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Warfare and Society in Early Greece

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Chapter 9

Herodotos' Persian Wars

1. Introduction

Our survey of the literary evidence began with the *Iliad*, so it is perhaps fitting to end it with an analysis of another large text that centres on warfare, namely the so-called *Historiai* (literally, 'inquiries') written by Herodotos.[818] The text, which later Classical or Hellenistic scholars divided into nine books,[819] was probably written no later than about 425. Herodotos was a native of Halikarnassos, born around 484; he died around 425.[820] The purpose of the *Historiai* is to provide both an overview of, and a context to, the Greco-Persian Wars. As Herodotos says in his introduction, the book serves to celebrate the deeds of both Greeks and non-Greeks ('barbarians'); it is an 'epic' story about Greek and Eastern civilisations and how they clashed. Some believe the purpose of the text is political and intended to be read; Herodotos' story emphasises *hubris* and may have been written specifically as a warning for (imperialistic) Athenians to not overstep their mark.[821]

Herodotos offers information on the history of parts of Greece. While he tells us a great deal about the 'ancient' past, he is probably most reliable when it comes to the period between about 525 and 479 (*i.e.*, within living memory, from about the time of the ascension of Dareios in 522 to the battle at Mykale in 479). However, his account is far from complete, let alone objective;[822] this subjectivity was no doubt exacerbated by the fact that he relied mostly on oral traditions for his information.[823] As Robin Osborne points out, 'we should not underestimate the extent to which the shape and tenor of Herodotus' account was affected by whose stories he did and whose stories he did not hear.'[824] Herodotos' stories commonly have a moral, in which the stereotypical rise and (hubristic) fall of various historical figures take centre stage.[825] In this chapter, I focus on the

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818 Translations in this chapter are by Henry Cary.
819 On the presentation of Herodotos' text, see Flory 1980; on composition, refer to Lattimore 1958.
820 Rawlings 2007, 78 n. 3; more in-depth, see Evans 1987.
821 See, for example, Moles 2002, 49 (with references).
822 Regarding Herodotos' accuracy, see, *e.g.*, Harrison 2002, 571–578.
823 Slings 2002; Osborne 2002, 510–513 (Herodotos' apparent 'neglect of written sources'); Forsdyke 2002, 521 (note discussion on pp. 522–523 on technique).
824 Osborne 2002, 509 and also 517.
825 Gray 2002, 296–298; see also Van Wees 2002, 328–335. As Gregory Crane observes,

information Herodotos provides concerning Greek warfare in the late sixth and early fifth centuries, *i.e.* the era of the Persian Wars.

2. Arms and armour

The *Historiai* do not abound with detailed descriptions of arms and armour. We have already noted in the previous chapter that Herodotos claimed that parts of the panoply (shield blazons, shield-handles, and the method used to fix crests to helmet) had been invented by Karians (Hdt. 1.171). As far as the actual pieces of weapons and armour are concerned, there is great continuity when compared to the evidence gleaned from earlier written sources, such as the Archaic poets and Homer.

One notable feature is that Herodotos, like Tyrtaios, makes a fundamental distinction between lightly- and heavily-armoured troops. Whereas Tyrtaios speaks of *panoploi*, Herodotos uses the word *hoplitēs*, from which our familiar form 'hoplite' is derived. Hoplites in the *Historiai* are equipped with body-armour (*e.g.*, Hdt. 8.27) and large, blazoned shields (Hdt. 9.74; also 8.27);[826] one type of helmet is specifically called Korinthian (Hdt. 4.180). As far as their weapons are concerned, the set of two spears seems to have gone out of use by the time of the Persian Wars, being replaced instead by a single thrusting spear: there are virtually no references to men carrying a set of multiple spears or to spears being cast. The sword was used as a secondary weapon, particularly at close quarters when the spear had broken (*e.g.*, Hdt. 7.224). If a warrior had broken both spear and sword, he would continue the fight with daggers, or whatever rocks or other makeshift weapons might be at hand, or else using his fists and teeth (*e.g.*, Hdt. 7.225).

Like Tyrtaios, Herodotos denotes lightly-armed men as *gumnētes* or, more commonly, as *psiloi*. These lightly-armed troops include javelineers (Hdt. 8.90), as well as archers. The bow and arrow now exclusively appear in the hands of specialist archers, particularly *epikouroi* (*e.g.* Hdt. 3.39). When Pausanias sends a messenger to the Athenians to ask for help, he hopes that they will *at least* send him some archers (Hdt. 9.60), which suggests that during this period, archers were relatively plentiful and perhaps possessed a lower status than hoplites. However, masses of archers are considered a mainstay of the Persian army, rather than the Greek. For example, at the battle of Thermopylai, when a man from Trachis reported that the Persians could fire enough arrows to block out the sun, the Spartan Dienekes is famously said to have regarded this as excellent news, for that meant the battle would be fought in the shade (Hdt. 7.226).

Troops on foot (*pezoi*) were kept separate from those on horseback (*hippeis*), as a throwaway comment makes clear (Hdt. 9.32). The Athenians at Marathon were noteworthy for possessing neither archers nor horsemen (Hdt. 6.112). Sizeable numbers of Greek horsemen—normally referred to as

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'Catastrophic falls from good fortune captivated the Archaic and Classical Greeks in a way that may seem oddly familiar to the observers of modern journalism' (Crane 1996, 57).

826 *Cf.* the remarkable anecdote regarding the Athenian Sophanes at Plataia, Hdt. 9.74.

'cavalry' by modern authors—are associated in the *Historiai* with specific regions within the Aegean area. Attika is specifically said to be ill suited for horses (Hdt. 9.13), with the exception of the area around Marathon (Hdt. 6.102). In contrast, the Boiotians possessed bodies of horsemen, commanded by an *hipparchos* (Hdt. 9.68–69). The Thessalians were also renowned for their horsemen (Hdt. 7.173, 7.196, 8.28); when the sons of Peisistratos enlisted the aid of the Thessalians, they levelled the ground near Phaleron to make it better suited for horses (Hdt. 5.63).

