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**DOI**

[10.1163/9789004682702\\_006](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004682702_006)

**Publication date**

2024

**Document Version**

Final published version

**Published in**

Reading Greek and Hellenistic-Roman Spolia

**License**

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[Link to publication](#)

**Citation for published version (APA):**

de Jong, I. J. F. (2024). Herodotus' Framing of the Persian Spolia at Plataea. In I. J. F. de Jong, & M. J. Versluys (Eds.), *Reading Greek and Hellenistic-Roman Spolia: Objects, Appropriation and Cultural Change* (pp. 71-86). (Euhormos: Greco-Roman Studies in Anchoring Innovation; Vol. 5). Brill. Advance online publication. [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004682702\\_006](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004682702_006)

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## Herodotus' Framing of the Persian Spolia at Plataea

*Irene J.F. de Jong*

If the Persian invasions of mainland Greece in the fifth century BC did not achieve their military goal and did not result in the capture of Greece, they did however have a decidedly cultural impact. The spolia of the Persian wars play, together with trade and diplomatic gifts, a major role in inspiring Athens' receptivity of Persian culture, as has been fully documented by Margaret Miller in her invaluable study from 1997.<sup>1</sup> The positive Athenian response to Persian culture or 'Perserie', as she calls it in an analogy with the 'Chinoiserie' which captivated Europe in the eighteenth century, includes the imitation of Persian metal vessels in Attic clay, the adoption of foreign items of dress and of luxury status symbols like parasols and peacocks, and the building of the Persian-looking Odeion.

One of Miller's central texts is Herodotus' report on the spoils of Plataea (*Histories* 9.80–84), which in its detail and tone evokes 'the vivid impact on the Greek collective memory' that this – for most mainland Greeks first – direct confrontation with oriental luxury on a massive scale must have had.<sup>2</sup> In my contribution I want to return to this passage and make a twofold argument: Herodotus' text indeed reflects Greek amazement at Persian luxury but both luxury and fascination are at the same time framed in a negative way. My purpose is not to question Miller's central thesis that the 'commonplace of modern scholarship that the Athenians hated and despised the Persians ... is disproved by the evidence of archaeology, epigraphy, iconography and literature' (1997: 1), but to show that one of her key texts is actually more complex.<sup>3</sup>

In what follows I will first briefly discuss other scenes from the *Histories* which tell what happens on a battlefield after battle, in order to bring out the special character of the Plataea episode. I will then take a closer look at the Plataea passage itself and the fascination with Persian luxury which it expresses. Next, looking at the other side of the coin, I will contextualise

1 And see her update in Miller 2017 and Morgan 2016, who also discusses the 'Perserie' in Sparta and Macedonia.

2 Miller 1997: 23.

3 For many details I draw on the *Narratological Commentary on Herodotus Histories* which I am currently writing.



FIGURE 5.1 Attic terracotta lamb rhyton, attributed to the London Painter, around 460 BCE  
THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, NEW YORK, 4116233, WITH  
PERMISSION

the passage and show how oriental wealth, above all gold, is often negatively charged in the *Histories*. Returning once more to the Plataea episode I will argue in the final part of this contribution how the ambiguity of the Plataea spolia is personified in the figure of the Spartan general Pausanias.

## 1 After-Battle Battlefield Scenes in the *Histories*

All six major battles in the *Histories* (Marathon, Thermopylae, Artemisium, Salamis, Plataea, and Mycale) are followed by a scene which recounts how victor and defeated return to the battlefield, primarily with an eye to collecting booty (victor) or securing the dead and, in the case of a sea battle, wrecks (both victor and defeated). Herodotus here blazes the trail for ancient historians to come, many of whom also feature at least one such scene and thereby

turn it into a historiographical topos.<sup>4</sup> Not every Herodotean after-battle battlefield scene mentions the collection of spolia, but I include them all since even the ones not featuring spoliation may help us to understand what exactly Herodotus-narrator is aiming at in the case of Plataea. I discuss the scenes not in the order in which they appear in the text but in an ascending order of length and complexity.

The sea battle of *Artemisium* ends with both parties pulling back after having suffered heavy losses (8.18):

The Greeks, once they broke off from the battle and pulled back, got hold of their dead and wrecks, but having been badly mauled [...] they started considering to flee further south.

