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The Conqueror Unmasked: The Double Description of the Royal Road in the Embassy of Aristagoras (Hdt. 5.49–54)*

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ABSTRACT: This article examines the relationship between the two descriptions of the Royal Road contained within the account of Aristagoras' embassy to Sparta (Hdt. 5.49–54). The second description, put forward by the narrator of the *Histories*, aims at unmasking the issues raised by the first, which the tyrant of Miletus presented to the King of Sparta. The relationship between these two descriptions cannot be explained simply in terms of an opposition between the perspective of a conqueror and the perspective of an enquirer, but rather depends on a more complex change of role. Aristagoras the conqueror makes his description appear to be like that of an enquirer. In response, Herodotus the enquirer uses his tools and method to produce a description from the point of view of an anti-conqueror, which underlines the impossibility of conquest.

KEYWORDS: Herodotus, Aristagoras of Miletus, Royal Road, ancient geography, imperialism, map.

The account of the Ionian Revolt forms a consistent and coherent narrative episode within the λόγοι of Herodotus' *Histories*. Its limits are clearly defined, both at the beginning (5.28) and the end of the narrative (6.32).¹ Between these two boundaries, even if Herodotus allows himself several historical analepses,² he refrains from long geographical or ethnographical digressions such as the ones that can be found in the early books of the *Histories*.³ One notable exception stands out, however: the description of 'the Royal Road' (ἡ ὁδὸς ἡ βασιληίη, 5.52–54). In the course of these chapters, Herodotus lists the peoples

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¹ 5.28: 'Soon afterwards, troubles reappeared and once again Naxos and Miletus were at the root of the troubles that were beginning to rise among the Ionians' (Μετὰ δὲ οὐ πολλὸν χρόνον ἀνανέωσις κακῶν ἦν, καὶ ἤρχετο τὸ δεῦτερον ἐκ Νάξου καὶ Μιλήτου Ἴωσι γίνεσθαι κακά). 6.32: 'And so the Ionians were enslaved for the third time: they had first been subjugated by the Lydians, and then twice in a row by the Persians' (Οὕτω τε τὸ τρίτον Ἴωνες κατεδουλώθησαν, πρῶτον μὲν ὑπὸ Λυδῶν, δις δὲ ἐπεξῆς τότε ὑπὸ Περσέων).

All quotations from the *Histories* use Nenci's Greek text, unless otherwise stated. All translations are my own.

² These include the developments on the history of Sparta (5.39–48) and the history of Athens (5.55–96).

³ Especially the digressions about Egypt (2.2–182), Scythia (4.1–82) and Libya (4.168–199).

of Asia who live in the territories of the Persian Empire crossed by this Royal Road from Sardis to Susa. The description is announced by Herodotus as a digression: ‘here is, incidentally, what we can say of this road’ (ἔχει γὰρ ἀμφὶ τῇ ὁδῷ ταύτῃ ὥδε, 5.52). It starts with a parenthetical γάρ⁴ and then ends with a resumptive δέ⁵ while the main character of the narrative, Aristagoras, is reintroduced by his name with the article (5.55).⁶ Between γάρ and δέ, the thread of the narrative is interrupted and the enquirer sets out to describe the Royal Road of the King of Persia in the present tense, sometimes intervening in the first person singular.⁷ In content and form, therefore, this description has all the markings of a geographical digression. However, if we consider the narrative background of the description, its role turns out to be more ambiguous. The description comes at the end of a famous episode in the Ionian Revolt: the embassy of Aristagoras. After becoming interim tyrant of Miletus, Aristagoras brings the cities of Ionia into open rebellion against Persian authority. Then he goes to Sparta in search of military support, and shows the Lacedaemonians ‘a bronze board on which was engraved the outline of the whole earth, as well as the whole sea and all the rivers’ (χάλκεον πίνακα ἐν τῷ γῆς ἀπάσης περίοδος ἐνετέμμητο καὶ θάλασσά τε πᾶσα καὶ ποταμοὶ πάντες, 5.49). He offers King Cleomenes a first description of the Royal Road to convince him to undertake an expedition against Susa, where Darius’ residence is located.

This description takes the form of a long presentation delivered entirely in direct speech (5.49.2–8). Aristagoras lists the territories crossed by the Royal Road, relying on the visual support of the map engraved on the πίναξ (5.49.5).⁸ After three days of reflection, Cleomenes asks to know the length of such an expedition. When Aristagoras tells him that Susa is three months’ march from the Aegean, he is shocked to discover a distance he could not have suspected because of the scale of the map. He rejects Aristagoras’ request and orders him to leave the city at once. The tyrant of Miletus then tries to corrupt Cleomenes but, in the face of the King’s resistance, he resolves to take his chances with the Athenians instead. Before beginning the account of the embassy to Athens, however, Herodotus goes back to the Royal Road and gives a second description of it: this is how a geographical digression enters the account of the Ionian Revolt.

Why does he add this second picture to the one already drawn by Aristagoras’ words? Several interpretations have been suggested to account for this duplication. The digression that follows the embassy to Sparta is sometimes considered an informational supplement introduced by Herodotus,⁹ and sometimes a full

⁴ Denniston 1934: 68–9. I will return later on to this γάρ: it can be interpreted in different ways.

⁵ Denniston 1934: 182–3.

⁶ ‘Aristagoras, then, left Sparta for Athens’ (Ἀπελαυνόμενος δέ ὁ Ἀρισταγόρης ἐκ τῆς Σπάρτης ἦε ἐς τὰς Ἀθήνας).

⁷ See for instance 5.54: ‘And for those who want to know more about these issues, I will also point out the following’ (Εἰ δέ τις τὸ ἀτρεκέστερον τούτων ἔτι δίζηται, ἐγὼ καὶ τοῦτο σημανέω).

⁸ ‘And as he said this, he showed it on the drawing of the earth that he had brought engraved on the board’ (Δεικνὺς δὲ ἔλεγε ταῦτα ἐς τῆς γῆς τὴν περίοδον, τὴν ἐφέρετο ἐν τῷ πίνακι ἐντετμημένην).

⁹ This is, for example, the interpretation suggested by Nenci in his commentary on Book 5 of the *Histories*: ‘si tratta solo di una summa di precisazioni a uso del pubblico erodoteo’ (‘it is only a summary of clarifications for the benefit of the Herodotean audience’, Nenci 1994: 232). See

correction intended to replace the first picture.¹⁰ In an article examining this double description of the Royal Road, David Branscome goes further by proposing to read the second version as a kind of manifesto presenting Herodotus' method of ethnographic investigation by example. The first description by Aristagoras, on this reading, is not so much incomplete as fraudulent, casting a favourable light by contrast on Herodotus' description.¹¹ In fact, this pairing of two enquirers is quite puzzling. It is not uncommon for Herodotus to include characters in his narrative who are engaged in an enquiry; they appear as intradiegetic doubles of the enquirer.¹² But generally, these embedded enquiries do not give rise to a counter-enquiry that is so explicitly taken over by the narrator of the *Histories*. The double description of the Royal Road, divided between Aristagoras' voice and Herodotus' own, thus appears to be a special case.

This doubling effect is not the only enigma posed by this episode of the Ionian Revolt. The role played by Aristagoras' map is another. This map — which embraces all the lands, and offers an all-encompassing vision, of the world —, is generally compared to those that Herodotus mockingly criticizes at the beginning of the controversy over the continents (4.36.2):¹³

Γελῶ δὲ ὀρῶν γῆς περιόδους γράψαντας πολλοὺς ἤδη καὶ οὐδένα νόον ἔχοντα ἐξηγησάμενον, οἱ Ὠκεανόν τε ῥέοντα γράφουσι πέριξ τὴν γῆν, ἐοῦσαν κυκλοτερέα ὡς ἀπὸ τὸρνου, καὶ τὴν Ἀσίην τῇ Εὐρώπῃ ποιούντων ἴσην. (ed. Rosén)

I laugh when I see that so many men have drawn representations of the outlines of the earth and that not one of them has provided a sensible explanation: in their drawings, the Ocean flows all around the earth, which is round as if it had just come out of a potter's wheel, and they go so far as to give Asia the same size as Europe.

