing-related, funereal, religious, and marriage *nomoi*, as well as *nomoi* that designate conventional modes of thinking or behavior. *Nomos* occasionally refers to clothing or bodily attributes such as tattooing (5.6); in this it overlaps with *diaita* as a designation. Clothing can be a distinguishing factor, for Herodotus sometimes explains that a culture practices the same customs as another, except for its clothing. Examples of this are the Black-Cloaks, who follow Scythian custom (4.107), and the Adurmachidae, who practice Egyptian customs but wear Libyan clothes (4.168.1). These usages indicate cultural distinction. The story of Scyles reveals that even changing clothes can have an impact on how one's cultural identity is perceived. According to Herodotus, for one month of the year Scyles dressed in Greek clothes and practiced Greek religious rites; he would then put on his Scythian clothes and return to ruling. The Scythians discover his actions and are outraged. Although it is his worship of Dionysus that upsets them the most, his change of clothing is an outward symbol of his broader and more inwardly focused cultural betrayal (4.78-80).

Funeral customs are often pointed to as the quintessential *nomoi*.¹⁴ This primarily

¹³ Romm (1998, 94).

¹⁴ Humphreys (1987), Munson (2000), Cartledge (2000).

stems from the episode at 3.38, in which Darius compares the funeral practices of the Callatae and the Greeks. When Darius asks the Callatae what it would take to get them to burn their fathers after they have died, their reaction is to cry out in horror and tell him not to say such things (οἱ δὲ ἀμβώσαντες μέγα εὐφημέειν μιν ἐκέλευον, 3.38).¹⁵ The Callatae's strong reaction accentuates the emotional impact of customs; also, Darius focuses on funereal rather than other customs because this is an element of culture very dear to the heart of the individuals who practice it. Herodotus also uses the word *nomos* in describing other funeral practices such as the Babylonian practice of embalming (1.200) and the Egyptian practice of letting their hair grow long in mourning (2.36.1). *Nomos* is also used to describe cannibalistic practices – such as the Padaei Indians who kill and eat any member of their tribe who falls ill (3.99.1) or the Issedones, who eat their dead and gild their skulls (4.26.1-2). The Massagetae sacrificially kill members of their tribe when they get old; they think that this is the best thing that can happen, and not being sacrificed is a calamity (1.216.3).

In the context of funerals, Herodotus uses *nomos* to describe attitudes towards death and mourning and to implicate funereal customs with religious practice. The Egyptians do not allow their corpses to be given to wild animals – they regard fire as a wild animal, so they do not cremate, nor do the Persians who view fire as a god (3.16.3). This story suggests that there can be overlapping practices with different underlying beliefs: neither the Egyptians nor the Persians cremate, but for entirely different reasons. The Egyptians do not want animals to violate their corpses, the Persians require that a

¹⁵ The word *nomos* does not appear in this section until the quotation from Pindar that *nomos* is king of everything (3.38.4). The summarizing statement at the end indicates that the funeral customs are *nomos*.

corpse be mauled by a bird or dog before it is buried (1.140.1). The Trausians provide another example of a reasoned funereal *nomos*; they gather and mourn a birth but celebrate a death (5.4.2). This episode shows that *nomoi* can have as their basis a society's particular philosophy; the term designates not only the action but also the belief behind it.¹⁶

Nomos is used to describe other specific religious practices such as purification rituals (1.35). It also describes aspects of worship – Herodotus uses the term to refer to Babylonian worship of Aphrodite through temple prostitution (1.199.1). When he describes how Persians make sacrifices, he adds to the description that it is a *nomos* that a Magus must be present (1.132.3). Another example may be found in the Egyptian refusal to eat animal heads because of religious *nomos* (2.39.4). In other sections of the *Histories*, he uses it to refer to more general religious practices, such as when Scyles practices Greek religious *nomoi* (4.78.4).

Nomos also serves to describe marriage customs. When he describes one of Babylon's most beautiful customs, he refers to their "marriage auction" (1.195-196). He tells of how the Massagetae have wives in common (1.216.1), and that it is a custom for the Nasamonians that the bride sleeps with all the guests at a wedding (4.172.1). Although marriage is a cultural practice, in some cultures there may be specific written laws about marriage, as shown in the section in which Cambyses asks if there is a law bidding him to marry his sister. The Magi he consults have trouble finding a law regarding this specific

¹⁶ As I discussed in Chapter 1 (17-18) *nomos* here designates more than difference, it also illuminates cultural attitudes toward death and indicates that the Trausians actively think about their *nomoi*.

request, but their very inquiry reveals that marriage practices can be codified.¹⁷ Marriage customs are important because marriage is the means by which a society preserves its ethnic heritage. They are practices used within societies and are therefore strongly distinguishing, for only a few marriages in Herodotus occur between individuals from different societies.¹⁸

Herodotus' use of the term *nomos* can be as basic as designating a general way of thinking about or doing things. The story of Peisistratus and his marriage to the daughter of Megacles is illustrative. Peisistratus does not sleep with her in the usual way (οὐ κατὰ νόμον) and this sparks outrage in her father (1.61.1). Herodotus' usage implies that there is a general understanding of how sex for reproduction works, as well as an understanding that this would be the expected form of the sexual encounter between Peisistratus and his new wife. Another example of this kind occurs in Book 5 at a meeting of Persians and Macedonians. It is Persian custom to eat with their women, but Macedonian custom to keep them in another section of the house. The argument between the two progresses into a dispute about whose way of things is more fitting for the context (5.18.2). Herodotus also uses *nomos* to designate a 'fair fight' (8.89.1, 9.48.2).

The group above indicates that some uses of *nomos* do not easily fit into a single category. The term is often used as an umbrella term for an agreed way of doing things. This agreement can be emotional, such as the reaction the Callatiae show to Darius' suggestion of cremating their fathers or the heated argument between the Persians and Macedonians. Members of a society respond to a perceived transgression of their cultural

¹⁷ Fortunately for the Magi, they resolve the situation through an appeal to another *nomos*: the king can do whatever he wants (3.31.1 ff.).

rules with a strong emotional reaction, such as anger or horror. This kind of reaction reveals that the custom carries emotional weight for the people. Some forms of social agreement are intellectual. Herodotus claims that there is an intellectual agreement (*nomos*) that the Arabian peninsula ends at a specific point (4.39.1).¹⁹ This suggests that many *nomoi* are things worth mentioning about a people because they involve a common agreement about a practice; it is either an emotional or an intellectual consensus, or both. Herodotus often aims to report the consensus achieved by the people he is describing rather than or alongside his own or the Greeks' interpretation of the matter, be it geographic or dining-related. This fosters Herodotus' seemingly neutral descriptions of practices that should seem horrifying to the Greeks, such as cannibalism.²⁰

The *nomoi* listed above can and often do have the people who practice them thinking about them, but not necessarily so. The next group of usages I discuss are presented as intentionally considered. In this case, the general agreement or consensus of a people implies some kind of coming together for discussion, which is a rudiment of community organization. The community is actively engaged in considering their *nomoi*, although this does not have to go so far as asserting them as necessary to the order of society.²¹ These usages indicate that the society has an awareness of its differences from others and engages in the practice of individuating itself further, either by codifying

¹⁸ The Persian kings did include the daughters of subject kings in their harem, as indicated by Cambyses' request that Amasis send his daughter to him as a concubine (3.1.2).

¹⁹ Herodotus also uses *nomos* to designate the agreed upon conventions about Egypt (2.17.2). Munson (2001, 86) points out that, "a country, he interprets, is not a predefined geographical entity surrounded by physical boundaries but rather coincides with the area of habitation of a certain people." Thomas (2000, 83) also discusses this usage.

²⁰ Romm (1998, 99) makes this connection.

nomoi or electing to adopt new *nomoi*.

Nomoi developed this way can attain the force of law since they are the products of community action. A good example of this kind of *nomos* occurs when, after the battle of Thyrea, the Argives make a *nomos* (*epoiēsanto*) not to grow their hair long until they win; the Spartans establish a *nomos* (*etheto*) to wear their hair long until they win (1.82.7-8).²² It seems unlikely that this law was “on the books” in either society; but, given a society such as Sparta that is known for shunning those who break social norms, the social code can be as strong as written law.²³ The growth or cutting of hair provides a cultural reminder of an historical event and serves to distinguish the Spartans and Argives from one another as societies. Both groups are part of the larger culture of Hellas, but they desire to create a cultural distinction that underpins the political differences that lead them to battle.²⁴ Here *nomos* is a self-conscious choice and spans the distance between custom and law.

A similar situation occurs after the hostilities between the Athenians and the Aeginetans and Argives. The Athenian women kill a man with their brooches after he brings back bad news of a battle. The Athenians enact a law dictating that the women not wear brooches at all; the Aeginetans and Argives make a *nomos* (*poiesai*) saying that

²¹ Evans (1961, 110 – 111) argues that *nomoi* are “the rational factor which makes people act as they do, and the possession of *nomoi* is a mark of civilization. They belong to people who have the capacity for rational thought.”

²² The verbs indicate that the Spartans and Argives took action to establish these customs. They do not simply exist, as many of the *nomoi* described in the early section do.

²³ Herodotus mentions at the end of this episode that the one surviving Spartan was too ashamed to return home and so committed suicide (1.82). This episode reinforces the idea of the power of Sparta’s social code, to be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

²⁴ Dillery (1996, 231) claims, concerning this episode, that it reveals “how events from the past, specifically episodes of violence, are thought of as moments that are worth remembering, even enshrining, in the manipulation of societal practice.”

women should wear brooches with really long pins. The Aeginetans supplement their law by also ruling that they should only use locally made, rather than Athenian, cups (5.88). The purpose of these laws is to remind the people of the story of the women, the battle, and the differences between Athens and Aegina. The Athenians and Aeginetans, as with the Spartans and Argives after Thyrea, establish customs that represent their organized remembrance and define the political identity of each *polis* as different from the others.²⁵

The two episodes discussed above are examples of the active establishment of a custom to underline a political disagreement. Next I will discuss examples in the text of societies comparing and borrowing customs from one another. Borrowing indicates that a society is looking at its own customs and the customs of others and assessing their relative value. In the ethnography of the Persians, Herodotus says that they are great collectors of *nomoi*, and this becomes a defining *nomos* (ξεινικὰ δὲ νόμια Πέρσαι προσίενται ἀνδρῶν μάλιστα, 1.135).²⁶ Herodotus then lists borrowed customs and practices and their sources. The Persians even learned their ethnocentric perspective from another society.²⁷ In Book 2, the Eleans boast to the Egyptians that their games are the fairest in the world (2.160.1). The Egyptians consider and tell the Eleans that unless they ban their own people from competing, the games are unfair. The Eleans put the Egyptians' suggestion into practice. They are not quite borrowing a law, but rather putting a *nomos* of their own up for consideration and accepting modifications to it

²⁵ Arendt (1958), Kottman (2003), and Rood (2006) all suggest some form of organized remembrance as an important element of defining a society.

²⁶ This example suggests that there are different levels of *nomoi*: some are specific cultural practices, others seem to function more as significant differentiating characteristics. I will discuss this point in more detail in Chapters 3 and 4.

²⁷ The learned this perspective from the Medes (1.134.3)

from outsiders, they are borrowing the Egyptians' approach, if not their actual custom.

My last example of a borrowed law is Solon's law from the Egyptians concerning the necessity that each Athenian report his income (Σόλων δὲ ὁ Ἀθηναῖος λαβὼν ἐξ Αἰγύπτου τοῦτον τὸν νόμον Ἀθηναίοισι ἔθετο, 2.177.2). His borrowing reveals his consideration about the merits of the law, and is also an example of a written law, which I will discuss below. Solon's status as a semi-mythical founding figure for the Athenians gives this adoption special significance. He sets in place codes of behavior and laws that allow the society to escape from *stasis*. Solon's rules and laws continue to define Athenian culture throughout the Peisistratean tyranny and into the democracy. Solon's adoption of this law demonstrates that he actively evaluated Egyptian law and chose to incorporate it into his Athenian law code.

The law Solon borrows has an application in the political realm for it indicates the development of a political institution to which the Athenians are reporting; the other uses of *nomos* discussed above are more generally cultural in their application. Many relate to the organization of the community, but do not necessarily have distinct political resonance. I will now turn to an examination of more explicitly political *nomoi*. Kurke (1999) defines political *nomos* as “not only custom that guides political action, but also custom that can be changed and legislated by the civic community.”²⁸ Solon's and Amasis' laws for Egypt fall under her rubric. Kurke's definition suggests at least two other courses of inquiry: laws about the internal workings of a society, and *nomos* established for political reasons thus creating political distinctions.

The Spartans are ruled by a diarchy. The uneasy situation of having two kings

²⁸ Kurke (1999, 88).

requires that they establish laws that govern the behavior and succession of the kings. These are laws governing their internal political structure. Two examples come to mind. When the Spartans crown Cleomenes, they cite a law that dictates that they make the eldest son king (5.42.2). This is a law that we see functioning as part of the law code, although it was established by the Pythia many generations before. When Cleomenes and Demaratus have a political disagreement and take the field against each other, the Spartans establish a law (*etethe nomos*) that two kings may not take the field at the same time (5.75.2). This law addresses a specific situation and is intended for the Spartan law code rather than for the society's cultural character. With Sparta, however, laws are often soon endowed with cultural resonance (as will be discussed in the section on Sparta in Chapter 3).

The Persians also have laws that govern the succession of kings. When Darius is unsure of whom to designate as his successor, Demaratus cites a law that helps Xerxes become king (7.3.3). He argues that the eldest son to be born after the father becomes king is the successor. The Egyptians have knowledge of this law (3.2.2), for they claim that it is not the law (οὐ σφι νόμος ἔστι) for a bastard to be crowned when a legitimate son of a king lives.²⁹ This walks a fine line between custom and law, but it is political in its expression, and exists in some form to which reference can be made.

Herodotus uses *nomos* to designate both laws that guide internal politics and those created for political reasons that make political distinctions. The latter are similar to those the Spartans and Argives create after Thyrea, but are more political in expression as well

²⁹ The complex legal issues of matrimony and legitimate succession are only hinted at in the *Histories*. Xerxes gains legitimacy as the son of Atossa and grandson of Cyrus, but this need not negate the legitimacy of Darius' sons by his first wife.

as in instigation. These laws are affected by both political structure and society. For example, the Spartans have kings, but do not kneel before him. They make this argument to the Persian king. When the Spartan envoys are told they should kneel to the king, they claim that it is against their *nomos* (οὔτε γὰρ σφίσι ἐν νόμῳ, 7.136.1). Not only do the Spartans assert their political independence from the Persian king, they also assert their political difference – they too have kings, but they do not kneel. Another Spartan example is Demaratus' explanation as to why the Spartans are brushing their hair before the battle of Thermopylae: they always brush their hair before battle regardless of whom they face. This habit may seem merely customary when considered from the point of view of the Spartans, but the effect of brushing their hair is focalized through their enemies in this episode. It makes a specific point to the Persians and Xerxes in particular: the Spartans do not care whom they fight. The practice of this *nomos* serves to reinforce cultural, political, and martial differences between the Spartans and the Persian army (7.209). The Spartans stay the same as other nations come and go; the Persians adapt elements of many of the cultures they come across.

In Book 7, Xerxes argues that the Persians need to invade Greece because it is part of Persian *nomos* to expand and invade (7.8a.1). The Persians plan a political move and use a political *nomos* to justify it. Xerxes' use of the law also reveals that it has an application internal to Persia, because Xerxes' kingship is unstable unless he attacks and conquers other states.³⁰

My last example is one of the best known in the *Histories*: Demaratus' explanation to Xerxes as to why the Spartans will fight the Persians against all odds

³⁰ See Evans (1969) for this argument.

(7.102-104). Xerxes is surprised that the Spartans do not have a master-king forcing them to fight, and so he wonders if they can fight well at all. Demaratus claims that the Spartans do have a master, but that master is the law (*despotes nomos*), and that the law always bids them to fight whether they can win or not. This passage is tricky because Demaratus may be translating a Spartan attitude toward the law into Persian usage with the use of *despotes*. His intent, however, is clear: he claims a Spartan political custom in order to establish a political difference (although Xerxes shows a continuing lack of understanding about what that political difference means). This *nomos* distinguishes the Spartans from the Persians because it indicates a relationship to the law different from the Persians own. In Persia, the king is *nomos* and the king is *despotes*. The king is the nexus of obedience. In Sparta, *nomos* is *despotes*; there is no need for a mediating figure.

The *nomoi* that create and express political difference often influence other tangentially related *nomoi*. Just as certain cultural attributes can dictate other customs, such as attitudes toward borrowing customs, so political customs can dictate both customs and laws. For example, the Spartans have a custom of diarchy, but they must restrict their kings through legislation in order to keep the diarchy stable. Political structures or constitutions, like political attitudes, can have their own set of *nomoi*. This constellation of *nomoi* can help ensure the lasting hold of a constitution. For example, as discussed in Chapter 1, Darius argues that the monarchy is a Persian *nomos*, and so they should continue to have one (3.82.5).³¹ Persian society is accustomed to monarchy and thus amenable to its return.

Herodotus uses the term *nomos* to describe rules governing specific subgroups

³¹ Chapter 1, 44-45.

within societies. These *nomoi* distinguish the subgroup from the rest of society.

After the Persian conspirators decide on monarchy, they make rules among themselves to govern their behavior. Most importantly, the conspirators set rules about their access to the king: they should be able to approach him unannounced at any time except when the king is with a woman (3.84.2). Intaphrenes breaks the agreement and is killed when he tries to see Darius while he is with one of his wives (3.118.1). The conspirators try to establish an oligarchic element to the monarchy, but Intaphrenes' story suggests that this sub-government fails. This story demonstrates that *nomoi* can be overridden by a broader *nomos*.³²

In a similar episode, the Egyptians overthrow the bad king Sethos and establish twelve kings in his place. These twelve kings make laws (νόμοισι τοῖσιδε χρεώμενοι) among themselves that they will not depose one another (2.147.3). This law is soon broken by Amasis, when he accidentally fulfils a prophecy by drinking from his bronze helmet. Amasis takes the monarchy. The accidental fulfillment signals the inherent instability of a multi-individual monarchy.

The laws the Egyptian kings and Persian conspirators establish go against how monarchy functions, they compete with the *nomos* of monarchy itself. When the Persians and Egyptians decided on monarchy, they decided on monarchy's specific *nomos*.

Monarchy's *nomos* is that it is *one-man rule*.³³ There are other subgroups within the *Histories* such as the castes in Egypt or the Magi in Persia. These groups have specific

³² This is a clear example of "contesting *nomoi*" a feature of Herodotus often remarked upon by scholars. Immerwahr (1966), Bloomer (1993), Thomas (2000), *inter alia*.

³³ Sparta has two kings, but the overriding *nomos* of Spartan politics is not monarchy, but rather *despotes nomos*, to which the kings are subject as well.

customs that define them within the cultures they inhabit, but these rules are not presented as political in the *Histories* and they do not compromise the broader political structure. The Egyptian kings' and the Persian conspirators' experiences reveal that *nomos* of a political constitution ought to apply to a society as a whole, since political *nomos* is public, even if it is not commonly experienced by every member of the society.³⁴ The subgroups of the conspirators or the Egyptian kings fail because they do not incorporate the society as a whole. Otanes is a special exception to this rule. Before the conspirators decide on who will be king, he requests that he and his family be exempt from the rule of the Persian king (3.83.2-3). In my view, this exception holds because Otanes makes a request for himself, not for a group. A group of people who enjoy special treatment compromises the law much more so than an individual.

I have reviewed uses of *nomos* that designate customs, laws, culture, and political institutions. I have shown how customs distinguish societies, and how societies will make those distinctions political as well as cultural, based upon their attitude toward their customs. The next set of terms, *nomos* compounds, are all political in nature. Herodotus uses the term *kakonomos* to describe Spartan society prior to Lycurgus' reforms (1.65.2) without further details. He intends the term to describe both the social state and the political state, for Lycurgus' reforms answer both cultural and political problems in Sparta (to be discussed more in Chapter 3). Herodotus uses the term *eunomia* to describe Sparta afterwards (1.65.2).³⁵ This usage also has both social and political echoes, since it

³⁴ For example, the kingship of many societies is defined by specific rules that dictate the behavior of the monarch. The people, however, are aware of these rules.

³⁵ Herodotus also claims that the Spartans shifted towards being well governed (εὐνομήθησαν, 1.66.1). Finley (1982, 27) argues: "before the reign of Leon and Agasicles, writes Herodotus, the Spartans were the worst governed of all the Greeks; they then switched to good order. Translation destroys the full sense of

shows that they have customs that promote social and political stability. In other uses of the term, such as in the Deioeces story (1.97.3) and in describing Egypt (2.124.1), the term has definite connotations of political stability.

The term *isonomia* is highly political and serves as Herodotus' gloss for democracy in the *Histories* (see the discussion of the Constitutional Debate in Chapter 1). Herodotus uses it four times (3.80.6, 3.83.1, 3.142.3, 5.37.2). It implies the idea of equality before or under the law, and hence is about the subject's relationship to the government rather than equality of customs. All four usages oppose it to the idea of tyranny. Steiner reads *isonomia* as the same thing as democracy, and suggests that it "depends in part on the existence of a written legal code, a single standard of justice accessible and visible to all."³⁶ Vlastos, on the other hand, suggests that *isonomia* is the name of the underlying philosophy of *demokratia*; it is a slogan for democracy and the opposite of tyranny, rather than a constitutional form in and of itself.³⁷ In regards to Herodotus, I agree with Vlastos' view that *isonomia* is political, but not specifically constitutional.

Finally, I will consider *anomos* and *anomia*. The adjective *anomos* occurs in the Gyges story as part of his argument against doing what Candaules bids him, because men should not see other men's wives naked (1.8.4). The word carries with it cultural weight

the judgment: both *eunomia* and *kakonomos* characterize a whole way of life, not only (or perhaps not at all) a form of constitution."

³⁶ Steiner (1994, 7).

³⁷ Vlastos (1953, 366). Humphreys (1987, 215 n. 5) suggests that *isonomia* was current as a term for a system in which power was shared according to rules, as opposed to tyranny.

because of the Lydian custom concerning nakedness (1.10.3).³⁸ Thus, *anomos* may be a compound that is not wholly political, but is used in a political context – that of the relationship between a king and his subject. The request Candaules makes will lead to his overthrow by Gyges and the queen. The term *anomia* is political, and Herodotus uses it twice in the Deioces story to describe the situation in Media before the establishment of Deioces as king (1.96.2; 1.97.2). At that time, the country was particularly lawless (εούσης ἀνομίης πολλῆς, 1.96.2). The country was without political organization of any kind, and hence was without cultural organization, for the customs of the Medes do not function to provide cohesion. As Deioces makes his bid for power, he has his supporters argue to the rest of the people: “‘the country is ungovernable’, they said, ‘on our current system, so let’s make one of us king. Then the country will be well governed and we’ll be able to concentrate on our jobs instead of losing our homes thanks to lawlessness’” (1.97.2). The term *anomia* does not imply that the Medes have no customs; rather, they are not able to practice their customs because of their political situation. Deioces brings justice and order to the Medes in the form of a tyranny. Hence, in this passage, *anomia* is highly political; it is the absence of political order. *Anomia* shows what many societies without political structure lack – justice and the ability to practice their day-to-day *nomoi*.

Nomos, then, encompasses both everyday life and political institutions. One element that connects the two meanings is the presence or absence of justice. Herodotus connects the concepts of justice and *nomos* explicitly in his description of the Androphagoi in Book 4. In this section, he describes a number of societies in geographic

³⁸ Herodotus does not specifically designate this with *nomos*, but the passage indicates that it is a custom for most of the non-Greek world.

proximity to the Scythians and yet culturally and politically distinct from them.³⁹ One such group is the Androphagoi, or cannibals. Herodotus tells us that they have an idiosyncratic way of life and are not at all Scythian. He further explains that they are “the most savage people in the world and do not think about justice or use *nomos*” (ἀνδροφάγοι δὲ ἀγριώτατα πάντων ἀνθρώπων ἔχουσι ἥθεα, οὔτε δίκην νομίζοντες οὔτε νόμῳ οὐδενὶ χρεώμενοι, 4.106). The parallel structure highlights the relationship between the two concepts *dike* (a political practice) and *nomos* (a more broadly defined culture term).⁴⁰ In my view, the description can imply a causal relationship: the Androphagoi have no justice because they have no *nomos*. This is the inverse of the Deioces episode, wherein the Medes do not enjoy *nomos* because they do not have justice. Deioces’ reign restores justice hence the ability to practice *nomos*. The two episodes taken together show that justice is the means through which political institutions ensure for the people the ability to practice *nomoi*. An examination of how justice is practiced reveals the connection between culture and politics.

I conclude this section by looking more closely at the term *ethea*, which I defined earlier as the attitudes societies have towards their laws and customs, their cultural perspective.⁴¹ The Androphagoi’s *ethea* are *agriotata*, most savage. They have *diata*, but no laws or justice because they are like animals in their attitude toward having any kind of community organization. In a very different example, the Athenians refer to the

³⁹ The political distinction becomes clear when the Scythians call all these tribes together to support them in their defense against the Persian invasion. Some agree, some refuse.

