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## Devastation of Cultivated Land in Herodotus

Edith Foster

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# KTÈMA

## CIVILISATIONS DE L'ORIENT, DE LA GRÈCE ET DE ROME ANTIQUES

### Grecs et non-Grecs de l'empire perse au monde hellénistique

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## Devastation of Cultivated Land in Herodotus

**ABSTRACT**–. This paper argues that we should distinguish the devastation of cultivated land in Herodotus from attacks on nature. It describes the main emphases of Herodotus' descriptions of the wasting and pillage of agricultural land and elucidates the relation between these emphases and the events of the Peloponnesian War. The paper concludes with an argument that Herodotus portrayed devastation of land as an action that was both intended and understood as an act of war, and that his accounts of such attacks should be considered as part of his presentation of warfare.

**KEYWORDS**–. farmland, nature, warfare, Thucydides, Sparta

**RÉSUMÉ**–. Cet article soutient que chez Hérodote il faut distinguer la dévastation de terres cultivées des atteintes à la nature. Il précise les principaux aspects que lesquels insiste l'historien quand il évoque la dévastation et le pillage de terres agricoles, et analyse la relation entre ces thèmes et les événements de la guerre du Péloponnèse. Il montre enfin qu'Hérodote a dépeint la dévastation des terres agricoles comme un acte de guerre, et que ses récits de telles attaques devraient être considérés comme faisant partie de sa présentation de la guerre.

**MOTS-CLÉS**–. terre agricole, nature, guerre, Thucydide, Sparte

This paper distinguishes between Herodotus' famous descriptions of attacks on the natural world and his descriptions of attacks on cultivated land.<sup>1</sup> The latter are distinctively different: they are primarily attacks on human beings and provoke military and political responses.<sup>2</sup> In contrast, Herodotus describes the destruction, alteration, or abuse of nature as enacted on a world which has a divine aspect and may therefore take its own revenge, as the sea, for instance, avenged

(1) I would like to thank the Herodotus Helpline for allowing me to hold this paper in December 2021, together with the discussants who contributed their observations at that time. In addition, I would like to thank the program committee of the Classical Association of the Mid-Western States for allowing me to hold a revised version of this paper at their annual meeting in March of 2022, at which time I found equally helpful discussants. Finally, I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers of *Ktèma* for their extremely helpful observations.

(2) To my surprise, I can find no previous scholarship that has separated Herodotus' accounts of attacks on agricultural land from his accounts of attacks on nature. CLARKE 2018, p. 221-270, 'The Conquest of Nature: Herodotus 'Military Narrative'', offers many fine analyses, but shows already in the title that it makes no such distinction. ROMM 2006 (see especially p. 186-190) also makes no distinction. A post-Second World War tradition of considering Herodotus in terms of broad oppositions between 'man and nature' (which perhaps began with IMMERWAHR 1966), on the one hand, and 'land and sea' (see PELLING 1991, p. 136-139), on the other, has perhaps caused us to see all attacks against the land itself, regardless of their character, as attacks on nature. But see PELLING 1991, p. 138-139 for remarks about the importance of 'the quartermaster's perspective' that anticipate the argument made here.

Xerxes' hubristic attacks.<sup>3</sup> Human beings, however, do not avenge aggressions against nature. For some examples, we may call to mind the Cnidians' attempt to split off their isthmus from the land (1.174. 2-6), Nitocris' diversions of the course of the Euphrates (1.185 -6), or Cyrus' division of the Gyndes' river into 360 channels (1.189 -190). Although the gods may sooner or later respond to such actions, human revenge is absent.

In contrast, human revenge is a main theme of Herodotus' accounts of attacks on agricultural land. In Herodotus, devastation of fields is undertaken for the sake of power, punishment, revenge, or all three, and provokes a responding revenge, wherever this response is possible.<sup>4</sup> His devastators, whether Greek, Lydian, Persian, or other, are usually motivated by anger against the people they are attacking, rather than by rational considerations of strategy, and nearly always fail to achieve their aims. Their attacks therefore do not ultimately weaken or draw concessions from their enemies, who instead emerge as stronger than before; moreover, the attackers offend the gods who guard the land. In sum, Herodotus depicts the devastation of cultivated land as a strategy that leads to a double failure: the attackers, rather than satisfying their passions, are weakened or defeated, the attacked, rather than being harmed, ultimately grow stronger.

We might conclude from this summary that the hubris of the attackers provoked Herodotus to shape narratives in which devastation of land is thwarted or avenged in a way that is emotionally and morally satisfying for his readers. This may well be the case; however, the narratives are also didactic and politically engaged, as we shall see from three examples. Xerxes' devastations of Greece, the most prominent Herodotean narrative in which devastation plays a role, shall be the first, and the Greek cities' attacks on Athens in Book 5 shall be the second. These are the lengthiest Herodotean accounts involving devastation of cultivated land, and in both the attackers are weakened or defeated, and the Athenians ultimately strengthened. However, Herodotus' account of the Greek-on-Greek wars in Book 5 exhibits one signal difference to the story of Xerxes' predations: in Book 5, Sparta is an important ravager of land, but remains unscathed, since no one is able to take revenge on Sparta's campaigns of devastation.

This is not to suggest that Spartan devastations remain unpunished in Herodotus. Our final example is especially pertinent to Herodotus' and his readers' experience of the Peloponnesian War. Herodotus' quizzical relation of Alyattes' devastations of Miletus directly addresses the futility of attacking the lands of those who 'rule the sea'. It highlights the failure of devastation as a war strategy, even where the plunderers may remain unharmed, and suggests that the habit of devastating land, so typical of Sparta in this period, could be used to bait attackers into unproductive strategies.