Since the battle has ended in a draw, no spoliation is mentioned. Spoliation does take place after the battle of *Mycale* (9.106.1):

After the Greeks had killed most of the barbarians, either in battle or in flight, they set fire to their ships [which they had beached: 97] and whole stronghold, but not before they had first taken out and brought ashore the booty (τὴν ληϊήν) and found (εὔρον) some treasure-chests (θησαυρούς τινας χρημάτων).<sup>5</sup>

The narrator is brief on the spoliation because he is intent on turning to a topic which at this point is more relevant to him: the Greeks' discussion as to how to deal with the Ionians, who had participated in the Persian expedition.

An interesting variant of the after-battle battlefield scene is found in connection with *Marathon*. The Spartans, restrained by their religious rules, come too late to participate in the battle itself but they visit the battlefield because they desire to 'look at' the dead Persians (6.120):

And they came to Marathon and looked at (ἐθεήσαντο) them. After that they praised the Athenians and their achievement and went home again.

4 Cf. e.g. x. *Ages*. 2.14. Latin literature in particular abounds in after-battle battlefield scenes, which show battlefields strewn with corpses, weapons, and debris; cf. e.g. *Sal. Cat.* 61.7–9; *Liv.* 22.51.5–6, 9; *Tac. Ann.* 1.61–62; *Luc.* 7.787–796; *Sil.* 10.449–453; and *Stat. Theb.* 12.1–59. The Latin material is excellently discussed by Pagán 2000, who does not however seem to be aware of (at least does not mention) the Greek tradition of the topos.

5 All translations are my own. For the treasuries which the Persians carried with them while on campaign, see e.g. 9.41.3, where talk is of 'much gold, both minted and un-minted, and much silver and drinking vessels', to cover expenses and to bribe Greek leaders.

The spolia of Marathon must have been considerable given the fact (that is to say, the Herodotean fact) that no less than 6,400 Persians were killed, many of whom wore costly arms and body gear, more on which will be said below.<sup>6</sup> Herodotus, however, does not speak about the spoliation which undoubtedly took place but instead focuses on the Spartans who 'look at' the dead Persians. The verb chosen, ἐθεήσαντο, suggests that the dead Persians were an impressive spectacle (θέη) and thus, albeit fleetingly, hints at their costly and exotic outfits. But rather than expanding on this theme, as he will do at Plataea, Herodotus here uses the after-battle topos to make another point.<sup>7</sup> He expects his narratees to note the contrast between the Spartans' *passive* spectatorship of dead Persians and the Athenians' earlier *active* viewing of these same Persians during battle: the Athenians 'were the first to endure the sight of Persian dress and men wearing it' (6.112.3).

A somewhat different viewing of a battlefield occurs after *Thermopylae*. The Persians have been victorious but at the cost of a great number of losses: 20,000 Persians, as against 4,000 Spartans, Thespians and helots. Xerxes invites the Persian sailors who fought at Artemisium to come to Thermopylae and 'look at' (the root θεη- occurs thrice) the corpses of Persians and Greeks which he has carefully rearranged: he has buried most of the Persians and left lying 1,000, but has collected on one spot the dead Greeks (8.24–25), thus erasing all signs of the protracted battle and suggesting instead that a minority of Persians overcame, in one go, a majority of Greeks.

*Salamis* comes closest to Plataea as regards the textual space devoted to spoliation (8.121–123.1), but here the focus lies on its religious aspect. The victorious Greeks dedicate, in three different temples, part of the spolia to the gods as ἀροθίνια or first fruits; this is a clear instance of the stage of 'objectification'.<sup>8</sup> They also turn part of the spolia into objects of art and dedicate these to the gods, an instance of 'transformation'. This religious focus fits the battle of Salamis well in which divine interventions and support play a major role.<sup>9</sup> We

6 Plutarch in his *Life of Aristides* 5.5 mentions in connection with Marathon 'silver and gold lay[ing] about in heaps', 'all sorts of raiment and untold wealth besides in the tents and captured utensils'. Pausanias too in his description of Delphi refers to various dedications made by the Athenians from the booty of Marathon (10.10.1, 11.5, 19.4).

7 I agree with Miller 1997: 32 that Herodotus' silence on the booty from Marathon is rhetorical ('he is reluctant to detract from his climactic account of the treasures gained after the battle of Plataea'), but I suggest a reason for what he *does* tell instead.

