Orestes as a representative of power play, (re-)establishment of political authority and expansionism[43]

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Power play and the Orestes myth

Power play was a defining aspect of ancient Greek social and political life. The (re-)formation of political order, the construction of social identity or status, and the (re-)establishment of authority of either individuals or social groups were all subject to power play. It became a diachronic element of ancient Greek political practice and represented a constant while not always consensual exchange of power among agents of authority. As expressed through literary texts, power play could and did hold ramifications for Greek politics and identity across time, thus gradually contributing to a system of circulation and promotion of various political ideas.

In archaic and classical Greek society, mythical stories were powerful enough to dominate the understanding and formation of social and political notions. Literature as well as historiography frequently produced mythical versions, while the nature of their performance or reading respectively, enabled their circulation among diverse audiences. Such versions were both literary presentations of commonly known stories and interpretations of social and political circumstances. Thus, they often reflected various forms of power play enabling a retrospective understanding of socio-political situation. While a form of power play traced within literature or historiography may recall or resemble a contemporary case of political tension, it can also be argued that current political circumstances influenced the ways in which mythical power plays were shaped.

A telling example of such an interaction lies in the various versions of the Orestes myth. The multiple power plays among the figures of the Orestes myth as found in both literature and historiography have often been presented either as a parallel to the power play among different social groups or communities or as a mythical justification of the political authority of various figures or city-states. As a result, depending on the literary genre and the period in which the myth is inscribed, power plays within the myth have been projected in either contemporary or diachronic political dynamics.

In general, I would suggest that power plays in the Orestes myth may be interpreted in two directions: one that refers to poetic versions of the myth with political and social connotations,

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and one that is connected to historiographical sources, such as Herodotus' *Histories*, that shed light to Orestes' role in the construction of power dynamics among various Greek city-states. Thus, in the presentation of the myth in the *Odyssey*, from a social perspective, the tension between Orestes and Aegisthus forms a case of power play. Although they both belong in a patriarchal system of governing, they represent different types of it: Orestes is a symbol of hereditary kingship as defined by a father-king and a son-heir sequence, while Aegisthus promotes a distorted version of this monarchic regime where the political authority has been usurped by a member outside the royal hereditary sequence that managed to gain power in a period of political upheaval.

From an intra-familial aspect, in lyric and tragic versions of the myth, the power play between Orestes and Clytemestra[44] underlines the conflict between male and female power and the prevalence of patriarchy. In Stesichorus' presentation of Clytemestra's dream, the matricide is an action that Orestes undertakes as the only rightful king of Sparta in order to prevent the rule of his mother (Stesichorus, *Oresteia* fr. 180; Davies – Finglass, 2014, pp.506-507; Neschke, 1986, p.296). At the same time, in Pindar's *Pythian* 11, the family bonds within the Atreid house are generally distorted and Orestes' act of vengeance fails to break the vicious cycle of bloodshed within his family, even though it restores the political stability provided by the patriarchal system (Pindar, *Pythian* 11.17-37; Finglass, 2007, p.3; Kurke, 2013, p.132).

From a political perspective, similar elements of the myth have been discussed as examples of social conflict related to the expansion of either Athens' or Sparta's political leadership over other Greek regions, in both literary and historiographical texts which involve themselves in contemporary political issues of the period. In Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, Orestes' presence in the Athenian court serves as the mythical justification of the foundation of Areopagus and the political alliance between Athens and Argos (Aeschylus, *Eumenides* 681-710, 755-777; Flaig, 2013, pp.71-72; Leão, 2010, p.50). At the same time, in Herodotus' *Histories*, the transfer of Orestes' bones is employed to explain the political rivalry between Sparta and Tegea (Herodotus, *Histories* 1.65-69; Barker, 2006, pp.14-15).

