

HERODOTUS—THE MOST HOMERIC HISTORIAN?

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HERODOTUS—THE MOST  
HOMERIC HISTORIAN?



Edited by  
IVAN MATIJAŠIĆ

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## PREFACE

This book explores the relationship between Herodotus and Homer and the reason why Herodotus was considered Homeric in antiquity. It stems from a conference at the School of History, Classics and Archaeology of Newcastle University which took place in March 2019, where most of the chapters that make up the book were presented. The conference was funded by the Research Committee of the School of History, Classics and Archaeology at Newcastle, and by the Institute of Classical Studies in London. I wish to express my gratitude to both institutions for their generous support, to the speakers for accepting my invitation to Newcastle, to the other numerous participants for a successful and fruitful discussion during the event, and to the chairs of each session: Federico Santangelo, Rowland Smith, Christopher Tuplin, and Jaap Wisse.

I also wish to thank the *Histos* editors, Rhiannon Ash and Timothy Rood, for accepting this edited book for publication in the journal's Supplements, and especially the supervisory editor of the Supplements, John Marincola, for the extremely helpful guidance and valuable assistance in the final stages of the publication process.

Each chapter is autonomous and includes a self-standing bibliography, but all have benefitted from discussion during the conference and from subsequent exchanges of emails and texts. The Covid-19 pandemic has certainly made our work more challenging, especially because of limited access to libraries, but we hope that our efforts have produced something that will benefit Herodotean and Homeric scholars. If the book manages to stimulate further thoughts or provoke some constructive reaction, it will have accomplished its principal objective.

I. M.

*Siena, October 2021*





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## TRUTH, FICTION, AND AUTHORITY IN HERODOTUS' BOOK 8\*

Giulia Donelli

This paper explores Herodotus' reception and exploitation of poetic frames of truth and fiction in Book 8 of the *Histories*.<sup>1</sup> Homeric influences operating on the level of diction, content, and narrative *topoi* have been identified repeatedly in the last four books of his oeuvre.<sup>2</sup> A convincing analogy has also been drawn in scholarship between Odysseus on the one hand, and both Herodotus<sup>3</sup> and Themistocles<sup>4</sup> on the other. It is within this broader framework that I seek to devote attention to a not yet fully explored case of poetic intertextuality found at the outset of Book 8. It is my hope to show that unravelling this case more explicitly will enrich our appreciation and understanding of Herodotus' narrative of the sea battles.

\* I am grateful to the faculty and students at the VIU Advanced Seminar in the Humanities 2015–16 for their comments on an earlier version of this work, and especially to Willy Cingano and Giambattista D'Alessio for their guidance. I have profited greatly from the feedback I received on a much developed version of the paper at the Workshop 'Herodotus and Homer: A Reappraisal' held in Newcastle in 2019. My special thanks go to Ivan Matijašić for his generous help and advice. I also wish to thank the anonymous reviewers of *Histos* for their constructive criticism. The responsibility for all the arguments presented in the paper is solely my own.

<sup>1</sup> I follow scholarly convention and refer to the second Artemisium *logos* and the Salamis *logos* as Book 8, even though the subdivision of Herodotus' work in nine books is obviously not the author's (see, e.g., Hornblower (2013) 1–2). This account is after all a coherent narrative unit: see Herodotus' own words at Hdt. 7.139ff., and Asheri–Vannicelli (2003) 9–11.

<sup>2</sup> Cf., e.g., Brown (1983) 27; Masaracchia (1977) 9–10 and 12; Flower–Marincola (2002) 4f.; Irwin (2011) 397, 404 and 408; Marincola (2018).

<sup>3</sup> Marincola (2007).

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Asheri–Vannicelli (2003) 19; A. M. Bowie (2007) 144–5; Marincola (2006) 20, after Dewald (1985); Pelling, above, pp. 41, 51–2.

Early in the account of the second Artemisium *logos*, and of the Salamis *logos*, Herodotus refers to the feat of the diver Scyllias, who is said (λέγεται, 8.8.3) to have covered a distance of eighty stadia underwater when defecting from the Persian to the Greek side. Herodotus rejects the story as implausible, arguing that the diver in fact made use of a boat to cross the strait from Aphetae to Artemisium. In dismissing the story, he provides his own, prose version of a well-known poetic statement:<sup>5</sup>

λέγεται μὲν νυν καὶ ἄλλα ψευδέσι ἕκελα περὶ τοῦ ἀνδρὸς τούτου, τὰ δὲ μετεξέτερα ἀληθέα· περὶ μέντοι τούτου γνώμη μοι ἀποδεδέχθω πλοῖω μιν ἀπικέσθαι ἐπὶ τὸ Ἄρτεμίσιον.

**This is not the only implausible tale that is told about Scyllias (although there are some true stories too)**, but, as far as this incident is concerned, I hereby state that in my opinion he went to Artemisium by boat.<sup>6</sup>

Closely comparable though syntactically different lines are attested in Hesiodic, Homeric, and Theognidean poetry.<sup>7</sup> In what follows, I propose to assess the relevance of this spectrum of tradition to Herodotus' version of the statement: what is the quality and extent of his legacy to poetic frames of truth and fiction?

I shall argue that although *prima facie* applied to a specific context, the statement could be interpreted as relevant to the ensuing narrative of Artemisium and Salamis more broadly. This narrative in fact addresses in a particularly pointed way the issues involved in getting to the truth: a remarkable series of episodes showcases deception, false or potentially ambiguous stories, ambivalent characters, and manipulation of visual and acoustic evidence.

The representation of sight and hearing as subject to manipulation, and thus unreliable tools for the interpretation of historical events, has implications for the epistemological grounds of Herodotus' own 'methodology', as

<sup>5</sup> The adjective ἕκελος is poetic and rare in prose; for a discussion of words from the same semantic field in Herodotus see Zelnick-Abramovitz (2007) 64–7.

<sup>6</sup> All translations are by Waterfield (1998).

<sup>7</sup> Hes. *Th.* 27–8: ἴδμεν ψεύδεα πολλὰ λέγειν ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα, | ἴδμεν δ' εὖτ' ἐθέλωμεν ἀληθέα γηρύσασθαι; Hom. *Od.* 19.203: ἴσκε ψεύδεα πολλὰ λέγων ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα; Thgn. 713: οὐδ' εἰ ψεύδεα μὲν ποιοῖς ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα. Cf. below, §4.

outlined elsewhere in the *Histories*: it amounts, potentially, to an implicit challenging of *ᾄψις* and *ἀκοή*. If set against the reshaping of this poetic statement, however, it could be interpreted as part of a broader rhetorical strategy, aimed at reinforcing Herodotus' authority and persuasiveness (*πιθανότης*),<sup>8</sup> by making his *γνώμη* emerge as a most valuable principle to assess the truth of transmitted *logoi*.

In order to make this case, I start by surveying two programmatic passages, out of many scattered throughout the *Histories*, that exemplify the methodological framework of Herodotus' historical research. I then focus on the quality of the narrative of Artemisium and Salamis more specifically, and on the 'poetic' statement found at its outset. Since the line is attested in the poetry of both Hesiod and Homer, I review some of the passages where Herodotus engages openly with them. Finally, I explore the possible implications of this statement against the background of the preceding poetic and prose tradition, and its relevance to Book 8 more broadly.

### **1. Herodotus' 'Method': *ᾄψις*, *γνώμη*, *ἱστορίη*, and *ἀκοή***

Herodotus is notoriously an extremely intrusive narrator,<sup>9</sup> who intervenes repeatedly with methodological remarks in different sections of his work. Although his historical method is not a consistent one, at least by modern standards, his references to his own activity of *ἱστορίη* still reveal a complex of analytical procedures.<sup>10</sup>

Besides the obvious case of the proem,<sup>11</sup> the Egyptian *logos* undoubtedly stands out for its richness in programmatic statements.<sup>12</sup> Within it Herodotus refers to his criteria of *ᾄψις*, *γνώμη*, *ἱστορίη* and *ἀκοή* (2.99.1):

<sup>8</sup> On intertextuality as enhancing the persuasiveness of a narrative, see Pelling, above, p. 46

<sup>9</sup> Dewald (1987). On 'meta-historiē' in Herodotus see Luraghi (2006).

<sup>10</sup> Asheri (2005) xxxvii.

<sup>11</sup> On the nature of programmatic statements as 'first bids, ones that can be renounced as the work goes on', with special reference to the proem, see Pelling (2018) 199.