8 For the four stages of appropriation which spoliation entails, see the chapter by Versluys in this volume. For other instances of spolia offered to the gods, see 8.27.5 and 9.81.1.

9 Cf. Immerwahr 1966: 285: 'the section on the awarding of gifts to the gods and of prizes to men has as one guiding idea the premise that Salamis was won with the help of the gods.' The divine interventions include miracles (8.41.2–3, 55), an earthquake (8.64), the

also hear about booty being divided between the men (διεδάσαντο τὴν ληΐην ... μετὰ δὲ τὴν διαίρεσιν τῆς ληΐης). This division is of course a crucial element in Miller's thesis of Athenian *Perserie*: only if private citizens too, next to cities and the gods, received booty, can we understand how Persian luxury goods made their way so extensively into Athenian society leading to their crucial impact.<sup>10</sup>

Another important detail in this passage is Herodotus' autopsy of some of the Salamis booty. (i) The Phoenician trireme dedicated at the Isthmus, which 'was still there in my time' (καὶ ἐς ἐμέ: 8.121.1); the formulation suggests that he saw it. (ii) The image, made of the spolia, of a man holding a ship's prow in his hand, which 'stands (in Delphi) in the same place as the golden statue of Alexander the Macedonian' (8.121.2); the exactness of the location and his use of the present suggest that Herodotus has seen the two objects himself. And (iii) the Aeginetan dedication of three golden stars on a bronze mast, which finds itself in Delphi 'in the corner, very near to Croesus' crater' (8.122); the exactness of the location again suggests autopsy, which in this case is confirmed by Herodotus' earlier reference to Croesus' crater in the course of his autoptic report on the Lydian king's dedications in Delphi ('the silver crater lies in the corner of the temple porch' of the Apollo temple: 1.51).<sup>11</sup> If 'Herodotus the tourist'<sup>12</sup> was able to see the Persian spoils in temples, other Greeks would have seen them too, and this also explains how they could have their impact on Greek culture.

All three elements, dedication to the gods, division among men and autopsy by Herodotus, will recur in the after-battle battlefield scene of Plataea, which, like each of the other instances, has its own focus. This time the full spotlight falls on the breathtaking opulence and luxury of the Persian spolia.

## 2 The Persian Spolia at Plataea (9.80–84)

Although it is not the last after-battle battlefield scene of the *Histories*, the aftermath of Plataea is clearly composed in order to be the climax of the topos: it takes up about two and a half OCT pages, as against the less than

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presence of (statues of) the Aeacids (8.64, 83.2), oracles (8.77, 96.2), a portent (8.65), and mysterious (divine) appearances (8.84.2; 8.94.2–3).

10 Miller 1997: 43–45.

11 Cf. 'in the Corinthian treasury' (1.50.3), with note of Asheri, Lloyd and Corcella 2007: *ad loc.*: 'Herodotus' precise description points to autopsy'. For the present tense and the 'still in my time' motif as indications of autopsy, see Schepens 1980: 50–51.

12 See Redfield 1985 and Marincola 2013.

one page devoted to the aftermath of Salamis.<sup>13</sup> The section is marked off by ring-composition: Παυσανίης δὲ κήρυγμα ποιησάμενος μηδένα ἄπτεσθαι τῆς λήϊης, συγκομίζειν ἐκέλευε τοὺς εἰλωτας τὰ χρήματα (9.80.1) ≈ οἱ δὲ Ἕλληνες ὡς ἐν Πλαταιῆσι τὴν λήϊην διείλοντο (9.85.1).

This time we hear in full detail what a spoliation involves: helots<sup>14</sup> go over the entire Persian camp and ‘find’ (εὕρισκον: 9.80.1) all kinds of luxury goods and strip the Persian corpses of their armour and body gear. The verb εὕρισκω which is used here (twice) and in other spoliation scenes is significant.<sup>15</sup> It can have the connotation of a windfall,<sup>16</sup> and choosing this verb Herodotus conveys something of the excitement which the Greeks must have felt when executing the spoliation and hitting upon so much wealth, clearly much more than they were used to.