#### XERXES

Herodotus framed his account of Xerxes' attack on Greece with a description of the Persians' decision to invade. His well-known account of the 'throne room debate' is relevant to our theme

(3) The sea responds to Xerxes' canal building at Athos and whipping and shackling of the Hellespont (7.22-24; 7.35); see ROMM 2006, p. 186-190 for Herodotus' descriptions of hubristic claims to dominate rivers and seas, with PELLING 2019, p. 158.

(4) There are a few exceptions to this general plot line; these exceptions must be considered in their narrative contexts. For instance, Polycrates plunders all parties without distinction, saying his friends are happier with him when he returns their property than if he had never taken it in the first place (3.39.4): the fact that no one takes revenge on him is part of his 'excessive' good fortune. Again, at 4.120.1, 122.1, and 140.1 the Scythians waste their own pasturelands ahead of the Persian invasions, a devastation in self-defense.

not only because it exhibits Xerxes' imperial ambitions (7.8α—γ), but also because Xerxes' cousin Mardonius tempts Xerxes to invade Greece by arguing that 'Europe' is a rich and fertile land, replete with every kind of fruit tree, so beautiful that Xerxes alone deserves to possess it (7.5.3).<sup>5</sup> Mardonius' remark initiates a series of comments on the relation between the Persians and Greek agricultural resources.

The reader understands that Mardonius is lying, and that Greece is in fact rocky and hard to farm.<sup>6</sup> Corresponding to this knowledge, Xerxes' uncle Artabanus warns Xerxes that, far from being the paradise Mardonius had advertised, Greek land was likely to become a bitter enemy, and the more bitter as Xerxes was more successful:

γῆ δὲ πολεμὴ τῆδέ τοι κατίσταται· εἰ θέλει τοι μηδὲν ἀντίξοον καταστήναι, τοσοῦτῳ τοι γίνεται πολεμιωτέρῃ ὅσῳ ἂν προβαίνῃς ἐκαστέρῳ, τὸ πρόσω αἰεὶ κλεπτόμενος· εὐπρηξίης δὲ οὐκ ἔστι ἀνθρώποισι οὐδεμία πληθώρα. καὶ δὴ τοι, ὡς οὐδενὸς ἐναντιευμένου, λέγω τὴν χώραν πλεῦνα ἐν πλέονι χρόνῳ γινομένην λιμὸν τέξεσθαι.

For the land is hostile to you in the following way: if no opposition sets itself in your way, it will become more hostile the further you advance, drawn irresistibly forward: for there is no satiation of good luck for human beings. And so I say that more territory over more time will create famine, even if no one opposes you. (7.49.4-5)

Artabanus channels an image of Xerxes passing through Greece unopposed, eagerly advancing in order to add to the size of his conquest and succumbing to starvation when he has advanced so far that he cannot supply his army: in Artabanus' prediction, Xerxes' hunger for more will cause its opposite, famine. Artabanus is remembering the dangers faced by Xerxes' father, Darius, when he advanced against the nomadic Scythians, and we note that Artabanus does not distinguish between cultivated and uncultivated land: for him, all territory is equally dangerous.<sup>7</sup> Where Mardonius had depicted 'Europe' as a garden of Eden waiting to be seized, for Artabanus, any conquered territory is an active and hostile force, stealing the army forward until it starves.<sup>8</sup>

In contrast to Artabanus, Xerxes himself knows well how to distinguish cultivated land from territory.<sup>9</sup> For he responds that the Persians will not have to trust nature as Darius did, but rather can confide in success precisely because they are attacking farmers, rather than nomads:

ἡμεῖς τοίνυν ὁμοιούμενοι ἐκείνοισι ὄρην τε τοῦ ἔτεος καλλίστην πορευόμεθα, καὶ καταστρεψάμενοι πᾶσαν τὴν Εὐρώπην νοστήσομεν ὀπίσω, οὔτε λιμῶ ἐντυχόντες οὐδαμῶθι οὔτε ἄλλο ἄχαρι οὐδὲν παθόντες. τοῦτο μὲν γὰρ αὐτοὶ πολλὴν φορβὴν φερόμενοι πορευόμεθα, τοῦτο δέ, τῶν ἂν κου ἐπιβέωμεν γῆν καὶ ἔθνος, τούτων τὸν σίτον ἔξομεν· ἐπ' ἀροτῆρας δὲ καὶ οὐ νομάδας στρατευόμεθα ἄνδρας.

Indeed, we, who are certainly a match for them [i.e. for the Greeks], are journeying at the fairest

(5) 7.5.3 οὗτος μὲν οἱ ὁ λόγος ἦν τιμωρός· τοῦδε δὲ τοῦ λόγου παρενθήκη ποιείσκειτο τήνδε, ὡς ἡ Εὐρώπη περικαλλὴς εἶη χώρα, καὶ δένδρεα παντοῖα φέρει τὰ ἡμέρα, ἀρετὴν τε ἄκρη, βασιλεί τε μόνῳ θνητῶν ἀξίη ἐκτῆσθαι. ('That was his argument about taking revenge. But he kept on adding to his argument this suggestion, namely that Europe was a very beautiful land which bore every sort of cultivated (ἡμέρα) tree and had excellent soil, [a land] worthy for the king alone of mortals to possess.') Mardonius' lies offer the simultaneous possession of beauty and power, a poetics of temptation that has been well analyzed; cf. BARAGWANATH 2008, p. 165-167 and CLARKE 2018, p. 222; 334-335, with Aristagoras' similar lies at 5.31.1-3 and 5.49.5-9 and the contrasting Athenians at 8.144.1, who say that they cannot be bribed by any land, be it ever so beautiful.

