



Malta  
Classics  
Association

# MELITA CLASSICA

Vol. 3  
*2016*

*Journal of the  
Malta Classics Association*

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**Melita Classica**

*Vol. 3, 2016*

Text © Malta Classics Association  
Design and layout © Book Distributors Limited

ISBN: 978-99957-847-4-4

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## Themistocles as a trickster in Herodotus

*Nijole Juchneviene\**

Herodotus' *Histories* is the first extant work documenting the lives of the politicians<sup>1</sup> who took part in historical events. Although Herodotus' historiographical concept is mainly religious, it draws the attention to the importance of the individual within history; therefore, most of the time it is exactly the individual that determines a certain end of events.<sup>2</sup> The main source of information on wars and, especially, on the Greek politicians who took part in them, for Herodotus, was the oral tradition, which was sometimes authentic, but mostly it had already been perceived as a legend.<sup>3</sup> I am going to show that in his Themistoclean *logos* Herodotus employs the poetics of oral tradition, and the character of Themistocles in Herodotus bears the traits of an archetypal cultural hero, usually called the trickster.

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<sup>1</sup> Herodotus' reliance on other historians (*e. g.* Dionysius, Charon or Hellanicus) has been often discussed, but is hardly provable (see, *e.g.*, D. Fehling {1989}; J. Gould {1989}, 40; R. L. Fowler {1996}, 80-81; S. Hornblower {2004}, 15-16. The works of Hecataeus (and some other logographers) have made influence only on some geographical and ethnographical parts of *History* (S. West {1991}). The style of Herodotus' narrative is the style of the folktales (M. Lang {1984}, 4-6; J. Evans {1991}, 118). On Herodotus' informers and the oral traditions of the noble families see J. Wells (1923), 89-107; R. Thomas (1989), especially chapter 2.

<sup>2</sup> B. Gentili and G. Cerri (1988), 61; G. Lachenaud (1978), 667, refers to the perception of history in Herodotus as anthropocentric.

<sup>3</sup> The transformation of history into legend is already evident in Herodotus' narrative about the Persian wars (P. Cartledge {2007}, 156-175). These events and their participants inevitably became the theme of the literary works (Phrynichus' *Phoenissae*, *The capture of Miletus* and Aeschylus' *Persae* {see E. O'Neil [1942], 425-427; Simonides' poetry {6.2.1; 6.50.1; 6.197.1; 7.248.1; 7.249.1; 7.250.1; 7.251.1, etc.} {according to Plutarch [*Them.* 5], Simonides and Themistocles were friends by that time), the epigram by Timocreon against Themistocles {P.M.G. 727: for more details, see N. Robertson [1980], 61-78; R. M. McMullin [2001], 55-67}; Aristophanes' *Knights* {for more details, see C. A. Anderson [1989], 10-16}, as well as popular folktales and anecdotes of that day and of later times that prompted the ideas for political pamphlet, *e.g.*, the pamphlet by Stesimbrotus from Thasos on Miltiades, Themistocles and Pericles {for more details, see E. S. Gruen [1970]}).

According to the Greek tradition, this folklore figure is represented by special characters, which are regarded controversially.<sup>4</sup> This is best proved by the example of Prometheus: at the same time he is a thief and the saviour, a hero and a criminal, a God, who violated the laws of Gods, a fighter and a reconciler.<sup>5</sup> Salvation is reached through sinning. And, even though the saviour gets punished for it, he is able to outsmart his antagonists.

Themistocles is one of the most enigmatic figures in Herodotus' narrative. His activities, as well as his political career, are referred to as controversial; the evaluations of his actions range from accusations of treason, and hence condemnation, to heroisation and glorification as the saviour of Greece.<sup>6</sup> The scholars of this day refer to the situation of this sort of ancient tradition about Themistocles as *the myth of Themistocles* or *the saga of Themistocles*.<sup>7</sup> Its origins lie within the first extant works of Greek historiography, that is, in Herodotus' and Thucydides' *Histories*, where the latter one completes the first one. Herodotus' *Histories* only elaborate on Themistocles as much as his activities are related to Xerxes' campaign, whereas Thucydides talks only about that which Herodotus just enigmatically mentioned in passing,<sup>8</sup> but did not further elaborate upon, that is, Themistocles' further fate.

Thucydides, in his *Histories*, tells about *what really happened* to Themistocles (1.135-138). It is clear from his narrative that the accusations of treachery were prefabricated by the Spartans, who were afraid of Themistocles' politics (1.135).<sup>9</sup> Themistocles found out about

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<sup>4</sup> See G. S. Kirk (1982), 50.

<sup>5</sup> On Prometheus as a trickster, see C. Grottanelli (1983), 135.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Persae*, 355ff.; Thuc. 1.128-138; Diod. 11.54-59 (most probably, Diodorus retels Ephorus {see H. D. Westlake [1977], 106}); *Life of Themistocles* by Plutarch, *Themistocles* by Cornelius Nepos, etc.

<sup>7</sup> R. J. Lenardon (1978). Similarly, A. J. Holladay (1987), 186; P. Gardner (1898), 21-23.