That same feeling of exhilaration and fascination emanates from the detailed listing of the spolia. The helots find tents adorned with gold and silver, couches overlaid with gold and silver, golden craters, *phialai* and other drinking vessels, carts laden with sacks which when opened were seen to contain gold and silver cauldrons, and strip from the Persian corpses their golden armllets, collars, and daggers (9.80.1–2). Three golden and bronze objects are fabricated out of the spolia and dedicated to the gods in Delphi, Olympia and the Isthmus; their detailed description again (see above on the dedications of Salamis) suggests Herodotus’ autopsy (9.81.1).<sup>17</sup> The men divide among them women, horses,

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- 13 Actually it is even longer since the spoliation is preceded by two other incidents which take place on the battlefield: Pausanias graciously sets free a Coan woman, who had been taken captive and now lives as a concubine in the Persian camp, and rejects the proposal of Lampon to mutilate Mardonius’ body (9.77–79).
- 14 The detail of the helots is intriguing (but not discussed by the commentators Flower and Marincola 2002): Pausanias forbids the Greeks from collecting the booty themselves and instead makes helots do it. The measure is ambiguous: it can be read as correct leadership (he wants the distribution of the loot to take place in an organised and fair manner) or as greed (after all, Pausanias will get the largest part of the booty and hence wants it to be as big as possible). Whatever his intentions, his plan misfires since the helots steal part of the loot (9.80.3).
- 15 Plataea: εὕρισκον (9.80.1, 2), εὕρον (83.1); Mycale: εὕρον (9.106.1); and cf. εὕρε in the context of the chance spoliator Aminocles (7.190), more on whom below.
- 16 See esp. 7.155.1 (the combination εὕρημα εὕρισκων); 7.10.δ.2; and 8.109.2.
- 17 Note also the use of the definite article ὁ τρίπους ὁ χρύσεος, ‘that well-known tripod of gold’, the exact location (‘nearest to the altar’) and the precise size indications (‘ten cubits high’, ‘seven cubits high’) (9.81.1). Earlier Herodotus had told how the Tegeans in the course of the battle plundered Mardonius’ tent and took besides much else ‘the manger of Mardonius’ horses, all of bronze and amazing’ (9.70.3). They later dedicate the manger in the temple of Athena Alea in Tegea, where Herodotus probably saw it, since in 1.66.4 he writes about another object in that temple as being there ‘still in my time’; see Flower and Marincola 2002: ad 9.70.3.



FIGURE 5.2  
 Persian rhyton from the Achaemenid period  
 BRITISH MUSEUM 124081, WITH PERMISSION

talents, camels, and yoke-animals (9.81.2). Local Plataeans later find chests filled with gold, silver and other precious goods (9.83.1).

Three observations can be made regarding the objects listed. (i) Herodotus describes the vessels in Greek terms (*κρητήρας*, *φιάλας*, *λέβητες*) and does *not* indicate Persian characteristics like the animal heads of cups which actually caught the Athenians' fancy and led to their imitation in clay of the Persian metal ware.<sup>18</sup>

(ii) Herodotus' ethnographic instinct transpires from his surprise at the fact that none of the booty-collectors were interested in the 'many-coloured garments' (*ἔσθητος ... ποικίλης*: 9.80.2) of the Persians. His own catalogue of the Persian army had paid lavish attention to, and thus showed a fascination for, the often exotic garments of the many nationalities making up that army: tiaras, sleeved tunics of diverse colours (7.61), turbans (7.62), stiff and pointed *kurbasias* (7.64), garments of tree-wool (7.65), jerkins (7.67), dyed garments (7.67), etc.<sup>19</sup>

(iii) The arms and body gear have a decidedly Persian flavour. Armlets (*ψέλια*) and collars (*στρπετοι*) are also among the guest-gifts given by the Persian King Cambyses to the Ethiopians (3.20.1, 22.2); Herodotus calls the Persians selected

18 See Miller 1997: 136–146.

19 Flower and Marincola 2002: *ad* 9.80.1 also detect surprise but interpret it differently: 'tastes would soon change', i.e. as Miller 1997: 153–187 shows, Greeks would adopt Persian clothing.



