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Editors' Foreword

We have had a productive start to 2023 at New Classicists. On top of our regular work of helping early career and postgraduate authors to publish their exciting new research, we have also an upcoming conference at the Institute of Classical Studies in London titled "Bearers of Faith: Local Practice, Communal Ritual, and the expression of Religious Identity in the Ancient and Late-Antique Mediterranean, ca. 200 BC – AD 600" organised by two members of the journal's editorial board, Dr Luca Ricci and James Worth.

Our eighth issue eight has four new articles for your reading pleasure. Our first article by Dr Sara Mohr and Sam Butler dives into the fantastical future and a reception of the use of Agamemnon in Frank Herbert's *Dune*. Our next article is by Laura Nees Cardie, who brings us back to the ancient world with a thorough discussion of who the real Amazons were as seen in the literary, artistic, and archaeological evidence. Next, we have Georgia Choustoulaki's article that explores the speech *Endeixis Against Theocrines* and how it contributed to the construction of the portrait of a sycophant. Finally, there is Martine Diepenbroek's article, which explores steganography and secret communication in Persia and Sparta as depicted in Herodotus, and how it subsequently influenced later sources.

I would like to finally thank the authors who have submitted their work to New Classicists, both for this issue and in our upcoming issues. Your continued faith in our publication and mission means the world to us. I must also recognise New Classicists' editorial team who have volunteered their time and work diligently to keep this journal running smoothly.

I hope you enjoy our latest issue and continue to take a keen interest in New Classicists. We are already hard at work getting articles ready for the next issue.

Best regards,
Dr Jordon Houston and Giuseppe L. Ficocelli
Co-Editors-in-Chief

The Agamemnon Problem: The Fluidity of History-Making and Myth-Making in the *Dune* Universe

by Sara Mohr and Sam Butler

> "The Sisterhood has no need for archaeologists. As Reverend Mothers, we embody history." — Bene Gesserit Teaching (*Dune*: *House Corrino*, 183)[1]

1. Introduction

Frank Herbert's *Dune* series is regarded as a masterpiece of science fiction world-building and epic narrative structure. Set thousands of years in the future, the story revolves around House Atreides, the noble house controlling the planetary fief of Caladan as part of an interstellar, multi-planet society. However, the Atreides trace their ancestry back thousands of years to the times of the ancient Greeks of old Terra (Earth), specifically to Agamemnon. Outside of the books, Agamemnon is a prominent figure in ancient Greek mythology, most famous for leading the Greeks in the war against the city of Troy.

The use of such a genealogy in the *Dune* universe would be interesting enough in its own right, as it anchors this saga of the distant future in our own distant past. Yet what makes this genealogy a problem worthy of particular note is the introduction of the Titan Agamemnon in the *Legends of Dune* prequel trilogy written by Brian Herbert and Kevin J. Anderson.

The Titan Agamemnon, a human brain controlling a mechanical body, is a "real" character in the world, as opposed to the mythical ancient Greek Agamemnon, and can plausibly serve as an anchor for the heritage of House Atreides. However, references throughout the original six *Dune* books and throughout the *Legends of Dune* and *Prelude to Dune* trilogies[2] suggest that the Titan Agamemnon may not be the only Agamemnon to exist in the *Dune* universe. Further, it is not always clear to whom explicit mentions of "Agamemnon" are referring. The result is a muddled ancestral history for House Atreides in a way that may well be entirely accidental, but which mimics the way historical connections are made to a glorious past in the ancient world.

Our goal is not to critique the authors for their use or misuse of the "source material," or to point out inconsistencies between books. Rather, as ancient historians, we are interested in

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[1] In this article, we will be citing all books in the *Dune* series by their title only for the sake of simplicity.
[2] The *Legends of Dune* trilogy includes *The Butlerian Jihad, The Machine Crusade,* and *The Battle of Corrin.* The *Prelude to Dune* trilogy refers to *Dune: House Atreides*, *Dune: House Harkonnen*, and *Dune: House Corrino*.

exploring the ways that, intentionally or not, the ambiguity within the Atreides' lineage mimics a phenomenon that we can see throughout history. As detailed by Busse, the role of the author in the interpretation of a work has been debated even before Roland Barthes' seminal work "The Death of the Author" in 1968. And it has continued to be debated ever since (Busse 2017, 21-26). However, one lasting effect of Barthes' and other Postmodernists' writings is the idea that authorial intent is not the only metric for analyzing a work. The reader's experience and interpretations are also valid avenues of investigation. In this piece, therefore, our goal is not to critique inconsistencies between texts written by multiple authors with potentially different intentions. Instead, our focus will be on exploring the experience of the reader.

As ancient historians and science fiction enthusiasts, we are guided by four main questions: Is House Atreides' connection with the Agamemnon of ancient Greek myth "real" in the conceit of the books, or is it fabricated? In what way(s) does Agamemnon exist or not exist in the *Dune* universe? Can we recognize distinctions between the two Agamemnons as readers? The answers to these questions, or lack thereof, highlight the discrepancies among authors and among different series of the *Dune* universe that brings the story more in line with history than may have been intended.

2. *Dune* and the Ancient Greek Influence

Much has been written about the relation between science fiction writing and myth-making. Indeed, in their 1969 article on the topic titled "Science Fiction as Mythology," Sutton and Sutton even referenced F. Herbert's *Dune*, writing: "It is not infrequent to find themes from earlier mythologies serving as subplots for science fiction stories. Examples are readily afforded by F. Herbert, who weaves a knowledge of ecology with allusions to Old Testament myths in his novel *Dune* (236)." F. Herbert is perhaps one of the most well-referenced authors to do so (Christensen 2015; Rogers 2017). Our topic therefore is not a new one. But when it comes to the *Dune* universe, few works have gone beyond pointing out such "allusions" to discussing how the authors use mythological or historical motifs to explore the themes of this series (Kennedy 2016, 101). Our goal in this article is to take a deep dive into one such allusion in the *Dune* series in order to show how its inclusion enriches the series' exploration of history and myth-making across vast time scales, whether the authors intended so or not.

As has been noted, references to names, places and languages from our own past are abound in F. Herbert's series, as well as those of B. Herbert and K. J. Anderson. The universe of *Dune* is wide and complex and the authors build its history from traces of a varied past. The languages

represented in *Dune* are diverse. Atreides is based in Greek and Bene Gesserit is based in Latin[3], reflecting the strong influence of Classical history. But there is also representation from Navajo, Chakobsa, Turkish, Persian, and Nahuatl (*Dreamer of Dune*, 189). Additionally, the planet Arrakis and its notorious fearsome sandworm draw inspiration from the folklore of dragons. Particularly, the descriptions of Shai Hulud mimic those of the dragon who guarded the great treasure in the epic tale *Beowulf* (Interview with Frank Herbert 1969; Afterword to *Dune*, 876). B. Herbert would go on to name one of the subordinate Titans, under the thumb of the Titan Agamemnon, Beowulf in the *Legends of Dune* prequel trilogy.

But what is the effect of all these names and allusions on the reader? Kara Kennedy argues that "[Frank] Herbert deliberately chooses names that already exist or are slightly altered and so evoke recognizable time periods, environments, religions, and cultures, and construct the illusion of a universe that exists beyond the borders of the story itself" (Kennedy 2016, 100). On the one hand, this usage of names is a useful shortcut for the authors in their worldbuilding, especially since the Dune universe is meant to take place in our own distant future. For example, the fact that Shaddam IV is called "the Padishah Emperor" evokes Orientalizing tropes of the Eastern Despot for the reader ("Pad(i)shah," 1996; Kennedey 2016, 100). However, it is also possible that within the *Dune* universe, the term itself is a hold-over from ancient Terra. On the other hand, the fact that the authors rely on real-world examples creates room for confusion precisely because the reader cannot always be sure whether the referent of an ancient allusion is something specific from our own past or just a certain atmosphere.

Rogers and Stevens discuss the ambivalence of classical allusions in Science Fiction in the introduction to their volume *Classical Traditions in Science Fiction*. They argue that the inclusion of classical references in Science Fiction represents "an advanced post-modern moment marked by a recomposition of past cultural products that is omnivorous and, from a scholarly perspective, generally uncritical" (Rogers and Stevens 2015, 10). Within the *Dune* series, the use of allusions to past cultures and names is clearly "omnivorous" as noted above. What we are arguing here is that it is also "uncritical" (from the specialist's perspective) because the purpose is often, as Kennedy writes, to "evoke" a time or culture the reader may be familiar with, without engaging further with the cultural context of that allusion. And it is this generally "uncritical" handling of ancient "source material" that leads to ambiguity when it comes to one of the most developed allusions in the series: House Atreides.

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[3] Gesserit was also stylized to sound like Jesuit (*Dreamer of Dune*, 21).

There are many indications that when F. Herbert penned the first *Dune* books, he had story-lines and themes from ancient Greek mythology in his head. In an interview later published by his editor Tim O'Reilly, F. Herbert states that he viewed Paul Atreides as "the hero of a Greek tragedy, in a sense," and said "heroism was his Achilles' heel. That was his flaw" (O'Reilly 1987, 110). B. Herbert later laid out more explicitly the influence of the ancient world, specifically the ancient Greek world, on his father's conceptualization of *Dune*. In the afterword he penned to his father's *Dune*, B. Herbert explains perhaps the most well-known of these ancient Greek references:

> For the names of heroes, Frank Herbert selected from Greek mythology and other mythological bases. The Greek House Atreus, upon which House Atreides in *Dune* was based, was the ill-fated family of kings Menelaus and Agamemnon. A heroic family, it was beset by tragic flaws and burdened with a curse pronounced against it by Thyestes. This foreshadows the troubles Frank Herbert had in mind for the Atreides family. The evil Harkonnens of *Dune* are related to the Atreides by blood, so when they assassinate Paul's father Duke Leto, it is kinsmen against kinsmen, similar to what occurred in the household of Agamemnon when he was murdered by his wife Clytemnestra. (Afterword to *Dune* 2005, 875)

In his 2003 biography of his father, *Dreamer of Dune,* B. Herbert writes that his father had long been intrigued by the study of the past, even making several attempts at learning Latin in high school (40). Greek tragedy appeared to have a unique hold on F. Herbert, particularly based in the theme of hubris on the level of the individual and of society as a whole. B. Herbert writes,

> Very few readers realized that the story of Paul Atreides was not only a Greek tragedy on an individual and familial scale. There was another layer, larger than Paul, and in that layer Frank Herbert was warning that entire societies could be led to ruination by a hero. In Dune and Dune Messiah he was cautioning against pride and excessive confidence, the hubris of Greek tragedies that led to the great fall. But it was societal-scale hubris he was warning against... the potential demise of an entire society. (*Dreamer of Dune*, 191)

It seems clear, therefore, that F. Herbert's idea of his own Atreides was influenced by his understanding of ancient Greek mythology and the stories surrounding the House of Atreus. By choosing the name "Atreides" for the main protagonists of *Dune*, F. Herbert was aiming to

inject an air of tragedy into the story of this family that would further highlight the theme of hubris inherent in the work.

Whatever F. Herbert's original intentions, however, the inclusion of the Atreides within the *Dune* universe does more than just evoke a certain tragic sensibility. For while the allusions to Greek mythology are some of the most developed across all the *Dune* series, they are still the products of the "omnivorous" and "uncritical" approach that Rogers and Stevens argue characterizes Science Fiction's attitude towards the ancient world. This, and the fact that the *Dune* universe is the creation of multiple authors, leads to the interpretative quandary that we call the "Agamemnon Problem."

3. The Agamemnon Problem

It is clear for us as readers that there exist two Agamemnons of mythical (or semi-mythical) fame in the Dune universe: Agamemnon of ancient Greek myth and the Titan Agamemnon. However, two things remain unclear. Firstly, are we the readers supposed to treat their connection as real? Secondly, are the characters in the books aware of both Agamemnons? In this section, we will explore these questions which constitute what we have termed the Agamemnon Problem.

3.1 The Agamemnons

House Atreides in the *Dune* universe traces its lineage back to a larger-than-life figure named Agamemnon. In ancient Greek mythology, Agamemnon was king of the city of Mycenae. He is most famous for leading the Greeks against the city of Troy in order to recover his brother Menelaus' wife, Helen, who had been abducted by Paris, a prince of Troy. Agamemnon and Menelaus were known as "the Atreides," which simply means "Sons of Atreus." Atreus could trace his lineage back to the figure Tantalus, who attempted to serve his own son as a feast for the Gods. Because of this impious act, the Gods cursed the line of Tantalus to misfortune, a curse that only ended with Agamemnon's son Orestes. Orestes killed his mother, Agamemnon's wife, Clytemnestra, after she herself had killed Agamemnon. However, in a trial between Orestes and the avenging Furies, Orestes is acquitted and his line left at peace (Aeschylus, *Eumenides*).

Until the publication of the *Legends of Dune* prequel series, readers of F. Herbert's *Dune* were left to believe either that House Atreides had made up this connection to a family from the mythological past of Old Earth, or that in the *Dune* universe, the House of Atreus and Agamemnon should be considered as historical. However, B. Herbert and Anderson introduce the Titan Agamemnon, a human brain contained in a robot body known as a cymek. It is clear

that Agamemnon is a self-assigned name, as the human turned cymek sought to take on an air of grandeur as his power grew.

> As a boy, Agamemnon had been raised on pampered Earth, with the name of Andrew Skouros. His parents had led a hedonistic but passionless lifestyle, as had so many other citizens. They existed, they dabbled … but none of them really *lived*. Across the depths of time, he barely remembered the faces of his parents. All weak and feeble humans looked the same to him now. Andrew Skouros had always been restless. He asked uncomfortable questions that no one could answer." (*The Butlerian Jihad*, 300)

This passage is one of only a handful in the series that gives the reader a glimpse of the Titans before their transformation into cymeks, and Agamemnon is one of only a few Titans whose human names the reader learns. He is joined by other Titan cymeks who give themselves monikers after similarly powerful figures, like Juno, the Roman goddess, and Xerxes, the ancient Persian king.

At the same time, we are introduced to the Titan Agamemnon, we meet Vorian Atreides, a fully human son of Agamemnon. He is one of at least a dozen human men spawned from the Titan Agamemnon's sperm and a female human slave. Vorian is the only one who has been deemed worthy of living this long, both for his general skill and for his loyalty to machines over humans. We are later treated to how he started the famous House Atreides and even the Bene Gesserit. As the direct descendant of the Titan Agamemnon, it would be expected that Vorian would be referring to his father when waxing poetic about his strong heritage and connections to Agamemnon. However, we quickly learn that this is not the case for his descendants.

The name "Atreides" is first used for Vorian, not the Titan Agamemnon. Vorian is first mentioned by his father, who simply calls him "my son Vorian" (*The Butlerian Jihad*, 55). But a few pages later he is introduced by the narrator with his full name, "Vorian Atreides" (57). There is no indication as to how he took on this last name. When he meets Serena Butler, presumably the first free human he has ever met, she seems to already know his full name as she greets him as "Vorian Atreides" (*The Butlerian Jihad*, 378). She could only have learned this name after being captured by the machines and being sent to the robot Erasmus' villa where she meets Vorian. Hence, it seems Vorian already used Atreides as a last name before his defection to the humans.

Are we the readers supposed to imagine that the Titan Agamemnon gave him this name? As previously mentioned, the Titan Agamemnon's human name was Andrew Skouros, so it is not as if Atreides was a "family" name passed on from father to son. Is it possible then that the name

Atreides, just like the name Agamemnon, was assumed by the Titan just for its mythic connotations? This possibility seems to be precluded by the fact that we are told by the narrator that Vorian "could trace his lineage back past the Time of Titans, thousands of years to the House of Atreus in ancient Greece and another famous Agamemnon" (*The Butlerian Jihad* 2002, 57). This seems to be an explicit statement not only that Vorian was descended from the Agamemnon of Greek myth, but that *that* Agamemnon should also be considered as real in the *Dune* universe. It is potentially significant, in this case, that the name "Andrew Skouros" has a certain Greek ring to it. Andrew is the anglicized version of the Greek name Andreas (Ανδρέας), used in both ancient and modern Greece (Hanks et. al., 2006). *Skouros* (σκούρος) is a Greek adjective meaning "dark," or "shadowy," although it is not used in names ("Σκούρος," 2022). This choice of name thus seems to leave open the possibility that the Titan Agamemnon came from a human family with Greek roots that traced its lineage back to king Agamemnon of Mycenae. In this case, the decision on the part of Andrew to take on the name Agamemnon and then (much later) give his son the family name Atreides would not have been arbitrary, but rather a deliberate call back to his family's roots.

But the books won't let us off that easy. The problem with this picture is that it puts the burden of proof on the Titan Agamemnon. Whatever Vorian thinks he knows about his lineage would have come from his father. But the Titan's trustworthiness as a historian is explicitly called into question. Indeed, it is partly by learning about discrepancies between his father's and Omnius' accounts of the wars between the machines and humans that leads Vorian to defecting (*The Butlerian Jihad* 2002, 488-489). It is therefore reasonable to question whatever Vorian thinks he knows about his lineage from his father.

Our purpose here is not to argue which of these two scenarios is more likely or is what the authors intended. Rather it is to demonstrate that from the very origins of House Atreides in *The Butlerian Jihad*, there is reason for the reader to be uncertain what they are supposed to believe about the connection between the two Agamemnons. The possibility is raised that the Titan Agamemnon, and thus all of House Atreides, are descendants of a real king Agamemnon of Mycenae. But at the same time, we as readers are given reason enough to doubt this.

3.2 *The Question of in-text Awareness*

This first issue concerns what we as readers are supposed to think about the two Agamemnons. The second issue we will discuss is what the characters think. The basic question is, are the characters in the *Dune* universe aware of this doubling of Agamemnons? Given that the Titan Agamemnon is present for the action of the chronologically first three books, the

question may seem obtuse. However, in many places, the books leave plenty of room for ambiguity as to which Agamemnon is being referred to.

In fact, there is only one instance where the existence of two Agamemnon's is explicitly acknowledged. This is in the passage that introduces Vorian quoted above:

> Born from a female slave impregnated with Agamemnon's preserved sperm, dark-haired Vorian could trace his lineage back past the Time of Titans, thousands of years to the House of Atreus in ancient Greece and another famous Agamemnon. (*The Butlerian Jihad*, 57)

In the above passage, the Agamemnon of ancient Greek myth is specifically referred to as "another" Agamemnon, in contrast to the Titan of the same name.

In most cases, when a character refers to Agamemnon, it is clear that they believe they are referring to the mythical Agamemnon. The characters in the *Dune* universe are certainly aware of Earth's ancient past. Repeated references are made to ancient peoples and individuals such as the Egyptians (*The Butlerian Jihad*) and the Neo-Assyrian king Ashurnaṣirpal (*God Emperor of Dune* 131), as well as ideas such as Feng Shui (*House Atreides* 434), and the Indian concept of Maya or "illusion" (*Children of Dune* 107), to name a few. Despite this depth of knowledge, there appears to be continued confusion over the existence of an ancient Greek Agamemnon as more than a character in a story.

Nowhere is this more clear than the opening scene of *House Atreides*, in which a performance of the play *Agamemnon* by Aeschylus is staged.[4] Aeschylus (c. 525-455 BCE) was an ancient Greek tragedian and his *Agamemnon*, first put on in 458 BCE, depicted the return of Agamemnon from Troy and his murder at the hands of his wife Clytemnestra. At the beginning of *House Atreides*, the reader is told that the performance of the play is an annual tradition for the Atreides. We are then given a snapshot of the performance:

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[4] For a discussion of the reception of Aeschylus in *Dune*, see Rogers 2017

> 'Suffering is the great teacher of Men,' the chorus of old actors said as they stood on the stage, their voices in perfect unison. Though the performers were simple villagers from the town below Castle Caladan, they had rehearsed well for the annual performance of the official House Play. Their costumes were colorful, if not entirely authentic. The props – the facade of Agamemnon's palace, the flagstoned courtyard – showed a realism based only on enthusiasm and a few filmbook snap-shots of ancient Greece. The long play by Aeschylus had already gone on for some time... (Dune: House Atreides, 23-24)

The quoted phrase appears to be the rendering of a famous line (180) of the play: *πάθει μάθος* (pathei mathos*)*: "learning (comes from) suffering," which became proverbial.[5] In addition to the performance of the play by itself, the story of *Agamemnon* appears to be a large part of how the Atreides family thinks of themselves and their own history. In ruminating to himself, Duke Leto Atreides is said to have "shuddered as he thought of the play *Agamemnon*, and the curse of Atreus that had dogged his family since the dawn of history" (*House Atreides* 2001, 470). The introduction of this real ancient Greek play into the mythos of House Atreides, therefore, highlights the tension between myth and history that we are examining here. For it seems that the play is treated as an historical drama about the Atreides' ancestors. The added detail that the set design was based on images from ancient Greece may support this view.