Greeks from other parts of the Mediterranean also used horsemen, such as the Syrakousans (Hdt. 7.154 and 158). Riders were employed to despatch messages by both the Greeks (Hdt. 6.58, 9.54, 9.60), and the Persians (Hdt. 5.14, 9.17); they were also used as scouts (Hdt. 4.121, 7.208); furthermore, horsemen could seek out and destroy specific enemies (Hdt. 8.138). Certain elite bodies of fighting men had names that imply they once rode to the battlefield, such as the Spartan *hippeis* (Hdt. 1.67, 8.124).[827] However, the Persians employed greater numbers of horse troops, often to the detriment of Greek armies (Hdt. 4.87, 5.98, 6.29, 7.21, 7.40–41, 7.55, 7.84 and 87–88, 7.177, 8.113, 9.14, 9.20–25, 9.39–40, 9.49, 9.50–52 and 56–57, 9.60, 9.71, 9.85). The Lydians were also famous for their horsemen; Lydian troopers used long spears in combat (Hdt. 1.79–80). Persian horsemen apparently fought from horseback using javelins (Hdt. 9.17); it is unclear what weapons Greek horsemen used, and they may perhaps still have dismounted in the fashion of earlier *hippobatai*.

Some of the subject peoples recruited into the Persian army fielded large numbers of horse troops, such as the Skythians and the Lydians. Chariots were a relatively common feature on the Homeric battlefield, but their use was apparently discontinued shortly before the outbreak of the Persian Wars, although the Greeks still used them in races (Hdt. 5.77, 6.35–36, 6.70, 6.103, 6.122–126), as well as in processions, (Hdt. 1.60, 4.180), and also awarded them as prizes of honour (Hdt. 8.124). A chariot was still used by the Persians to transport their king (Hdt. 7.40–41, 7.55, 7.100, 8.115). Finally, chariots were used in war, sometimes alongside horsemen, by a number of foreign peoples, especially Lybians (Hdt. 1.179, 4.170, 4.183, 4.193, 5.9, 7.86–87, 7.184), as well as the Cypriots (Hdt. 5.113).

3. Warfare according to Herodotos

War in Herodotos differs from what we have observed in the Homeric and Archaic texts. On the whole, the scale of the fighting is much larger, involving higher numbers of combatants (although the exact figures are no doubt inflated), and the armies appear to be mobilised by a more or less central authority, with generals often being official magistrates or other appointed individuals rather than charismatic war-lords. There appears to be a shift from the individual to the collective body, a change that is perhaps best demonstrated by the structure of the army in the field and by the treatment of the war-dead, as I shall discuss in the following subsections.

827   Greenhalgh 1973, 94–95.

a. Causes of war

As far as the Greeks are concerned, the historical importance of the Persian Wars cannot be underestimated. In his prologue, Herodotos claims that the Greco-Persian conflict was essentially a struggle between different ideologies. He explains that the Trojan War came about due to differences in culture between the Greeks and the peoples of Asia as regards the abduction of women. It all started, according to Herodotos, when Greeks and Asians engaged in a tit-for-tat raiding of each other's women, including Zeus' abduction of Europa (Hdt. 1.1–5). Examples abound in the *Historiai* of battles and wars instigated by a desire for revenge (*e.g.*, Hdt. 4.1–4).[828] In an important paper, J.E. Lendon has pointed out how fundamental the concept of vengeance was to the ancient Greeks, connected as it was to ideas of friendship and gift-exchange. 'Both *xenia* and *philia* are grounded in the powerful Greek ethic of reciprocity,' he notes. 'But reciprocity has its dark side too; for just as it was obligatory for a Greek to give when given to, so too was it long obligatory to strike back when struck.'[829]

b. Raising an army

There is some evidence in Herodotos that he was familiar with the concept of private warbands existing in earlier times, which centred on an aristocratic leader (warlord). Kylon, an Athenian who had made a name for himself at the Olympic games, wanted to make himself a *turannos* in the later seventh century. He managed to secure the help of a number of men of his own age and tried to capture the Akropolis. Kylon and his companions failed, and were subsequently executed by members of the Alkmeonid *genos* (clan), an act for which they in turn were cursed (Hdt. 5.71).

However, from the latter half of the sixth century, such warbands seem to have all but disappeared. Larger armies appeared in their stead. The exact mechanism by which armies were mobilised around the time of the Persian Wars is never described by Herodotos, but personal ties of friendship and blood no longer appear to be a dominant factor. When in the later sixth century, the people of Aigina were fighting the Athenians, they asked the Argives for help. The Argive *dēmos* (in this case, the 'State') refused to answer their call. However, a thousand Argive volunteers, led by Eurybates, decided to join the battle regardless of what their political leaders had decided (Hdt. 6.92). In Athens, a centralised mechanism for mobilising the army may not have been available until the reforms of Kleisthenes at the end of the sixth century (Hdt. 5.66; *cf.* 5.78), a point recently emphasised by Henk Singor.[830] Sparta's rise to military prominence from the latter half of the sixth century onwards is probably also due to reforms that enabled the centralised mobilisation of armed forces on a grander scale than had hitherto been possible.

