Greek Scythians: Exploring Hybridity in Herodotus' *Histories*

Scholars have been suggesting for years that Greek thought was dominated by oppositional binaries, such as male and female, right and left, and at rest and in motion. In terms of Greek identity, scholars such as Paul Cartledge (1993) and Edith Hall (2002) have argued that the Greeks used a similar mindset when establishing the difference between themselves and the other peoples of the Mediterranean. Similarly, Jonathan Hall (2002) has asserted that while at one point the Greeks used their kinship ties to construct their identity, the Greek-Barbarian binary helped legitimize the Delian League. Herodotus himself spoke of Greeks and others in binary language in his proem when he said that his purpose for writing his inquiry was to make sure that τὰ **μὲν** Ἕλλησι, τὰ **δὲ** βαρβάροισι ἀποδεχθέντα, "the achievements accomplished by both the Greeks and the foreigners" might not be forgotten (1.3). However, in recent years scholars like Erich Gruen (2011) and Joseph Skinner (2012) have argued that the relationship between Greek and non-Greek is more complex than a simple oppositional binary. Maria Fragoulaki (2013) showed that there was a middle ground, or "hybridity," as she called it, where Greek and foreign cultures met and mingled (13). Therefore, while an oppositional analogy for identity existed in Greek thought, the complexity of the relationship between Greek and the other is influenced by more variables than a simple "us versus them" mentality.

In this paper, I intend to argue that Herodotus, while remaining within this binary framework, deconstructs the oppositional relationship between Greek and non-Greek. Herodotus is a provocative case study for examining this relationship because, as Cartledge (1993) aptly noted, his "attitude to non-Greeks…was hugely untypical" (38). While Herodotus' text provides a plethora of non-Greek nations for this study, this paper focuses on the Scythians. Although at first glance, the Scythians might seem like a counterexample for thinking about Greek identity,

as Herodotus describes them as the youngest (and therefore least developed) culture of all the nations of the world. Moreover, the Scythians were nomads, the opposite of the city-dwelling Greeks. However, Herodotus' characterization of the Scythians reveals that this nomadic people cannot be strictly opposed to the Greeks. Herodotus narrates two origin stories that claim that this nation was descended from either Zeus or Herakles (4.5-10). These kinship bonds, such as Xerxes suggested existed between the Persians and the Argives, provides a unique insight on how the Greek-Barbarian relationship can be non-oppositional, even if Herodotus finds these claims dubious. Furthermore, Herodotus notes that the Scythians technically worship the same gods by different names (4.59-63), although this falls into Fragoulaki's middle ground because they do not worship the gods in the same way.

Nevertheless, as Herodotus describes, the Athenians are ordered by the gods to abandon their city and rely on their ships in order to beat back the Persians (7.140-4). Since the majority of the populace follows this command, the Athenians in a sense turn towards a sort of Naval Nomadism, as I call it. Therefore, Herodotus uses the Scythians as an exemplum for the Athenians on how this lifestyle has its benefits, especially in war. Darius' invasion of Scythia acts as a microcosm of Xerxes' later invasion of Greece, and foreshadows how the Greek navy will help win the day. As a result, even though nomadism is seen as a negative trait of an uncivilized people, Herodotus shows how this lifestyle, when it is used temporarily and as a Naval Nomadism, benefitted the Athenians in the Persian War.

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