<sup>12</sup> Herodotus' authorial persona in the Egyptian *logos* is characterised by a strong polemical stance towards tradition and towards his predecessors: Homer, of course, but Hecataeus too, who in this *logos* is mentioned once (2.143.1–4), and only to be criticised (cf. Lloyd (1989) 21). Elsewhere, Hecataeus is portrayed in a much more positive light (5.36, 125–6; 6.137). See, e.g., Vannicelli (2001) 211 and Cartledge–Greenwood (2002) 354f. On Herodotus' 'loquacity in talking about his job' in Book 2, see Luraghi (2009) 443.

μέχρι μὲν τούτου ὄψις τε ἐμὴ καὶ γνώμη καὶ ἱστορίη ταῦτα λέγουσά ἐστι,  
τὸ δὲ ἀπὸ τοῦδε Αἰγυπτίους ἔρχομαι λόγους ἐρέων κατὰ τὰ ἤκουον·  
προσέεται δέ τι αὐτοῖσι καὶ τῆς ἐμῆς ὄψις.

So far my account of Egypt has been dictated by my own observation, judgement and investigation, but from now on I will be relating Egyptian accounts, supplemented by what I personally saw.

As seen by Lloyd, ὄψις here is highlighted as the principal source for the narrative up to this point,<sup>13</sup> followed by γνώμη and ἱστορίη. The former is employed in contexts where Herodotus tries to establish the truthfulness of reported traditions on the grounds of data that he is able to assess,<sup>14</sup> while ἱστορίη denotes the inquiries, the questions raised by the investigation of hearsay.<sup>15</sup> An implication of the statement in 2.99.1 is therefore that, for the ensuing narrative, Herodotus' stance on the information gathered through ἀκοή will inevitably be more passive.<sup>16</sup>

An understanding of sight (ὄψις) as reinforcing the reliability of the narrative emerges elsewhere in the *Histories*, most obviously in Herodotus' emphatic references to the eyewitness quality (αὐτόπτης) of his own or his informants' account.<sup>17</sup>

In the exchange with Gyges in Book 1, Candaules contends that 'ears are less trustworthy than eyes' (1.8.2: ὦτα γὰρ τυγχάνει ἀνθρώποισι ἔοντα ἀπιστότερα ὀφθαλμῶν).<sup>18</sup> Indeed, the lesser trustworthiness of hearing also

<sup>13</sup> See Lloyd (1989) xviii, after von Fritz (1967) 158. Lloyd *ibid.* quotes examples for how, within the Egyptian *logos*, ὄψις is often used to support Herodotus' arguments for accepting or rejecting traditions.

<sup>14</sup> The employment of the 'technique' of γνώμη is often signalled by the occurrence of verbs like δοκέω: cf. Lloyd (1989) xviii and e.g. Hdt. 2.2; 2.43; 2.50–6.

<sup>15</sup> See Lloyd (1989) xix; Nesselrath (2017) 183–4; and Nikolaiu-Arabatzi (2018) 224–8 for a recent analysis of ἱστορίη and ἱστορέειν.

<sup>16</sup> Lloyd (1989) xix.

<sup>17</sup> See esp. Hdt. 2.29, 131.1, with Nesselrath (2017) 192; 3.115; 4.16. On Herodotus' use of 'claims about the visibility of what he describes [...] to substantiate his arguments' and his use of terminology suggesting that for him 'the visual is associated with the acquisition of knowledge' see Harman (2018) 272, after Thomas (2000) 190–212, 221–8, 249–69. Similarly, Clay (2007) 236; Katz Anhalt (2008) 277. On autopsy in Greek historiography, see Nenci (1955) esp. 30–1 and Schepens (1980).

<sup>18</sup> On the tale of Candaules and Gyges, see e.g. Katz Anhalt (2008); Nesselrath (2017) 185; A. M. Bowie (2018) 25–8; Harman (2018) 273–4, and Pelling, above, pp. 47–8. Contrast



finds other parallels in the oeuvre: Herodotus explicitly expresses scepticism against it on at least another occasion (2.123.1), and yet forcefully asserts his duty to preserve reported traditions. In a famous passage from Book 7 he maintains that if necessity coerces him to report 'what is said', it does not, however, bind him to believe it (7.152.3):<sup>19</sup>

ἐγὼ δὲ ὀφείλω λέγειν τὰ λεγόμενα, πείθεσθαί γε μὲν οὐ παντάπασιν ὀφείλω (καί μοι τοῦτο τὸ ἔπος ἐχέτω ἐς πάντα τὸν λόγον).

I am obliged to record the things I am told, but I am certainly not required to believe them—this remark may be taken to apply to the whole of my account.

Herodotus seems here to distance himself from his own narrative when based on τὰ λεγόμενα. His γνώμη thus emerges, implicitly, as autonomous from transmitted traditions, and as a prominent tool of evaluation of the information gathered through ἀκοή.

And yet, it is not only the reliability of hearsay that can be challenged in the *Histories*: as I explore below, ὄψις too can be represented as subject to misinterpretation or distortion.<sup>20</sup>

Therefore, although ὄψις, γνώμη, and ἱστορίη should ideally be combined to produce a most accurate account,<sup>21</sup> as Herodotus states in 2.99.1, it is γνώμη, the autonomous assessment and interpretation of what is seen and heard, that emerges, implicitly, as the ultimate tool of evaluation of the information collected by the historian.

The importance of γνώμη comes to the fore at the beginning of Herodotus' narrative of Artemisium and Salamis, through a statement that, I propose to argue, has broader implications on the narrative than its immediate context of occurrence might suggest. A number of passages from this narrative in particular seem in fact to challenge and problematise ἀκοή, but also and especially ὄψις, as valuable principles for the interpretation of historical events.

Xerxes' statement at Hdt. 7.39: εὖ νυν τόδ' ἐξεπίστασο, ὡς ἐν τοῖσι ὡσὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων οἰκέει ὁ θυμός, κτλ.

<sup>19</sup> On this passage, see most recently Pelling (2018) 203–5.

<sup>20</sup> See my survey of examples from Book 8 below and Nesselrath (2017) 194–5.

<sup>21</sup> Nesselrath (2017) 184.

## 2. Problematising Truth in Book 8 of the *Histories*

The elusiveness and partiality of human knowledge are recurrent themes in the *Histories*, fundamental to Herodotus' construction of historical meaning throughout the oeuvre, and obviously at home in the context of a war narrative.

Yet Book 8 in particular is characterised by a searching approach to the problem of attaining historical truth. The narrative presents us with characters who, despite being eyewitnesses, are deceived in what they see (8.87–8); characters who do not trust the words of eyewitnesses who are in fact reporting the truth (8.79–82); or characters manipulating visual and acoustic evidence to their own advantage (8.24–5). Clandestine meetings instigated by Themistocles, held behind the backs of the rest of the Greeks, run through the *logos* like a *fil rouge* (8.4–5, 57–8, 75, 79–80, 110);<sup>22</sup> different episodes of deception and stratagems are told (8.27–8); false or potentially ambiguous stories (8.54–5)<sup>23</sup> are recounted, to be sometimes rejected by Herodotus (8.118–20), sometimes left to the audience's judgement.

Herodotus' representation of characters engaged in investigations akin to his own activity of *ἱστορίη* is a matter that has of course already attracted scholarly attention. It has been observed how several kingly figures are portrayed in the narrative as inquirers who display linguistic, geographical, or ethnographical interests comparable to Herodotus' own,<sup>24</sup> and how some episodes, including two from Book 8 in particular (8.87 and 8.90), draw into focus reflections on 'the nature of historical recording and judgement'.<sup>25</sup> But beyond allowing Herodotus to thematise the issues involved in historiographical practice, several incidents in Book 8 seem in fact to undermine the grounds of two of his historiographical criteria, namely sight and hearing.

To begin with sight (*ὄψις*), it emerges as a deceptive tool for the anticipation and evaluation of historical events at the very outset of the narrative on Artemisium. In *seeing* the limited size of the Greek fleet in

<sup>22</sup> A. M. Bowie (2007) 93.

<sup>23</sup> See A. M. Bowie (2007) 141 on the story of 'the new shoot from Athena's olive tree' as 'an instructive and ambiguous one'.

<sup>24</sup> Christ (1994).