In this passage, Herodotus' criticism is explicit. It opens with a mocking laugh ('I laugh', γελῶ), denounces the stupidity of the authors of these maps ('not one of them has provided a sensible explanation', οὐδένα νόον ἔχοντα ἐξηγησάμενον) and compares their drawing to the work of a potter ('as if it had just come out of a potter's wheel', ὡς ἀπὸ τὸρνου). In contrast, the map brought by Aristagoras to Sparta does not elicit any similar comments. The references to the 'board' (πίναξ) and the 'drawing of the earth' (τῆς γῆς τὴν περίοδον) engraved on it remain perfectly neutral, and the river Ocean, which never fails to arouse Herodotus' acerbic scepticism, is not mentioned.¹⁴ There is nothing in the episode of the embassy to Sparta to indicate with certainty that Herodotus disapproves of the

also How and Wells 1975: 21 and Jacoby 1913: 439.

¹⁰ This is the interpretation adopted by Legrand 1946: 99 n. 2 and defended by Pelling 2007, then Purves 2010: 144–6.

¹¹ Branscome 2010.

¹² On these mirror figures of the enquirer in the narrative of the *Histories*, see Demont 2002; see also Branscome 2013 who focuses on five instances where these doubles appear flawed.

¹³ This parallel is noted, for example, by How and Wells in their commentary on Book 5 (1975: 20).

¹⁴ See 2.23 and 4.8.2.

map presented by Aristagoras. Should we consider the criticism of the maps at the beginning of the discussion of the continents as a key to the correct interpretation of the Spartan episode? Does the use of the map aim to discredit Aristagoras' character? Reinhold Bichler gives it even greater importance by placing it at the centre of his interpretation of the passage. For Bichler, Aristagoras' speech and the Spartans' initial misunderstanding of the scale and the reality of distances should be read as a denunciation of any map as an instrument of manipulation; a warning against a partial and misleading source of knowledge.¹⁵

The role played by this map is all the more difficult to determine, as Branscome points out, because in the course of Aristagoras' second embassy to Athens it seems to disappear.¹⁶ Certainly, the narrator indicates, in connection with this second embassy, that 'Aristagoras stood before the people and undertook to address them in the same way as he did at Sparta' (ἐπελθὼν [...] ἐπὶ τὸν δῆμον ὁ Ἀρισταγόρης ταῦτ' ἔλεγε καὶ ἐν τῇ Σπάρτῃ), but he makes no mention of the map or the πίναξ (5.97). At the same time, however, Aristagoras' second embassy is in general much more concise than the first.¹⁷ Herodotus refrains from reproducing the entire presentation in direct speech, but merely summarizes it in indirect speech; he reminds us only of the essential elements and points out the new argument Aristagoras added to adjust his speech to his Athenian audience, recalling the link between Athens and its colony of Mytilene on the Ionian coast. Should we understand that Herodotus simply omits to mention the map on this second occasion, in order to speed up his account? Is its presence to be inferred from 'in the same way as he did at Sparta' (ταῦτ' [...] καὶ ἐν τῇ Σπάρτῃ)? Or does Herodotus' silence signify that Aristagoras does not use his map to support his Athenian discourse, as suggested by Branscome?¹⁸

This abbreviated second embassy raises another question. It is easy to understand why Herodotus, in order to ensure the fluidity of his account, develops only one of Aristagoras' two embassies in detail and gives an allusive summary of the other. On the other hand, giving the Spartan episode the longest, richest and most detailed account of the two is not dictated by the chronology of events. Herodotus could just as well have summarized Aristagoras' speech in Sparta in a few sentences and not unfolded it in direct speech until his appearance at Athens. Moreover, Herodotus shows his taste for analepsis on several occasions

¹⁵ Bichler 2018: 154–5. This criticism of the map as a deceptive object of persuasion can also be found in the interpretation of the embassy to Sparta given by Purves 2010: 119 and above all at 133–4, where she shows how Aristagoras' πίναξ materially serves the purpose of his speech (see footnote 56 below). On the persuasive power of certain objects used in the *Histories* to support a discourse, and the map of Aristagoras in particular, see Murnaghan 2001.

¹⁶ Branscome 2010: 25.

¹⁷ The account of the embassy to Sparta runs from chapters 49–54, while chapter 97 is enough for the account of the embassy to Athens.

¹⁸ 'In the one speech, Aristagoras clearly uses the map, in the other speech, he does not' (Branscome 2010: 25). Murnaghan 2001 also links the episode to that of the Samian embassy to Sparta (3.46). She shows the connection between the Spartan context and the use of a visual display to disarm the Lacedaemonians' defiance of rhetoric; cf. Murnaghan 2001: 60–1 and 69–71. Yet, from this perspective, such a display is useless in Athens, hence the disappearance of this motif; cf. Murnaghan 2001: 70.

in the *Histories*: a chronologically earlier event is not guaranteed to precede a later one in the historian's narrative.¹⁹ Thus, the insistence on the Spartan episode is a deliberate choice by the narrator, rendered more surprising since, both in historical and narrative terms, it is the embassy to Athens that is of greater importance. Indeed, it is Aristagoras' second embassy, crowned with success, that triggers the expedition of 498: this is the moment when the tyrant of Miletus leads the Athenians on the path to war, provoking their march on Sardis (5.99–101) and the burning of the temple of Cybele (5.102), then the Persian response and the suppression of the Ionian Revolt. It is also the attack on Sardis that enrages Darius above all and sows the seeds of the first Persian War (5.105). By contrast, the embassy to Sparta does nothing to tip the balance. Why, then, does Herodotus choose to develop Aristagoras' speech to Cleomenes and the Spartan King's reaction to it, rather than the speech he later makes to the Athenian people? In this article, I want to return to the account of the embassy to Sparta to try to understand what interests Herodotus in this episode and what motivates the duplication of the enquiry and the enquirer observed there.

THE ENQUIRER AND THE CONQUEROR

While examining the various perspectives adopted by Herodotus to describe geographical space, Katherine Clarke suggests interpreting this duplication as the confrontation of 'two different layers of geographical expertise and two different viewpoints':²⁰ in response to Aristagoras' 'bird's eye perspective',²¹ based on the map, Herodotus would present another rival viewpoint by following the itinerary of a journey. Such reading could align with Bichler's interpretation: Herodotus, while being more accurate than Aristagoras in calculating the time of the journey, would underscore the superiority of his own method for describing geographical space, in contrast to the bird's eye approach. However, another kind of distinction between various perspectives on space could also be useful to interpret this double description: that established by Pascal Payen in *Les Îles nomades*.²² Payen notes that the *Histories* contain a double vision of space, two competing perspectives in opposition to each other. He calls one of them the 'voie du conquérant' ('the conqueror's way'), which considers space as an object of conquest and is concerned with the peoples to be subdued, the borders to be crossed and the wealth to be conquered.²³ This is the perspective that is revealed in the geography of the Persian Kings and the accounts of their expeditions. In contrast, Payen identifies a 'cheminement de l'enquêteur' ('path of the enquirer'), which characterizes geographical descriptions where knowledge of space is entirely dissociated from the idea of conquest.²⁴ Moreover, he also notes a marked

¹⁹ See, for example, the structure of the first book of the *Histories*: the story of the confrontation between Croesus and Cyrus precedes the narrative of the latter's childhood and accession.

²⁰ Clarke 2018: 49.

²¹ Clarke 2018: 48.

²² Payen 1997: 321–2.

²³ Payen 1997: 336.