And there are many indications throughout the *Prelude to Dune* series that the Atreides view this story portrayed by Aeschylus as family history. In *House Harkonnen* (2000), Duke Leto laments that House Atreides is undoubtedly cursed, and has been "since the days of Agamemnon" (680). A deepening of the family connection to Agamemnon is also evident in the name Leto gives to his young son, Paul:

> Taking his son in his strong hands, Duke Leto lifted the baby high. "Citizens of Caladan, meet your next ruler–*Paul Orestes Atreides*!" The name had been chosen to honor Leto's father Paulus, while the middle name, Orestes, commemorated the son of Agamemnon in the House of Atreus, thought to be the forerunner of House Atreides (*House Corrino*, 655).

As previously discussed, Orestes is the son of Agamemnon in the ancient Greek story. However, the passage suggests that he and his father were the forerunners of House Atreides, and therefore were real people, who started the Atreides line. In the *Dune* universe, there is indeed an

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[5] Translation is our own.

Agamemnon who had a son who then began what would be known as House Atreides. But they are distinctly different from the ancient Agamemnon and his son Orestes.

In F. Herbert's original series, there are several references to an Agamemnon, and two of these are clearly to the one from ancient Greek mythology. These both come from the mouth of Leto II in *God Emperor of Dune* (1987). The first is in a passage in the *Stolen Journals* where Leto is speaking to the audience, he knows will eventually read them. Here he declares: "My paternal grandfather was *The Atreides*, descendant of the House of Atreus and tracing his ancestry directly back to the Greek original" (13). The second comes from an imagined dialogue Leto has with himself, where he states: "Through my father's line and the others, I have gone right back to the House of Atreus" (183). From these references, the reader learns that Leto II traces his ancestry back to a House of Atreus and Agamemnon specifically, which he considers to be "Greek."

In these cases, a character is obviously referring to the ancient Greek Agamemnon. In fact, in the *Prelude to Dune* series and F. Herbert's series, there are no clear references to the Titan Agamemnon. One obvious explanation for this may be that the series about the machine war was the last to be written. Without knowing how much of the prequel series is inspired by topics included in F. Herbert's notes, we could assume that the Titan Agamemnon did not exist before *The Bulerian Jihad* was published in 2002. However, regardless of authorial intent, once the reader becomes aware of the potential existence of two Agamemnon's in the Atreides line, many of the references to Agamemnon become ambiguous.

For example, when Leto I sees the body of his first son Victor lying in a morgue, he remarks: "There can be no doubt now [...] House Atreides is cursed... and has been since the days of Agamemnon" (*House Harkonnen,* 680). While this can be read as a reference to the tradition of the curse of the House of Atreus in Greek myth, the idea also applies to the Titan Agamemnon and his son Vorian, both of whom could be considered cursed; the former for become a cymek and enemy of humanity and the latter for being in responsible for the deaths of billions of humans in his extermination campaign against the Synchronized Worlds.

The two other references to Agamemnon from F. Herbert's original series can also be read as ambiguous. In *Children of Dune* (1987), when Alia suffers the assault of her Other Memories that leads her to cede control to the memory of Baron Harkonnen, the only voice that is explicitly named is Agamemnon: "I, Agamemnon, your ancestor, demand audience!" (60). Chronologically later comes the passage where Ghanima is scolding Irulan for not knowing her history:

> We Atreides go back to Agamemnon and we know what's in our blood. Never forget that, childless wife of my father. We Atreides have a bloody history and we're not through with the blood (*Children of Dune* 1987, 287).

Again, in both cases there is room to question which Agamemnon the characters are referring to. The other memory in Alia's head could be either given that they are both her ancestors. And both the figure of myth and the Titan could be said to have started "a bloody history."

This then is the Agamemnon Problem. The doubling of Agamemnons in the lineage of the Atreides creates a situation that leads readers to question the validity of the Atreides' claims and moreover to question what the Atreides' themselves think about their lineage. Our goal in tracing this problem is to highlight another way in which the books deal with the theme of myth-making and its consequences. The existence of two Agamemnons in the Dune universe, especially with one who outside of the books could be considered 'mythical,' sheds light on the ways in which humans view the past and incorporate it into their present, and how myths can come to be viewed as reality, and real events and people as mythical.

4. Problematizing the Problem

In the preceding section, we presented the Agamemnon Problem as insoluble from the characters' perspective; while we the readers know about the two Agamemnons, there is hardly any proof that the characters do as well. This is the ambiguity that we find so fascinating; over the course of history, the boundary between myth and history can be easily elided.

Our discussion thus far has mostly been focused on the Atreides themselves and what they knew of their own "lineage." However, the Butlerian Jihad was common knowledge, and a further layer of complexity is added to our argument when we address the question of what in general was known about the Butlerian Jihad by the time we get to the action of the *House* series and Frank Herbert's original series. There are numerous references to the war with the Machines by characters in the original series and the reader is obviously meant to understand that most people knew about it, especially through the command: "Thou shalt not make a machine in the likeness of a human mind!" preserved in the O.C. Bible. Yet given that it occurred 10,000 years before the action of the original *Dune* series, how detailed was their knowledge?

One potential answer is that at least some people should have been aware of the Titan Agamemnon. The *Butlerian Jihad* begins thus: "Princess Irulan writes: 'Any true student must realize that History has no beginning. Regardless of where a story starts, there are always earlier heroes and earlier tragedies'" (*The Butlerian Jihad* 2002, 1). The conceit is that the opening

chapter of this book, which gives a general overview of the rise of the Titans and then the machines, is taken from one of the writings of Irulan. But in our much-discussed passage from *Children of Dune*, Irulan is shown to be ignorant of the name Agamemnon when Ghanima mentions him. How can this be if she wrote about the Butlerian Jihad?

One obvious answer is that she only learned of the Titan Agamemnon and wrote her work on the Jihad after the events described in *Children of Dune*. Having (miraculously) survived all the events of first Paul's, then Leto II's rise to power, Irulan apparently lived out her life peacefully. It is easy to imagine that, after Leto II secured his place as emperor, Irulan retired to a life of research and writing. In various chapter epigrams, she is mentioned as the author of no less than 22 separate works, and so there is no reason she could not have authored one on the Butlerian Jihad.[6][7] One imaginable scenario therefore is that someone like Irulan, with access to Imperial and Bene Gesserit archives, could have uncovered accurate information about both Agamemnons. The general public and even House Atreides could have relegated both to "the distant past," only preserving the name of one figure. This is of course an unanswerable question, but our point is that the fact that Irulan seems to have written a history of the Jihad mentioning the Cymek Agamemnon does not mean that everyone, including the Atreides themselves, would have been aware of the Cymek Agamemnon.

The other source for information about the past that we must address here is the Other Memory of the Bene Gesserit sisters and of Alia, Paul Atreides, and his children. In the *Dune* universe, the Bene Gesserit sisters gain the ability to access the memories of all their female ancestors through the initiation ritual by which they become Reverend Mothers. Paul Atreides, as the Kwisatz Haderach, has the ability to access all the memories of both male and female ancestors, a power shared by his sister Alia, and his children Ghanima and Leto II.[8] It is this

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[6] Assuming Collected Sayings of Muad'dib and Sayings of Muad'dib are the same work, and likewise for Conversations with Muad'dib and Muad'dib: Conversations

[7] Though interestingly, it is to Harq al-Ada that an epigram in Children of Dune (395) from a work titled The Butlerian Jihad is attributed. This is the name given by Leto II to Farad'n, the grandson of Shaddam IV and eventual husband to Ghanima. At the end of Children of Dune, when Farad'n is forced to become Ghanima's consort and rechristened, he is also tasked by Leto II to become the official scribe of the Atreides and no less than 17 works are attributed to him in epigrams.

[8] As we learn from Reverend Mother Mohiam:

> 'We look down so many avenues of the past...but only feminine avenues.' Her voice took on a note of sadness. 'Yet, there's a place where no Truthsayer can see. We are repelled by it, terrorized. It is said a man will come one day and find in the gift of the drug his inward eye. He will look where we cannot—into both feminine and masculine pasts.'
> 'Your Kwisatz Haderach?' (*Dune*, 15)

ability that leads to the attitude captured in the epigram we use at the start of this article, that the Bene Gesserit have no need for archaeologists (or, we might add, historians) because they have access to the actual experiences of their ancestors since the beginning of humanity. It is therefore reasonable to ask how any sort of historical confusion could arise for people with this ability; to put it another way, did they not have ancestors who lived at the time of the Butlerian Jihad and potentially in ancient Greece?

In fact, we are given a demonstration of a Bene Gesserit sister using her Other Memory to fact check something from ancient history, specifically something about ancient Greece. In *Chapterhouse: Dune* (1987), Odrade, now Mother Superior, meets the disgraced sister Dortjula and learns she has a hobby:

> Odrade thought most interests boring but found it significant that Dortjula called hers a hobby. She collected old coins, did she?
> "What kind?"
> "I have two early Greek in silver and a perfect gold obol."
> "Authentic?"
> "They're real." Meaning she had done a self-scan of Other Memory to authenticate them (Chapterhouse Dune, 145).

We learn several important things from this exchange. Firstly, actual physical objects, here coins, from Old Earth have survived until the present of the books. Secondly, we see Other Memory in action: Dortjula has evidently looked back through her Other Memories to find someone who lived in ancient Greece who can confirm that indeed the coins that Dortjula possesses are genuine. A corollary to this that has important implications for our question is that we are given a mechanism whereby someone like Dortjula could "remember" either stories about the mythical king Agamemnon if he is supposed to be mythical, or memories of the actual king if he is supposed to be real. Furthermore, people with Other Memory should be able to remember the Titan Agamemnon and be able to distinguish him from the Agamemnon of ancient Greece. Whether this is the case or not is in the end immaterial; we as readers do not see Other Memory being used for this purpose, so the ambiguity remains.

5. Real World Examples

As we have said, what makes the doubling of Agamemnons in the *Dune* universe particularly interesting is that it mirrors, intentionally or not, the ways in which people throughout history have reused names, and the ways in which people pass between myth and history. The following examples are by no means meant to be exhaustive, rather we merely wish to point out two key

instances of this phenomenon from our areas of expertise in ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern history.

Perhaps no Near Eastern king is as widely known as Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon. His fame, or rather infamy, is largely due to his role in Jewish history, where he is known as the destroyer of the Kingdom of Judah leading to the Babylonian exile. Under his rule, Babylon was the seat of an empire that rivaled that of the Assyrians, becoming the commercial and political center of the ancient Near East. In fact, our image of a grand Babylonian capital city is largely due to his extensive building projects (Beaulieu 2017). From the framework of his success, it is no wonder that he takes on a larger-than-life persona in our modern world. However, he is actually one of three Mesopotamian rulers to have had the name Nebuchadnezzar. As each new Nebuchadnezzar appeared on the scene, the mythologized version of their stories took on more weight, even in the ancient world.

It is not clear after whom Nebuchadnezzar II was named, if anyone. Nebuchadnezzar I ruled as the fourth king of the Second Dynasty of Isin in the 12th century BCE. He is known primarily for his victory over Elam and the return of the statue of the god Marduk to its rightful place. Nebuchadnezzar II and Nebuchadnezzar I are unrelated. It is another Nebuchadnezzar, who was ruler of Uruk under the reign of Ashurbanipal in the seventh century BCE who was likely the grandfather of Nebuchadnezzar II. This familial character was not the subject of renewed interest during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II. Rather, it was Nebuchadnezzar I. Ultimately, in the narrative the Babylonians were trying to write, it did not matter which Nebuchadnezzar was the hero of the story.

The mythologizing of "King Nebuchadnezzar" began in earnest during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II. To mythologize a real person is to make them abstract, to eventually ignore the name of the individual altogether in favor of an image that can be conjured in connection with multiple real people (Sack 2004). In the case of Nebuchadnezzars I and II, it is clear to see where that would be possible. The biggest threat to the Neo-Babylonian Empire were the Persians, an outside non-native foe with the potential to compromise important Babylonian traditions and customs. In crafting the narrative of the rightful heirs to Babylon fighting against outsiders, the Babylonians turned to the exploits of Nebuchadnezzar I, easily equating Elam and Persia (Nielsen 2015). While the achievements of Nebuchadnezzar I were aligned with those of Nebuchadnezzar II, beginning the abstraction of the great king, the process became more involved in Greek sources.

The historian Megasthenes of the third and fourth centuries BCE writes of a king Nebuchadnezzar, without stating which one. He attributes superhuman attributes to this king, including building the walls of Babylon in just 15 days (Sack 2004). Megasthenes also claims that his version of Nebuchadnezzar lived during the time of Belus, who was considered by some Hellenistic sources to be the first king in the Mesopotamian region after the creation (Sack 2004). For authors like Megasthenes it didn't matter that there were no specifics around which Nebuchadnezzar was being referred to, or that his feats were impossible to have achieved. What mattered was the ability to pick some historical fact and relate it well enough to established tradition to create the myth of the great king Nebuchadnezzar. There were three Nebuchadnezzars who lived and ruled in Mesopotamia. As time marched on, it mattered less which achievements belonged to whom. What became important was the narrative and the sense of connection to the past the narrative forged.

The previous example mirrors what we argue is happening in the *Dune* universe: someone taking on or calling back to a prestigious name for their own gain. But the case of Marcus Junius Brutus, one of the assassins of Julius Caesar, illustrates that identification with a real or fictitious predecessor is not always beneficial for an individual. Marcus Junius Brutus (c. 85–42 BCE), or just Brutus as he is more commonly known thanks to Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, was a Roman politician, military commander, and erstwhile ally of Julius Caesar. He is perhaps most well-known now for his "betrayal" when he joined the conspiracy against Caesar and was one of the men who assassinated him in 44 BCE. What interests us here is one of the tactics that, according to our sources, was used to persuade him to turn against Caesar. For Brutus was not the first Junius Brutus in the annals of Roman history. Roman tradition held that a Lucius Junius Brutus was one of the main actors in the abolition of the monarchy in Rome and its re-foundation, in 509 BCE, as a Republic (Livy 1.56.7-60.4). As one of the founders of the Republic, the name Junius Brutus therefore had a large amount of cultural cache by the time Caesar's rise to power seemed to presage the Republic's end.

It is for this reason that those who were unhappy with Caesar's rule capitalized on the similarity of their names and possible connection to urge Marcus Junius Brutus to stand against Caesar. According to the biography of Brutus written by Plutarch (c. 46– 119 CE), some denied that Marcus was the actual descendent of Lucius (Plutarch, *Brutus* 1.4). Regardless, our sources agree that many accepted the relation, and began urging Brutus to emulate his famous namesake. In particular, graffiti began appearing on a statue of Lucius Junius Brutus calling Marcus unworthy of his supposed ancestor (Plutarch, *Brutus* 9.3; Appian *Civil Wars* 2.112; Cassius Dio 44.11.4-12.3).

We can never know how much this tactic actually affected Brutus' decision to join the conspiracy against Caesar. What is important to us is that it provides a real-world example of another way in which people use names to make connections through time. Whether or not Lucius Junius Brutus actually existed or did all that was attributed to him, or whether Marcus was actually descended from him is immaterial. The fact remains that, to the best of our knowledge, people did actually draw a meaningful connection between the two and tried to use that for their political advantage. Moreover, even now when we look back at Roman history, it is almost impossible to bring up one Lucius Brutus without mentioning the other. The significance of their connection, whether fictitious or not, still remains.

6. Conclusions

As a giant of the science fiction and fantasy world, *Dune* has been the subject of many inquiries into its role as a modern myth-making tool. However, many of these studies focus on the existence of references to known historical figures and concepts rather than their implications for how these works reflect actual history-making processes. *Dune* and its accompanying stories can be understood as modern classics, central to the canon of science fiction in the twentieth century. Science fiction as a genre speculates on the possibilities of the future and how humanity finds its place in that future, much like how ancient myths serve to explain humanity's experience in the world (James 1994). In a sense, science fiction and historical writing are two sides of the same coin in that those who write history and the authors of our modern science fiction novels are storytellers and world-builders, defining spaces, people, and cultures for those who do not have the privilege of being present. In this article, we have taken a deep dive into the use of the figure Agamemnon in the *Dune* universe to highlight the complexity of myth and history creation that is a hallmark of these books and of science fiction in general.

The Agamemnon Problem leads us to wonder as readers and as ancient historians whether the abstraction of Agamemnon for the characters in the *Dune* universe can be taken as evidence of a uniquely human approach to history-making, noting the similarities between science fiction and history in how they reveal our understanding of human knowledge (Rogers and Stevens 2015). It is often ambiguous for the reader which Agamemnon is being referred to in a given moment, either the cymek or the mythical Greek figure. This mirrors reality in that when it comes to people's relation to the past, we tend to find connection based on identity, difference, continuity, and change rather than any kind of inert factuality (Freedman 2000). History can be researched and written as a method of understanding our present moment. So, too, is the case with science fiction. It appears that in each instance of his reference, Agamemnon is serving a

purpose for the characters in their present moment, much like Nebuchadnezzar and Brutus did at various points throughout history.

As we continue to study the relationship between ancient history and science fiction, we can perhaps find a new avenue forward as historians through incorporating the ways in which authors of modern myth-like stories are inspired by and, in fact, replicate mechanisms of storytelling and history-making. Beyond acknowledging the connection between the two genres, we as historians can more deeply embrace it in our research and teaching by recognizing science fiction as a form of history-writing, but for a past that has yet to occur. Accidental or not, the existence of the Agamemnon Problem brings this epistemological connection into focus and serves as a concrete example of the ways in which humans construct both realistic and imagined pasts.

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The Real Amazons in Literature, Art, and Archaeology

by Laura Nees Cardie

It has long been debated as to the extent to which the Amazons can be called real historical women. Yet, with archaeological studies discovering the burials of ancient warrior women in the Eurasian Steppes, it is becoming more apparent that there is truth in the myths. The Greeks' awareness of these women to the East is also apparent due to their depictions in art and literature from as early as the 8th century BCE, which included historical travel writers such as Aristeas from the 7th century BCE. Adrienne Mayor promotes an important approach to the study of the real Amazons by using archaeological discoveries of warrior women to the East alongside the historical accounts of Greek writers to prove that the Amazons were based upon these historical women. Building upon this, the real Amazons can be further verified by considering the mythic accounts together with the historical ones, demonstrating how the latter influenced the former; an approach that will be the focus of this paper.

Ken Dowden argues that myth is the opposite of history[1] and that "mythology tells us nothing of value... even if it is based on a kernel of truth"[2]. However, this statement is quite contradictory, for if myth has elements of truth to it, surely then it does have elements of historical value as well; providing there is also historical evidence to support the claims. This is especially the case when looking into the function of myth. Despite the complexity of defining myth, it can be fair to say that some myths were used by the Greeks to explain the world around them. For example, the Eleusinian myth and the Pandora myth, with the former rationalising the seasons[3] and the latter the creation of the first woman, as well as how evil entered the world[4]. So, in turn, the Amazon myth could have been used to understand the warrior women to the East, who had different customs and statuses to those within the Hellenic city-states[5]. While Greek women were expected to remain in the home and focus on domestic tasks and child-rearing, these Eastern women rode and fought with men and although they did not live in a matriarchal society, the Greeks may have adapted this detail in the Amazon myth to understand

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[1] Dowden 1992; 4
[2] Dowden 1992; 49
[3] *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*; 398-402. Also, Demeter has received the epithet "bringer of seasons" (*Homeric Hymn to Demeter*; 54, 193, 493)
[4] Hesiod, *Works and Days*; 80-82 & 94-95
[5] Sparta perhaps being an exception with Wilde arguing that they would appear "quintessentially Amazon" (Wilde 1999; 23) to the Athenians; however, Spartan women we not expected to fight.

why they were different to Greek women; explaining why they had not been domesticated by men.