<sup>25</sup> A. M. Bowie (2009) 174. See also Grethlein (2009).

comparison to the size of their own, the Persians assume that they shall win an easy victory (8.10.1):<sup>26</sup>

*ὄρέοντες* δέ σφεας οἷ τε ἄλλοι στρατιῶται οἱ Ξέρξεω καὶ οἱ στρατηγοὶ ἐπιπλέοντας νηυσὶ ὀλίγησι, πάγχυ σφι μανίην ἐπενείκοντες ἀνήγον καὶ αὐτοὶ τὰς νέας, ἐλπίσαντές σφεας εὐπετέως αἰρήσειν, οἰκότα κάρτα ἐλπίσαντες, τὰς μὲν γε τῶν Ἑλλήνων ὄρέοντες ὀλίγας νέας, τὰς δὲ ἑωυτῶν πλήθει τε πολλαπλησίας καὶ ἄμεινον πλωούσας. καταφρονήσαντες ταῦτα ἐκυκλοῦντο αὐτοὺς ἐς μέσον.

When Xerxes' troops and their commanders **saw** the small number of Greeks ships bearing down on them, they were certain that the Greeks must have gone mad. They too put to sea, expecting an easy victory—not an unreasonable hope, since they could **see** that their ships far outnumbered the Greeks' and were more manoeuvrable too. And so they confidently set about encircling the Greek fleet.

The ensuing events, however, prove them wrong (8.15.1):

*τρίτη* δὲ ἡμέρη δεινόν τι ποιησάμενοι οἱ στρατηγοὶ τῶν βαρβάρων νέας οὕτω σφι ὀλίγας λυμαίνεσθαι καὶ τὸ ἀπὸ Ξέρξεω δειμαίνοντες οὐκ ἀνέμειναν ἔτι τοὺς Ἑλληνας μάχης ἄρξαι, ἀλλὰ παρασκευασάμενοι κατὰ μέσον ἡμέρης ἀνήγον τὰς νέας.

The Persian commanders were angry at the harm done them by such a small number of ships, and they were also afraid of how Xerxes would react, so on the third day they stopped waiting for the Greeks to initiate the fighting and instead, at midday, when their preparations were complete, they put to sea.

The Persians incorrectly interpret the visual evidence available to them in the here and now, and thus respond by making inappropriate practical decisions.

When it comes to reconstructing the 'truth' of past historical events, the Persians' ability to make sense of visual evidence proves equally inadequate: the account of their tour of the battlefield at Thermopylae, which follows shortly after in the narrative, also problematises *ὄψις*. The scene has been

<sup>26</sup> Cf. also Nesselrath (2017) 193.

aptly and yet quite unsuccessfully manipulated by Xerxes to make it such that the totality of casualties on the Persian side would not be seen by the sailors, and the Persian dead would thus appear to be far less numerous than the Greek ones (8.24.1):

ἐνθαῦτα δὲ τούτων ἐόντων, Ξέρξης ἐτοιμασάμενος τὰ περὶ τοὺς νεκροὺς ἔπεμπε εἰς τὸν ναυτικὸν στρατὸν κήρυκα. προετοιμάσατο δὲ τάδε· ὅσοι τοῦ στρατοῦ τοῦ ἐωυτοῦ ἦσαν νεκροὶ ἐν Θερμοπύλῃσι (ἦσαν δὲ καὶ δύο μυριάδες), ὑπολιπόμενος τούτων ὡς χιλίους, τοὺς λοιποὺς τάφρους ὀρυξάμενος ἔθαψε, φυλλάδα τε ἐπιβαλὼν καὶ γῆν ἐπαμησάμενος, **ἵνα μὴ ὀφθείησαν** ὑπὸ τοῦ ναυτικοῦ στρατοῦ.

While they were there a man arrived with a message from Xerxes for the fleet. Now Xerxes had made some prior arrangements as regards the bodies of the men from his army who had died at Thermopylae. About twenty thousand men had fallen there, but he left about a thousand of the corpses and buried the rest in mass graves, which he covered with earth and leaves **to disguise them** from the fleet.

Indeed, the sailors do realise that the picture has been manipulated, but they are still wrong in assuming that the dead there lying are only Spartans and Thespians, while they are actually *looking* at helots too (8.25.1–2):

πάντες δὲ ἠπιστέατο τοὺς κειμένους εἶναι πάντας Λακεδαιμονίους καὶ Θεσπιάας, **ὀρέοντες** καὶ τοὺς εἴλωτας. οὐ μὲν οὐδ' ἐλάνθανε τοὺς διαβεβηκότας Ξέρξης ταῦτα πρήξας περὶ τοὺς νεκροὺς τοὺς ἐωυτοῦ, κτλ.

Everyone was convinced that all the enemy corpses lying there were Lacedaemonians and Thespians, but in fact **they were also seeing** helots. None of the men who had come over from Euboea were taken in by Xerxes' ridiculous ploy with the bodies of his men, etc.

In the immediately ensuing story, narrated in flashback, ὄψις again proves untrustworthy as an epistemological tool for assessing the situation at hand and coping with it accordingly. The Thessalians react with horror *at the sight* of those who are in fact nothing but Phocians covered in chalk, and mistakenly assume that their enemy is some kind of a *τέρας* instead (8.27.4):

τούτους ὦν αἶ τε φυλακαὶ τῶν Θεσσαλῶν πρῶται ἰδοῦσαι ἐφοβήθησαν, δόξασαι ἀλλοῖόν τι εἶναι τέρας, κτλ.

First the Thessalian sentries and then the main army became terrified at **the sight of** the Phocians, and thought they were seeing something supernatural and ominous, etc.

The case of Artemisia's deeds in the course of the sea-battle at Salamis perhaps most pointedly thematises the deceptiveness and elusiveness of sight as a valuable tool for the interpretation of unfolding historical events. The scene is inserted in the wider context of Xerxes' *watching* (θεήσασθαι, 8.69 and 86) from a hill what he (mistakenly) anticipates will be a decisive victory at sea.<sup>27</sup> First, Artemisia's exploits are utterly misinterpreted, to her own advantage, by the captain of the Attic ship who is chasing her (8.87.2–4):

ἐπειδὴ γὰρ ἐς θόρυβον πολλὸν ἀπίκετο τὰ βασιλέος πρήγματα, ἐν τούτῳ τῷ καιρῷ ἢ νηὺς ἢ Ἀρτεμισίης ἐδιώκετο ὑπὸ νεὸς Ἀττικῆς· καὶ ἢ οὐκ ἔχουσα διαφυγεῖν (ἔμπροσθε γὰρ αὐτῆς ἦσαν ἄλλαι νέες φίλιαι, ἢ δὲ αὐτῆς πρὸς τῶν πολεμίων μάλιστα ἐτύγχανε εἶναι), ἔδοξέ οἱ τόδε ποιῆσαι, τὸ καὶ συνήνεικε ποιησάσῃ· διωκομένη γὰρ ὑπὸ τῆς Ἀττικῆς φέρουσα ἐνέβαλε νηὶ φιλίῃ ἀνδρῶν τε Καλυνδέων καὶ αὐτοῦ ἐπιπλέοντος τοῦ Καλυνδέων βασιλέος Δαμασιθύμου. [3] Εἰ μὲν <νυν> καὶ τι νεῖκος πρὸς αὐτόν <οἱ> ἐγεγόνεε ἔτι περὶ Ἑλλήσποντον ἑόντων, οὐ μέντοι <ἔγωγε> ἔχω γε εἰπεῖν, οὔτε εἰ ἐκ προνοίης αὐτὰ ἐποίησε, οὔτε εἰ συνεκύρησε ἢ τῶν Καλυνδέων κατὰ τύχην παραπεσοῦσα νηὺς. [4] ὡς δὲ ἐνέβαλέ τε καὶ κατέδυσε, εὐτυχίῃ χρησαμένη διπλὰ ἑωυτὴν ἀγαθὰ ἐργάσατο· ὃ τε γὰρ τῆς Ἀττικῆς νεὸς τριήραρχος ὡς εἶδέ μιν ἐμβάλλουσαν νηὶ ἀνδρῶν βαρβάρων, νομίσας τὴν νέα τὴν Ἀρτεμισίης ἢ Ἑλληνίδα εἶναι ἢ αὐτομολέειν ἐκ τῶν βαρβάρων καὶ αὐτοῖσι ἀμύνειν, ἀποστρέψας πρὸς ἄλλας ἐτράπετο.