This paper proposes the co-examination of two non-tragic examples of power play revolving around the figure of Orestes that have hitherto been kept separate: the Orestes myth in the *Odyssey* and the recovery of Orestes' bones described in Herodotus. Although previous scholarship has offered general discussions on the myth, the two versions have been examined separately as they occur in different literary genres and historical periods. Instead of such an approach, I shall provide a specific reading of the political and literary function of the aforementioned mythical versions based on the role of Orestes and the concept of power play. As will be shown, diachronically and along the genres, Orestes is related to the successful resolution of political

[44] For the etymology of the Greek name *Κλυταιμήστρα/Κλυταιμήστρη* (*Clytaemestra/Clytaemestre*), see Sommerstein (2008) x; also, cf. Hesiod, *Catalogue of Women* 19.9-27.

disruption and the re-establishment of already existing forms of authority, while the political ideas he represents serve as a mythical justification of political expansionism. More specifically, in the *Odyssey*, I shall discuss the role of the social power play between Aegisthus and Orestes in the progress of the plot. As I shall show, the rivalry between them serves as a mythical parallel to the conflict between Odysseus and the suitors and offers a gradual justification of their killing through the transformation of Orestes into a symbol of political stability. I shall then examine a historical and socio-political approach to the figure of Orestes in Herodotus' *Histories*, namely the relocation of his bones from Sparta to Tegea. As I shall argue, in Herodotus' narration, Orestes remains a symbol of mythical justification for the historical political tension between Sparta and Tegea and the subsequent re-establishment and expansion of Sparta's political authority.

Mythical power plays: Orestes vs Aegisthus and Odysseus vs the suitors

The Oresteia-story is frequently narrated in the *Odyssey* by gods and men either extensively or briefly.[45] Scholars have described it as a mythical exemplum and a pedagogical guide for Telemachus' coming of age procedure.[46] Although such an interpretation of the story is fundamental, it is still the case that Telemachus never acts according to Orestes' paradigm. On the other hand, Odysseus' homecoming has two levels of accomplishment, consisting of his return to Ithaca and the extinction of his political enemies, who represent the rising power of the aristocracy, and who threaten his marriage and the welfare of his *oikos* (Thornton, 1970, p.2). Such an act resembles the murder of Aegisthus and validates the connection between Orestes and Odysseus. Although the killing of the suitors was a massive murder that constituted a dubious side of Odysseus' return (Gottesman, 2014, p.55), scholarship has shown that various elements of the plot throughout the poem gradually foreshadow and justify it as a necessary act that Odysseus undertakes in order to restore his political power and social status.[47]

However, there is still room for further analysis on the narrative elements employed for such a connection between the wider plot of the poem and Odysseus' act of revenge. Therefore, this discussion seeks to show how the power play between Orestes and Aegisthus followed by the subsequent act of vengeance enables the accomplishment of Odysseus' return. The *Odyssey* is an epic poem about Odysseus' successful homecoming (Katz, 1991, p.29) to the accomplishment of which major aspects of the plot contribute: among others, for example, Athena's twofold plan about Odysseus' return (*Odyssey* 1.80-95);[48] Telemachus' journey as a quest for Odysseus' whereabouts and a preparatory action for his homecoming (*Odyssey* 1.88-95; 1.267-285);

[45] The story is narrated six times in the poem by multiple internal narrators with various points of focalisation.
[46] D' Arms – Hulley, 1946; Millar – Carmichael, 1954; Clarke, 1963; Finley, 1965; Rose, 1967; Austin, 1969; Belmont, 1969; Geddes, 1984; Olson, 1990; Olson, 1995; Petropoulos, 2011.
[47] Allen, 1939, p.112; Heubeck – West et al., 1988, p.53; Olson, 1990, p.59; Petropoulos, 2011, p.84; Gottesman, 2014, p.55.
[48] For a theory that the plan belongs to Zeus, see Marks, 2008, p.18.

Teiresias' insight into the reason why Odysseus' return is delayed and how it can be accomplished (*Odyssey* 11.90-137); Penelope's weaving (*Odyssey* 2.85-128; 19.137–158; 24.138-161); Zeus' settlement of the end of the poem and Athena's subsequent intervention to prevent the suitors' kinsmen from reacting (*Odyssey* 24.472-544). Supported by a system of formulas some of the aforementioned elements unfold throughout the narration (e.g. Athena's plot), while some others are repeated (e.g. Penelope's weaving), so that all different aspects of the plot come together (Marks, 2008, pp. 65, 76-77).