While the smaller war-bands known from Homer and at least some of

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828   See also Harrison 2002, 551–559 (accumulation of causes in Herodotos).
829   Lendon 2000, 3.
830   Singor 2000; see also Van Effenterre 1976, Frost 1984.

the Archaic poets are no longer a feature during the Persian Wars, the centrally-organised and larger armies of this period were not inflexible. A leader could detach a small group of warriors from the main force and lead them on specific missions. For example, Herodotos tells the story of the Athenian Aristeides, son of Lysimachos. During the battle of Salamis, he assembled a number of *hoplites*, fellow Athenians, from those who were ranged along the shores of Salamis. With this task force, he sailed to Psyttaleia, a small island between Salamis and the mainland, where they killed all of the Persians who were stationed there (Hdt. 8.95; concerning Psyttaleia, see 8.76). While some believe that this episode was concocted to put down the Themistoklean achievements during the sea-battle,[831] this cannot be proved.[832]

Alliances were more formal from probably the later sixth century onwards than they had been before. We have already seen how Alkaios described his brother as a *summachos* in the Babylonian army. *Summachoi* feature in Herodotos where they can best be translated as 'allies', that is communities that have agreed to fight together against a common enemy. Such alliances can be large or small (*e.g.*, Hdt. 1.22, 1.77, 1.102, 2.181, 4.120). The most famous *summachia*, 'alliance', is that of a large number of Greek states, led by Sparta, against the Persian invaders in 480–479. However, it is characteristic of the Greeks that this alliance crumbled almost as soon as the invader had been repulsed. As Thomas Harrison points out, 'though the Greeks engineer a seemingly resolute unity in the face of battle (8.86), this unity is, in the broader canvas of the war and the *Histories*, at best tenuous.'[833]

c. Spartan militarism

As is well known, Sparta differed to some extent as far as social and military organisation are concerned from most other Greek cities. For one thing, Sparta was ruled by not one, but two kings,[834] who had the right to declare war against anyone they wished (Hdt. 6.56). Furthermore, at some unknown point in the past, the Spartans had subjugated the other people of Lakonia (the so-called *perioikoi*, 'dwellers about') and enslaved the Messenians (called 'helots'). Spartan citizens ('Spartiates'), *perioikoi*, and helots together were referred to as Lakedaimonians and operated as a single armed force, if not on an equal footing (Hdt. 7.235). By the fifth century, the Spartans were renowned for their austere militarism, which was a result of their peculiar sociopolitical system. The legendary lawgiver Lykourgos was said to have created 'good laws' (*eunomia*) and established three important institutions that, as Herodotos puts it, all concerned warfare, namely the *enōmotias kai triekadas kai sussitia*. Nothing is known for certain as regards the

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831   *E.g.*, Fornara 1966.
832   Harrison 2002, 572.
833   Harrison 2002, 567.
834   This diarchy may have been instituted as recently as the sixth century; see Miller 1998, 1–2 (with references).

triekas.[835] The *enōmotia* ('sworn band') was probably derived from a warband or other all-male warrior group,[836] and was no doubt closely related to the *sussitia*, the 'common meals' or 'messes'. Furthermore, Lykourgos is credited by Herodotos with having set up the ephors (Spartan magistrates) and the *gerontes*, the 'council of elders' (Hdt. 1.65), a more formal body than the Homeric *gerontes*, of which the two kings were also a member.

The Spartans' reputation as a military force to be reckoned with pops up regularly in Herodotos. Whenever a polity requires military aid, the Spartans are usually the ones they turn to first; it was even possible for individuals to call in aid. When tyranny had been overthrown in Athens, a number of rival aristocratic factions vied for control. The two most important ones were led by Kleisthenes (of the Alkmeonidai) and Isagoras. Isagoras had a powerful guest-friend, namely Kleomenes, one of the kings of Sparta. Kleomenes sent a herald to Athens, which intimidated Kleisthenes enough to cause him to leave the city.[837] A little later, Kleomenes arrived in Athens with a small army. He drove out another seven hundred families. When he tried to dissolve the Council, the latter resisted, forcing Kleomenes and Isagoras to withdraw to the Akropolis, where they were besieged for two days. Kleomenes and his army was allowed to leave on the third day. Isagoras' supporters were executed; Kleisthenes and the other exiles were allowed to return.[838]

d. The use of mercenaries

The story of how pharaoh Psammetichos once hired Ionian and Karian raiders to serve him as *epikouroi* has already been summarised in the previous chapter (Hdt. 2.152–154). Greeks continued to be used as troops by foreign empires (*e.g.*, Hdt. 3.4–11), although not always as either volunteers or sellswords: when the Persians conquered a Greek city, it often had to provide levies for the army of the King of Kings. If we may believe Herodotos, Greek troops were considered to be among the cream of the military crop; the author frequently points out their superior weapons, armour, and skill, and contrasts them with Persian troops, who are lightly-armed, unskilled, and disorganised.

Some tyrants used mercenaries to secure their power. Polykrates, tyrant of Samos between 538 and 522, possessed a sizeable fleet of one hundred pentekonters, an army of mercenaries, and a force of one thousand *oikeioi* ('native') archers, which he used to conquer a number of cities and islands (Hdt. 3.39 and 3.45). Likewise, the Athenian tyrant Peisistratos, after being ousted for a third time, collected gifts and money from communities that owed him a favour. He then enlisted the aid of Argive mercenaries;

835 Perhaps it has something to do with the three Doric tribes, the Hylleis, Pamphyloi, and Dymanatai or Dymanes (Hdt. 5.68); *cf.* Tyrtaios fr. 19 West?