One of the complexities of myth is its fluidity. Helen Morales states that "myth is a complex game of production and reception that involves selecting some parts of a narrative and suppressing"[6] and this is evident in the transformative nature of the Amazon myth. We see them develop over the centuries depending on the aims of the individual author. Homer in the 8th century BCE calls them "equals of men"[7] to depict them as formidable enemies to strengthen the heroism of the Greeks. Then, Aeschylus in the 6th century BCE described them as those "who loathe all men"[8] in Prometheus' foretelling of Io's arduous wanderings. Meanwhile, Hellanikos in the 5th century BCE calls them the complete opposite as "man-loving"[9] in his logographical account of the Amazons and Scythia. These authors all choose to select the 'otherness' of the Amazons while suppressing or exaggerating their fierceness. Lyn Webster Wilde argues that this reveals the growing fascination with the Amazons[10], but this can be taken further to show the ambiguity of the Amazons' relationships with men. This results in an adaptable concept that changes depending on the function they must serve to the individual author. Therefore, although these women were not part of a matriarchal society, that does not mean that they did not influence the creation of the Amazon myth; despite what some scholars claim[11].

In this paper, I will demonstrate the origins of the Amazon myth as the ancient warrior women of the Eurasian Steppes. Using ancient Greek literature and art, I will explore the awareness and portrayal of these Amazonian women in both historical and mythic accounts, and how these two genres overlap. Then, I will relate this to the archaeological evidence found in the Eurasian Steppes and the influence it had on these Greek interpretations. By accepting the existence of Amazons in the real ancient world, we can look at the themes of gender and culture with a new understanding and reveal the interesting complexities that accompany the study.

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[6] Morales 2007; 9
[7] Homer, *Iliad*; 3.189 & 6.186
[8] Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*; 725
[9] Hellanikos; FGH 323a F 17c
[10] Wilde 1999; 3
[11] Tyrell 1984; 24. Pomperoy 1976

Amazons in Literature

The earliest written accounts of these warrior women come from Homer who describes them in the 8th century BCE as the "equal of men"[12] followed by Arctinus, in the 7th century BCE, who continued the story of the *Iliad* in his now-lost epic poem the *Aethiopis*[13]. The epic begins where the *Iliad* ended, with the arrival of the Amazons after the funeral of Hector. Arctinus describes the Amazon Queen Penthesilea as a skilled fighter who "dominates the battlefield"[14], and who takes on the great Achilles, thus proving that the Amazons were an equal foe as implied by Homer. From then on, the myths of the Amazons were adapted in various genres, as previously mentioned, throughout the Greek and Roman periods Yet, in all versions, they remained the fierce women who were the equals of the Greek heroes.

However, it is through the accounts of historical travel writers that an argument can be made for the existence of real Amazons. The accounts of the warrior women in the Eurasian Steppes being brought to Greece by these writers were transformed into the legends of the Amazons[15]. The first known account comes from Aristeas, in the 7th century BCE, who was the first to link the Amazons to the Sarmatians, when he was travelling the region, in his now-lost work the *Arimaspea*[16]. Although lost, we know of his writings from Herodotus who references this work in his *Histories*; thus, we can also assume that this work was also a source and influence for this later writer[17]. In the mid-5th century BCE, Herodotus also writes of his own travels north of the Black Sea, where he heard the tales of warrior nomad women from the Eurasian Steppes whom he named 'Amazons'[18]. The story goes that after the Greeks won the battle at Thermodon against the Amazons and took them captive, the women attacked the crew onboard the boat and ended up in Scythia. The men there, believing them to be foes, attacked but when they realised they were women, the Amazons and Scythians joined and lay together.

> "Ever since then the women of the Sauromatae have followed their ancient ways; they ride out hunting, with their men or without them; they go to war and dress the same as the men"[19].

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[12] Homer, *Iliad*; 3.189 & 6.186. Ἀμαζόνες ἀντιάνειραι is often mistranslated to 'against men' due to the English prefix anti but the actual translation is 'equals of men'; 'anti' = 'equivalent, 'aneirai' = 'men'. Mayor 2014; 23

[13] Arctinus may even have been a pupil of Homer and thus following the same intended story (Stewart 1995; 576)

[14] Arctinus of Miletus, *The Aethiopis Fragment 1* (From Proclus, *Chrestomathia ii*)

[15] Guliaev 2003; 124. Murphy 2003; 98

[16] Dowden 1992; 104

[17] Mayor 2014; 56-58. Herodotus, *The Histories*; 4.13

[18] Davis-Kimball & Littleton 1997; 45

[19] Herodotus, *The Histories*; 4.110-117

Thus, Herodotus subtly explains why these women were so different to Greek women, for they came from an inferior race who have not been civilised by men.

Herodotus is one of two vital 5th century BCE sources, the other being Hippocrates[20]. In his treatise, *Airs, Waters, and Places,* Hippocrates discusses the impact the climate has on the health and character of the inhabitants of certain areas and while he does not name the Amazons in his text, Hippocrates discusses the uniqueness of the Scythian Sauromatae in the same way as Herodotus;

> "Their name is Sauromatae. Their women, so long as they are virgins, ride, shoot, throw the javelin while mounted, and fight with their enemies."[21]

Both accounts focus on the skills of these Eastern warrior women and consequently influenced the contemporary portrayals of the Amazons. Lorna Hardwick highlights the clear connection Herodotus makes between the Sauromatae and the Amazons, and the overlapping attributes of Hippocrates' description of the female warriors with those of the Amazons[22]. For example, they were skilled horse-riders just as the Amazons were known for, with Euripides using the epithet "horse-riding Queen of the Amazons"[23] to describe Hippolyta in his play *Hippolytus*, the Amazon Queen's son. Furthermore, perhaps the most significant attribute is that they go to war with men, which is the purpose behind their references in multiple myths. They fight with the Trojans during the Trojan War[24], they are attacked by Herakles[25] and on another occasion Bellerophon[26] during their individual tasks, and they go to war with Theseus and his city, Athens[27]. The overlaps between the historical and mythic sources reveal that these two groups of women were connected, with the historical influencing the mythic. Eileen Murphy asserts that the repetition of these details in the myths may show how they "evidently were based on

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[20] Stewart 1995; 577

[21] Hippocrates, *Airs, Waters, Places*; 17

[22] Hardwick 1990; 20

[23] Euripides, Hippolytus; 308. Also, Lysias, a 4th century BCE orator, asserts that "they were first of all to mount horses" (Lysias, Funeral Oration; 4). Similarly, Pindar says describes the "Amazons with their fine horses" (Pindar, Olympian Ode; 8.48)

[24] Arctinus of Miletus, The Aethiopis Fragment 1. Quintus of Smyrna, Fall of Troy; 1.22. Virgil, Aeneid; 1. 490. Seneca, Troades; 236. Diodorus Siculus. Library of History; 2.45

[25] Euripides, Heracles; 408-418. Pseudo-Apollodorus, Bibliotheca; 2.5.9. Hyginus, Fabulae; 30.10. Diodorus Siculus. Library of History; 2.45

[26] Homer, Iliad; 6.186. Pindar, Olympian Ode; 13.89. Pseudo-Apollodorus, Bibliotheca; 2.33

[27] Pausanias, Description of Greece; 1.2.1. Plutarch, Theseus; 26-27. Justinus, Epitome of Pompeius Trogus' Philippic Histories; 2.4

some kernel of truth"[28]. Therefore, this indicates that the Greeks had knowledge of the real warrior women in the nomad societies to the East who formed a foundation for the myth of the Amazons. So, as some scholars have noted[29], the stories of the warrior women could have come over to Greece from the reports of Greek travel writers and sparked an interest in the imaginations of the poets and playwrights.

Moreover, the Amazons in literature reveal not only the stories from the Eurasian Steppes but also what was on show in Greece that related to the Amazons being real. For example, we know from authors such as Pausanias and Plutarch that in places like Athens and Thessaly, there were Mycenaean tombs that were so old to the Classical Greeks that they reappropriated them to the fallen Amazons who fought against Theseus in Athens[30]. Also, from Euripides' play, *Herakles*, we learn that Hippolyta's belt, taken by Herakles during his ninth labour, was still on show in the Temple of Hera in Mycenae[31]. Adrienne Mayor suggests that these artefacts may have even been genuine Scythian objects[32] and if this was so, this point further contributes to the awareness of the culture of the Scythian and nomadic tribes to the East. These objects functioned as a way of presenting the triumphs of the Greeks over the non-Greeks/barbarians, a factor that was ingrained into the mythic function of the Amazons. Some scholars argue that the Amazons' way of life was viewed by the Greeks as being a distorted version of their own. Thus, going against the customs of the Greek *oikos* and in turn the Greek woman's lifestyle[33]. However, Andrew Stewart takes this further by claiming that the Amazon myth was also a warning to "those who withdr[e]w from or reject[ed] ordinary society"[34]. Again, these ideas can be taken even further when looking into the function of the Amazon myth by explaining the use of portraying the Amazons as opposites in order to understand why there were warrior women. By taking on the appearance of a Greek male by participating in male activities such as horse-riding, fighting and leading a society, the Amazons take on the role of the 'Other' and consequently are inferior to Greek society, as is evident by the tombs and trophies of defeated Amazons, on show. Therefore, the Amazon myth has been taken from the reports of these women to the East and

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[28] Murphy 2003; 98
[29] Davis-Kimball & Littleton 1997; 48. Tyrell 1984; 24. Guliaev 2003; 124
[30] Plutarch, Theseus; 27. Pausanias, Descriptions of Greece; 1.2.1. Mayor 2014; 276-77, 285. Larson 1995; 112-113
[31] Euripides, *Herakles*; 308
[32] Mayor 2016; 970 & 2021; 132
[33] Hardwick 1990; 17. Pomperoy 1976
[34] Stewart 1995; 574

transformed into the mythic race that continuously catches the imaginations of ancient writers across a range of genres.

Amazons in Art

Despite the varying identification of their homeland in ancient literature, "the geographic placement of the Amazon is consistently in the East"[35], marking their connection to the real nomad warrior women and influencing their representation in ancient art. Many scholars note that the depiction of the Amazons' iconography depended upon the knowledge of the individual painter with the key to their portrayal being to appear as the 'Other' to the Greek viewer[36], whether that be through their clothes, weaponry, or gender discourse. Also, with the growing knowledge of the non-Greek world to the East, the artists could then begin to use these Eastern stereotypes to illustrate the Amazons in what was believed to be their homeland. So, by looking at the ancient art of the Amazons in the same way as the ancient literature, relating the mythic Amazons to the historical East, the origins of the Amazon myth can be revealed to be connected to the awareness of the nomad women in the Eurasian Steppes through their depiction, adaptation, and function.

The first known image of the Amazons in art comes from a clay votive shield found in Tiryns, from the early 7th century BCE[37]. It depicts two Amazons and three Greeks, one of whom is lying on the ground. Though fragmented, it is clear that the late geometric style takes influence from the Near East in its patterned design and that the fighters were females due to the indication of breasts and long skirts, a method that preceded the use of white skin in black-figure vase paintings[38]. Susan Langdon comments that these designs were derived from the Assyrian dress, a feature used by early Greek painters to illustrate the 'Others' in art[39]. Hence, this proves that in art as well as literature, the Amazons were connected to the East from the start. Moreover, the identity of the main Greek figure on the shield is unknown but scholars have suggested multiple theories; one being that as the shield was found in the Tiryns' Temple of Hera, the story may relate to Herakles' task to retrieve the belt of Hippolyte, which was set by King Eurystheus of Tiryns, with Hera being the main antagonist to the hero[40]. Another interpretation relates the

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[35] Patten 2013; 13

[36] Hardwick 1990; 28. Shapiro 1983; 106. Patten 2013; 20. Stewart 1995; 572

[37] Tiryns clay votive shield from the early 7th century BCE (ca.700-680 BCE), Nafplion Archaeological Museum

[38] Markoe 1996; 50. Langdon 2002; 3. Mayor 2021; 131.

[39] Langdon 2002; 3

[40] Glenn Markoe sees this as a "straightforward" interpretation (Markoe 1996; 50). Meanwhile, Adrienne Mayor acknowledges the anonymity of the figure but suggests Herakles as a possibility (Mayor 2021; 131). Langdon resists identifying the hero but notes Herakles as a possibility (Langdon 2002; 7)

narrative to the story of Achilles and Penthesilea during the Trojan War with the dates aligning with the epics the *Iliad* and the *Aethiopis*[41]. Meanwhile, Langdon argues that though the contemporary viewer would have recognised the figure, the formulaic combat of epic literature provides a flexibility that allows the hero to be interchangeable[42]. Instead, she focuses more on the ritual use as relating to the rite of passage for young boys[43], which could be expanded on by linking the need to defeat the 'Other' – as referenced through the Amazons and the Centaurs being depicted on the shield – relating back to the need to explain the real warrior women as contrasts to the Greek norms through mythicising them. By defeating the Amazons, if even ritually, the Greeks are reaffirming their superiority over the 'Other' and thus metaphorically fighting the "embodi[ment of] the Greek fears of an invading barbarian society"[44] to the East; a reoccurring theme and function in the art of the Amazons.

During the second quarter of the 6th century BCE, Amazons began to be depicted on black-figure vases in ways that indicate foreignness to the individual painter, as mentioned before. The Archaic Tyrrhenian neck-amphora[45] and the Vulci amphora of Herakles killing Amazon Queen Andromache[46] portray Amazons in the Athenian hoplite costume which reflects the 'Otherness' – and thus the foreignness of the Amazons – through the gender discourse[47]; with the fact that warrior women went against Greek customs. Another way to show their 'Otherness' is demonstrated by the Amazon frieze from The Mausoleum at Halicarnassus[48] and the Penn University Attic Black-figure neck-amphora[49] through the Amazons presentation as horse-riders. "Since Greek geography tended to be more rocky and mountainous, it was unsuitable for warfare from the saddle… also through the masculine symbol of the horse"[50] the Amazons once again go against the Greek norms. Their foreignness is linked to the flat plains of the Eurasian Steppes resulting in the functionality and traditions of using horses. Moreover, the choice to depict them with bows and arrows, as shown in the Penn neck-amphora, reveals further the intention to display the fact the Amazons were the opposite of the Greeks. Fighting with a bow

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[41] Patten 2013; PI. I, 1. Langdon notes Achilles as another possibility (Langdon 2002; 9)

[42] Langdon 2002; 9

[43] Langdon 2002; 6-10

[44] Patten 2013; 31. Stewart 1996; 583

[45] Archaic Tyrrhenian neck-amphora (ca. 560 B.C.E) Museum of Fine Art, Boston

[46] High Archaic black figure neck-amphora of Herakles killing Amazon Queen Andromache, attributed to Camtar Painter (ca. 570-560 BCE), Vulci Museum

[47] Patten 2013; 21

[48] The Amazon frieze from The Mausoleum at Halicarnassus (350 BCE) British Museum

[49] Attic Black-figure neck-amphora (Late 6th century BCE) Penn University Museum

[50] Patten 2013; 21

in contrast to a sword or spear, was not a Greek custom[51] as they preferred face-to-face fighting. So, it was often a characteristic of the Eastern warriors in art; especially the Scythians[52], where both the Amazons and the historical warrior women originated from. Therefore, this demonstrates the continuous impact of the awareness of the historical people from the East and the development and function of the Amazon myth.

The growing interest and knowledge of the East during the late 6th century BCE, as argued by many scholars[53], consequently influenced the way artists depicted the Amazons in their work. Hardwick claims that the main two inspirations for the costume of the Amazons came from the Thracians and the Scythians[54], a view that can be proven through the Penn neck-amphora which depicts Amazons with Scythian caps and patterned trousers, along with one armed with a Thracian pelta and spear. Expanding on this, Hardwick links the introduction of the Scythian-dressed Amazons with the "mercenaries [who] were hired by Peisistratos to form a corps of archers in the Athenian army"[55], proving the awareness the Greek artists had of Eastern iconography. Furthermore, it can be argued that through the Greek travel writers, the knowledge of Eastern traditions was growing during this time as well. Hardwick claims that the depiction of the Amazon Scythian archer disappeared by 500 BCE, with the departure of the mercenaries. However, the patterned clothing and horse-riding Amazons continued to be portrayed in art as shown by the 420 BCE Attic red-figure neck-amphora in Berlin[56], showing the embedded connection between the two races.

The Persian War provoked another change in the depiction of the Amazons, starting in the 5th century BCE, as they began to take on the appearance of the Persian invaders[57]. Although the quantity of their iconography decreased in this period, they began to appear on a larger scale through their depictions on public monuments such as the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus[58], the Stoa Poikile and even the Athenian Parthenon. This was a political manoeuvre to celebrate the Greek's triumph over their Eastern invaders by linking back to the myth of the Amazons to promote their repeated superiority. This is unsurprising, as Annaliese Elaine Patten says[59], for

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[51] Shapiro 1983; 110-111
[52] Shapiro 1983; 110
[53] Hardwick 1990; 29. Shapiro 1983; 106. Patten 2013; 22
[54] Shapiro 1983; 106
[55] Shapiro 1983; 112
[56] Attic red-figure neck-amphora of a riding Amazon in Scythian costume, (420 BCE) Staatliche Antikensammlungen, Berlin
[57] Hardwick 1990; 31. Patten 2013; 14. Shapiro 1983; 114. Stewart 1996; 582.
[58] Figure 5 shows the Amazons in Persian caps and riding horses showing them as distinctively the Eastern other.
[59] Patten 2013; 14

the Thracians, Scythians and Persian were all non-Greeks from the East who were a threat to Greek society, just like the Amazons were. Expanding upon this, the connection of the Amazons and their connection with these peoples can be related back to the literature previously mentioned as well as Athenian orator Isocrates' famous speech which promoted the union of the Greek states against Persia around 380 BCE.

> "The races which have the strongest instinct for domination and the greatest power of aggression—the Scythians and the Thracians and the Persians... our territory was invaded by the Thracians... and by the Scythians, led by the Amazons"[60].

This speech connects the literary accounts of the Amazons with their visual representations, highlighting their function not only in the mythic past but also in the historic records as former Eastern invaders who fought alongside the real peoples the Greeks encountered.

Therefore, the art of the Amazons shows these warrior women as distinctively Eastern and the 'Other' from their illustrated first appearance. Whether a female hoplite, Thracian, Scythian, or Persian, the Amazons are firmly shown as not only a non-Greek but also the practitioners of customs that were the opposite of those of the Greeks. When explored in parallel with the literature on Amazons, they are located in the same area as the real warrior women of the Eurasian Steppes and continue to present the need to explain them as opposing the Greek norms. Moreover, the argument that the Amazons were based on real women is strengthened when both the literature and art are explored in conjunction with the discovered burials of these warrior women.

Amazons in Archaeology

Excavations in European Scythia uncovered 270 graves of warrior women from the 7th century BCE to the 1st century BCE; leading Archaeologists to estimate that 37% of warrior graves were female[61]. These women were buried with both typical feminine objects, along with armour and weapons, provoking scholars to name them the Amazons from myth[62]. In some cases, due to the original gender identification methods, some warrior women were misinterpreted as men, and it was only in recent years that this has been corrected with modern

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[60] Isocrates, *Panegyricus*; 67-68
[61] Fialko 2018; 31. Mayor 2014; 63. Murphy 2003; 98
[62] Anthony 2007; 329. Ascherson 1996; 112. Clayton 2001-2; 75. Fialko 2018; 31. Guliaev 2003; 114. Mayor 2014; 64 & 80.

methods[63]. This led some to believe that the inclusion of weapons in the graves was just ceremonial. However, analysis of the bones reveals otherwise, with these women presenting "injuries of the 'military' character"[64]. Moreover, the women were buried with the same honours and traditions as the men[65], showing a different approach to gender in Scythian society, while also linking to the representations of Amazons as 'equals of men'. Another trait of the Amazons, horse-riding, is evident in the burials of the Scythian warrior women whose graves contained horse equipment and in one case the remains of a horse, and whose bones reveal bowed legs; an effect of a lifetime of riding[66]. Some women's bones even showed healed traumas that resulted from falling off their horses or fighting horseback in battle[67]. Therefore, the existence of these graves found in the homeland of the Amazon race with dates overlapping their introduction into Greek literature and art, proves that there is some truth in the foundation of the myth.

Some examples of Scythian burials include the 1991 excavation of 5th/4th century BCE Scythian mounds between the Don and the Dnieper where 112 graves of 'Amazons' were uncovered; such as the 31 warrior women graves at the Elizavetovsky cemetery, along the Don river[68], and burial mound No. 5 near Zelenoe in Kherson containing the graves of three armed females[69]. The ages of these armoured women, between 16 and 30 years old, suggest to scholars that this society included a "form of lightly armed auxiliary units for specific age and social groups of the Scythian women"[70]. Another excavation in the region revealed earlier burials including Bobrica Kurgan 35 from the 7th/6th century BCE containing a warrior woman and her horse, and Zelenojie Kurgan 5, which held 3 girls between 10 and 15 along with a variety of weapons, armour, and tradition feminine goods[71].