<sup>8</sup> Hdt. 8.109.25: Ταῦτα ἔλεγε ἀποθήκην μέλλων ποιήσεσθαι ἐς τὸν Πέρσην, ἴνα, ἦν ἄρα τί μιν καταλαμβάνη πρὸς Ἀθηναίων πάθος, ἔχη ἀποστροφὴν· τὰ περ ὧν καὶ ἐγένετο.

<sup>9</sup> οἱ δὲ Ἀθηναῖοι, ὡς καὶ τοῦ θεοῦ ἄγος κρίναντος, ἀντεπέταξαν τοῖς Λακεδαιμονίοις ἐλαύνειν αὐτό. Τοῦ δὲ μηδισμού τοῦ Πausanίου οἱ Λακεδαιμόνιοι πρέσβεις πέμψαντες

the intentions to arrest him in advance (1.136.1) and, having no other resort, in an attempt to escape death (1.136.5: τὸ σῶμα σώζεσθαι), decided to leave for Persia and ask the Persian king for grace. Having experienced many dangers, which he escaped due to his cleverness and original solutions, he managed to reach Artaxerxes and lived in his dominion where he was provided with everything he needed and gained considerable influence (μέγας καὶ ὅσος οὐδείς πω Ἑλλήνων), mostly because he proved himself to be smart (ξυνετός) (1.138). Thucydides gives the famous characteristics of Themistocles – the first analytical psychological essay<sup>10</sup> in the history of Western literature, in which he stresses his inherent smartness and a discerning mind (οἰκεία ξύνεσις), a surprising skill to promptly (δι' ἐλαχίστης βουλής) make the best decision in a particular situation and foresee the possible sequence of events in the future (τοῦ γενησομένου ἄριστος εἰκαστής), as well as the ability to predict long-term positive and negative outcomes of certain decisions made (τό τε ἄμεινον ἢ χεῖρον ἐν τῷ ἀφανεῖ ἔτι προεώρα μάλιστα). Thucydides primarily attributes exceptional intellectual qualities to Themistocles, which he considered to be a feature of a great politician which was missed in the reality of his day.<sup>11</sup>

Thucydides is also the first historian to have told about the last days of Themistocles' life. He rejects the popular version that Themistocles

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παρὰ τοὺς Ἀθηναίους ξυνεπητιῶντο καὶ τὸν Θεμιστοκλέα, ὡς ἠϋρισκον ἐκ τῶν περὶ Πausanias ἐλέγχων, ἤξιον τε τοῖς αὐτοῖς κολάζεσθαι αὐτόν. οἱ δὲ πεισθέντες (ἔτυχε γὰρ ὡστρακισμένος καὶ ἔχων δίαίταν μὲν ἐν Ἄργει, ἐπιφοιτῶν δὲ καὶ ἐς τὴν ἄλλην Πελοπόννησον) πέμπουσι μετὰ τῶν Λακεδαιμονίων ἐτοίμων ὄντων ξυνδιώκειν ἄνδρας οἷς εἶρητο ἄγειν ὅπου ἂν περιτύχωσιν.

<sup>10</sup> Thuc. 1.138.3: Ἦν γὰρ ὁ Θεμιστοκλῆς βεβαιότατα δὴ φύσεως ἰσχὺν δηλώσας καὶ διαφερόντως τι ἐς αὐτὸ μᾶλλον ἐτέρου ἄξιος θαυμάσαι· οἰκεία γὰρ ξύνεσις καὶ οὔτε προμαθῶν ἐς αὐτὴν οὐδὲν οὔτ' ἐπιμαθῶν, τῶν τε παραχρῆμα δι' ἐλαχίστης βουλής κράτιστος γνώμων καὶ τῶν μελλόντων ἐπὶ πλείστον τοῦ γενησομένου ἄριστος εἰκαστής· καὶ ἃ μὲν μετὰ χεῖρας ἔχοι, καὶ ἐξηγήσασθαι οἷός τε, ὧν δ' ἄπειρος εἶη, κρίναι ἱκανῶς οὐκ ἀπήλλακτο· τό τε ἄμεινον ἢ χεῖρον ἐν τῷ ἀφανεῖ ἔτι προεώρα μάλιστα. καὶ τὸ ξύμπαν εἰπεῖν φύσεως μὲν δυνάμει, μελέτης δὲ βραχύτητι κράτιστος δὴ οὗτος αὐτοσχεδιάζειν τὰ δέοντα ἐγένετο.

<sup>11</sup> Themistocles' characteristics stands out both stylistically and lexically from the whole excursus about him; no doubt, it was written by Thucydides, however; the other parts of the excursus and their style and lexis show that, possibly, Thucydides was using some Ionic sources, too (H. D. Westlake {1977}, 105).

poisoned himself when he was forced to fulfil his promise to the king, and claims that the cause of his death was an illness;<sup>12</sup> he says that Themistocles' remains were secretly delivered to and buried in Attica by his relatives. The miscellaneous accounts of Themistocles' death and the history of the secret relocation of his remains back to his homeland undoubtedly means that Themistocles' life had been a legend already in Thucydides' days. Although Thucydides rejects the dramatic details of this legend, it is evident from the excursus that he was certain about Themistocles being the most famous politician of his time and, judging from all the genius characteristics attributed solely to him, the best one out of all politicians before him (1.138.6). He became the victim of political intrigues and, therefore, he was forced to choose the destiny of an exile, but it helped him save his life.