²⁴ Payen 1997: 338.

tendency in the *Histories* regarding the interplay between these two perspectives: the tendency to substitute the narrative of the Persian conquests, where the geographical perspective of the conqueror should appear, with a description of space from the perspective of the enquirer. The military narrative itself is deferred to the end of the enquirer's description, which is also usually much longer. This is the case, for example, with Cambyses' conquest of Egypt, which is interrupted by the extensive digression devoted to the Egyptian territory and people (2.2–182). Similarly, Darius' expedition against the Libyans is interrupted once by the account of the founding of Cyrene (4.159–167), and then a second time by the description of the various Libyan peoples (4.168–199). The latter description follows the perspective not of the conqueror (for the information Herodotus provides about each of these peoples may not necessarily be related to their conquest²⁵) but of the enquirer. For Payen, this tendency is part of a more general approach in the *Histories* of denouncing conquest and imperialism.

Payen applies this distinction between two clashing perspectives on space to the episode of Aristagoras' embassy to Sparta — and more precisely, to the curious doubling of the description of the Royal Road. According to him, this duplication must be understood as a confrontation of two opposite views on the same space: that of the conqueror, through Aristagoras' speech, and that of the enquirer, in the second description taken on by Herodotus himself. Indeed, Aristagoras' speech aims to convince the Spartans to launch an expedition against Susa. In this respect, it can be seen as part of the conqueror's perspective — hence the importance for Herodotus to then re-establish the enquirer's perspective by adding a second description as a corrective.

Or non seulement le piège du tyran de Milet est déjoué par Cléomène, mais son intention de décrire l'espace, frauduleuse à l'origine, est reprise par Hérodote qui prolonge l'épisode en assumant la description de la route royale. L'enquêteur ôte la parole à Aristagoras, et de Sarde à Suse, le lecteur n'aura pas à suivre un apprenti conquérant. Preuve est donnée même que l'on peut franchir des fleuves sans intention hostile, tels le Tigre ou le Gyndès, 'celui que Cyrus partagea autrefois en trois cent soixante canaux'.²⁶ Par ce rappel, la description s'oppose explicitement à l'une des constantes les plus nettes du processus de conquête.²⁷ Il semble par conséquent que, dans l'*Enquête*, un regard voie autrement et plus loin que le conquérant.²⁸

²⁵ For instance, he stresses the hair custom of the Macae (4.175.1), the diet of the Lotophagi (4.177) or the strange custom of not having individual names among the Atlantes (4.184.1) — or the Atarantes, if one accepts Salmasius' conjecture (see Corcella 1993: 374).

²⁶ Payen quotes Herodotus' text: 5.52.5.

²⁷ Payen refers to the motif of transgressing a border marked by a river or an inlet.

²⁸ Payen 1997: 337. ('However, Cleomenes not only foils the trap set by the tyrant of Miletus, but furthermore Herodotus takes up his attempt to describe the territory, which was originally deceptive, and extends the episode by taking on the description of the Royal Road. The enquirer silences Aristagoras and, from Sardis to Susa, the reader will not have to follow an

Thanks to the duplication of the description of the Royal Road, the episode of the embassy to Sparta would therefore provide a new way of interweaving the two perspectives on space in the *Histories*: no longer a simple juxtaposition or substitution, but instead more a dialectical confrontation, embodied by two different voices. Closer examination of these two descriptions, however, shows that, even if the distinction between the views of the enquirer and the conqueror is an enlightening one, we cannot clearly assimilate the description of Aristagoras with the perspective of the conqueror, nor that of Herodotus with the perspective of the enquirer. The interplay between the two is more complex. Aristagoras offers the geographical description of a conqueror disguised as an enquirer, while Herodotus does not, strictly speaking, offer the description of an enquirer, but rather the reverse of the conqueror's view.

A CONQUEROR DISGUISED AS AN ENQUIRER

Aristagoras, in giving the Spartans a geographical presentation based on a world map, takes on the appearance of a genuine enquirer. Commentators have noted, for example, the similarity of his discourse to the descriptions at the core of Herodotus' geographical digressions, to a point where Simon Hornblower talks of 'a stereophonic effect in the geographical paragraphs' of Aristagoras' speech,²⁹ blending his voice and the historian's one. The most striking similarity can be observed in the content of Aristagoras' presentation. First, it combines ethnography and geography.³⁰ To describe the Royal Road, Aristagoras lists the peoples whose territory it crosses, and accompanies each of them with a more or less developed commentary, either on the territory,³¹ or on the people itself.³² In addition, the various details that appear to qualify these peoples and territories (individually or as a whole) all find a correspondent in the geographical digressions or catalogues that Herodotus indulges in throughout his narrative. Aristagoras' remarks on the military equipment of the peoples of Asia (5.49.3),³³ for example, recall the account of the contingents of Xerxes' army (7.61–99). The mention of the tribute paid by the Cilicians to the King of Persia (5.49.6)³⁴ refers to the catalogue of the satrapies (3.90–97). We can also cite the allusions to the resources specific to each territory, references to the extent of a territory or comments on the name of

aspiring conqueror. He demonstrates that it is possible to cross rivers without hostile intent, such as the Tigris or the Gyndes, 'which Cyrus once divided into three hundred and sixty channels'. With this reminder, his description goes explicitly against one of the clearest and most frequent features of the inquiry process. Thus, it seems that, in the *Histories*, there is an eye seeing differently and further than the conqueror does.'

²⁹ Hornblower 2013: 165.

³⁰ Bichler points out that this combination is generally a feature of Herodotus' geography (2018: 139).

³¹ In terms of the fertile (ἀγαθὴν) land attributed to the Lydians (5.49.5).

³² In terms of the amount of tribute paid to the Persians by the Cilicians.

³³ 'To go into battle, they wear trousers and caps on their heads' (Ἀναξυρίδας δὲ ἔχοντες ἔρχονται ἐς τὰς μάχας καὶ κυρβασίας ἐπὶ τῆσι κεφαλῆσι). I will return to the description of this military equipment below.

³⁴ 'Who pay to the Great King fifty talents of annual tribute' (Οἱ πεντακόσια τάλαντα βασιλεῖ τὸν ἐπέτειον φόρον ἐπιτελεῦσι).

a people (5.49.6).³⁵ The description of Aristagoras, then, offers a concentration of examples of the characteristic interests of the enquirer Herodotus.³⁶

Close formal similarities, moreover, have been observed between this discourse and Herodotus' geographical descriptions. Branscome notes that the organization of the description, from people to people along a single axis, is in all respects similar to the description of the peoples of Libya in the geographical digression devoted to them (4.168–194).³⁷ The style of the speech and its vocabulary can also be compared to Herodotus' spatial descriptions. Branscome stresses the use of the verb ἔρχομαι ('come close to')³⁸ to indicate that two peoples share a border, which is also observed in the description of the peoples of Libya.³⁹ He also points to the shared use of an uncommon noun, κυρβασία, which refers to a kind of pointed cap worn by some peoples of the Persian Empire.⁴⁰ Aristagoras' speech thus displays a close affinity, both in form and substance, with the descriptions given by the principal enquirer of the *Histories*, Herodotus. This affinity has led some commentators, such as Giuseppe Nenci⁴¹ and Branscome,⁴² to the conclusion that Herodotus is himself describing the peoples of Asia through the character of Aristagoras, before choosing to continue the description in his own name and without going through this intermediary, when Aristagoras, chased away by Cleomenes, is no longer able to relay his words.

However, if we consider all these similarities while paying attention to the context of Aristagoras' speech,⁴³ we can see that it is a rigged discourse from start to finish. Aristagoras' objective, when he arrives in Sparta, is to obtain the military support of the Lacedaemonians.⁴⁴ Indeed, the whole speech is directed towards this single objective: to arouse in the Spartans the desire to launch an expedition against the King of Persia. To this end, Aristagoras puts forward two very clear arguments at the beginning of his presentation, even before starting to describe the Royal Road. The first is based on the ease of the proposed expedition: 'and you

³⁵ 'Here are the Armenians, who are also rich in herds' (Ἀρμένιοι οἶδε, καὶ οὗτοι ἐόντες πολυπρόβατοι), 'The Cilicians, whose territory extends as far as the sea' (Κίλικες, κατήκοντες ἐπὶ θάλασσαν), 'The Cappadocians, whom we call the Syrians' (Καππαδόκαι, τοὺς ἡμεῖς Συρίους καλέομεν).