Additionally, the Middle Dom cemeteries reveal that women played a role "in the military structure of the steppe"[72]; for example, Durovka 16 contained the remains of a warrior woman between the ages of 30 and 35 whose bones reveal her to be a rider[73], while burial mound No.6

[63] Davis-Kimball 1997; 41. Mayor 2014; 64-65. Murphy 2003; 11. Taylor 1994; 395

[64] Fialko 2018; 42. Also Fialko 2018; 31. Ascherson 1996; 111. Davis-Kimball & Littleton 1997; 48. Mayor 2014; 68. Murphy 2003; 11 & 98

[65] Fialko 2018; 42. Murphy 2003; 8, 11 & 98

[66] Fialko 2018; 38. Guliaev 2003; 114. Mayor 2014; 65.

[67] Murphy 2003; 68. Mayor 2014; 80

[68] Mayor 2014; 70

[69] Hasanov 2018; 139

[70] Guliaev & Savchenko 1995. Also, Fialko 1991; 13. 2018; 38. Guliaev 2003; 115

[71] Fialko 2010; 119-127. Hasanov 2018; 143. Mayor 2014; 70.

[72] Balgabayevaa 2016; 5277

[73] Kozlovskaya 1996

contained a warrior woman aged 20-25, along with the remains of a horse[74]. Archaeologists used other grave goods such as jewellery and grand structures to indicate that the graves belonged to wealthy women. However, for the purposes of this study, what is interesting about the artefacts is that they included a "Greek amphora with oil or wine"[75]. This is not an isolated case as Greek amphoras appear in Kurgan 4 and Kurgan 30 along the Don River[76]; highlighting both the trade that occurred between the two societies and subsequently showing the Greek's awareness of these warrior women. We also know that "archaeologists recovered pointed battle-axes, daggers, and swords in leather scabbards painted with geometric, curvilinear, and zigzag designs"[77] matching those illustrated on Greek vases; further proving the Greeks' knowledge of the warrior women in the Eurasian Steppes.

However, this does not mean that the Greek representation of these Eastern women, in the form of the Amazon myth, was always completely historically accurate. The evidence suggests that they lived in a mixed society[78] despite Herodotus claiming that they lived by themselves and never intended to live the way Scythian women do;

> "[who] stay in their wagons and do women's work, and do not go out hunting or anywhere else"[79]

We also know that Scythian women "did not spend all their time sitting around in wagons but that they were also engaged in heavy physical labour"[80], as Herodotus states. Instead, by looking at both the literary and archaeological evidence, the parallels between these Scythian women and the Amazons become apparent; women who take an active role in the physical side of living in the Eurasian Steppes. This way of life to the Greeks would have seemed unnatural, while to the Scythians their nomad lifestyles would dictate different customs with the burials showing that it would be more practical for women to wear male clothing such as trousers – partnered with jewellery to become more feminine – and ride alongside the men[81]. Thus, the Amazon myth separates the non-Greek customs of the Scythian women from what would seem natural to them, to confer why there were warrior women in the East. The 'Other' to Greece after all comes

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[74] Guliaev & Savchenko, 1995
[75] Guliaev & Savchenko, 1995
[76] Mayor 2014; 70
[77] Mayor 2014; 79
[78] Clayton 2001-2; 75
[79] Herodotus, *The Histories*; 4.114
[80] Murphy 2003; 96
[81] Clayton 2001-2; 76. Fialko 2018; 38. Fialko even indicates that the written and artistic sources of Amazons in male clothing come from the appearance of real Scythian women.

from a distorted view of their own world, with the barbarians living the complete opposite way to the lives of the civilised Greeks. So, the Amazon myth originates from seeing these fighting, horse-riding, and un-Greek women, who threaten the traditions established by Greek men and place them into a mythical race where they can be controlled and subdued.

Conclusion

When it comes to assessing whether or not the Amazons were real, there is a clear answer. Though the Amazon figures in myth were fictional, there were warrior women whose appearance, customs and homeland correspond with those of the Amazons, as several scholars have demonstrated. This paper has expanded upon this by exhibiting how the ancient Greek literature and art from as early as the 8th century BCE, along with the recent archaeological finds in the Eurasian Steppes. Herodotus and Hippocrates' reports of Scythian women who rode and fought like men, and Queens Hippolyte and Penthesilea from myth, share the same characteristics to the extent that both the mythical and the historical are called Amazons. Meanwhile, the Tiryns votive shield, vase paintings and monuments all highlight the foreignness and strangeness of the Amazons. They take on the characteristics of the contemporary writings and knowledge to depict these warrior women in the same fashion as those living in the Eurasian Steppes; with their weapons, horses and clothing marking them as the 'Other'. Lastly, the archaeological evidence proves not only the existence of warrior women but that the accounts of the Amazons were based in truth. These discoveries and similarities have challenged our previous attitudes toward the Amazons and opened scholarship up to accepting the theory of the Amazons being real historical women. Thus, themes of gender and culture in the ancient world can be studied with a new understanding and the complexities that come with the study can be explored further; breaking the stereotypical opinion of how women lived in those periods.

Furthermore, by considering the function of myth was partly as a flexible tool for the ancients to use as a way of understanding the world around them, the Amazons can be seen as the Greek reaction to the knowledge of a society where gendered roles were defined differently. Rather than recognising that this was a natural custom of race, the Greeks became protective of their way of life; inspiring the writers and artists of the time to form a picture of an untamed barbarian race who are ultimately defeated by the heroic Greek male. Thus, by examining the range of literary genres and material evidence, both mythic and historical, the real Amazons can be revealed.

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Constructing the Sycophant: The Case of Theocrines

by Georgia Choustoulaki

Introduction[1]

The 58th oration of the Demosthenic corpus, entitled *Endeixis Against Theocrines,*[2] is one of the five forensic speeches in the corpus of Attic oratory that discuss the denunciation to the officials of a person who violates the law (*endeixis*).[3] This procedure could be used against a wide range of criminals such as *kakourgoi* "malefactors", *atimoi* "people deprived of civil rights", and *pheugontes* "exiles who returned to Athens without reprieve".[4] The anonymous prosecutor, whom Libanius (*Arg.D.* 26.3) identifies as Epichares, brings an *endeixis* against Theocrines. He accuses Theocrines of illegally continuing to appear in the public sphere and behaving like an *epitimos* (i.e. in possession of his rights and franchises) despite having lost his civil rights (*atimos*) as a public debtor. The dispute between the two parties had begun earlier, when Theocrines successfully prosecuted Epichares' father on a charge of unconstitutional action (*graphē paranomōn*), which resulted in a fine of ten talents. Epichares' father was unable to pay the fine and was subsequently disenfranchised (becoming an *atimos*). He, therefore, pressured his son to bring this lawsuit against Theocrines, with the aim of getting revenge on him.

From the beginning of the speech, the young prosecutor attacks and undermines the ethos of his opponent, describing him not only as a public debtor but, more importantly, as a sycophant who constantly violates, distorts and abuses the laws to serve his own interests. He simultaneously seeks to elevate his own ethos as a prudent and obedient son who, despite his

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[1] I would like to thank warmly my supervisor Kostas Apostolakis for reading this paper and improving my argument. I am also grateful to prof. Andreas Serafim and the two anonymous peer-reviewers for their comments and suggestions. Any errors remain my own.

[2] Ancient sources attributed this speech either to Demosthenes or to Dinarchus (cf. D.H. *Din*. 10; Harp. s.v. ἀγραφίου, ἐνδεκάζοντας, Θεοκρίνης; Lib. *Arg.D*. 26.4) but neither of them could have been the author. Dinarchus is ruled out on chronological (see Schaefer 1858, 278; Blass 1893, 498–504; MacDowell 2009, 293) and stylistic grounds (see Mayer 1895, 27–28). Demosthenic authorship is being rejected because of the speaker's allegations that Demosthenes had promised to act as his *sunēgoros,* but then betrayed him and reconciled with Theocrines (cf. §§ 4, 39–44 and see Schaefer 1858, 279–280; Blass 1893, 498–504; MacDowell 2009, 293). Bers (2003, 130–131) seems to adopt Schaefer's view that the speech was written by someone "second rate" author. I am inclined to accept the positions of Blass and MacDowell that probably Epichares has written the speech himself. The date of the speech must be within a year or two of 340 BCE.

[3] The others are And. 1; [Lys.] 6; [D.] 25; 26.

[4] On *endeixis* and the persons against whom it could be applied, see Hansen 1976; Todd, 1993, 117; Phillips 2013, 30–31; Kapparis 2019, 41.

youth and inexperience, is undertaking a difficult legal battle to defend his father and revenge himself on his enemies. By explaining his motives, he attempts to dismiss any suspicion of sycophantic activity on his own part, since characterizing someone as a sycophant is a tactic that can be used indiscriminately by both parties.[5] As Christ (1998, 59) aptly points out, "no individual was a sycophant until a hostile party labeled him one and for the designation to stick and thus do any harm, the labeler had to persuade an audience to join in bestowing it". To fully understand the speaker's intentions in this speech, we must first examine the Athenian perceptions of the concept of the sycophant and sycophancy.

The Athenian legal system relied on the initiative of free male citizens who had the right and the duty to bring a public suit (*graphē*) against anyone who might attempt to harm the public interest. This system of volunteer prosecution (*ho boulomenos*) was considered one of the three most democratic reforms of Solon (Arist. *Ath.* 9.1–2) and was maintained throughout the classical period. After the democratic reforms of Ephialtes, in particular, when most of the judicial powers were transferred to popular courts, many new opportunities for litigation emerged.[6] However, the Athenians knew that a legal action could have been used both as a means of obtaining justice and as a weapon for achieving selfish ends. Their concerns about the excess and abuse of litigation is regularly expressed in our sources.

In this context we find the term "sycophant"[7] to denote anyone who took advantage of the Athenian legal system, which allowed – and encouraged – prosecution by *ho boulomenos* ("whoever wishes") on public charges.[8] Indeed, some scholars seem to believe that there were

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[5] An indicative example is Demosthenes' speech *On the Crown* and Aeschines' speech *Against Ctesiphon*, where both litigants exchange accusations of sycophantic behaviour (cf. D. 18.112–113, 212, 266, 289; Aeschin. 3.64, 172, 231, 256). For this tactic of the litigants in public affairs, see Osborne 1990, 92–93; Christ 1998, 64; Wohl 2010, 42.

[6] On a general overview of the judicial system in democratic Athens, see Christ 1998, 14–47.

[7] The etymology of the term is difficult to trace. Many attempts have been made to do so without satisfactory results; see Lofberg 1917, vi–vii, who summarizes all the speculations on the etymology of the term; cf. also Harvey 1990, 105. It seems, arguably, to be an etymological connection between the term *sykophantēs*, the legal process *phasis*, and the verb *phainō*, while the association of this legal process with the sycophant appears quite often in Aristophanes (cf. Ar. *Ach.* 725–6; *Av.* 1410–69 and see Lofberg 1917, 19 ff.; Osborne 1990, 87).

[8] Lofberg 1917, 26–59; Bonner & Smith 1938, 39–74; Ehrenberg 1951, 343–347; Jones 1956, 123–124; Crawley 1970, 86; Harrison 1971, 60–62; Cohen 1973, 89–90; Adkins 1976, 316–318; MacDowell 1978, 62–66; Rhodes 1981, 444–445; Harvey 1985, 78; Ostwald 1986, 81–82; Sinclair 1988, 73; Ober 1989, 174; Harvey 1990, 103–121; Todd 1993, 92–94; Rubinstein 2000, 198–212. According to Osborne (1990, 93) this position is misleading; he believes that the term sycophant could be used indiscriminately against any prosecutor. Osborne's position is supported by Christ 1998 and Wohl 2010, 41. Allen (2000, 156–167) presents a different interpretation of sycophants.

professional sycophants who lived solely off this activity.[9] This view is convincingly disputed by Osborne (1990, 93–94), who argues that there were no professional sycophants in the sense of a particular group whose main source of income was lawsuits and extortions, and that this characterization could be brought against any plaintiff.[10] Christ (1998, 48–71) also agrees with Osborne that sycophancy was not a real profession and that there was no distinct group of sycophants.[11] Rather, he points out that "sycophancy was both an element in the invective wielded by individuals against one another and a part of Athenian discourse about civic identity".[12]

The speaker of *Against Theocrines* addresses these issues in his attempt to portray his opponent as a dangerous sycophant, who pretends to be a leader of the people but in essence seeks, through the use and abuse of the legal system, only his own benefit and not that of the city. Moreover, the speaker chooses to attribute to his opponent characteristics considered typical of a sycophant, such as vexatious litigation, financial motivation, false charges, sophistical quibbling, abusive attacks, the raking up of the past and rhetorical skills.[13] He also systematically contrasts his own behaviour to Theocrines' sycophantic practices.

This speech is an important source for understanding the way in which a litigant constructs the portrait of the sycophant and applies it to his opponent. In this paper I attempt to show that many of the accusations that the speaker addresses to Theocrines contain – and can be interpreted as – elements of slander and invective, often occurring in other forensic speeches of the time. It is worth noting that even elements of comic invective can be detected, contributing to the presentation of Theocrines as a typical sycophant.

Rhetorical skills, legal expertise and sycophancy

In [D.] 58, the combination of rhetorical skills and legal expertise emerges as an indicator of sycophantic behaviour. The fact that Theocrines was of mature age and played an active role in political life, particularly in the law courts, allows the speaker to present him as a sycophant.

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[9] Lofberg 1917, 24, 73–85; Bonner & Smith 1938, 45; Ehrenberg 1951, 343–347; Jones 1956, 123; Crawley 1970, 86–7; Ostwald 1986, 81; Harvey 1990, 116–118.

[10] Harvey (1990, 103–121) criticizes Osborne's positions and, while acknowledging the rhetorical dimension of sycophantic allegations, favours the view that there were professional sycophants (esp. 114–116). However, while Osborne ultimately considers the role of sycophant to be vital to the functioning of Athenian democracy, Harvey is right to point out the negative consequences of sycophancy (116–119).

[11] This position is also supported by Rubinstein 2000, 211–212 and Wohl 2010, 42.

[12] Christ 1998, 48.

[13] As Harvey (1990, 110–114) points out, these are the key characteristics that sources most often attribute to sycophants.

Expert orators with special rhetorical skills were always a source of concern and suspicion for judges,[14] and the speaker attempts to take advantage of the audience's anticipated fear of his opponent. It is stated that Theocrines is presented as attempting to deceive the judges with his eloquence (§§ 22–23, 36), as he has allegedly succeeded in doing in the past (§§ 31–32, 39–40). The speaker also portrays Theocrines as an expert in the laws (§§ 15, 24) who uses or abuses them at will (§§ 5, 12, 14–15, 19, 45–47).[15] The accusation is heavy: the violation of the laws by Theocrines is not a result of ignorance, the speaker argues, but a conscious choice that indicates audacity, arrogance, greed, and opportunism. After all, his rhetorical ability is not limited to legal cases, but potentially supports political ambitions, since he presents himself as a guardian of the laws and a defender of the constitution (§34).

Theocrines' acquaintance with the Athenian legal system is highlighted through the narrative of how he has undertaken and manipulated specific prosecutions against his fellow-citizens. The first case concerns the lawsuit of *phasis* against Micon, which he later withdrew (§§5–13).[16] This episode underscores Theocrines' contemptuous attitude towards the laws and emphasizes his motives. According to the speaker, Theocrines was bribed by Micon to withdraw the prosecution (§6). However, abandonment of a public lawsuit was subject to a fine of one thousand drachmas (§6).[17] Until the repayment of the fine, the public debtor was considered an *atimos* and had no right to participate in public life. Despite this provision, Theocrines defiantly continued to appear as a litigant in court.

It is worth noting that, although *phasis* was one of the legal proceedings primarily related to the sycophant, due to the reward it brought to the successful plaintiff, in this case the speaker

[14] Dover 1974, 25–28, 189–190; Ober 1989, 165–177; Christ 1998, 193–224; Hesk 2000, 208–218; Schloemann 2002, 139–146; Wohl 2010, 39–40.

[15] Harris (2020, 149–168) argues that the Athenians appreciate those with legal expertise and points out that "when litigants criticize their opponents, they never fault them for knowing the laws, but for twisting the laws, for bringing false charges or for being litigious and refusing to settle out of court". In this speech the plaintiff emphasizes Theocrines' legal expertise in order to allude to possible misuses of the law, in order to deceive his fellow-citizens.

[16] The legal action of *phasis* denotes the disclosure by the plaintiff of a property either illegally acquired or related to an offense. It was considered a privileged lawsuit, since, in case of conviction, the plaintiff was awarded half the imposed fine. In this case it seems that Theocrines had reported Micon's ship, probably on the grounds that he was trading corn in a forbidden area (cf. [D.] 35.50). For more details on this type of lawsuit, see MacDowell 1978, 62–63, 94–95, 158–159; 1991, 187–198; Wallace 2003, 167–181.

[17] The speech under examination states only the thousand-drachma fine, while other sources (cf. And. 1.33, 76; [D.] 26.9; 53.1; Thphr. fr. 636 Fortenbauch) also mention the partial deprivation of political rights, which may have taken the form of forfeiture of the right to bring a public action of the same type or all types of public lawsuit. On this matter, see Bonner & Smith 1938, 56–57; Harrison 1971, 83; Hansen 1976, 63–66; MacDowell 1978, 64–65; Todd 1993, 143; Harris 2006, 405–422; Wallace 2006, 57–66.

does not seem to link this form of litigation with sycophancy, nor does he criticize Theocrines for choosing this special procedure.[18] On the contrary, the emphasis falls on the fact that Theocrines' accusations were unfounded,[19] and that is why he preferred the out-of-court settlement. This compromise was clearly considered a sycophantic practice. In fact, at this point the speaker not only quotes the law, but also comments on the intention of the legislator (§11). His aim is to show that Theocrines, by launching baseless accusations against merchants and ship-owners, abuses the law of *phasis* and causes harm to the public interest. What emerges from the speaker's argument is that the sycophant, while appearing to be an expert on the legal system, actually violates the spirit of the laws and misuses them. Theocrines' sycophantic practices are manifested in a variety of legal procedures,[20] since, apart from *phasis*, he has also used against his fellow-citizens the *graphē kakōseōs orphanou* "indictment for maltreatment of an orphan" and the *graphē paranomōn*, a legal process mainly employed against politicians.[21] However, the most telling feature of Theocrines' sycophantic behaviour is that he brings baseless lawsuits and later withdraws them for a fee.

The image of the sycophant who is well acquainted with both the legal system and rhetorical techniques is further strengthened by the description of the lawsuit brought by Theocrines against Polyeuctus (§32). This lawsuit was directly related to Theocrines' legal dispute with the speaker's father (§§30–31). The latter had proposed a decree (*psēphisma*) that Charidemus, the biological son of Ischomachus, be granted free meals in the Prytaneion. Theocrines, however, denounced this decree as illegal, claiming that the real motive of the mover of the decree was to deprive Charidemus of his property, because he would have to return to the house of his biological father and leave the house of his stepfather, Aeschylus.[22] He also claimed that the decree was initiated by Polyeuctus, the husband of Charidemus' mother. The jury was convinced by Theocrines' assertions and sentenced the speaker's father to the enormous fine of ten talents.

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[18] This passage reinforces the view of some scholars who do not believe that legal proceedings that brought financial benefits to successful plaintiffs were the sycophants' main motive; e.g. Osborne 1985, 44–48; Christ 1998, 138–143.

[19] Cf. D. 57.34: *τοῦτο γάρ ἐστιν ὁ συκοφάντης, αἰτιᾶσθαι μὲν πάντα, ἐξελέγξαι δὲ μηδέν* "because this is what a sycophant is, he brings accusations of all kinds but proves nothing".

[20] *Inter alia*, Theocrines is said to have filed plenty of lawsuits – at least five – against fellow-citizens. Aristogeiton and Diondas also are depicted as sycophants who have initiated numerous lawsuits; cf. [D.] 25.37–38; Hyp. *Dion.* 9. Diondas, in particular, despite being too young has allegedly filed fifty lawsuits and won none; See Horváth 2014, 137–139.