It so happened that in the midst of the general confusion of the Persian fleet, Artemisia's ship was being chased by one from Attica. She found it impossible to escape, because the way ahead was blocked by friendly ships, and hostile ships were particularly close to hers, so she decided on

<sup>27</sup> On the 'theatricality' of this scene, see Katz Anhalt (2008) 272–3. Harman (2018) 276 remarks on the 'self-important way in which Xerxes views', which contributes to the 'ironic punch of the narrative'. On Xerxes' role as spectator in other scenes of the *Histories*, see Harman (2018) 277 n. 19.

a plan which in fact did her a lot of good. With the Attic ship close astern, she bore down on and rammed one of the ships from her own side, which was crewed by men from Calynda and had on board Damasithymus, the king of Calynda. Now, I cannot say whether she and Damasithymus had fallen out while they were based at the Hellespont, or whether this action of hers was premeditated, or whether the Calyndian ship just happened to be in the way at the time. In any case, she found that by ramming it and sinking it she created for herself a double piece of good fortune. In the first place, when the captain of the Attic ship **saw** her ramming an enemy vessel, he assumed that Artemisia's ship was either Greek, or was a defector from the Persians fighting on his side, so he changed course and turned to attack the other ships.

Then, the Persian king's entourage, and in fact Xerxes himself, equally mistakenly construe Artemisia's deeds (8.88.2):<sup>28</sup>

λέγεται γὰρ βασιλέα **θηεύμενον** μαθεῖν τὴν νέα ἐμβάλλουσαν, καὶ δὴ τινα εἰπεῖν τῶν παρεόντων· “Δέσποτα, **ὄρα**ς Ἀρτεμισίην ὡς εὖ ἀγωνίζεται καὶ νέα τῶν πολεμίων κατέδυσε;” καὶ τὸν ἐπειρέσθαι εἰ ἀληθέως ἐστὶ Ἀρτεμισίης τὸ ἔργον, καὶ τοὺς φάναι, σαφέως τὸ ἐπίσημον τῆς νεὸς ἐπισταμένους· τὴν δὲ διαφθαρεῖσαν ἠπιστέατο εἶναι πολεμίην.

It is reported that as Xerxes was watching the battle he **noticed** her ship ramming the other vessel, and one of his entourage said, ‘Master, **can you see** how well Artemisia is fighting? Look, she has sunk an enemy ship!’ Xerxes asked if it was really Artemisia, and they confirmed it was, because they could recognize the insignia on her ship, and therefore assumed that the ship she had destroyed was one of the enemy's.

Visual evidence is thus repeatedly represented as deceptive, or easy to distort, in the narrative of Book 8.<sup>29</sup>

To a lesser extent, the reliability of *ἀκοή* is also implicitly challenged in episodes that involve the manipulation or misinterpretation of what is heard or reported. A relevant incident comes in Themistocles' appropriation of

<sup>28</sup> On how in this context ‘Xerxes’ failure to get the facts straight throws into relief the accuracy of Herodotus’ account’ see Grethlein (2009) 208–9.

<sup>29</sup> For other examples of distortion of visual evidence in the *Histories* see Nesselrath (2017) 194–5.

what were in fact Mnesiphilus' thoughts and words to persuade Eurybiades not to sail away from Salamis (8.58.2):<sup>30</sup>

ἐνθαῦτα ὁ Θεμιστοκλέης παριζόμενος οἱ καταλέγει ἐκεῖνά τε πάντα τὰ ἤκουσε Μνησιφίλου, ἑωυτοῦ ποιούμενος, καὶ ἄλλα πολλὰ προστιθείς.

So Themistocles sat down and **recounted Mnesiphilus' arguments as if they were his own**, and added some new points as well.<sup>31</sup>

Indeed, it is not factual truth that is at stake here: Mnesiphilus' words are nothing but a warning about (however likely) *potential* outcomes. Yet emphasis is placed on how easily and deliberately Themistocles plagiarises what he has in fact heard from someone else (πάντα τὰ ἤκουσε Μνησιφίλου, ἑωυτοῦ ποιούμενος), manipulating it to his own advantage.

His exchange with Aristides in 8.79–83 then contextually challenges the reliability of both ἀκοή and ὄψις. Aristides comes as an eyewitness (αὐτόπτης) to inform Themistocles that the Greeks are being surrounded by the Persians (8.79.4):

‘ἐγὼ γὰρ αὐτόπτης τοι λέγω γενόμενος ὅτι νῦν οὐδ’ ἦν θέλωσι Κορίνθιοί τε καὶ αὐτὸς Εὐρυβιάδης οἰοί τε ἔσσονται ἐκπλῶσαι· περιεχόμεθα γὰρ ὑπὸ τῶν πολεμίων κύκλω. ἀλλ’ ἐσελθὼν σφι ταῦτα σήμερον.’

‘I can assure you of that, because **I’ve seen the reason for myself**. Neither the Corinthians nor Eurybiades will be able to sail away from here, because we are surrounded by the enemy. You’d better go back into the meeting and tell them the news.’

Themistocles, aware that the rest of the Greeks would not trust him, encourages Aristides to report the news himself (8.80). The Greeks, however, still refuse to believe the news, even though they come from an actual eyewitness (8.81):

ταῦτα ἔλεγε παρελθὼν ὁ Ἀριστείδης, φάμενος ἐξ Αἰγίνης τε ἦκειν καὶ μόγισ διεκπλῶσαι λαθὼν τοὺς ἐπορμόντας· περιέχεσθαι γὰρ πᾶν τὸ

<sup>30</sup> See A. M. Bowie (2007) 144–5 for an understanding of this scene as entertaining ‘an intratextual relation with the assembly in *Iliad* 2’, and Pelling, above, pp. 51–2.

<sup>31</sup> Translation adapted from Waterfield (1998).

στρατόπεδον τὸ Ἑλληνικὸν ὑπὸ τῶν νεῶν τῶν Ξέρξεω παραρτέεσθαι τε συνεβούλευε ὡς ἀλεξήσομένους. καὶ ὁ μὲν ταῦτα εἶπας μετεστήκεε, τῶν δὲ αὐτῆς ἐγένετο λόγων ἀμφισβασίη· οἱ γὰρ πλείονες τῶν στρατηγῶν οὐκ ἐπίθοντο τὰ ἔσαγγελθέντα.

So Aristides went in to the Greek commanders. He told them that the Greek navy was entirely surrounded by Xerxes' fleet—so much that **on his way from Aegina** he had only just managed to slip past the enemy blockade—and he advised them to get ready to face an attack. Afterwards, he left the meeting. Then the arguments began all over again, because most of the commanders **did not believe the news**.

Ultimately, they are persuaded only by the arrival of a ship bringing ‘the whole truth’ (8.82.1).

ἀπιστεόντων δὲ τούτων ἦκε τριήρης ἀνδρῶν Τηνίων αὐτομολέουσα ... ἣ περ δὴ ἔφερε τὴν ἀληθείην πᾶσαν.

Just then, **while they were still inclined to disbelieve** Aristides' report, a crew of Tenian deserters [...] brought their trireme into Salamis. They were able to give the Greeks **a complete and accurate account** of the situation.

The representation of characters either utterly misled by sight and hearing in their interpretation of the unfolding historical events, or unwilling to trust the sight and hearing of others, problematises two of the grounds upon which Herodotus constructs the authority of his account throughout the *Histories*.

The characterisation of some prominent figures as conspicuously ambiguous also contributes to the conjuring of an atmosphere of deception and ambivalence. Themistocles is of course bribed as much as he bribes (8.5), and acts ‘with a view to two results’ (8.22.3: ἐπ’ ἀμφότερα νοέων). Artemisia, as seen above, kills two birds with one stone in the course of the sea-battle (8.87.4: εὐτυχίῃ χρησαμένη διπλὰ ἑωυτὴν ἀγαθὰ ἐργάσατο). The speech that Alexander of Macedon delivers to the Athenians is a spiralling masterpiece of double-talk rhetoric (8.140).<sup>32</sup>

<sup>32</sup> On the complexity and ambiguity of Alexander, see Vannicelli (2013) 68.



Herodotus' narrative almost subliminally elicits a rejection of the senses as valuable epistemological tools by representing their ineffectiveness in the context of historical events. While some single, outstanding characters take advantage of such a state of things, almost everyone else in the narrative is more or less helpless in the face of the partiality of human perception. Not Herodotus, of course: it is precisely his status as authoritative narrator that enables him to represent and highlight such helplessness in the first place.<sup>33</sup>

In what follows, I shall suggest that Herodotus' reworking of a poetic statement that thematises the distinction between lies and truth is aimed at enhancing his authorial authority at the outset of Book 8. Such enhancement might in fact be all the more needed at this specific point in the narrative: for not only does Herodotus' account of Artemisium and Salamis draw attention to the difficulties involved in attaining the truth, but this account itself was arguably only one of many competing accounts claiming to represent truthfully recent historical events.