⁴⁰ Vlastos (1953, 343) suggests that the pairing gives *nomos* a political flavor and has poetic precedent in Theognis and possibly Solon. Rood (2006) agrees. I suggest that the structure could likewise suggest an oppositional meaning for *nomos*: it is a cultural code.

⁴¹ Chapter 2, 56.

Greeks' shared *ethea* in their speech to the Spartans in Book 8 in order to add an element of drama and create an emotional connection (8.144). Their argument is that all Greeks approach the world in basically the same way and, most importantly, in a way different from the Persians. The Athenians use this idea in a political context and in such a way as to suggest a political unity of Greeks (their Pan-Hellenism) in the face of the Persian invasion.

The idea of *ethea* also comes out in the short narratives Herodotus has heard about a society or from its members. These narratives are essential to understanding a cultural system, for they often illuminate cultural attitudes and thus enhance our understanding of the society's *ethea*; they reveal the relationship the society has with its cultural characteristics and history. Herodotus often attempts to convey this by focalizing through individuals in the society he is describing. Munson (2001) examines this aspect of Herodotean narrative and I will mention one of her examples that I find especially illustrative. Munson argues that Herodotus presents the story of the Crestonaeans (who compete to be killed when their husbands die) through their experience and emotions rather than through his, since he claims that the women are disappointed when they are not chosen to be killed (5.5). Herodotus is often successful at getting across these kinds of attitudes towards customs, although he occasionally expresses his own judgment. In this section, she argues that the ethnographer can incorporate practices he finds disturbing into a notion of relativism by showing how the practices are internalized.⁴² The ethnographer's ability to incorporate provides his readers with a glimpse at a society's relationship to its own laws.

⁴² Munson (2001, 160-161).

These narratives as well as specific cultural practices and the attitudes a people has towards them contribute to the overall ethnographic and political portrait of a society. In order to discuss more clearly how narratives reveal *nomoi* and *ethea*, I will now shift my mode of analysis. I will examine the expression of *nomoi* and related terms in specific societies.

PART TWO: The Developmental Approach

Herodotus uses the terms discussed above to describe very different practices, political institutions, and societal attitudes. He also uses them in his descriptions of diverse societies in the *Histories*. This section will show how these terms are expressed in cultural systems. The combination of *nomoi* and *ethea* reveal a society's attitude towards itself and its institutions. This is important for my larger argument because cultural relativism is an attitude about others' attitudes – the cultural relativist will attempt to understand that each society is protective of its particular cultural traits. I discuss primitive societies, which have less complex cultural and political structures. Since they are less complex, it is easier to establish the nature of the relationship between culture and politics. The societies discussed below indicate similar attitudes towards their culture. First, however, I will discuss what is meant by “primitive” societies.

Romm (1992), following Hartog, shows how Herodotus presents a world made up of societies in the interior of inhabited space, the *oikoumene*, and societies on the borders of that space, the *eremoi* or *eschatiai*.⁴³ The interior of inhabited space, basically the center of Herodotus' imagined map of the world, is better known and characterized by milder climate and topography, whereas the outer edges are less well known and have a

⁴³ Romm (1992, 32-41).

harsher climate and more striking topography. Societies in the center are more advanced – they have developed agricultural technology and complex political structures. As one moves away from the center, societies are less and less developed – or, as Romm puts it, they move backward in time.⁴⁴ The outer edges are populated by peoples who are either terrible and savage or almost wonderful in their primitive lives. Those who live close to a pure state of nature partake in the *topos* of the noble savage, a *topos* found throughout Greek literature, from Homer and Hesiod onwards.⁴⁵ Another way of making this distinction might be by denoting the people of these societies as either hard or soft primitives.⁴⁶

The distinction between hard and soft primitives stems from the polarity between hard and soft societies, which is a motif across the text that is applied to primitive and more advanced societies. The distinction between hard and soft societies in the *Histories*

⁴⁴ Romm (1992, 47). He connects to the argument of Rossellini and Said (1975) that humankind becomes more bestial as one moves away from the *oikoumene*.

⁴⁵ Flory (1987, 89) argues, “Noble savages have a social organization resembling a utopia especially in regards their treatment of their children, wives, and elderly. Herodotus portrays in a favorable light not only these social customs but also the laissez-faire, minimalist political structure of primitive societies.” Michel de Certeau (1988) has identified the tendency to present utopian and dystopian societies as a part of travel and ethnographic writing. Dougherty (1996) includes de Certeau’s argument as an interpretive model for the societies in the *Odyssey*. Romm (1992, 68).

⁴⁶ Romm (1992) suggests that this kind of distinction stems in part from the ethnocentrism of societies in the center, or its inverse. Herodotus often attacks ethnocentrism by showing primitive societies besting the center, such as when the Ethiopians meet the Persians, discussed below. Societies in the center can be ethnocentric and disdain outsider societies, or they can practice the inverse, and idealize them.

In my view this attitude is linked to a society’s own conception of what *it* was like in the past, and how linked to that past self the society wants to remain. For example, the Egyptians are respectful of, though not eager to embrace, outside practice because they are comfortable with their own long history. The Persians experienced a break with their past: they had to fight for their independence from the Medes. Thus, they are less respectful of more primitive societies because they are uncomfortable with their own past as a subject state of another empire but at the same time they are willing to embrace outside practice. I will explore this attitude more completely in Chapter 3, as it indicates an important factor in a society’s attitude towards its own laws.

has long been recognized and used as an interpretive tool for understanding the text.⁴⁷

That is, the hard/soft polarity is a macrosystemic model for understanding the *Histories*. I believe, however, that this polarity breaks down when one looks at primitive societies, for some are hard and some are soft. An explanation of these terms, however, is necessary for showing how they do not fully apply in the examples I discuss below. “Hard” connotes societies that enjoy few luxuries, consider strength an important factor of their culture, and, in general, are defined by the effort to survive, often through pillaging and raiding rather than traditional agriculture. They live in harsher climates. These societies tend to have very few defined cultural practices separate from those that support the qualities identified above.⁴⁸ “Soft” societies, on the other hand, are more domesticated. They have standing armies, farm, enjoy many luxuries, and have established a rich cultural life around these luxuries. They live in more temperate climates. Egypt is a good example of a soft culture in the *Histories*.⁴⁹

The dichotomy between hard and soft is malleable, however, and several societies undergo softening. The Lydians seem soft but have hard roots. The Persians, originally hard, betray a growing softness throughout the narrative, although in many ways they maintain a hard mentality even while enjoying the luxuries their conquest has brought them; this is the focus of Cyrus’ advice to the Persians at the conclusion of the

⁴⁷ For Herodotus, consider Cyrus’ admonition to remain a hard society at 9.122. Redfield (1985), Lateiner (1989), Gould (1989), Evans (1991), Erbse (1992), Romm (1992), Moles (1996), Dewald (1997) and Pelling (1999) all have discussions of the hard/soft polarity in the *Histories*. All show that this dichotomy is not rigid, as I will discuss below.

⁴⁸ My distinction is a modification of Redfield’s (1985) distinctions between hard and soft societies. The emphasis upon survival in hard cultures is my own, although I believe that this is implicit in Redfield’s schema.

⁴⁹ Redfield (1985, 106) asserts the Scythia and Egypt provide the opposite ends of the hard/soft polarity.

Histories.⁵⁰ The Greeks are a hard people in the *Histories* – mostly because of their lack of luxury and the strong relationship between the citizen body and the military, which implies a survivalist mentality in the *polis*. The Greeks, however, farm and have complex local political structures that suggest a nascent softness as well.

Furthermore, the distinction between hard and soft often only comes out in cultural comparison and hence is highly relative. There is a sliding scale along the hard/soft line. My initial focus is upon the primitive societies described in the *Histories*, though I will alternate my focus between those that are hard primitives and those that are soft. What defines most of these societies is a survivalist mentality and a decided lack of complexity in their political organization. As I progress through societies, I will point out basic features that rudimentary political organization can provide: justice, stability, and representation to the outside world.

I have already discussed the Androphagoi, who have neither customs nor justice, which is something that political organization can supply. The Argippaei are an exception to this formulation. Herodotus tells us that these people dress like Scythians, but have their own language, are all bald, and live off of trees. Each individual has his own tree, which he protects in the winter and eats from year round. They are said to be holy, and, thus, no one mistreats them (τούτους οὐδεὶς ἀδικεῖ ἀνθρώπων). Rather, they settle disputes between their neighbors and shelter anyone who comes to them from injustice (ὅς ἂν φεύγων καταφύγῃ ἐς τούτους, ὑπ' οὐδενὸς ἀδικεῖται, 4.23.5). The Argippaei do not have many customs and Herodotus ascribes no community organization

⁵⁰ This passage has enjoyed much discussion, which I will review below. Some scholars ascribe to the view that, because the Persians *did* get soft, they lost their war to the Greeks. Cobet (1971), Raaflaub (1987) and (2002), Dewald (1997). This view has changed in recent years, see, especially, Pelling (1997).

to them. Their subsistence level existence and symbiotic relationship with their trees suggest that they are close to a pure state of nature, which may be the source of their well-regarded justice and holiness.⁵¹ Thus, in primitive societies one can have no customs, and no justice, or only a few customs, and perfect justice. Justice can be achieved without political organization, but only when accompanied by extraordinary customs.⁵²

Another exceptional society is the Agathyrsians (4.104). The Agathyrsians are a people to whom Herodotus does not ascribe recognizable political organization, but they do enjoy peace and order. Their customs are similar to the Thracians – a hard, warlike society discussed below – except for the custom of keeping their women in common. Any woman is available to any man for sex. As Herodotus sees it, this practice ensures that the men act as brothers and are on good terms with each other, since they are related (4.104).⁵³ The Agathyrsians have a custom which, although not political, solidifies them as a community and keeps them from fighting amongst themselves, from even needing justice. This shows that customs can provide the rudiments of political life. Their *nomos* is *dike*. The Agathyrsians follow a cultural practice that promotes community stability, and this cultural practice is what distinguishes them from the Thracians to whom they are compared.

⁵¹ Romm (1992) argues that the Ethiopians live in a near state of nature and hence are valorized by Herodotus.

⁵² I would like to note that in these passages, the “injustice” term is used with a negative. The Argippaei do not actively work to have justice, but rather their way of life allows them not to have injustice.

⁵³ Herodotus mentions the practice of having women in common among a number of other hard civilizations, including the Massagetae (1.216), although he does not provide a similar explanation for the practice in that case.

Herodotus begins Book 5 by describing the Thracians, the object of Darius' expansion after Scythia (5.1-11). The Thracians are an especially warlike society that makes its living by plundering surrounding tribes. Herodotus claims that, if they had a single ruler or a common purpose, the Thracians would be invincible and the most powerful people in the world (εἰ δὲ ὑπ' ἑνὸς ἄρχοιτο ἢ φρονέοι κατὰ τούτο, ἄμαχόν τ' ἂν εἶη καὶ πολλῶ κρᾶτιστον πάντων ἐθνέων κατὰ γνώμην τὴν ἐμήν, 5.3.1). Since they cannot unite, they are weak.⁵⁴ Herodotus mentions that the Thracians all practice very similar customs (νόμοισι δὲ οὗτοι παραπλησίοισι πάντες χρέωνται, 5.3.2), which reveals that customs *can* provide a way to group a society, but that, for most societies, a political structure is needed to organize it effectively. The Thracians' customs and warlike *ethea* prevent them from experiencing political organization, since their focus is upon the individual family or tribe rather than the people as a whole, and, in effect, from being able to resist the invading Persian army successfully.⁵⁵ This inability implies that political organization is necessary for most societies to be effective in dealing with the outside world.⁵⁶ Political organization provides a society with stability and justice and enables that society to assert its autonomy.

The next two societies I discuss have monarchies and are able to resist or rebuff a Persian invasion. The Massagetae have a warrior queen, Tomyris, who leads her people in their fight against the Persians. The Massagetae are a hard people who live on the

⁵⁴ Benardete (1978, 134) claims that Herodotus believes that Thracian unification can never happen.

⁵⁵ Benardete (1978) makes this claim as part of his comparison of the Thracian's non-political way and the tyrants, a point to which I will return in Chapter 4.

⁵⁶ The Argippaei are protected by the holiness and innocence rather than by any ability to resist.

border of known human society,⁵⁷ their queen represents her people and their customs to the Persians. The focus of Herodotus' narrative is on how Tomyris guides her people through the Persian invasion of her land. First, Tomyris sees through Cyrus' offer of marriage as simply a pretext for controlling the Massagetae (1.205.1). She then offers to meet him in a fair contest of strength and sends her own son against the Persians as general of her army. Cyrus defeats her son by tricking him with wine.⁵⁸ Tomyris expresses her outrage at his un-militaristic trick. She fights him again in the fiercest battle of non-Greeks Herodotus knows of and wins (1.214.1). This indicates her and her people's level of outrage at how Cyrus has treated the Massagetae and specifically her son.

As the main focus of the narrative, Tomyris is intended as representative of her people. She uncovers Cyrus' lies about his proposed marriage and sees the import of his actions clearly. This perspicacity is a feature of other primitive societies, such as the Ethiopians discussed below, and the Scythians, discussed in Chapter 3. She arranges for her people to fight in the way they are most accustomed, and she defends their ability and strength. When the Massagetae have been compromised by Cyrus' trick with wine, Tomyris rebukes him for using such a foul means and upholds the standard of a fair battle

⁵⁷ Their practices of ritual cannibalism and loose rules about sex mark them as inhabitants of this border. The Massagetae do not work the land, but rather live off of fishing, cattle, and mares' milk. They are primarily horsemen themselves, and have gold and bronze in abundance. The sun, to which they sacrifice horses, is their only object of worship; they reason that the swiftest of animals is fitting for the swiftest of gods (1.216.4). The Massagetae sacrifice their most valuable and defining possessions, horses, to the sun, which represents that possession on a higher plane. There is a close connection between who they are as a society and how they worship.

⁵⁸ Cyrus arranges an easy fight in which the Massagetae are victorious. They come upon banquet tables, which have been left as a trick, and proceed to get drunk. Then they are killed by the Persians. Many primitive societies are marked by an uneasy relationship with wine.

(1.212.2). In this way, Tomyris acts as the clear-seeing representative of her people and their values. The Massagetae do not have many customs, but they do have a queen who will represent and defend them all.

A soft primitive society that complements the story of the Massagetae is that of the Ethiopians. In Book 3, Cambyses sends messengers to them with the pretence of making an alliance. They really intend to spy on the Ethiopians in order to gain the information they need to subjugate them (3.17.2). According to Herodotus, the Ethiopians are the tallest and most attractive people in the world (λέγονται εἶναι μέγιστοι καὶ κάλλιστοι ἀνθρώπων πάντων, 3.20.1). He then explains that they practice different customs from anyone else, and, in particular, in how they choose their king. The shift from a broad statement to the specific mention of king selection highlights the importance of this custom. The Ethiopians “examine who of the citizens is tallest and has the correlative strength and judge him as worthy to be king” (τὸν ἄν τῶν ἀστῶν κρίνωσι μέγιστόν τε εἶναι καὶ κατὰ τὸ μέγαθος ἔχειν τὴν ἰσχύν, τοῦτον ἀξιούσι βασιλεύειν, 3.20.2). That the Ethiopians actively think about who will be their king is made clear by the cognitive words *krinein* and *axioun*. They choose him on the basis of their society’s distinguishing cultural characteristics. Their custom dictates how and by what criteria they pick their kings. Herodotus then tells of the specific Ethiopian king who meets the Persian messengers. He, like Tomyris, immediately detects their true intention and rebukes Cambyses for it. He then gives the messengers a bow with the instructions to go away until the Persians can draw such bows (3.21.3). The king gives an answer to the Persians that suits the Ethiopians’ cultural values: he is able to represent their strength as a group in his person and with the symbolic exchange of the bow.

The king continues in his role as representative of his people as he examines the gifts of the Persians; he disparages their cloaks, gold, and perfume, but appreciates their wine (3.22).⁵⁹ He then gives the Persian messengers a tour of his society, showing them a spring with healing properties, a jail in which the prisoners are bound with golden shackles,⁶⁰ the table of the sun, and the Ethiopians' coffins (3.23-24), which all serve to prove the Ethiopians' superiority. The Ethiopian king's actions reinforce that he is his people's representative, since he is the intermediary through whom the society is encountered and understood.

The Ethiopians are a primitive yet soft society. They enjoy certain luxuries that may suggest softness, yet their hardness is evident through their strength and rejection of luxuries.⁶¹ They have as their leader an individual who is the pinnacle of their cultural traits; that is, he is the larger-than-life representative, a hero figure for his people.

Almost all primitive cultures experience one-man rule, which suggests that this is the simplest method of moving towards political organization.⁶² The people choose someone who represents their cultural values to the highest degree and that individual represents these values to others. Just as most societies have hero-founders, so hard cultures have hero-kings and queens.⁶³ I will discuss this feature of the Scythian kingship

⁵⁹ As a soft society, the Ethiopians are able to appreciate wine instead of being compromised by it, as the Massagetae are.

⁶⁰ The Ethiopians use golden shackles because gold is in abundance in their land. The shackles are another indication that the Ethiopians live on the edges of the human world and are soft primitives.

⁶¹ Redfield (1985, 113) suggests that the Ethiopians are soft, but he does not make the distinction between soft and civilized and soft and primitive. The Ethiopians do not have harsh lives, but their society is more reflective of a savage utopia rather than a soft society's highly cultivated luxury.

⁶² Herodotus' suggestion that the Thracians could be united under one man suggests that Herodotus recognizes monarchy as the first stage in political organization.

⁶³ Redfield defines hard cultures as operating on the heroic model of gift exchange and theft.

in Chapter 3, as well as its role in forming both Persia and Spartan models of monarchy.

More primitive societies are organized by political structures (when they have political structures at all) that are reflective of their cultural norms. The relationship between the people and their institutions is more immediate, that is, their customs and institutions function to ensure their day-to-day survival. When they do not have political structures, their society is defined by custom alone, which can but does not always offer a form of community stability. In primitive societies with political organizations there are kings (or queens) who offer a figure with whom the people may interact reflectively. These rulers act in defense of their cultures on their own cultures' terms. The political customs of these societies provide the basic needs of the governed – justice, stability, and organization through rule at home and providing a voice to the outside world – either through the societies' cultural qualities or in a way that mirrors them. The basic functions of government in the *Histories* can be identified by looking at the simplest of the cultures Herodotus describes and by showing how the cultural qualities and customs define the parameters of how a monarch rules and represents his or her people. Societies that are softer or more developed demonstrate a more complex relationship between their political structures and cultural habits.

PART 2A: The Interdependence of Politics and Culture

I will conclude by examining briefly the implications of the close relationship between culture and political structure. Primitive societies are mostly unchanging; they are not presented with a past from which they developed in the *Histories*. Societies discussed in the next chapter do change over time, and part of that change is caused by the political's influence on culture. A significant *nomos* of monarchy in many primitive

societies is that the king or queen reinforces or reflects his or her society's cultural characteristics. Thus, a society will begin to trend towards those characteristics that are emphasized in or by the individual person of the king. The Scythians are reflective of this trend. The Scythians are primarily a nomadic people, but not all of them are. The Scythian king chooses the strategy of nomadism when confronted with the invading Persian army. His action not only influences the outsider's perception of the Scythians (they must be super nomads), but impels all the Scythians to take on a more active nomadic life than they may have had in peacetime.

In the influence of politics on basic cultural attributes, one can observe a progressive distance between the ruler and ruled.⁶⁴ This distance begins from the establishment of political forms. As a society develops and picks its leaders on more and more specific and emphasized cultural characteristics, the distance between the leader and the society as a whole increases. This distance allows for the continued influence of politics on culture and the cycle continues, for the continuing influence accounts for the continuously increasing distance between ruler and ruled. Herodotus shows that this kind of influence works like a positive feedback cycle until either some kind of stability is reached or the political structure oversteps its bounds. Then, more often than not, the political structure will undergo some kind of change.⁶⁵ This cycle occurs in Herodotus' stories of how the tyrannies are formed in the Greek city-states. The societies promote oligarchic competition, which becomes more and more extreme. Finally, one family or

⁶⁴ Dewald (2003, 28) cites this distance as a quality of tyranny. In my view, an extreme distance is concomitant with tyranny, but all political institutions create some form of distance.

⁶⁵ For this argument, see Darius' rejection of democracy and oligarchy in the Constitutional Debate (3.82.3-4).

individual wins, and a tyranny results.⁶⁶ Another result of the cycle, though less common, is that a society may reject some aspect of its culture that created the difficult political situation in the first place. In my view, this rejection is implied in the cultural change that occurred in Sparta during Lycurgus' time. The political and social situation⁶⁷ motivated Lycurgus to change the constitution *and* the customs of the Spartans (1.65.5). A second example of this kind of result occurs in Athens. After the removal of the Peisistratids, aristocratic competition occurs again, but this time results in democracy rather than tyranny. The actual establishment of democracy required, however, the enforcement of new lines of allegiance in society and the dissolving of the original tribes of the Athenian people (5.66.2).

This chapter first addressed the terms Herodotus uses to describe customs, laws, culture, and political institutions. *Nomos* has a broad semantic field that covers both cultural and political concepts. This suggests a relationship between culture and politics. The nature of this relationship can be elucidated by the *ethea*, or attitude towards its culture, of a society, which is revealed through the narratives Herodotus records about that society. The five societies discussed in the second half of the chapter reveal the relationship between culture and the rudiments of political organization, which are justice, stability, and capability for self-defense. Once a society has attained these basic elements of political organization, that organization can begin to affect the culture. The culture of the simpler societies discussed above may not experience this kind of

⁶⁶ For this argument, see Anderson (2005).

⁶⁷ Herodotus describes the Spartans as *kakonomotatoi*, 1.65.2

influence, but more advanced societies may many times over. Chapter 3 will discuss these more complex societies.

Chapter Three: Nomos and Politics: Case Studies of Societies in the *Histories*

In Chapter 2, I suggested that comparatively primitive societies reveal the development of political institutions. These institutions are reflective of the culture they represent.¹ This chapter will examine six societies – Lydia, Egypt, Scythia, Sparta, Persia, and Athens – that have more developed cultures and political institutions, and thus present complex relationships between their cultural attributes and political structures. I will examine the culture of each society as practiced by the group as a whole, their political organization, and the stories that reveal the relationship between the two. Like the more primitive societies discussed in Chapter 2, these societies' political institutions also reflect the cultural values of the people. The internal political structure provides a picture of how a society incorporates individuals and customs into itself. Political experiences with others provide the basis for understanding how each society asserts its particular place in the macro-systemic world and thus reaffirms the dominant cultural traits that define the society.

I have chosen these societies because Herodotus provides more information about each of them than about other societies in the *Histories*. Each has a political structure representative of its cultural identity, although the mechanisms of this representation differ within the society. Also, each society experiences long periods of stability and strength, which allow the societies to be analyzed as cultural systems rather than as a series of disconnected stories and collections of *nomoi*. They provide the best subjects for the analysis

¹ Chapter 2, 84-86.

of Herodotus' micro-systemic understanding of societal identity.

I present the societies in three groupings. I begin with Lydia and Egypt. I group these two societies as paradigmatic because they figure early in the *Histories* and yet are only distantly related to the narrative of Greek and Persian hostilities. Lydia is distanced because, after the Persian conquest of Lydia, the Lydians are not active political players in the *Histories*. Egypt is distanced from the main narrative in a similar manner; although Egypt and Egyptians figure throughout the *Histories*, Herodotus does not present them as interacting within the international political events of the later narrative.²

The second group of societies is Scythia and Sparta. These societies share similarities with the less developed or primitive societies discussed in Chapter 2. Scythia has a king who acts as a larger-than-life representative of the Scythian culture. Sparta's kings function in a similar manner. The Spartans have a more developed political structure than the Scythians do, but in his presentation Herodotus focuses his attention primarily upon their kings rather than the other more developed elements of their government such as the council and the ephors. In doing so, Herodotus may be making the Spartans appear less developed than they actually are. This also contributes to the contrast between Athens and Sparta, an issue I will discuss in Chapter 4.

Persia and Athens make up the last group. I group these because they are the most politically active in the *Histories* and both societies are expansionist. The Persians practice expansion as political policy and they view their conquest of others as an expression of their freedom. The Athenians, although they have a strong definition of personal freedom that they apply within their society, strongly display a nascent expansionist tendency throughout the *Histories* and, as a political policy, must also expand in order to reinforce the personal

freedom they claim for themselves.

Part One: Lydia and Egypt

Case Study One: Lydia.

In the analysis of Lydia that follows, I first examine the cultural traits of the Lydians and then their political history. I will focus on the strong pull that the Gyges and Croesus narratives exert on the text and how that may influence our understanding of what cultural attributes are important to the Lydians. I conclude my discussion with an analysis of a significant episode in Lydian political history: their revolt after they are conquered by the Persians. The Lydians are a society that accepts monarchy and their monarch both expresses and is controlled by their cultural attributes. They insist upon legitimacy in that monarchy and also autonomous rule for Lydia. The Lydians revolt when either of these issues comes into question, and it takes cultural change to make them acquiesce to foreign rule.