[21] On *graphē paranomōn*, see Hansen 1974, 44–65; MacDowell 1978, 50–52; Hansen 1991, 205–212; Yunis 1988, 361–382; Giannadaki 2014, 15–33; Canevaro 2015, 17–21; Giannadaki 2020, 9–26.

[22] For more details regarding the family status and the property of Charidemus, see Murray 1964, 312–313; MacDowell 2007, 111–113.

The speaker, however, takes care to explain this judgment: it was by means of his lies and deceptive rhetoric that Theocrines caused the jury's anger against his father.[23] This explanation highlights a readily recognizable feature of the sycophant: his ability to effectively manipulate judges and lead them to erroneous and unjust decisions.[24]

Motivated by this judgment, Theocrines lodged a *graphē kakōseōs orphanou* against Polyeuctus.[25] The speaker's account suggests that Theocrines had not premeditated this lawsuit, but he activated it when he realized that the judges had believed him and were enraged against the speaker's father, after having heard such slanders. In the end, however, he chose to come to a compromise with Polyeuctus for two hundred drachmas. This episode highlights the flexibility and readiness of a cunning sycophant, and also provides an explanation for the potential reaction of his victims: rather than being involved in the uncertainties of a trial, they preferred to give in to the blackmail. A prosecutor who, according to the speaker, levels baseless charges in the court, but nevertheless succeeds in manipulating and infuriating the judges to the point of imposing the excessive fine of ten talents on his opponent, is a formidable adversary and one whom everybody wishes to avoid. Moreover, the fact that Theocrines opted for this legal procedure, which had no consequences in case of withdrawal or obtaining less than one-fifth of the judges' votes, suggests that he knew the legal system well enough to take advantage of it at any time.

Another way in which Theocrines has exploited the legal system and deceived the people is highlighted by the speaker when describing Theocrines' legal dispute with Demosthenes. Here the speaker extends the accusation of Theocrines' sycophantic practices to the political sphere, while exposing his collusion with his opponents, in order to further stress his deceptive nature.[26] More specifically, in §§42–43 it is claimed that Theocrines had submitted an indictment for unconstitutional action (*graphē paranomōn*) against Demosthenes, even proposing the fine of ten talents. However, this lawsuit was never heard, because, when the time for the trial came, a witness testified under oath that Demosthenes was unable to appear in court due to illness, although everybody knew that he was going around abusing Aeschines. Theocrines accepted the

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[23] It is a commonplace in the courts for litigants to interpret previous convictions against them as a result of the deceptive rhetoric of their opponents; e.g. Is. 5.8; D. 36.23–25; 37.20, 45, 48; 45.7; [D.] 43.10; 46.9; 47.1, 3, *passim*; 59.5; See Hesk 2000, 55.

[24] E.g. D. 37.45; [D.] 26.20; 48.36; 59.5.

[25] It seems that the indictment for maltreatment of parents, orphans, heiresses (*epiklēroi)* and orphans' estates could be classified either as *graphai* or as *eisangeliai* (cf. Is. 11.6, 15, 28 *passim*; Arist. *Ath.* 56.6; Harp. and Sud. s.v. εἰσαγγελία and κακώσεως). In any case, this special indictment was safer for the prosecutor; cf. Is. 3.47; D. 37.46. For more details see Lipsius 1915, 342–353; Harrison 1968, 117–119; MacDowell 1978, 94–95; Rhodes 1981, 629–630; Todd 1993, 107–108; Kapparis 2019, 283–290.

[26] On the rhetoric of deception, see Hesk 2000, 202–241; Kremmydas 2013, 51–89.

testimony without further reaction and, more importantly, he neither swore a counter-oath that Demosthenes was well enough to attend, nor requested that the trial be postponed (§43). In this narrative the speaker comments that this practice was common enough among people such as Theocrines (i.e. sycophants) when withdrawing a prosecution.[27] In fact he considers the affidavit about illness (*hypōmosia*) to be false, and explains the uncomplaining acceptance of the testimony as a result of a conciliation between Theocrines and Demosthenes. Thus, the narrative of Theocrines' legal dispute with Demosthenes confirms their feigned hatred, the promotion of individual interests over the interests of the city, and the twisted practices of a sycophant who is very familiar with the laws and tends to abuse them.

It is worth noting that earlier in the speech the plaintiff has claimed that Theocrines and Demosthenes pretend to be enemies and exchange vulgar insults in public, but in fact they have reconciled and deceived the people (§§ 39–40, 44). This collusion of political opponents is a rhetorical *topos*,[28] satirized by the fourth-century comic poet Antiphanes in his play *Sappho* (fr. 194 K-A, ca. 360 BCE): *οὗτοι (sc. οἱ ῥήτορες) κεκραγότες δὲ τὰ διαπόντια / τἀκ τῆς Ἀσίας καὶ τἀπὸ Θράκης λήμματα / ἕλκουσι δεῦρο, νεμομένων δὲ πλησίον / αὐτῶν κάθηται λοιδορουμένων τ' ἀεὶ / ὁ δῆμος οὐδὲν οὔτ' ἀκούων οὔθ' ὁρῶν* "They (the speakers) shout and bring the overseas revenues from Asia and Thrace here. And while they're splitting the money up among themselves and constantly abusing one another, the people sit nearby hearing and seeing nothing" (trans. D. S. Olson).[29] Antiphanes satirizes politicians who are bribed to support specific political positions, while the people are unable to perceive the plot being set up in front of their eyes, as the orators publicly accuse each other of deceiving them, while secretly sharing the city's revenue.

Comic abuse, although presented as inflated, can also be detected in different parts of the speech that is under examination in this paper. In addition to the fake enmity of Theocrines and Demosthenes that intends to deceive people and avert possible allegations of public offenses, the speaker directly accuses Theocrines of receiving money to support a decree in favour of the Tenedians (§35) and presents depositions to confirm his charge.[30] It seems, therefore, that the

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[27] Cf. D. 21.84; 39.37; [D.] 47.39, 45; 48.25; Hyp. *Eux.* 7. For details regarding the practice of *hypōmosia*, see Harrison 1971, 155 ff.; Thür 1998, 815; Horváth 2018, 132ff.; Sato 2018, 149ff.

[28] Cf. Aeschin. 2.74 *οἱ συντεταγμένοι ῥήτορες* "*public speakers acting unanimously...*"; Din. 1.99; Hyp. *Dem. passim*. On the rhetoric of collusion of politicians, see Roisman 2006, 66–117 and Apostolakis 2021, 53–54.

[29] Olson 2007, 441. For more details regarding this fragment, see Konstantakos 2000, 157–180; Olson 2007, 200–203; Olson 2021, 11–22.

[30] Even Theocrines' involvement in the case of the Aenians, although not explicitly stated, could be interpreted as the result of bribery, which impelled the Aenians to secede from the Second Athenian Confederacy and enter an alliance with Philip (§§ 37–38).

rhetorical construction of the portrait of the sycophant shares with comic invective the picture of deceitful demagogues, who employ aggressive rhetoric against their opponents, but in fact collude with them before the people of the Assembly.[31] Moreover, the revenue shared between the orators in Antiphanes' fragment can be compared to the speaker's claim that common criminals are forced to snatch more from their victims because they are forced to give a portion of the money to Theocrines and his ilk in order to avoid prosecution (§64).

Theocrines' eloquence and acquaintance with Athenian law are also highlighted through the anticipatory subversion of Theocrines' expected argument concerning the form of the present trial. According to the speaker, Theocrines would argue that he should not have been sued through the process of *endeixis,* but through the process of *graphē agraphiou* (§§50–52). This type of lawsuit was directed against persons listed as public debtors, but their names were removed from the lists before they repaid their debt to the city.[32] The speaker draws the judges' attention to the way in which Theocrines will attempt to distort the laws and explains why this legal procedure does not suit his case. Moreover, through an apostrophe to Theocrines himself, he asks him why he is focusing on the formalities of the legal process instead of apologizing for the present accusations. This comment underlines once again Theocrines' obsession with the laws.[33] The speaker also often emphasizes his opponent's deceitful rhetoric, which aims at distracting the judges from the issue that is under consideration in the trial (§§ 22–23, 36).

In contrast to these descriptions, the speaker presents himself as young and inexperienced in matters of a legal nature.[34] Precisely because he is young, he considers it necessary to justify his action in bringing a public lawsuit, so as not to be considered arrogant and litigious.[35] He also attributes it to the pressure his father has put on him (§§ 2–3, 57). However, despite his assertions about inexperience, he cites several laws to convince the judges of Theocrines' guilt. This legal

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[31] A similar collusion between official prosecutors in front of people's eyes is described in Ar. *V.* 692–5, esp. v. 695 σὺ δὲ χασκάζεις τὸν κωλακρέτην, τὸ δὲ πραττόμενόν σε λέληθεν "But you're so busy panting after the paymaster that you don't see what's going on". For the comic description of the "naïve citizens" cf. also *Eq.* 1262 (Κεχηναίων πόλις "the city of the Openmouthenians" (trans. A. H. Sommerstein).

[32] cf. Arist. *Ath.* 59.3 with Rhodes *ad loc.*; Harp. *s.v.* ἀγραφίου; Sud. *s.v.* ἀγραφίου.

[33] Cf. Men. fr. 768 K-A: καλὸν οἱ νόμοι σφόδρ' εἰσίν· ὁ δ' ὁρῶν τοὺς νόμους λίαν ἀκριβῶς συκοφάντης φαίνεται "The laws are a splendid thing; but the man who looks too closely to the laws is considered a sycophant".

[34] The combination of inexperience and youth is commonplace in forensic speeches, especially in prologues, where litigants use it either to seek the leniency of the judges (cf. Lys. 19.2; D. 27.2; 41.2) or to justify the presence of an advocate (*synēgoros*), as they themselves are not familiar with legal procedures (cf. e.g. D. 36.1; [D.] 59.14 and see Kapparis 1999 *ad loc*). Concerning our speech, in the beginning the speaker uses this commonplace argument when asking for leniency (§2), but in the end he uses it in order to invite an advocate (cf. §§ 60–61, 70). For the rhetoric of youth and inexperience in the courts see Hesk 2000, 208–209; Roisman 2005, 17–25.

[35] Cf. D. 54.1.

familiarity is justified by the crimes of his opponent. The speaker admits that he has thoroughly investigated all Theocrines' illegal actions and it is this investigation which accounts for the knowledge he has acquired,[36] while he seems to have had his father's guidance in matters of a legal nature (§5).

Moreover, the speaker sometimes chooses to share the views of older fellow-citizens on matters of law and politics (§§ 24, 62), in order to emphasize his own concentration on the traditional values of the city and his respect for his fellow-citizens on the one hand, and to shake off any suspicion of excessive familiarity with the legal system on the other. Furthermore, he often states his inability to satisfactorily describe what his family has suffered due to Theocrines (§§3, 41 60), and for this very reason he seeks the understanding of the judges, thus contrasting his supposed rhetorical inexperience with his litigious opponent's deceitful rhetoric (§§ 40, 44).

The sycophant as a false guardian of the people

According to the speaker, the rhetoric of his opponent is deceptive, but his actions may reveal his true character. Through his declamations, Theocrines presents himself as the guardian of the people, who sues those who propose illegal decrees, and argues that the abolition of *graphē paranomōn* subverts the democratic constitution (§34). The speaker tries to overturn this false image by presenting Theocrines' public actions and revealing the motives behind the prosecutions he carries out and their outcome. His aim is to alienate Theocrines from the judges and present him as a real enemy of the city, one who causes tensions and problems in matters of both domestic and foreign policy.

More specifically, Theocrines appears to undermine public life in all its aspects. The fact alone that he is described as a public debtor who continues to exercise his political rights and sue his fellow-citizens renders him the opposite of an exemplary law-abiding citizen and far from an ideal leader of the people. The speaker tries to highlight his contradictory attitude by confronting Theocrines with a hypothetical dilemma regarding the *graphē paranomōn* (§§45–47). Whatever answer Theocrines gives to this dilemma is to his detriment. So, the speaker asks Theocrines what he would do if someone submitted a decree in the Assembly proposing that *atimoi* and public debtors regain their political rights. If he does not denounce this decree as illegal, then he can in no way be considered a leader of the people; if he denounces it, his

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[36] Cf. Hyp. *Ath*. 13, where the speaker claims that it was his opponent's rhetorical ability that inspired fear and impelled him to indulge in the laws day and night, in order to be prepared for the trial (*καὶ γὰρ οὕτω με διατέθηκας καὶ περίφοβον πεποίηκας,μὴ ἀπόλωμαι [ὑ]πὸ σοῦ καὶ τῆς δεινότητος τῆς σῆς,ὥ[σ]τε τούς τε νόμους ἐξετάζειν καὶ μελετᾶν νύκτα καὶ ἡμέραν*); cf. D. 21.191–192; 54.17 and see Christ 1998, 203–208.

shamelessness will be perceived, as he would be accusing someone else of an offense he is still committing. Even more revealing is Theocrines' action in the courts, where, according to the speaker, he combines persuasion with intimidation in order to discourage the witnesses from testifying (§7).[37] He thus distorts the truth and manipulates the results of the trials.

This picture of a false leader of the people is already exemplified in the lawsuit that Theocrines brought against Micon (§§5–13). Although not much information is provided on Micon, it seems that he was a ship-owner engaged in commerce rather than a politician, and therefore the lawsuit against him was not the result of political rivalry. The speaker claims that Theocrines sued an ordinary individual with baseless accusations, aiming to obtain monetary benefits. As the indictment did not reach the courtroom, the speaker wonders whether the complaint was well grounded and Theocrines nevertheless withdrew the lawsuit, or whether it was a product of sycophancy, and he withdrew it only when the victim gave in to his blackmail. In the first scenario, not only has Theocrines violated the law on withdrawal of a public lawsuit, but he has damaged the public interest as well, since the offender went unpunished, and the city was deprived of the money that would have resulted from his conviction. In the second scenario, which the speaker probably favours, it seems that Theocrines' complaint was baseless and motivated by selfish motives, so there was no reason to bring the matter to trial once it had fulfilled its goal. If so, Theocrines has also violated the law protecting merchants and ship-owners from sycophants (§11). In either case, the withdrawal alone of this lawsuit is enough to classify Theocrines as a sycophant, even though the speaker chooses to give more examples of his sycophantic activities.

Moreover, by not paying the fine of one thousand drachmas for withdrawal of a public prosecution, Theocrines has deprived the city of its revenues, and violated the law by participating in political life despite being a public debtor. In fact, regarding the non-payment of fines and the absence of his name from the Acropolis as a public debtor, Theocrines seems to have something in common with his father, as the latter also tried to deprive the city of the sum of five hundred drachmas imposed on him by the court (§§19–21). At this point, the speaker also expresses his views on the different treatment followed in private and public cases, and explicitly states that in private cases there is the possibility of a bilateral arrangement between the

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[37] Persuasion in these contexts is usually interpreted as bribery, but this is not clarified. The speaker insinuates that Theocrines had bribed some witnesses, while it seems that in the case of Demosthenes Theocrines withdrew his lawsuit against the orator in exchange for the latter's silence.

litigants, but in public cases litigants should obey the laws and not make secret agreements, because the public interest is at risk.

Another incident that highlights Theocrines' ethical instability is his behaviour on the death of his brother (§§28–29). The way in which one handles his private affairs is often seen as representative of how one would later manage public affairs,[38] as private life is seen as an indicator of public behaviour. Theocrines is said to have sought out his brother's killers, and while he proclaimed everywhere that he would bring them to trial, he finally chose to reconcile with them for money. His choice renders him a representative example of an unreliable individual, thus also prosecutor, since his actions invalidate his words. In fact, his choice to receive financial compensation was not against the law,[39] but it was a morally reprehensible action, which is mentioned here precisely to further discredit him. A victim's relatives had a social and moral obligation to punish his murderers (cf. e.g. Antiph. 1.5); Theocrines not only failed to punish them but also appears to have betrayed his dead brother for money. This private incident is presented as being inextricably linked to Theocrines' public behaviour. The speaker stresses that a man who chooses not to punish his brother's killers, for a fee, is likely to be bribed not to punish the city's enemies in the future. In fact, this narrative of Theocrines' family tragedy and his selfish behaviour is concluded with a comment which serves as a moral dictum and indirectly links sycophancy to lack of financial independence and poverty. Theocrines is here portrayed as an unreliable prosecutor who profiteers by filing lawsuits, to the detriment of his fellow-citizens. The speaker's comment that aspiring politicians must be financially independent, in order not to be tempted to embezzle public money, clearly echoes the common assumption that poverty, along with lack of self-control, is a potential factor and motive for corruption.[40]

In his political career, moreover, Theocrines constantly appears to break his promises to the people. Although he claims that he keeps a watch on those who propose illegal decrees (§34), his actions do not confirm this promise. More specifically, apart from the case of Demosthenes already mentioned, the speaker refers to other decrees that were not denounced as illegal due to Theocrines receiving bribes. These cases are not analyzed in detail by the speaker and, although he provides depositions, we cannot know either their content or what exactly they confirm. His general and vague accusations concern the bribing of Theocrines in support of a decree proposed

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[38] Cf. Lys. 19.9–10; D. 18.296; 19.229; 36.39, 45; Aeschin. 1.30, 42 and see Dover 1974, 178–180.

[39] Gagarin 1981, 138–139.

[40] Cf. Hom. Od. 14.156–7; Thgn. 386–92; Th. 3.45.4; Eur. El. 375–6 ἀλλ᾽ ἔχει νόσον/ πενία,διδάσκει δ᾽ ἄνδρα τῇ χρείᾳ κακόν "Yet there is a disease in poverty, it teaches a man to be wicked in his need"; D. 18.131; 45.67. See also Taylor 2001, 57–61.

by Antimedon for the Tenedians (§35), and the blackmailing of other politicians such as Hyperides and Demosthenes, on whom no further information is given.

The speaker, however, chooses to mention a decree that was indeed denounced by Theocrines as illegal, in order to highlight the disastrous consequences of his opponent's involvement in foreign policy issues. According to the speaker, this decree caused the secession of Aenus from the Second Athenian Confederacy (§§37–38). It seems that General Chares had agreed with them the amount of the contribution they would pay to the Athenians, and Thucydides approved this agreement in the corresponding decree. However, the decree was denounced as illegal first by Charinus and then by Theocrines. The speaker calls Charinus a traitor[41] and adds that Theocrines is also following in his footsteps. Theocrines' association with Charinus, who has been convicted and exiled for treason, further undermines his ethos, as he appears to share a similar treacherous attitude.

The speaker justifies the decision of the men of Aenus to join Philip as the only solution available to them to get rid of sycophants like Theocrines and criticizes the Athenians who still tolerate him.[42] Moreover, the speaker presents as the peak of Theocrines' arrogance his declaration that he would denounce Thucydides for this decree, although the secession of Aenus, for which Theocrines bore a significant share of the blame, had already taken place. He thus tries to highlight Theocrines' litigiousness and his tendency to cause tensions and disturbances in the city.

Through these incidents, Theocrines is presented as the most unsuitable man to deal with public affairs because he would not hesitate to betray both his fatherland and his family if offered the appropriate financial compensation. This description not only undermines the image of the protector of the city that Theocrines espoused for himself but also incriminates him for having the tendency to harm the city more than anyone else.

Theocrines' explanations that his prosecutions are motivated by his zeal to serve the public interest are regarded by the speaker as a mere justification offered by a sycophant, the trademark of sycophantic practice being the prosecutor's willingness to abandon the case for a price: D. 58.34 ἵνα μὴ πιστεύητε αὐτῷ λέγοντι ὡς αὐτὸς φυλάττει τοὺς παράνομα γράφοντας, καὶ ὡς, ὅταν αἱ τῶν παρανόμων γραφαὶ ἀναιρεθῶσιν, ὁ δῆμος καταλύεται· ταῦτα γὰρ οἱ πάντα πωλοῦντες λέγειν

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[41] Dinarchus (1.63) states that Charinus was exiled due to his treacherous behaviour, and it was Demosthenes who expelled him on the strength of the council's report.

[42] For the actions of sycophants against the allied cities cf. Ar. *Eq.* 838; *Av.* 1422ff.; *Pax* 638ff.; Antiph. 5.78. See also Lofberg 1917, 68–72.