### 3. Hesiod and Homer in the *Histories*

As mentioned above, Herodotus' statement in 8.8.3 finds parallels in the poetry of Hesiod, Homer, and Theognis. The former two are explicitly named in the *Histories*: a short detour into these explicit references can shed light on Herodotus' stance towards them, and provide a background to his reshaping of the line attested in the output of both.

Hesiod is introduced only twice, always in association with Homer. On the first occasion, Herodotus remarks on their role in the making of the Greek *theogoniē* (2.53.2):

ἔνθεν δὲ ἐγένετο ἕκαστος τῶν θεῶν, εἴτε δὴ αἰεὶ ἦσαν πάντες, ὁκοῖοί τε  
τινες τὰ εἶδεα, οὐκ ἠπιστέατο μέχρι οὗ πρώην τε καὶ χθὲς ὡς εἰπεῖν λόγῳ.  
Ἡσίοδον γὰρ καὶ Ὅμηρον ἠλικίην τετρακοσίοισι ἔτεσι δοκέω μέο  
πρεσβυτέρους γενέσθαι καὶ οὐ πλέοσι· οὗτοι δὲ εἰσι οἱ ποιήσαντες  
θεογονίην Ἑλλήσι καὶ τοῖσι θεοῖσι τὰς ἐπωνυμίας δόντες καὶ τιμὰς τε καὶ

<sup>33</sup> See Thomas (2018) 267 on how 'the false stories connected with the Persian Wars which Herodotus tells in order to refute them make it intriguingly clear that Herodotus was alert to "false stories" about any period, showing his judgement as an impartial historian and narrator'. On how some Herodotean tales thematise 'the unreliability of visual perception' and thereby 'address a tension in Herodotus' own methodology between the use of visual evidence to corroborate historiographical assertions and the difficulty of interpreting such evidence correctly', see Katz Anhalt (2008) 277.

*τέχνας διελόντες καὶ εἶδεα αὐτῶν σημήναντες. οἱ δὲ πρότερον ποιηταὶ λεγόμενοι τούτων τῶν ἀνδρῶν γενέσθαι ὕστερον, ἔμοιγε δοκέειν, ἐγένοντο.*

However, it was only yesterday or the day before, so to speak, that the Greeks came to know the provenance of each of the gods, and whether they have all existed for ever, and what they each look like. After all, I think that Hesiod and Homer lived no more than four hundred years before my time, and they were the ones who created the gods' family trees for the Greek world, gave them their names, assigned them their honours and areas of expertise, and told us what they looked like. Any poets who are supposed to have lived before Homer and Hesiod actually came after them, in my opinion. Of the last two opinions, the first is the view of the priestesses at Dodona, but the second—the bit about Hesiod and Homer—is my own opinion.

The poets are here held up as founding authorities for the Greeks' beliefs.<sup>34</sup> In emphasising how recent Greek religious traditions are in comparison to Egyptian ones, Herodotus takes the opportunity to express his opinion on Hesiod's and Homer's chronology. His dating can be seen as bearing a programmatic value: by placing Homer 'midway' between the Trojan War and his own time, Herodotus seems to undertake 'a careful balancing act between distance and appropriation'.<sup>35</sup> Homer is the closest extant source to the heroic past,<sup>36</sup> but still not so close to it as to be taken as fully reliable.

When naming both poets again in Book 4, Herodotus comments on their references to the Hyperboreans (4.32.1):

*Ἵπερβορέων δὲ πέρι ἀνθρώπων οὔτε τι Σκύθαι λέγουσι οὐδὲν οὔτε τινὲς ἄλλοι τῶν ταύτη οἰκημένων, εἰ μὴ ἄρα Ἴσσηδόνες. ὡς δ' ἐγὼ δοκέω, οὐδ' οὗτοι λέγουσι οὐδέν· ἔλεγον γὰρ ἂν καὶ Σκύθαι, ὡς περὶ τῶν μουνοφθάλμων λέγουσι. ἀλλ' Ἡσιόδω μὲν ἐστὶ περὶ Ἵπερβορέων*

<sup>34</sup> Cf., for Homer, Hdt. 2.116–20, discussed by Haywood, above, pp. 62–72. See Nagy (1990) 215 on Hdt. 2.53.2; and most recently Currie (2021) 47–56.

<sup>35</sup> Graziosi (2002) 117–18.

<sup>36</sup> Similarly, Kim (2010) 23 on Thucydides' remarks on the dating of Homer (cf. 1.3.3: *τεκμηριοὶ δὲ μάλιστα Ὅμηρος· πολλῶν γὰρ ὕστερον ἔτι καὶ τῶν Τρωικῶν γενόμενος κτλ.*), less precise than Herodotus' and yet more explicitly programmatic.

εἰρημμένα, ἔστι δὲ καὶ Ὀμήρω ἐν Ἐπιγόνουσι, εἰ δὴ τῷ ἔόντι γε Ὀμηρος ταῦτα τὰ ἔπεα ἐποίησε.

None of the tribes living there, including the Scythians, have anything to say about the Hyperboreans. Perhaps the Issedones do, but I do not think so, because if they did the Scythians would have stories about them too, just as they do about the one-eyed people. Hesiod, however, has mentioned the Hyperboreans, and so has Homer in the *Epigoni* (if indeed Homer really is the author of this poem).

Here Herodotus is drawing a contrast between what the poets maintain and what can be inferred through investigation: this passage can therefore be seen as also bearing programmatic implications, in as much as a difference in terms of methodology between the poets and the historiographer emerges.

Homer is mentioned independently too: on occasion, he figures (not unambiguously) as an authoritative model (2.113–20) and source (4.29) for the historiographer or for characters in his narrative (7.161.3).<sup>37</sup> Elsewhere, and more interestingly for my present purposes, references to his authority can spark discussions on matters of literary criticism.<sup>38</sup> These occur either in the form of remarks concerning the generic difference standing between Herodotus' own work and method and the Homeric epic tradition (2.23, 113–20), or in the form of authorship discussions (2.113–20 and 4.32, quoted above).

Two references to Homer in particular seem to have implications on a programmatic and methodological level.<sup>39</sup> When dealing with the flooding of the Nile,<sup>40</sup> Herodotus briefly touches on the river Ocean, dismissing it as

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Matijašić, above, p. 10; Pelling, above, pp. 48–9; Haywood, above, p. 76.

<sup>38</sup> On evidence for the emergence of literary criticism in Herodotus, see Grintser (2019) and most recently Currie (2021).

<sup>39</sup> I do not address here the issue of Herodotus' reference to Ὀμήρεια ἔπεα in Hdt. 5.67: see Cingano (1985) for discussion and more recently (and briefly) Fantuzzi–Tsagalis (2015) 11–2. Cf. Matijašić, above, p. 7.

<sup>40</sup> See Lloyd (1989) *ad loc.* for this theory being 'that of Hecataeus (*FGrHist* 1 F 302) ... who may have owed something to Euthymenes of Massilia (*FGrHist* 645 F 1(5))'; on Herodotus' rejection of a 'conception of the Oceanus ... based on an older, cosmologically grounded worldview' see Bichler (2018) 140; on how this discussion is 'impressive in its logic even if it reaches the wrong conclusion' see Pelling (2018) 203.

non-existent and attributing the invention of its name and its introduction into poetry ‘to Homer or some older poet’ (2.23):<sup>41</sup>

ὁ δὲ περὶ τοῦ Ὀκεανοῦ λέξας ἐς ἀφανὲς τὸν μῦθον ἀνερείκας οὐκ ἔχει  
ἔλεγχον· οὐ γάρ τινα ἔγωγε οἶδα ποταμὸν Ὀκεανὸν ἑόντα, Ὅμηρον δὲ ἢ  
τινα τῶν πρότερον γενομένων ποιητέων δοκέω τοῦνομα εὐρόντα ἐς ποίησιν  
ἔσεινείκασθαι.

It is impossible to argue against the person who spoke about the Ocean, because the tale is based on something which is obscure and dubious. I do not know of the existence of any River Ocean, and I think that Homer or one of the other poets from past times invented the name and introduced it into his poetry.