(6) The idea that poor soil produces strong peoples because of the difficulty of farming is an Herodotean sub-theme that bears on separating attacks on nature from attacks on cultivated land. See remarks by Cyrus, 1.123-126, 9.122.3, Sandanis 1.71.2, Demaratus 7.102.1, and the related remarks of Croesus at 1.155.4 and Pausanias at 9.82.3. These speakers suggest or illustrate that tilling difficult soil produces scant food, but a tough kind of human being; the consequence would be that an attack on their farmland is an attack on the source of their national character.

(7) For Darius' Scythian campaign, see 4.118-142, with 4.46.

(8) On Artabanus' predictions as right in general, but wrong in particulars, see PELLING 1991; cf. SCARDINO 2007, p. 183.

(9) This fact is another hint that we also should separate the two in our analyses of Herodotus' narratives.

season of the year, and having conquered all of Greece, we will return home, not having met with any famine or suffered anything else unpleasant. For one thing, we ourselves are travelling with a great supply of resources, for another, we shall have the grain of those whose lands and people we are attacking, since we are attacking plowing men, and not nomads. (7.50.4)

Xerxes argues that the Greek practice of farming will be advantageous for the Persians, who will be able to take their crops: Greek farming makes Greece both easier to invade and more valuable to the conqueror than the lands of the nomads. Artabanus should therefore take confidence that the Persians will prevail: the farmers Xerxes is attacking will themselves feed his army.<sup>10</sup> Xerxes' rebuttal of Artabanus' anxious predictions ends the Persian conversation about Greek agricultural resources with an apparently rational assessment that abandons both Mardonius' and Artabanus' focus on resources or their absence, and turns to the actual object of exploitation, namely, the people who farm Greek land.

But Xerxes' hubris, in assuming that resources he has not yet conquered are already his, shines through, and he anyway plays the part of a rational and calculating leader only momentarily.<sup>11</sup> Once he has arrived in Greece, he takes no thought for exploiting the labour of farmers and the produce of farmland, but rather destroys those resources for the sake of revenge and to punish whatever resists the passion to rule that is the main motivation for his invasion (7.8γ; 7.11.2-4).

Herodotus' story of Xerxes' attack on Greece leads from exploitation and destruction to failure and starvation, from a fat life to an emaciated death. The campaign begins with feasts: Xerxes banquets his way to Greece, reducing the cities in Persian controlled territory to poverty. Required to feed the king and his army with everything they have, and going deep into debt to do so, the cities would wake up the next morning to find that the Persian army had taken all moveable property; as Herodotus says, 'they left nothing behind' (7.118.2-120). This exploitation of those who had not resisted Xerxes' rule introduces his treatment of those parts of Greece that are resisting, where his army destroys whatever comes within their reach. Once the Greeks have withdrawn after the battle of Artemision, the Persians overrun (ἐπέδραμον) the territory of Histiaea (8.23.2). They spare Medizing Doris (8.31), but (with encouragement from their Thessalian allies, who were enemies of the Phocians) ravage Phocis:

οἱ δὲ βάρβαροι τὴν χώραν πᾶσαν ἐπέδραμον τὴν Φωκίδα: Θεσσαλοὶ γὰρ οὕτω ἤγον τὸν στρατόν: ὀκόσα δὲ ἐπέσχον, πάντα ἐπέφλεγον καὶ ἔκειρον, καὶ ἐς τὰς πόλεις ἐνιέντες πῦρ καὶ ἐς τὰ ἱερά.

The barbarians overran all of Phocis: for the Thessalians were leading their army. And wherever they stopped they burned and cut down everything and threw fire upon the cities and sanctuaries (8.32.2).<sup>12</sup>

They wreck everything in their path as they proceed southward (8.33). The god himself saves Delphi (8.36-39), but the destruction continues as Xerxes draws near to Athens; soon we find that

(10) See THORNE 2001 for analysis of the practical aspects of devastation of land in ancient Greece, as far as they are known; the author takes issue with HANSON 1998, who argues that devastation of land was difficult and therefore not as severe in its consequences as we might imagine, cf. footnote 37.

(11) As Tom Harrison has noted, Xerxes' remark 'may suggest an awareness of the need for supplies and logistical planning. But it is not a concern that is sustained...' HARRISON 2002, p. 564; cf. SANCISI-WEERDENBURG 2002, p. 587. Xerxes may have been genuinely mistaken about the extent of Greek resources: see 7.8α.2, for his misinformed assumption that Greek land was productive and fertile. Moreover, he had not been totally without thought for supplying his forces: he had ordered food depots to be created (7.25.2); the depots, in addition to whatever was expropriated from subject cities, seem to have been initially adequate (7.187.1), even though they were ultimately drastically inadequate.