by Mardonius to stay in Europe (and hence the men who fight at Plataea) ἄνδρας στρεπτοφόρους τε καὶ ψελιοφόρους (8.113.3); and outside the *Histories* this type of body gear is nearly always found in a Persian context (x. *An.* 1.2.27; *Cyr.* 1.3.2). The point is made explicit in the case of the daggers, which Herodotus refers to with the Persian word ἀκινάκη (9.80.2; cf. 7.54.2: Περσικὸν ξίφος, τὸν ἀκινάκην καλέουσι).<sup>20</sup> What is intriguing is his use of the definite article in connection with these daggers (ἔσχύλευον ψέλια τε καὶ στρεπτοὺς καὶ τοὺς ἀκινάκας), which conveys the sense of ‘those well-known daggers’.<sup>21</sup> Herodotus may simply mean that they are well-known from the *Histories* itself, which repeatedly speaks of them (cf. 3.118.2, 128.5; 7.54.2, 67.1; 8.120; 9.107.2). But it may also suggest his autopsy of them, reputedly including that of Mardonius himself (cf. Demosthenes 24.129), on the Acropolis.<sup>22</sup>

What stands out in Herodotus’ list of the spolia at Plataea and what clearly is the most characteristic orientalising element is the abundance of gold.

### 3 Persian Gold in Plataea (and Elsewhere in the *Histories*)

Persian gold is mentioned no less than ten times in the Plataean spolia episode, with silver coming a good second (seven times). Herodotus’ text here mirrors the impact which this particular aspect of the Persian booty must have had on the Greeks then and there, and later when the spolia became family heirlooms or were on display in temples. As Miller 1997: 29 writes: ‘Though Attica had the silver mines of Laureion (Hdt. 7.144.1), Thasos her gold mines (Hdt. 6.46), and Siphnos her brief period of metal-wealth (Hdt. 3.57.2), the contrast between the Persian booty and the general Greek poverty in precious metals must have been considerable’.<sup>23</sup>

The same fascination with Persian gold transpires from Herodotus’ explicit references to the gold of the weapons of the Persian contingent in his catalogues (7.41.2, 83.2), and of Masistes’ fish-scale corslet (9.22.2) and the bit of his

20 In general on Herodotus’ use of non-Greek words, see Armayor 1978 and Harrison 1998.

21 Cf. Stein 1894: *ad loc.* (‘der Artikel, weil es die an Persern schon bekannte Waffe war’). There are many more instances of this use of the definite article in Herodotus to refer to well-known things, e.g. the infamous path which would lead the Persians around the mountains of Thermopylae and allow them to defeat the Spartans (τὴν ... ἀτραπὸν: 7.175.2).

22 As argued above for the golden tripod in Delphi. For discussion of the archaeological record of the ἀκινάκη, see Miller 1997: 46–48 and Van Rookhuijzen in this volume.

23 Compare also the argument which Aristagoras uses with the Spartan king: ‘why would you fight with the Arcadians and Argives, *men who have neither gold nor silver*, when you could easily become master of Asia, which is rich in those metals’ (5.49).

horse (9.20). Earlier he had paid lavish attention to the Lydian Croesus' famous wealth: his sacrifice of couches covered with gold and silver and golden *phialai* (1.50) and his dedications in Delphi (117 ingots of white gold, a bowl of gold and a bowl of silver, four silver casks, two sprinkling-vessels one of gold and one of silver, basins of silver, a golden female figure: 1.50–51, and a golden shield: 1.92.1), Thebes (a golden tripod: 1.92.1) and Ephesus (oxen and pillars of gold: 1.92.1), which were there for Herodotus and other Greeks to see.<sup>24</sup>

Some decades before Herodotus, Aeschylus likewise in his *Persians* (performed in 472), which deals with the battle of Salamis, had put great emphasis on Persian gold: the royal palace in Sardis is 'rich in gold' (3) and 'with golden ornaments' (159), the army 'gold-bedecked' (9), and Xerxes 'born of the golden race' (80).

Gold, thus, in the fifth century BC is 'emblematic of Asian luxury'.<sup>25</sup> The question is how to evaluate the Greeks' response to this gold. I am happy to concur with Miller when she writes 'the inflow of such wealth in such exotic form must have had a tremendous and formative impact on Athenian society' (1997: 29), but will argue that as regards Herodotus' *Histories* the picture is more nuanced.