Herodotus’ intended targets here are, arguably, prose competitors in the first place:<sup>42</sup> he polemicalises against the idea of making use of the river Ocean, a poetic invention, to explain something about the real world. Yet Homer too is implicitly targeted, for his poetic invention is set against Herodotus’ own method, obviously to the advantage of the latter.<sup>43</sup> The contrast drawn between the level of Herodotus’ own, ‘sure knowledge’ (ἔγωγε οἶδα), and what must remain ἀφανές,<sup>44</sup> and the statement that it is impossible to prove or disprove (οὐκ ἔχει ἔλεγχον) one who relies on ‘data’ extrapolated from Homeric poetry, point to the marking of a generic difference between Herodotus and Homer.

A comparable difference on the methodological and generic level then emerges in the long excursus on Helen’s stay in Egypt during the Trojan War (2.113–20),<sup>45</sup> where Herodotus famously reports a version of the ‘Helen Story’ different from that of the *Iliad*.<sup>46</sup> He presents it as the result of his own

<sup>41</sup> Lloyd (2010) 251 quotes, as *comparanda* to this kind of sceptical expressions, Solon fr. 29 W<sup>2</sup> (πολλὰ ψεύδονται αἰοδοί) and Pind. *Ol.* 1.28–9: ἦ θαύματα πολλά, καὶ πού τι καὶ βροτῶν φάτις ὑπὲρ τὸν ἀλαθῆ λόγον δεδαιδαλμένοι ψεύδεσι ποικίλοις | ἔξαπατῶντι μῦθοι.

<sup>42</sup> On Herodotus’ criticism of Ionian geographers see also Hdt. 4.8 and 4.36, with Corcella (2001) 253 and 262–3. In Hdt. 3.115, Herodotus speaks of the river Eridanus as some poet’s invention, cf. Verdin (1977) 62.

<sup>43</sup> E.g. Verdin (1977) 62; Grethlein (2010) 156.

<sup>44</sup> Marcozzi–Sinatra–Vannicelli (1994) 164 n. 5.

<sup>45</sup> Kim (2010) 30. See de Jong (2012) for a narratological analysis of this set of passages.

<sup>46</sup> See my discussion in Donelli (2016) 12–8.

activity of *ἱστορίη*, and as more authoritative and reliable than the Homeric one on the grounds of the authority and the antiquity of the informants (Egyptian priests who claim as their source the eyewitness Menelaus),<sup>47</sup> and the implausibility of the canonical Homeric narrative (2.120.2–4), which is questioned on the basis of a detailed argument from probability.<sup>48</sup>

Besides questioning Homer's reliability and presenting his own version of the events as, precisely, methodologically and historically more reliable, however, Herodotus contextually defends the poet. He claims that Homer actually knew the 'true' version of the story but decided to stick to his epic poetic purposes;<sup>49</sup> Herodotus thereby builds his argument on a striking acknowledgement of the different degrees of 'suitability' of a story to a given literary genre, according to a criterion that was later to become fundamental in literary criticism.<sup>50</sup>

When engaging explicitly with Hesiod, and, especially, Homer, Herodotus appears therefore to be engaging in methodological and programmatic matters; it is against this background that I shall analyse Homeric and Hesiodic intertextuality in 8.8.3.

#### 4. Poetic (and Prose) Intertextuality

I turn now to a more detailed analysis of the poetic occurrences of the statement echoed by Herodotus in 8.8.3.

In the *Odyssey*, the line figures in the context of Odysseus' meeting with Penelope in Book 19,<sup>51</sup> in the form of a narrator's comment on Odysseus' 'Cretan lies' (19.203):

*ἴσκε ψεύδεα πολλὰ λέγων ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα.*

<sup>47</sup> Kim (2010) 32.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Kim (2010) 32. See Nicolai (2012) esp. 637–8, for a comparison between Herodotus' arguments and oratorical techniques in the *argumentatio*.

<sup>49</sup> Pindar too emphasises Homer's ability to distort the truth, e.g. *Nem.* 7.20ff.

<sup>50</sup> Cf., e.g., Verdin (1977) 61; Boedeker (2000) 105; Graziosi (2002) 113–18; Grintser (2018) 161–6. On generic 'suitability' or 'appropriateness' see Ford (2002) 13–22; on the Latin equivalent of *τὸ πρέπον*, i.e., *decorum*, in ancient literary criticism, especially Horace's *Ars Poetica*, see, e.g., Russell (2006). For a different interpretation of the meaning of *εὐπρεπής* in Hdt. 2.116.1, see Currie (2021) 15–20.

<sup>51</sup> On how Odysseus' encounter with Eumaeus (*Od.* 14.124–7) foreshadows this meeting, see Buongiovanni (2011) 9–15.

Thus he made the many falsehoods of his tale seem like the truth.<sup>52</sup>

The linguistic and syntactical interpretation of this line is problematic, and has been sparking scholarly debate since antiquity.<sup>53</sup> Notwithstanding these difficulties, the authorial stance displayed here bears comparison to Herodotus' own at the outset of Book 8: just as in the *Odyssey* the narrator alerts the audience to the deliberate falsehood of the stories told by one of his characters to another,<sup>54</sup> so does Herodotus highlight for his audience the falsehood of some of the stories circulating about Scyllias (8.8.3). Homeric intertextuality thus increases the persuasiveness and immediacy of his authorial stance by summoning up an earlier, authoritative authorial stance.<sup>55</sup> As seen above, Herodotus' explicit references to Homer can, on occasion, be programmatic in nature. More implicit Homeric echoes can also indeed occur in emphatically programmatic contexts, for one, the proem to the *Histories* (1.5.3–4), which is famously reminiscent of the proem to the *Odyssey* (1.3–4).<sup>56</sup> Homeric intertextuality in 8.8.3 might thus support

<sup>52</sup> Translation by A. T. Murray (1919).

<sup>53</sup> In particular, the meaning of ἴσκει has been the object of discussion since antiquity (Russo (1985) 236): the verb is understood either as equivalent to εἴκαζε, ὁμοίου, or as equivalent to ἔλεγε. The verb occurs in the latter meaning in Hellenistic poetry, though this use might in fact reflect a mistaken reading of *Od.* 22.31 (Russo (1985) 237. West (1966) 163 compares Hom. *Od.* 19.203 and Hes. *Th.* 27, finding the former 'the less satisfactory of the two as Greek, and the less firmly integrated in its context', since 'if ἴσκει is meant in the proper sense 'assimilate', then ὁμοῖα is superfluous, and if it bears the secondary sense 'speak', then λέγων is superfluous'. More recent commentators (e.g., Russo (1985) 236–7; Rutherford (1992) 165–6 take ἴσκει as a form from εἴσκω, 'to make like' (LSJ s.v. εἴσκω), on the grounds of its other occurrences in Homeric poetry (*Il.* 11.799; 16.41; *Od.* 4.279; 22.31).

<sup>54</sup> E.g. Buongiovanni (2011) 11; Rutherford (1992) 165, who remarks on how 'the hero's persuasive falsehoods associate him with the art of the poet'.

<sup>55</sup> Pelling, above, p. 41.

<sup>56</sup> Interestingly, an echo from the proem to the *Odyssey* (πολλῶν δ' ἀνθρώπων ἴδεν ἄστεα καὶ νόον ἔγνω, | πολλὰ δ' ὅ γ' ἐν πόντῳ πάθεν ἄλγεα ὃν κατὰ θυμόν) occurs in Book 19 too, some thirty lines before the narrator's comment on Odysseus' Cretan lies analysed here (19.170). The shared context of occurrence, in Book 19 of the *Odyssey*, of lines echoed by Herodotus in 1.5.3–4 and 8.8.3 respectively, might suggest the programmatic nature of the latter statement. When explicitly taking issue with Homer in a passage that is sometimes (in my opinion, unnecessarily) considered spurious (2.116–17), Herodotus can surely refer to sections from a same book of the *Odyssey* (4.227–30 and 351–2) that, at least in our version of the poem, are separated by a larger number of intervening lines (124) than is the case here. However, the question remains how many readers or listeners, if any, would have managed

the case for an understanding of this authorial statement as also bearing implications on a methodological level for the ensuing narrative, beyond its specific context of occurrence.

In Hesiodic poetry, the line is uttered by the Muses in the proem to the *Theogony* (22–8):<sup>57</sup>

αἶ νύ ποθ' Ἡσίοδον καλὴν ἐδίδαξαν ἀοιδὴν,  
 ἄρνας ποιμαίνονθ' Ἑλικῶνος ὑπο ζαθέοιο.  
 τόνδε δέ με πρώτιστα θεαὶ πρὸς μῦθον ἔειπον,  
 Μοῦσαι Ὀλυμπιάδες, κοῦραι Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο·  
 'ποιμένες ἄγραυλοι, κάκ' ἐλέγχεα, γαστέρες οἶον,  
 ἴδμεν ψεῦδεα πολλὰ λέγειν ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα,  
 ἴδμεν δ' εὖτ' ἐθέλωμεν ἀληθέα γηρῦσασθαι'.