Much of the scholarly attention to Lydia in Herodotus' *Histories* focuses upon the Lydian king. The Croesus *logos* provides a model to which the Persian kings are compared and contrasted.³ Croesus is the focus of a lot of scholarship; his encounter with Solon,⁴ his testing of oracles,⁵ his role in other literary genres,⁶ and his role as wise advisor to Cyrus and Cambyses have all been examined in great detail.⁷ Croesus provides a foil to many of the

² Myers (1954), Fornara (1971).

³ For example, see J. G. Gammie (1986, 171-195), D. Konstan (1983, 1-22).

⁴ See, recently, C. Pelling (2006, 141-177). Also, T. Harrison (2000, 31-63).

⁵ See H. I. Flower (1991, 57-77), H. W. Parke (1984, 209-32).

⁶ See G. Crane (1996, 57-85), C. P. Segal (1971, 39-51).

⁷ See Stahl (1975, 1-36), Raaflaub (1987, 241-245), Dewald (1997, 62-82).

later major characters in the *Histories*.⁸ I, however, intend to look at the Lydian people. They are mostly in the background of Croesus' story, but Herodotus does provide an ethnography of them and, in one particular episode, they act on their own. The episode in which they rebel against Cyrus reveals the Lydian character. After this rebellion, the Lydians slip quietly out of the narrative.

A recurring element in Herodotus' description of the Lydians is their martial excellence. Herodotus tells us that no race in Asia was more courageous or warlike than the Lydians (ἦν δὲ τοῦτον τὸν χρόνον ἔθνος οὐδὲν ἐν τῇ Ἀσίῃ οὔτε ἀνδριώτερον οὔτε ἀλκιμώτερον τοῦ Λυδίου, 1.79.3). They fought on horseback with spears. This trait is also evident in Bias of Priene's argument to Croesus that the Lydians should not attack the islanders. He suggests that the islanders are planning to attack the Lydians on land with horses. Croesus responds "If only the gods would put it into the islanders' minds to come against the sons of Lydia with horses!" (1.27.2). The message of the story confirms that the Lydian cavalry is strong. When the Persians besiege Sardis after Croesus' failed pre-emptive strike against them, the Lydians fight on even in the face of great odds. The Persians use camels to incapacitate their cavalry, but this setback "does not turn the Lydians into cowards" (οὐ μέντοι οἱ γε Λυδοὶ τὸ ἐντεῦθεν δειλοὶ ἦσαν, 1.80.6); rather, they leap from their horses and fight on foot. Before their defeat at Sardis, the Lydians carried out several successful campaigns. Their martial ability seems surprising when one focuses upon the court intrigues of Candaules' wife or the great wealth of Gyges or Croesus. These court stories correlate better with other elements of the Lydian ethnography.

According to Herodotus, the Lydians inhabit a good, rich land (5.49.5). Their customs

⁸ Marg (1953).

are similar to the Greeks, with the exception of the prostitution of their daughters (1.94.1). They are known for their gold and the fact that they coined money and were retailers (1.93-94).⁹ Herodotus tells us, however, that they, like the Scythians, Thracians, Persians, and others, regard tradesmen as the lowest stratum of society (2.167.1). The Lydians themselves recognize that they live the good life when Sandanis advises Croesus not to attack the Persians, for the Lydians live an easy life and the Persians do not (1.71.2-3). Sandanis argues that when the Persians come upon Lydian luxuries, they will not want to return to their old, “hard” ways. That Herodotus has a Lydian assert that the Lydians have a pleasant life with many goods emphasizes their appreciation of this element of their culture. Croesus rejects the advice, but Herodotus tells us that by giving it, Sandanis’ reputation was greatly increased.¹⁰

Lydia has many elements of a good, soft life, yet is also warlike and hard. Redfield suggests that the Lydians represent the center, or a strong mixing point in terms of land and customs in Herodotus’ world.¹¹ They do not have extreme weather or practice outlandish customs. Rather, they are a combination of hard and soft. Kurke (1999) suggests a slightly different mode of understanding the Lydians. She demonstrates that Herodotus’ portrait of Lydia is largely viewed through an archaic Greek aristocratic lens, which valorized the society of the luxurious yet courageous Lydians, though with some problems.¹² Thus, the

⁹ Much of this information is included in Herodotus’ description of the tomb of Alyattes. On the tomb, plaques proclaim who contributed to its construction, primarily traders, artisans, and prostitutes. I agree with Immerwahr (1964, 265) that this passage is ethnographic.

¹⁰ Pelling (2006) mentions this episode as paradigmatic of the attempt to educate tyrants. Croesus rejects the advice at the time, but uses it, in a revised form, against the Massagetae.

¹¹ Redfield (1985, 112).

¹² Kurke (1999, 166): “Herodotus’ text in fact incorporates two contradictory representations of the Lydians, uncomfortably – and anachronistically – juxtaposed. We might regard the characterization that emerges from the historical account, centered around Kroisos, as the aristocratic, pro-habrosune valorization of the Lydian monarch and the Lydian people. But this model seems to coexist very uneasily with the Lydian ethnographic account the history offers at 1.93-94, which portrays the Lydians in very different terms. And, while this latter

Lydians, like the Persians who will inherit their country, cannot be easily categorized as hard or soft; rather, they are a cultural mixture. In my view, this mixture suggests that the analysis of Lydia's ethnography should proceed cautiously and that we should resist categorizing the Lydians or interpreting their history and people using the traditional broad categories of hard or soft.

The Lydians have a hereditary monarchy, which is held by different dynasties. Herodotus begins his history proper by introducing Croesus but then jumping back five generations to the story of the end of one dynasty (the Heracleidae) and the beginning of another (the Mermnadae) (1.7.1). The focus on family dynasties emphasizes Croesus' inherited guilt, but also the tradition of monarchy among the Lydians. The story of Gyges and Candaules is well known and often examined as a paradigmatic story in the *Histories*. I want to emphasize a few important elements. After Gyges has witnessed Candaules' queen in the bedroom, she calls him in and gives him a terrible choice: either kill Candaules and take her and the throne or kill himself. She explains that he must do this so that he will never again follow Candaules and violate *nomos*.¹³ Her explanation sets an important precedent – kings should not force their followers to violate *nomos*, and their legitimacy is in question if they do so. Gyges hesitates at being asked to kill his master (whom he consistently calls *despotes*), but then elects to survive (*perieinai*, 1.11.4). The emphasis upon Candaules as master allows us to interpret Gyges' actions not merely as a bid for survival but also as his

model is distanced from Kroisos by the atemporality of ethnography, the inconcinnities between the two accounts call into question the elitist portrait of the noble, luxurious, and warlike Lydians.”

¹³ She first says: ὡς ἂν μὴ πάντα πειθόμενος Κανδαύλῃ τοῦ λοιποῦ ἴδῃς τὰ μὴ σε δεῖ. She further explains Gyges' seeing what he should not see as ποιήσαντα οὐ νομιζόμενα (1.11.2-3). Gyges had already indicated that he was aware that Candaules was asking him to subvert *nomos* (he calls the request ἀνόμων, 1.8.4).

claim to freedom and its consequence: the kingship.¹⁴

The focus for many scholars has been the power of Candaules' queen and her disruptive force in the politics of Lydia. She falls into the paradigm of the subversive woman who figures throughout Herodotus' *Histories*. Yet, as scholars have argued, women also represent and reinforce *nomos*.¹⁵ Candaules' queen is subversive in her use of power, yet protective of *nomos*. The violation of women and the subversion of *nomos* are often a joint feature of the tyrant in the *Histories*, as Otanes' argument in the Constitutional Debate suggests (3.80.5). Candaules acts tyrannically and thus his wife and steward are compelled to remove him. In this story, *nomos* affects politics because the king chooses to disregard *nomos*. Candaules' actions and Gyges' usurpation of the throne call into question the legitimacy of the monarchy in Lydia. Gyges, however, works to legitimize his own rule.

I have described the first steps towards Gyges' assumption of power – the reaction against a violation of *nomos* on the personal level. This makes for a good story, but it does not completely resolve the issue of Gyges' new position. Herodotus tells us that the Lydians were upset about Candaules' overthrow and took up arms against Gyges.¹⁶ This action reveals that the population feels that it has some role in controlling the monarchy and a voice in issues of succession. Herodotus reinforces the political nature of the conflict by calling the supporters of Gyges “partisans” (στασιῶται, 1. 13.1).¹⁷ Gyges and his followers resolve the

¹⁴ Baragwanath (2008, 73-74) also emphasizes two ways of interpreting Gyges' motivation. He could be asserting what is honorable or focused on his own survival.

¹⁵ Dewald (1981), Lateiner (1989).

¹⁶ ὡς γὰρ δὴ οἱ Λυδοὶ δεινὸν ἐποιεῦντο τὸ Κανδαύλεω πάθος καὶ ἐν ὀπλοισι ἦσαν, 1.13.1). Herodotus refers to the resistance as “the Lydians,” which implies that the opposition was of a significant size.

¹⁷ This term is political – already in mid-fifth century a heavily laden term.

situation by offering to seek arbitration from the oracle at Delphi. The parties agree and the Pythia sanctions Gyges' rule. In my view, this arbitration provides a mandate for Gyges from the societal point of view and demonstrates that the kingship in Lydia has real ties to the society. The Pythia's response also warns of retribution to Gyges' line (though everyone ignores it) which will provide impetus for the Croesus *logos*.

Throughout this story, Gyges' position is called a *basileiē* (1.11.2). It is only after the resolution of his succession that Herodotus sums up by saying, "and thus the Mermnadae deprived the Heracleidae of the tyranny and held it for themselves," (τὴν μὲν δὴ τυραννίδα οὕτω ἔσχον οἱ Μερμνάδαι τοῦς Ἡρακλείδας ἀπελόμενοι, 1.14.1). He refers to Gyges' descendant, Croesus, as a tyrant as well (1.6.1). Herodotus engages in a deliberate confusion of terms, which may undermine the idea that the Lydian monarchy is legitimate. However, as Davie has argued, Herodotus uses these terms interchangeably when referring to one-man rule, except in the case of the Greek tyrants (who are always *tyrannoi*).¹⁸ Thus, I do not think that Herodotus' terminology complicates my argument about the nature of the Lydian monarchy. The story of Gyges functions not as one of many indictments of tyranny, but rather as an example of how individuals play an important role in the political structure, but that their power is limited by culture and the political will of the people.

Croesus is also a powerful individual, but, like Gyges, the power he exerts as king is not necessarily oppressive.¹⁹ Croesus himself rejects the possibility that tyrannies can produce fighting men when he chooses Sparta over Athens because he discovered that

¹⁸ Davie (1979).

¹⁹ Davie (1979); Flory (1987).

Athens was “currently in a state of oppression” under the Peisistratids (1.59.5).²⁰ Croesus as a monarch also appears to fit into Herodotus’ primarily Greek aristocratic portrait of the country, since tyrants were particularly anti-aristocratic in their policies, although they were drawn from the ranks of the aristocracy themselves.²¹ The Lydians seemingly live a life out of the heroic age: under their kings they are able to live in luxury *and* express their warlike nature through many campaigns. The kings guide the Lydian people. For example, Herodotus tells the story of the Lydian king who worked to save his people from a severe famine. He divided up his people, and sent half of them, under the leadership of his son, to found a new city. This king acts in the interests of his people within the confines of a constitutional monarchy (1.94.5-6).

As I discussed in Chapter 2, one function of government is to reflect and represent its people to the outside world.²² Under the leadership of its kings, Lydia undertakes many successful military ventures.²³ These campaigns reveal that the Lydians are involved in wars, often because of the need for an intervention.²⁴ Practicing intervention is a strong indicator of an autonomous country asserting its power (and its very autonomy).²⁵

I have discussed how the Lydians have a monarchy that enables them to practice their

²⁰ As Forsdyke (2001, 341) points out, the “implicit association of tyranny and weakness is made explicit through Croesus’ choice to seek an alliance with Sparta instead of Athens.”

²¹ For example, see the oligarchic resistance to tyranny on Samos (3.141-147) and also Thrasybulus’ advice to Periander to kill all the elite because they are potential competition (5.92).

²² Chapter 2, 80-84.

²³ Gyges attacks Miletus and Smyrna 1.14; Ardys attacks Priene and Miletus 1.15; Alyattes wages war against the Medes, Cimmererians, Smyrna, the Clazomenae, and Miletus 1.16-17.

²⁴ For example, Croesus goes to war with the Persians not just for the purpose of a preemptive strike but also because of family ties to Astyages (1.75). Croesus frees Miltiades from the Lampsacenes (6.37).

²⁵ See P. Low’s (2007, 175-211) discussion on the importance of autonomy in *Interstate Relations in Classical Greece*. Cambridge.

warfare and in which the people feel capable of influencing the king. Their king also reflects the luxury and wealth of the state.²⁶ The Lydians have strong leaders who dominate the narrative, but the Lydians can act on their own. The best evidence that their political behavior is a result of their cultural characteristics – and not the work of a Croesus or Gyges – may be found in the story of the later Lydian revolt under Pactyes. The Lydians’ independent action shows that their cultural character is not tied to a king.

Even without Croesus, the Lydians revolt under the leadership of Pactyes (1.154-157).²⁷ The political change that happened with the removal of Croesus did not alter the cultural tendencies of the Lydians nor their desire for autonomous rule. Pactyes is able to fill the space in the Lydian political and cultural structure for a single leader of a people who still want freedom. When Cyrus complains to Croesus, “it doesn’t look as though the Lydians will ever stop making work for me and trouble for themselves,” he recognizes that the fault of the rebellion is with the Lydians themselves (1.155.1). Cyrus is slightly surprised, however, because he gave them back their city after defeating Croesus.²⁸ Croesus is worried about his people, and advises Cyrus not to be angry with them. He explains that the first time they were a problem, it was his fault, and the second time it is Pactyes’ fault. Therefore, Cyrus should punish Pactyes. This argument rests upon the idea that individuals are responsible for the actions of a country rather than the cultural tendencies of that society.

Croesus’ first tactic is to direct Cyrus’ attention away from the culture that seems

²⁶ Cf. Croesus’ interactions with Solon (1.30) and Alcmaeon (6.125).

²⁷ Pactyes is actively involved: τοὺς Λυδοὺς ἀπέστησε ὁ Πιακτύης ἀπὸ τε Ταβάλου καὶ Κύρου, (1.154.1).

²⁸ That is, that the Persians perceived the Lydians as soft, and hence would not expect them to rebel once defeated.

bred to resist him and to agree with Cyrus' assessment of Lydia as needing a king. Yet Croesus undermines his interpretation and his own distraction with his later advice, for he goes on to suggest: "you can issue a directive to ensure that they never rebel and are no threat to you. The way to do this is to forbid them to own weaponry, and decree that they should wear cloaks and slippers, that they should take up music, and that they are to become retailers" (1.155.4). After the Lydians are forced to do these things, Croesus argues "you will see them become women instead of men, and so there will be no danger of them rising up against you." The merchant characteristic was present already;²⁹ Croesus brings this trait out and removes the warlike element of the society.³⁰ As a result, not only are the Lydians removed from history and importance in Herodotus' *Histories*, they are also released from the aristocratic paradigm.

Herodotus gives three reasons that Croesus suggests this change of culture: the Lydians would be better off this way than as slaves,³¹ he wanted to Cyrus to listen to him, and he was afraid the Lydians would revolt sometime in the future and suffer worse punishment. Croesus, as Herodotus presents him, understands that the revolts were not a fault of individuals such as himself or Pactyes acting on his own, but rather were generated by Lydian culture.

Croesus' solution to the problem is interesting in that he suggests making the Lydians "soft," even though there were many hints that the Lydians were soft already, especially in

²⁹ See above and 1.93-94.

³⁰ Or, as Kurke (1999, 168), puts it: "Kroisos recommends all the attributes of a luxurious lifestyle ... conjoined with *kapeleia* to remove the Lydians from the stage of history."

³¹ αἰρετώτερα ταῦτα εὐρίσκων Λυδοῖσι ἢ ἀνδραποδισθέντας πρηθῆναι σφεας (1.156.1).

contrast to the Persians. The Lydians represent softness for the Persians,³² but they do not act in a soft way until they are defeated and transformed by Cyrus' reforms. The hard/soft paradigm works here but requires the recognition that there is a great deal of relativity within this binary schema. There are different manifestations of softness and societies react in very different ways to that softness.³³ Even while fitting the soft description, the Lydians still find their own autonomy important, and it is this that drives them to revolt after being defeated by Cyrus. The desire for political autonomy is only squashed by the changes Cyrus makes to their culture. This resistance reveals that the Lydians' original cultural characteristics generated a desire for national autonomy even while being ruled by a single man. The country and its citizens are not slavish.

In the course of Cyrus' complaint and through Croesus' fears, we can deduce that the normal course of events would be to enslave the Lydians and destroy their city. Yet Croesus makes an original suggestion: change their culture. This cultural change, as Croesus anticipates and the narrative confirms (Herodotus tells us that these changes "resulted in a complete alteration of the Lydian lifestyle," (Λυδοὶ τὴν πᾶσαν δίαιταν τῆς ζώης μετέβαλον, 1.157.2)), modifies the nature of the society in such a way as to make them amenable to Persian rule.

Among the Lydians, their cultural characteristics generate a monarchy that enables them to practice their warfare and is conscious of their preference for trading and retail. The Lydians wish to act on their own. They reveal that they have a strong sense of their cultural

³² See, for example, Sandanis' advice quoted above (1.71) as well as Cyrus' early lesson for the Persians to get them to fight (1.126); hence Cyrus' confusion, especially if he already has the understanding of hard and soft cultures he demonstrates at the end of the *Histories*.

³³ Sandanis suggests that the Persians will cling to Lydian culture once they experience it (1.71).

identity in both their revolt under Pactyes and their involvement in the succession of Gyges. The Lydians act to assert their particular culture and, when they do so, they reaffirm their political choice of one-man rule. Yet the latent softness apparent in Herodotus' ethnography of the Lydians contributes to their downfall.³⁴ Croesus and Cyrus make a change in the Lydian culture, but it is a change that is not too removed from their cultural qualities. Rather, the change accentuates the softness of the Lydians and stamps out their warlike nature. Most importantly, this section also reveals that cultural change can bring about political change. The change in Lydian values results in a willingness to be a dependent state. The Lydians are one example of a society that, although it has a monarch, has controls in place that enable the people to act in defense of their culture and of the institution of monarchy in their society.

Case Study 2: Egypt

Herodotus provides a long ethnography of Egypt in Book Two of his *Histories*. Some scholars have argued that this section represents an earlier stage in Herodotus' project, before he decided to write the history of the Persian wars.³⁵ Yet the Egyptian story, however disproportionate to Egypt's role in the Persian War as Herodotus tells it, fits into the sequence of countries Herodotus describes as being conquered by Persia,³⁶ although this

³⁴ In addition to the characteristics discussed above, Herodotus provides a more extended ethnography of the Lydians at 1.93-94. The Lydians build great monuments and primarily practice trade. They also invented coinage and several games. All of these attributes suggest that the Lydians, though valorous, are inherently soft.

³⁵ See Myres (1953, 96). Myres compares the description of Egypt with descriptions of Scythia, Libya, Persia, Babylonia, the Massagetae and Thrace. He argues "all these descriptions may therefore be regarded as based on independent drafts, of earlier dates than their present contexts, and as illustrating the method of Ionian 'logographers'." Hartog (1989) gives a history of the separation of the ethnographic books from the "historical" in his introduction.

³⁶ Myres (1954), Fornara (1971).

ethnography has little connection to the rest of the text. Fornara (1971) argues that this disconnect suggests that the ethnographies were the original subject of the *Histories*. Thus, Egypt provides a model for understanding how Herodotus conceives of the function of ethnographic information in the *Histories* as a whole, for his account of Egypt provides historical as well as ethnographic information. Herodotus' account provides the most material for understanding what Herodotus may have been trying to accomplish with his ethnographies and describes another society that may serve as a case study for analyzing the relationship between culture and politics. The Egyptian pharaohs are near absolute rulers and rule may pass illegitimately from one to another. The Egyptians are a people who exhibit a strong desire to fulfil their expected cultural roles. It is when the ability to do so comes into question that the Egyptian people revolt. Egyptian political life promotes a great distance between the rulers and the ruled, but this distance creates stability and non-interference in the daily lives of the Egyptians.

In Book Two, Herodotus reflects the strong interest in Egypt and Egyptian culture prevalent throughout Greek literature from Homer onwards. As Vasunia points out, they are recognized as an older culture and respected for their knowledge. The Egyptians also represent a barbarian culture that is not as savage or strange as the societies further east, south, west, or north. Herodotus shows the Egyptians as being equally culturally biased as the Greeks in that they view all other cultures as barbarians (βαρβάρους δὲ πάντας οἱ Αἰγύπτιοι καλέουσι τοὺς μὴ σφίσι ὁμογλώσσους 2.158.5).³⁷ A second example of Egypt's cultural bias lies in Herodotus' explanation of how the Egyptians view writing. He

³⁷ The term ὁμογλώσσους is significant because it is one of the criteria by which the Athenians define Hellenic identity at 8.144 (ὁμόγλωσσον).

claims that whereas the Greeks, when they write, write left to right (ἀπὸ τῶν ἀριστερῶν ἐπὶ τὰ δεξιὰ), the Egyptians do the reverse (ἀπὸ τῶν δεξιῶν ἐπὶ τὰ ἀριστερά). He explains further that “although this is their actual practice, they say that they are doing it right, while the Greeks are left-handed” (καὶ ποιεῦντες ταῦτα αὐτοὶ μὲν φασὶ ἐπιδέξια ποιέειν, Ἕλληνας δὲ ἐπαρίστερα, 2.36.4). Herodotus allows the Egyptians to redefine left and right for themselves. Herodotus also reflects the Greeks’ fascination with Egypt and Egypt’s own individuality when he claims that their customs are the opposite of everywhere else (τὰ πολλὰ πάντα ἔμπαλιν τοῖσι ἄλλοισι ἀνθρώποισι ἐστήσαντο ἥθεά τε καὶ νόμους, 2.35.2). This symmetrical opposition does not hold throughout the ethnography, but it does help structure it.³⁸ Herodotus demonstrates that Egyptian culture is self-aware and self-contained. Egypt is a good micro-system that also reveals many of Herodotus’ macro-systemic concerns.

The Egyptian *logos* also reflects on a smaller scale Herodotus’ project and the difficulties he faces in constructing a long historical narrative. He begins with an ethnography and then provides a history of Egypt. The historical nature of Egyptian society prompts Herodotus to provide a national history as well as an ethnography that will satisfy his curiosity and that of his Greek audience. Or, as he puts it, “I am going to talk at some length about Egypt, because it has very many remarkable features and has produced more monuments which beggar description than anywhere else in the world. That is why more will be said about it,” (ἐρχομαι δὲ περὶ Αἰγύπτου μηκυνέων τὸν λόγον, ὅτι πλείστα θωμάσια ἔχει καὶ ἔργα λόγου μέζω παρέχεται πρὸς πᾶσαν χώραν· τούτων εἵνεκα πλέω περὶ αὐτῆς εἰρήσεται, 2.35.1).

³⁸ Redfield (1985).

In my analysis of Egypt in the *Histories*, I follow Herodotus' organization by examining the Egyptians' cultural characteristics before moving on to their history and political structure. I identify broad categories of attributes since, unlike with Lydia, Herodotus provides an extensive and varied catalogue of customs. Egypt is defined by its river, the Nile, both geographically and socially. Herodotus chooses to define Egypt as the country which was created by the Nile and its tributaries and inhabited by Egyptians (2.17.1-2) and claims that, because of the singular habits of the river, Egyptian way of life and customs are different from any other society's customs (2.35.2). Herodotus provides an extensive description of the geography of Egypt. This attention signals the importance of the land and river in his depiction of the people.

The Egyptians, as Herodotus presents them, are a people steeped in knowledge. This knowledge seems to be rooted in the society's age, as is reflected in Herodotus' description of it. Egypt is very old, but not the oldest of civilizations.³⁹ The Egyptians perpetuate their customs rather than acquire new ones (πατρίοισι δὲ χρεώμενοι νόμοισι ἄλλον οὐδένα ἐπικτῶνται, 2.79.1). They may do this in part because of their reverence for the past, which is also manifested in their respect of their elders (2.80.1). They are protective of their traditions, for they avoid acquiring others' customs, especially those of the Greeks (Ἑλληνικοῖσι δὲ νομαίοισι φεύγουσι χρᾶσθαι, ... μηδ' ἄλλων μηδαμῶν ἀνθρώπων νομαίοισι, 2.91.1). Finally, their respect for age, tradition, and the past may also be reflected in the fact that they are very mindful of death.⁴⁰ They develop elaborate

³⁹ Psammetichus discovers this through a test at 2.2.

⁴⁰ Herodotus tells the story of how, at feasts, a carving of a dead man is passed around to remind the guests of their destination in life (2.78).

funeral practices that stand in relationship to this awareness of death.⁴¹

The Egyptians also claim vast religious knowledge.⁴² Their valuation of religion is reflected, for one example, in the fact that not only is every king since Min recorded, so is every high priest (2.142.1). As another example, the era when the kings Cheops and Chephren closed the religious sanctuaries was regarded as one of the worst times in Egyptian history.⁴³ The Egyptians also reveal their devotion to religion in their practice of the worship of Apis even in the face of religious and political repression by Cambyses (3.27-29). Herodotus provides numerous examples of religious practices (or hints at them) and lists sacred animals, places, and songs. He also emphasizes the primacy of Egyptian knowledge about religion in describing how the Egyptians proved that they were “the first to establish the epithets of the Twelve Gods and that the Greeks got these epithets from them, and they claim to have been the first to assign the gods altars, statues, and temples and to carve figures on to stones” (2.4). Many others seek to possess Egypt’s knowledge (Hecateus and Herodotus included) and this desire for it confirms their historical and religious knowledge as a cultural quality.⁴⁴ For example, the Eleans come to Egypt for guidance concerning their religious games. The Egyptians help them by suggesting that the Eleans must not participate themselves (2.160.4).