(12) HARRISON 2002, p. 560 sees again an attack on nature, rather than on agricultural land and resources. But ἐπέφλεγον καὶ ἔκειρον are emphatic verbs for the destruction of crops and property. On the other hand, Harrison helpfully mentions 'the divine possession of the Greek landscape, of an undercurrent that pulls against the Persians in their attempt to appropriate Greece (p. 560, with note 18).' For the consequences of destroying temples while plundering land, see the conclusion of this paper.

he has set fire to all of Attica (8.50.1) and likewise destroyed Plataea and Thespis with fire as a punishment for their refusal to join Persia (8.50.2).<sup>13</sup> Nor does the plundering of Attica end after the Persians lose the battle of Salamis and Xerxes retreats back to Persia, but rather Mardonius, in his turn, considers Attica to be a 'possession of the Persian spear' (9.4.2) and destroys it again when the Athenians refuse to concede during the winter after the battle of Salamis (9.13.2; Thuc. 1.89.3).

Xerxes' attack on Greece has therefore nothing to do with claiming the resources of farmers in order to feed his army; in fact, he destroys Greek fields as a matter of course. Doing the rational thing, namely taking the resources of the farmers, as he had suggested to Artabanus, does not seem to occur to him.

The practice of laying waste to everything backfires on the Persians, since it stiffens Greek and certainly Athenian determination (cf. e.g. 8.144.2), and ultimately causes the starvation of Xerxes' own forces. Herodotus' account of Xerxes' retreat northward after losing the battle of Salamis shows his forces seizing the crops of friends and enemies alike, as well as eating the grass, and the bark and leaves of the trees, as they die of dysentery and hunger, punished for their master's hubris (8.115).<sup>14</sup> This starvation fulfills Artabanus' predictions, closes the theme of Xerxes' devastation of Greece, and annuls the banqueting the Persians had enjoyed during their invasion, when they proceeded southward on this same path. Likewise, it shows the desperate Persians trying and failing to survive on the leaves and bark of the trees Mardonius had advertised as fertile and easy to acquire.<sup>15</sup>

A more rational plan had been offered: Demaratus had advised Xerxes to occupy the island of Kythera and to ravage the Spartans from there, which would have split the Spartans against each other and allowed Xerxes to conquer the Greeks piecemeal. As Herodotus' readers knew from Athens' occupation of Kythera in 424 BCE, this was a plan that might have worked (7.235.2-237; Thuc. 4. 53-55).

#### GREEK-ON-GREEK DEVASTATIONS IN THE CENTRAL SECTIONS OF BOOK 5

Plundering and devastation of cultivated land are practiced by a broad spectrum of Herodotean peoples.<sup>16</sup> The main example of Greek-on-Greek devastations is found in the central sections of Book 5, where the Spartans, Chalcidians, Thebans, and Aeginetans make repeated incursions into Attica but fail to prevent the growth of Athens and the development of Athenian democracy. Once again, therefore, plundering fails to gain concessions and backfires, making the object of the attacks stronger. Moreover, as in his account of Xerxes' invasion of Greece, in Book 5 Herodotus foregrounds the Greek states' passionate motivations for wasting another state's land and, in respect to the smaller powers, their imprudence in so doing.

(13) Cf. 7.133.2: Herodotus records the suggestion that the devastation of Attica and Athens was a divine punishment for killing Darius' heralds (cf. 6.48-49); this plot co-exists with the plot of Xerxes' predations.

(14) 8.115.2 δκου δὲ πορευόμενοι γινοίατο καὶ κατ' οὐστιας ἀνθρώπους, τὸν τούτων καρπὸν ἀρπάζοντες ἐσιτέοντο· εἰ δὲ καρπὸν μηδένα εὔροειν, οἱ δὲ τὴν ποίην τὴν ἐκ τῆς γῆς ἀναφυομένην καὶ τῶν δενδρέων τὸν φλοιὸν περιλέποντες καὶ τὰ φύλλα καταδρέποντες κατήσθιον, ὁμοίως τῶν τε ἡμέρωι καὶ τῶν ἀγρίων, καὶ ἔλειπον οὐδέν· ταῦτα δ' ἐποίηον ὑπὸ λιμοῦ. [3] ἐπιλαβῶν δὲ λοιμός τε τὸν στρατὸν καὶ δυσεντερὴ κατ' ὁδὸν ἔφθειρε... ('Wherever and to whatever peoples they came, seizing their crop, they ate it. If they found no crop, they consumed the grass growing up from the land, and stripping the bark and cutting off the leaves of cultivated and wild trees alike, they ate them, and they left nothing behind: they were doing these things because they were starving. And disease fell upon the army and dysentery destroyed them on their way...')

(15) As a final irony, Mardonius himself cuts down the trees of Persia's Theban allies in his pressing need to protect his army during the winter of 479 (9.15.2).

(16) Cf. e.g. 2.152.4 (the Thracians); 3.58.3 (the Samians); 6.42.1 (the Persians force the Ionians to stop plundering one another); 6.90.1 (Aeginetan exiles plunder their own people).



Our narrative begins when the Spartans are tricked into expelling Athens' Peisistratid tyrants in 511 and 510 BCE (5.63 and 64).<sup>17</sup> Athens' growing post-tyranny power and independence soon cause the Spartans to change their minds, and when king Cleomenes' first attempt to overthrow Athenian democracy and install his candidate Isagoras as tyrant fails, he raises a large army to attack again. Herodotus makes it clear that the motivations for this second attack are anger arising from a sense of insult and the desire for revenge. Like Xerxes, Cleomenes is determined to punish the Athenians for their hubris, i.e. resistance to his rule (5.74.1).<sup>18</sup>

In 506 BCE Cleomenes therefore attacks again, this time by arrangement with Sparta's allies (5.74.2). He wastes Eleusis, while the Boeotians capture borderland demes and the Chalcidians devastate other areas of Attica (5.74.2).<sup>19</sup> However, Cleomenes' large army evaporates, and he is forced 'ingloriously' (5.77.1) to abandon the attack and go home.<sup>20</sup> His retreat does not happen soon enough to prevent him from committing the infraction that caused his later madness, at least according to the Athenians, since during this invasion he devastated not only the land, but also the precinct of the temple of Demeter at Eleusis (6.75.3).