836 In Thoukydides' time, the *enōmotia* was the smallest Spartan tactical unit, numbering thirty-two men (Thouk. 5.68).

837 For further details, see Bicknell 1970.

838 For further discussion, unimportant here, see Forsdyke 2002, 539–545.

furthermore, a man from Naxos, Lygdamis, provided him with both money and men (Hdt. 1.61). Peisistratos and his mercenaries then waged a full-scale battle against the—apparently rather small—army of the Athenians and managed to secure a victory (Hdt. 1.62–63), allowing him to rule for the third and final time (Hdt. 1.64).

e. The journey to the battlefield

Before and during the period of the Persian Wars, the Greeks continued to fight among themselves, between neighbouring territories (*e.g.*, Hdt. 1.30); they used ships to travel from their hometown to an enemy settlement that could most easily be reached by sea. However, a feature that we have not encountered earlier is the long march over land to reach the battlefield, such as when the Spartans and their allies march to Thermopylai (Hdt. 7.177). In Homer and the lyric poets, long distances are generally covered using ships. A possible explanation for overland marches might be that armies were now far larger than could be easily transported using available ships. This ties in to the notion, suggested in earlier chapters, that the scale of fighting increased in the course of the Archaic period, moving from relatively small-scale raids to devastatingly large wars.

f. Fortifications

Most sizeable cities in the *Historiai* are walled and equipped with multiple towers (*e.g.*, Hdt. 3.156, 9.118). Wherever stone or mudbrick fortifications were lacking, the Greeks were apt to construct temporary wooden palisades (for example, to guard the Isthmus at Korinth: Hdt. 7.139; see also 6.36). At the behest of a number of exiled Samians, the Spartans waged war against Polykrates, tyrant of Samos. When the Lakedaimonian army arrived at Samos, they attacked the Samian wall. The Samians quickly increased the height of their walls in vulnerable places. Eventually, the Spartans were chased from the walls and had to give up after a siege of forty days (Hdt. 3.54).

g. Army organisation

In the *Iliad*, as we have seen, different types of troops are not separated into distinct homogenous units; instead, the basic tactical unit is the heterogonous warband. This also appears to have been the basic unit that lyric poets had in mind. However, it is clear from Herodotos' descriptions of important battles during the Persian Wars that the Greeks by that time, like the Medes and their Persian successors, had divided their troops into largely homogenous units according to type (*e.g.*, tactical units of archers, spearmen, and horsemen). When this change occurred precisely among the Greeks is never stated explicitly in any of the literary sources, but it obviously must have happened, if we believe Herodotos, sometime in the sixth century, prior to the outbreak of the Persian Wars (*cf.* Hdt. 1.103).

By the time of the Persian Wars, different types of troops no longer intermix on the battlefield, as they do in Homer and possibly the lyric poets (*e.g.*, Tyrtaios' *panoploi* and *gumnētes*), but are now each organised into

distinct units. The army as a whole is of course still called *stratos*, the typical Greek word for 'army' or 'host'. Individual units are called *lochoi*, while larger divisions are dubbed *tēlea*. *Lochos* was already used by Homer to refer to a body of men; Herodotos uses it in much the same way (*e.g.*, Hdt. 9.53). It is often translated as 'company', numbering up to a few hundred men and commanded by a *lochagos*, 'captain'.[839] The battle-array or order of battle itself may be referred to as *taxis*.[840] *Taxis* could also mean 'division', in which case it was divided into *lochoi*, as made clear in Aischylos' play *Persai* (298). A *taxis* was commanded by a *taxiarchos*. The army as a whole was commanded by one or more *stratēgoi*, 'generals' (Hdt. 7.83).[841] The *polemarchos* ('polemarch'), a commander-in-chief of the army, was an archon-position at Athens (Hdt. 6.109); it was also the title of a high-ranking military commander at Sparta (Hdt. 7.173), though one of the kings always served as commander of the army there.

While we have already seen that Greek warriors tended to band together and fight in groups, sometimes in 'waves', the use of a more rigid formation appears to have been an invention of around the time of the Persian Wars. In Herodotos, the heavily-armed warriors, or *hoplites*, are arranged in roughly rectangular formations (wider than they are deep), with men arrayed in ranks and files (*e.g.*, Hdt. 5.76, 9.18, 9.25). Unlike later Greek historians, Herodotos gives no absolute depths of formations used,[842] so fighting in formation may still have been somewhat looser than would be the case, for example, during the later Peloponnesian Wars. At Marathon, Herodotos points out that the Athenian line was much thinner in the centre than at the wings (Hdt. 6.111), while at Plataia the Spartan formation was much deeper than those of the other Greeks (Hdt. 9.31).[843] However, once battle began, there was still ample room for individuals to prove their worth and subsequently be singled out by Herodotos for special mention.

The ebb and flood of war, familiar from Homer and perhaps some of the lyric poets, during which men might run back and forth between the battle itself and their camp, is absent from Herodotos' descriptions. Instead, the men seem to have stayed put for as long as the battle lasted, and the use of formations ensured that each man had a proper place on the battlefield; the Spartans were reportedly somewhat peeved when Thermopylai-survivor Aristodemos abandoned his position in the ranks to fight the Persians (Hdt. 9.71). In short, I imagine that the bulk of the fighting would have been conducted by those in the front ranks, with the one directly behind his

839 The Athenian commander Olympidoros led a group, *lochos*, of three hundred picked men (Hdt. 9.21). Variations on the world *lochos* are also used to denote men hiding in ambush (*e.g.*, Hdt. 6.37) as well as ships stationed somewhere (*e.g.*, Hdt. 8.6).

840 They fight *kata taxein*, 'in good order' (Hdt. 8.86; *cf.* 5.75, 9.26); also used of ships (*e.g.*, Hdt. 6,37).

841 In Athens and a number of other cities, *stratēgoi* were also magistrates (Hdt. 5.38, 6.109).

842 Pritchett 1971, 134–143.

843 There is no mention in the *Historiai* of the *phalanx tōn hoplitōn*, the 'hoplite phalanx': a phrase that we do encounter in the works of later Greek historians (*e.g.*, Xen. *Anab.* 6.5.27; *cf.* 1.8.17 and 6.5.25). This may suggest that phalanx fighting was not yet fully formed, or still relatively new. See also, briefly, Pritchett 1985, 22.

file-leader taking his place when he fell or otherwise had to step back from combat. This mode of fighting probably resembled something of a 'meatgrinder', though still relatively fluid when compared to the phalanxes of later years.[844]