³⁶ We can adduce another similarity noticed by Clarke (2018: 94), not exactly in Aristagoras' speech but on his board: she observes that Herodotus points out the representation of the 'rivers' (ποταμοί, 5.49) engraved on the map, which is consonant with his own interest in this geographical feature (on this interest, see Clarke 2018: 93–110).

³⁷ Branscome 2010: 17.

³⁸ LSJ, s.v. ἔχω C.I.3: 'come next to, follow closely'.

³⁹ Branscome 2010: 17–18.

⁴⁰ It is attributed to the Saces in the catalogue of Xerxes' contingents (7.64.2) and to the King of Persia himself in Aristophanes' *Birds* (lines 486–487). On this piece of equipment, see Vannicelli 2017: 370 and 376–7.

⁴¹ Nenci 1994: 224.

⁴² Branscome 2010: 17.

⁴³ See the warnings of Solmsen about interpreting Aristagoras' speech without taking into account the narrative background in which it is included (1943: 196–7).

⁴⁴ This aim is explicitly stated as the reason for Aristagoras' journey to Sparta from the beginning: 'For he then had to find a powerful alliance' (Ἔδεε γὰρ δὴ συμμαχίης τινός οἱ μεγάλης ἐξευρεθῆναι, 5.38.2).

can easily be successful in this enterprise' (εὐπετέως δὲ ὑμῖν ταῦτα οἶά τε χωρέειν ἐστί, 5.49.3). The second is the wealth of Asia (5.49.4):

Ἔστι δὲ καὶ ἀγαθὰ τοῖσι τὴν ἥπειρον ἐκείνην νεμομένοισι ὅσα οὐδὲ τοῖσι συνάπασι ἄλλοισι, ἀπὸ χρυσοῦ ἀρξαμένοισι, ἄργυρος καὶ χαλκός καὶ ἐσθῆς ποικίλη καὶ ὑποζύγια τε καὶ ἀνδράποδα.

And the inhabitants of that continent also possess more wealth than all the other peoples put together, starting with gold, then silver, bronze and embroidered cloth, beasts of burden and slaves.

Aristagoras lays out before Cleomenes' eyes the wealth of the peoples of Asia, which an expedition against the King of Persia would enable him to seize. However, if we reconsider the different elements that could lead us to assimilate Aristagoras' speech with the perspective of an enquirer, we will observe that most of them actually have only one function: to suggest one or the other of these two main ideas that Aristagoras hammers out repeatedly through his speech. The geographical or ethnographic details that appear in Aristagoras' speech relate almost exclusively to the wealth of the countries he mentions. The Lydians possess a 'fertile land' (χώρην ἀγαθὴν) and are themselves 'the richest in silver' (πολυαργυρώτατοι). The Phrygians, for their part, are 'the richest in flocks and fruits' (πολυπροβατώτατοι and πολυκαρπώτατοι) and the Armenians are also 'rich in herds' (πολυπρόβατοι). As for the mention of the considerable tribute paid by the Cilicians to the Persians, this also suggests the abundance of their wealth.⁴⁵ The enumeration finally ends with the evocation of the 'treasure houses full of wealth' (τῶν χρημάτων θησαυροί) of the Great King in his residence in Susa (5.49.7). Tim Rood has highlighted the extreme emphasis placed on the theme of wealth by the remarkable concentration of superlatives (πολυαργυρώτατοι, πολυπροβατώτατοι and πολυκαρπώτατοι). This concentration is all the clearer given the repetition of πολυ-, common to all three, which adds a further degree of intensity. Moreover, as Rood points out, these three compound adjectives, augmented with a superlative suffix, have a certain volume that draws attention to them and to the richness they depict.⁴⁶

The second central idea of the speech is the easiness of the proposed expedition. Christopher Pelling underlines the importance of this notion of

⁴⁵ See above, footnote 34.

⁴⁶ 'Aristagoras attempts to pass off as knowledge a rather crude version of ethnography, full of polysyllabic superlatives (*poluargutōtatoi*, *poluprobatōtatoi*, *polukarpōtatoi* – 'very rich in silver/flocks/crops') that he hopes will attract his rapacious listener', (Rood 2006: 295). This search for volume may help explain an oddness noted by Stein: the Lydians are singled out by Aristagoras for their wealth in 'silver' (ἄργυρος) whereas Lydia is otherwise known for its gold deposits — a metal that Aristagoras himself, incidentally, emphasizes at the beginning of his speech. Stein explains the mention of this ἄργυρος instead of the expected χρυσός by pointing out that the term ἄργυρος in composition commonly denotes wealth in general, or any noble metal, and no longer specifically silver (Stein 1868: 47). But one can add that if Aristagoras here prefers ἄργυρος to χρυσός, it may be in order to form an adjective one syllable longer than πολυχρυσώτατοι and to ensure an effect of isometry between the three superlatives, which also helps to emphasize them.

‘ease’ (εὐπέτεια) as well as its powerful presence in Aristagoras’ words through the occurrences of the adjective ‘easy’ (εὐπετής) and the corresponding adverb ‘easily’ (εὐπετέως).⁴⁷ Yet it can be noticed, once again, that certain elements giving Aristagoras’ discourse the appearance of a geographical survey serve to highlight the idea of an effortless expedition throughout his presentation. Branscome has shown how the description of Persian equipment is organized to neutralize the fear it might arouse in the Spartan audience.⁴⁸ First, this armour is attributed, in Aristagoras’ speech, to anonymous βάρβαροι rather than to the Persians: as Branscome notes, the name of the Persians is consistently absent throughout Aristagoras’ discourse, suggesting a strategy of avoidance. He connects this pattern to another passage in the *Histories* where Herodotus mentions the Greeks’ fear at the mere mention of the Medes.⁴⁹ Branscome also points out how the terms chosen by Aristagoras to designate the equipment of these βάρβαροι are intended to suggest harmless (‘a short spear’, αἰχμὴ βραχέα) or even ridiculous military equipment (‘pointed caps’, κυρβασίας).⁵⁰ An observation from Nenci should also be introduced here. By comparing this description with that of the equipment of the Persians at the beginning of the list of Xerxes’ contingents, Nenci notes a parallel tainted by an intriguing discrepancy. Xerxes’ Persians march armed as follows (7.61.1):

Αἰχμάς δὲ βραχέας εἶχον, τόξα δὲ μεγάλα, οἴστούς δὲ καλαμίνους, πρὸς δὲ ἐγχειρίδια παρὰ τὸν δεξιὸν μηρὸν παραιωρεύμενα ἐκ τῆς ζώνης. (ed. Vannicelli)

They carried short spears, large bows, reed arrows and, in addition, daggers hanging from the belt along the right thigh.

Now, the βάρβαροι of Aristagoras fight with ‘bows and a short spear’ (τόξα καὶ αἰχμὴ βραχέα), at least according to the text transmitted by the manuscripts (5.49.6).

⁴⁷ Pelling 2007: 179–80. There are three occurrences of words from the εὐπέτεια family in chapter 49 alone. Further, Pelling and Nenci (Nenci 1994: 224) also show the systematic presence of words from this family in the speech of Aristagoras in other passages of Book 5. Solmsen called easiness the ‘keyword’ of Aristagoras’ speeches (1943: 199).

⁴⁸ Branscome 2010: 11.