Thus, although a concrete authorial plan cannot be traced in the *Odyssey*, the poem's formulaic nature contributes to a coherent textual connection among the various though relating points of the plot (Webber, 1989, pp.1-2). Given that repeating utterances move beyond a mere reappearance of the same phrases *metri* or *memoriae gratia* and become part of the oral performance of the epic (Nagy, 2004, p.139-141), narrative elements helpfully marked by similar formulas can be easily recalled by the audience. Hence, the more a narrative element is mentioned, the more powerful it becomes. From this perspective, the repetition of Orestes' act, partially consisting of recurrent formulaic structures, is not simply an artefact of mythical tradition in oral poetry but also becomes one of the narrative elements contributing to the successful homecoming.

As I shall argue, the repetition of the Oresteia-story facilitates Odysseus' homecoming in multiple ways. First, Orestes becomes a symbol of justice in which the heroic κλέος (*kleos*) is related to and restored by an act of vengeance. His exemplum contributes to Telemachus' transformation into a son suitable for Odysseus and capable of accompanying him in the killing of the suitors. Subsequently, the repeating references to the power play between Orestes and Aegisthus gradually build a solid ground for the killing of the suitors to take place and enable the audience to reach the end of the poem already prepared for what *should* happen. Hence, even before it happens, the killing has been gradually justified as an inevitable and necessary act of restoration of Odysseus' political authority. In addition, as I shall show, Orestes' model of retributive justice enables Odysseus to overcome the killing of the suitors and preserve the hereditary kingship.

Zeus is the first who refers to Orestes in the *Odyssey*, in the first assembly of the gods.

> ὡς καὶ νῦν Αἴγισθος ὑπὲρ μόρον Ἀτρεΐδαο
> γῆμ᾽ ἄλοχον μνηστήν, τὸν δ᾽ ἔκτανε νοστήσαντα,
> εἰδὼς αἰπὺν ὄλεθρον, ἐπεὶ πρό οἱ εἴπομεν ἡμεῖς,
> Ἑρμείαν πέμψαντες, ἐύσκοπον ἀργεϊφόντην,
> μήτ᾽ αὐτὸν κτείνειν μήτε μνάασθαι ἄκοιτιν.
> ἐκ γὰρ Ὀρέσταο <u>τίσις</u> ἔσσεται Ἀτρεΐδαο,
> ὁππότ᾽ ἂν ἡβήσῃ τε καὶ ἧς ἱμείρεται αἴης.
>
> (*Odyssey* 1.35-41)

as now lately, beyond what was given, Aigisthos married
the wife of Atreus' son, and murdered him on his homecoming,
though he knew it was sheer destruction, for we ourselves had told him,
sending Hermes, the mighty watcher, Argeïphontes,
not to kill the man, nor court his lady for marriage;
for vengeance would come on him from Orestes, son of Atreides,
whenever he came of age and longed for his own country.

(Translation by Lattimore, 1967, p.28)

In his first presentation in the poem, Orestes is described as Agamemnon's son who killed Aegisthus when he returned to his homeland in order to avenge his father's murder. For Orestes, τίσις (*tisis*) is the revenge on his father's murderer (Jones, 1941, pp.197-201), which enables him to restore Agamemnon's honour and the normal hereditary sequence to the throne. This act of vengeance guarantees his *kleos*, namely the glory and fame that come as a result of the successful murder of his political rival.[49] By the time Orestes killed Aegisthus, he became the winner of this power play and maintained his social status as the only capable heir to Agamemnon's throne. Furthermore, I would suggest that his *tisis* introduces a set of political ideas that gradually define the type of restoration of social order needed in Ithaca as well as the political system promoted in the *Odyssey*. Orestes represents the already existing type of regime and contributes to the reestablishment of its political authority in periods of political ambiguity. He symbolises the superiority of the hereditary kingship over any other regime. Even more, his act promotes the retributive punishment of the political enemies as the only way to the restoration of social power.