εἰθισμένοι εἰσίν "… in order that you not believe him when he says that he was of his own accord guarding against those who make unconstitutional proposals and that the democracy is subverted whenever actions against such proposals are cancelled. You know, this is what men who will sell anything customarily say" (trans. V. Bers).[43]

Sycophants presenting themselves as protectors of democracy are a *topos* in Aristophanes. In *Wealth* (performed in 388 BCE), in the controversy between the Just Man (*Δίκαιος*) and the Informer (*Συκοφάντης*), the latter threatens the god Ploutos with prosecution, on the grounds that he disregards the Council and the Assembly and overthrows democracy: *Pl*. 946–50 *τοῦτον τὸν ἰσχυρὸν θεὸν ἐγὼ ποιήσω τήμερον δοῦναι δίκην, / ὅτιὴ καταλύει περιφανῶς εἷς ὢν μόνος / τὴν δημοκρατίαν, οὔτε τὴν βουλὴν πιθὼν / τὴν τῶν πολιτῶν οὔτε τὴν ἐκκλησίαν* "I am going to make this mighty god pay the penalty of his crimes this very day, because he is manifestly guilty of attempting to subvert our democracy, acting entirely on his own sole authority, without obtaining the approval of the citizens' Council or of the Assembly either" (trans. A. H. Sommerstein). It is worth noting that, concerning sycophancy, both the Informer in *Wealth* and Theocrines in *Against Theocrines* are presented as arguing that they defend the constitution against those who attempt to overthrow it (*καταλύειν τὸν δῆμον/τὴν δημοκρατίαν*). Besides, just as the Informer argues that he, being a volunteer prosecutor, is an upstanding patriot (v. 900 *χρηστὸς* "honest, virtuous" and *φιλόπολις* "patriotic"), so Theocrines presents himself as a guardian (*φύλαξ*) of democracy against the movers of unconstitutional proposals. And finally, the speaker's refutation that Theocrines in fact sells everything (*πάντα πωλεῖν*) calls to mind the comment of the Just Man, that the city has a rotten patron (v. 920 *πονηρὸν προστάτην*).[44]

This picture of the false leader of the people is also found in [D.] 25, *Against Aristogeiton I*, where an attempt is also made to depict the defendant Aristogeiton as a sycophant. In fact, Aristogeiton is said to present himself as the watch-dog of the people, reproducing the stereotype of the politician who wants to be advertised as a faithful leader of the people.[45] In fact, however, Aristogeiton does not behave like a typical watch-dog, as he ends up devouring the sheep he claims to be watching (25:40: *ἃ δέ φησι φυλάττειν πρόβατ' αὐτὸς κατεσθίειν*), just as Theocrines

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[43] I have used the translation of Bers (2003) in all the passages from *Against Theocrines*.

[44] This image of Theocrines is close to the stock comic character of *alazôn* "*braggart*", who pretends to have worthy qualities that actually he does not have. See Serafim (2020, 37–38), who traces elements of this stock comic character in public speeches of Attic oratory and provides the relative bibliography. Cf. also Apostolakis 2021, 45–51.

[45] This characterization is also said to have been used by Demosthenes of himself and those who defend the interests of the city; cf. Plu. *Dem*. 23.4. For more details on Aristogeiton as the "watch-dog" of the people, see Apostolakis 2014, 216–227; Serafim 2020, 39–40.

ends up very far from protecting the city despite his statement that he is vigilant and ready to react to those who submit illegal decrees (§§ 34, 46 *ὡς αὐτὸς φυλάττει τοὺς παράνομα γράφοντας*). In fact, the reversal of the stereotype of the protector of the people appears for the first time in the comic theatre, in Aristophanes' *Knights* (performed in 424 BCE). In this play it is the Sausage-Seller who warns the people about Paphlagon (Cleon), who, despite presenting himself as the watch-dog of the people, robs and deceives them (v. 1023–34); in the present speech the young prosecutor is the one who undertakes to show the people that Theocrines is a false protector who in fact causes tensions in order to reap financial benefits. It seems, therefore, that comic invective and forensic rhetoric offer a similar picture of the sycophant.

Slander, invective and sycophancy

The speaker does not confine himself to describing incidents that highlight Theocrines' unstable and unethical behaviour and sycophantic practices. He also chooses to attack Theocrines with the weapons used by sycophants, namely slander (*diabolē*) and invective (*loidoria*). *Diabolē* (L. *calumnia*) aims to methodically undermine the ethos of the opponent,[46] in contrast to invective (L. *invectio*) which includes fierce attacks and offensive characterizations. Regarding the invective, the speaker has already called Theocrines a sycophant in the prologue (§2), but in the course of his speech he does not limit himself to this description.[47] The word that most often appears in connection with the sycophant is the adjective *ponēros*. As Rosenbloom (2003, 89) points out, "*ponēria* covers all anti-social 'badness' but its core characteristic is the privileging of private profit, power and pleasure above the laws, values and interests of the community and the use of deceit, flattery and slander to attain them". These are precisely the flaws which the speaker systematically ascribes to Theocrines.

More specifically, the speaker uses the word *ponēria* four times (§§27, 38, 63, 66) with reference to the behaviour of Theocrines and his ilk, while the word *ponēros* is used four times to describe Theocrines (§§17, 24, 27, 40), once to describe Theocrines' father (§20), and once to describe the speechwriter Ctesicles (§20). The first use of the term is already found in the passage where the speaker introduces Theocrines' grandfather as the person who passed on this characteristic to his grandson, calling him *πονηρὸν ἐκ τριγονίας* (§17) "a third-generation scoundrel". This specific insult, insofar as it distorts the *topos* of "hereditary virtue" into a *topos*

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[46] For the rhetoric of *diabolē* in Attic orators, see Carey 2004, 1–13.

[47] As has been already pointed out, the sycophant is a person to whom the sharpest insults and the most negative characterizations are attributed. Harvey (1990, 109–10) has compiled an extensive list of all the negative terms applied to sycophants in the sources.

of "hereditary wickedness", may have a comic origin. The idea of "hereditary wickedness" is found in Aristophanes' *Birds* (414 BCE), where the Sycophant considers it his duty to continue the sycophantic tradition of his family, which goes back to his grandfather (v. 1451 *Τὸ γένος οὐ καταισχυνῶ./Παππῷος ὁ βίος συκοφαντεῖν ἐστί μοι* "I will not disgrace my family/ I am a third-generation sycophant"). Of course, in the case of Theocrines and his grandfather, the term applied to them in this particular passage is not directly related to their sycophantic practices, but to their attempt to deprive the city of its income by not paying their debts.[48] However, this point highlights the selfish behaviour of Theocrines and his family, as they appear to despise the laws and place their own profit above the interests of the city.

The plaintiff attempts to substantiate the allegations of hereditary *ponēria* by referring to Theocrines' father,[49] and particularly to the way in which he tried to avoid paying the fine imposed on him in a trial for assertion of freedom of a reputed slave (*aphaeresis eis eleutherian*, §§19–21).[50] He states that Theocrines' father, after the court imposed a fine on him, came to an agreement with the speechwriter Ctesicles, who was handling his opponent's case, in order not to hand over his name to the officials and list him as a public debtor on the Acropolis. This covert consultation with the speechwriter of the opposing party, which bypasses the laws and officials, automatically designates Theocrines' father a wicked litigant.

Besides being *ponēros*, Theocrines is also described as a "despicable animal" (*miaron thērion*, §49). The word *miaros* normally refers to miasma and religious contamination and is often used of sycophants, who are presented as outcasts (cf. §64: *ὧν γένος ἐξωλέστερον οὐδέν ἐστιν* "there is no more damnable breed than these men").[51] Aristogeiton is also called a *miaron thērion* (cf. [D.] 25.58; also cf. Din. 2.10: *thērion*), which must be removed from the city by any means, while both the adjective *miaros* and the word *thērion* (referring to people) often appear in

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[48] For a similar incident where the reputation of the thief follows the grandson, cf. [D.] 10.73 *παππῷα … καὶ πατρῷα δόξα* "the repute of your grandfather and father".

[49] It is common practice for forensic oratory litigants, in their attempt to tarnish the ethos of their opponent, to resort to abusive attacks against both the father and the grandfather of their opponent; cf. Aeschin. 3.172; Hyp. *Ath*. 19.

[50] This trial concerned the illegal emancipation of Cephisodorus' slave by Theocrines' father, who had claimed her to be a free woman, but could not prove his claim in court. For this legal procedure and its parameters, see Harrison 1968, 178–180, 221; MacDowell 1978, 80; Scafuro 1997, 401; Kapparis 1999, 248–250; Fisher 2001, 200; Carey 2018, 88–89; Kapparis 2019, 105–107.

[51] Christ 1998, 51–59.

Aristophanes in the context of comic invective.[52] At this point it is worth noting that the speaker also uses the adjective *miaros* of Demosthenes (§43), but artfully presents it as coming from Theocrines. Moreover, it is a common assumption that the Athenians considered sycophants to be complete strangers and enemies who should be expelled from the city forever, and this is exactly the image that the speaker wants to create of Theocrines.[53]

A supposed sycophant is systematically insulted by his opponents, but at the same time he is presented as the person who launches the harshest accusations and insults against his fellow-citizens and his victims. In this case in particular, the speaker claims that both Theocrines and Demosthenes are constantly insulting each other in public (§ 40) and even go so far as to launch insults that fall into the category of *aporrhēta*, "forbidden".[54] This category includes the accusation that one is a murderer (*androphonos*), that he has abused his father (*patraloias*) or his mother (*mētraloias*), and that he has cast away his shield on the battlefield (*rhipsaspis*). These offenses were considered very serious and so such false accusations were punishable, which is why the speaker does not actually specify them but just castigates both men and undermines their ethos.

Moreover, the undermining of Theocrines' character has been methodically orchestrated through the narration of his family tragedy. By activating slander, the speaker introduces Theocrines' private life into the realm of the courts and the public sphere and describes the way in which Theocrines handled his brother's murder. As we have said, Theocrines chose to come to an agreement with his brother's killers for a fee. This act was morally reprehensible, which is why the speaker tends to emphasize it. He even concludes this narrative with the following ironical comment: "What an honest man, so trustworthy, so immune to bribery!" (*χρηστός γ ᾽ἐστὶ καὶ πιστὸς καὶ κρείττων χρημάτων,* §29). The speaker describes Theocrines as the most unsuitable person to handle public and private affairs. Indeed, Theocrines is consistently described as an unreliable, unstable, and corrupt citizen (§§ 40–43, 62–64).

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[52] For *miaros* cf.: Ar. *Ach*. 182, 557; *Nu*. 1332; *V*. 397 and see Worman 2008, esp. 261–2, 271–2; for the characterization *thērion* cf.: Ar. *Eq*. 273; *V*. 448; *Av*. 87. For the technique of naming adversaries after animals see Serafim 2020, 38–40.

[53] For the sycophant as a stranger: cf. Ar. *Ach*. 517–519, 725–6; *Av*. 1699–1701; Aeschin. 3.172. As an enemy: cf. Ar. *Pl*. 877–879; [D.] 25.82. As an unwelcome outsider and outcast: cf. Ar. *Ach*. 904–5, 926–28; *Av*. 1461–65; *Pl*. 926–43; Isoc. 15.301; Lys. 12.5; 25.19; [D.] 25.95; X. *HG*. 2.3.12; Arist. *Ath*. 35.3. See also Christ 1998, 50–59, who discusses most of the above passages in detail.

[54] For *aporrhēta* see MacDowell 1978, 126–130; Todd 1993, 259–62; Wallace 1994, 114–124; Todd 2007, 634–5; Kamen 2020, 87–114.

Conclusion

Throughout the speech, the plaintiff outlines his opponent's litigiousness and public activity as negatively as possible. The image of the guardian of the people that Theocrines tried to create for himself is attempted to get overturned and the real motives behind all his actions are highlighted. Theocrines is presented as filing or withdrawing lawsuits for financial gain (cf. §§ 6, 13, 28, 32, 33, 35, 62, 63, 65). Moreover, he is litigious (§§22, 34, 45) and brings or is planning to bring fellow-citizens to court (§§ 1, 23, 32, 35, 36,). He has the rhetorical skills to persuade (§§ 36, 41, 62) and to deceive the judges (§§ 22, 23), by distracting them from the issue under consideration in each case. He does not hesitate to spread false accusations against merchants and ship-owners (§12) and Athenian allies (§37), resorting to abusive attacks on his fellow-citizens (§63) in order to achieve his goals (§§ 42, 63). In brief, all the typical characteristics of a sycophant, which make him a source of fear and danger, are attributed to him (§65). In this sense, *Against Theocrines* offers invaluable information about the study of sycophancy and the sycophant. The speaker's description of Theocrines reinforces the view that the sycophant does not belong to a distinct group of people with objective characteristics, but rather constitutes a rhetorical construct, which includes material from well-known fields of slander and invective, and exploits current prejudices. The description of sycophants may draw and capitalize on and further social prejudices and fears, but it is a discursive description rather than a "real" representation of a category of Athenians. The recycling of this material from oration to oration, and its presence in other genres, especially Old (and Middle) Comedy, strongly points towards discursive construction of the figure of the sycophant, a figure playing a real, practical role in the democratic discourse and political struggle.

Finally, regardless of the truth of these allegations against Theocrines and the outcome of the trial, which is not known to us, it seems that our speech contributed to the construction of the picture of a "sycophant Theocrines", which was to survive in the following years. More specifically, about ten years later, in the oration *On the Crown*, Demosthenes was to use Theocrines' name as a term of abuse applied to Aeschines, by calling him, among other epithets, "the tragic Theocrines".[55] This inventive characterization, which apparently had some effect on

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[55] D. 18.313: *ἐν τούτοις λαμπροφωνότατος, μνημονικώτατος, ὑποκριτὴς ἄριστος, τραγικὸς Θεοκρίνης.* "It is then that your voice is at its most resonant and your memory at its best; then that you are supreme actor, a tragic Theocrines" (trans. S. Usher); Cf. Harp. s.v. *Θεοκρίνης*: [...] *βούλεται δὲ αὐτὸν λέγειν συκοφάντην, ἐπειδὴ ὁ Θεοκρίνης τοιοῦτος, ὡς ἔστι δῆλον ἐκ τοῦ Κατὰ Θεοκρίνου, εἴτε Δημοσθένους ἐστὶν εἴτε Δεινάρχου οὗτος ὁ λόγος· τὸν γοῦν πάλαι μὲν ὑποκριτὴν τραγικὸν, ὕστερον δὲ συκοφάντην εἰκότως ὠνόμασε τραγικὸν Θεοκρίνην* "He wants to call him (i.e. Aeschines) a sycophant because Theorcrines was a man of this kind, as it is obvious from *Against*

the audience of a court in 330 BCE, might be an indication that Theocrines remained in the minds of the judges, and the Athenians in general, the sycophant par excellence.

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Theocrines, a speech written either by Demosthenes or by Dinarchus. The man, therefore, who first was a tragic actor and later a sycophant, was reasonably called "the tragic Theocrines".

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Secretive Spartans: Herodotus' views towards secret communication in Persia and Sparta and its effect on post-Herodotean sources

by Martine Diepenbroek

Introduction

The gathering of intelligence and spying on the enemy is essential for every modern government to determine the political and military direction of the state – especially in times of conflict when essential information on the enemy can obviously facilitate the war effort.[1] Although this may look like a modern practice, nothing is less true. When we take a look at original sources, we see that throughout history, individuals in all ancient civilisations have been trying to encipher confidential correspondence, while others have been trying to decipher these messages.[2] Therefore, some method of concealing confidential information was essential. This could be achieved by hiding a message so that it seemed that there was no message at all (steganography), or by writing a message in a form of code that could not be easily understood by the enemy (cryptography).[3] This concealing of information was among the common practices of spies in antiquity in times of war.[4] The earliest Greco-Roman source which provides us with unambiguous examples of steganography is Herodotus' *Histories* – in which we find four examples of secret communication (1.123; 5.28; 7.239; 8.128). Scholars who have discussed these passages in the past have analysed their contents and concluded that the passages had a common theme, namely, that a clever individual tried to outmanoeuvre a tyrannical Near Eastern despot.[5] Although this is partly correct, it is not as black and white as that. In this article, I will argue that

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[1] Gerolymatos 1986, 13. See also Starr 1974, 1; Sheldon 2008; Van Tilborg 2006, xiii.

[2] According to our available sources, confidential correspondence in Antiquity was mainly used in a military context. Yet, evidence for the use of secret confidential information in other contexts in antiquity might be lost.

[3] Steganography, from the Greek words στεγανός meaning 'covered' or 'concealed' and γράφειν meaning 'to write', is the practice of concealing a message within another message, an image, or an object, without giving the idea that a secret message is hidden in it (Cox, Miller et al. 2008, 2; Johnson, Duric et al. 2001, 1). Cryptography, from the Greek words κρυπτός, meaning 'hidden from' or 'secret,' and γράφειν is the practice of techniques for securing communication by enciphering a text (Bauer 2013, xix; Hodges 1985, 146; Reba & Shier 2015, 479-480; Reinke 1962, 113; Seyfarth 1970, 181; Smith 1955, 16).

[4] Besides its use in a military context, other ancient uses of cryptography and steganography include its use in love letters, its use to increase the level of mysticism in inscriptions, and its use in magical and religious texts (Aus. *Ep*, 28.21-22; Ov, *Ars Am.* 3.627-630; Plin. *HN*, 26.39 (62); Waldstein & Wisse 1995; Wisse 1979; 1980; 1981; 1982; 1983; 1989; 1990).

[5] Ceccarelli 2013; Fabule 2011; Lateiner 1990.

in fact four individuals tried to outmanoeuvre someone else for their own benefit. We will also see that the four stories together fit in well within Herodotus' narrative style – a point that other scholars seem to have overlooked so far. And finally, I will argue that we can make some statements about literacy in Greece in Herodotus' days when we look at his narrative. However, we have to remain very cautious when discussing the levels of literacy in the ancient world. The article will be divided into three parts. First, I will discuss Herodotus' views towards communication – and especially secret communication – by analysing the four secret messages. Secondly, I will discuss Herodotus' views on Greeks – especially Spartans – and Persians. And finally, I will discuss Herodotus' narrative style in relation to his views towards the four secret messages.

Communication and secret communication in Herodotus' *Histories*

Written forms of communication were still rather uncommon in Greece in Herodotus' days (early 5th century BCE). From the 9th century BCE onward, objects inscribed with Phoenician writing began to be brought into the Greek world. And by the middle of the 8th century BCE, pottery inscribed in Greek begins to occur in the archaeological record.[6] From the beginning of the 7th century BCE, curses and dedications began to be inscribed on objects,[7] and by the 6th century BCE, surviving inscriptions include public records such as law codes, lists of officials, and records of treaties.[8] It is also in this period that we see the earliest extant Greek literature appear in the form of poetry (Alcaeus; Alcman; Pindar; Sappho; Tyrtaeus), and epic (Homer; Hesiod). Alongside the dominant lyric and epic traditions, tragedy began to develop in the archaic period, borrowing elements from the pre-existing genres of archaic Greek poetry.[9] By the 6th century BCE, the first written prose in Greek literature appeared as well (Anaximander of Miletus; Pherecydes of Syros).[10] Yet, as Engels argues, prose literature can largely be said to have begun with Herodotus in the early 5th century BCE.[11] This shows that even though Herodotus had examples of earlier written texts, he did not have examples of large prosaic works to build upon. By the end of the 5th century or the beginning of the 4th century BCE literacy was most likely more widespread in the Greek world than before this date and the exchange of letters took place regularly, it seems – based on the large number of inscriptions that have survived from this

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[6] Osborne 2009, 101.
[7] Osborne 2009, 104.
[8] Jeffery 1982, 831.
[9] See e.g.: Kirk 1985, 44-45; Kurke 2007, 141; Power 2016, 58–63; Winnington-Ingram 1985, 258-259.
[10] Power 2016, 58; Purves 2010, 97-110.
[11] Engels 2008, 146.

period.[12] Yet, it is not until the 4th century BCE (and perhaps even after that) that the first reading culture appears in Athens. And even then, only part of society – especially the higher classes – would be able to read and write.