The story, told by Thucydides, was well known to Herodotus, but his *Histories* do not tell about it. The case of Themistocles in the *Histories* is exceptional: the other politicians who took part in the Persian wars (Miltiades, Leonidas, Pausanias etc.) in the *Histories* have their 'past' and 'future', assumed from the time of the described events. This allows Herodotus to summarize the dramatic changes of the politicians' lives, applying the traditional ὕβρις – νέμεσις motive. The biography of Miltiades, the hero of Marathon, is modelled according to the latter principle (Hdt. 6. 35).<sup>13</sup> It is a way Herodotus chose to dramatize the images

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<sup>12</sup> 1.138.4: νοσήσας δὲ τελευτᾶ τὸν βίον· λέγουσι δὲ τινες καὶ ἐκούσιον φαρμάκῳ ἀποθανεῖν αὐτόν, ἀδύνατον νομίσαντα εἶναι ἐπιτελέσαι βασιλεῖ ἃ ὑπέσχετο. Perhaps, Thucydides considered the idea that Themistocles poisoned himself by drinking the blood of an ox even less credible; therefore, he chose the general term φάρμακον. This theory was mentioned in the *Knights*, 83-84, staged in 424 B.C., which proves the version to be popular and widely known after less than 35 years after Themistocles' death (K. J. Redford {1987}, 217). The blood of the ox as the reason of Themistocles' death is also named by Diodorus (11.58.3) and Plutarch, *Them.* 31.5-6; the less popular version by Plutarch is that Themistocles died from poison. The blood of the ox was thought to be poisonous, probably due to its fast coagulation (J. Marr {1995}, 159).

<sup>13</sup> The simplest folk version of the belief that gods punish those who are too successful or too proud is typical of many nations (D. Grene {1961}, 483). It is reflected in Herodotus' *Histories* in a leitmotiv of *Gods' envy* (the dialogue between Croesus and Solon in 1.32, the great success of Polycrates in 3.40, etc.) and in the works of the tragedians of that day (*Persians*, 362 and *Agamemnon*, 946-947 by Aeschylus).

of the characters by employing the poetics of tragedy:<sup>14</sup> he introduces the motive of the tragic error or predestination that is impossible for a character to avoid, as well as the motive of false pride. The tragic fate of Miltiades could be explained by such ethically connotative leitmotifs as his owning of great property and its excessive desire (6.41; 6.133), pride (his tyranny – 4.137; 6.39; 6.104), selfish deception (6.132), anger and revenge (6.133), aberration (6.134) and the crime induced by it (6.134).<sup>15</sup> Themistocles' activities and the later tragic peripeteia of his life would be just as suitable to depict the decadence of a morally corrupt person. However, Herodotus chose a different stylistic code for his Themistoclean *logos*.

In Herodotus' *Histories*, Themistocles is a compositional link to the story about the fight against Xerxes. The description of his activities joins together the events before Xerxes' campaign, the battles at Artemisium and Salamis, and the situation at the ally camp after the reached victory.<sup>16</sup> He is introduced into the narrative *in medias res*, in the episode about preparation of the Athenians to confront Persians after the prophecy of the Delphic oracle given to them (7.143). Such an introduction makes him stand out from all the other historical characters who are mentioned in advance in excursuses or parentheses before the main narrative about them.<sup>17</sup>

Herodotus begins the story about Xerxes' campaign by describing in detail the unstoppable marching of the Persian soldiery towards central Greece, and presenting the chaos in Athens in attempt to find escape after having received ambiguous, but non-optimistic answers from the Delphic oracle (7.140-142). The situation in Athens is portrayed as hopeless, with neither priests nor politicians being able to come up with a solution. It

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<sup>14</sup> For information on the impact of the style of tragedy on Herodotus evident in his description of the historical event and character portrayal, see H. R. Immerwahr (1954), 16-45; Ch. C. Chiasson (2003), 5-35.

<sup>15</sup> See M. Lang (1984), 251.

<sup>16</sup> Themistocles is mentioned in 7.143, 144, 173; 8.4, 5, 19, 22, 23, 57-59, 61, 63, 75, 79, 83, 92, 108-112, 123-125; 9.98.

<sup>17</sup> Before the main narrative about them, such personalities as Miltiades (4.137), Leonidas (5.41), Pausanias (4.81), even Dareius or Xerxes (1.183), are mentioned.

is exactly then when Themistocles is introduced into the narrative; until that moment, he was not mentioned in *Histories* at all. Themistocles appears as if out of nowhere, he is a person without the past: ἦν δὲ τῶν τις Ἀθηναίων ἀνὴρ ἐς πρώτους νεωστὶ παριῶν, τῷ οὖνομα μὲν ἦν Θεμιστοκλῆς, παῖς δὲ Νεοκλέος ἐκαλέετο (7.143). He is also the only politician of the Greco-Persian war epoch who is introduced into the narrative via the traditional folk tale formula (ἦν δὲ τῶν τις...).<sup>18</sup> This kind of opening points to the beginning of the *logos* about the most glorious victory of the Greeks – the victory at Salamis, which had already become a legend.<sup>19</sup> It also alludes to the narrative being about Themistocles who, from the first lines of the story, is depicted as the saviour of Athens and the whole Greece.