The Egyptians, in their pursuit of knowledge, are also interested in measurement and division of space and time. Herodotus tells us that the Egyptians have developed a far more

⁴¹ Most specifically, mummification, which Herodotus describes at 2.86-90.

⁴² See 2.3, 4, 37, 58.

⁴³ Herodotus tells us the Egyptians lived under awful conditions (2.124) and hated even mentioning the names of two kings (2.127).

⁴⁴ Moyer (2002, 71) argues that the Egyptian participate in an active engagement with their historical past, to which Herodotus was a witness.

accurate calendar than that used in Greece (2.4.1). Herodotus himself adopts this penchant for measurement, primarily at the beginning of the section on Egypt, for he carefully records the length of the Nile, the parameters of the whole country, and other aspects of physical measurement he learned from the Egyptians or observed for himself.

Egyptian society is divided into seven classes of people: priests, warriors, cowherds, swineherds, retailers, translators, and pilots. Herodotus comments that each of these classes is named after a profession (2.164.1). The division into classes not only reflects Egyptian interest in measurement and division, but also a strong hierarchy among the Egyptian people. This hierarchy is perpetuated by the continuation through families working in the professions named by the classes.⁴⁵ The importance of the hierarchy is also reflected in the Egyptians' resistance to devaluation of the classes. For example, the warrior and priest classes received special privileges (2.168.1). The king Sethos did not like the warrior class and tried to remove their privileges. The Egyptians resisted and Sethos was deposed (2.141.1).

Overall, in Herodotus, the Egyptian people are a people interested in history, knowledgeable about religion and devoted to religious practice, and resistant to change (at any level of lived society). As I mentioned above, the kings Cheops and Chephren forced the people to build their pyramids and closed the sanctuaries. The next king, Mycerinus, allowed the people,

Who had been ground down to a state of total misery, to return to their work and their sacrifices, but he was also the fairest of all the kings in judging their legal cases. Because of this they speak more highly of Mycerinus than they do of any other Egyptian king.

(τὸν δὲ τὰ τε ἰρὰ ἀνοῖξαι καὶ τὸν λεῶν τετραμένον κακοῦ ἀνεῖναι πρὸς ἔγγρα τε καὶ θυσίας, δίκας δὲ σφι πάντων βασιλέων δικαιωτάτος κρίνειν. κατὰ τοῦτο μὲν νυν τὸ ἔργον ἀπάντων ὅσοι ἤδη βασιλέες

⁴⁵ Herodotus does not confirm this in the Egyptian ethnography, but rather in his description of Spartan customs. He says there that the Spartans, like the Egyptians, have inherited professions (6.60).

ἐγένοντο Αἰγυπτίων αἰνέουσι μάλιστα τοῦτον (2.129.1-2).

The Egyptians also value justice; yet their focus is upon being able to live, work, and worship as they are accustomed.

The Egyptians are ruled by a hereditary monarchy. As Herodotus tells it, the Egyptians always had a king (2.99.1). After the overthrow of Sethos, a priest of Hephaestus, “the Egyptians decided they could not live without a king and so no sooner had they won their freedom after the reign of the priest of Hephaestus than they divided the whole country into regions and created a system of twelve kings” (ἐλευθερωθέντες Αἰγύπτιοι μετὰ τὸν ἱερέα τοῦ Ηφαίστου βασιλεύσαντα (οὐδένα γὰρ χρόνον οἰοί τε ἦσαν ἄνευ βασιλέος διαιτᾶσθαι) ἐστήσαντο δωδέκα βασιλέας, [ἐς] δωδέκα μοίρας δασάμενοι Αἴγυπτον πᾶσαν, 2.147.2). Vasunia claims that ‘if Egypt has to remain servile, however, then Egypt must always have a king or master to whom it belongs, and this is precisely what Herodotus makes clear in his Egyptian *logos* ... The Egyptians are capable of seeking liberty, as Hartog says, but not of living with it [1988, 324].’⁴⁶ This argument holds if one imagines that freedom, or liberty, is defined as “not having a king.” This passage comes immediately after Herodotus claims that up to this point, “his account has relied on what the Egyptians alone say.” He explains that from now on, including this story, he will report other people’s views as well and supplement it all with his autopsy (2.147.1). Herodotus claims the description as his own and thus it may be informed by his own conception of freedom rather than the Egyptians’. In my view, Herodotus does not judge the Egyptians for their decision. He shows that they have always had a king, and thus, given a choice, they still choose monarchy and doing so does not compromise their freedom. They

⁴⁶ Vasunia (2001, 80).

want the freedom not to change. He gives the agency in the decision to reinstall a monarchy to the Egyptians themselves, which implies that, in Herodotus, the Egyptians prefer monarchy.

The twelve kings, rather than the Egyptians, express their agency by working out how their oligarchy will function. They intermarry and make agreements to avoid the transference to a true monarchy, although these measures eventually prove ineffective and Egypt will return to having one king. Vasunia continues his discussion on the kingship in much less loaded terms: “In other words, Egypt needs a king to retain its identity as Egypt, and the Egyptians must have a ruler to administer their country, so they themselves set up a higher authority.”⁴⁷ This argument follows along similar lines to Herodotus’ description of Egyptian space. The Egyptian people get their identity in part from having a king; the Egyptian land gets its identity by being the land inhabited by Egyptians (2.17.1). The kings reflect the Egyptian interest in measurement through their own practices. Sesostris divided the land for tax purposes and built canals, which divided Egypt up into manageable spaces (2.109.1). Herodotus credits several kings with vast building projects that divide up and measure both space and time.⁴⁸ The Egyptians obey their king and go through periods of subjugation if their kings happen to be bad. If those kings, however, such as Sethos, subvert Egyptian custom too strongly, they may be actively resisted. The Egyptians also practice resistance through a form of *damnatio memoriae* towards their bad kings such as Cheops and

⁴⁷ Vasunia (2001, 80).

⁴⁸ Min (2.99), Sesostris (2.109), Rhampsinitus (2.124), Cheops and Chephren (2.127), Mycerinus (2.134), Psammetichus (2.153), Necho (2.158), and Amasis (2.175) are all credited with building projects, to name a few. “Although Herodotus presents the kings as transgressing space and as doing violence to the natural symmetry of things, the Egyptian representations of the pharaoh’s building activities point not to transgression and violation, but rather to extension and replication.” (Vasunia 2001, 108).

Chephren.⁴⁹ After they have achieved a new balance between their culture and their political institutions, the Egyptians return to a monarchy since that has always been the custom of the society.

Herodotus also shows how some Egyptian kings interact with their subjects to ensure the subjects' comfort with their rules. For example, the king Amasis experiences some difficulty from the people because he is of humble origins. He teaches them with a clever example: he takes a golden footbath he and his guests have used and turns it into a beautiful statue, which the Egyptians revere. Then he reveals his trick and explains that he and the footbath were similar. Herodotus sums up the story by commenting: "that was how he convinced the Egyptians that it was reasonable to accept him as their master"

(τοιούτῳ μὲν τρόπῳ προσηγάγετο τοὺς Αἰγυπτίους ὥστε δικαιοῦν δουλεύειν, 2.172.5). Despite Herodotus' loaded way of describing the Egyptians as slaves of Amasis (he refers to himself as *basileus*), Amasis appeals to the Egyptians' respect for wisdom and love of intelligence and reveals a willingness to respond to the people and their concerns.⁵⁰

Like many of the kings about whom Herodotus writes, the Egyptian kings are strong individuals acting within a very loosely defined political position. There are limits to their behavior, which the Egyptians respond to either actively (overthrow) or passively (unrest or *damnatio memoriae*). These individuals, however, like Gyges and Croesus, seem to respond to and work with the people's distress. One episode reflects the king's attitude towards the personal and private, the story of Psammenitus.

⁴⁹ 2.128 "The Egyptians loathe Chephren and Cheops so much that they really do not like to mention their names. Instead, they say the pyramids belonged to a shepherd called Philitis, who at this time used to graze his flocks on the same land."

⁵⁰ Amasis is a trickster figure, which, in Egyptian culture, is received in a positive manner. Cf. Rhampsinitus and the thief (2.121).

After Cambyses conquers Egypt, he subjects Psammenitus' son to execution and insults his daughter (3.14). Psammenitus maintains a stiff upper lip when he sees his daughter and son pass by, but weeps to see an old friend reduced to begging. Cambyses asks him to explain his behavior, and Psammenitus explains that his personal loss is too great for tears, but the public degradation of a friend demands them. That is, he is able to appreciate the impact of the Persian victory more fully when he looks at it through someone who slightly more removed from his own personal and immediate concerns. This answer elicits a sympathetic response from Cambyses, Croesus, and the Persians. Psammenitus reveals an understanding of Solon's teaching to Croesus in Book One, and also a recognition that there is a difference between what one keeps to oneself and what one publicly acts upon. Psammenitus responds to an individual who is close to him, but not within his family circle. It is through his friend's degradation that he is able to experience his own and his country's loss. His story is indicative of how the king, by custom distant from the lives of his subjects, may still experience and represent their defeat.

The Egyptians reveal pride in their kings, however, even in the face of a foreign ruler who has subjugated them. When Darius seeks to have his statue placed in front of the statues of Sesostriis, Egypt's most expansionist pharaoh, the priests refuse. They reason that Sesostriis conquered many lands, including Scythia, but Darius was unable to conquer Scythia. Therefore, his statue can not be placed in front of Sesostriis' statues. According to the Egyptians, Darius was convinced (2.110). The Egyptians use a narrative of one of their kings to assert their cultural primacy to a foreign invader.⁵¹ This reveals that the Egyptians view

⁵¹ Moyer (2002, 81) argues that "the exploits of Sesostriis as related to Herodotus by the Egyptian priests were not faithful records of a particular king's activities. Rather, they were part of Egyptian efforts to construct a discursive identity in the past to rival the accomplishments of those who afflicted them in the present."

their kings as representative of them and reinforces the idea of their pride in their cultural history.

Herodotus' *Histories* do not devote much time to showing Egypt active on the international level. The king Sesostris leads the Egyptians on a great, expansionist mission during his reign, but turns back when he meets the Scythians (2.102-3). I believe that this expansion demonstrates that the Egyptians may be *capable* of expansion, but do not value it. Rather, they prefer stability to expansion and change. Their ability to resist, however, is another matter. Not only do they resist Sethos, they resist Cambyses' invasion of Egypt by fighting well (3.10) and revolting soon after before they are finally subdued (3.15.1). The Egyptians are capable of expansion, but, in general, they and their pharaohs are content to stay at home.

Egypt and its knowledge, in Herodotus' *Histories*, is a possession of its kings and, through them, its people. The kings possess it to measure, divide, and rule as they will. The Persians will maintain that attitude and seek to hold on to Egypt, but the people continue to assert their cultural rights. This is reflected in Xerxes' privileging the putting down of an Egyptian revolt at 7.7-8 to the invasion of Greece. The Egyptian kings are possessors of Egypt, and in that role represent the Egyptians to the Persians, but, unlike the Spartan and Scythian kings discussed below, they do not serve as larger-than-life representatives of the general Egyptian cultural character. Rather, the pharaohs are primarily forces of stability. They serve their role as pharaoh so that individual Egyptians can follow their traditional *nomoi*; Egyptian kings allow the Egyptians to focus their energies elsewhere.

PART 2: Scythia and Sparta

Case Study: Scythia

Herodotus devotes a large portion of Book Four to a description of the Scythians. He tells of the country and the many different tribes of Scythia.⁵² He offers many digressions and explanations of even stranger people throughout his ethnography of Scythia.⁵³ I will focus upon the nomadic Scythians,⁵⁴ who are represented by those who live in the “kingdom” and who regard all other Scythians as slaves (4.20.1). My analysis will be heavily influenced by Hartog’s detailed discussion of the Scythians in *The Mirror of Herodotus*.⁵⁵ His argument focuses upon the structuralist binary opposition of Greek and Other as it plays out in the *Histories*. My study, as already stated, is an attempt to move away from that binary opposition. Hartog’s in-depth analysis of Scythian culture, however, is still extremely helpful, even if his goal is different from my own. I will first discuss several important elements of Scythian culture, including their nomadism, their cultural youth and simplicity, their non-verbal communication style, their religious practices, and their culture of warfare. I will then analyze the political apparatus of the Scythians. The Scythians have a society in which the kings closely represent the culture. The kings are, in essence, symbolic of the Scythian people and represent Scythian culture to both their own people and outsiders.

The Scythians’ nomadic nature is the element made most apparent throughout Herodotus’ ethnography. It serves as an explanation of several rather strange Scythian

⁵² Among them, the Callipidae, Alizones, Nerrians, and Borysthenites (4.17-18).

⁵³ Such as the Arimaspians and Hyperboreans (4.13), as well as the Sauromatae, Budinians, Thyssagaetae, and Iyrcae (4.21-22). Many of these tribes have been discussed in Chapter 2.

⁵⁴ There are, apparently, Scythians who farm, 4.17-18.

⁵⁵ Hartog (1988).

customs such as the blinding of slaves (τούτων μὲν εἵνεκα ἅπαντα τὸν ἄν
λάβωσι οἱ Σκύθαι ἐκτυφλοῦσι· οὐ γὰρ ἄρόται εἰσὶ ἀλλὰ νομάδες, 4.2.2). Their
customs surrounding burial, living situations, and warfare, which will be discussed below,
also derive from or emphasize their nomadic nature.

The Scythians claim to be the newest people in the world (ὥς δὲ Σκύθαι
λέγουσι, νεώτατον ἅπαντων ἔθνέων εἶναι το σφέτερον, 4.5.1). As the Egyptians
emphasize their age and culture, so the Scythians delight in their roughness. Both the
Egyptians and the Scythians are resistant to others' customs (4.76.1); this resistance serves to
preserve their cultural identities. Herodotus strengthens the idea that they are resistant to
others through the stories of Anacharsis and Scyles,⁵⁶ both of whom adopt foreign customs
and are punished for their defection.

The Scythians, like the Persians (1.138.1), honor the truth. This aspect is represented
in the story of the king's reaction to illness. If a king gets sick, they assume it is because
someone has sworn falsely by his hearth and use divination to seek out who has told the lie
(4.68.2). If the diviners do not identify the liars, they are killed as liars themselves, since they
pretended to know what they did not. The Scythian love of truth is unlike the Persian,
however, in that the Scythians focus on the *nature* of the situation rather than the words. For
example, the Scythians believe that when they follow their appointed roles, things fall into
place. For example, when the Scythian men go on an unusually long marauding trip (twenty-
eight years), their slaves take over and father children (4.1-3). When they return, they
initially fight their slaves in battle. After an indecisive day, they reason that if they treat their
slaves *as slaves*, the slaves will give in. The next day, they approach their slaves with whips.

⁵⁶ Anacharsis: 4.46, 76-77; Scyles: 4.47, 78-80.

This action results in the slaves' capitulation and the return to normal life for the Scythians. Their focus on the nature of the situation results in their thinking on a non-verbal or symbolic level.

Two examples highlight the Scythians' tendency towards symbolic communications within their society. Whenever anyone wants to make an oath, the parties involved mix their blood with wine, dip in sacred implements, perform extensive prayers, and then each party drinks from the cup (4.70). The reliance on more than an exchange of words brings out their need for more depth in their oaths. The second example comes from when a Scythian king carries out a population census of his people (4.81). The king Ariantas has each of his people bring an arrowhead, and then has all the arrowheads made into a giant bowl. Herodotus tells us that the bowl could hold over six hundred amphorae, and is six fingers thick. No population numbers are actually given; rather, the size of the Scythian population is symbolized by the size of the bowl.

In their interactions with outsiders, the Scythians also employ non-verbal or symbolic communication. In Book One, some Scythians made their way to the court of the Median Cyaxares. They hunt for him and train some boys in archery and hunting. One day, Cyaxares rebukes them after they have had a bad hunt. The Scythians are insulted and, rather than voicing this to Cyaxares, they kill one of the boys in their care and feed him to Cyaxares and his guests. They then flee (1.73.5).⁵⁷ The Scythians do not wait around to explain what they did; their actions speak for themselves.

When Darius demands earth and water from the Scythians, they send him "gifts" in response and tell him to figure out what the bird, mouse, frog, and five arrows mean

⁵⁷ A comparable story of is that of Astyages feeding Harpagus his own son. But Astyages intends to communicate the import of his actions to Harpagus, rather than letting them speak for themselves (1.118-119).

(4.131.1). Darius interprets them as earth and water, but another Persian, Gobryas, rightly interprets them as a threat meaning “if you do not become birds and fly into the sky, or mice and burrow into the ground, or frogs and jump into the lakes, you will never return home but rather be shot by these arrows” (4.132.3). The use of the symbols gets across the Scythian message more forcefully, because they stand in the stead of the requested symbolic earth and water. By sending back a non-verbal threat in place of the non-verbal symbols of earth and water, their message of rejection is stronger.⁵⁸ They send a second message to Darius when, immediately before engaging in battle, the Scythians break ranks to chase a hare. This action communicates to the Persians the Scythians’ lack of concern for the impending battle and thus implies their victory; Darius reads it as a confirmation of Gobryas’ interpretation of the previous gifts (4.134.2). This story reiterates the simplicity of the Scythian culture and the freedom they gain from choosing that outlook. I believe that, in addition to their nomadic nature, their symbolic communication style is central to understanding Scythia’s non-literate society.

The religious practices of the Scythians accentuate both their nomadic culture and their custom of warfare. The Scythians honor Hestia over all other gods. After her, they worship Zeus and Earth, Apollo, Aphrodite, Heracles, and Ares. The royal Scythians also worship Poseidon (4.59.1). Hartog argues that, for a nomadic culture, it is fitting that they would honor the goddess of the hearth because they intellectually honor what is the most transient aspect of their culture.⁵⁹ The Scythians do not build statues, altars or temples to

⁵⁸ West (1988, 211) argues that this form of communication is “deeply rooted in the conventions of illiterate and preliterate societies.” Benardete (1979, 127) asserts that this indicates the Scythians’ inability to comprehend multiple meanings. Although the Scythians are simple, in my view this is a preference for truer discourse rather than an inability to comprehend many levels of thought.

⁵⁹ Hartog (1988, 119-125).

their gods. This absence conforms to their nomadic culture. But Herodotus complicates the interpretation by admitting that they do build such things for Ares on a regular basis. They also offer Ares human sacrifice (4.62).

The relationship with Ares correlates to the Scythians' custom of warfare and plundering, for the Scythians have a strong custom of warfare and the honor gained by it. After they have killed enemies, they scalp them, wear their skins, and save the skulls as a badge of their honor. As Herodotus tells us, "this they call courage"(ταύτην ἀνδραγαθίην λέγοντες, 4.65.2). Herodotus allows the Scythians a redefinition of terms that is comparable to the Egyptian redefinition of barbarians. This highlights Herodotus' understanding that abstract terms and concepts may be defined subjectively.⁶⁰ If honor requires bloodshed, then the god of war requires blood.⁶¹

The internal political organization of the Scythians is not explained. Despite their nomadism, they do seem to have some form of government. Herodotus tells us that provincial governors in Scythia honor the Scythians who have killed men in battle that year (4.66). Thus, the Scythians have some form of political organization that sanctions their custom of killing in warfare. Their worship of Ares is regionally defined (4.62.1), for temples are built in specific districts. The political offices and division into provinces develop from cultural values and are thus significant as affirmations of Scythia's cultural characteristics.

Primarily, however, the role of government and the king becomes clear in the course of international engagement. In the *Histories*, this occurs when the Persians invade. Prior to

⁶⁰ This is similar to Herodotus' example of the Egyptians' position that they write correctly (right to left) and that everyone else writes backward (left to right).

⁶¹ Hartog (1989, 191) argues: "such is this sacrifice, altogether in conformity with the image of the Scythians as beings made for war."

this, the Scythians had a long marauding trip in which they made it as far as Egypt – they did not, however, establish any system for maintaining dominance after they left, which reveals that the Scythians viewed the trip as marauding rather than as conquest. For this reason, Darius marches on Scythia for payback (4.1.1). For the most part, the Scythians stay within their country in the *Histories* – although Herodotus tells us that they trade with societies to the north (4.24). Their tendency to remain within their boundaries, their isolationism, has a direct relationship to their resistance to others’ customs, for it allows them to preserve their identity.

The interaction of the Scythians and Amazons, which results in the Sauromatae tribe, provides a potential counter-example to Scythian isolationism. Amazons, who had been captured by Greeks, were shipwrecked among the Scythians. The Scythians, thinking that they were men, fought them. When they realized that the Amazons were women, they decided to try to incorporate them into their society. After the young Scythian men had “tamed” the Amazons through non-verbal wooing (another reaffirmation of their tendency for non-verbal communication), they formed a separate tribe. The Amazons could not act like Scythian women. The Scythians welcome the Amazons because they embody their own cultural values or are even harder than the Scythians are. The new society was formed for the Amazons’ sake rather than because the Scythians were unwilling to take in the Amazons (4.110 – 117). The Scythians value the Amazons for their prowess in warfare and pillaging, a significant *nomos* of the Scythians, and this valuation overrides their desire for cultural isolation. The story affirms the Scythian traits of isolationism and nomadism, and provides an insight into the underlying logic of their isolationism. The Scythians practice isolationism to remain hard; the Amazons are even harder than the Scythians, so the Scythians are willing

to incorporate them into their society.

The Scythians are, for the most part, an isolated warrior society. As such, Herodotus praises the Scythians for having found out the best practice in the world. It is impossible to catch the Scythians or escape from their country (4.46.2). When Darius invades, the Scythians put Herodotus' description into practice: they follow a tactic of constantly retreating and leading the Persians on (4.120, 122).⁶² Their nomadic way of life, which allows them to move around with little risk of being overcome and enslaved, motivates this tactic. The Scythian king Idanthyrsus explains in his response to Darius' message that the Scythians should stop wandering around and instead submit to him (4.126): "What I am doing now is not far removed from what I have been accustomed to do in peacetime. I am not going to fight you, and I will explain this. We do not have towns or farmlands that if we should fear would be taken or conquered, we might engage you in battle quite quickly" (4.127.1-2).

This episode may also provide some insight into the Scythians' attitude towards freedom. Darius demands earth and water as an acknowledgement of him as master (δεσπότη), the Scythian king associates slavery with lack of freedom and shows how the Scythians' cultural trait of nomadism is both an assertion of their freedom and an act of resistance to enslavement. Herodotus sums up the reply by saying "on hearing the name of slavery, the Scythian kings were filled with anger" (οἱ δὲ Σκυθέων βασιλῆες ἀκούσαντες τῆς δουλοσύνης τὸ οὖνομα οῤῥγης ἐπλήθησαν, 4.128.1). They experience a strong emotional reaction to the threat of slavery and this shows how important freedom is to them. In another episode, the Scythians suggest that if the Ionians dismantle the

⁶² Hartog (1988, 202-204) points out that it is Herodotus' genius to interpret Scythian nomadism as strategy. It is the only way that makes his portrait of Scythia make sense.

bridge they are guarding for Darius, they can be free (ἐλεύθεροι, 4.136.4). When the Ionians fall through and continue to help Darius, the Scythians look down on them as the worst free people (ἐλευθέρους), but the best slaves (δούλων) (4.142).⁶³ The Scythians have a strong concept of national freedom or autonomy, which they oppose to slavery, and which they assert through their nomadic practices. The Scythian kings are often the figure through whom this freedom is asserted, and I will now turn to an examination of that institution.

As Herodotus relates, when the Scythian kingship was instituted, four golden implements dropped from the sky: a plough, a yoke, a *sagaris* or battleaxe, and a cup (4.5.3). Three brothers, the sons of the first Scythian, approached the implements. The two older brothers are not able to touch them, but the youngest can. He inherits the job of protecting these implements (4.5.4). The implements, as symbols of civilization, also symbolize the kingship.⁶⁴ The story suggests that the kingship came into being at the same time as the Scythian civilization.

These kings lead in battles and participate in councils of war with other tribes (4.118-119). The Scythian kings have extensive funeral rituals in which the body is carried around to all of the people before being taken and buried in some area of Scythia. The kings are then supplied with human sacrifices and horses that guard his burial mound (4.71-72).

⁶³ Hartog (1988, 40) argues that the role of the Scythians as “freedom fighters” happens by necessity so that they may be analogs for the Athenians. Yet, in his analysis, “liberty does not appear to be a particularly important feature; in fact, the Scythian king is himself a perfect *despotes*”. Yet, as Hartog often insists, the mirror goes two ways and the Scythian role as “freedom fighters” reflects Athenian action *and* Scythian culture. In my evaluation, Herodotus’ emphasis upon freedom in the Scythian *logos* needs to be taken into account, especially in light of Hartog’s later comment that the true nature of the Scythian king is difficult to pin down, as he is also a nomad.