Once the Spartans have gone home, the Athenians avenge the attacks. Because they want to pay back (τίνυσθαι βουλόμενοι 5.77.1) the Spartans' Boiotian and Chalcidian accomplices, they attack both, defeating them in battle. They take many captives and charge a high ransom for their return; 4,000 Athenian cleruchs also occupy Chalcidian land: through their incursions, the Boeotians and Chalcidians have increased, rather than diminishing, Athens' power.

In answer, the Boeotians take up the revenge theme. βουλόμενοι τείσασθαι Ἀθηναίους, 'determined to take revenge on Athens' (5.79.1), the Thebans request help from the Aeginetans (5.81.1), who lay waste to Phalerum and other coastal demes of Attica, causing great damage (5.81.2-3; 5.89). Herodotus lays stress on the fact that the Aeginetan attack is a surprise attack, an 'unannounced war', and on their motivations: over-confidence because of their present prosperity, and a grievance against Athens resulting from an old quarrel.<sup>21</sup> In retaliation (ἐς τιμωρίην, 5.90.1), the Athenians are about to go to war against Aegina in the same way as they had against the Thebans and Chalcidians, but are prevented when the Spartans arrive yet again, determined to reinstate the Peisistratids as tyrants over Athens in order to quell Athenian power and Athenian democracy for good (5.90-1). However, their allies prevent this.<sup>22</sup>

(17) It is impossible for me to do justice to the complex account contained in Book 5. I must refer the reader to IRWIN and GREENWOOD 2007, with HORNBLLOWER 2013, as starting points for filling in the information I must pass over.

(18) 5.74.1: Κλεομένης δὲ ἐπιστάμενος περιβρίσθαι ἔπεισεν καὶ ἔργοισι ὑπ' Ἀθηναίων συνέλεγε ἐκ πάσης Πελοποννήσου στρατόν, οὐ φράζων ἐς τὸ συλλέγει, τίσασθαι τε ἐθέλων τὸν δῆμον τὸν Ἀθηναίων καὶ Ἰσαγόρην βουλόμενος τύραννον καταστήσαι... ('Cleomenes, however, understanding that the Athenians had done him wrong in word and deed, mustered an army from the whole of the Peloponnesus, not announcing the purpose for which he mustered it, but wanting to avenge himself on the Athenian people and wishing to set up Isagoras as tyrant...')

(19) 5.74.2: Κλεομένης τε δὴ στόλῳ μεγάλῳ ἐσέβαλε ἐς Ἐλευσίνα, καὶ οἱ Βοιωτοὶ ἀπὸ συνθήματος Οἰνόην αἰρέουσι καὶ Ὑσιὰς δῆμους τοὺς ἐσχάτους τῆς Ἀττικῆς, Χαλκιδέες τε ἐπὶ τὰ ἔτερα ἐσίνοντο ἐπιόντες χώρους τῆς Ἀττικῆς. ('Cleomenes advanced as far as Eleusis with a large force, while the Boeotians, according to plan, took Oenio and Hysiae, demes on the borders of Attica, and the Chalcidians attacking on the other side were wasting Attic fields.')

(20) On the dissolution of the Spartan and allied force, see 5.75 with HORNBLLOWER 2013 ad loc.

(21) 5.81.2-3 Αἰγινῆται δὲ εὐδαμονίῃ τε μεγάλῃ ἐπαρθέντες καὶ ἔχθρης παλαιῆς ἀναμνησθέντες ἐχούσης ἐς Ἀθηναίους, τότε Θηβαίων δεηθέντων πόλεμον ἀκήρυκτον Ἀθηναίοισι ἐπέφερον. [3] ἐπικειμένων γὰρ αὐτῶν Βοιωτοῖσι, ἐπιπλώσαντες μακρῆσι νηυσὶ ἐς τὴν Ἀττικὴν κατὰ μὲν ἔσσαν Φάληρον κατὰ δὲ τῆς ἄλλης παραλίης πολλοὺς δῆμους, ποιούντες δὲ ταῦτα μεγάλως Ἀθηναίους ἐσικνέοντο. ('The Aeginetans, proud because of their great wealth and mindful of having an ancient enmity toward the Athenians, brought an undeclared war against the Athenians at that time when the Thebans asked [them for help]. For while these [i.e. the Athenians] were pressing the Boeotians, they ravaged Phalerum and many demes along the remaining seacoast, sailing up in longboats, and in doing these things they harmed the Athenians greatly.') In general, Herodotus represents the Aeginetans in this period as hubristic and preemptory; cf. 83.1-2, 84.2.

(22) Cf. 5.92-3.



In sum: in Book 5, the motivation of revenge governs both the unsuccessful attackers and the successful Athenians, who take or will take revenge on the Boeotians, Chalcidians, and Aeginetans; these are smaller powers who ravaged Athenian lands at the request of Sparta, or in the Aeginetan case, at the request of Sparta's ally, Boeotia.<sup>23</sup> Their provocation of Athens was very dangerous, in that they ravaged the lands of a power against whose military forces they were too weak to defend themselves. In particular, Athens will not rest until the Aeginetans are entirely annihilated. As Thucydides shows, the Athenians defeated and reduced the Aeginetans to subjects in 459-457 BCE (cf. Thuc. 1.105.2 and 1.108.4),<sup>24</sup> expelled them from their island in 431 BCE (Thuc. 2.27.1), and finally exterminated the people themselves in 424 BCE (Thuc. 4.57); like the occupation of Kythera, these are events that Herodotus and his readers would have experienced. While it would certainly be an exaggeration to argue that Aegina's original devastation of Attica caused all of Athens' subsequent actions, it is nevertheless true that the Aeginetans attacked Athens first: the stories of Book 5 show that the smaller Greek states are even more imprudent than Xerxes, who does not risk the existence of his state when he devastates Attica.