The whole narrative of Herodotus' *Histories* is future oriented; its primary purpose is to save the glorious deeds from the oblivion. The same goes to the narrative about Themistocles, which reflects Herodotus' opinion of him and which is dedicated to future generations. Herodotus' contemporaries, the Athenians, were well informed about Themistocles' activities and his family; during Herodotus' time, Themistocles' relatives lived in Athens.<sup>20</sup> Many were able to notice that such an introduction into the narrative distorts historical truth, since Themistocles in 480 B.C. by no means was a novice in politics (ἐς πρώτους νεωστὶ παριῶν) or an unheard-of person (τις); his father, Neocles, belonged to the noble Lycomidae family which was well known in Athens. Although Themistocles' family was not very influential,<sup>21</sup> he himself undoubtedly was a prominent politician.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>18</sup> In this manner, in the *Histories*, only the narratives about Candaulus (1.7), Croesus (1.6), Periander (1.23), Deioces (1.96), Otanes (3.68), Cylon (5.71), Onesilus (5.104), begin.

<sup>19</sup> Herodotus (and some historians of both Antiquity and Modern Day who have been influenced by Herodotus' narrative) considers this battle, and not the one of Plataea, to be crucial in the wars against the Persians (P. Cartledge {2007}, 10).

<sup>20</sup> Cf. *Thuc.* 1.138.6: τὰ δὲ ὅσα φασι κομισθῆναι αὐτοῦ οἱ προσήκοντες οἴκαδε κελεύσαντος ἐκείνου καὶ τεθῆναι κρύφα Ἀθηναίων ἐν τῇ Ἀττικῇ.

<sup>21</sup> N. G. L. Hammond (1986), 154.

<sup>22</sup> Probably in 493 B.C. (or 483: see J. A. R. Munro {1892}, 333), Themistocles was elected an archon; so, at that time, he possibly was 44 (or 34) years old; the first date is more probable (P. Green {1998}, 23; N. G. L. Hammond {1986}, 210). There is certain proof about

It is exactly this kind of Herodotus' presentation of Themistocles that assures scholars of Herodotus' negative opinion about him.<sup>23</sup> I am going to show that the profile of this politician can be interpreted differently.

The narrative about Themistocles begins with the episode of interpretation of the prophecy (7.143). Themistocles' ability to rightly (κατὰ τὸ ὀρθόν) decipher the second prophecy is emphasized which, according to Herodotus, was misunderstood even by the interpreters of prophecies. Themistocles advised the Athenians not to hide behind the wooden walls of the Acropolis; instead, they should prepare for the sea battle with the Persians, since it is exactly the ships that Pythia was talking about. The Athenians acknowledged Themistocles' opinion being more plausible than the insights of the priests. The episode which discloses Themistocles' extraordinary intellectual and political<sup>24</sup> skills is linked to the events of the very near past (parenthesis, providing the 'forgotten' or delayed information<sup>25</sup> - 7.144): it becomes evident that earlier, *luckily* (ἐξ καίρῳ), Themistocles had persuaded the Athenians to build ships from the additional profit received from the Laureion mines, supposedly for the war against Aegina, instead of sharing the money. This was the first one of Themistocles' lies that make up Herodotus' saga about him. Actually, this politician made use of the possible war against Aegina so that he might build up the fleet for the war against the Persians. So, at the moment of the narrative, the Athenians, earlier having been 'tricked' by Themistocles and having agreed with his opinion, had already built the ships.

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Themistocles' political influence before the battle of Salamis: during the excavations of the Athenian agora, ostraka were found, with mostly Themistocles' name written on them (R. Osborne {2001}, 332).

<sup>23</sup> Herodotus' narrative about Themistocles is considered to be subjective and unfavourable by Peter Green, one of the most famous scholars of the history of the Persian wars period (P. Green {1998}, 23; Daniel Gill {1969}, 333-345, is of the opinion that Herodotus could have been affected by Alcmaeonid propaganda; similarly in A. J. Podlecki {1975}, 71, and others).

<sup>24</sup> It is evident that Themistocles made use of the prophecy as a perfect chance to draw religious Athenians to his side. This episode is similarly interpreted by Plutarch (*Them.* 4).

<sup>25</sup> This kind of narratological strategy is used in novelistic, traditional narrative-based parts of *Histories*.

Towards the end of the narrative of the episode about the preparation for the battle, it is stated that Themistocles led the Athenian troops, who were heading towards Tempe plain which they had to defend (7.173); however, nothing is said about Themistocles as a *strategos*.