⁶⁴ Hartog (1988, 19-22) points out the difficulties of this, because the symbols seem to be particularly *un-*nomadic. He argues, and Kurke (1999, 61-62) reasserts his argument, that Herodotus uses here the language of monarchy in general even when confronted with nomads. The golden nature of the implements signals this, as well as, as Kurke argues, the nobility of the kingship (compared to the counterfeit Polycrates or Croesus).

Immediately after describing the royal funeral preparations, Herodotus describes the burial practice of regular Scythians. Their bodies are carried around to friends and fed as if they were alive (4.73.1). The proximity invites comparison: the king receives what his people receive on a larger scale. Also, as I discussed above, according to the Scythians, falsely swearing on the king's hearth makes him ill (4.68.2). His hearth and body are tied up in the health of the state, which is dependent on the actions of his people; they must keep to their custom of speaking truthfully. The Scythian king, like the Spartan kings, is a representative of the Scythian culture writ large.

The Scythians have a loosely organized society defined by certain significant elements of their culture. They have a monarchy, which came into being at the same time as the society, but Herodotus offers little description of how their king governs except in times of outside pressure. The king's role in leading the military reflects his position as first in cultural expression. As discussed above, he represents the Scythians' essential nomadism to others through his speech and military policy, especially when he claims that the Scythians will not fight unless the Persians threaten their burial grounds (4.128.2). This assertion affirms the importance of the royal funerals, to which Herodotus devotes a lot of text. The burial grounds are analogous to the king's hearth discussed above. Both are symbols that are fixed in place, which runs contrary to the nomadic lifestyle. That the Scythians are willing to break from their customary habits for their kings reveals their central importance.

Herodotus presents the kings as having a significant place at the center of Scythian society, but does not suggest that his people mark his power with taxes or tribute. Thus, the Scythian kingship is not so much an institution separate from the people or that rules the people, but rather is a symbol for the people. The king functions to symbolize Scythian

culture, to reinforce it to his citizens, and to assert it to foreigners, as when he speaks for his people and leads them in war. However, the Scythians do not really participate in international politics unless they must and then only until the situation is resolved in their favor. Scythian society is the quintessential hard culture of the *Histories*. They have very little organization and their political structure, both regionally and constitutionally, correlates strongly with their cultural values. The Scythians' strong protectiveness of their culture generates the need for a king who preserves and represents their society.

Case Study: Sparta

The Sparta presented in the *Histories* is a strong society, dominated by its kings and heavily steeped in tradition. The Spartans' history is often linked to the mythological past. Their kingship has mythological roots through Herakles. Also, as Herodotus tells it, their society is changed into a highly regulated, military society through the reforms of the semi-mythical Lycurgus.⁶⁵ In addition to the story of Lycurgus, Herodotus records a tale about the recovery of the bones of Orestes; after their recovery, Sparta becomes a successful military power (1.67-68). This story reveals that the Spartans are willing and eager to relate their history to the mythological past. They accomplish this, in part, by suppressing elements of their history in order to create a stronger focus upon tradition. Herodotus presents Spartan history in this way, though he does give hints that he is aware of the non-mythologizing tradition. For example, aside from the mention of the council and *syssitia* in the digression of Book One, Herodotus focuses his presentation of Spartan government on the kings, who partake in the heroic, traditional character of Spartan society.

I will discuss the kings after I have explored the general characteristics of Spartan

⁶⁵ Van Wees (1999, 1) argues that the Spartans were well aware that Lycurgus, if he existed, did not create a lasting state of *eunomia* in Sparta.

society. The cultural institutions and political structures of Spartan society are neatly enmeshed: the Spartans' cultural attributes become codified law, and their written law is internalized into their culture. Their monarch represents but is also subject to their *nomoi*. They construe their freedom, which is tied to both their political and cultural autonomy, as the subjection of every citizen, regardless of status, to their *nomoi*.

The Sparta of the *Histories*, as well as the historical one, is a difficult subject to grasp. As J. Hall has pointed out, Sparta is at times the most Greek of all the Greek city-states, yet also the most alien.⁶⁶ The Spartans choose to separate themselves from other Greeks. This is perhaps best exemplified by the inscription at Thermopylae: "Stranger, tell the people of Lacedaemon / That we who lie here obeyed their commands" (ὦ ξεῖν', ἀγγέλλειν Λακεδαιμονίοις ὅτι τῆδε | κείμεθα τοῖς κείνων ῥήμασι πειθόμενοι, 7.228.2). The addressee is "stranger," implying that others, even fellow Greek speakers, are separate from Sparta. Herodotus seems to recognize their alien nature; he provides an ethnography of Spartan kingship in which he ties in their customs with those of Persia, Egypt, and Lydia.⁶⁷ The necessity for ethnography indicates how strange the Spartans must have seemed to their fellow Greeks. Herodotus provides a great deal of information about Spartan culture and politics, a very important facet of which is the idea of Sparta having *despotes nomos* (7.104).

In his conversation with Xerxes before the battle of Thermopylae, Demaratus claims that in Sparta the law is master (*despotes nomos*). The law commands them always to fight or die (7.104.4-5). Although Demaratus' comments are focused on military customs, I will argue that strict adherence to cultural precepts and traditions is an important aspect of

⁶⁶ J. Hall (2001, 32). Pelling (1999) also asserts the outsider nature of the Spartans within Greece.

⁶⁷ See 6.53-60.

Spartan civic life.⁶⁸

I will begin by discussing the cultural characteristics of the Spartans. The Spartans, as mentioned above, maintain a high level of military prowess. This ability is enabled in part by the military organization of their society (the sworn companies, the divisions of thirty, and the communal messes) which Lycurgus institutes (1.65.5). The military organization supersedes ties of family or clan and strengthens their devotion to military excellence and the state.⁶⁹

The Spartans are also very religious. Evidence of this quality may be found in their willingness to delay their own involvement in military actions because of religious festivals. They put the requirements of religion before the military needs of Greece when they delay sending out a full army before the battle of Thermopylae because of the Carnean festival (7.206.1).⁷⁰ Most of the evidence for the Spartans' religious scruples may be found in their political organization; thus, I will discuss it further below.

Spartan society is also organized around a hierarchy of age. In his ethnography of Egypt, Herodotus compares Egyptian custom to the Spartan custom of younger people

⁶⁸ Forsdyke (2001, 348) argues that Demaratus' comments are intended to represent the Athenians' ideology that political freedom leads to military strength. She goes on to argue that "Spartan military courage does not depend on political freedom, as Athenian military strength does in Athenian democratic ideology. Spartan courage depends on law/custom (*nomos*) and is socially enforced through shame. Fear of social humiliation motivates Spartan courage, as can be seen by the examples of those Spartans who avoided death at Thermopylae." Although military excellence may not be an outcome of political freedom, it is a defining element in Sparta's political apparatus; Sparta does have freedom, however, for the monarchs are also bound by law.

⁶⁹ See Cartledge (2001, 14) "A further differentiating requirement imposed on Spartiates was daily attendance at the evening meal eaten communally in the messes. This, like the *agoge*, was designed primarily to inculcate group solidarity, to the detriment of familial or any other kind of individualizing ties and values." Or H. W. Singor (1999, 73) "As a 'substitute family' the *syssition* finds its place naturally in the even larger 'family' of the *phyle*. In both cases it was society or the state that authorized and enforced these bonds, and in the case of the *syssitia* by deliberately cutting across the real ties of kinship."

⁷⁰ Superstition also delays the Spartans coming to Athens' aid at Marathon (6.106.3).

deferring to elders by standing up when they approach or yielding the road to them (2.80.1). The respect for age ties into respect for military accomplishment. The Spartans go to battle expecting to die so the city sends out special companies, like the one that followed Leonidas, of picked men who already have sons (7.205.2). Thus, most of the older Spartiates must have had considerable experience and get respect because of both their age and military ability.

The Spartans are also known for practicing silence.⁷¹ When the Samians seek aid from Sparta, the Spartans insist that they speak as sparingly as possible (3.46.1). Silence is also used as a method of control or condemnation. For example, the survivor of Thermopylae, Aristodamus, was disgraced by the Spartans. “No Spartiate would give him a light for his fire or talk to him” (οὔτε οἱ πῦρ οὐδεὶς ἔναυε Σπαρτιητέων οὔτε διελέγετο, 7.231). Silence is on par with denying shelter in the Spartan mode of punishment.⁷²

It seems likely that Sparta’s internal political affairs closely reflect Spartan custom. The Spartans have a monarchy, which they claim they have had since mythical times.⁷³ The hereditary monarchy follows from the custom that the Spartans, like the Egyptians, pass their trades from father to son (6.60.1). The monarchy, however, soon became a dual monarchy, when one king had twins and died without naming a successor. The Spartans consulted the Pythia and were told to make both twins kings, but honor the elder house more (6.52.5). The deference to Delphi in this matter reveals yet again Spartan religious scruples. The honoring of the elder ties into the Spartan deference towards old age.

⁷¹ The Spartans, like the Scythians, practice a special mode of communication. This helps them maintain their cultural identity and isolation.

⁷² David (1999, 127) argues that the Spartan “*kosmos*” of silence allows for authoritarian control by the state at all levels of Spartan society while providing the illusion of equality.

⁷³ The Spartans provide one version of their ancestral kingship: that they are descended from Heracles (6.52.1). Other Greeks claim the Dorians can trace their kings as far back as Perseus (6.53.1) and that they are originally Egyptian. A Persian story, which makes Perseus Assyrian, also traces Spartan roots back to Egypt.

Herodotus provides a long explanation of the kings' powers and privileges in Book Six of the *Histories*. The kings have two hereditary priesthoods (6.56.1). They also have the right to appoint *Pythioi* (emissaries to Delphi), and to look after any oracles received (6.57.1-3). Both the priesthood and the special emissaries reflect that the Spartans expect their leaders to act as an intercessor for them in divine affairs. The state needs a representative to the divine realm.

The kings also have a wide range of military powers. The kings' representation of Sparta in divine matters is comparable to their representation of the whole Spartan state on the battlefield. The kings have a right to wage war on whomever they choose and cannot be blocked in their desire to do so. They must be the first out to battle and the last back (6.56.1). If a king dies in war and only then, the Spartans make a statue of him and carry it around for the funeral (6.58.1). The extra privilege of a statue granted to a king who dies in war shows that Sparta honors its kings especially for their military role. The Spartan citizen must fight or die; the king is the most extreme representation of that *ethos*.⁷⁴

When any king dies, there is extensive mourning, which Herodotus compares explicitly to Asian practices (νόμος δὲ τοῖσι Λακεδαιμονίοισι κατὰ τῶν βασιλέων τοὺς θανάτους ἐστὶ ὡυτὸς καὶ τοῖσι βαρβάροισι τοῖσι ἐν τῇ Ἀσίῃ, 6.58.2). The people are required to participate and two members of each family must mutilate themselves. The Spartans must say that the late king was the best king there ever was (6.58.3). The comparison with Asian practices and the excessive mourning and praise of the dead king hint that the kings are a slightly “other” presence in Sparta, along with the rest of Greece. Their funerals function as rituals of excess for a tightly controlled and organized

⁷⁴ Leonidas may be the best example here.

society. The funerary practices also indicate that the kings are powerful representatives of a society who may need to be controlled.⁷⁵ Herodotus' Spartans maintain old customs and rituals; they modernize slowly and remain bound to old ideas.

Two elements control the power of the kings: the dual kingship, which keeps the power of one king from getting too great, and the ephors and council of elders. These groups were established by Lycurgus at the time of his great reforms (1.65.5). Their role in Spartan politics, however, is less visible than the role of the kings in the *Histories*. Herodotus tells us that the kings have a place on the council of elders, but not an overriding vote (6.57.5). The council of elders carries some weight because it is constituted by older Spartan citizens. The Spartan respect for old age lends authority to the council. The kings, regardless of their age, may attain some of that authority by being members of the council. Primarily, however, the *Histories* present the council and ephors controlling or moderating the kings' affairs. They force Anaxandridas to marry two women in order to produce an heir (5.40) and bear some responsibility for deposing Demaratus (6.65ff).⁷⁶ Thus, the kings represent the customs of Sparta writ large. The ephors and council of elders, in their element of controlling the kings, represent the concept of *despotes nomos*.

The Spartan kings are allowed diplomatic representatives and the right to wage war.

⁷⁵ Hartog (1989, 155) argues, concerning the Spartan kings' funerals, that "In any case – and this constitutes yet another difference from the funeral speech – what is celebrated is the king or, rather, the institution of royalty, that is, of hereditary monarchy, not the city as such." I will argue that the kings are like mythical heroes. They are larger than life and flawed, but the recognition of them implies an inherent identification with the kings on a cultural level rather than the level of the state. The special burial practices suggest a similarity with the Scythians, whose royal funerals serve to define the society.

⁷⁶ The council and ephors are not the only figures controlling the king. When Cleomenes goes insane, his relatives are responsible for putting him the stocks (6.75.2). This offers further proof that the kings follow different rules than the rest of the Spartans, for the Spartan system of *syssitia* is designed to lower the importance of family ties (Singor, 1999, 73).

These rights put them at the center of Spartan foreign policy.⁷⁷ Both Cleomenes and Pausanias engage in military actions without consulting the council or ephors.⁷⁸ This role of the kings eclipses other institutions of Sparta that enable people to act as international representatives, such as the institution of the “benefactors,” Spartans who have aged out of the rank of knights, who spend a year traveling on missions for the Spartans (1.67.5).

The kings are the primary representatives in foreign affairs. The Spartans begin their forceful interaction with outsiders after the reforms of Lycurgus, which put Sparta into a state of *eunomia*. At this time, Sparta grows and flourishes, and “stops being content with peace” (καὶ δὴ σφι οὐκέτι ἀπέχρα ἡσυχίην ἄγειν, 1.66.1). Sparta’s new organization and prosperity cause it to look outward. Herodotus tells of Sparta’s war with Tegea, and a few later military encounters, and then skips ahead to Sparta at the time of the *Histories*’ main action. By this time, Spartan military primacy is acknowledged by the Greeks and Croesus, among others.⁷⁹

Sparta attained its military recognition by fighting (and winning) battles. Its military success abroad reaffirms its custom of heavy militarization at home. At the time of the main actions of the *Histories*, Sparta’s foreign policy is governed in large part by the recognition afforded to it. The acknowledgement of their military dominance may be seen in the fact that

⁷⁷ It is the kings who are appealed to or who go on embassies (Leotychidas to Athens 6.85-86), Cleomenes by Hippias and Anaxagoras.

⁷⁸ At least, Herodotus does not show them in the act of consultation. Although Pausanias is not technically a king but rather the regent in place of Leonidas’ son, he acts with the full power of a king.

⁷⁹ The Spartans actively respond to this recognition. They are especially inclined to accept Croesus’ request for an alliance because of his evaluation of them as the military leaders of Greece (1.70). This desire for recognition works against them when they approach their allies with the plan to invade Athens and re-establish the tyranny. Yet part of the recognition of their military prowess stems from the idea that the Spartans are the bastions of freedom. The Corinthians remind them of this and convince them to forgo their invasion (5.92).

they are the assumed leaders of the Greek resistance to Persia.⁸⁰ Also, when the Athenians win at Marathon, the Spartans view the dead and congratulate the Athenians (6.120). This move on their part shows their eagerness to participate in great battles,⁸¹ but also an assertion of the role they have in judging the great battles of others.

The Spartan military *ethos* is also what causes Demaratus (a former Spartan king) to tell Xerxes that the Spartans will not allow Greece to fall into slavery, that they will resist when everyone else gives in, and that if they have a thousand men, then a thousand men will fight (7.102.3). This statement comes before his description of Sparta's *despotes nomos*; it describes Sparta as a whole and shows that its group mentality perfectly reflects the mentality of the individual citizen. Sparta's military meritocracy within is reflected by their desire to be on top of a military meritocracy without. The Spartans feel this position is being threatened by the Athenians and plan to march on them, but are stopped by their more mindful allies (5.91-94). Socles the Corinthian suggests that the Spartans should stick to their position and not try to establish tyrannies, an admonition the Spartans respond to at that time. This position, granted to them as a kind of control and justification of their military prominence, dictates how Sparta uses its military power.⁸² For example, the Spartans send their troops to Thermopylae in an effort to inspire others to fight as well (7.206.1). They understand the

⁸⁰ Tronson (1991) argues the extreme position that the resistance was Spartan motivated and that Herodotus' heightening of Athenian involvement is part of his project of Panhellenism.

⁸¹ Some argue that this is evidence of Spartan reluctance to engage in the battle, as is their delay before Plataea. Even if this is so, it does not negate their position of primary judges of military excellence in Greece.

⁸² Raaflaub (1994, 169) makes the argument: "At least from the late 6th century on, Sparta was widely recognized (and sanctioned by divine authority at Delphi) as the 'head' or 'patron' (prostata) of the Greeks. Its claim to holding this prostasia rested largely on its reputation, however authentic, of having always stood at the forefront of the struggle against tyranny, but the obligation inherent in it reached farther: to protect any Greek community threatened by injustice. This is why the Ionians appealed to Sparta when they were threatened by Cyrus after the defeat of Croesus, why Aristagoras of Miletus turned first to Sparta for assistance in the planned revolt of the Ionians against Persia, and why hegemony in the Hellenic League against the Persians in 481 naturally fell to Sparta."

effect their marching to war will have.

The Spartans are often asked to intervene on the basis of their being liberators or champions of Greece.⁸³ They also seek out or respond to religious reasons for intervention, which the efficacy of bribing the Pythia to tell the Spartans to liberate Athens reveals (and the Spartans' subsequent anger when they discover this, 5.63.1-3). The Spartans also send recompense for the Persian heralds they kill (7.134). Whether or not this is a pretext or the truth is up in the air.

Sparta controls its society within by its strict military organization and silence. Its military dominance is an important aspect to Spartan foreign relations. Yet Sparta also uses silence to control the discourse around it, so that people appealing to Sparta must speak in a Spartan way. I have already mentioned the Samians. Later examples include the non-communicativeness of Pausanias before the battle of Plataea (9.49.1) and Cleomenes' silence towards Aristagoras when he comes to ask for aid in the Ionian revolt (5.51).

Sparta, like other hard societies in the *Histories*, is presented as having a political infrastructure that is very closely tied to its cultural characteristics. The Spartans have also instituted elements that control this relationship and keep their kings bound to the rule of law. As one of the dominant powers in Greece, it stands to reason that Spartan, rather than Hellenic, characteristics led to their dominance. The Spartans enjoy a freedom that is very unlike Athenian freedom, for it is generated by a strong sense of civic unity under the law, which binds even their kings.

⁸³ Aristagoras uses this argument in trying to convince Cleomenes to lead Spartans to the aid of the Ionians in their revolt (5.49-51).

PART 3: Persia and Athens

As I mentioned above, my last case studies are Persia and Athens. Both of these societies are very dynamic in the *Histories* and both practice aggressive policies. They differ in their mechanisms, however. Persia operates under the impetus of one very powerful individual. Athens enjoys the benefits of many active and, at times, aggressive individuals.

Case Study: Persia

Herodotus provides a long ethnography of the Persians in Book One of the *Histories*.⁸⁴ Much of the rest of the *Histories* is motivated by the actions of the Persian king and his court. Thus, Persia provides ample evidence to examine the influence of cultural characteristics on politics at home and, significantly in Persia's case, abroad. The Persians, like the Lydians, have a monarchy that must remain autonomous. Like the Egyptians, their king provides stability, although in a different manner, for the Persian king centers the society and is both the originator and enforcer of *nomos*. The king is bound to the laws, but can also define them.

In his depiction of the Persians, Herodotus gives Persia and its people a voice.⁸⁵ At the very beginning of the *Histories*, Herodotus focalizes his historicization of myth through the Persians (1.2–5). The Persian stories' focus on human rather than divine causes sets up the Persians as highly pragmatic: they do not look for symbolism, but rather force, numbers,

⁸⁴ A concern with the Persian ethnography is that it is set in a specific time, namely, during the reign of Cyrus before the Persians become soft. In my view, Herodotus holds the Persians to the standards of this time (indicated by the concluding section (9.122). Cambyses, Darius, and Xerxes all refer back to Cyrus' reign as a model for their own behavior and actions, and the ethnography presented at this time may be a standard for the Persians as it is for Herodotus.

⁸⁵ It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to investigate Herodotus' sources for this account. Herodotus interacted with Persian aristocrats, and his ethnography is focalized through them. There is one example in which the Persian aristocracy are representatives of the Persian people as a whole. As discussed in Chapter 1, when the conspirators go to assassinate the usurping Magus, the Persian people proceed to kill all Magi (the Magophonia) (3.79.2-3).

and fact.

In his extended ethnography of the Persians (1.131-140), Herodotus tells us that they do not build temples or anthropomorphize their gods. They think people are foolish to do so (1.131.1). The Persians' attitude about their practice reinforces its importance as a cultural tendency. It reveals the Persians as discriminating when it comes to religious practice. This tendency may tie in to a stronger cultural characteristic: the Persians dislike lies. The symbolic representation of a deity may be interpreted as a kind of misdirection or lie. The Persians do not lie and also dislike debt, mainly because, as Herodotus explains, they think that someone in debt is likely to lie (1.138.1). This dislike is mirrored in Cyrus' negative comment about the Greeks: he distrusts anyone with a marketplace at which they gather together to lie to one another (1.153.1).

Persian education is focused upon three elements: horsemanship, archery, and honesty (παιδεύουσι δὲ τοὺς παῖδας ἀπὸ πενταέτεος ἀρξάμενοι μέχρι εἰκοσαέτεος τρία μῶνα, ἵππεύειν καὶ τοξεύειν καὶ ἀληθίζεσθαι, 1.136.2). I have already mentioned their honesty, the other two elements reveal another Persian cultural trait – they value warfare and martial ability.⁸⁶ For them, ability is a reflection of bravery (1.136.1). Croesus describes the Persians as naturally aggressive when he advises Cyrus on what to do after the fall of Sardis (1.89.2). The Persians themselves reveal this value in their culture through their honoring of the Aeginetan Pytheas. Pytheas fights bravely as he is hacked to pieces. The Persians are so impressed with him that they bind his wounds and carry him around to show everyone such a brave man (7.181.3). The veneration of Pytheas is an action of the Persian people; the king mirrors the respect for military bravery. For example, on the

⁸⁶ This trait is supported by the Persian kings' tendency to reward their commanders with a great deal of independence and money; e.g. Zopyrus, (3.160).

individual level, Darius rewards Zopyrus for his taking of Babylon; on the broader level of society, Xerxes cites the tradition of warfare amongst the Persians in order to justify his decision to invade Europe (7.8a.1).

Herodotus also describes the Persian practice of deference to rank (1.134). When Persians meet each other in the street, the difference in their rank determines the manner of their greetings. The greater the difference, the more extreme the deference to the higher ranked individual. This practice is similar to the Spartan and Egyptian practice of deference to the old (2.80.1), but Herodotus makes no mention of age in his description of the Persian custom, only rank. This reveals a strong social hierarchy within the Persian community that is deeply ingrained in the habits of the people. Alongside the social hierarchy, the Persians honor birthdays and regard them as the most important day of the year for any given Persian (1.133.1). Unlike the Egyptians, who honor age and antiquity, or the Scythians who preserve their newness, the Persians raise the birthday to the most important time of the year. This is a cyclical event, and signals that the Persians value a center (the center of the yearly cycle is the birthday) more than they honor the extremes of antiquity or cultural youth.

The Persian sense of hierarchy exists within their society and in their evaluation of other societies. They mirror their internal attitude by honoring more the countries closer to them geographically, and in decreasing levels as one gets more distant from Persia. This sense of geographical and social hierarchy initially seems at odds with the Persian trait of adaptability. They adopt several customs from other societies (*ξεινικὰ δὲ νόμια Περσῶν προσίενται ἀνδρῶν μάλιστα*, 1.135). The Persians are willing to pull into the center anything beneficial they see on the outside. The Persians are so secure in their concept of the center, that they are comfortable bringing in new customs in order to perfect it.

Redfield comments that although the Persians are great collectors of *nomoi*, they are not as discriminating as the Greeks.⁸⁷ His reason is that they collect in the pursuit of pleasure. The Persians wear Median clothes because they are more attractive, they use Egyptian fighting gear because it is more effective, and they adopt the practice of pederasty from the Greeks. In my view, this indicates that the Persians, like the Greeks, collect *nomoi* for pleasure and for utility.

Debate and discussion figure in the Persian narrative. Herodotus tells a story about how Persians debate issues. If they debate it while drunk, they must debate it sober, and vice versa (1.133.3-4). This may simply be an amusing custom Herodotus wishes to preserve, or it is indicative that the Persians take debate seriously, and recognize that state of mind affects decision-making processes. That they question debates made in sound mind as well as those made while drunk shows their carefulness with this issue. It also shows that they value the validity of the debate over the outcome. Another example of debate is the Constitutional Debate in Book Three (3.80-82), discussed in detail in Chapter 1.⁸⁸ In the preparations for and during Xerxes' invasion of Greece, the Persian leaders debate strategy and oppose the king – with mixed results.⁸⁹

The Persian policy of discussion is also reflected in Mardonius' criticism of the Greek

⁸⁷ Redfield (1985, 117).