In large engagements between groups of allies, the troops are arranged on the battlefield in a specific order of battle, stationed according to regional contingent, in a manner familiar from the *Iliad*. In Herodotos, however, there is a clear hierarchy as regards the exact placement of troops on the line. A battle-line could be divided into three parts: the centre, and the left and right wings (the Greek word for 'wing', *keras*, originally means 'horn'). The far-right was considered the place of honour (Hdt. 6.111); this is an element that we have not encountered before. Commanders do not appear to have had a specific place assigned to them, although they did take an active part in the fighting, sometimes leading to their demise (*e.g.*, Hdt. 6.114, 7.224); they probably took position in the front rank, to fight as *promachos*, though there is no proof that they took their place at the extreme right, as they did in later times.[845]

h. Agents and attendants in the Greek armies

Like Homeric armies, Greek armies during the Persian Wars included a number of agents and attendants, as well as a large number of slaves, some of whom may have taken a part in the fighting, such as the Messenian helots (Hdt. 9.28).[846] I shall return to the use of slaves in battle in the summary to this part of the book. Other agents include the now familiar seers, heralds (*e.g.*, Hdt. 9.12), and scouts. Furthermore, it seems that commanders had servants and shield-bearers (Hdt. 5.111, 9.82), and attendants were an apparently common feature in Greek armies (Hdt. 7.229, 9.50).

The *manteis*, seers, often feature more prominently in Herodotos' descriptions than in Homer's (they are absent from the lyric fragments), and few commanders undertake anything without consulting a seer (*e.g.*, Hdt. 7.113). A new element is the pre-battle sacrifice, *sphagia* (a word that emphasises the flowing of blood), to determine whether or not one should attack.[847] However, it must be noted that in Herodotos, this sacrifice is always conducted within the confines of the camp rather than on the battlefield; the latter would become the norm shortly after the Persian Wars.[848] In some instances, a seer is able to give direct tactical advice (Hdt. 8.27).

Spies are fairly rare in Herodotos' account of the Persian Wars, although both the Greeks and the Persians rely on the intelligence provided by traitors and deserters (*e.g.*, Hdt. 7.219; also Hdt. 6.101, *cf*. 6.21). Both sides typically picked their battlegrounds after some consideration: the Greeks specifically decided to make their stand at Thermopylai because the

844   See Cawkwell 1989, 388–389; Brouwers 2007b, 38–40.
845   Hanson 2000 [1989], 113–115.
846   On the role of slaves in warfare, see Hunt 1998.
847   Pritchett 1971, 114 (table 2), collects the evidence.
848   Jameson 1991, esp. pp. 200–213.

Persians' superior numbers and horses would be of no avail to them there (Hdt. 7.177). Lookouts were sometimes posted to keep an eye on the enemy; they would send out runners to report back any news (Hdt. 7.192). When the Persian fleet was on the move, a squadron of ten fast ships formed an advance guard (Hdt. 7.179). Relatively small ships, such as pentekonters (see below), were normally used as naval spies (*e.g.*, Hdt. 1.152).

i. Bloodless campaigns

It is usually assumed that once an army was mobilised and on its way to engage its target, a battle would be inevitable. Certainly, this is an impression fostered by both Homer and the lyric poets. However, Herodotos' account contains a large number of expeditions in which opponents never came to blows. Some communities, rather than risking battle with the mighty Persian army, surrendered rather than try and put up any resistance. For example, when the Persians took Egypt, the neighbouring Lybians, Kyrenaians, and Barkaians immediately surrendered (Hdt. 3.13).

In Greece, some people simply abandoned their cities to the encroaching Persian fleet. For example, the Byzantines and Chalkedonians left their cities and fled inland, where they founded a new city (Hdt. 6.33). When the Persians invaded Naxos, many of the people there had fled to the mountains. The few that remained were enslaved, after which the city and its sacred places (*ta hiera*) were burnt (Hdt. 6.96). Likewise, the Phokians tried to evade the Persians by fleeing to the slopes of Parnassos, to the city of Neon, and to Amphissa in the Krisaian plain (Hdt. 8.32); others fled to the islands, or escaped the Aegean altogether. Famously, most Athenians abandoned their city and fled to the island of Salamis in 480 (Hdt. 8.41), while a few holed up on the Akropolis.

Sometimes, an attack—often a siege—was simply unsuccessful and had to be abandoned. At one point, the Athenians besieged Kallipolis, Leontinoi, Naxos, and Zankle, but failed to capture any of these cities (Hdt. 7.154). The Athenian commander Miltiades suffered from equally bad luck. In 489, he besieged the city of Paros, telling the islanders that he would not leave until they were dead or had paid him a hundred talents. A short while later, Miltiades hurt his leg while leaping over a fence. He abandoned the siege and ultimately died of the wound on his leg (Hdt. 6.133–135).

j. Open-field or pitched battles

As Thomas Harrison points out, 'Herodotus's accounts of battle are necessarily stylized.' Furthermore, whenever the historian does describe a battle, he 'ascribes a limited range of tactical choices to any commander: the decision to fight a battle in a confined space (a "tactic" employed with success by the Greeks at Artemisium, Thermopylae, and at Salamis [...]) or in a location suitable for cavalry.'[849] Most battles in Herodotos are either pitched battles, sieges, or sea-battles (a type of battle that we have not yet

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849   Harrison 2002, 564–565.

encountered in the texts examined thus far).[850]

Some of the older battles described by Herodotos are mostly anecdotal, but they may contain a kernel of truth. His brief description of the so-called 'Battle of the Fetters' (traditionally dated around 560), in which the Spartans were defeated by the Tegeans and clamped in their own irons, serves mostly to underscore Herodotos' theme of *hubris*, even if he claims to have seen the original fetters in a temple at Tegea (Hdt. 1.66). In the 'Battle of the Champions', referenced later by Thoukydides (5.41), the Spartans had captured a piece of borderland called Thyreai from the Argives. The two sides agreed to settle the dispute in the way of a formal challenge: each side would only leave three hundred of their best warriors to fight, while the remainder of the armies went home to await the outcome. The ensuing battle lasted until nightfall. Only three men had survived: two Argives and a Spartan named Othryades.[851] The Argives believed they had won and rushed off to tell their people the news. Othryades, however, remained put on the battlefield and stripped the enemy corpses of their armour. Next day, both armies returned to the site and a quarrel naturally arose about who was the rightful victor. Finally, the two sides came to blows in an all-out battle that was ultimately won by Sparta (Hdt. 1.82). The generally accepted date for this battle is 546.[852]