In addition, Orestes' revenge was not unexpected. The gods had warned Aegisthus (*Odyssey* 1.34-39) and approved his death as a just punishment (Marks, 2008, pp.17-19). Furthermore, Athena, whose concern is to ensure Odysseus' safe homecoming, approves Orestes' act of vengeance and claims that every usurper should share the same fate as Aegisthus (*Odyssey* 1.44-50). Thus, an implicit comparison between the suitors and Aegisthus, and subsequently between Odysseus and Orestes, is gradually introduced.[50] The analogy becomes even clearer in *Odyssey* 1.252-270, where Mentor imagines Odysseus' safe homecoming and the performance of the killing of the suitors as a necessary action that would restore the hereditary kingship and bring Odysseus' family together (Austin, 1969, pp.62-63).

As a result, I would argue that this kind of *tisis* is included in a larger model of justice that defines the *Odyssey*, and especially its main act of punishment, namely the killing of the suitors. The

[49] For initiation and adulthood rites, see van Gennep, 1960, p.11; Turner, 1969, p.94; Dowden, 1999, p.224; Graf, 2003, p.3ff; Martin, 2014, p.6.
[50] See, Olson, 1990, p.61; Olson, 1995, p.27; de Jong, 2001, pp.12-14; Marks, 2008, pp.20-22.

model is introduced in the beginning of the poem through the divine justification of Orestes' revenge and refers to a *lex talionis*, a retaliatory form of retribution law based on bloodshed and revenge upon an enemy, since violence is countered with violence.[51] Subsequently, from a literary point of view, the presentation of Orestes as a symbol of justice, the connection between his *kleos* and his act of vengeance and the subsequent gradual justification of the killing of the suitors even before its commitment, reveal that the hero's act is one of the narrative elements that enable Odysseus' successful homecoming.

Moreover, the suitors represent the political danger in Ithaca caused by the rising power of the aristocrats during the king's absence (Mireaux, 1948-1949, pp.152-153). Therefore, *tisis*, namely their punishment, would acquire a political dimension which in turn would contribute to the resolution of the political disorder in Ithaca. When Telemachus visits Pylos in the third book, Nestor cannot offer any reliable information about Odysseus' whereabouts, but he provides him with a useful instruction: for the social order and the hereditary kingship to be restored in Ithaca the suitors must die, regardless of whether Odysseus returns or not. In such a narrative, the Oresteia-story is exploited as the closest example of a similar case, in which a royal house managed to preserve its power through an act of vengeance, so that Telemachus is convinced of the necessity to imitate Orestes and perform the killing of the suitors (*Odyssey* 3.195-200, 3.313-316; Alden, 1987, p.133).

> ἀλλ᾽ ἦ τοι κεῖνος μὲν ἐπισμυγερῶς ἀπέτισεν·
> ὡς ἀγαθὸν καὶ παῖδα καταφθιμένοιο λιπέσθαι
> ἀνδρός, ἐπεὶ καὶ κεῖνος ἐτίσατο πατροφονῆα,
> Αἴγισθον δολόμητιν, ὅ οἱ πατέρα κλυτὸν ἔκτα.
> καὶ σὺ φίλος, μάλα γάρ σ᾽ ὁρόω καλόν τε μέγαν τε,
> ἄλκιμος ἔσσ᾽, ἵνα τίς σε καὶ ὀψιγόνων ἐὺ εἴπῃ.
>
> (*Odyssey* 3.195-200)

> but Aigisthos too paid for it, in a dismal fashion;
> so it is good, when a man has perished, to have a son left
> after him, since this one took vengeance on his father's killer,
> the treacherous Aigisthos, who cut down his glorious father.
> so you too, dear friend, for I see you are tall and splendid,
> be brave too, so that men unborn may speak well of you.
>
> (Translation by Lattimore, 1967, p.56)

[51] Happily, the suggested definition of justice here is corroborated by a very recent work published on the theme of revenge in the *Odyssey* (Loney, 2019), although the rest of my argumentation remains distinct.