One time, they taught Hesiod beautiful song  
 while he was pasturing lambs under holy Helicon.  
 And this speech the goddesses spoke first of all to me,  
 the Olympian Muses, the daughters of aegis-holding Zeus:  
 'Field-dwelling shepherds, ignoble disgraces, mere bellies:  
 we know how to say many false things similar to genuine ones,  
 but we know, when we wish, how to proclaim true things'.<sup>58</sup>

The interpretation of this passage is much debated in scholarship, though general consensus has it that Hesiod is here contrasting epic 'falsehoods'<sup>59</sup> to his poetry, presented as inspired by the Muses.<sup>60</sup> In the immediately following lines (29–34), Hesiod receives from them a sceptre, a 'divine voice'

to realise this. For arguments in support of the authenticity of Hdt. 2.116–17, see most recently Currie (2021) 10–13.

<sup>57</sup> We might recall here that Hesiod is on one occasion (2.53.2) mentioned in the *Histories* precisely for his role in the making of the Greeks' 'theogony', cf. above, §3.

<sup>58</sup> Translation by Most (2018).

<sup>59</sup> These epic 'falsehoods' have been understood in scholarship either in general terms (e.g., Rutherford (1992) 165; P. Murray (1981) 91, or specifically as *Od.* 19.203 (e.g., Bertelli (2001) 80; Arrighetti (2006) 7–11; Buongiovanni (2011), esp. 14–5, who further connects both passages with *Od.* 14.124–7, cf. above, n. 40). For a detailed discussion see Pucci (2007) 60–9 and (2009) 42–3; Tsagalis (2009) 133–5; Ricciardelli (2018) 106–8, with further bibliography.

<sup>60</sup> Note, with P. Murray (1981) 91, that while Hesiod's Muses contrast true to false knowledge, the Homeric Muses grant knowledge as opposed to ignorance.

(*αὐδὴν θέσπιν*), and instructions to sing of the future, the past, and the eternal gods.<sup>61</sup>

The goddesses play a comparable epistemological role in Homeric poetry (*Il.* 2.485–486):

*ὕμεις γὰρ θεαί ἐστε πάρεστε τε ἴστε τε πάντα,  
ἡμεῖς δὲ κλέος οἶον ἀκούομεν οὐδέ τι ἴδμεν·*

for you are goddesses and are present and know all things,  
but we hear only a rumour and know nothing.<sup>62</sup>

The decisive line here runs between *ἀκοή* and *ᾄψις*,<sup>63</sup> with knowledge attaching unproblematically to the latter. For Herodotus, instead, both criteria are compromised, and the Muses' prerogative in vouching for the truth shifts emphatically to his own *γνώμη* (8.8.3):<sup>64</sup>

*λέγεται μὲν νυν καὶ ἄλλα ψευδέσι ἴκελα περὶ τοῦ ἀνδρὸς τούτου, τὰ δὲ  
μετεξέτερα ἀληθέα· περὶ μέντοι τούτου γνώμη μοι ἀποδεδέχθω πλοῖω μιν  
ἀπικέσθαι ἐπὶ τὸ Ἄρτεμισιον.*

This is not the only implausible tale that is told about Scyllias (although there are some true stories too), but, as far as this incident is concerned, I hereby state that in my opinion he went to Artemisium by boat.

While Hesiod's Muses declare their ability to say plausible things in addition to true things,<sup>65</sup> Herodotus remarks on the implausibility of the stories circulating about Scyllias: his formulation provides the 'converse of the

<sup>61</sup> For an interpretation of this description of the Muses' tasks as representing 'the combined role of poetry and historiography' see Zelnick-Abramovitz (2007) 58.

<sup>62</sup> Translation by A. T. Murray (1925).

<sup>63</sup> Graziosi-Haubold (2005) 44ff. and (2010) 1–8.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Masaracchia (1977) 161.

<sup>65</sup> On *ἐπίμοισιν ὁμοῖα* as meaning 'plausible', see West (1966) 163. Ricciardelli (2018) 108, after Krisher (1965) 163 and 166ff. and Rudhardt (1996) 29–31, understands *ἔτυμος* as indicating a fact that has actually happened, and *ἀληθής* as etymologically indicating a fact that is true because unforgotten, actually happened and transmitted. *Contra* Tsagalis (2009) 133ff., who understands *ἔτυμα* as truths that pertain to the real world, and *ἀληθέα* as eternal truths: he finds support for this hypothesis in the different verbs governing the accusatives, i.e., *λέγειν* and *γηρύσασθαι*.



Hesiodic sense'.<sup>66</sup> 'Converse' Hesiodic intertextuality enables him to appropriate the poetic statement and to claim for his *γνώμη* the epistemological authority to discern historical truth from falsehood. This stance, I suggest, is called for by the challenge to the epistemological reliability of *ᾄσις* and *ἀκοή* 'staged' within the narrative of the sea battles.

In Theognis' poetry, the statement occurs in a set of lines that is syntactically problematic (699–718):

πλήθει δ' ἀνθρώπων ἀρετὴ μία γίνεται ἥδε,  
 πλουτεῖν τῶν δ' ἄλλων οὐδὲν ἄρ' ἦν ὄφελος, 700  
 οὐδ' εἰ σωφροσύνην μὲν ἔχουσ' Ῥαδαμάνθυος αὐτοῦ,  
 πλείονα δ' εἰδείης Σισύφου Αἰολίδεω,  
 ὅστε καὶ ἐξ Αἰδέω πολυϋδρήμισιν ἀνήλθεν  
 πείσας Περσεφόνην αἰμυλλίοισι λόγοις,  
 ἥτε βροτοῖς παρέχει λήθην βλάπτουσα νόοιο— 705  
 ἄλλος δ' οὐπω τις τοῦτο γ' ἐπεφράσατο,  
 ὄντινα δὴ θανάτοιο μέλαν νέφος ἀμφικαλύψῃ,  
 ἔλθῃ δ' ἐς σκιερὸν χῶρον ἀποφθιμένων,  
 κυανέας τε πύλας παραμείψεται, αἵτε θανόντων  
 ψυχὰς εἴργουσιν καίπερ ἀναινομένας· 710  
 ἀλλ' ἄρα κάκειθεν πάλιν ἦλυθε Σίσυφος ἥρωσ  
 ἐς φάος ἡελίου σφῆμισι πολυφροσύναις—  
 οὐδ' εἰ ψεύδεα μὲν ποιοῖς ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοῖα,  
 γλώσσαν ἔχων ἀγαθὴν Νέστορος ἀντιθέου,  
 ὠκύτερος δ' εἴησθα πόδας ταχεῶν Ἄρπυιῶν 715  
 καὶ παίδων Βορέω, τῶν ἄφαρ εἰσὶ πόδες.  
 ἀλλὰ χρὴ πάντας γνώμην ταύτην καταθέσθαι,  
 ὡς πλοῦτος πλείστην πᾶσιν ἔχει δύναμιν.

For the majority of people this alone is best: wealth. Nothing else after all is of use, not even if you have the good judgement of Rhadamanthys himself or know more than Sisyphus, son of Aeolus, who by his wits came up even from Hades, after persuading with wily words Persephone who impairs the mind of mortals and brings them forgetfulness. No one else has ever yet contrived this, once death's dark cloud has enveloped him and he has come to the shadowy place of the dead and passed the black gates which hold back the souls of the dead, for all their protestations. But

<sup>66</sup> West (1966) 163.

even from there the hero Sisyphus returned to the light of the sun by his cleverness. (Nothing else is of use), not even if you compose lies that are like the truth, with the eloquent tongue of godlike Nestor, and were faster of foot than the swift Harpies and the fleet-footed sons of Boreas. No, everyone should store up this thought, that for all people wealth has the greatest power.<sup>67</sup>

As observed by Ferrari, the ‘*ductus*’<sup>68</sup> of the passage, modelled on Tyrtaeus’ fr. 12 W<sup>2</sup>, and characterised by *οὐδ’ εἰ* in anaphora, is first expanded in two relative clauses (703–5), then brought back to Sisyphus via *ἀλλά* (711), then eventually abruptly resumed (*οὐδ’ εἰ* 713), with no apparent logical or syntactical continuity between lines 712 and 713. Ferrari understands these syntactical difficulties as more likely related to the extemporaneous nature of the poetry<sup>69</sup> than to interpolation.