⁴⁹ Branscome 2010: 13. The passage in question occurs in the account of the Battle of Marathon: ‘Then the Athenians threw themselves upon the barbarians and engaged in a battle worthy of record. Indeed, they were the first of all the Greeks we know to charge the enemies on the run and the first to bear the sight of the Medes’ equipment and the men who wore it: until then, the Greeks were afraid even to hear the name of the Medes’ (Ἀθηναῖοι δὲ ἔπειτα ἀθρόοι προσέμιξαν τοῖσι βαρβάροισι, ἐμάχοντο ἀξίως λόγου. Πρῶτοι μὲν γὰρ Ἑλλήνων πάντων τῶν ἡμεῖς ἴδμεν δρόμῳ ἐς πολεμίους ἐχρήσαντο, πρῶτοι δὲ ἀνέσχοντο ἐσθῆτα τε Μηδικὴν ὀρέοντες καὶ τοὺς ἄνδρας ταύτην ἡσθημένους: τέως δὲ ἦν τοῖσι Ἑλλήσι καὶ τὸ οὖνομα τὸ Μήδων φόβος ἀκοῦσαι, 6.112.3).

⁵⁰ According to Branscome, it occurs mainly in the comic theatre of Aristophanes and in only one other instance in Herodotus, not in relation to the Persians but to the Saces — a Scythian people from Central Asia (see above, footnote 40). Cf. Branscome 2010: 33. Herodotus refrains, in any case, from placing the word τίραρα in Aristagoras’ mouth, which he himself commonly uses to designate the headdress worn by the Persians — especially when he describes their military equipment in Xerxes’ army (7.61.1).

However, Nenci finds the mention of τόξα without qualifiers surprising in this context.⁵¹ Relying on the parallel provided by the equipment of Xerxes' Persians, he proposes to reinstate in Aristagoras' speech the adjective 'large' (μεγάλα) that would have been lost in the transmission of the texts: 'large bows and a short spear' (τόξα <μεγάλα> καὶ αἰχμὴ βραχέα).⁵² In the light of Branscome's reading, however, an alternative interpretation of this omission might be possible: that the avoidance of the adjective μέγας in the description of their weapons is a deliberate one, as part of a strategy on Aristagoras' part to play down the power of the Persians. What's more, in so doing, he introduces ambiguity to the adjective βραχύς: whether by virtue of the nearby agreement, or because in the Ionic dialect, the neuter plural and the feminine singular are homonyms, βραχέα could refer not only to αἰχμή but also to τόξα ('short bows and a short spear'). The adjective, however, is never used by Herodotus in connection with a bow: in the *Histories*, spears are the only weapons that are described as βραχέα.⁵³ The τόξα, on the other hand, are either 'large' (μεγάλα, 7.61.1) or 'made of reed' (καλάμινα, 7.64.1, 7.65, 7.67.1), 'made in the country' (ἐπιχώρια, 7.64.1, 7.64.2, 7.67.1, 7.67.2), 'in the Median way' (Μηδικά, 7.66.1, 7.67.1), 'bent backward' (παλίντονα, 7.69.1) or 'long' (μακρά, 7.69.1), but they are never βραχέα. It seems more reasonable, therefore, to envisage a cautious silence on the part of Aristagoras about the large bows with which the Persians are armed ('bows and a short spear'),⁵⁴ or, at a pinch, a skilful ambiguity ('bows and a spear, short in size') rather than a deliberate lie ('short bows and a short spear') such as the one uttered by the same character in a similar context about the size of Euboea. By contrast, Nenci's conjecture would draw Aristagoras' statement in the opposite direction to that suggested by Branscome's interpretation.

We might also adduce the choice of the verb ἔχομαι ('come next to') to indicate the progression of the description: thus, 'to the Lydians follow the Phrygians which you can see here' (Λυδῶν δὲ [...] οἶδε ἔχονται Φρύγες, 5.49.5). The use of this phrase is of particular interest for Aristagoras' perspective: it allows him

⁵¹ Indeed, in the *Histories*, for all other occurrences where τόξα is coordinated with αἰχμή, there is at least one adjective for each of the two terms (7.61.1; 7.64.1) or an adjective common to both (7.67.1), or no adjective at all (4.3.4, which is in a different context since it does not specifically describe the military equipment in question). The asymmetry that characterizes the occurrence of Aristagoras' speech is isolated.

⁵² 'Ritengo che l'indicazione degli archi non seguita da una indicazione del tipo di archi sia dovuta alla caduta di μεγάλα nella tradizione manoscritta, in quanto Erodoto è molto esatto nella descrizione dei particolari tecnici e degli armamenti e in VII 61,1, descrivendo in dettaglio l'armamento dell'esercito persiano, precisa appunto αἰχμὰς δὲ βραχέας εἶχον, τόξα δὲ μεγάλα' ('I believe that the indication of the bows not followed by an indication of the type of bows is due to the fall of μεγάλα in the manuscript tradition since Herodotus is very accurate in his description of technical particulars and armaments, and in 7.61.1, describing in detail the weaponry of the Persian army, he specifies precisely αἰχμὰς δὲ βραχέας εἶχον, τόξα δὲ μεγάλα', Nenci 1994: 225). This conjecture is pointed out by Wilson in his edition of the *Histories* (2015: 453), but he does not adopt it.

⁵³ See 7.61.1, 7.64.1, 7.79 with αἰχμή; see also 7.211.2 with δόρυ.

⁵⁴ At least in the representation of the Persians in Herodotus' text, according to the parallel that constitutes the description of the Persian contingent in Xerxes' army. The Persian iconographic representations, on the other hand, rather suggest a reduction in the size of the bows from the reign of Darius, perhaps to adapt the weapon for use by the cavalry. On the different bows used by the Persians in the time of Darius, see Zutterman 2003: 139–41.

to evoke the border without actually naming it. Instead of appearing as a separation between two territories, it is expressed in the form of a simple, smooth succession, without any mention of the challenges of crossing such borders. This phrase becomes increasingly elliptical, moreover, to the point where the verb ἔχομαι disappears when we move from the Armenians to the Matienes: ‘to the Armenians [follow] the Matienes, who possess the territory here’ (Ἀρμενίων δὲ Ματιηνοὶ χώραν τήνδε ἔχοντες). On the other hand, the verb ἔχω reappears afterwards, in its original sense of ‘to possess’.⁵⁵ This transfer is particularly representative of the approach underlying Aristagoras’ description: the expression of the frontier, with all the obstacles it could oppose to the conquest, keeps shrinking until it disappears, replaced instead by the abundance of riches promised to the conqueror. This vanishing of the border then culminates in the evocation of the treasures of Susa: ‘and the treasure houses full of wealth, here they are’ (καὶ τῶν χρημάτων οἱ θησαυροὶ ἐνταῦθά εἰσι, 5.49.7). The very idea of succession has disappeared, replaced by a simple local adverb (ἐνταῦθα) which makes the treasures arise much more effectively in Cleomenes’ eyes by erasing any distance. Aristagoras’ speech focuses entirely on conquest: every detail he mentions is intended to emphasize the wealth of the peoples who would be subdued or to play down the effort or difficulty of the undertaking. However, it is significant that the elements useful to the conqueror’s discourse are precisely those which, at first sight, could link him to the enquirer’s perspective.⁵⁶ Aristagoras’ conquering view is disguised in order to manipulate better his Spartan audience and to establish his dreams of conquest on the apparent legitimacy of an enquirer’s discourse.

THE NEGATIVE OF A CONQUEROR’S PERSPECTIVE

Aristagoras’ manoeuvres are finally revealed when Cleomenes learns how long the expedition he is planning will last: three months (5.50.2). The King of Sparta interrupts the tyrant of Miletus before he has a chance to continue his misrepresentation (5.50.3) and orders him to leave the city.⁵⁷ Then the enquirer of the *Histories* takes over and gives his own description of the Royal Road. This description appears at first sight as a confirmation of the first one that Aristagoras has just presented. It starts with a γάρ, which can be interpreted as simply opening

⁵⁵ LSJ, s.v. ἔχω A.I.1.