⁸⁸ Thompson (1996, 76) argues that in this debate “Darius appeals to the quintessential Persian creed that strength in government is generated by eliminating all possibilities of dissent.” I do not think that this is so. Rather, the Persians are interesting in strictly controlling dissent rather than quashing it completely, as their interest in debate shows.

⁸⁹ Xerxes' uncle Artabanus opposes Xerxes' plans for going to war and is threatened for it. However, Xerxes comes to agree with him; a similar situation arises when Artemisia opposes Xerxes, yet Xerxes rewards her rather than punishes her. These stories suggest that opposing a powerful individual is a delicate affair in Persia, but not a forbidden one. Pelling (2006) discusses the difficulty of speaking to power in both the Lydian and Persian courts.

method of fighting. He claims that they should not fight at all but rather practice diplomacy, since they all speak the same language (7.9b.2). His comment indicates that the Persians recognize the importance of discussion over warfare.⁹⁰

Debates reveal how individuals can speak to power and before power in Persian society. The problems of speaking to power do not arise in debate, but in situations of people asking favors of the king. There are several episodes in which a Persian or leader of a subject state asks for his children to be spared from going to war. The king instead kills the requested members of the family.⁹¹ This harsh attitude has at its base another Persian *nomos*, which is revealed through how the Persians are required to pray. They are not allowed to pray merely for themselves, but must also pray for the Persian king and the whole Persian race. Herodotus explains this by saying “since he [they one who prays] is, after all, a member of the Persian race” (ἐν γὰρ δὴ τοῖσι ἅπασι Πέρσησι καὶ αὐτὸς γίνεται, 1.132.2). The issue of prayer here reveals the custom of how an individual views himself in relation to his society. The prayer reveals a tripartite division: the individual, the people, and the king. The Persians very strongly identify themselves with their nation and the king as the head of that nation. In the episodes of individual punishment for making a request, the king is supporting the Persian *nomos* of holding king and country before individual needs and desires by punishing those who seek an exemption from that attitude.

The Persians have had a monarchy since they gained their independence from the Medes. The monarchy is soon enshrined as custom, as Darius makes clear in his argument for monarchy in the Constitutional Debate (3.82.5). The structure of having a monarch makes

⁹⁰ Mardonius’ comment also supports the idea that language can bond societies. The Persians do not understand the divided society of the Greeks.

⁹¹ Darius (4.84); Xerxes (7.39).

sense in the strictly hierarchical social structure of Persia. There are different levels of rank in the Persian society that individuals must act out. The king is the pinnacle of the hierarchy.⁹² One reflection of the king being at the center of this hierarchy is seen in Herodotus' description of the aftermath of Darius' ascent to the throne: "everything was filled with his power" (δυνάμιός τε πάντα οἱ ἐπιπλέατο, 3.88.3). Darius' power trickles down into all levels of society.

The Persian king, however powerful, has advisors, and debate plays a role in decision making for the King, although in the interests of maintaining his power he may not immediately reveal the effects such debates have on his decisions.⁹³ The best examples of a court debate occur before the invasion of Europe in Book 7, in which Artabanus disagrees with Xerxes' position (7.10). Although Xerxes at first is angry with Artabanus (7.11.1), he eventually comes to agree with him (though he is thwarted in his wise decision by a disturbing dream). Cyrus takes on Croesus as an advisor and listens to him after he comes to appreciate Croesus' perspective. He also charges Croesus with advising his son Cambyses (1.208). From the perspective of the needs of narrative, the wise advisors serve to heighten the tragic nature of the Persian kings.⁹⁴ The fact that Persian kings willingly have advisors, however, is significant. Their presence may aid in illuminating the kings' tyrannical natures,

⁹² Davie (1979, 162) reminds us that in Darius' representation of monarchy, "the monarch is viewed as man at his best, the highest representative of the community over which he presides, whose judgment, like his character, will be beyond reproach. This is evidently not conceived as a mere imaginative fiction, as the allusion to Cyrus' services makes clear; it was Cyrus who gave the Persians freedom and Cyrus had been a *monarchos*."

⁹³ E. Barker (forthcoming, 168) brings out the strangeness of Persian debate in the *Histories*: "It is a curious fact that the most formal debates in terms of context and structure occur not in Greece but in Persia: the importance of dissent is explored most vigorously in the context of speaking before power." In Barker's argument Herodotus uses the Persians to center his discussion of debate, I focus on the fact that Herodotus attributes debate to them at all.

⁹⁴ Redfield (1985, 114). Also Pelling (2006).

but they also highlight the fact that the king keeps advisors and at least listens to them. The advisors in Attic tragedy are often presented as unwelcome or become so,⁹⁵ but this is not necessarily true of Herodotus' Persian kings' advisors.

As a military society, like Sparta, the Persians need a commander of their troops to be effective on the battlefield. After Cyrus encourages the Persians to revolt against the Medes, Herodotus comments that “now that they found a leader, they enthusiastically went about gaining their freedom [or independence]” (Πέρσαι μὲν νῦν προστάτεω ἐπιλαβόμενοι ἄσμενοι ἐλευθεροῦντο, 1.127.1). The Persians need a king not only as the center of their hierarchy but as leader of their army. It is having a king that allows them to be an independent nation. The credit for independence is reasserted by Hystaspes (1.210.2) and Darius (3.82.5). What is important to the Persians and their king in regards to independence is that Persia stays autonomous rather than that individual Persians feel autonomous. The Theban fighters at Thermopylae are not given the choice to fight; the Spartans exert a similar power over them as Xerxes does over the unnamed Persian who laments his slavery at Orchomenus (9.16). The claims of narrative and the shifting focus on individuals heighten this Persian's personal feeling of tragedy, but his story should be taken as indicative of the Persians feeling unfree in general. The Persians are represented as part of the state in a key part of their identity as seen in their prayer (1.132.2 mentioned above). The king, as center of the Persian hierarchy and Persian state, has the job of ensuring that Persia stays at the center of the global hierarchy.⁹⁶ The flaw in this structure comes out most clearly during the battle

⁹⁵ See, for example, Teiresias' position in *Antigone* and *Oedipus Tyrannus* or Cadmus and Teiresias' role in the *Bacchae*.

⁹⁶ Thompson (1996, 138) rightly points out that Persian “subjects could do anything the King wished, too. This makes the Persians slavish from one point of view, capable of great works and deeds from another.” The position of the Persians as slaves or free is dependent upon how the king uses them, rather than their nature.

of Plataea. According to Herodotus, the Persians fight well until Mardonius – Xerxes’s proxy – is killed. After that, their army falls apart (9.63.2).

When we encounter Persia in action on the international level in the *Histories*, we see it at the center of an international empire. The empire provides a model of international relations that ties into the Persian custom of social hierarchy at home. Herodotus tells us that the Persians think that they are the best, and that the further you get away from Persia, the worse people get (1.134.2).⁹⁷ This concept is also reflected in the tribute system that Darius institutes. Herodotus claims, however wrongly, that every state was taxed except for Persia (3.97.1).⁹⁸ This shows a higher valuation of Persia than of the subject states (which is to be expected). Persia treats her subject states in very different ways, depending upon the state. This reflects the eclecticism and adaptability that the Persians demonstrate in their willingness to adapt foreign customs. Mardonius establishes democracies in the Ionian states after the revolt to make them easier to control, although Persia is usually associated with supporting tyrannies.⁹⁹ This episode, along with the Constitutional Debate, shows that the Persians are flexible in considering forms of government for themselves and for others. Also, Herodotus tells us, they usually follow the practice of reinstating the sons of conquered kings as the new leaders (3.15.2). This indicates that the Persians are willing to use whatever system works at the local level within their empire. Persian imperial philosophy is totalizing, but respects the unique societies that it incorporates. Their willingness to be adaptable in

⁹⁷ He extends his comment to add that this is a philosophy they got from the Medes, the imperial power in Asia before Persia conquered them.

⁹⁸ Herodotus is wrong, because, as Armayor (1978, 6) points out: “Darius repeatedly tells us, both at Behistun and Persepolis, that the Persians bore tribute like anyone else (DB 1.6f, DPe 2).”

⁹⁹ Cawkwell (1995).

regards to other societies reflects a cyclical view of history. The Persians are not asserting a better form of government, as the Athenians will do, but rather the best way to incorporate disparate elements of their Empire.¹⁰⁰

The trait of honesty also appears in Persia's foreign relationships. After Cyrus has defeated Lydia, the subject states of Lydia come to him seeking the same kind of relationship with Persia as with Lydia. Cyrus rebukes them by telling them a parable about a man who called out fish with his pipe. When the fish did not come, he caught them the next day. The fish begged to be spared, but the fisherman claimed that when they did not come when he called, they lost their right to negotiate (1.141.2). The subject country's desire to establish good relationships with Persia after assisting Lydia in resistance is a kind of deception. The Persians are not above using their requirement of honesty to enforce their power upon others.

The Persians' trait of warfare has a strong influence on their international relations. This trait is recognized by others¹⁰¹ and acted upon by the kings.¹⁰² The kings act aggressively to conquer and also to punish states that resist them and thereby bring Persian power into question. This is the motivation for Darius' invasion of Scythia (4.1.1) and his desire, which Xerxes inherits, to invade Attica¹⁰³ in recompense for Athens' role in the Ionian rebellion and sacking of Sardis. This reasoning may also govern the Persians' version of history presented at the beginning of the text, in which the Greek sack of Troy went

¹⁰⁰ The Persian Empire is culturally relativistic for the most part, but its guiding principles are different from the Greeks.

¹⁰¹ Croesus recognizes their aggression (1.46), the Oracle recognizes their empire (1.53), the Babylonian queen recognizes their desire to conquer and prepares for it (1.185), and Amasis worries about them (3.10).

¹⁰² As Lateiner (1989, 210) argues "Xerxes' invasion of Greece was the politically necessary result of the continuous growth of Persian power through wars, a growth which constituted for the Great King 'a tradition, an obligation, and hence a powerful impulse.' This was Herodotus' original historical insight."

¹⁰³ He gets a servant to remind him three times a day to remember the Athenians (5.105).

unanswered by the Persians. According to them, this unanswered act was the true beginning of the east – west conflict (1.4.4). Persia’s self-defined freedom is dependent upon their autonomy, expansion, and need to address challenges to their authority.¹⁰⁴

Persian aggression, motivated by their kings, is best explained, I think, by looking at two paradigmatic episodes together. In the first, Cyrus convinces the Persians to revolt by constructing an example for them (1.125-126). One day, the Persians are instructed to come with scythes and clear a large area in a single day. The following day, Cyrus prepares a huge feast for them. He then asks them which they liked better and they answer that they preferred the feast. He uses this example to urge them to be slaves no longer, to work the fields no longer, but rather be masters and enjoy giant meals.¹⁰⁵ Yet this lesson seems to go against another lesson in the history which Cyrus also gives. Cyrus tells his fellow Persians that it is better to live in a harsh land and rule than cultivate fertile lands and be slaves (9.122.4). This gnomic statement has generally been interpreted along the lines that it is better to be hard than soft. The enjoying of great meals does not imply softness in Cyrus’ first lesson, and does not need to be implied in the second. Rather, it is the cultivation of fields that will make the Persians soft. Domination and aggression allows the Persians to live the life they want, full of giant meals, without having to soften and cultivate the land. It keeps their military wits sharp and maintains their ability to rule.¹⁰⁶ Cyrus’ advice at both times is a dangerous philosophy for the Persians, because it implies that they must keep fighting and expanding, a process that

¹⁰⁴ Challenges to authority may be associated with the failing of power.

¹⁰⁵ This seems to tie in with the Persian custom of having huge meals with many courses (1.133.2).

¹⁰⁶ One can see a parallel with Sparta or Scythia here. They maintain their military dominance by having helots, slaves, and perioeki do their farming. If they had to farm, they would not be so able militarily.

will eventually lead to major setbacks for the Persian state.¹⁰⁷

After the battle of Plataea (9.82), Pausanias has the Persian cooks and his own servants prepare two meals: one Persian, one Spartan. He laughs at the folly of the Persians for attacking such a poor people. This comparative meal production is often interpreted as a paradigmatic episode for the flaws in the Persian system. But Pausanias is attracted to this flawed system and eventually Medizes. I would like to suggest that the comparative meal is paradigmatic for the misunderstanding between the two cultures. Herodotus tells us that the Persians enjoy large meals with many courses – this is analogous to enjoying their large empire with many different subject states. The Persians attack so that they can continue to have big meals. It is not a matter of amassing wealth, but rather maintaining a military society instead of having to shift into an agrarian one – a practice analogous to the Spartan practice of keeping their helots. The Persians will use and enjoy their wealth and they are warlike; they value warfare as the means and luxury as the end of their culture. The Spartans value the military life *for itself*, and put limits on the display of wealth in all aspects of their lives. The Persians seek to strengthen their center by externalities; the Spartans strengthen their center by protecting it from influence.

Persian political behavior, both domestic and international, shares many important similarities with their culture. The valuation of the center and the respect for rank affects how, why, and through what means they organize themselves politically (through a monarch) and practice both diplomacy and aggression. The Persian king is at the center of political and social action and his position complements Persian culture as Herodotus describes it.

¹⁰⁷ Many other hard societies in the *Histories* are pillaging societies that do not suffer the same kinds of problems as Persia. This may be caused by the fact that Persia simply becomes too big and politically complex to practice Cyrus' philosophy. They must expand their empire to maintain their character, but the fact of empire changes their character.

CASE STUDY: Athens

My last case study, Athens, is difficult to analyze because Herodotus provides no organized ethnography of the society.¹⁰⁸ Its general cultural characteristics can be determined, however, for Athens features throughout the *Histories*, Herodotus seems to expect a familiarity with the Athenians as they themselves do when they chide the Spartans for worrying about their treating with the Persians (8.144.1). Unlike Sparta or Persia, Athens does not have a founding moment from which to begin analysis, but rather several key events that reveal or determine the city's character, such as the story of the Pelasgians, the reforms of Solon, the tyranny of the Peisistratids, the foundation of the democracy, the battle of Marathon, and the events of the second Persian invasion. Athens is constantly developing and changing itself and its interactions with others. The Athenians are committed to their democracy, once founded, and have a strong sense of individual and societal autonomy.

The first introduction to Athens comes through one of its citizens: Solon, the traditional lawgiver of the city. Solon has left Athens to travel, observe, and let the Athenians accustom themselves to his laws, which he had drawn up for them at their request and which they had bound themselves to follow for ten years (1.29.2). What this early story reveals is that the Athenians are willing to try for good government and social organization and that they are self-aware enough to realize that they are not necessarily going to like what it will take to attain such things.

Croesus, Solon's host, asks Solon to name the happiest person he knows. Solon names an Athenian first: Tellus of Athens, who is survived by his sons, died gloriously in

¹⁰⁸ He may not have done so because the Athenians may have been his primary audience (discussed in Chapter 1) or because the Greek world was all too familiar with Athenian customs because of her empire, aggressive Pan-Hellenism (which equates to empire), and the Peloponnesian War (Forsdyke, 2001).

battle, and was granted a public funeral by the city (1.30.3-5). This example demonstrates that the Athenians collectively honor individual action on behalf of their city. Other societies also honor individuals, but this is done either by a king (as Darius honors Zopyrus 3.160.2) or by a group of one society honoring another for a particular trait (as the Persians honor Pytheas 7.181).

The interaction between Solon and Croesus is anachronistic – Solon predates Croesus – and serves many other purposes in the narrative. Solon’s views are often interpreted as reflecting Herodotus’ opinions, and Solon’s interactions with Croesus offer the first example of the wise advisor / warner motif in the *Histories*.¹⁰⁹ Herodotus returns to a more accurate chronology in his next mention of Athens. Croesus investigates Athens and Sparta in his search for allies against Persia. He discovers that Athens is currently under a tyranny, and thus chooses Sparta. In this second introduction to Athens, the reader, through Croesus, learns that Athens is a very old city, originally inhabited by the Pelasgians who, by mixing with the Hellenes, grew strong (1.57.3).

The narrative of Athens as learned by Croesus continues by relating how Peisistratus attained the tyranny three times, the last time securely. Peisistratus originally got the tyranny after some oligarchic infighting, and ruled the state fairly and with respect for its laws (1.59.6). Peisistratus lost power, and regained it with a trick – he dressed a woman up and pretended she was Athena. Herodotus is surprised that this method worked, because the Athenians have the reputation of being very intelligent (1.60.3). Peisistratus subsequently loses power one more time and regains it through fighting. During this narrative, Herodotus reveals that the Athenians are known to be intelligent and that Athens continually suffers

¹⁰⁹ Gyges may also be interpreted as a warner, but the narrative of Gyges and Candaules focuses more upon Candaules’ transgression than on Gyges’ advice.

under party disputes. It is strange that Herodotus presents Athens as intelligent through a negative example. But the Athenians rarely seem to act intelligently as a group; rather, it is individual Athenians who reveal great cleverness throughout the *Histories*. Foolish action is one danger of Athenian group behavior, as is their tendency towards factionalism.

That the Athenians are prone to factional dispute is ever present in the *Histories*. Even after the Peisistratids are deposed, Athens immediately breaks down into factions. This time, however, instead of ending up with another tyrant, the Athenians end up with a democracy. The factional disputes reveal the Athenian respect for the active individual, already mentioned with Tellus. They attach to charismatic individuals and fight over the city for them. Another indication that the Athenians respect individual action lies in the story of the tyrannicides. The story of these two men, which Herodotus tries to correct and, in so doing, reveals that the Athenians are attached to the tale, emphasizes the bold actions of the individual over the actual group action of establishing a democracy. The tyrannicides are not even successful, but the Athenians prefer to credit them in the establishment of the democracy rather than their debt to Sparta and their own work.¹¹⁰ The positive evaluation of the individual is an important element of the Athenian democracy. Herodotus praises the practice of *isegoria* because Athens shows how good it can be when everyone has a voice and the individual is allowed to achieve what he will (5.78). Athens accomplished nothing under the tyrants, but was very powerful once it had a democracy. The connection between individual autonomy and military power will develop as the *Histories* progress.

The Athenians suppress from their history the oligarchic competition for control of

¹¹⁰ It is also worth noting that the tyrannicides come from non-Athenian origins but they are important to Athenian history as the Athenians present it (5.57). This reiterates the Athenian acceptance of foreign presence and influence.

Athens after the ousting of the tyrants. In reality, this competition results in Cleisthenes' promising more power to the *demos* (5.69.2).¹¹¹ When his party is exiled, the Athenians themselves rise up against Isagoras and the Spartans in order to bring him back. Cleisthenes then designs the democracy to erase older group identities – he divides the Athenians into ten tribes, when before they had had four (5.66).¹¹² Cleisthenes acts because group ties are too strong in Athens. Thus, Cleisthenes' reforms and the Athenians' convenient forgetting of their history reveal a conscious reflection on and resistance to sub-group identity.

When the Athenians act as a group, they are often prone to strong emotional reactions. This may be seen in their reaction to Phrynicus' *Sack of Miletus*. The Athenians burst into tears, fine Phrynicus, and ban the play (6.21.2).¹¹³ Also, their excited assistance to Aristagoras in the Ionian revolt (5.97.2) suggests that they are more easily convinced and a bit more foolish than the single Spartan king Cleomenes. The Athenians rightly fear their disposition to foolish actions, and have at times taken steps to avoid it, such as having Solon leave Athens (1.29.2).

The new democracy emphasizes the individual as that which makes Athens strong. Sparta recognizes this newfound strength when they attempt to re-establish the tyranny

¹¹¹ Or rather, as Euben (1986, 370) puts it, "Herodotus shows us that the power of a collectivity acting together is not proportionate to the strength or capabilities of the separate individuals who compose it, but derives from the constellation of their collective lives."

¹¹² Meier (1990, 141-142) argues that the organization by tribes affected Athenian identity in a powerful way: "The identity of the Athenians was determined by the fact that the only significant affiliation that transcended the narrow ties of house and neighborhood was their political affiliation, that is, their affiliation to the *polis*. This had been so ever since Cleisthenes institutionalized a solidarity that united broad sections of the citizenry."

¹¹³ Kottman (2003, 87) argues that the reaction of the Athenians to the play defines them as a group above other ties: "Indeed, the very fact that the Athenians could identify themselves so strongly with the Milesians, such that the Milesians' catastrophe (*kaka*) refers 'to the Athenians' own troubles and misfortunes,' underscores the extent to which the polity – in its emergent form – is defined not by fixed borders, allegiances, or blood ties. Rather, the *polis* emerges here, to borrow Arendt's phrase, as 'a kind of organized remembrance.'"

(5.98ff). As Athens develops her democracy, the society constructs narratives that praise the individual acting for the community rather than groups working on behalf of or for control of the city. Herodotus is keen to emphasize that tyranny was a former state of Athens and that some people were quite content with it (1.62.1). Peisistratus controlled the fractious state and, according to Herodotus, governed it well (1.59.6). Thus the tyrant, like the democracy, is a solution to the Athenian's fractiousness.¹¹⁴

After the establishment of the democracy, the Athenians begin to move into a position of power in Greece. They fight in a few wars with Aegina and Argos, but their next defining moment is the battle of Marathon. The debate prior to the battle of Marathon provides an example of power at work in Athens and how the Athenians, through the figure of Miltiades, think about the country's democracy.¹¹⁵ The generals, ten of them, debate whether or not to fight the Persians. Callimachus, the War Archon, has the deciding vote. The multiplicity of generals reveals the Athenian willingness to raise individuals to positions of power but also their need to provide checks on them. Miltiades argues with Callimachus in order to convince him to fight. He claims that not fighting will hurt the democracy and cause civil war.¹¹⁶ Fighting will advance the freedom of Athens and turn them into the leaders of Greece (6.109.6). What I want to highlight is that Miltiades proposes that fighting produces freedom:

¹¹⁴ In this, the Athenians are like the Thracians (discussed in Chapter 2), whom Herodotus claims would be the strongest people in the world if they were united by a king (5.3). That the Athenians are able to unite under a democracy indicates that this political form is particularly appropriate to them.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Thompson (1996, 37), who argues, "Herodotus' account of Marathon is compact, to be sure, but it should be recognized that in this compact design is revealed nothing less than the unfolding of Athenian identity. Marathon seems to represent for Herodotus the moment in which Athenian political identity is first haltingly enunciated, and the most critical details of this account bring home this point."

¹¹⁶ In so doing, he brings up the above-discussed tendency towards factionalism.

by fighting, the Athenians will be free from civil unrest at home and free from foreign oppression.¹¹⁷

After Marathon, Miltiades is given the freedom to do whatever he wants (6.132), and he attacks Paros unsuccessfully and expensively. Themistocles is another individual who is freed by the system: the democracy fosters independent action. He is allowed to manipulate debate before the battle of Salamis and hence help the Greeks win the war. Themistocles' independence goes too far when he tries to get money out of the Andrians and is rebuffed. The Athenians, however, do have the ability to quell individual action if it is not representative of the general will. When the Athenian ambassadors to Persia give Darius earth and water they are punished for it on their return (5.73.3). This episode occurs earlier in Athenian history. After Marathon, Athens undergoes a shift in understanding. First, Herodotus points out that individual freedom helps the Athenians do well militarily (5.78). Later their actions indicate that they believe that fighting is the only way to maintain their individual and national freedom.

This idea grows after the building of the Athenian fleet. Themistocles correctly interprets the "wall of wood" oracle (7.141.3) and urges the Athenians to use the giant fleet he encouraged them to build to aid in their war with Aegina (7.144.1). This fleet enables the Athenians to ward off the Persian invasion, but it also empowers even the poorest Athenians to participate in the military actions of the city, for serving as a rower does not require the

¹¹⁷ Connor (1988, 7) suggests the inverse: Athens' new organization and freedom pushed it to fight more. "The reorganization of Athens into ten tribes, for example, provided a more effective basis for Athens's military power. That new system enabled Athens to take the leadership against the Persians and eventually to dominate many Greek states. At this time Athens was developing a new sense of itself and of its place in the Greek world. Soon it took on a hegemonic role among the Greeks. As it did so, it naturally found itself drawn with increasing frequency into warfare." In my view, this passage emphasizes the idea that the Athenians believed that fighting promotes freedom; Herodotus argues at 5.78 that freedom made the Athenians better fighters.

funds that arming oneself for land battles would.¹¹⁸ This allows the Athenians to extend their democratic ideology throughout the more of the Athenian populace.

The Athenian democratic ideology incorporates an expanding idea of who are the citizens of Athens. The Athenians extend their citizen power through the fleet, and continue to look outward. This suggests that they may be able to keep extending their concept of Athens beyond the scope of the city walls. Their ability to incorporate others into their conception of themselves promotes their view that their civic ideology may be applied globally. Another indication of this expansiveness is their reaction to Xerxes' invasion. As Herodotus says, they all knew that Athens was a focus of the Persian invasion but that Xerxes was actually after all of Greece (7.138.1). The Athenians succeed in arguing that the Persian invasion is a Greek concern, rather than only an Athenian concern. At 8.144, they make Sparta's concern about their loyalty in the war a Pan-Hellenic issue: they argue that they are Greeks first. This argument is suited to the Spartans, who are leaders of Greece but strongly independent of it, and also apt for the Athenians, for in their opinion, the solution to their political problems is to continue to be progressively inclusive. As civic empowerment spread throughout the Athenian citizen body, so the Athenians will involve the rest of Greece.¹¹⁹

Athens is so much on the rise, so eager for power, yet, in its foreign policy at the beginning of the fifth century, Athens is willing to yield to the Spartans for the good of Greece (8.3.1). They also exhibit this attitude in their conversation with Gelon (7.161.2-3) and in the discussion of who gets the left wing before the battle of Plataea (9.27). The

¹¹⁸ Raaflaub (1996).