In fact, Aegisthus' rise to power recalls the suitors' usurping behaviour in Odysseus' palace as presented in the first book (*Odyssey* 1.91-178). Nestor observes an escalation in the way in which he gained his political power (*Odyssey* 3.263-273, 3.304-310). Aegisthus, in dealing with various obstacles – from the resisting Clytemestra, whom he eventually convinced to move to his palace; to the exile of the singer whom Agamemnon set as Clytemestra's guard; and to the murder of the king himself – gradually deconstructed Agamemnon's political authority and established his own based on adultery and bloodshed (Thornton, 1970, p.11; Olson, 1995, p.34). Furthermore, his political rule was a usurped and imposed seven-year reign which made people suffer and came to an end when Orestes returned to Mycenae and punished him.

> ἑπτάετες δ᾽ ἤνασσε πολυχρύσοιο Μυκήνης,
> κτείνας Ἀτρεΐδην, δέδμητο δὲ λαὸς ὑπ᾽ αὐτῷ.
> τῷ δέ οἱ ὀγδοάτῳ κακὸν ἤλυθε δῖος Ὀρέστης
> ἂψ ἀπ᾽ Ἀθηνάων, κατὰ δ᾽ ἔκτανε πατροφονῆα,
> Αἴγισθον δολόμητιν, ὅ οἱ πατέρα κλυτὸν ἔκτα.
>
> (*Odyssey*, 3.304-310)

> seven years he lived as lord over golden Mykene,
> after he killed Atreides, with the people subject beneath him,
> but in the eighth the evil came on him, great Orestes
> come home from Athens, and he killed his father's murderer,
> the treacherous Aigisthos, who had killed his glorious father.
>
> (Translation by Lattimore, 1967, p.59)

Regardless of whether Telemachus did or did not perform a similar act of vengeance after all, I would suggest that the political significance of the outcome of the power play between Orestes and Aegisthus contributed to the achievement of two greater purposes. Firstly, Telemachus realised the connection between the restoration of political power and the murder of his rivals and completed his coming of age procedure based on social ideas provided by Orestes' example, so that he can facilitate his father's return. Secondly, following the political practice introduced by Orestes' act of vengeance, Odysseus accomplished both levels of his homecoming, he reestablished his status both as the leader of his *oikos* and the king of Ithaca, and he became the only winner in the power play between hereditary kingship and rising aristocracy. Furthermore, a diachronic dimension is acquired: Odysseus managed to re-establish his reign not temporarily but forever (*Odyssey*, 24.482-483; Marks, 2008, 75), while Telemachus contributed to the killing as Odysseus' only capable heir indicating that the model of justice provided by Orestes will be maintained in future forms of the regime. This perpetual perspective of hereditary kingship shows that Orestes does not only enable the justification of the killing of the suitors; even more, he becomes a mythical symbol of the political superiority of the hereditary kingship diachronically.

In fact, the presence of the suitors in Odysseus' palace caused a social disorder which reflected Aegisthus' illegitimate rule imposed on Mycenae during Agamemnon's absence, as they are both outsiders attempting to enter the royal house and usurp its political authority. Odysseus' effective reaction to that political attack was analogous to Orestes' act of vengeance. Gradually though implicitly the killing of the suitors has already been justified when it takes place: the divine approval of Orestes' act of vengeance, already expressed, and the acceptance of Odysseus as Ithaca's only rightful king, seals the idea that the murder of the suitors is inevitable and necessary for the restoration of Ithaca's political order (Murrin, 2007, p.508).

The mythical figure of Orestes and the historical power play between Sparta and Tegea

In the 6th and 5th century BCE, the relationship between Sparta and other Peloponnesian city-states was complicated (Dougherty, 1993, p.31). The social and political rise of Athens followed by a network of alliances with other Greek city-states caused Sparta's concern about its political role in Greece after the Persian Wars. In such a power play among various Greek city-states that changed the political dynamics, a series of mythical connections between Sparta's historical past and heroic figures was introduced to justify the city's role as the most powerful Greek political and military force even after the Persian Wars (Cawkwell, 1993, pp.370-376; Forsdyke, 2007, p.226). To that purpose, a bond between the Atreid house and Sparta's heroic past was introduced. Among other versions of the Orestes myth that promoted such a connection (Stesichorus' *Oresteia*; Pindar's *Pythian* 11), around 430s BCE, in the *Histories*, Herodotus presents a story according to which the relocation of Orestes' bones from Tegea to Sparta was a mythical prerequisite for the conquest of Tegea (Parker, 2011, pp.117-118). In fact, it was a common political practice for various city-states to link their mythical pasts with multiple heroes after their death through the recovery of their bones in order to claim their political authority over other regions or broaden the impact of their foreign policy (e.g. Theseus' bones, see Podlecki, 1971; Tisamenus' bones, see Leahy, 1955).