For almost invariably he sheds a negative light on gold. The story of Croesus who, overconfident on account of his wealth, attacks the Persians and loses both throne and riches, is too well-known to need repeating. There are more examples,<sup>26</sup> but particularly relevant for our spolia theme is the story of the Greek Aminocles, who can be considered a chance spoliator. When a horrific

24 Cf. 'all these were still surviving until my own time' (1.92) and see note 11.

25 Garvie 2009: *ad* 93–94. The association of gold with Asia is a new development with regard to the Homeric epics, where Mycenae is called *πολύχρυσος* (*Il.* 7.180; 11.46) and where Greeks receive large quantities of gold (e.g. Odysseus from the Phaeacians in *Od.* 8.390–395). Since gold is associated primarily with the gods, all of whose equipment and tableware are of gold (cf. e.g. *Il.* 4.1–4 and 5.722–731), it is a status symbol of *all* princes in the epics, whether Trojan or Greek. Whether the Greek princes really disposed of so much gold is a question, which is answered negatively by Muhly 2011; he suggests that when Odysseus is said to receive thirteen talents of gold (= 364 kg) as a guest-gift, this is heroic exaggeration. All the gold found in the shaft-graves of Mycenae does not amount to more than 14 kg. This would confirm Miller's thesis that fifth-century Greeks must have been amazed when *actually seeing* the mass of gold of the Persian army.

26 Democedes protesting against Darius' gift of two golden fetters, which only reminds him of his captivity (3.130.4); the Lydian Pythius' offering to and receiving from Xerxes a large amount of gold and silver, which does not prevent Xerxes from executing one of Pythius' sons (7.27–29, 39). It is also relevant to realise that the Persians' tremendous wealth was not the result of natural causes (as was the case with the Lydian Croesus, who profited from the gold dust of Mt Tmolus: 1.93 and 5.101) but of the levying of tributes (3.89–96). In general on gold (esp. as political factor) in the *Histories*, see Lombardo 1989.

storm hits the Persian fleet moored near the Sepiad headland and destroys no less than 400 ships, this naval catastrophe 'became a great boon for Aminocles' (7.190):

Some time after he picked up many gold drinking-cups which were washed ashore, and many silver ones, and he found (εἶδρε) Persian treasure-chests, and acquired innumerable precious objects. Thanks to this lucky find (εὐρήμασι) he became a rich man, although in other respects he was not fortunate (εὐτυχέων): for him, too (like all mortals), a dreadful misfortune which involved the slaying of a son brought grief.

This is quintessential Herodotean stuff: at the very moment of a mortal's good luck the – in his worldview – inevitable change of fate is adumbrated. 'Money can't buy happiness' would have been Herodotus' favourite motto; indeed, given that the gods resent a mortal's excessive good fortune, wealth is even dangerous and sure to bring its owner disaster.

When we now return to Herodotus' Plataea spolia scene with these other 'gold' scenes in mind, we may look at the abundance of spoliated Persian gold objects with different eyes. I contend that they convey a message of poetic justice, that is, the Persians getting their just deserts. To understand this point we must call to mind an earlier passage, which forms part of Herodotus' report of Xerxes' advance march through Greece. The Persians force medising Greek states to provide luxurious dinners to them, and the expenditure this entails nearly 'ruins' (ἐξ πᾶν κακοῦ ἀπικατό: 7.118) the Greeks (7.119):

As soon as they heard that the Persian army was approaching, the citizens of a Greek town would grind meal for months. They would fatten the best cattle money could buy and would feed poultry in coops and water-fowl in ponds. And they fabricated *gold and silver cups and craters and all other kinds of tableware* (for the king and his retinue). As soon as the army arrived, a tent was built for Xerxes' lodging ... When the hour came for dinner, the Greek hosts had a hard time, while the Persians, when they had eaten their fill, spent the night there, and on the next day took down the tent, and marched away, *taking all things movable with them and leaving behind nothing*.'

In a sense what the Persian 'guests' do – at least in Herodotus' presentation<sup>27</sup> – is to loot their Greek 'hosts' since they *take with them* the gold and silver

27 As so often, we are dealing with a Greek interpretation, indeed misconception, of a Persian custom. The Persian king was both a receiver and giver of gifts, which were often

tableware which the latter have fabricated for their entertainment. So when at Plataea Herodotus pays so much attention to the gold and silver couches and tableware of the Persians that are captured by the Greeks, he shows (rather than tells) how the tables are turned and how this time it is the Greeks who ruin the Persians.<sup>28</sup>

This is one aspect of Herodotus' negative framing of the Persian spolia at Plataea: more than just being the standard outcome of a battle won, the spoliation is morally charged and made to symbolize the way in which the Persians are, deservedly, stripped of their fabulous riches.<sup>29</sup> But with this conclusion we have not yet fully unpacked the significance of the passage. For there is still the central figure of the spoliation scene, the Spartan general Pausanias, for us to take a closer look at.