The pitched battles fought during the Persian Wars have peculiar features of their own. I shall briefly discuss the major battles, namely those of Marathon, Thermopylai, and Plataia. These battles were fought not too long before Herodotos' own time, and he may have been able to interview witnesses and participants. The descriptions of these battles may therefore be more accurate than those of earlier engagements, hopefully allowing for a better reconstruction of, for example, the mechanics of combat.[853] One element that has received much criticism is Herodotos' juggling with numbers: on the whole, most agree that he has greatly inflated the number of combatants at each of the battles, particularly on the Persian side.[854]

The land battles described by Herodotos are characterised by large-scale manoeuvres. No longer do the battles consist of fluid, back-and-forth movement of parts of the army. Rather, the core of the army consists of hoplites who move and fight in unison under their general's command. At Marathon (490), the Athenians charged the Persians at a run (Hdt. 6.112), perhaps the first *massed* charge—rather than a *mass* charge—in Greek

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850   We may safely ignore the characterisation of Greek combat that Herodotos attributed to the Persian general Mardonios (Hdt. 7.9), as little of that description—apart from the observation that the Greeks were stubborn and quarrelsome!—is borne out by the *Historiai*.

851   Dillery 1996, 217, points out that the duel and the motif of the sole survivor are a recurring pattern in Herodotos; here at Thyreai and later at Thermopylai. These patterns belong alongside 'The recurrence of the wise advisor, the endless parade of dynasts who destroy themselves through their self-delusion and excess, the inevitablity of vengeance.'

852   Kelly 1970a, 975 n. 17.

853   On the possibility of reconstructing ancient battles, see Whatley 1964.

854   In some cases, at least, 'what may have been no more than a "modest superiority" in numbers has been monstrously inflated' (Harrison 2002, 576).

history.[855] The Athenian line crashed into the Persians. In the course of the battle, the Persians managed to break through the thin Athenian centre. However, the wings of the Athenian army were strong and they managed to envelop the Persians: a manoeuvre known as 'double envelopment' or the 'pincer movement'. When the Persians routed, the Athenians and their Plataian allies wheeled round and went after the Persians who had broken through the centre, slaughtering many as they fled. The Greeks followed the Persians back to their ships, called for fire, and then proceeded to attack the fleet (Hdt. 6.113), capturing a total of seven ships. According to Herodotos, about 6,400 Persians died, while on the Athenian side only 192 men were killed (Hdt. 6.117), among them Kallimachos, the *polemarchos*, and Stesilaos, one of the generals (Hdt. 6.114).

Similar large-scale tactical manoeuvring on the battlefield is clear from other descriptions. At Thermopylai, the Spartans and their allies took up position in the narrow pass and lured the Persians into the funnel by rushing out towards them and then running back when their numerically superior enemy came near (Hdt. 7.202–210). The Greeks managed to kill large numbers of Persian attackers. Herodotos furthermore claims that the Persians were at a disadvantage as far as their equipment and skill was concerned (Hdt. 7.211). In the end, the Greeks were overrun when a traitor led some of the Persian troops along a hidden track so that they could attack them in the rear (Hdt. 7.215–223). The Greeks were also able to fall back in a more or less organised way, as demonstrated by their large-scale tactical retreat just prior to the Battle of Plataia (Hdt. 9.50–52).

A few elements in Herodotos' battle descriptions appear to have been inspired more by epic tradition than actual events. One example is found in Herodotos' account of the Battle of Thermopylai. After several days of hard fighting, most of the spears of the Greeks had by now been broken in combat, so much of the fighting was now done using swords. It was during this part of the battle that the Spartan king Leonidas was killed, alongside other brave Spartans (Hdt. 7.224). An epic battle ensued over the corpse of Leonidas, recalling the *Leichekämpfe* in the *Iliad*.[856] At last, the remaining Greeks, except the Thebans (who surrendered; Hdt. 7.233), made their stand on a hillock, defending themselves now with daggers. They were, however, at long last overwhelmed by the arrows of the Persians and died (Hdt. 7.225).

k. Ambuscades, single combat, and surprise attacks

As far as ambuscades and single combat is concerned, Herodotos is consistent with the evidence examined so far. Ambushes and other surprise attacks were commonly employed by the Greeks both before and during the Persian Wars.[857] Herodotos' text features a number of anecdotes in which ruses play an important part (*e.g.*, Hdt. 6.77–78 and 8.27). Furthermore, instances of single combat, called *monomachia*, are limited. We are told that

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855   Rawlings 2007, 92.
856   On Homeric echoes in Herodotos, see Boedeker 2002, esp. pp. 101–107.
857   The evidence is collected in Pritchett 1974, 164 (table 4) and 180 (table 7).