⁵⁶ This comment relates to the elements of Aristagoras’ language, but it can be extended to the material support of his speech: Purves stresses how Aristagoras’ πίναξ, with its coppery glint and large-scale-map-crushing distances, itself suggests the treasures to be conquered and the easiness of obtaining them; cf. Purves 2010: 133–4. Purves interprets this evocative power given to the πίναξ as a general condemnation, on Herodotus’ part, of the use of the map to represent space (on this condemnation, see also footnote 15). However, if we bring it together with the observations on the elements of geographical language in Aristagoras’ discourse, we can rather consider that it contributes to staging a misappropriation: that of the enquirer’s own tools (the geographical map and the elements of language of spatial description) for the benefit of the tyrant’s dreams of conquest.

⁵⁷ ‘Cleomenes interrupted the further speech Aristagoras was launching into about the journey and said ...’ (Ὁ δὲ ὑπαρπάσας τὸν ἐπίλοιπον λόγον τὸν ὁ Ἀρισταγόρης ὥρμητο λέγειν περὶ τῆς ὁδοῦ, εἶπε).

a digression,⁵⁸ but also in a stronger sense, as introducing a genuine explanation. If so, it points back not to what immediately precedes it (Aristagoras' forced departure, 5.51.3),⁵⁹ but to the tyrant's speech, which ended a few lines earlier.⁶⁰ The second description it introduces would then have the function of extending and corroborating the first.⁶¹ The opening sentence of this second description seems, in fact, to support this interpretation (5.52.1):

Σταθμοί τε πανταχῆ εἰσι βασιλῆιοι καὶ καταλύσιες κάλλισται, διὰ οἰκεομένης τε ἡ ὁδὸς ἅπασα καὶ ἀσφαλῆος.

There are royal staging posts and superb resting places on all sides and the whole road passes through inhabited country held safe from danger.

Deborah T. Steiner, appreciating the charm and safety of the Royal Road in this preamble, recognizes the same notion of ease that was at the core of Aristagoras' speech.⁶² However, this tranquillity is ambivalent. It is displayed as a positive feature in the words Herodotus chooses (κάλλισται, ἀσφαλῆος), but its implications regarding a Greek expedition against Susa are more concerning: both the 'royal staging posts' (σταθμοὶ βασιλῆιοι),⁶³ and the reference to a populated territory (οἰκεομένης) with the adjective 'secure' (ἀσφαλῆς), suggest a route guarded and protected by numerous garrisons. A Spartan army marching on Susa would certainly not be the beneficiary of this safety emphasized by Herodotus, but rather the target of these protective measures. This first characterization of the Royal Road, appreciating the comfort of travel it offers, thus seems to adopt a radically different viewpoint on the object of the description: the perspective moves away

⁵⁸ On parenthetical γάρ, see above, footnote 4.

⁵⁹ 'Aristagoras left Sparta immediately, without having the opportunity to say anything more about the expedition against the Great King' (Ὁ Ἀρισταγόρης ἀπαλλάσσετο τὸ παράπαν ἐκ τῆς Σπάρτης, οὐδέ οἱ ἐξεγένετο ἐπὶ πλέον ἐπισημῆναι περὶ τῆς ἀνόδου τῆς παρὰ βασιλεία).

⁶⁰ On this delayed use of γάρ, see Denniston 1934: 63.

⁶¹ Nenci seems to understand this γάρ as such: 'non è esatto di dire con Legrand, *ad loc.*, che introdotto con γάρ il discorso si presenta come il sostituto di ciò che Aristagora avrebbe potuto dire, perché invece si tratta solo di una *summa* di precisazioni a uso del pubblico erodoteo' ('It is not true to say like Legrand, *ad loc.*, that the description, introduced with γάρ, appears as the substitute for what Aristagoras might have said. Instead, it is only a summary of clarifications for the benefit of the Herodotean audience', Nenci 1994: 232). While for Legrand the particle γάρ presents the second description of the Royal Road as a direct response to Aristagoras' hasty departure ('introduite par γάρ, elle se présente comme le substitut de ce qu'Aristagoras aurait pu dire' ['The description, introduced with γάρ, appears as the substitute for what Aristagoras might have said'], Legrand 1946: 99), for Nenci γάρ merely introduces a series of details completing the first description.

⁶² 'His [Herodotus'] representation does not wholly contradict the impression Aristagoras sought to give of a road traveled in easy stages. The rivers are all navigable, and the journey is broken up by the inns along its way. From the coast to the Great King's court, the voyager needs never leave inhabited territory, but follows the "royal road" divided up into the Persian unit of measurement, the parasang. Ease of travel and communication is a distinguishing feature of the Persian Empire, spanned by a network of roads maintained and guarded by the king's own troops.' (Steiner 1994: 149).

⁶³ LSJ, s.v. σταθμός, II: 'stations or stages on the royal road, where the King rested in travelling.'

from that of a Spartan conqueror towards a much more neutral, almost a touristic viewpoint — the gaze of a traveller free of any project of conquest, or even that of a subject of the Great King peacefully enjoying the comforts and beauty of the road. Should we recognize here the perspective of an enquirer oblivious to the possibility of conquest? Herodotus, according to this reading, would simply be substituting for Aristagoras' discourse a disinterested description of space relying on local sources of information.⁶⁴ This impression of neutrality, however, does not last long. Indeed, the following part of Herodotus' description accumulates elements that can be interpreted as obstacles to conquest, like the 'royal staging posts' (σταθμοὶ βασιλῆιοι) that line the road and the 'populated and secure' (οἰκεομένης τε καὶ ἀσφαλέος) territory it runs through.

First among these obstacles are the frontiers that Aristagoras had erased. To begin with, the term for frontier, οὐρός, occurs several times.⁶⁵ Further, Herodotus inserts between each people on the list an independent phrase entirely devoted to designating the border that separates it from its neighbour.⁶⁶ Yet each sentence is also an opportunity to mention the concrete obstacles that characterize these borders: between Phrygia and Cappadocia, a river guarded by 'gates' (πύλαι) and 'a large guard post' (φυλακτῆριον μέγα, 5.52.2); between Cappadocia and Cilicia, 'two gates', (διξάς πύλας, 5.52.2) and 'two guard posts' (διξὰ φυλακτῆρια); between Cilicia and Armenia, a river (5.52.3). No barrier is mentioned separating Armenia from Matiene, but by way of compensation Armenia is given a 'guard post' (φυλακτῆριον, 5.52.3) within its territory and Matiene is given four rivers flowing through it (5.52.4). Finally, Matiene is separated from Kissia by the last of these four rivers, the Gyndes (5.52.5).

Moreover, the obstacle represented by the rivers, whether or not they serve as borders, is systematically amplified by the addition of a further detail. The river Halys is fortified by a gate and a guard post, while all the other rivers mentioned are invariably described as 'navigable' (νησιπέρητοι). For Steiner, this characterization emphasizes the ease of progression: navigable rivers are open routes.⁶⁷ Pelling has argued, however, that the adjective can be understood in reverse: any river which is sufficiently wide and deep for boats to navigate is necessarily more difficult to cross for an army.⁶⁸ This list of obstacles highlighted

⁶⁴ Nenci, in particular, traces this second description of the Royal Road back to Persian sources that would explain the differences between the two depictions. According to him, Herodotus' strategy in this passage consists in completing Aristagoras' description with the help of more precise Persian sources. Cf. Nenci 1994: 231–2.

⁶⁵ In Herodotus' description, it occurs once in the singular (5.50.3: 'the frontier between Cilicia and Armenia is a navigable river', οὐρός δὲ Κιλικίης καὶ τῆς Ἀρμενίης ἐστὶ ποταμὸς νησιπέρητος) and twice in the plural (5.52.2: 'to the frontiers of Cilicia', μέχρι οὐρῶν τῶν Κιλικίων, then 'on the frontiers of this people', ἐπὶ δὲ τοῖσι τούτων οὐροισι).