Nevertheless, Herodotus' historiographical presentation shares some common elements with the epic approach. Mythical narratives have a substantial role in the presentation of the main theme of the *Histories*, namely the attestation of the causes of the Persian Wars (*Histories* 1.1). Immediately after the proem, Herodotus introduces an account of various mythical abductions of Greek, Persian or Trojan women that led to the Trojan War and the hatred between Persians and Greeks. Although as an authorial figure he differs significantly from a poetic one, he still regards myth as a source of understanding of human motivation. Such a technique offers a logical explanation and aetiology to myths that were considered the causes of the Trojan War. In fact, Herodotus attempts to reasonably justify how the various mythological incidents can be applied to actual historical facts. Based on reason, he applies what is supposed to be a historical explanation to the mythic and legendary past in order to rationalise it (Dewald, 2012, pp.61-65, 75-77; Saïd, 2012, pp.90-93). As I shall show, the recovery of Orestes' bones falls into a similar category of mythical justification. Furthermore, as I shall argue, despite the fundamental differences between epic poetry and historiography, in the *Histories*, just like in the *Odyssey*,

Orestes remains a symbol of restoration of an already existing political system, and contributes to the expansion of its authority and the justification of the relevant means to such a purpose.

The *Histories* have mostly been discussed within a historical context. Likewise, the transfer of Orestes' bones has been examined as another case that offers an insight in its contemporary historical circumstances. Recent scholarship on this matter has followed two main directions. According to the first one, a change in Sparta's foreign policy is marked by the recovery of Orestes' bones: Sparta created an alliance with Tegea and set the foundations for the Peloponnesian League.[52] According to the second one, the relocation of Orestes' bones does not indicate any change in Spartan policy. On the contrary, it offers a continuation of the already existing interstate relations and Spartan practices: Tegea was seized by Spartans, no alliance was agreed, and Sparta continued its effort to gain control over the Peloponnese.[53]

Moreover, I would suggest that a fundamental duality lies in the understanding of the *Histories*. Although the story refers to political practices of the past, it also offers an insight into the actual historical time of composition that lies in the mid-5th century BCE, around 430-420 BCE.[54] Therefore, as I shall show, the role of Orestes in the construction of Spartan foreign policy bears a double political orientation depending on the historical period in which this narrative can be inscribed. Furthermore, in 430s BCE, multiple literary versions of the Orestes myth had already been circulated. Although the relocation of Orestes' bones is not included in them, it remains another aspect of an already existing variety of stories revolving around the same figure. Thus, I shall provide a literary reading in order to show that the role of the hero in the *Histories* resembles his function in the *Odyssey*, as he remains a mythical symbol of political restoration and stability. In addition, given that Spartans claimed their inherited right to rule over the entire Peloponnese and conquered Tegea (Phillips, 2003, p.310), I shall argue that Orestes' presentation as a Spartan hero serves as an aetiology for Sparta's political history and expansionism that is retrospectively justified in both previous periods of its history and the 5th century BCE.

In an analysis of Sparta's political history, Herodotus underlines Spartans' failure to conquer Tegea during Leon's and Hegesicles' kingship (c. 575-560 BCE) despite their previous victories and the already established legal innovations of Lycurgus (Herodotus, *Histories* 1.65; Nafissi, 2018, pp.93-99).[55] Furthermore, when they consulted the Delphic Oracle on how to expand their power in Arcadia, they were given an oracle which they, nevertheless, misinterpreted. Thus, they were defeated and enslaved by Tegeans (Herodotus, *Histories* 1.66.1-2; Kurke, 2009, pp.417-

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[52] Dickins, 1912, pp.20-26; Leahy, 1955, pp.30-31; Parke – Wormell, 1956, pp.95-100; Leahy, 1958; Huxley, 1962, pp.60-70; Jones, 1967, pp.43-46; Forrest, 1968, pp.74-83; Jeffery, 1976, pp.120-125; Sealey, 1976, pp.80-85; Cartledge, 1979, pp.135-140; Huxley, 1979; Hammond, 1982, pp.355-359; Hall, 2007, pp.335-336.