Themistocles is the main character in book 8 of the *Histories*, in which the sea battles against Xerxes' fleet are described. Here, as in the first episodes, we do not see Themistocles fighting or leading the troops. The narrative once again is concentrated on the battle of opinions. Its main leitmotifs are Themistocles' shrewd mind, the accurate foretelling of the future events and the ability to make the best decision, as well as the powerful ability to persuade others with his opinion; when words become inefficient, Themistocles employs deception *in order to save Greece* (8.160: σῶσαι τὴν Ἑλλάδα). On the other hand, the narrative discloses the other side of Themistocles: by doing good to Greece,<sup>26</sup> he usually does not ignore himself either.

When the Greeks, having reached Artemisium, notice myriads of Persian ships, they decide to run away in fright. The Euboeans ask them to wait until they take their women and children to a safer place; however, the general, Eurybiades, objects to it. Then they turn to Themistocles and, after having paid him thirty talents, 'persuade' him to stay. Themistocles comes up with an idea of how to "persuade" the others: he gives five talents to Eurybiades, pretending to grant them from his own money; the last one, Corinthian Adeimantus, receives three talents. Having deceived both sides, Themistocles holds up the Greeks: he keeps their unity and the war spirit yet, at the same time, he benefits himself from the situation.<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, 8.19 tells about another trickery of Themistocles, which had a very different outcome: he helped to plant the evil seed between the Persians and their allies, the Ionians and Carians. Herodotus comments on the smart move of Themistocles by pointing out that, even

<sup>26</sup> 8.79, Aristeides addresses Themistocles: Ἡμέας στασιάζειν χρεόν ἐστι <ει> ἐν [τε] τεῷ ἄλλω καιρῷ καὶ δὴ καὶ ἐν τῷδε περὶ τοῦ ὀκότερος ἡμέων πλέω ἀγαθὰ τὴν πατρίδα ἐργάσεται.

<sup>27</sup> 8.5.3: Οὗτοί τε δὴ πληγέντες δῶροισι ἀναπεπεισμένοι ἦσαν καὶ τοῖσι Εὐβοεῦσι ἐκεχάριστο, αὐτὸς τε ὁ Θεμιστοκλῆς ἐκέρδηνε. Ἐλάνθανε δὲ τὰ λοιπὰ ἔχων, ἀλλ' ἠπιστέατο οἱ μεταλαβόντες τούτων τῶν χρημάτων ἐκ τῶν Ἀθηνέων ἐλθεῖν ἐπὶ τῷ λόγῳ τούτῳ [τὰ χρήματα].

if he had not succeeded, the king would still had been suspicious towards their loyalty. So, in any case, Themistocles' idea proved to be worth it.<sup>28</sup>

When, after having decided to leave Artemisium and having gathered at Salamis, the Greeks find out that Xerxes had occupied Athens, they decide to sail away at dawn (8.56). After Themistocles returns to his ship, the Athenian Mnesiphylus warns him that this kind of irresponsible decision will be disastrous for Greece (8.57: ἀπολέεταί τε ἡ Ἑλλάς ἀβουλίῃσι); he suggests, if there still is at least a tiny possibility, finding another way to persuade Eurybiades to make up his mind (ἀναγνῶσαι Εὐρυβιάδην μεταβουλεύσασθαι). Themistocles immediately paid a visit to Eurybiades and, having presented Mnesiphylus' opinion as his own (ἔωστοῦ ποιούμενος), persuades him to call another council of the *strategoí* (8.58). During the discussion (8.59-62), Themistocles is proactive: before Eurybiades says anything, Themistocles starts presenting strong arguments to the allies about why it is of great importance to have a battle at Salamis; he has no doubt that the Greeks will surely win due to the strategically most convenient place, and concluded that the freedom of Greece depends on the right decision of Eurybiades, which is to agree with Themistocles' opinion (8.60: Ἐν σοὶ νῦν ἔστι σῶσαι τὴν Ἑλλάδα, ἣν ἐμοὶ πείθη...); leaving Salamis, however, would be perilous to Greece (VIII. 62.1: ἀνατρέψεις τὴν Ἑλλάδα).

Themistocles managed to persuade the others, this time only by words, and the Greeks started preparing for the battle (8.64, 70). When they lined up, night fell. When dawn broke, Themistocles had to return to his role of the saviour of Greece: the Peloponnesians found out that Xerxes had sent an army to the Isthmus and was going to take the Peloponnese (8.71); therefore, they were getting ready to sail and fight for the Peloponnese. The Athenians wanted to stay and fight at Salamis. This time, Themistocles fails to persuade the Peloponnesians (8.75: ἔσσοῦτο τῇ γνώμῃ ὑπὸ τῶν Πελοποννησίων...). Then, to achieve his aim, he again turns to trickery and lies. He leaves a meeting unnoticed (... λαθῶν ἐξέρχεται...) and sends one of his slaves to the Persians, with the message that Themistocles had sent him in secret, because he is on the king's side and wants him to win. His suggestion to the king is to

<sup>28</sup> 8.22.3: Θεμιστοκλέης δὲ ταῦτα ἔγραφε, δοκέειν ἐμοί, ἐπ' ἀμφότερα νοέων...

surround the Greeks at Salamis as fast as he can, since they are going to sail away. The Persians fall for the lie (8.76.1: Τοῖσι δὲ ὡς πιστὰ ἐγένετο τὰ ἀγγελθέντα...), and block the gulf of Salamis at night. At this moment, we would expect a remark from Herodotus, questioning the fact of why the king trusts Themistocles; yet, there is no comment about it. The absence of Herodotus' comment may signify that the strategy of the narrative has changed and it is now being constructed according to the logic of a fairy tale about a smart trickster: Themistocles is smarter, and that is why he wins.