## ALYATTES

Will Sparta be the one power that escapes the consequences of devastating other states' lands? In the accounts from Book 5 that we have just reviewed, the Athenians take revenge on Sparta's henchmen, but not on powerful Sparta herself. Thucydides shows that the Spartans continued to rely on their invulnerability to attack in the post-Persian war and inter-war period. The Spartans promised to devastate Attica in the late 460's and in 432; in between these promised devastations, which for various reasons did not come about, came the abortive invasion of King Pleistoanax in about 446.<sup>25</sup> In 431, the five Peloponnesian War devastations of Attica (interrupted by the devastation of Plataea in 429) begin. Further attacks are forestalled only by Athens' victory over Sparta at Sphacteria in 425, since the Athenians promised to kill the prisoners captured in this battle if the Spartans attacked their land again (Thuc. 4.41.1). Finally, and in addition to attacks against the agricultural land of other cities during Sparta's wars with her allies in 418, we should mention the Spartans' more or less continuous devastation of Attica from 413 until the end of the war, once they had gained their base at Deceleia.<sup>26</sup>

Writing in the historical context created by Sparta's promised and actuated attacks on the agricultural land of other states, Herodotus has given us accounts of devastations which are undertaken to suppress a competitor's power, to punish resistance, and to take revenge for perceived slights. We have reviewed his two longest and most prominent narratives of this type. Herodotus shows in both accounts that the aggressors failed to dominate those who were attacked; it is surely not a coincidence that in both cases the Athenians were the objects of the attacks. Herodotus' main devastation accounts are therefore relevant to the events of the Peloponnesian War, during which

(23) For yet more stories of Greek-on-Greek revenge, see the post-war devastations, e.g. at 8.121.1, where the Greeks waste Karystos, even though it had paid indemnities, and 9.86.2, where the Greeks punish Theban Medizing by 'cutting' their fields.

(24) Cf. HORNBLOWER 2013, ad loc 6.91.1, for a possible reflection of this event in Herodotus.

(25) On these invasions, as well as the invasions of the Archidamian War, cf. BRUNT 1965 and KELLY 1982.

(26) And as for the post-Peloponnesian War period, see Xenophon's *Hellenica* and RIEDINGER 1991, p. 209-210, who ironically called this period the 'Golden Age' of Spartan devastation of land; Aeneas Tacticus is our best supplementary 4<sup>th</sup> century source.

Sparta's attacks on Attica remained fruitless;<sup>27</sup> in this regard, an even sharper lesson can be drawn from Herodotus' mysterious tale of the Lydian king Alyattes' attacks upon the land of the Milesians.

Alyattes, king of Lydia and a serial attacker of his neighbors (1.16.2), has inherited from his father a war to conquer Miletus (17.1). He invades annually when the crops are ripe, making a festival of it by bringing a band of flutes and pipes to accompany the work. He takes the fruit and crops, but leaves the farmhouses intact. This goes on for eleven years, since the Milesians, for their part, 'rule the sea' in their area and pay no attention to these annual invasions.<sup>28</sup> In contrast, Alyattes' battlefield warfare is harmful to Miletus: during this period he twice defeats the Milesians in battles fought away from the city (1.18.1).

Then, in the 12<sup>th</sup> year of these incursions, the invaders accidentally set fire to a temple of Athena as they are burning the crops. Alyattes falls ill, inquires at Delphi, and finds that the Pythia will not answer him until this temple is rebuilt. He therefore sends a messenger to Miletus to ask for a truce during which to rebuild the temple (1.19).

This messenger is the opportunity that Thrasyboulos, the clever tyrant of Miletus, required.<sup>29</sup> Bringing out the supplies stored in the city, Thrasyboulos has the citizens drink and celebrate while Alyattes' messenger is in Miletus; the messenger then reports back to Alyattes that the Milesians are feasting. Confounded in his expectation that the Milesians would by this time be reduced to misery and starvation,<sup>30</sup> Alyattes makes a peace and an alliance with Miletus and builds two temples to Athena, to make up for the one he burned on the land. As a result, he recovers from his illness (1.22.3).

This 'happy end' story has fantastic aspects. It predicates, for instance, that if a plunderer leaves the buildings on the land, the farmers will come out of the city to plant crops, even though they know that their army will not defend the land against annual invasions, and even though there is food in the city, for twelve years in a row. The implausibility of this scenario leads us to suspect that Herodotus is telling a story in which the Milesians were allowing Alyattes to prosecute plundering attacks in order to distract him from raising the more harmful battles: in other words, Thrasyboulos was manipulating Alyattes not only at the end of the story, but all along. Another fantastic element of this story is that neither side is seriously harmed. This is a story about the plundering of crops in which no one goes hungry and the attackers are not seriously punished.