#### 4 Pausanias and the Persian Spoils

It is the victorious Spartan general Pausanias who orders the spoliation and division of spolia. But he also does something else (9.82):

When Pausanias *saw* (ὄρωντα) Mardonius' tent adorned with gold and silver and multi-coloured tapestries, he ordered Mardonius' bakers and cooks to prepare the kind of meal they were used to prepare for Mardonius. They obeyed, and when Pausanias *saw* (ιδόντα) the golden and silver couches beautifully (εἶδ) draped, the tables of gold and silver, and all the magnificent (μεγαλοπρεπέα) tableware, he was *bowled over* by the good things (ἀγαθά) laid out before him and, by way of joke (ἐπὶ γελώτι), ordered his own servants to prepare a Spartan meal. When the meal was ready and was far different, Pausanias started laughing (γελάσαντα) and sent for the other generals. When they were assembled, Pausanias *pointed*

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exchanged during banquets. Gifts and banquets were means to effect social and political bonding. The gifts received by the king of course actually were a form of tribute. See Wright and Hollman 2021 and the chapter of Strootman in this volume. For the motif of the Near-Eastern and Greek banquet in Herodotus, invariably a site for the 'enacting or marking of events of especial importance, the making of crucial dispositions, the examination of moral qualities', see Bowie 2003.

28 Compare Aeschylus in his *Persians*, who makes the defeated king Xerxes enter the stage in rags (1017, 1030), so as to bring out visually and symbolically the complete ruin of the original splendour of the Persian 'gold-bedecked' army; for this motif of reversal, see e.g. Said 1988: 337–341.

29 A small-scale repetition of the motif is the defeated Xerxes' loss, on his way home, of the sacred chariot of Zeus (8.115.4), which had formed the glorious centre of his army while marching out from Sardis (7.40.4).

at each meal and said: ‘Men of Greece, I have brought you here because of *these* things (τῶνδε), because I wanted to show you the folly (τὴν ἀφροσύνην) of *this* (τοῦδε) Persian leader, who having *such* (τοῖνδε) a style of living came against us who have *such* (οὕτω) a woeful (δίζυρήν) one.’

If we talk about the impact of objects, more specifically the impact of the Persian spolia at Plataea, then this episode is of crucial interest. Herodotus once again lists a number of the spolia but now has them looked at, or in narratological terms focalized, by one of the characters, Pausanias, who very much likes what he sees (note εἶ, μεγαλοπρεπέα, and ἀγαθά). This brings the spolia close to the narratees who, sharing Pausanias’ focalization, ‘see’ the golden en silver objects for themselves. The couches, tables, tableware and dishes also become almost tangible in that the Spartan points at them, his gestures being evoked in the text by the deictic pronouns τῶνδε, τοῦδε,<sup>30</sup> τοῖνδε and οὕτω.

Pausanias uses Persian spolia, symbolically employed in a meal,<sup>31</sup> to convey a message to his fellow Greeks: the Persians are mad to attack a country as poor as mainland Greece. This is a type of argument that is also voiced by other characters in the *Histories*,<sup>32</sup> and that forms part of a much larger theme: the opposition between austere/hard people and luxurious/soft people.<sup>33</sup> Usually, this theme is invoked to stress the toughness of the plucky Greeks who despite smaller numbers and fewer material resources dare to resist the massive and well-equipped Persian forces.<sup>34</sup> But here something else is going on. Pausanias clearly wants to deride<sup>35</sup> his Persian opponent who has put everything at risk against a country that has nothing to offer.

There is however one detail in Pausanias’ speech which, in combination with the emphasis on his gaping at the Persian luxury, also conveys a different emotion: it is quite remarkable that he refers to the Greek way of life as ‘woeful’

30 With τοῦδε Pausanias obviously does not point at Mardonius himself (who is dead) but at his tent, which Xerxes had bequeathed to his general when he fled home from Greece (9.82.1). Xerxes’/Mardonius’ tent clearly caught the fancy of the Greeks since two different stories are told about it: in 9.70 we heard about the Tegeans looting it, but here it is still intact enough to host Pausanias’ lavish Persian meal.