¹¹⁹ The Spartans play to that role when they call the Athenians liberators of Greece (8.142.3).

Athenians' initial willingness to yield to the Spartans and yet to assert their own place wins them over to the Spartans and helps them ultimately to get their way. During the Persian invasion, Herodotus presents Sparta as having had no choice but to resist (7.139.3). Athens, however, does have a choice and plays on that choice in their various threats to the Spartans that they will Medize (9.7a.1-2). The emphasis that Athens has a choice in how it involves itself in international affairs is complicated by its increasing expansion. An expanding Athens must fight, but this necessity must find its limit, as it does for Persia.¹²⁰

The Athenians are a people defined by both the strong valuation of individual action and the active engagement of the citizens in the governance of the society. This may be expressed through requesting that Solon give them laws, following a faction in the development of the Peisistratean tyranny, or investing in the new democracy. The democracy was designed and culturally memorialized as built on the strength of individual action over the power of group action, especially factional action. This has the effect of making Athens both strongly individualistic, and also conglomerating. The individual's freedom leads to the city's ability to fight, and thus its autonomy.

What also distinguishes the democracy is that the Athenians see it as a culmination of their history, a progressive step in their quest for ideal government. The ideology of progress will affect future Athenian actions. After the Spartans have leave war, the Athenians intend to pursue the Persians and free the Ionian states. Then, motivated by their idea of progress, they will keep growing and promoting their new, all-encompassing political ideology.

This chapter provides examples of six societies that exhibit particular solutions to the

¹²⁰ Cf. Lateiner (1989, 194) "Human power, by its very increase, if not by an internal necessity, tends to destroy itself. Individuals cannot realize appropriate limits."

problem of organizing themselves politically. Each society reveals a different relationship between the people and their laws, which encompass political institutions and rulers as well. In the next chapter, these societies will provide the basis for a discussion of freedom and how it connects to an individual society's relationship with their cultural and political *nomoi*.

Chapter Four: Political Relativism as an Ideological Position

In my introduction, I suggested that the same methodology could be used to examine both culture and politics in the *Histories*. In my second and third chapters I demonstrated the close relationship between the two concepts. This chapter examines the question: what is political relativism and how does it relate to cultural relativism? I first review the relationship between culture and politics; then I refine my definition of cultural relativism and test its applicability to the political realm. Finally, I explore the functioning of political relativism and suggest how it is a useful model for understanding the larger themes of the *Histories*.

Chapter 2 showed the ways in which Herodotus intertwines cultural and political description. Although Herodotus uses a clear vocabulary for describing political constitutions (*monarchia, basileia, tyrannia, oligarchia, democratia, es meson*), he does not employ a distinct vocabulary for political and governmental processes such as laws or the duties of a king or government official. For these he uses more general phrases. Most of his political description is presented using some form of the term *nomos*, which has a range of connotations in the text. Lateiner argues, and I agree, that “*nomos* neutrally embraces custom, culture, and law.”¹ The primary function of the term *nomos*, more than to define moral boundaries, is to establish distinctions for and between societies. The macro-systemic perspective of constitutional forms does not distinguish most of the societies Herodotus discusses; rather, the micro-systemic mechanisms by which the particular governments

¹ Lateiner (1989, 137). He goes on to argue that *nomos* “also defines various moral limits, acceptable and unacceptable behaviors. *Nomos* defines the activities both within and outside a boundary, a limit that is clarified by depicted transgressions.”

exercise their power and represent their people do differentiate societies, especially their political structures from one another. These mechanisms are closely related to a society's customs. In other words, a society's political life is distinct, although the general manner in which all societies are governed and their political trajectory are not necessarily so.² Cultural description and political practice reinforce the internal unity of a society while also clarifying its difference from other societies within a larger frame of reference.

Chapter 3 showed how the cultural practices of a given society can dictate the exercise of its government's power and the very nature of its political life. Thus, not only do we find that cultural and political description provide a full portrait of a particular society, but also that customs are reflected in the mechanisms of political power. The one exception is tyranny, which in part is the breakdown of this reflection. Yet tyranny, discussed in more detail below, also demonstrates the connection between culture and political structures by its negation of that principle.

Despite a particular constitution's role in defining a society's identity, a change of political forms does not cause a society to break down. Rather, societies tend to be resilient; they return to an equilibrium of customs and politics with their new political situation. This is especially evident in the political transformations of Sparta, Athens, Persia, and Egypt.³ Each society incorporates its political change into its social memory (and hence its cultural

² Meier (1990, 135) recognizes this general principle: "[Herodotus'] ability to trace a sequence of events spanning many generations and involving many historical agents was linked with a conviction that whatever happens is governed by underlying law. This law ensures that the political world as a whole remains constant: no power rules everyone or forever; whoever rises is destined to fall." Waters (1972, 86) argues that a constellation of *nomoi* often come together to produce the same overriding *nomos*: that "*kuklos* is a law of nature."

³ Sparta undergoes political change with the reforms of Lycurgus (1.66.1; Chapter 3, 125). Athens suffers under a tyranny (1.60; Chapter 3, 141-142) and transforms into a democracy (5.66 – 69, Chapter 3, 142 – 145). Persia gets its independence from the Medes (1.127; Chapter 3, 135). Egypt recovers from bad kings (2.129, 147; Chapter 3, 104-106).

character) and recovers.⁴ Even a conquered society does not necessarily lose its identity with its loss of political autonomy; societies ruled by the Persians retain their identity or even inscribe their subjection upon their social identity. A good example of this phenomenon is Lydia. As discussed in Chapter 3, the Lydians maintain their cultural identity and resist the Persians. Cyrus must change their culture to make them amenable to imperial control. They slowly shift into acceptance of their new political and cultural situation.⁵

Since social identity is not completely dependent upon politics, politics is only a subset of the characteristics that define a society. Political institutions, however, offer an easy mode of comparison between societies because of structural similarities and because one can make broad generalizations about individual political constitutions, as one can about different societies' cultural practices, such as the similarities in marriage or funeral rites. The macro-systemic generalizations about constitutions, however, can only go so far, for the evidence for them is implicated in individual motivation, societal experiences, and political ideology, as shown in the analysis of the Constitutional Debate in Chapter 1. These generalizations must be re-applied to a particular setting. Herodotus' consistent emphasis upon the particular has been a major frustration for political scholars from Aristotle onwards.⁶ Political thinkers assume that Herodotus has no systematic political theory, since he does not make many abstract generalizations from the evidence he accumulates. I suggest that Herodotus does have a political theory, one that embraces the general and the particular. I call this broader,

⁴ Immerwahr (1966, 150) agrees. "A change in history does not always result in extinction. Egyptian history shows the continuity of a country's history through several cycles."

⁵ See discussion in Chapter 3, 96-99. Another example of the Persians' attempt to make countries amenable to their rule might be the establishment of democracies in Ionia (6.43.3).

⁶ See Thompson (1996)'s Chapter One, for a discussion of the history of political thinkers' interaction with Herodotus.

macro-systemic perspective “political relativism.”⁷

The stance of political relativism promotes the acceptance of the political forms of another society as best for them. It stems from the idea that there is not a single form of political structure that is better than any other. Grief suggests that “it is misleading to expect that a beneficial organization of one society will yield the same results in another. The effects of organizations are a function of their impact on the rules of the game and the cultural beliefs of the society within which the game is embedded.”⁸ Although Grief’s analysis is based on competing trading practices in the medieval Mediterranean, his argument is applicable to institutional practice in general and political institutions in Herodotus. As I discussed in Chapter 1, Herodotus does not suggest that a single legitimate political institution is wholly better than another, since the value of that political institution should be assessed on a society-by-society basis.⁹

Political relativism provides a fruitful model for understanding Herodotus’ attitude toward and presentation of politics. The term “political relativism” is applicable because it functions like cultural relativism. Since politics is a subset of culture, it follows that similar approaches to culture and politics are acceptable. Both cultural relativism and political relativism are macro-systemic ideologies that embrace the tension between particular

⁷ Other scholars have hinted at this as the mode of analyzing Herodotus’ political thought. Lateiner (1989, 220) posits that Herodotus’ contribution to political thought “includes the central observation that governments of all types make policy on the basis of past political history, present political pressures, internal and external, and often ruthless self-interest. Further, he recognized that national character often (and occasionally individuals) can determine a nation’s survival.” Raaflaub (1987, 246ff) also acknowledges Herodotus’ political thought inherent in the recognition that broad processes occur in the *Histories* that are always tied to individual occurrences, and that one does not trump the other.

⁸ Grief (1994, 944).

qualities and broad similarities. The logic of generalizations about political forms and the rise and fall of a society's strength, however, is different from the generalizations that can be made about cultural identity, such as the distinction between hard and soft cultures. Thus, the assumption of an analogous relationship between cultural relativism and political relativism cannot stand by itself since, although both require a macro-systemic perspective, the reasoning behind the two ideas differs. In order to flesh out the comparison of the two ideas, I will first refine the definition of cultural relativism and then show political relativism's applicability in the *Histories* both as an ideological position related to cultural relativism and on its own merit.

The central passage that highlights Herodotus' cultural relativism is Darius' comparison of funeral practices (3.38.3-4), but this passage is part of a longer *logos*. Darius' test is a brief digression in the *Histories*, the purpose of which is to provide further evidence for why Cambyses is insane. The event that drives this characterization of Cambyses is his denigration of the Egyptian bull-god Apis, who appears during Cambyses' time in Memphis (3.27.3ff). Cambyses becomes angry, first at the Egyptians for celebrating at a time when he has suffered a defeat, then at the Egyptian governors, who attempt to explain the coming of Apis but who Cambyses thinks are lying, and finally, at the Egyptian priests. To express his anger, he stabs the bull-god in the thigh to prove that it is flesh and blood (3.29.1). Cambyses proceeds to mock the Egyptians for their religious belief, and leaves the bull to waste away.

After this signal event, Cambyses performs a number of "insane" actions (3.30-37), which are caused either, as the Egyptians claim, by his religious violation or by the sacred disease (3.33). Cambyses kills his brother, forces the Magi to manipulate their understanding of Persian law so that he can marry his sisters, kills the son of one of his heralds, tries to kill

⁹ Chapter 1, 50-52.

Croesus, and continues to deride Egyptian religious belief by exhuming Apis and burning him. Herodotus sums up this list by claiming that he is certain Cambyses was mad (ἐμῶν), otherwise he would not have mocked religion and tradition. Herodotus argues that each society regards its own practices as best, and that only a mad man would mock such things (3.38.1-2).¹⁰

The first step to cultural relativism, therefore, is to appreciate that societies value their traditions and rituals, for to do otherwise is to be insane. In Herodotus' version of the story, Cambyses does not do that, and in fact, he throws his disdain for those traditions and rituals in the faces of the Egyptians. Flower (2006) suggests from archaeological evidence that this story is invented, for there is a tomb to Apis dated to around this time.¹¹ This would indicate that the story is even more important for Herodotus' goals, since Herodotus includes it for his own reasons. It gives shape to Cambyses' random acts of violence and allows for a moral lesson. Herodotus ends his account with another story, which is interpretively significant because it too may have been made up and because it is a break from the chronological order of the work. Also, the story ends with a saying that has the force of a proverb.¹² This is Darius' comparison of the funeral customs of the Greeks and Calliatiae.

The story of the Greeks and the Calliatiae reveals that Herodotus' cultural relativism does not preclude judgment of practices or even revulsion at the practices of another society.

¹⁰ A parallel example of madness may be found in Cleomenes' insanity after desecrating the sanctuary of Hera at Argos. Herodotus give several interpretations of his madness: the Greeks say it is because he bribed the Pythia, the Athenians say it is because he desecrated the sanctuary at Eleusis, and the Argives claim it is caused by his desecration of the sanctuary of Hera and mistreatment of his prisoners there (6.75). The Spartans themselves claim that he went insane because he drank his wine "Scythian style" (6.84.3). Every reason for his madness involves the violation of customary behavior.

¹¹ Flower (2006, 280). The presence of the tomb suggests that Cambyses followed the Persian practice of supporting local traditions.

¹² Shapiro (1996) on the power of proverbs in Herodotus.

Both the Greeks and the Calliatiae reject the funeral practices of the other, but when the Calliatiae do so, they cry out in horror (οἱ δὲ ἀμβώσαντες μέγα εὐφημέειν μιν ἐκέλευον, 3.38.4). There is not judgment on their emotional reaction in the text, for holding the position of cultural relativism requires appreciating the subjective and often emotional experience of a society or the individuals within that society.¹³ In this passage, Darius is the model of the cultural relativist – he witnesses the reactions of the two societies and draws his own conclusions. He does not insert Persian practice into the test (burial after being mauled by wild animals, 1.140.1). He does, however, insert his own system of valuation, for he asks in terms of money (ἐπὶ κόσῳ χρήματι, 3.38.3). Thinking in terms of money is a significant characteristic of Darius in particular,¹⁴ but this does not negate the test itself.¹⁵ In a similar manner, the historian may set the terms of cultural comparison, but he removes or carefully marks his own opinion.

Cambyses' actions suggest that he holds an opposing attitude. Cambyses' crime in stabbing Apis goes beyond judgment of religious practice to active cultural chauvinism.¹⁶ Not only is he disrespectful of Egyptian religious belief, but he plays with the Egyptians' emotional reaction. Cambyses has carried out a horrific lesson for the Egyptians as part of an attempt to force them into a realization about their cultural flaws. His disdain stems in part

¹³ Munson (2001, 161) argues, “the case just examined (women dying on the pyre, 5.5) communicates that a *nomos* that the ethnographer’s culture considers inhumane or unholy can be integrated into a relativistic view if it is internalized by all those whom it affects. Herodotus’ report about a custom of the Massagetae [1.216] conveys the same message.”

¹⁴ See Kurke (1999) Chapter Two of her book, on Darius as *kapelos*.

¹⁵ The insertion of some kind of personal ideology by the ethnographer is unavoidable. De Certeau (1984), Clifford (1984), Harrison (2000).

¹⁶ For this term, see Munson (2001, 180) *passim*.

from Persian religious belief, but goes beyond this when he violates both Persian and Egyptian belief by cremating the god.¹⁷ Cambyses' violation of foreign practices goes hand in hand with violation of his own culture's *nomoi*.

Cambyses is directly involved in the comparison of culture; his own beliefs influence his interpretation of the episode and thus he judges the Egyptians for having different ones. Darius creates distance between himself and the societies being compared; he does not mention Persian practice, nor does Herodotus as narrator. Herodotus himself often maintains distance. As Chamberlain suggests, Herodotus, as a narrator, is "emphatically not a competing individual ... but rather an anonymous authority, an informed bystander."¹⁸

The practice of judging customs can be a fruitful one for societies. Several societies adopt foreign customs: the Persians (1.135), the Lydians (1.94.3), and the Greeks (in general)¹⁹ all do so. The Scythians and the Egyptians decidedly do not, but neither do they force their own culture upon others. The dynamic process of encountering other cultures and undergoing cultural change as a result of that encounter is often a positive, or at least not negative, practice in Herodotus, when good judgment is applied.²⁰ Herodotus does not judge those who choose to defend their culture from a change introduced or practiced by an individual or another society, as happens when the Scythian king punishes Scyles for becoming Greek (4.78-80).

The comparison of cultural practice for the purpose of adoption extends into the

¹⁷ Immerwahr (1966, 97) notes the double violation.

¹⁸ Chamberlain (2001, 30). Chamberlain's argument centers on how Herodotus maintains a distant voice by avoiding the first person singular.

¹⁹ According to Herodotus, the Greeks learned their religious practices from the Egyptians (2.51.1)

²⁰ For example, Solon's borrowing of the Egyptian law about stating income (2.177.2).

political realm. The Persians adopt the Median attitude towards other countries (1.134.3), and they also engage in a Constitutional Debate (as discussed in Chapter One). In this debate, Otanes suggests the adoption of the Athenian (though he does not identify it as such) form of government. The deciding argument in this debate, however, centers on Persian freedom (ἐλευθερίη, 3.82.5); specifically, the Persians choose monarchy because they got their freedom from a monarch.

Freedom (*eleutheria*) is a concept through which political difference may be apprehended and attempted to be explained, such as in, most memorably, Demaratus' explanation of Spartan valor to Xerxes before Thermopylae (ἐλεύθεροι γὰρ ἔόντες οὐ πάντα ἐλεύθεροι εἰσί· ἔπεστι γὰρ σφι δεσπότης νόμος, 7.104.4). But the comparison he makes and the term he uses do not successfully convince Xerxes, because freedom is *culturally* defined in the *Histories*.²¹ Darius defines Persian freedom as national freedom (the state is autonomous);²² the Athenians define their own freedom as the individual's and hence the *polis*' freedom,²³ and the Spartans define freedom as being subject to the laws rather than to an individual.²⁴ Many societies define freedom as simply the ability to be self-determined, either individually (the Egyptians) or nationally (the Scythians).²⁵

²¹ Munson (2005, 32) on cultural translation of certain terms.

²² Darius' argument in the constitutional debate (3.82.5). See my discussion in Chapter 1, 38 and Chapter 3, 136.

²³ As discussed in Chapter 3, 144-147. The argument between Callimachus and Miltiades before Marathon highlights this connection. Miltiades claims that the Callimachus' choice is either to enslave the Athenians or make them free (ἐλευθέρας, 6.104.6).

²⁴ This is implicit in the idea of *despotes nomos*. See my discussion, Chapter 3, 124, 127. Forsdyke (2001, 334) concludes that when the Spartans [in book five] "refer to Athens as 'free,' they are referring to the political freedom obtained under the democracy, not just freedom from tyranny." Although her argument focuses upon the presence of Athenian democratic ideological jargon in Herodotus, this passage seems to show that the Spartans allow different definitions of freedom.

²⁵ Egyptians: Chapter 3, 105-108. Scythians: Chapter 3, 117.

Fornara points out the competing methods by which a sense of freedom can be obtained:

Athenian *isegoria* is balanced, at least, by Spartan law: Herodotus, it would appear, was politically too moderate to be an ideologue. An Athenian democrat would have judged differently of Sparta; Herodotus was wise enough to perceive and applaud the merits of different government as long as each contributed to *eleutheria*.²⁶

Fornara presumes an absolute valuation of freedom. Flory and Thompson contrast freedom and servitude, and point out the pros and cons of each side.²⁷ But I suggest that freedom can take on different forms and value in different societies. For example, Maeandrius of Samos tries to introduce democracy after the death of Polycrates. He first builds a temple to Zeus the Liberator (Διὸς ἐλευθερίου βωμὸν, 3.142.2) and then introduces his idea to the Samians. His effort, however, is resisted by the leading Samians. Herodotus comments that they must not want to be free (οὐ γὰρ δὴ, ὡς οἴκασι, ἐβούλοντο εἶναι ἐλεύθεροι, 3.143.2). He makes similar comments about the Athenians, some of whom prefer tyranny to freedom (τοῖσι ἢ τυραννὶς πρὸ ἐλευθερίας ἦν ἀσπαστότερον, 1.62.1), and the Egyptians, who give up their freedom for monarchy (ἐλευθερωθέντες Αἰγύπτιοι..., 2.147.2). These comments may indicate that Herodotus the narrator may have his own definite evaluation of freedom for he seems to be applying some form of judgment in these passages. The individuals in the societies he describes may have a differing one.

²⁶ Fornara (1971, 49).

²⁷ Flory (1987, 119) “For Herodotus, freedom and one-man rule are extreme opposites that possess parallel and equal merits and defects. Freedom, an enviable condition, can lead to anarchy or can bring the power to enslave others. Servitude, on the other hand, though intrinsically odious, need not preclude and may even foster nobility if men serve a noble master. One-man rule, though liable to misuse, possesses certain advantages over less authoritarian political systems.” Thompson (1996) is slightly less in favor of servitude, but also recognizes its ability to inspire men to great acts.

Raaflaub suggests that the idea of freedom developed over time;²⁸ his argument mirrors that of Hegel, whom I will discuss in my conclusions. In Raaflaub's argument, people first began to perceive freedom as individual freedom, as being "not a slave." Often in the *Histories*, speakers contrast freedom with slavery, and associate those who enslave with tyrants.²⁹ The figure of the tyrant, then, may be a good way to explore the idea of freedom, and to test whether it is culturally defined or objective and absolute, for tyrants share many similarities across cultures.³⁰

The traditional tyrant in the *Histories* provides the best picture of someone who is not a cultural or political relativist.³¹ Like Cambyses, he does not respect even his own culture. The tyrant also circumvents the middle ground between the individual and the macro-systemic political world, for he denies any individual, save himself, a role in political infrastructure. The tyrant infringes upon the culture of his people in one of two ways: he outlaws or violates specific customs, or he manipulates the people's cultural characteristics in such a way as to remove their right to self-determination (νόμαιά τε κινέει πάτρια, 3.80.5). Peisistratus manipulates the Athenian *ethos*, for he initially hides his tyranny behind legal government practices (1.59.6). Deioces also hides his tyranny behind justice (1.96.2).³²

²⁸ See Raaflaub (2004) on the invention of freedom.

²⁹ See, for example, the Scythians' resistance to Persian domination (4.126-128) discussed in Chapter 3, 116-117.

³⁰ That tyranny is the opposite of freedom is apparent in many episodes. For one example, the Spartans identify Athens as free, and hence, a threat, since they have deposed their tyrant (ὄς ἐπείτε δι' ἡμέας ἐλευθερωθεῖς ἀνέκυψε ... 5.91.2).

³¹ This is well defined by the "despotic template" of Dewald (2003). The best summary in Herodotus of these attributes are listed by Otanes in the Constitutional Debate, 3.80.3-5.

³² Benardete (1979, 25) argues, "basing himself on what the Greeks would regard as the greatest injustice, tyranny, Deioces was just. Though he knew the just and unjust were at war with one another, that did not prevent him from being just in all particular cases so that he could completely conceal his injustices in general."

Thus, tyranny is a state of *anomie*³³ because the tyrant has disturbed the regular rules of society – he has subverted the commonality of the society.³⁴ Tyranny is also a state of slavery, or lack of freedom, because by creating *anomie*, the tyrant has denied cultural self-determination to the people ruled by him.³⁵ If we take tyranny as definitively *not*-freedom, then a general, cross-cultural definition of freedom can take shape. In the *Histories*, freedom is the unrestrained practice of *nomos*, even if that *nomos* is an autocratic monarchy. The Spartan definition of freedom is the closest to this one, for they honor the rule of law above all else, even when it may create political inequality.³⁶ Freedom, being the unhindered practice of *nomos*, will ultimately be different for different societies, since they have different *nomoi*.

The idea of freedom offers a term of comparison between societies because freedom is defined subjectively. A free society is a successful society,³⁷ but each society has its own brand of freedom that reflects the society's culture. Under this understanding of how people perceive freedom, cross-constitutional comparison will lead to the question "what will help *us* feel free?" There is not an absolute answer. A culture must arrive at a new idea of freedom or else their political comparisons will take the form of an evaluation of "does this political structure express us?" Comparison of the freedom of different societies is difficult because each society will ask its own particular questions of its political structure under the

³³ Deioces eliminates one form of *anomie* in Media, but he creates another by his deceptive justice.

³⁴ Benardete (1979, 136) makes the interesting comparison between the Thracians, who lack common purpose, and tyranny. He also claims tyranny is *anomie*.

³⁵ This is one of Candaules' mistake, for he forces Gyges to violate cultural precepts (1.8.4). See Chapter 3, 92-93 for further discussion of this passage.

³⁶ Vlastos (1953, 351-352).

³⁷ Croesus recognizes that Athens will not be a good ally while they are not free (1.65).

requirement of freedom. A comparison across time, however, of a specific society is possible.

Sparta had the worst constitution ever until Lycurgus instituted their reforms. They now live in a state of *eunomia* (1.65.2). The Athenians were weak when they were oppressed by a tyranny, but now that they have a democracy they are a military power. Herodotus' explanation of the Athenian transformation seems to be general, for he says "the advantages to everyone having a voice in political procedure are not restricted to single instances, but are plain to see wherever one looks" (5.78). This seems to suggest that Herodotus is making a general statement about *isegoria*. A comment about Athens flourishing and an explanation of its weakness under the tyrants frame this claim. In my view, the context of the claim indicates that this evaluation is true in Athens, but not necessarily in general. This story fits into other stories in Herodotus where he shows the outcome of positive political change, such as what is experienced by the Spartans under Lycurgus (1.65) and the Persians under both Cyrus (1.127.1) and Darius (3.88.3), which have similar kinds of outcomes. The praise of democracy is strictly Athenian, and the story should be categorized with the others.

The comparison of political forms in which there is positive judgment in the narrator's voice happens within societies across time. Each of these changes has, for the most part, a beneficial effect upon the members of the society and the society as a whole. When one looks at a successful society, which has undergone positive change or maintained a healthy stability over time, one sees that they have developed a political structure reflective of their customs and which can be controlled by their customs rather than controlling them, as a tyrant would do.