[53] Cawkwell, 1993; Boedeker, 1998; Phillips, 2003; Welwei, 2004.

[54] For the composition date, see Sansone, 1985, pp.1-9.

[55] For Lycurgus' laws see Forrest, 1968, pp.40-60; Welwei, 2004, p.223; Cartledge, 2009, pp.42-44; Nafissi, 2018.

423).[56] According to the same story, several years later, at some point between 560-546 BCE, during the reign of Anaxandridas and Ariston, Spartans conquered Tegea based on an oracle given by the Delphi, according to which,

> *ἔστι τις Ἀρκαδίης Τεγέη λευρῷ ἐνὶ χώρῳ,*
> *ἔνθ᾽ἄνεμοι πνείουσι δύω κρατερῆς ὑπ᾽ ἀνάγκης,*
> *καὶ τύπος ἀντίτυπος, καὶ πῆμ᾽ ἐπὶ πήματι κεῖται*
> *ἔνθ᾽ Ἀγαμεμνονίδην κατέχειν φυσίζοος αἶα·*
> *τὸν σὺ κομισσάμενος Τεγέης ἐπιτάρροθος ἔσσῃ.*
>
> (*Histories* 1.67.4)

> There is a certain Tegea, in the level land of Arcadia,
> where two winds blow by mighty necessity,
> and there is stroke and counterstroke, and grief is laid upon grief.
> There the grain-giving earth holds Agamemnon's son:
> When you have conveyed him safely home, you will be lord of Tegea.
>
> (Translation by Kurke, 2009, p.436)

Spartans had to trace Orestes' bones in Tegea and relocate them to Sparta where they belonged. After a thorough search, Lychas, one of the noble men,[57] while in Tegea, found the bones in the backyard of a blacksmith, and removed them to Sparta, so that in the following battles, Tegea was finally defeated (*Histories* 1.68.6). However, this story, which Herodotus presents as a sequence of facts that led to the restoration of Orestes' bones, is most probably fictional (Asheri et al., 2007, p.130). Even more, the historical momentum in which Tegea's conquest took place, if it really did ever happen, does not imply that the cult of Orestes was established in the same period. On the contrary, given that there is no safe date or even evidence for the historicity of this battle, the story was either a pre-existing one applied as a mythical justification to Sparta's expansionism, or an ex post facto explanation of the competition with Tegea. As it is quite uncertain when, how or if this story was formed, the following focusses on the literary aspects of it based on the fact that it is presented as having taken place at some point in Sparta's past, and it is related to the city's current political situation in the time of composition of Herodotus' *Histories*.

In any case, as I have shown, in the *Histories*, the interpretation of the Orestes myth has maintained some fundamental political aspects already acquired in the *Odyssey*. In a period of

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[56] For Spartan expansionism see Barker, 2006, pp.14-15; Doak, 2013, pp.206-207.
[57] For Lychas' social status, see Braun, 1994, pp.42-45; Boedeker, 1998, pp.172-173.

ambiguity and conflict, the hero contributed to the re-establishment of Sparta's superiority over its political rivals, while it served as a model of political stability since Herodotus presents a story including the recovery of the hero's bones as a means that affirmed the Spartan leadership.