Eurybates, an apparently over-eager commander of an Argive army of volunteers, was killed in single combat by the fourth man he challenged (Hdt. 6.92). Another example of *monomachia* took the form of a military contest in three distinct stages, where man squared off against man, horse against horse, and dog against dog (Hdt. 5.1); a further example is drawn from myth (Hdt. 9.26). *Monomachia* is also the term used by the Athenians to describe their battle against the Persians at Marathon (Hdt. 9.27); in this case, the term denotes a test of strength between two specific groups.

l. Naval warfare

The official Athenian naval force was no longer maintained by individuals on a voluntary basis, as was the case in the Homeric epics. Instead, we now find officials in charge of the maintenance of Athens' ships. According to Herodotos, the Kylon conspiracy, mentioned earlier, was put down by the *prutaneis* (leaders) of the *naukrariai* (Hdt. 5.71). These 'naucraries' were an organisational unit presumably responsible for the upkeep of ships. The historian claims that, back then, these men effectively ruled Athens (Hdt. 5.71).[858] The word *naukrarias* derives from the Greek word *naus*, 'ship', although Herodotos tells us next to nothing about this institution and later Greek authors regard them as the predecessors of the Kleisthenic demes (*demoi*),[859] and therefore subdivisions of the four Ionian *phulai* ('tribes').[860] By the time of the Persian Wars, the *prutaneis* of the *naukrariai* were probably the ones who were responsible for getting their ships and crews ready for war.

Herodotos is the first to describe naval warfare, in the sense of battles fought out between rival fleets. Two sea-battles are described in some detail, namely those of Artemision (fought on the same day as Thermopylai, 11 August 480) and Salamis (September 480). Ships only rarely appear as the property of private individuals (*e.g.*, Hdt. 8.17). Under pressure from the Persians, the Athenians under Themistokles initiated a large-scale ship-building programme (see below).[861] Herodotos mentions two types of vessels, namely the *pentekontoros*, or fifty-oared galley, and the trireme. Herodotos' *pentekontoros* may have been the same type of ship as the fifty-oared warships in Homer (the use of the word *eikosoros* at *Odyssey* 9.322–323, lends some support to this idea through analogy), though it is not impossible that Herodotos' vessels were actually biremes (who also had about 25 men to a side, staggered across two tiers; this type of ship is otherwise notable by its absence in Herodotos' account).

The *triērēs* or 'trireme' was much larger; its single most distinguishing feature were its three banks of oars on either side of the ship. The trireme was probably introduced in the Aegean around the middle of the sixth century. Around that time, the poet Hipponax it the first to refer to a trireme in one of his extant fragments, in which he admonishes Mimnes for painting

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858   But note the discussion in Lang 1967, 244–246.
859   For a discussion on the *naukrariai*, Attic tribes, and so forth, see Hall 2007, 215–217.
860   Hall 2007, 223.
861   Rawlings 2007, 106–108.

'on a trireme's many-benched side a serpent that runs from the ram to the helmsman; for it is a dangerous omen for the helmsman' (fr. 28.2–5 West; translation Gerber). Aside from steersmen and a captain (*triērarchos*, Hdt. 8.85), a trireme needed about 170 rowers (*eretai*), one man per oar, who were *thētes* or possibly slaves; each vessel also had a complement of hoplites that served as marines (*epibatai*) in boarding actions (Hdt. 7.100, 7.180–181, 8.83, 9.32). Triremes had bronze-reinforced rams at the front: these were the first true warships, *i.e.* vessels that were weapons in themselves (*e.g.*, Hdt. 8.90).

Like the land battles, the sea battles are characterised by large-scale co-ordinated movement, with fleets even deployed in simple formations. Most ancient sea-battles onwards appear to have been fought with vessels formed up line abreast, rather than line ahead (*e.g.*, Hdt. 8.85).[862] At the Sea-Battle of Artemision, the Greeks used the *diekplous*, a tactic in which ships sought an opening in order to ram an enemy vessel (*cf.* Hdt. 6.12), to break the line of Persian ships (Hdt. 8.9). At Salamis, the naval equivalent of Leonidas' tactic at Thermopylai was used by luring the Persian ships into a narrow straight where they could be easily attacked by the numerically inferior Greek ships (Hdt. 8.56–64, 8.85–89). Herodotos claims that the Persians were relatively quickly disordered by the tactics used by the Greeks (Hdt. 8.86), which might suggest that the Greeks were better organised.

m. Distribution of booty

Epic tinges in Herodotos have been noted earlier; the battle around Leonidas' corpse is a fine example of a Homeric-style *Leichekampf* (Hdt. 7.225). The stripping of the enemy dead of their weapons and, in the case of the Persians, jewellery following a battle is mentioned rarely by Herodotos (Hdt. 9.80), but these were undoubtedly a major part of the spoils of war and probably taken for granted. The stripping of the enemy fallen of their armour also plays a crucial role in his account of the older 'Battle of the Champions' (Hdt. 1.83), discussed earlier.

Distribution of booty may have taken place shortly after victory, prior to the burial of the dead (*e.g.*, Hdt. 9.85). A portion of the spoils, usually a tithe, was to be dedicated to the gods (*e.g.* Hdt. 9.81), and the generals were expected to be given their own portions (*e.g.*, Hdt. 9.81),[863] probably before the rest was distributed among the remaining warriors in the army. The spoils naturally consisted of arms and armour, and whatever else might be found on the bodies of the dead or in their camp. For example, after the battle of Plataia, the Greeks discovered considerable treasures in the Persian camp that were originally intended to bribe the Greeks into submission (Hdt. 9.41). Prisoners of war were enslaved (Hdt. 1.151, 6.45, 6.106), held for ransom, usually at a fixed price (Hdt. 5.77, 6.79, 9.99), or executed (Hdt. 1.167, 4.202, 8.127, 9.120); only rarely were prisoners ritually sacrificed (Hdt. 7.180).

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862 Lazenby 1987, 170–172.
863 On the difficulties of interpreting the precise portion in this passage, see Pritchett 1971, 54–55.