Before the time in which reading and writing became more common, the ancient Greeks saw letters and long distance communication as something related to Near Eastern kingdoms with their tyrannical regimes and they believed such forms of communication to be fraught with dangers.[13] Herodotus' *Histories* follows this pattern: in the whole work, we can find only eleven instances of written communication – only one of which concerned direct intra-Greek communication in a Greek context (8.22). In other words, Herodotus still lived in a mainly oral society in which his, and other stories were handed down verbally from one generation to the next.[14] Because of this oral tradition, there was awareness among early Greek writers of the advantages and disadvantages of written over oral communication. As O'Toole states:

> writing fixed a message in time and space, [but] a written document that seemed objective and straightforward could also be full of paradoxes.[15]

In the generation after Herodotus, we see these disadvantages of writing again in Plato's *Phaedrus* where Socrates complains that writing represented no true wisdom, but only its semblance, and even worse, once something had been put into writing, it could have fallen into the wrong hands (275B-275E). Moreover, writing was full of ambiguities. Since a written document could not be cross-examined as a person could, it could have been used not only to inform but to deceive as well. We see this deliberate deception, for example, in Herodotus' story of Themistocles cutting messages into rocks for the Ionians during Xerxes' invasion of Greece. Themistocles sent men to the places where Ionian ships put in for resupply and he had them cut written messages into the rocks there, urging the Ionians to abandon Xerxes and join the Greek side (8.22; 8.55). As O'Toole argues, this was a clever plan: either the Ionians who read the

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[12] *IG, V.1: Lakonia and Messenia*; *Laconia Survey Inscriptions Catalogue*, *Laconia Survey Project;* Cartledge 1978; 2003 (I & II); Christidis, Arapopoulou & Chrite 2007; Hodkinson & Powell 2009; Hondius & Woodward 1919-1921, 88-143; Kennell 2010; Powell 2017; Tod 1933, 108-111. Yet, absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. Therefore, we must be careful when making claims about literacy in ancient Greece (Ceccarelli 2013, 185). Despite multiple investigations, there is still no agreement on the degree of literacy achieved by all the Greeks in the late archaic and classical periods (Boring 1979; Cartledge 1978; Clanchy 1979; Goody 1986; Goody & Watt 1968; Harris 1989; Harvey 1966; Havelock 1963; 1982; Immerwahr 1990; Steiner 1994, 4; Street 1984; Swiggers 1996; Thomas 1989; Turner 1952).

[13] Apollod. *Epit.* 3.7; 5.19; Hellanic (*FGrHist* 4 frag. 178a); Paus. 10.31.2; Pl, *Ap*, 41b; Hdt. 1.99-100. See also Bellamy 1989 (I) & (II); Ceccarelli 2013, 24; 60; Rosenmeyer 2001, 39-44.

[14] Gould 1989, 76–78.

[15] O'Toole 1991, 153.

messages would be persuaded to rebel against the Persians, or Xerxes himself would see the messages and distrust his allies, withholding them from the order of battle. Herewith, an important point regarding writing is made: a message was not always as straightforward as it appeared to be.[16]

Sending deliberately confusing – or even secret – signs and messages could be useful when enemies were nearby. We know that this was a topic that fascinated Herodotus, since in the *Histories* we can find at least 69 instances of trickery and deceit.[17] In fact, all eleven instances of written communication in Herodotus' work are either deceptive or ambiguous. And four of these eleven messages are clear examples of hidden confidential messaging: that is, steganography (1.123; 5.35; 7.239; 8.128).

The first instance of steganography that Herodotus gives us occurs in Book 1. According to Herodotus, political intrigue and feuding among the Persians once prompted the Median general Harpagus to plot against his King Astyages, seeking revenge for the murder of Harpagus' son by the king. Harpagus, therefore, plotted to assist the Persian prince Cyrus against Astyages in a *coup d'état.* Having garnered support from some Median nobles, Harpagus sent word to Cyrus through a message hidden in the body of a hare, since he desired to make his intent known to Cyrus while the plot obviously had to remain a secret (1.123-1.124).[18] After receiving the gift, cutting the hare open and reading the message, Cyrus acted upon Harpagus' advice to rally the Persians against the Medes. The secretive and deceitful uses of writing in this case did not end there. Instead, Cyrus resorted to a second subterfuge to accomplish the revolt. In a ruse to enlist the help of the otherwise loyal army, he wrote out a document containing instructions to the soldiers. He read from this document aloud, pretending that it had come from King Astyages without letting anyone see it. This bogus royal document ordered the troops to assemble fully armed, and it appointed Cyrus as their leader, with instructions that the army had to obey him in everything. Thus established in his usurpation by an apparently authoritative charter, Cyrus won the army to his side and seized the throne (1.125-127).[19] Herodotus finishes his story by stating that in this way King Astyages was deposed from his sovereignty after ruling cruelly for 35 years (1.130). This example may show that Herodotus had negative views towards despotic regimes and that he believed that there was a close connection between these regimes and the use

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[16] O'Toole 1991, 153-154.

[17] For a list of all instances of trickery in Herodotus' *Histories* see Hollmann 2005, 316-323; Hollmann 2011.

[18] On Harpagus' motives for sending the message and his role in the story as described by Herodotus see Gray 1995, 185-211.

[19] O'Toole 1991, 154.

of secret communication. However, it must be kept in mind that writing in the Near East was far more common than it was in Greece in Herodotus' days. Also, Harpagus hold a personal grudge against Astyages for killing his son. After the king killed his son, Harpagus took several years to plan his revenge by sending gifts to Cyrus and meeting secretly with Median nobles before the actions took place (book 1). Therefore, it is better to say – as Hamel argues – that we see a struggle for dominance between Cyrus and Astyages, with the help of Harpagus.[20]

The second example of steganography appears in book 5 – in a passage on Histiaeus of Miletus, who was appointed as tyrant of that city by Darius of Persia (5.35).[21] Histiaeus took part in Darius' expedition against the Scythians (ca. 513 BCE). After the successful campaign, Darius considered Histiaeus to be a loyal servant. However, Histiaeus' ambitions alarmed Darius' advisors, and Histiaeus was, therefore, 'rewarded' by being compelled to remain in Susa as Darius' 'Royal Table-Companion.'[22] Obviously, Histiaeus was unhappy having to stay in Susa, since he was in a way imprisoned. Therefore, he made plans to return to his position as king of Miletus by instigating a revolt: the Ionian Revolt.[23] In Histiaeus' view, when instigating a revolt Darius had to send him back to Miletus to deal with it. And after arrival in Miletus, Histiaeus would take control of the area again. To start the revolt Histiaeus sent word to his nephew and son-in-law Aristagoras in Miletus. This message he tattooed on the head of his most trustworthy slave, after shaving the slave's head.[24] Histiaeus then waited for the slave's hair to grow back, and subsequently sent the man to Aristagoras in Miletus, instructing him to let Aristagoras shave his head again for the message to become visible (5.35.2-4). As in the previous example, the message was delivered, and Aristagoras could start the revolt.

According to Ceccarelli, the story of Histiaeus' message fits in well with Herodotus' negative view towards autocratic rulers in the Near East, since the example shows how in the Near East slaves could be mutilated to send messages.[25] Marking your slaves was a way to punish them and to show that they were your property.[26] So, one could literally write on a body of a slave, the body

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[20] Hamel 2012, 45.
[21] Waters 2014, 83. See also Waters 1985.
[22] Holland 2006, 153–154.
[23] Chapman incorrectly suggests that Herodotus' work is the only account of the Ionian Revolt available to us (Chapman 1972, 546). In addition to Herodotus' work, we have e.g., Aeschylus' *The Persians*, and Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*.
[24] Sending the slave was a clever idea from Histiaeus' point of view. Slaves had little to lose, were used to obscurity, and were believed to live lives of duplicity. Therefore, the seemed useful as spies (Richmond 1998, 6).
[25] Ceccarelli 2013, 127.
[26] Kamen 2010, 95 + note 1. For other purposes of tattooing, including decorative tattooing, see e.g., Fisher 1993; Kamen 2010; Jones 1987; 2000.

hereby being seen as a worthless object. And since tattoos are permanent, it was impossible to remove them.[27] If text were written on a slave's back or on his head (as in Herodotus' story) the bearer could not even see it himself. In this way, the slave was forever marked by his master, showing his master's power over him, even if a slave was later freed. However, tattooing slaves is not something that we only see in the Near Eastern kingdoms. In fact, it was just as common in the ancient Greek world too. To give a few examples, in Aristophanes' *The Wasps* (844-850; 1372-1375), and *Women at the Thesmophoria* (773-784) we read about slaves whose bodies were punctured, punctuated, and tattooed. And as DuBois argues, a Greek slave girl's pubis was once covered with black pitch used to prepare writing tablets.[28]

Moreover, we cannot be certain if any of these events concerning the slave and the secret message have in fact happened. According to O'Toole, what we see in the story is Herodotus' inability to resist a good story for the story itself.[29] And with the story, Herodotus makes a graphic and a geographical point about the uses of secret writing in the Greek world that was still getting used to the very idea of writing.[30] We see the graphic point in the fact that marking slaves was already a common practice, and so the slave in this story was marked as well – yet in a different way: the markings were invisible since they were hidden under the slave's hair.[31] When we take a look at the main characters and locations in the story, we see Herodotus making a geographical point as well. The instigator of the rebellion was Histiaeus, who was communicating with his son-in-law Aristagoras – while both were in Asia Minor. So, here we see the first reference of Greeks using secret communication – yet still in a Near Eastern (geographical) context. The story is also an example of trust and betrayal. Even though Histiaeus was appointed by Darius as ruler of Miletus, he was later 'imprisoned' at the Persian court, and, therefore, tried to escape and seize power over Miletus again. So, as in the first example, the instigator of the rebellion had personal reasons to take revenge.

The third secret letter can be found in Book 7 of the *Histories*. According to Herodotus, when the Spartan king Demaratus was in exile at Xerxes' court in Persia, he wanted to send word to the Spartans to inform them about Xerxes' invasion of Greece (480 BCE). Since Demaratus

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[27] Kamen 2010, 98. See also Petron, *Sat*, 106.

[28] DuBois 1988-I, 75. See also DuBois 1988-II; 1991; 2003; 2007; Jones 1987; 2000; Kamen 2010. DuBois 1988-I, 75-78; 2007; Kamen 2010, 95-98

[29] O'Toole 1991, 155. Modern cryptographers often incorrectly present this story as a historical account based on facts (Bauer 2013, 8; Singh 1999, 6).

[30] O'Toole 1991, 155.

[31] Ceccarelli presumes that Histiaeus tattooed the word '*revolt*' on the slave's head (Ceccarelli 2013, 114). However, Herodotus does not disclose what Histiaeus' message said.

was afraid that the message would fall into the wrong hands, he wrote the message under the wax of a wax tablet. The seemingly blank tablet reached Sparta, and the Spartans were initially confused about what to do with an ostensibly blank tablet until Gorgo, the wife of King Leonidas, suggested that they would look for a hidden message and scrape off the wax. In this way the message was discovered and the Spartans were warned about Xerxes' invasion (7.239).[32] Herodotus does not tell us why it was Gorgo who discovered the message or how she discovered it,[33] but according to Herodotus, because of Demaratus' letter, the Spartans had time to inform the other Greeks, and together they defeated the Persians at the Battle of Salamis (7.239; 8). This is significant since Demaratus had to rely on the ingenuity of the Spartans to discover the secret message. The apparent success of the message being delivered and understood seems to be the major point of discussion for modern historians of cryptography. Sheldon, for example, sees Demaratus' message as 'one of the most important messages in all of Greek history'.[34] And according to Singh, Xerxes had lost the vital element of surprise and, when the Persian fleet approached the Bay of Salamis near Athens, the Greeks were prepared.[35] This shows how modern historians of cryptography often incorrectly tend to present Herodotus' stories as clear historical facts, attributing the direct influence of the secret messages that Herodotus discusses to the success of subsequent historical events. Why Demaratus, being in exile from Sparta because of political issues, decided to inform the Spartans about Xerxes' invasion is unknown. Perhaps he still felt connected to his own people, he did not want Xerxes to invade his homeland, or he tried to get back into the Spartans' good grace.

Interestingly, with Demaratus' letter to the Spartans, Herodotus literally introduces letters into the Greek world with a physical written message being sent from Persia to Sparta. Herodotus' story also obviously implies that the Spartans were able to read and write. However, later in the 4th century BCE the Spartans were depicted as 'illiterate', 'foolish' and secretive by other Greeks – especially Athenian – sources, as we will see later in this article. We will see that this idea of 'secretive Spartans' is a stereotypical one. The Spartans were not so different from the other Greeks or more secretive than others. In fact, in the story of Histiaeus and Aristagoras, we

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[32] According to Justin it was not the king's wife, but his sister who discovered Demaratus' message (*Epit*, 2.10.12-172.10.13). See also Dvornik 1974, 57; Sheldon 1987, 28; Sheldon 2005, 42.

[33] The passage in which Gorgo discovered Demaratus' secret message is the oldest known passage in which a woman took the initiative in deciphering a secret message. Later – in Roman love elegy – we find many examples in which the woman took initiative in sending secret messages (see Propertius, Tibullus, Ovid; especially Ovid, *Ars Amatoria*).

[34] Sheldon 1986, 39.

[35] Singh 1999, 5.

see a Greek communicating with another Greek to start a rebellion, while in the story of Demaratus, we see a Greek who wanted to warn his fellow Greeks about Xerxes' planned invasion of his homeland.

The final instance of a secret letter occurs in Book 8 of Herodotus' work. This story is set at the siege of Potidaea in 479 BCE,[36] after the battle of Salamis. Timoxenus, *strategos* of the Scionians, betrayed his city Scione (near Potidaea) by trading messages with the Persian commander Artabazus through letters hidden under the feathers of arrows that were shot into an agreed place (8.128.1). The messages were wrapped around the shaft of the arrow that was subsequently covered in feathers to make the message invisible, just as the message on the slave's head was covered by his hair (5.35.2-4).[37] Timoxenus' treachery was discovered only when Artabazus missed his aim. Instead of his steganographic arrow falling in the spot agreed upon, Artabazus accidentally shot a Potidaean soldier. His fellow soldiers who came to aid the wounded man found the letter on the arrow and Timoxenus' betrayal became known (8.128-129.1).

In this example, we see a Greek (Timoxenus) betraying his fellow Greeks by aiding the Persian army in Greece. While in the story of Histiaeus and Aristagoras, we saw two Greeks in a Near Eastern context communicating in secret, here we see a Greek and a Persian communicating with each other in a partially Greek context (Greek-Persian). Herodotus may have disapproved of Timoxenus' betrayal, but he discusses the passage in a neutral way. We cannot, therefore, say with certainty what he thought of the matter. Yet, he discusses how the leaders of the army responded to it. According to Herodotus, the people who came to aid the wounded man and found the letter, took the letter to one of their generals. The generals read the letter and perceived that Timoxenus was a traitor, but they decided not to condemn Timoxenus with a charge of treason, for fear that the people of Scione would thereafter all be called traitors (8.128).

In the previous three stories (Harpagus and Cyrus; Histiaeus and Aristagoras; Demaratus to the Spartans), a secret plot was not discovered. Yet, in this example, Timoxenus' betrayal was discovered when a secret letter fell into the wrong hands. And here, we get to the point of the spreading of literacy in the ancient world once more. As Svenbro argues, the fact that the soldiers handed over the letter to their general, may simply have been a sign of respect for their leaders. However, it is more likely that they gave the letter to someone who could read.[38] As generals,

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[36] For the date, see e.g., Burliga 2008, 92-93. See also Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*.
[37] Godley 1925, 131; How & Wells 1928, 700. See also Aen. Tact. 31.25-27.
[38] Svenbro 2018, 55-56.

Timoxenus and Artabazus had a better education than the soldiers. They could read and write, and, therefore, they could communicate with each other fairly secretly – since many people around them could not read and write. Although Herodotus does not discuss what he thought of Timoxenus' betrayal, maybe we can say that the story is used as a warning for those who communicate secretly: when communicating in secret, you have to be very cautious, and you should be aware that there is always the risk of discovery.

Herodotus' views towards Spartans, other Greeks, and Persians

As Fabule argues, one can see a pattern in the four steganographic messages found in Herodotus' work:

> the pattern reflects the following scenario: under the thumb of some potentate, a leader (foreign tyrant, a general, or client-king) sends a cunningly disguised secret message, that related information detrimental to his overlord.[39]

Fabule is correct in stating that the four instances of steganography in Herodotus' work are unique since they have three features in common that cannot be found in this combination elsewhere in the work in connection with other messages or in other instances of trickery and deceit.[40] First, all four instances are examples of long-distance communication sent when roads were guarded. The steganographic methods used for sending the messages were purposefully chosen instead of cryptographic methods and designed to raise as little suspicion as possible among third parties. Secondly, there is no intra-Greek exchange of messages. Messages were either sent between a Greek and a non-Greek (Timoxenus and Artabazus), between non-Greeks (Harpagus and Cyrus), or in a non-Greek setting (Histiaeus and Aristagoras in Asia Minor; Demaratus as an exile in Persia). Thirdly, all four instances deal with resistance against a despotic ruler for personal reasons. However, I argue that the case is more complicated than this may seem. First, the word 'tyrant' has a negative meaning in the modern world. Yet, it must be pointed out that *tyrannos* in Greek can simply be translated as an 'absolute ruler,' someone who had unlimited powers to rule the state, often seen in the ancient Near East in Herodotus' days – as opposed to the democratic state in Greece (especially Athens). In Herodotus' days, the rule of a *tyrannos* in the Near East was seen as a bureaucratic autocracy and marked by an institutional

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[39] Fabule 2011, 36. For a concise list of exiled or alienated Greeks who, for their own purposes, solicited Persian assistance against their fellow-citizen, see Boedeker 1987, 191-192.

[40] Ceccarelli 2013, 113; Fabule 2011, 36. For a list of all instances of trickery in Herodotus' *Histories* see Hollmann 2005, 316-323; Hollmann 2011.

harshness and distance between ruler and ruled.[41] Herodotus experienced this type of regime as a young boy. By Herodotus' days (the early 5th century BCE) his birthplace Halicarnassus was subject to Persian control.[42] According to the *Suda*, as a boy, Herodotus spent time on the island of Samos, to which he had fled with his family from the oppressions of Lygdamis, ruler of Halicarnassus (*Suda* s.v. *Herodotos*). Later, Herodotus returned to Halicarnassus, where he seems to have taken part in political struggles against Lygdamis. These struggles ended in the death of Herodotus' cousin (or uncle) Panyassis and in Herodotus' own exile (*Suda* entry *Herodotos*; *Panuassis*).[43] Lateiner suggests that Herodotus especially supported cases in which an otherwise defenceless individual attempted to outwit or out-manoeuvre a powerful tyrannical autocrat because of this personal experience which led to a strong aversion to despotic regimes.[44] However, our source on Herodotus' early life, the *Suda*, is a 10th-century Byzantine encyclopaedia written about 1500 years after Herodotus lived. And even though Herodotus may have disliked or even fought against Lygdamis, he does not always see Persia as 'the enemy.' In fact, in book I of his *Histories*, we find an interesting passage on the differences between the behaviour and values of the Persians with those of the Greeks (1.131-140). Here Herodotus even seems to be in favour of Persia when he says that there was no nation which so readily adopted foreign customs as the Persians (1.135).

Still, it must be kept in mind that the *Histories* stands as one of the earliest accounts of the rise of the Persian Empire, as well as the events and causes of the Greco-Persian Wars between Persia and the Greek city-states in the 5th century BCE (mainly Athens and its allies). Therefore, it is only logical that rulers mentioned in the *Histories* are depicted as (despotic) invaders.[45] Moreover, Herodotus' narrative is full of stories about characters who used various forms of trickery and deceit either to gain power as despotic leaders (negatively portrayed) or to deceive these leaders – as we see in our four secret messages.[46] We can also find various examples of political treachery[47] and of military deceit that Herodotus appears to have admired for its

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[41] Dewald 2003, 28-33; Ferrill 1978, 385-398.

[42] Gould 2012, 674.

[43] Gould 2012, 674; Waters 1972, 138.

[44] Lateiner 1990, 231; Gould 2012, 674; Waters 1972, 138.

[45] Croesus (Book 1); Cyrus (Book 1); Deioces the Mede (Book 1); Cambyses (Book 2-3); Darius (Book 3-4); Xerxes (Book 7-9). The rulers are depicted in what calls the 'despotic template' (Dewald 2003, 28-33). In this version of the template, a *tyrannis* (the rule of a tyrant = sole ruler) is a bureaucratic autocracy, and it is marked by an institutional harshness and distance between ruler and ruled (Dewald 2003, 28-33; Ferrill 1978, 385-398).

[46] Hdt. 1.47-49; 1.60; 1.63; 3.72; 3.85-88; 3.154-60; 8.24-25.