Subsequently, Orestes preserves the political superiority of kingship over other regimes as the relocation of his bones restores the prevalence of Sparta's political system over other cities. The hero is related through blood to the Spartan king Menelaus. Moreover, in the *Odyssey*, Agamemnon was the king of Mycenae and the general who led all Achaeans to the victorious Trojan War. Thus, Orestes, as both a Spartan and an Achaean descendant, is connected to the wider region of the Peloponnese. As a result, I would suggest that this duality in his political profile explains why Orestes is connected to the expansion of Spartan foreign policy. He is not a Spartan in the strictest definition of the word and at the same time, he is related to Menelaus' throne. His father is the general of the whole Greek army in Troy and his uncle is the one that ruled over Sparta. Although Orestes was never considered the king of Sparta, his contribution to such a narrative of Spartan politics extends the authority of this political system around the Peloponnese by the time he is related to Menelaus' throne, and mythically justifies Sparta's political expansion.

Therefore, what really matters is not the establishment of Sparta's right to claim that all different city-states of the Peloponnese share the same origins (Huxley, 1983, pp.5-8). On the contrary, I would suggest that what is established through Orestes' relation to Sparta is that all different origins of the Peloponnese should be subjected to Spartan power and political system. Though not a strictly Spartan hero, Orestes is still related to the Spartan throne, thus justifying Sparta's political system and offering a solid ground for the expansion of its authority over other city-states.

On the other hand, I would argue that a retrospective analysis of such a narrative would shed light on the double role of the relocation of Orestes' bones in Spartan foreign policy and political history depending on the historical period in which it is examined. In the original context of this story and when examined under the light of the interstate relations between Sparta and Tegea, the hero represented the restoration of Spartan political authority after a period of political ambiguity and the promotion of the already existing double kingship. However, such a justification of Spartan interstate relations and techniques of expansionism acquires another dimension if applied to the historical and political context of the mid-5th century BCE. In the aftermath of the Persian Wars, Athens' greatest achievement in the battlefield and the foreign policy, Sparta lost much of its previous glory (Powell, 2018, p.291). From a 5th-century perspective, the recovery of Orestes' bones offers a retrospective justification of Sparta's foreign policy not so much in relation with other Greek city-states, but mainly with Lydia. The alliance offered to Spartans by Croesus came in the aftermath of their victory against Tegeans and recognised Sparta as the most powerful Greek city (*Histories* 1.69). Such an approach to Spartan political history offers a retrospective explanation and justification of the city's decision to withdraw from the anti-Persian campaigning

in 470s BCE.[58] Although I would not suggest that Herodotus necessarily promotes his contemporary Spartan political ideals through the presentation of Orestes as a Spartan hero, I would recognise in such a narration another reminder of Sparta's previous leadership over the Peloponnese and a retrospective justification of its political history and foreign policy that would enhance its authority after the Persian Wars.

Conclusion: A literary comparison between the *Histories* and the *Odyssey*

Having been composed almost three centuries apart, the *Histories* and the *Odyssey* represent two different literary genres. The first seeks to trace a causal relationship among facts in order to offer historical evidence on the Persian Wars, while the other one forms a complex fictional narrative revolving around Odysseus' homecoming. However, in both cases, various mythical episodes with social connotations having taken place in different periods of either mythical or historical time, were brought together in a complicated nexus that created causality between an act of enforcement and the re-establishment of political authority.

On a structural level, both presentations of Orestes' role are retrospectively arranged. In the *Histories*, the narration of the power play between Sparta and Tegea started with the initial Spartan defeat; it recalled Lycurgus' legal reformations of the 9th century BCE; it returned to the later oracle about the relocation of Orestes' bones, and the subsequent Spartan victory; and finally, through Croesus' alliance offer to Sparta, it reached the period after Tegea's defeat. Similarly, in the *Odyssey*, Orestes' act of vengeance is recalled as a mythical exemplum of the past although it foreshadows the killing of the suitors.

Thus, as I have shown, in both cases Orestes remains a symbol of political restoration and stability. In the *Histories*, the relocation of Orestes' bones serves as a mythical justification for Sparta's claims in the mid-fifth century relating to its successful foreign policy and the restoration of its political leadership and the expansion of its authority. Seemingly, the *Odyssey* introduces the Orestes myth in order to initiate the gradual in-advance justification of the killing of the suitors as an act that guarantees the restoration of Odysseus' political authority.

[58] For a historical account of the relevant facts, see Powell, 2018, pp.291-299.

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