(27) That Herodotus experienced the Spartan invasions of Attica during the Archidamian War is shown at 9.73.3, where he explicitly addresses the Spartans' treatment of Decelea during their devastations of Attica: τοῖσι δὲ Δεκελεῦσι ἐν Σπάρτῃ ἀπὸ τούτου τοῦ ἔργου ἀτελεῖ τε καὶ προεδρὴ διατελεῖ ἐς τὸδε αἰεὶ ἔτι εὐοῦσα, οὕτω ὥστε καὶ ἐς τὸν πόλεμον τὸν ὕστερον πολλοῖσι ἔτεσι τούτων γενόμενον Ἀθηναίοισι τε καὶ Πελοποννησίοισι, σινομένων τὴν ἄλλην Ἀττικὴν Λακεδαιμονίων, Δεκελῆς ἀπέχεσθαι (9.73.3) ('For that deed the Deceleans have always had and still have freedom at Sparta from all dues and chief places at feasts, to such an extent that even for the war that was waged many years after this time between the Athenians and Peloponnesians, the Lacedaemonians kept themselves away from Decelea, although they were devastating the rest of Attica.') Herodotus speaks of the war and its invasions as past events; since the invasions ended in 425 BCE with the Athenian victory at Sphacteria, he must be writing in the later 420's, at least. If 'the war' he references is the Archidamian War, he is writing after the Peace of Nicias of 421.

(28) τῆς γὰρ θαλάσσης οἱ Μιλήσιοι ἐπεκράτεον, ὥστε ἐπέδρης μὴ εἶναι ἔργον τῇ στρατιῇ. τὰς δὲ οἰκίας οὐ κατέβαλλε ὁ Λυδὸς τῶνδε εἵνεκα, ὅκως ἔχοιεν ἐνθεῦτεν ὀρμώμενοι τὴν γῆν σπεῖρειν τε καὶ ἐργάζεσθαι οἱ Μιλήσιοι, αὐτὸς δὲ ἐκείνων ἐργαζομένων ἔχοι τι καὶ σίνεσθαι ἐσβάλλων. ('For since the Milesians had command of the sea, it was no use for his army to besiege their city. The reason that the Lydian [i.e. Alyattes] did not throw down the houses was so that setting out from them the Milesians would plant and work the land, and he himself would have something to destroy when he invaded, since they were continuing to work.')

(29) For Thrasyboulos as one of Herodotus' tricksters, see HARRISON 2002, p. 357.

(30) ἐλπίζων γὰρ ὁ Ἀλυάττης σιτοδείην τε εἶναι ἰσχυρὴν ἐν τῇ Μιλήτῳ καὶ τὸν λεῶν τετρῦσθαι ἐς τὸ ἔσχατον κακοῦ, ἤκουε τοῦ κήρυκος νοστήσαντος ἐκ τῆς Μιλήτου τοὺς ἐναντίους λόγους ἢ ὡς αὐτὸς κατεδόκεε. ('For Alyattes, expecting that there would be a great lack of food in Miletus and that the people would be reduced to the furthest extremity of misery, was now hearing from the herald who was returning from Miletus a report that contradicted this expectation.')

One possible way to analyze the Alyattes story is to examine its structural similarities to the story of Xerxes' attack on Greece. On the one hand, the narratives of Xerxes' campaign and Alyattes' attacks on Miletus show opposing possibilities, since in one story both sides suffer grievous harm, and in the other neither side does. However, both Xerxes and Alyattes, having inherited a war, aggressively invade. Both commit religious infractions, destroying temples as they plunder. In both stories, the plunderer's initial festive exploitations are decisively answered, Xerxes' by starvation, Alyattes' by a successful trick.<sup>31</sup> Most important, in both stories, plundering of cultivated land fails to wrest concessions from the attacked. Indeed, in the Alyattes story, the plundering seems to be practically an activity the Milesians have set up to occupy Alyattes, who thinks he is in control, but is not.

But the Alyattes story also seems to comment on Peloponnesian war events. Thucydides, who began his account of each of the first years of the Archidamian War by showing that the Athenians had planted their crops, even though the Spartans were probably coming back, and even though they knew that their army would not defend the land, and even though there was food in the city, because, like the Milesians, they were 'masters of the sea', springs inescapably to mind. Herodotus' story about Alyattes is like an alternative universe in which Pericles' policy for the Archidamian War succeeds perfectly: instead of the result of the Spartan invasions of Attica, namely intense pain and anxiety, destruction, deaths of defenders, the plague, etc., the Milesians fulfill Pericles' policy of ignoring the devastations and prevail, without suffering at all from the ravaging of their crops.<sup>32</sup>

The persistent outcome of Herodotus' accounts seems to sound a warning: Sparta's failure to win concessions from Athens by ravaging Attica compares with Xerxes' and the Greek cities' and Alyattes' failure to compel concessions by these same means.<sup>33</sup> It should quickly be noted that this Herodotean pattern is not proleptic only: it also looks backwards, since there is something Homeric about it: plundering in Homer leads to quarrels and delays, rather than any kind of victory, as Thucydides noticed (cf. Thuc. 1.12).<sup>34</sup> There is nevertheless a strong connection between Herodotus' devastation stories and the events of the Peloponnesian War. Interesting, and I believe little noticed, is Herodotus' apparent perception that a party's habit of ravaging the land can be used against them. The Alyattes story shows how Alyattes was lured into repetitively executing his arrogant and mocking, but entirely ineffective, strategy. Did Pericles' policy for the Archidamian War lure the Spartans into ravaging Attica in order to distract them from more effective ideas, such as they had later, when in 424 BCE they attacked Athens' Thracian district and seized Amphipolis (Thuc. 4.102-8)?