[47] Hdt. 1.205.2; 4.78.2; 5.37.1; 3.65.6; 9.85.

effectiveness or intellectual ingenuity.[48] Such acts of deception necessarily had to be hidden from what Greek sources (including Herodotus) call the 'King's Eyes and Ears', apparently a sort of ancient 'secret service', most likely in the form of a group of high-ranking officials through whom (in the view of the Greeks) the Persian king received all sorts of information on agitation throughout his kingdom.[49] That fact that the Greeks potentially saw the 'King's Eyes and Ears' as some sort of secret police or intelligence agency becomes most clear from a passage in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* where the author told us that Cyrus had men spying for him (8.2.10). We cannot know what Herodotus thought of the' King's Eyes' since he discussed it in a neutral way, by simply saying that Cyrus appointed one person as the 'King's Eye,' and various other men as this person's assistants (1.114.2; see also 1.100.2). Yet, the passage shows that Herodotus saw a connection between Near Eastern states and kings spying on their people. With this idea of Near Eastern states spying on their people in mind, later ancient sources attribute to Sparta a similar sort of secret service, known as the *krypteia*.[50] However, there are no Spartan sources on the *krypteia* – as there are no Persian sources on the 'King's Eyes and Ears'.[51] Therefore, as an organisation, the *krypteia*'s mandate and practices have been debated since antiquity (Pl. *Laws*, 1.633c; Plut. *Cleom.* 28; *Lyc.* 28).[52]

As we already saw in the story of Demaratus, Herodotus also links Sparta to Near Eastern states and secrecy. Throughout the *Histories*, the Spartans are depicted in a positive and a negative way. On the one hand, Herodotus argues that the Spartans are more like the Persians and the Egyptians than they are like the other Greeks, but primarily in their constitution (6.58-60). It must be kept in mind that Sparta was one of the few *poleis* in Greece ruled by kings.[53] The section quoted here discusses kingship, and rituals related to the death of the king. It is not a

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[48] Hdt. 1.21; 1.91.1; 1.212.2; 2.100.2; 3.72; 4.146.3; 4.160.4; 4.201-202; 6.77.-79; 8.27.3-4; 9.90.3. See 3.85-88 on Darius using lies, trickery, and deceit to become the king (negatively portrayed); and 3.150-160 on how the Persian nobleman Zopyrus played a decisive role in Darius' siege of Babylon by mutilating himself and convincing the Babylonians that he was deserting from Darius' camp and requesting shelter in the city, while he then opened the city's gates to the Persians. See also Dewald 1993, 55-70; Hollmann 2005, 316-323; Hollmann 2011. Hollmann provides us with a list of 69 instances of trickery and deceit in Herodotus.

[49] Aesch. *Pers.* 979; Hdt, 1.114.2; Xen, *Cyr*, 8.2.10-12; 8.6.17-18; Bowie 2007, 160.

[50] Aesch. *Per.* 979; *Supp.*; Arist. *MU*, 398a; Hdt. 1.114.2; 8.8.1-2; Just. *Epit 3.3; Pl. Laws*, 1.633b-c; 6.763b; Scholia on Plato's *Laws*, 1.633b-c; 6.763b, Edition De Forest Allen, Burnet, et al.; Plut, *Cleom.* 28.4; *Lyc.* 28.1-7; Pseudo-Heraclitus of Pontus (FHG, 2 = Arist. Frag 538); Xen, *Cyr*, 8.2.10-12; 8.6.17-18); Cartledge 2003-I, 70; Cartledge 2003-II; Ross 2012.

[51] Bowie 2007, 160; Briant 2002, 343-344; Sheldon 2008, 79.

[52] Africa 1968; Cartledge 2001; Ducat 2006; Figueira 2018; Gardner 2019; Jeanmaire 1913; Kennell 2010; Köchly 1835; Nafissi 2018; Richer 2018; Ross 2012; Wachsmuth 1844-1846; Wallon 1850.

[53] Interestingly, the authority of the Spartan kings was severely circumscribed compared to other *poleis*. The actual power rested with the five elected *ephoroi* (Connolly 2006, 38).

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reference to Sparta emulating the Persian spying regime or that the *krypteia* was considered the same. On the other hand, in passage 1.152, Herodotus tells us that the Spartans refused to aid the Ionians (their fellow Greeks) in the Greek struggle against the Persian occupation (1.152), while in the next passage, Cyrus (according to Herodotus) argues that one should never be afraid of a people (the Spartans) who perjured themselves and deceived each other (1.153.1). Moreover, Herodotus describes the Spartans as a people eager to conquer other nations and forestall the dangers of the growth of other competitor Greek states, especially Athens.[54] Thus, as Herodotus may imply in his account of Demaratus' letter to the Spartans (or rather as the Athenians saw it after the Peloponnesian War), one of the potential dangers of the Spartan expertise in secret communication was that it could be used against other Greeks – including Athenians.

In this way, Herodotus' work introduces a contradiction that we see playing out in several post-Herodotean sources: that is, on the one hand, the Spartans are stereotyped as uncivilised, stupid, and semi-literate, while on the other hand, they are associated with cunning secrecy and deception, including the use of secret *written* communications. Greek sources after Herodotus (mainly from the 5th and 4th centuries BCE) distance themselves from the use of such strange and secretive stratagems and devices.[55] These sources mainly come from Sparta's most famous opponent Athens. Aristophanes, for example, depicts the Spartans as barbarians in a passage in which he opposed this barbarism to Athenian civilisation (*Birds*, 1280-1285). While Thucydides argues that Sparta was built in a simplistic (read 'non-Athenian') way, and Lacedaemon (Sparta) was composed of rural villages as opposed to the cities found in Attica (Thuc. 1.10). Thucydides argues that Athens' military power just before the Peloponnesian War alarmed the Spartans, who became afraid of losing their own empire to the Athenians and made the outbreak of war inevitable (1.23; 1.79; 1.68-1.71; 1.75-1.78; 1.88). Plutarch adds that war seemed so important to all of Spartan society, that even Spartan mothers urged their sons to come back from war either *with* their shields (that is, victorious), or *on* them (that is, dead), but never *without* since the latter would mean a soldier had retreated or even deserted (Plu. *Mor.*, 241-242). With these warlike customs came the idea among non-Spartans of the Spartans being uneducated. According to Plato, the sophist Hippias of Elis complained about the Spartans not being able to count, let alone be able to understand and appreciate his lectures (*Hp. Mai.* 285c). Together with these negative stereotypical views of the 'illiterate' Spartans comes a further connection that seems to have been made between Sparta and secrecy. Thucydides discusses the secrecy of the Spartan

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[54] Hdt. 1.46; 1.67-68; 1.70; 1.77; 1.82-83; 1.88; 3.57; 5.46-65; 5.74-75; 5.91.1-2; see also Thuc. 2.8.4; 1.140.1.
[55] See also Blösel 2018.

government (5.68.2; see also 7.424). And from Plutarch and Aulus Gellius (based on Theopompus), we know that the Spartans in the 5th and 4th centuries BCE probably used a method for secret communication known as the *scytale* (Plu, *Lys*, 19.5-7; Gell., *NA*. 17.9.6-16).[56] This view of the Spartans leads some modern historians to describe Sparta as the most secretive of all Greek states.[57] Yet, it is important to reiterate that all Athenian sources on Sparta from this period are non-Spartan or even anti-Spartan in the period during and after the Peloponnesian War, and the Athenian defeat when anti-Spartan sentiment would have been high.[58] In fact, our sources show us that the Spartans were not so different from other Greeks or more secretive than others. Archaeological and epigraphic sources give us evidence of Spartan literacy.[59] And it is highly likely that there were once many more (now lost) Spartan written documents and inscriptions related to a variety of private and public events. Many Spartan documents would have been written on perishable materials such as wood, leather, or papyrus that have not survived. Millender, therefore, argues on the basis of the available evidence that we should not assume that the Spartans wrote very little, but that we should instead consider the existence of a great number of 'now lost inscriptions' from Sparta.[60] In fact, it has been argued that literary skills, however basic, were even necessary for a full Spartan citizen, because of the Lacedaemonians' frequent conduct of warfare and diplomacy.[61] The evidence discussed above therefore proves that the Spartans were certainly not illiterate, even if the true extent of literacy in Sparta as, indeed, in the ancient Greek world as a whole, is still much debated.[62] Herodotus' story of Demaratus in fact proves the fact that some of the Spartans – at least the higher classes in society – were literate. As Millender points out, the account of the Spartans' reception of the message credits the Lacedaemonian authorities with the ability to read and implies Gorgo's familiarity with wooden writing tablets.[63] Next to this, the story shows that according to

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[56] Diepenbroek 2021; 2022; Kelly 1985; West 1988; Sheldon 2008.

[57] Boring 1979, 94; Huxley 1983, 2.

[58] Significantly, this idea of the Spartans being seen as a people using 'non-Greek' practices can even be found in Kasten's 2001 cryptographic report 'One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blowfish: A History of Cryptography and its Application in Society' in which the Greeks and Spartans are mentioned separately: Kasten 2001, 1-2.

[59] *IG V.1: Lakonia and Messenia*; *Laconia Survey Inscriptions Catalogue, Laconia Survey Project;* Cartledge 1978; 2003 (I & II); Christidis, Arapopoulou & Chrite 2007; Hodkinson & Powell 2009; Hondius & Woodward 1919-1921, 88-143; Kennell 2010; Powell 2017; Tod 1933, 108-111. See also: Bengtson 1975; Boring 1979; Millender 2001, 130-131; Peek 1974; Wolicki 2018, 21-30.

[60] Millender 2001, 138.

[61] Millender 2001, 159.

[62] See e.g.: Bodel 2001, 61; Cartledge 1978; 2001; 2013-II; Harvey 1966,585-635; Hodkinson & Powell 2009; 2010; Millender 2001; Mintz 2018; Schrader 2011, 501; Too 2001, 69.

[63] Millender 2001, 142.

Herodotus the Spartans were trustworthy too. Although this is partly correct, it is not as black and white as that. In this article, I will argue that in fact four individuals tried to outmanoeuvre someone else for their own benefit. We will also see that the four stories together fit in well within Herodotus' narrative style – a point that other scholars seem to have overlooked so far. And finally, I will argue that we can make some statements about literacy in Greece in Herodotus' days when we look at his narrative as a whole. Herodotus shows that Demaratus wanted to warn his fellow Greeks about Xerxes' planned invasion of their homeland, while in the story of Histiaeus and Aristagoras, we see a Greek communicating with another Greek to do the opposite: to instigate a rebellion in secret.

Herodotus' narrative style

As Augustyn argues, the *Histories* can be seen as a straightforward work of geographical, sociological, and historical descriptions of a varied empire.[64] The structure of the work, however, is more complex than that, and so is the author's method of narration. For example, Herodotus had no need to explain Greek geography, customs, or political systems to his Greek readers, since this information was known to them. Yet, he wanted to describe the political situation at the relevant times of the Greek cities later involved in the war. This he achieved by means of digressions skilfully worked into his main narrative.[65] By discussing political and social developments in Greece and Persia, Herodotus explained the position of the Greek city-states before moving on to the Persian invasion. Next to this, Herodotus wrote with the purpose of explaining; that is, he discusses the reasons for or the causes of an event.[66] So, what we see in the four stories on secret communication are some Greek and Persian individuals who played the right role in the narrative at the right time. For example, the events in which Cyrus took control of the Persian empire, and of the Ionian revolt led to the point in the story in which Demaratus warned the Greeks at the right time about Xerxes' planned invasion. As Gould argues, Herodotus' means of explanation do not necessarily posit a simple cause; rather, his explanations cover a host of potential causes.[67] Herodotus attributes these causes to both divine and human

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[64] Augustyn 2022.

[65] Augustyn 2022.

[66] Herodotus' explanation that an event 'was going to happen' maps well on to Aristotelean and Homeric means of expression. This idea reveals a tragic discovery associated with fifth-century drama. This tragic discovery can be seen in Homer's Iliad as well (Gould 1989, 75-76).

[67] Gould 1989, 65. Yet, as Gould argues, t is notable, however, that the obligations of gratitude and revenge are the fundamental human motives for Herodotus, just as they are the primary stimulus to the generation of narrative itself (1989, 65).

agents.[68] Interestingly, we do not see this in the four stories on secret communication. Here there is no godly intervention. Instead, we see clever individuals could achieve whatever they wanted with good planning and with a bit of luck (Timoxenus' betrayal).[69] Therefore, it is incorrect to state that Herodotus believed that everything was related to fate and that humans had no choice in what happened in their lives, as De Ste. Croix and Lang argue.[70]

Even though we cannot see godly intervention in the four stories, we can find elements from mythology. As Romm argues, Herodotus worked under a common ancient Greek cultural assumption that the way in which events are remembered and retold in myth and legend produces a valid kind of understanding, even when this retelling is not entirely factual.[71] For Herodotus, then, it would have taken both myth and history to produce a truthful understanding. We cannot say with certainty how much – if any – of the stories on secret messaging are true, but to Herodotus, this was irrelevant: the stories simply played an explanatory role in his narrative that was partly based on facts and partly on myth. In fact, Herodotus used a number of oral and written sources that he used to fit into his work in the most suitable way.[72] For example, Athenian tragic poets provided him with a world-view of a balance between conflicting forces, upset by the hybris of kings, and they provided his narrative with a model of episodic structure.[73] Here again, we see our four secret messages reappear. In the four stories, the hybris of kings and leaders led them to feel that they were invincible. Yet, the stories show us otherwise. Harpagus and Cyrus managed to overthrow Astyages; Histiaeus and Aristagoras managed to fool King Darius and start an uprising; Demaratus fooled Xerxes by sending word about his upcoming invasion of Greece; and finally, Timoxenus and Artabazus

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[68] Gould 1989, 67-70.

[69] Gould 1989, 77–78.

[70] De Ste. Croix 1977, 142; Lang 1967; 1984.

[71] Romm 1998, 6.

[72] Even though Herodotus mocked Hecataeus in his work, it is possible that Herodotus borrowed material from him, as stated by Porphyry of Tyre in a quote recorded by Eueebius (*PEl*, 10.3; Immerwahr 1985, 430; 440). Yet, since we are dealing with an indirect source here (Eusebius referring to Porphyry who is turn referring to Herodotus) we must be cautious with these statements. There is no proof that Herodotus derived the ambitious scope of his own work, with its grand theme of Greece and Persia from any predecessor, opposite to speculations about this by Burn and Murray (Burn 1972, 22–23; Murray 1986, 188).

[73] Herodotus' familiarity with Athenian tragedy is demonstrated passages echoing Aeschylus The Persians, including the epigrammatic observation that the defeat of the Persian navy at Salamis caused the defeat of the land army (The Persians 728 = Histories 8.68). In Sophocles' plays in turn there appear to be echoes of the Histories, especially a passage in Antigone that resembles Herodotus' account of the death of Intaphernes as Immerwahr points out (Antigone, 904-902 = Histories. 3.119; Immerwahr 1985, 427; 432). However, this point has been rejected by Jebb who argues that this echoing of Sophocles in Herodotus is a contentious issue (Jebb 1976; 181–182, note 904–920).

perhaps became overconfident and did not pay attention when shooting their arrows. Artabazus hit a man, and thereby, their betrayal was discovered. Homer was another inspirational source for Herodotus.[74] Like Homer drew extensively on a tradition of oral poetry, so Herodotus appears to have drawn on an Ionian tradition of storytelling, collecting and interpreting the oral histories he chanced upon in his travels. These oral histories often contained substantial facts relating to geography, anthropology, and history, all compiled by Herodotus in a style and format that was used to show his audience the causes of the war between the Greeks and the Persians.[75] Yet, they also contained folk-tale motifs and demonstrated a moral. One moral that we find throughout the work seems to be that individuals are responsible for their own actions, and that they can achieve whatever they want with persistence, practice, and a bit of luck, but also caution. This is something that we clearly see in the four secret messages. In every example, a few individuals try to outmanoeuvre others who are higher in rank. And with caution – without too much hybris, as we see in the story of Timoxenus and Artabazus – they can be victorious (Harpagus and Cyrus; Histiaeus and Aristagoras; Demaratus to the Spartans).

Conclusion

Literary skills and the related practice of messaging were more widespread in the Near East than in Greece in Herodotus' days (5th century BCE). Until the first reading culture appears in Athens in the 4th century BCE – and perhaps even after that – letters, stories, and letter writing in Greece were related to the Near East and believed to be fraught with dangers. Herodotus' *Histories* – as the first large Greek work in prose – follows this pattern. Throughout the work, we can find only eleven instances of written communication, and instances of secret communication were even rarer: four of these eleven instances are clear examples of steganographic messaging sent among the Persians and Greeks that are related to trickery and deceit (1.123; 5.28; 7.239; 8.128). Scholars who have discussed these passages in the past argued that the passages had one common theme: a clever individual tried to outmanoeuvre a tyrannical Near Eastern despot. However, we have seen that it is not as black and white as it may seem in the first place. In fact, in the four examples, we see individuals who tried to outmanoeuvre someone else for their own benefit. Harpagus wanted to punish King Astyages for killing Harpagus' son. Histiaeus wanted to punish Darius for 'imprisoning' him at Darius' court. Demaratus (being exiled in Persia) warned the Spartans about Xerxes' invasion of Greece. In this way, Demaratus perhaps tried to get back into the Spartans' good grace or he was unhappy in

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[74] Rawlinson 1859, 6.
[75] Murray 1986, 190–191

Persia and, therefore, wanted to punish Xerxes. Timoxenus' reasons for betraying his fellow Greeks are unclear. Yet, again it is very likely that communicating with Artabazus was to his personal advantage.

We must be cautious when making statements about the level and spreading of literacy in the ancient world. Yet, in this article, it has been shown that we can make some careful considerations concerning the spreading and shifting of literacy in the ancient world, at least within Herodotus' narrative. The first secret message was sent within Persian territory and between two Persians: Harpagus and Cyrus. The second message was sent in Asia Minor between two Greeks working in a Near Eastern context (Histiaeus to Aristagoras). The third message was sent from Persia to Greece, and from a Greek to his fellow Greeks (Demaratus being exiled in Persia sending a letter to Sparta). And finally, the fourth message was sent within Greek territory (set at the Siege of Potidaea) and was sent between a Greek and a Persian (Timoxenus and Artabazus).

Demaratus' message to his fellow Spartans plays a crucial role in this idea of the spreading of literacy within Herodotus' narrative. In the example, namely, we literally see a letter being sent westwards, from Persia to Greece, in the same way that literacy started in the ancient Near East and slowly moved to Greece. We cannot know if much – if any – of the story of Demaratus is true, but we can say that with the letter Herodotus literally (physically) introduced (secret) messaging in the Greek world. This would have fitted in well with Herodotus' love of explanatory stories, and the idea of cause and effect. Demaratus appeared in the story at the exact right time, as did all the other characters. The events in which Cyrus took control of the Persian empire, and of the Ionian revolt led to the point in the story in which Demaratus warned the Greeks at the right time about Xerxes' planned invasion of Greece, and finally led to a Greek communicating secretly with a Persian within Greek territory at the Siege of Potidaea (Timoxenus and Artabazus).

As we have seen, with Demaratus' example, Herodotus indirectly links Sparta to Persia and to (secret) messaging. In post-Herodotean sources from the 5th and 4th centuries BCE (the period during and soon after the Peloponnesian War and the Spartan victory over Athens), this view led to the Spartans being depicted as uncivilised, foolish, and illiterate. However, Demaratus' letter to the Spartans in fact shows the Spartans' literacy skills. It is a salient connection between Spartans and their characteristic secrecy, but also a connection between the Spartans and letter writing. In other words: it is an acknowledgement of their literacy. In fact, it has been argued that literary skills, however basic, were even necessary for a full Spartan citizen, because of the

Lacedaemonians' frequent conduct of warfare and diplomacy. Yet, it goes too far to argue that the Spartans were in fact more literate than the other Greeks. As our four stories show, the figures communicating with each other all came from higher classes of society: the class of kings, nobles, and generals.

Yet, literacy slowly spread throughout Greece from the 5th/4th century BCE onward and reading and writing became more common in Greece after Herodotus' days. As stated before, we must be very cautious when making statements about literacy in ancient Greece, and we cannot know with certainty how much – if any – of the stories on the secret messages were true. However, myth and history both formed crucial parts of the *Histories* that reinforced each other. So, maybe we can say that in a way Herodotus anticipates the spreading of literacy by embedding the story of Demaratus in his work: a letter sent to Greece to fight the Persian enemies, which led to the start of a new era in which literary culture flourished: the Classical Period – at least within the greater context of his narrative.

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