These societies have political structures that respond to and respect their own people

and cultural institutions. I will examine the monarchies first. On the domestic level, the king represents the values and customs of his people in some form. The Scythian king, a nomad like most Scythians, guides and encourages his people in the practice of their customs of warfare, truth-telling, and isolation. The Persian king, on the other hand, centers the hierarchy of Persian society. He exercises great power in order to keep Persia at the center of the international hierarchy as he is the center of their domestic one.³⁸ The Lydian king leads his country in warfare and lives the good life at home. The Egyptian king, as the representative of all Egyptians, builds monuments, measures the geographical features of Egypt, and reaffirms Egyptian culture. The Spartans have two kings who represent the military and religious emphasis of Spartan culture and also by their very doubleness represent the Spartans' desire for balance and control. Each kingship has a particular motivation and form.

All stable societies have mechanisms particular to themselves to control their political affairs. The Spartans have the council and ephors, who can pass laws to moderate the kings' powers or, if necessary, depose a king. The Egyptians hate to mention the name of their bad kings. In a society devoted to memory and tradition, the partial removal from tradition (*damnatio memoriae*) is a strong message to present and future kings. The Persian kings have fewer controls placed on them than rulers in my other examples do because they are meant to represent the highest power. However, the Persian tradition of debate suggests limits. Cyrus, Cambyses, and Xerxes all have advisors whom they ignore at their peril. Darius participates in the debate that renegotiated the establishment of the Persian monarchy. The kingship is not

³⁸ Chapter 3, 134-135. The king creates a feeling of unity within the Persian society, and this extends into the Empire. Immerwahr (1966, 185) claims, "internal cohesion with a corresponding respect for rank may be considered the main characteristic of Persian rule over others." This is in direct contrast to the lack of unity or commonality seen amongst the Thracians or manufactured by tyrants.

open to everyone for they do not allow non-Persians. The issue of succession to the throne is one that must be decided; it is not necessarily obvious.³⁹

As discussed in Chapter 3, the Athenians, who are obviously different because of their democracy, have also constructed a political structure both meaningful to them and representative of their customs. It is designed to hold in check their disposition to factionalism by directing it toward the good of the city as a whole. Having recently recovered from tyranny, they worry about issues of power and have developed a self-correcting system.

Political relativism, like cultural relativism, is the appreciation that societies organize their governments in ways that are reflective of their culture and which can be controlled by their culture, that is, the appreciation that their government is appropriate to them. As there are arguments against Herodotus being a cultural relativist,⁴⁰ so there are arguments against Herodotus being a political relativist. I have discussed the need for a non-judgmental attitude in political relativism (151-152), and Herodotus is occasionally judgmental. He values freedom and his comments suggest that he may have his own definition of it.⁴¹ Tyrants and empires deny the validity and expression of their subjects' internally-defined freedom. Herodotus' narrative often indicts countries for their political policies, most importantly for expansion, tyranny, and empire.⁴² Yet Herodotus still promotes political relativism even when he condemns societies that subject other people because although an imperial power

³⁹7.2-4 describes the maneuverings of Xerxes, Demaratus, and Atossa in order to get Xerxes the throne over his older half-brother.

⁴⁰ The strongest argument against Herodotus' cultural relativism is his Hellenocentrism. See my discussion of this problem in Chapter 1, 12-14, 18.

⁴¹ See above, 159.

such as Persia may maintain fidelity to its own customs, it does not necessarily do the same to those of the people it conquers.⁴³ Just as forcing one's own customs on others can be bad, or at least generate conflict,⁴⁴ so the forcing of political structures or the denying of political autonomy is presented negatively in the *Histories*.

Political relativism focuses upon internal freedom, which is the freedom to practice one's own customs and the freedom from domination by a tyrant. The other kind of freedom, external freedom, is the freedom to assert oneself internationally. Since this often takes the form of domination, the draw towards exerting external freedom often involves compromising others' internal freedom. Thus, societies that define their freedom nationally, such as Persia, Athens and Scythia, run the risk of violating others' freedom and thus the principle of political relativism. Many have found this disconcerting, especially in regards to Athens, which waves the banner of freedom but will subjugate others.⁴⁵ Pelling argues that this is a paradox, but not a contradiction.⁴⁶ The paradox demonstrates that Athens values freedom for itself, but not for others; freedom, to the Athenians, is a locally applied concept. Sparta considers dominating Athens until it is reminded that it is a liberator by the Corinthians (5.92.a1). The political relativist recognizes that aggressive political ideology, or the assertion of a superior form of government, can develop into a perversion of the idea of

⁴² The text entire is widely perceived to be an indictment of empire. Herodotus indicates this when he begins his narrative: "Croesus was the first non-Greek we know of to have subjected Greeks to the payment of tribute, though he made alliances with some of them" (1.6.2).

⁴³ Persia indicates some movement in the direction of accepting the customs of those they conquer, to be discussed below.

⁴⁴ For example, when the Persians force the Macedonians to honor their customs about dining with women, the Macedonians kill the Persians (5.18-21).

⁴⁵ The so-called "Andrian Dialogue" (8.111) is a precursor to Athenian imperial activity.

⁴⁶ Pelling (2002, 146).

freedom, for it does not embrace the different subjective experiences of others. Political relativism promotes the idea that one should respect that freedom is experienced by others in particular ways, and not deny that freedom while asserting one's own. Thus, Herodotus can judge the aggressive actions of other states because those actions do violate the principle of political relativism.

Herodotus gives his readers access to the insider's subjective experiences when he gives others a voice;⁴⁷ this action is meant to challenge the audience's own subjectivity. One must recognize the micro-systemic position not only of others but also of oneself to achieve cultural and political relativism. The recognition of both one's own and the other's experience allows one to take the objective stance of "each to his own."

In the *Histories*, Herodotus provides models for cultural relativists, such as Darius, and potential examples of the political relativist, such as the arbitrator or intervener. They must be distanced and willing to empathize with the subjective experience of each society, and willing not to enforce their own micro-systemic ideology, but rather to take a macro-systemic view of the problem. Thus, a good model for a political relativist is the arbitrator between two city-states or two factions. The arbitrator is a third party, uninvolved in the dispute, who may be able to provide a solution or make a choice without inserting too much of his own ideology into the discussion. Connor raises the idea of the *histor* as a potential role for Herodotus himself, for the *histor* was originally the name for this kind of arbitrator. He goes on to argue that this is one of many roles of the historian.⁴⁸

Delphi serves as arbitrator for many states; for example, it ratifies Gyges' assumption

⁴⁷ Munson (2001) on the role of foreign logoi. Dewald (1987, 168). Discussed above, Chapter 2, 75-76.

⁴⁸ Connor (1993b, 5).

of the kingship in Lydia after the different parties agree to seek arbitration (1.13). The practice of distance is similar to Darius' position in the comparison of funeral customs discussed above, for Darius does not introduce the Persian practice of burial into the discussion. Another illuminating image may be found in the Egyptians' advice to the Eleans about their games. The Egyptians tell the Eleans that the only fair way for them to host games is to not participate themselves, because that way there is no unfair advantage for the judge or those who are close to him (2.160.4). The arbitrator is essentially one who intervenes in, and can resolve, political affairs without pre-judgment.

The arbitrator provides a model of intervention, but it is not necessarily *political* intervention. There are many examples of political intervention in the *Histories*. Low argues that "there is a strong tradition of positive representation of intervention in classical sources."⁴⁹ Yet, as she also points out, the Greeks recognize that some moral judgments are relative: "what appeared to be a morally justified action to one state was in fact likely to be an action which preserved their own conception of the proper order of things – a conception which might not be shared by other nations."⁵⁰ Thus intervention can be good, and is often represented as good, as long as the intervener makes allowances for the relative moral stances of the parties involved – as long as, that is, the intervener choose to be politically relative. Sometimes intervention serves to right a wrong, as when one state is invited to aid another when being oppressed or threatened. A society offers military assistance and then leaves its allies behind to sort themselves out politically; alliances often work this way. This is the stance of political relativism. At other times, an intervention occurs that promotes the

⁴⁹ Low (2007, 178).

⁵⁰ Low (2007, 29).

intervener's own advantage: this is the act of a political chauvinist. I will discuss this kind of intervention below.

There are several positive models of intervention in the *Histories*. Sparta helps to free Athens from tyrants (5.63; 5.76). The Athenians and Mytileneans ask Periander to help them settle a conflict (5.95.2). Croesus intervenes and aids his friend Miltiades (6.37). Athens is asked to help Plataea in its war with Thebes after the Plataeans were turned down by the Spartans (6.108.4). In Herodotus, this intervention by Athens results in a long and fruitful interaction between the cities without evidence of the pressure Athens will put on her allies later in the fifth century. The Spartans are asked for help by the Samians (3.46) and Croesus (1.69).⁵¹ In all of these examples, the interveners provide aid without applying political pressure; they respect that the political turmoil, if any, is internal and needs to be resolved internally.

A good transitional model for thinking about intervention in the *Histories* occurs in Book Seven, when the Greeks ask the Syracusan tyrant Gelon for help in the war against Persia (7.157-162). Gelon has the opportunity to intervene in a positive way, but he demands too much power over the allied Greek forces – “there is one condition, however: that I should be the general and leader (στρατηγός τε καὶ ἡγεμῶν) of the Greek forces against Persia” (7.158.5). The mainland Greeks reject his demand and leave without his aid. His demand indicates negative intervention, because he demands power over autonomous states.

There are many negative models of intervention, and these episodes or story arcs figure much more prominently in the text. For example, Croesus attacks Persia for two

⁵¹ In this final example, the Spartans do not actually bring aid to Croesus, and their intervention on Samos is not necessarily good. What I want to emphasize here is that it is common for societies to ask for alliances or intervention. The outcome of those interventions is not my focus.

reasons. First, he is guest-friends with the Median king Astyages (1.75.1), and second, he is concerned about their growing power (1.46.1). The first reason can be understood as positive intervention: he wishes to free the Medes from imperial rule. This reason, however, is overshadowed by Croesus' proactive self-defense. The unfolding of events reveals that Croesus' move has negative connotations, since it is joined with a great deal of personal pride, such as the testing of oracles (1.47-49) and the assumption that the oracle was not directed at him (1.53).

The Persian Empire provides a major example of negative intervention, in that Persia conquers and deprives many states of their autonomy. Munson claims that the primary ethnographic feature of the Persians is their ethnocentrism, which leads to their primary feature in history: their empire.⁵² Yet the Persian Empire is surprisingly relativistic, although it is a superficial relativism. Persia manipulates local customs rather than violates them. For example, the Persians tend to establish governments similar to the old ones, yet friendly, in their newly conquered territories (3.15.2).⁵³ But, as with tyrants, we should not read this as acceptable in Herodotus. What the Persian Empire meets in Greece is an unwillingness to have the political customs of the individual city-states manipulated by outsiders.⁵⁴ This may perhaps be caused by the anti-tyrannical nature of Sparta, Athens, and Corinth, or because, as

⁵² Munson (2001, 152). Persian ethnocentrism stems from their model of graduated respect for states based upon their distance from Persia itself.

⁵³ In Herodotus, the Persian Empire reveals that it has a great deal of knowledge about or at least willingness to learn about those whom they fight or have conquered. For example: Zopyrus manages to infiltrate Babylon, Cyrus follows Croesus' advice, Cambyses sends spies to Ethiopia, and Darius recognizes that he will not be able to defeat the Scythians based upon his understanding of their cultural character. Historically, the Persians would adopt existing power structures and put local figures into key positions (as in Israel and Egypt). They also took care to publish their proclamations in the appropriate languages. Herodotus reveals this practice to some extent, but does not emphasize it as much as he could have.

⁵⁴ As indicated, for example, in both Athens' and Sparta's rejection and murder of the Persian heralds (7.133), and Athens' complaint to Sparta that Aegina medized (6.49.2).

Raaflaub suggests, “military conquest with the purpose or result of subjecting previously independent communities to formal outside rule was unknown in warfare among Greek *poleis* before the Persian Wars.”⁵⁵ The Greeks had not experienced and so could not accept the imperialism that Persia was bringing to Greece. Persia eventually meets its match here because, in its interaction with the Greeks, Persia’s bad political relativism is revealed for what it is.

One of the more shocking attempts at bad intervention in the *Histories* is Sparta’s plan to invade Athens and re-establish a tyranny (5.76, 5.91-94). They do so because they fear the power of the democratic Athenian state. The return of the tyrants in Athens by the Spartans is halted by the one of the Corinthians, who reminds Sparta that they are not oppressors, but rather liberators. Sparta needs to be reminded to be politically tolerant. The episode reveals that Sparta’s system of alliances is not a full hegemony: Sparta can be influenced by the other members of the alliance. This episode is also significant because it signals the beginning of opposition between the Athenian democracy and the Spartan oligarchic diarchy. At this point in time, mistrust flourishes, but Athens maintains the alliance through yielding to Sparta’s superior military ability.

The lesson of political relativism applies much more strongly in Greece itself. The Spartans and the Athenians show a much higher degree of political chauvinism and hence point to a much more dangerous future.⁵⁶ Mardonius’ calculation that the Greeks will lose because they fight one another rather than use diplomacy, while incorrect because the Greeks

⁵⁵ Raaflaub (2004, 72).

⁵⁶ Moles (2002, 36) shows that Herodotus’ attitude towards the Athenians is actually radically negative. The Spartans are willing to attack the Athenians for their democracy (5.91-94). Themistocles, through Athens, attacks Andros (8.111).

do win, is not a false criticism (7.9.b1). In the face of the Persian invasion, however, they are able to work together and practice good political relativism: a respectful if wary appreciation for who they all are.⁵⁷ For example, I have already discussed the Athenians' willingness to yield to the Spartans (147), but the Spartans also show deference to the Athenians, as seen prior to the battle of Plataea, where they request that the Athenians stand opposite the Persians in battle (9.46). This request indicates that the Spartans recognize the Athenians' military experience and are willing to exchange the most honored place in the battle because of it. But, as many point out, Greece during the time of the composition of the *Histories* is on the brink of internal war between Athenian Imperialism versus Spartan Hegemony, which turns into a war of the opposing political ideologies of democracy and oligarchy.⁵⁸ As Raaflaub argues, "while composing his history, Herodotus had in mind not only Athens' rise to power but also the destructive antagonism between the two leading powers and their detrimental inclination primarily to be concerned with their own interests."⁵⁹

The Greek misapprehension of the Persian Empire's failed invasion sets this conflict in motion. Steiner suggests that Herodotus "shapes his narrative so as to throw into relief the qualities that gave the victories to Greece."⁶⁰ In one way, she is correct, but she assumes, as Hall is inclined to do as well, some kind of common Greek identity, perhaps with Sparta at the center of "Greekness," perhaps Athens. At first glance, it seems that the Greeks won because of a shared idea of freedom, but, as I hope to have shown, Athens and Sparta have

⁵⁷ The Greeks debate and scheme against one another, as seen in their arguments before the battles of Salamis (8. 59-64) and Plataea (9.27, 46, 50-51), but they are able to overcome their arguments when the battle occurs.

⁵⁸ As presented by Thucydides.

⁵⁹ Raaflaub (1987, 239).

⁶⁰ Steiner (1994, 184).

very different conceptions of freedom. Each state thinks that its political institutions promote that freedom,⁶¹ and hence is responsible the victory. The Greeks do not focus upon the strengthening and equalizing nature of their alliance that promoted political relativism.⁶²

Hartog suggests that Herodotus “is excluded from politics and there is no way for his knowledge to be directly converted into power. His words are not directly political.”⁶³

Herodotus may not theorize the utilization of power, but his position is still political and can promote a form of power, the power of a united Greece.⁶⁴ Political relativism provides Herodotus with a vision of a united Hellas without the political domination of one state or another. The Athenian vision of Panhellenism described in Book Eight is integral to this model. Their description focuses upon the cultural similarities of the Greeks, but does not mention their political differences: “we are all Greek – one race speaking one language, with temples to the gods and religious rites in common, and with a common way of life”

(αὐτίς δὲ τὸ Ἑλληνικόν, ἐὼν ὁμαιμόν τε καὶ ὁμόγλωσσον, καὶ θεῶν ἰδρύματά τε κοινὰ καὶ θυσίαι ἡθεᾶ τε ὁμότροπα, 8.144.2). The Athenians

⁶¹ Euben (1986, 360) “the victory at Salamis was won by men because of their political culture. With [Herodotus] (but still more with Thucydides), we see the Athenians coming to understand their power (as distinct from their material strength) and so their triumph, as emanating from their democratic ethos.”

⁶² Munson (2001, 272-273) “Herodotus achieves a demythologized reconstruction of Greek resistance to the Persian invader and the later attempts of different groups of Greeks to interpret that even in their own ways. He portrays what the Greeks conceive Greekness to be as it actually manifested itself in precious moments at Marathon, Thermopylae, Salamis, and Plataea. His is, however, a qualified portrayal that reveals at least the fragility, if not the utter falsity, of the cultural superiority to which the Greeks lay a claim.” Lateiner (1989, 16) “The Persians threatened the Mediterranean world with ‘an excess of unity’ – a threat whose consequences are clearly presented in the *Histories*. A variety of national customs and institutions is both natural and beneficial for all, according to Herodotus, since different geographical and historical circumstances should prompt different responses; and all men can profit from nature’s and humanity’s diversity.”

⁶³ Hartog (1988, 363).

⁶⁴ Tronson (1991, 93-110) argues that the entire resistance was actually Spartan led, but that Herodotus gave the Athenians a more important role, perhaps to please them, but more likely to make the victory more Pan-Hellenic. As J. Hall (2000, 207) points out though, Panhellenism became an Athenian thing and all about their hegemony, rather than a nice true vision. Herodotus, I think, has his own, non-Athenian vision of Panhellenism.

emphasize similarities without making political differences important. This kind of Panhellenism is supported by the model of political relativism. The Greeks were successful in warding off the Persians, but not because of an overriding cultural dominance or political constitution. Rather, each state was able to feel that it was fighting under a common cause for its own, internally defined freedom. The Greeks won because they were able to unite *despite* their political differences. Herodotus recognizes this fact, and hence promotes political relativism.

This chapter first defined cultural relativism and political relativism and showed how the two concepts overlap and differ. The most significant interaction between the two concepts centers on the concept of freedom. Cultural relativism allows one to conceive of freedom as culturally defined, for freedom is the unhindered practice of *nomos*. Political relativism promotes the idea that states should accept not only the cultural difference of other people, but also their political difference. I then explored political relativism as a stance modeled by the arbitrator in the *Histories* and promoted by the text. Herodotus' position of political relativism influences the interpretation of his Panhellenism, for it suggests that, although he calls them the saviors of Greece (7.139.5), Herodotus does not believe that Athenian democracy was primarily responsible for the defeat of the Persian army, but rather that the Greek alliance as a whole was.⁶⁵ This interpretation conflicts with thinkers who believe that Herodotus prefers democracy to other forms of government. In my conclusion, I will gesture towards why this may be so in terms of Herodotus' concept of History.

⁶⁵ Herodotus does indeed give the Athenians great credit for the victory (7.139.5), but I believe, in general, that he promotes a broader view of the Greek victory. It was the Athenian decision to oppose the Persians that prompts him to call them the "saviors of Greece." The Spartans would have done so out of principle, and fought and died nobly. Thus, the Athenians have the credit of tipping the balance in the favor of the Greeks, but not for the actual victories. Even at Salamis, the Athenians get second place honors (8.93.1), the Aeginetans were rewarded the highest honors.

Conclusions

In my introduction, I suggested that causation in the *Histories* works on two levels, the macrosystemic and the microsystemic. This means that both large forces such as the inevitable rise and fall of societies or the balance between hard and soft societies and individuals or individual societies influence the historical narrative. The tension between the two levels makes them difficult to separate. Scholars are quick to note the tension but tend to focus on either the macrosystemic or microsystemic elements in their analysis.¹ This dissertation modeled its analysis of a point of intersection between the two levels – the political realm – on the analysis of another point of intersection – the cultural realm.

My analysis of the Constitutional Debate in Chapter 1 revealed that Herodotus promotes applied political theory. Both the macrosystemic perspective of political forms and the microsystemic perspective of the individual conspirators and Persian social values come together and promote the most viable political institution for Persia – a monarchy. This result suggests that the influence of cultural values on the political world is important for understanding political thinking in Herodotus.

Thus, in Chapter 2, I analyzed the relationship between culture and politics. First, I looked at the term *nomos* and its application in both the cultural and political realm. I concluded that *nomos*' primary function is that it creates distinctions that are cultural, political, or both. A strong example of this function may be found in Herodotus' narrative of the aftermath of the

¹ Raaflaub (1987), Dewald (2002), *inter alia*, focus on macrosystemic elements; Gould (1984), Flory (1987), Thompson (1996), *inter alia*, focus on microsystemic elements. Scholars who focus on both levels tend to be proponents of Herodotus' cultural relativism, such as Lateiner (1989) and Munson (2001).

battle of Thyrea (1.82). The Spartans institute a *nomos* that they will wear their hair long until they beat the Argives; the Argives institute the opposite *nomos* of wearing their hair short. The *nomoi* are expressed in everyday practices, much like clothing and tattoos, but have a political application. They reinforce the political difference between the Spartans and the Argives. Next, I examined how the cultural and political force of *nomos* influences the development of the so-called “hard” societies in the *Histories*. I argued that the ability to practice *nomos* promotes institutional formation, which in turn can provide justice, stability, and representation.

In Chapter 3, I expanded this rubric further; I examined societies that have these traits and looked into the mechanism by which culture and politics interact in complex societies. I discovered that, in many cases, culture acts as a limiting factor on the power of the political institutions. This limiting factor promotes both stability and strength for a society. These two qualities provide the space for the exercise of freedom.

In my final chapter, I examined the idea of freedom. I defined freedom in the *Histories* as the unhindered practice of *nomos*. This kind of freedom can foster internal unity and enable a society to assert external differences. It also suggests that importance of autonomy for individual societies. When a society has been conquered by another, its people lose their freedom. What this suggests is that the valuation of freedom in Herodotus is macrosystemic – individuals or societies are more successful when they feel free – the varying definitions are microsystemic – each society experiences freedom in a manner particular to its cultural values. Herodotus’ anti-imperialist stance is the best evidence for this position, because empires compromise the freedom of their subject states.

The role of the political relativist, like that of an arbitrator, is to take the macrosystemic perspective of freedom and evaluate societies on the basis of how they are structured to promote

their specific kind of freedom, rather than applying absolutist notions that privilege their own cultural and political biases. This is why I call Herodotus' thought applied or implicit political theory, for Herodotus encourages a stance that takes into account the culture and values of a particular society before making judgment. In suggesting this, this dissertation should deepen our appreciation of Herodotus as a political thinker. He resists or undermines abstract commentary, as I showed in my analysis of the Constitutional Debate, because he puts equal weight on both the macrosystemic and the microsystemic. Herodotus may engage in constructing macrosystemic binary systems of thought such as hard and soft or Greek and Other, but he undermines these binaries by a microsystemic emphasis upon the unique nature of each society he discusses. Immerwahr (1966) concludes that Herodotus is anti-imperialist because of his positive evaluation of variety.² This conclusion fits with a political relativist interpretation. Political relativism, however, also offers a solution to the problem of imperialistic or hegemonic ideologies by providing a new perspective on the cultural and political practices of societies.

Political relativism is one way to mediate the argument between political forms. It is the stance to take when reading the Constitutional Debate, but, as discussed in Chapter 1, this is difficult for democratic thinkers because Athenian democratic thinking often denies the viability of other political forms. As I discussed in Chapter 3, the Athenians expand their definition of freedom. They first include the majority of their population, then they begin to look outward and equate their concerns with the concerns of Greece as a whole. The Athenians are taking the first steps towards political and cultural hegemony in Greece. There are many traces of this ideology in the *Histories*, which scholars such as Forsdyke (1996, 2001) have elucidated. The presence of Athenian democratic ideology clouds our picture of how the text presents ideas such as freedom and equality, yet, as I hope to have shown, the *Histories* promotes political relativism, which

² Immerwahr (1966, 188).

allows for multiple definitions of those terms.

The Athenian view of political history is progressive, but Herodotus, like Solon, has a cyclical view of history.³ In this view of the world, constitutions fail, regardless of what kind of government; what was important once is insignificant now, and what is great was once insignificant (1.5.4). States must act, as Solon suggests in Book One, to protect themselves from decline as much as possible by being self-sufficient (1.32.8). Herodotus encourages us to look at the differences between the political structures in each particular context from the position of political relativism, rather than comparatively with an eye to establishing a hierarchy of political forms. Redfield reflects on the effect of one of Herodotus' goals for his readers: "to be aware of the system of mankind, of the laws which govern the transformations of *nomoi*, is in some degree to be free of systematic necessity."⁴ He suggests that Herodotus may think that this understanding is key to the Greeks' attaining some kind of joint cultural progress, rather than disparate states making political progress. I propose, instead, that Herodotus, since he conceives of cyclical time, promotes political and cultural relativism as a means to stave off the inevitable decline, which his history illuminates in so many societies and for so many people.

³ Lateiner (1977, 174) claims "History in the long perspective shows neither progress nor regress to Herodotus."

⁴ Redfield (1985, 118).

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