(31) Herodotus' account of Themistocles' threats against the Andrians seems similar: like Alyattes' plundering, his threats to plunder are in vain (8.111-112), and the Andrians defeat them with a clever and funny answer (8.111.3).

(32) Herodotus' language, when he says τῆς γὰρ θαλάσσης οἱ Μιλήσιοι ἐπεκράτεον, also seems too close to the language of Pericles' speeches in Thucydides to be entirely coincidental, cf. Thuc. 1.143.5, in which Pericles argues exactly the point that Herodotus' story seems to be making, namely that the Spartan devastations will not hurt Athens, see also 2.62.2.

(33) For another example, see the story of Miltiades, victor of Marathon, who disgraces himself by attacking Paros with a large force (6.132) because of a personal grudge against a Parian (6.133.1) and because he has promised the Athenians to bring home riches. He threatens to destroy the Parians completely if they do not give him 100 talents. However, he gains no concessions by besieging the city and wasting the countryside (6.135.1) and is thereafter prosecuted at Athens for having deceived the assembly.

(34) Cf. READY 2007.

## CONCLUSION

It is hoped that the evidence contained in the body of this paper shows that Herodotus' accounts of devastation of agricultural land should be separated from his accounts of attacks on nature.<sup>35</sup> It is not only that attacks on agricultural land are really attempts to dominate those who farm the land, but also that Herodotus' devastation stories pertain closely to Spartan practices, and Athenian survival, during the first part of the Peloponnesian War. In other words, these accounts perform an entirely different narrative function than Herodotus' accounts of attacks on the natural world. I will conclude with some ancient evidence that later fifth and fourth century Greek authors also took for granted that devastation of land was an attack directed at other people, rather than at nature.

There has never been any confusion that Thucydides' numerous devastation accounts are anything but part of his description of warfare on human beings. It would be hard to be confused about this, since Thucydides and his speakers are explicit about the military and political aims of devastation (cf. e.g. 1.71.4, 1.81.1, 1.122.1, 2.11.6-8, 2.13.1) and also about its human costs (e.g. 2.14-17). Likewise, in Book 5 of Plato's *Republic*, Socrates forbids the guardians of his 'city in speech' from devastating farmland or burning farmhouses on the land of other Greek cities. He grounds this injunction in the principle that his guardians should make war with the intention of someday becoming allies, rather than permanent enemies (*Rep.* 5.469b-470e). In other words, for Plato's Socrates, devastation of crops and farmhouses is an attack on others that creates lasting enmity, and which must be forbidden if his 'city in speech' is to have useful on-going relations with its neighbors.<sup>36</sup>

Looking back at Herodotus, we can conclude that his views were similar to those reflected in Thucydides and Plato. In Herodotus, those who attack others' agricultural resources either hope to harm and dominate their enemies by doing as much damage as is in their power to do, like Xerxes and the Greek cities that attacked Athens in Book 5, or configure their strategies of devastation to suit specific war aims, like Alyattes, who tried to demoralize and starve the Milesians into submission with his 'plundering parties'. Either way, their intentions pertain to the human beings they are attacking.<sup>37</sup>

Herodotus' devastation accounts are therefore part of his presentation of warfare. In this, he is like Thucydides. He differs from Thucydides in that his devastation accounts share a characteristic plot development: as we have seen, regardless of the level of destruction, Herodotus' most prominent devastation narratives show attacks on agricultural land that do not defeat the attacked, but instead ultimately strengthen them. In addition, the devastations cause religious infractions. Xerxes, Cleomenes, and Alyattes destroy temples on the land, and each brings down the wrath of the gods upon himself.<sup>38</sup> The devastation stories therefore share the theme of hubris against the

(35) Herodotus' vocabulary for devastation of cropland is also distinctive. His most common verbs for devastation: *σίνομαι* 'harm' or 'damage' or 'plunder' (cf. 1.17.3, 5.74.2, 5.81.3, 6.97.2, 8.31, 9.13, 9.73.3, 9.87.1); *δηῖω*, 'devastate' (cf. 5.89.2, 6.135.1, 7.133.2, 8.80.1 and 2, 8.121.1. This verb becomes the regular verb for devastation of land in Thucydides, occurring 66 times; see JACKSON 1969, appendices.); *κείρω*, 'cut' crops or fruit trees (cf. 6.99.2, 7.131, 8.32.2, 9.15.2, 8.65.1, 4.127.2).

(36) The Platonic passage also echoes Herodotus' descriptions of devastation as an act of violence and indicts Greek cities generally if they do not, when they have the upper hand, act in a moderate way (*μέτριον*) toward the defeated, refraining from burning lands and houses, and taking for their use only the crops available (5.470d-e; cf. 471a).

(37) These suggestions are pertinent to the arguments of HANSON 1998, which is so far the single monograph devoted to ancient devastation of agricultural land. Hanson concludes that physical factors, such as the difficulty of destroying trees, restrained attackers from doing very much damage to the lands they invaded (see the countervailing argument in THORNE 2001). Hanson does not consider whether political considerations may have played a role in dictating the severity of destruction. But Alyattes' political aims were served by less destruction, Xerxes' by more.

(38) The opposing example is found at 6.97.2: Datis refuses to waste or plunder Delos so as not to incur divine anger.

gods with Herodotus' accounts of attacks on nature, but this should not cause us to continue to consider these two types of stories as belonging to the same category. Instead, we should note the distinct character of Herodotus' accounts of attacks on cultivated land and their relation to the unfolding Peloponnesian War.

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