⁶⁶ For instance, after mentioning Cappadocia and before moving on to the territory of the Cilicians, he states: 'on the frontiers of this people, you will go through two gates and pass through two guard posts' (ἐπὶ δὲ τοῖσι τούτων οὐροισι διξάς τε πύλας διεξαλάς καὶ διξὰ φυλακτῆρια παραμείψαι, 5.52.2).

⁶⁷ Steiner 1994: 149.

⁶⁸ Pelling 2007: 195. Pelling points out that the river Gyndes is already qualified by this adjective in the episode when its impetuous flood takes away one of Cyrus' horses as it was trying to swim across it (1.189). It is the only other occurrence where the adjective is

by Herodotus can finally be crowned with the different way in which the city of Susa, the goal of the planned expedition, is introduced. In Aristagoras' speech, Susa is a cache of treasure before it is a city (5.49.7):

Παρά ποταμὸν τόνδε Χοάσπην κείμενά ἐστι τὰ Σοῦσα ταῦτα, ἔνθα βασιλεὺς τε μέγας δίαίταν ποιέεται, καὶ τῶν χρημάτων οἱ θησαυροὶ ἐνθαῦτά εἰσι.

On the side of the river Choaspes, which is here, you can see Susa, where the Great King lives, and his treasure houses full of wealth, here they are!

The participle κείμενα suggests a Susa lying, prone and defenceless, on the banks of the river, offered up to Spartan conquest. Moreover, it is designated merely by name: it is only referred to as a πόλις in the next sentence, when, as the object of the participle ἐλόντες, it has already been conquered (5.49.7).⁶⁹ When Herodotus mentions Susa, by contrast, he omits mention of treasure houses and wealth, but reasserts its status as a πόλις (5.52.6):

Ἐκ δὲ ταύτης ἐς τὴν Κισσίην χώραν μεταβαίνοντι ἕνδεκα σταθμοί, παρασάγγαι δὲ δύο καὶ τεσσαράκοντα καὶ ἡμισὺ ἐστὶ ἐπὶ ποταμὸν Χοάσπην, ἔοντα καὶ τοῦτον νησιπέρητον, ἐπ' ᾧ Σοῦσα πόλις πεπόλισται.

When you leave the Matiene and go on into the territory of Kissia, they are eleven stages and forty-two and a half parasangs to the river Choaspes, which you have to cross by boat too; on its banks is erected the city of Susa.

Susa is transformed into a real city likely to defend itself. What is more, the verb πολίζω, highlighted here by the repetition of the stem (πόλις πεπόλισται) that I have failed to render faithfully in my translation, highlights its material construction. Thus, it points to the fortification that probably protects it, which the perfect tense helps to settle firmly in reality.

Another feature of Herodotus' description — completely omitted, by contrast, in Aristagoras' speech — is that it highlights the length of the journey. These chapters are saturated with indications of distance. For each territory that the Royal Road passes through, Herodotus systematically relates the length of this section in parasangs.⁷⁰ He also gives the number of σταθμοί (5.49.1):

associated with a river. However, it occurs one more time, with a very different overtone, in the description of the fertile lands of Babylonia irrigated by large canals. It does not qualify a river there, but the largest of the canals that run across the area's plains — this involves very different issues concerning navigation and crossing.

⁶⁹ 'Once this city is seized, you can now rival Zeus' wealth without any fear!' (Ἐλόντες δὲ ταύτην τὴν πόλιν θαρσέοντες ἤδη τῷ Διὶ πλούτου πέρι ἐρίζετε).

⁷⁰ With one single exception: in the text of the manuscripts, the indication of parasangs is not given for the section of the road that crosses Matiene. However, as the total number of

Διὰ μὲν γε Λυδίας καὶ Φρυγίας σταθμοὶ τείνοντες εἴκοσὶ εἰσι,
 παρασάγγαι δὲ τέσσερες καὶ ἐνενήκοντα καὶ ἥμισυ.

Across Lydia and Phrygia, first of all, stretches twenty stages and
 ninety-four and a half parasangs.

Since these σταθμοί are systematically associated with the measurement of space in parasangs and are here subjects of the participle τείνοντες, they can no longer simply designate the staging-posts that line the Royal Road, but rather the stages of the journey which are marked by these staging-posts.⁷¹ What might be read at the outset of the description as an indication of the comfort of the journey instead becomes suggestive of its length, which can be considered the real object of the second description.⁷² For such an interpretation, it must be assumed that the γάρ opening this section does not refer to Aristagoras' speech, but specifically to his subsequent response to Cleomenes' request about the length of the expedition. Thus, the opening γάρ presents Herodotus' description as a validation not of the whole speech, but only of the travel time indicated by Aristagoras. This seems to be confirmed by Herodotus' conclusion, which, after summing up the length of each section of the road, explicitly underlines his validation of this detail (5.54.1):

Οὕτω τῷ Μιλησίῳ Ἀρισταγόρῃ εἶπαντι πρὸς Κλεομένεα τὸν
 Λακεδαιμόνιον εἶναι τριῶν μηνῶν τὴν ἄνοδον τὴν παρὰ βασιλέα
 ὀρθῶς εἶρητο.

Thus, when Aristagoras of Miletus told Cleomenes the
 Lacedaemonian that it would take three months to reach the Great
 King, he was right.

This process of verification accounts for another peculiarity in the passage. Instead of converting travel time into units of distance, as he usually does, Herodotus reverses the traditional order and converts the units of distance into units of time.⁷³ At the very end of the passage, he adds a final clarification: in order to calculate correctly the travel time from the Aegean Sea to Susa, one must add to the total the duration of the journey from Ephesus to Sardis.

parasangs indicated by Herodotus at the end of his description ('since they are four hundred and fifty parasangs', παρασαγγέων ἐόντων πενήκοντα καὶ τετρακοσίων, 5.53) exceeds what we can obtain by adding the successive measurements, Stein suggests, in a conjecture, adding the missing parasangs from the part of the second description devoted to Matiene. Cf. Nenci 1994: 233.

⁷¹ Σταθμός initially indicates any 'place where one stops' (see Chantraine et al. 2009: 1007), such as a staging-post or a garrison in the case of the Royal Road. But it also comes to designate, from this sense of 'staging-post' or 'stage', a day of travel. Cf. Beekes and van Beek 2010: 1389 ('location, stable, farmstead, night lodgings, travel stage, day's march').

⁷² As for the verb ἔχω in Aristagoras' speech (see above), the antanaclasis here is especially meaningful: it makes manifest the shift by which the description moves from one view to another, thus revealing the perspective it actually adopts.

⁷³ For instance, when he measures the width of the Black Sea.

Καὶ δὴ λέγω σταδίουσ εἶναι τοὺσ πάντασ ἀπὸ θαλάσσησ τῆσ Ἑλληνικῆσ μέχρι Σούσων (τοῦτο γὰρ Μεμνόνειον ἄστυ καλέεται) τεσσεράκοντα καὶ τετρακισχιλίουσ καὶ μυρίουσ· οἱ γὰρ ἐξ Ἐφέσου ἐσ Σάρδισ εἰσὶ τεσσεράκοντα καὶ πεντακόσιοι στάδιοι· καὶ οὕτω τρισὶ ἡμέρησι μηκύνεται ἡ τρίμηνοσ ὁδός.

So this is what I say: from the Greek Sea to Susa (as Memnon's city is called) is a total of fourteen thousand four hundred stadia; indeed, from Ephesus to Sardis there are five hundred and forty stadia; and so the journey of three months is three days longer.