If this interpretation is accepted, the broader context of the occurrence of the line strongly suggests its intertextual relevance to Herodotus’ version of the statement. For in the *Histories*, the story of the diver Scyllias happens to be framed by a series of episodes of bribery and corruption (8.4–5) that corroborate the very *γνώμη* Theognis advises everyone to store up (717–18): that the only drive to human action is, in fact, money.

Indeed, different listeners or readers pick up different intertextualities, beyond the author’s control:<sup>70</sup> yet each of these poetic antecedents involves authorial self-references that draw attention to the author’s privileged access to, or knowledge of, truth as opposed to falsehood.

This poetic line had already been adopted in a prose programmatic context: the proem to Hecataeus’ *Genealogies* (fr. 1 Fowler) has been

<sup>67</sup> Translation by Gerber (1999).

<sup>68</sup> Ferrari (1989) 190 n. 4; see also *ibid.* 191 n. 10, and Henderson (1983) on the long digression on Sisyphus (lines 702–12).

<sup>69</sup> Ferrari (1989) 190 n. 4 quotes as a *comparandum* Achilles’ reply to Odysseus in *Il.* 9.379ff., which presents a similar structure, with *οὐδ’ εἰ* in anaphora, and similar digressions expanding on the main train of thought. On Theognis’ lines, see also Colesanti (2011) 21 n. 61.

<sup>70</sup> Pelling, above, pp. 44–5.

convincingly interpreted<sup>71</sup> as 'interfering' both with Homeric poetry (*Il.* 7.76),<sup>72</sup> and with the same passage from the *Theogony* seen above:

Ἑκαταῖος Μιλήσιος ὧδε μυθεῖται· τάδε γράφω, ὡς μοι δοκεῖ ἀληθέα εἶναι· οἱ γὰρ Ἑλλήνων λόγοι πολλοί τε καὶ γελοῖοι, ὡς ἐμοὶ φαίνονται, εἰσίν.

Hecataeus the Milesian speaks as follows: I write down these things as they seem to me to be true, for the tales of the Greeks are many and ridiculous, as they seem to me.<sup>73</sup>

Unlike Hesiod, however, Hecataeus relies on 'no external authority'<sup>74</sup> to support the truthfulness of his claims: as Fowler remarks, the Muses of Homer and Hesiod 'have been replaced by the personal opinion of the writer'.<sup>75</sup> They seem indeed to have met a comparable fate in Herodotus' *Histories* too. Just as Hecataeus targets the unreliability of the *logoi* of the Greeks, so Herodotus expresses scepticism towards what is reported about Scyllias (λέγεται), thereby challenging the reliability of ἀκοή. Just as Hecataeus places emphasis 'on the relation between opinion (δοκεῖ) and truth (ἀληθέα)', thereby making his personal judgement (δόξα), 'the only truth standard',<sup>76</sup> so does Herodotus assert as such the authority of his γνώμη. And yet, if Hecataeus is taking 'a critical attitude towards tradition ... a step further'<sup>77</sup> than Hesiod is, Herodotus is taking it to the next level still. His appropriation of this poetic programmatic statement is in fact applied not to the Greek mythic tradition, but to a different subject matter entirely: history, and quite recent history at that.

<sup>71</sup> Cf., e.g., Jacoby (1912) 2738; Pearson (1939) 97–89; Bertelli (2001) 81 after Calame (1986) 81; Corcella (1996); Porciani (1997).

<sup>72</sup> Hom. *Il.* 7.76: ὧδε δὲ μυθέομαι, Ζεὺς δ' ἄμι' ἐπιμάρτυρος ἔστω. According to Bertelli (2001) 80, this use of μυθέομαι is 'the only precedent' [italics original] to Hecataeus' formulation. But the verb occurs also, remarkably, in Eumaeus' words to Odysseus in *Od.* 14.124–5, where emphasis is placed on how 'wandering men' (ἄνδρες ἀλήται) lie and do not want to tell (μυθήσασθαι) the truth (ἀληθέα).

<sup>73</sup> Translation by Bertelli (2001) 80.

<sup>74</sup> Bertelli (2001) 81.

<sup>75</sup> Fowler (2013) 678.

<sup>76</sup> Bertelli (2001) 81.

<sup>77</sup> Bertelli (2001) 82.

## 5. Conclusions

At the outset of Book 8, Herodotus posits his *γνώμη* as a prominent tool of evaluation of historical truth by reworking a statement that, in both poetic and prose contexts, had served the purpose of emphasising the narrator's privileged status in discerning truth from falsehood. He thereby claims for himself an authority sitting somewhere between traditional poetic forms of authority and the developing prose ones.

It is generally and rightly pointed out in scholarship<sup>78</sup> that Herodotus shares with the early medical writers the emphasis on the senses as reliable epistemological tools. I have ventured to suggest, however, that in his narrative of Artemisium and Salamis he seems to challenge, at least implicitly, their reliability. After all, early medical writers too refer to the intelligence (*διανοίη*) needed to discriminate true from false statements.<sup>79</sup> Yet Herodotus' resort to the *poetic* tradition at the opening of a narrative that goes on to highlight, precisely, the epistemological unreliability of the senses draws him perhaps closer to pre-Socratic philosophers than to early medical writers.

The philosophers and Herodotus make claims about their own personal insight and intellectual grasp: Heraclitus, in his prose—which is yet somewhat 'poetic' in its being riddling, oracular-like—speaks of eyes and ears as 'bad witnesses' (22 B 107 D-K), and presents the deep structure of reality as a riddle or sign which he is able to crack, while ordinary people are just puzzled by it (22 B 1 D-K). In his poem, Parmenides also questions the senses,<sup>80</sup> and, despite using the language of divine inspiration, also seems to claim to have the personal *logos* by which he can test the 'strife-encompassed refutation'<sup>81</sup> (*πολύδηρις ἔλεγχος*) presented to him by the goddess (28 B 7.3–5 D-K).<sup>82</sup> Democritus, 'in stark contrast to the medical writers',<sup>83</sup> sets the senses in opposition to 'genuine knowledge' (*γνησίη γνώμη*, 68 B 11 D-K).

<sup>78</sup> Cf., e.g., Lateiner (1986); Thomas (1993) and (2000); Demont (2018); Pelling (2018).

<sup>79</sup> See Lateiner (1986) 6 on the author of *On Regimen* 1.26–7, 2.14, 48 and 41; Clements (2014) 129–31.

<sup>80</sup> Lami (1991) 280 n. 32; Clements (2014) 116.

<sup>81</sup> Translation by Kirk–Raven–Schofield (1983) 248.

<sup>82</sup> For discussion of possible intertextual relationships between Parmenides' poem and both Homeric and Hesiodic poetry (including *Th.* 27–8), see Buongiovanni (2011) 15–20, with further bibliography.

<sup>83</sup> Clements (2014) 131.

The alternative itself, available to the Presocratics, between prose and poetry as viable strategies of communication attests to a persisting perception of the tension between prose and poetic forms and formulations as key to authoritative intellectual expression. Prose developed only after centuries of reliance on verse for the dissemination, through performance, of authoritative public speech: no matter whether through appropriation or rejection, implicitly or explicitly, poetic authority had still to be negotiated by early prose writers.<sup>84</sup>

As to the question why Herodotus challenges his own methodology and resorts to a poetic-like authority at this particular point in the narrative, my tentative answer is twofold. First, the oral traditions he was drawing on for his account of the Persian Wars had arguably already given an epic-like or elegiac-like shape to the events: Simonides' Artemisium, Salamis, and Plataea elegies (fr. 1–4, 6–9, and 10–18 W<sup>2</sup>, respectively) in fact strongly suggest this. Discussing ὄψις and ἀκοή in relationship to γνώμη in terms that resonate with poetic language and diction would have been, perhaps, an almost natural choice. Secondly, the increasingly greater closeness in time of the events reported arguably implied a plurality of competing versions of events, each purporting to be 'the truth'.<sup>85</sup> To establish the authority and persuasiveness of his version, Herodotus resorted to the authoritative voice par excellence in the competitive, traditionalist, and performative context of Greek σοφία: the poet's voice.

<sup>84</sup> On Herodotus' engagement with the lyric and epic tradition see Donelli (2021).

<sup>85</sup> On how, paradoxically, greater difficulties might be met in trying to ascertain the recent past as opposed to the distant past, see Thomas (2018) 265 and 267.

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