While the Greeks are still arguing without knowing what was done, Aristеides,<sup>29</sup> who had come back from exile, visited Themistocles and announced that the Greeks were surrounded (8.79). In Herodotus' narrative, two former enemies<sup>30</sup> meet – Aristеides who, according to Herodotus, was the most just and the most honourable Athenian of that day (8.79.1: τὸν ἐγὼ νενόμικα, πυνθανόμενος αὐτοῦ τὸν τρόπον, ἄριστον ἄνδρα γενέσθαι ἐν Ἀθήνησι καὶ δικαιοτάτον) and Themistocles, whom Herodotus names as the smartest (8.110.1:... δεδογμένος εἶναι σοφός, ἐφάνη ἐὼν ἀληθέως σοφός τε καὶ εὐβουλος...; 8.110.3:... ἀνὴρ δὲ τῶν συμμαχῶν πάντων ἄριστος καὶ σοφώτατος...; 8.124.1: πολλὸν Ἑλλήνων σοφώτατος ἀνὰ πᾶσαν τὴν Ἑλλάδα...). Themistocles admits to Aristеides that it was him who encouraged the Persians, because he wanted to make the Greeks fight at Salamis at any cost (8.80.1). Strangely, Aristеides is not angered by Themistocles' 'treachery'. Both politicians agree to act together and try to help Greece as much as they can.

However, Aristеides, *the most just and most honourable man in Athens*, is not the main hero of the story; his merits in the war against the Persians in Herodotus are minimal.<sup>31</sup> Since it objects to the surviving

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<sup>29</sup> In the ostracism of 480 B.C., during which Aristеides' supporters wanted to banish Themistocles, Themistocles won and actually it was Aristеides who was banished. During the time of Xerxes' campaign, ostracism was cancelled, and the exiles were granted the right to come back to their homeland (Arist. *Ath.* 22.8).

<sup>30</sup> 8.79.2: Οὗτος ὡνήρ στὰς ἐπὶ τὸ συνέδριον ἐξεκαλέετο Θεμιστοκλέα, ἐόντα μὲν ἐωυτῷ οὐ φίλον, ἐχθρὸν δὲ τὰ μάλιστα.

<sup>31</sup> Herodotus briefly mentions that Aristеides, together with the soldiers, killed all the Persian soldiers in Psyttaleia (8.95). Other authors consider his merits much greater

Greek tradition, it can be assumed, that Aristeides was mentioned in the story only to inform the Greeks that they are surrounded: he is granted the role of an honourable and just, but an unintelligent character in the story about a smart trickster. In folktales of similar nature, it is a secondary character that is put in contrast to the protagonist. In this episode, Themistocles speaks the most. As soon as Themistocles asks him, Aristeides agrees to inform the Greeks about the blockade of the gulf (8.81). Themistocles explains his request by stating that if he, and not Aristeides, was to tell it to the Greeks, they would think that he made it up and would not believe him (8.80.2: "Ἦν γὰρ ἐγὼ αὐτὰ λέγω, δόξω πλάσας λέγειν καὶ οὐ πείσω ὡς οὐ ποιεύντων τῶν βαρβάρων ταῦτα..."). In this way, Themistocles' reputation as a liar *par excellence* is indirectly confirmed. However, the Greeks do not believe Aristeides, either; the Greeks were only persuaded by the crew, who deserted Tenos' camp and told the Greeks that they were surrounded (8.82).

In the third part of the Themistoclean *logos*, which tells the story after the victory at Salamis, the previous motives of the narrative are repeated. Themistocles once again tries to persuade the Greeks to act wisely and destroy the bridges over the Hellespont, so that the Persian army might not escape and be finally thrashed (8.108). Yet, the Greeks take the opposite view – they think that the Persians should be allowed to escape, for it would be impossible to defeat them. Undoubtedly, Herodotus' audience knew well that this decision was wrong, and that Themistocles was right: not even a year passed when the Greeks defeated the Persian army that remained in Greece, in the battle of Plataea. Seeing that he will not be able to convince the majority (8.109.1: Ὡς δὲ ἔμαθε ὅτι οὐ πείσει τοὺς γε πολλοὺς...), Themistocles delivers a different kind of speech dedicated to his only supporters, the Athenians, in which he denies everything that he had ever said: it is better to let the enemies escape, rather than chase them; because the glory of the victory against the Persians does not

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(Aesch., *Persae*, 447-471; Plut., *Aristeid.*, 10). Timocreon of Rhodes, a contemporary of Themistocles, in his invective that harshly criticizes Themistocles, contrasts Themistocles with Aristeides (N. Robertson {1980}, 65).