Because the purpose of his revision is, in fact, to verify the last piece of information given by Aristagoras, Herodotus does not attempt to discover a measure of distance but a measure of time — hence this reverse conversion. In doing so, however, he adopts a perspective that is not quite the one he usually follows when assuming, according to Payen's distinction, the viewpoint of the enquirer. Thus, this reverse conversion is another clue that the second description of the road is not free of any link to the conquest planned by Aristagoras, since it also aims to measure its length, and the narrator even boasts of calculating it more precisely than Aristagoras does himself.

A comparable transformation can be observed on a stylistic level. If some typical features of geographical description can be identified in Aristagoras' discourse, they are even more visible — more numerous, more coherent and more characteristic — in Herodotus' second version. In addition to the large number of indications of spatial measurements, Rood has noted the abundant use of the dative of point of view to mark the progression of the description in space,⁷⁴ for instance 'when one has passed these obstacles and is making one's way through Cilicia' (ταῦτα δὲ διεξέλασαντι καὶ διὰ τῆσ Κιλικικῆσ ὁδὸν πορευομένω, 5.52.3). This is a turn of phrase that Nenci identifies as a characteristic feature of geographical prose, inherited from Hecataeus of Miletus.⁷⁵ It is a feature abundantly used by Herodotus in those passages of the *Histories* where he is describing space from the perspective of the enquirer rather than that of the conqueror.⁷⁶ The same observation can be made about another feature noted by Rood: the indefinite use of the second person singular ('on the frontiers of this people, you will go through two gates', ἐπὶ δὲ τοῖσι τοῦτων οὐροισι διξάσ τε πύλασ διεξελάσ, 5.52.2), which is also observed in Herodotus' geographical descriptions. However, these two features appear throughout the description of the Royal Road in one and the same context: the crossing of a border. They allow Herodotus to draw even more attention to the obstacle that frontiers represent. Far from disappearing, as in Aristagoras' speech, they are signposted by means of verbal forms that express the action of crossing them; these verbs fulfil the double role of underlining the presence of a frontier and presenting it as an obstacle to be overcome. These

⁷⁴ Rood 2006: 295.

⁷⁵ Nenci 1994: 233.

⁷⁶ See the use of the participle 'going inland' (ἀνιόντι), which indicates that the description of Egypt follows the rise of the Nile.

verb forms, which are characteristic of the enquirer's descriptions, thus take on a new function: instead of lending precision to the geographical description, they participate in the construction of a discourse on the space being described — in this case, highlighting the obstacles it contains.

The strategy Herodotus employs in the narrative of this episode to counter the perspective of the conqueror embodied by Aristagoras differs from his usual strategy, as identified by Payen. Rather than seizing the floor from Aristagoras and substituting an enquirer's perspective, he first allows him to speak. Then he opposes him, not exactly from an enquirer's perspective, but with an inverted version of the conqueror's perspective.

UNMASKING A SHAM

The context of the episode may give us a clue to explain this change of strategy: within the narrative framework of the Ionian Revolt, the geographical dimension of the episode is, in fact, secondary. What is at issue is not the Royal Road in itself, or the methods of chorographical description, but the characterization of Aristagoras, a key figure in the revolt.⁷⁷ The confrontation between these two opposing presentations of the peoples of Asia is part of a broader staging around the character of Aristagoras orchestrated by the narrator of the *Histories* that encompasses the entire episode.

Aristagoras is very involved in the story of the Ionian Revolt from the first trouble in Naxos (5.30), but he gets his hour of glory in this scene of the embassy to Sparta. He is given a long piece of direct speech, which animates the character. Like a theatrical character, Aristagoras can rely on a stage prop: the map engraved on his πίναξ, which he makes abundant use of and integrates into his speech by means of numerous deictics.⁷⁸ Branscome suggests that we should consider the map and deictics as a way for Herodotus to use Aristagoras' speech as a prose map. Through Aristagoras' speech, the map would first be virtually traced in the reader's mind and then would serve as a visual support for Herodotus' own description of the Royal Road, the correct one.⁷⁹ This hypothesis is, however, difficult to reconcile with the fact that the second description of the Royal Road is not a real enquirer's description, but rather a focused and accurate response to Aristagoras' intentionally misleading map commentary. Nevertheless, Branscome's interpretation highlights an important aspect of this scene: the concentration of deictics in Aristagoras' speech cannot have the same effect for the addressee of the speech, Cleomenes, who sees the map engraved on the πίναξ and follows Aristagoras' indications on a real image, and for the addressee of the narrative, who does not have the possibility to do so, as pointed out by Purves.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ On Herodotus' critical judgement on this character in the account of the Ionian Revolt, and on the role of his speeches in the expression of this judgement, see Solmsen 1943: 200–1.

⁷⁸ For instance 'the Lydians here' (οἶδε Λυδοί, 5.49.5). On Aristagoras' πίναξ as a material item supporting his rhetorical speech, see Murnaghan 2001: 69–70.

⁷⁹ Branscome 2010: 22.

⁸⁰ Purves 2010: 137. Comparing this episode with the Homeric *ekphrasis*, Purves argues in particular that Herodotus refrains, when mentioning Aristagoras' map with its content, from describing it in detail: he leaves this to the biased and partial speech of the tyrant of Miletus.

Yet the narrator's description of the map on the πίναξ seems too succinct, and Aristagoras' description of the space depicted on it too imprecise, to allow the audience of the *Histories* to picture it mentally. It is much easier, by contrast, to take away the virtual image of an Aristagoras gesticulating around his πίναξ to show the peoples he evokes, with a growing excitement that can be gauged from the rhythm of his description, accelerating as we approach Susa and culminating in the exclamation full of hubris that he lets out (5.49.7). The deictics thus serve a double function: that of indicating to Cleomenes where to look on the map, to follow Aristagoras' directions, and that of allowing the audience of the *Histories* to picture more effectively a dynamic scene, in the manner of internal *didascalia* in a theatre dialogue. This unbridled agitation gives the episode the potential of a comic scene. To this must be added the rest of the Spartan episode: it ends with Aristagoras' failure, which takes the form of a triple snub. The false enquirer is alternately interrupted and chased out of Sparta by Cleomenes (5.50.3), foiled by an eight- or nine-year-old girl (5.51),⁸¹ and finally unmasked by a real enquirer, the narrator of the *Histories*, who temporarily borrows the perspective of the conqueror to reveal Aristagoras' imposture.⁸² The narrator's attitude is not devoid of sarcasm: although pretending to agree with his adversary, he contradicts him point by point, except for one issue for which he insists on his qualified approval. Yet this exception is the duration of the expedition. Thus, the only piece of information validated by Herodotus is the one that, as he also points out, costs Aristagoras the success of his embassy.

The failure of the embassy may also help to explain why Herodotus chose to develop Aristagoras' embassy to Sparta rather than to Athens: Aristagoras' failure in Sparta provides a more suitable context to discredit the figure of the would-be conqueror by ridiculing him. The embassy to Athens, by contrast, with its much weightier consequences, is not a laughing matter.⁸³ Aristagoras is stripped of his stage tricks: his map disappears from the narrative, and his words are not recorded any more in direct speech but through the narrator's mouth. The arguments are stated unadorned, the name of the Persians is no longer concealed and the yearning for conquest of the tyrant of Miletus can no longer be disguised as an enquirer's discourse. Aristagoras is not ridiculous and his dangerous ambitions are not delusive anymore. Herodotus has exploited the failure of the embassy to Sparta to discredit Aristagoras' character and create distrust of him; now he uses the success of the embassy to Athens to highlight more clearly the most alarming side of the imperialist tyrant.

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⁸¹ This girl is Gorgo, Cleomenes' daughter. When Aristagoras, after being spurned by the King, appears before him again as a supplicant and tries to buy a Spartan expedition for money, she speaks out to highlight the threat of corruption from the tyrant of Miletus, who is then driven out of Sparta for good.

⁸² On the role of humour in Herodotus' condemnation of tyranny, see Dewald 2006: 156ff.

⁸³ See the ambivalent link, pointed out by Dewald 2006, between humour and danger in the *Histories*.

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