Whereas in Homer and the Archaic poets each death is lamented and honoured individually, in Herodotos the war-dead feature as a collective. Enemy Persians, at least, were left unburied, scattered across the battlefield. Hence, when the Spartans learnt of the Athenian victory at Marathon, they set off for the place and looked at the corpses littering the field, then commended the Athenians on a job well done (Hdt. 6.120). The natural impulse for some men was to mutilate enemy corpses: Lampon suggested to Pausanias that he defile the body of Mardonios in order to avenge the death of Leonidas, who was also mutilated by the Persians (Hdt. 9.78–79).[864]

Herodotos does not say what happened to the 192 Athenian dead at Marathon, but Thoukydides mentions, in the famous funeral oration attributed to Perikles, that they were buried where they fell (Thouk. 2.34). Excavations carried out from the end of the nineteenth century onwards have revealed several mass graves in the area, one of which is ascribed to the Athenians, another possibly to their Plataian allies and slaves (Greeks were cremated, slaves inhumed).[865] The men who died at Thermopylai were also buried on the battlefield, covered by a burial mound. Three inscriptions, one for all the dead collectively, one specifically for the Spartans, and one for the Spartan soothsayer Megistias (an act of friendship on the part of his *xenos* Simonides son of Leoprepes), were placed at the site (Hdt. 7.228). After the battle of Plataia, each of the Greek communities buried their dead in separate mass graves. Herodotos adds that other Greek communities erected burial mounds at Plataia in order to pretend to have fought there as well (Hdt. 9.85). Sometimes, Herodotos mentions specific warriors by name, as for example with the four young Spartans he lists among the fallen at Plataia.[866]

4. Conclusions

What (dis)continuity is there between Herodotos' descriptions of war and martial activities and those of Homer and the Archaic poets? Like Homer, he may distinguish between troops on foot (*pezoi*) and troops on horseback (*hippeis*). Furthermore, like Tyrtaios but unlike all other Archaic sources, he makes a fundamental distinction between heavily-armoured warriors on foot (*hoplitai*, called *panoploi* by Tyrtaios) and lightly-armoured troops (in addition to the Tyrtaian *gumnētes*, Herodotos refers to these as *psiloi)*. Most of his descriptions of battle focus mostly on the *hoplitai*: in some cases, such as at the battles of Marathon and Thermopylai, it seems as if these are the only Greek troops engaged in the fighting. In contrast, the Persians are called *gumnētes* ('naked'), and said to employ large numbers of archers.[867]

864   Some Persian actions described by Herodotos, such as the ritual mutilation of corpses belonging to troublesome enemies, 'represent in distorted fashion near-eastern rituals' (Harrison 2002, 576).

865   For a summary, refer to Pritchett 1985, 126–129; see also Whitley 1994, 215–217.

866   Herodotos points out that only among the Spartans, younger and older men are treated differently; a custom they supposedly shared with the Egyptians (Hdt. 2.80).

867   It should be noted that this stereotype is not paculiar to Herodotos. Throughout

Horsemen, in the sense of men who fought from horseback, were limited to specific regions in Greece, especially Thessaly and Boiotia, and some Eastern peoples, such as the Lydians, are singled out as horse-masters.

By the time of the Persian Wars, small warbands no longer dominate the battlefield. Instead, large armies, mobilised through a central authority, were used by the major Greek communities. In Sparta, all men were now organised in mess groups—the sober and restrained counterparts to the drinking groups familiar from the Archaic poets—and so-called 'sworn bands'. The kings had the power to declare war against any they desired, though their political power was curtailed by magistrates (the ephors) and the *gerontes* or elders. Similarly, at Athens the army was now centrally mobilised and commanded by what we might term 'state-appointed officials', elected as either one of ten *stratēgoi* ('generals') or *polemarchos* ('war-chief', 'war archon'). It was still possible for some men to ignore the decisions of the 'State' (*dēmos*), as Eurybates and his thousand Argives did, but on the whole ties of friendship, blood, and dependency were replaced by centralised mechanisms of recruitment and mobilisation.

The descriptions of battles in Herodotos are little more than rough sketches. Furthermore, some evidence is clearly anecdotal. Herodotos' descriptions of the Archaic 'Battle of the Fetters' and the 'Battle of the Champions' obviously fall into that category, although one could argue that the latter was similar to the Lelantine War discussed in the previous chapter: in both, the opponents agreed to fight according to specific rules. This, however, should not be taken to mean that *all* Archaic battles were highly ritualised in nature, as the bulk of the evidence proves that this was clearly not the case (and anecdotal evidence generally arises from atypical situations). If anything, such battles are the exceptions, rather than indicative of the general rule.

Herodotos' descriptions of the battles fought in the course of the Persian Wars are more believable, not in the least since he was probably able to interview survivors. These battles are also different with regards to scale and organisation than those familiar from the Archaic poets. Hoplites, *psiloi*, and horsemen no longer mingled freely on the battlefield, but operated instead in separate units (*telea* or *lochoi*). The fluid back-and-forth, characteristic of Homeric battle and perhaps also of the lyric poets, has gone. Instead, hoplites now operated in roughly rectangular formations (normally referred to as 'phalanxes'), that were generally wider than they were deep, although Herodotos never specifies the exact depth. It is remarkable that the Greek armies in each of the major battles performed large-scale military manoeuvres. At Marathon, the Athenians managed to envelop the Persian host. At Thermopylai, the army of Leonidas managed to lure the Persians deeper and deeper into the narrow defile by running out and falling back when the enemy came too close. At Plataia, Herodotos makes a special point of contrasting the Persian custom of attacking singly or in small groups with the Spartan tactic of sticking together.

Aischylos' play *Persai*, 'the Persian bow is contrasted with the Greek spear' (Kelley 1979, 216).

Herodotos' *Historiai*, then, present a world that is different from that of Homer and the lyric poets. Troops are now clearly designated as lightly- or heavily-armed, and as operating on foot or on horseback. Armies no longer consist of small groups of men centred on an aristocratic leader, but are instead mobilised by a central authority and commanded by state-appointed officials. On the battlefield, both on land and at sea, the forces as a whole work together to perform military manoeuvres. Unfortunately, the moment that this change occurred has not been recorded in any of the extant literary sources, but based on the Archaic sources discussed in the former chapter, especially the Salamis decree, the changes must have occurred sometime during the second half of the sixth century.