belong to the Greeks, it belongs to the gods and heroes.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, let everyone take care of themselves and their families – let them rebuild their houses and farm their land (8.109). In this episode Themistocles once again stands out as the smartest and the wisest. Having foreseen that the allies now will argue even more than before the battle and that it will be even harder for him to defend his opinion, Themistocles invents a new trickery and openly lies to the Athenians. The Athenians, just like Xerxes earlier, give in to Themistocles' trickery (here is another paradox: in the previous episode they would not have believed him, although he would have told the truth, and now they believe him, although he is lying). At this point, Herodotus comments on why the Athenians did not detect trickery: Θεμιστοκλῆς μὲν ταῦτα λέγων διέβαλλε, Ἀθηναῖοι δὲ ἐπίειθοντο· ἐπειδὴ γὰρ καὶ πρότερον, δεδογμένος εἶναι σοφός, ἐφάνη ἔων ἀληθέως σοφός τε καὶ εὐβουλος, πάντως ἔτοιμοι ἦσαν λέγοντι πείθεσθαι (8.110).

After delivering the speech of such sort, Themistocles immediately sends his slave to Xerxes for the second time, with the message that he had talked the Greeks into not destroying the bridges across the Hellespont; therefore, the king has got a perfect possibility to retreat. Herodotus presents the following motive to explain Themistocles' action: he did it, in order to please the king, so that the king might grant him shelter in case the Athenians changed their opinion about him (8.109). Herodotus absolutely justifies Themistocles' actions by stating that this truly happened (τά περ ὧν καὶ ἐγένετο).

At the end of the Themistoclean *logos* (8.111-112), his goal to benefit from the islands that supported the Persians is told: he pretended to demand the money for contribution, but actually, for himself. This episode brings the reader to the beginning of the story, when Themistocles received a lot of money from the Euboeans for persuading the Greeks to stay at Artemisium, and kept most of it to himself (8.4-5). However, the interpretation of these two events is different – the second one presents a negative view towards Themistocles' actions for the first and only time (οὐ γὰρ ἐπαύετο πλεονεκτέων). This way, Herodotus proves his principle

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<sup>32</sup> 8.109.3: Τάδε γὰρ οὐκ ἡμεῖς κατεργασάμεθα, ἀλλὰ θεοὶ τε καὶ ἥρωες, οἱ ἐφθόνησαν ἄνδρα ἓνα τῆς τε Ἀσίας καὶ τῆς Εὐρώπης βασιλεῦσαι...

to present all opinions objectively;<sup>33</sup> still, this episode does not alter the portrait of Themistocles in the *Histories*. It is also the last episode in the narrative about Themistocles.

Nothing is said about Themistocles' later fate, even though Herodotus was familiar with the Athenians' stories. Only one thing is obvious: Herodotus explains the end of Themistocles' career as the outcome of hostile and biased acts (πρὸς Ἀθηναίων πάθος – 8.109.5).<sup>34</sup> The Athenians' opinion about him had changed, just as Themistocles predicted. Since only Themistocles' opinion in the narrative is right, the Athenians' opinion *a priori* seems doubtful.

When telling about Xerxes' campaign, Herodotus presents his own opinion about the role of the Athenians in this war more than once – he calls them the true saviours of Greece.<sup>35</sup> Yet, in Herodotus' narrative, the only representative of the Athenians is Themistocles. It is he who gets all the glory of the victory at Salamis. Themistocles is the only one of the Greek war leaders who not only clearly perceives the current situation and offers the best decision, but also, using his smartness and trickery, makes everyone obey him. Even when Themistocles receives the greatest acknowledgement, he does not stop thinking about what awaits him in the future. Predicting that the Athenians' opinion about him might change, he takes actions that will have to save his life in the future, in advance.

So, Herodotus and Thucydides share the same opinion on Themistocles;<sup>36</sup> however, it is presented in a different way. Thucydides' analytical approach is revealed through the direct characteristics of Themistocles as an exceptionally smart and insightful politician.

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<sup>33</sup> 7.152.3: Ἐγὼ δὲ ὀφείλω λέγειν τὰ λεγόμενα, πείθεσθαι γὰρ μὲν οὐ παντάπασιν ὀφείλω (καὶ μοι τοῦτο τὸ ἔπος ἐχέτω ἐς πάντα τὸν λόγον).

<sup>34</sup> The tradition of Themistocles' treachery still seems quite doubtful; moreover, there is a possibility that Themistocles' letters are a falsification (R. J. Lenardon {1978}, 136).

<sup>35</sup> 7.139: Νῦν δὲ Ἀθηναίους ἂν τις λέγων σωτῆρας γενέσθαι τῆς Ἑλλάδος οὐκ ἂν ἀμαρτάνοι τάληθέος...

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Thuc. 1.138.3: τὸ τε ἄμεινον ἢ χειρὸν ἐν τῷ ἀφανεῖ ἔτι προεώρα μάλιστα.

Meanwhile, Herodotus employs the poetics of folktales about a smart trickster, in order to present his opinion.

The protagonist of such stories shamelessly subverts the existing norms and does not follow the traditional behavioural rules; however, by acting this way, he is able to achieve positive results both for himself and everybody else. It is exactly the ability to overstep the bounds and get away with it, and moreover, to benefit from it, that is the main trait of an archetypal trickster.<sup>37</sup>

If it is a person, he usually is ordinary and undistinguished;<sup>38</sup> nevertheless, due to the ability to outwit and outsmart everybody, he is able to trick a superior antagonist (in this case, they are Xerxes, Eurybiades, Aristeides, the Athenians). Perhaps that is the reason why Themistocles is presented as *homo novus*, a novice in politics, whereas the leader of the aristocrats, Aristeides, is granted the role of an unapprehensive deuteragonist.

In Herodotus' *Histories*, the motive of trickery and the trickster is very common.<sup>39</sup> Smartness, wit and courage to carry out that, which had been thought as a plan, usually guarantee success in the *Histories*.

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<sup>37</sup> See C. Grottanelli (1983), 120-139.

<sup>38</sup> C. Grottanelli (1983), 120.

<sup>39</sup> *E.g.*, the story about an Egyptian pharaoh Rampsinit and his treasure (2.121: a thief, who survived, is awarded for his smartness – he gets the pharaoh's daughter as his wife); the story about Peisistratus' trick, which helped him gain back his power (1.60); the story about the leaders of the Ionian revolt, Histiaeus and Aristagoras, one of whom succeeds in tricking the king himself, whereas the other one tricks not only the king and his men, but also the Athenians, together with the Ionians, who took part in the riot (5.97; 6.30) (on Herodotus' opinion of the so-called Ionian revolt, see K. H. Waters {1970}, 504-508); the story about a doctor, Democedes, who tricked Darius and not only came back to his homeland, but also married a rich woman (3.129.3-138); the story about a queen, Artemisia, who attacked the Persian ship, and was praised for that by the Persian king, as well as by Herodotus himself (8.87-88); the story about the Zopyrus' deceit (3.154-160); the trickery of Alexander, the Macedonian prince, who killed Persian messengers and was not punished by the king (4.146, 5.20), etc.

Herodotus admires tricksters who are able to find a way out of the most difficult situation. Μηχανή, τέχνη, σοφία, δόλος, άπάτη, έπιστήμη are the keywords of humorous and comic episodes of Herodotus' narrative.<sup>40</sup>

This kind of *Odyssey*-resembling aspect of Herodotus' *Histories*,<sup>41</sup> according to D. Lateiner, is evident in the narrative about Themistocles, too. However, Themistocles surpasses all other tricksters in Herodotus' *Histories*. His trickeries overstep the limits of private life and gain the geopolitical dimension. Not expecting it himself, he becomes a tool for the gods' will: it is thanks to him that Xerxes' campaign starts as a tragedy, and ends as a farce. He manages to trick the Greeks, as well as the Persian king, in order to reach the only goal, which is to save Greece. Yet, Themistocles does not exclude himself, while thinking of the freedom of his homeland: he is able to present his deceit that destroyed the Persians at Salamis as a good deed to the king; he also tells the king that the Greeks' decision not to pursue the Persians was his own merit (in the same way, Themistocles is able to deceive not only Xerxes, but also Artaxerxes) and, what is more, due to these deceptions, Themistocles is able to save his life after many years.<sup>42</sup> Herodotus presents a very detailed and coherent description of Xerxes' preparation for the campaign, the composition of his army and their rout (7.20-131); however, he does not provide a detailed description of the sea battles, neither strategy nor tactics. He draws his attention to Themistocles' actions that disclose his main trait, and disregards other episodes: he does not discuss Themistocles' past activities, nor does he tell about the end of Themistocles' life. In the political game of the two leaders – Athens and Sparta – Themistocles' trickeries lose their power and he becomes the victim of the machinations and trickeries of others.

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<sup>40</sup> D. Lateiner (1990), 231-233.

<sup>41</sup> D. Lateiner (1990), 231. Cf. Athena's words about Odysseus (*Od.* 13.291-299): κερδαλέος κ' εΐη και επίκλοπος, ός σε παρέλθοι / έν πάντεσσι δόλοισι, και ει θεός άντιάσειε. / σχέτλιε, ποικιλομήτα, δόλων άατ', ούκ άρ' έμελλες, / ούδ' έν σή περ έών γαΐη, λήξειν άπατάων / μύθων τε κλοπίων, οΐ τοι πεδόθεν φίλοι εισίν. / άλλ' άγε μηκέτι ταΰτα λεγώμεθα, ειδότες άμφω / κέρδε', έπει σύ μέν έσαι βροτῶν όχ' άριστος άπάντων / βουλή και μύθοισιν, έγώ δ' έν πάσι θεοΐσι / μήτι τε κλέομαι και κέρδεσιν'...

<sup>42</sup> He probably escaped from Greece in 467 B.C., and came to Persia after 465 B.C.

Themistocles remained alive only because he knew in advance that it could happen. *And it truly happened* – τὰ περ ὧν καὶ ἐγένετο.

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