31 Food often plays a role in spolia discourse, see the chapter of Van Gils and Henzel in this volume.

32 E.g. Sandanis who warns Croesus when he is preparing to march against the Persians that he has little to gain (at that stage the Persians are still a sober people) but much to lose (1.71).

33 See e.g. Flower and Marincola 2002: 38–39.

34 Cf. e.g. Demaratus warning Xerxes that ‘poverty has always been indigenous to Greece, but she has won for herself courage, the result of wisdom and the force of custom’ (7.102.1).

35 Hence the ascending series: ἐπὶ γελῶτι – γελάσαντα – τὴν ἀφροσύνην.

(ὀϊζυρήν),<sup>36</sup> rather than, say, 'simple but good'. This suggests that Pausanias is not entirely impervious to the attractions of the Persian way of life. And here it is relevant to recall what this same Spartan would later do: he married the daughter of the Persian general Megabates (5.32), wore Persian clothes and had Persian meals (!) prepared for himself (Th. *Pel.* 1.130.1), 'developed a desire to become ruler (τύραννος) of Greece' (*Hist.* 5.32), was accused of medism (*Hist.* 8.3.2) and died of starvation in Athena's temple in Sparta (Th. *Pel.* 1.134). Herodotus mentions these negative facts only in passing or not at all since he clearly does not want to detract from the glory of Pausanias' victory at Plataea. But in the spoliation scene of Plataea he does hint at things to come by indicating Pausanias' (i) obvious fascination with the Persian luxury goods, (ii) laughter, always an ominous sign in the *Histories*,<sup>37</sup> and (iii) low esteem of the Greek way of life.<sup>38</sup>

This negative undertone of Pausanias' behaviour after Plataea can be further substantiated by comparing another banquet scene. Two Spartan heralds are sent to Susa and on their way make a stop-over with the Persian satrap Hydarnes (7.135):

He gave them a hospitable welcome and invited them to dinner, in the course of which he asked them: 'Why, men of Sparta, do you refuse to become friends with the king? You *see* (ὄρατε) how the king knows how to honour brave men, when you *look at* (ἀποβλέποντες) me and my situation. So it could be with you, if you would submit to the king.'

36 Flower and Marincola 2002: *ad* 82.3 note that this (poetic) word occurs only here in the *Histories*.

37 See e.g. Lateiner 1977.

38 Cf. Flower and Marincola 2002: *ad* 9.82; Pelling 2006: 115–116 ('it is a delicious hint of the Pausanias of the future, the person who would indeed find it incomprehensible that anyone would attack Greece for the dubious pleasure of eating a Spartan supper') and Rutherford 2018: 18 ('The historian did not need to spell out the contrast between this admirable rejection of decadent dining and Pausanias' later corruption by foreign ways and foreign wealth ... Pausanias rightly exposes the Persians' misguided ambitions as absurd; but that does not mean that a Greek, even a Spartan, cannot be tempted to aspire to wealth of the kind associated with the invading power'). The fact that Pausanias is given a larger share of the spolia than the others (9.81.2) also perhaps hints at a nascent tendency to see himself as 'more equal' (in the Orwellian sense) than the other Greeks. The irony of the passage has been completely missed by How and Wells 1928: *ad loc.*, who write: 'this contrast between Persian luxury and Spartan hardiness is *rather strangely* assigned to Pausanias, who himself within a year or two fell into the luxurious and despotic habits of an Eastern Sultan' (my italics, IdJ).



FIGURE 5.3 Pausanias. Eighteenth century print  
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Once again, a lavish meal is used to symbolize, very concretely, the Persian way of life and is focalized by Greeks, who, this time, are openly invited to adopt that luxurious life-style. The Spartan heralds, however, indignantly refuse the idea of medising and instead glowingly praise freedom. Their steadfast refusal points up, by way of contrast, the ambiguity of Pausanias' much warmer response to Persian luxury.

Where does all of this leave us when talking about the impact of the Plataean spolia?

## 5 Conclusion: The Impact of the Plataean Spolia

Herodotus' report on the spoliation at Plataea displays three of the four stages of appropriation discussed by Versluys in his chapter. To start with, it reflects Greek fascination with Persian luxury and wealth, especially the abundance of gold. Herodotus counters this fascination, however, by framing the Greek spoliation of Persian tableware as a form of poetic justice for the Persian 'theft' of Greek tableware on their march through Greece. For the spolia to have this symbolic significance they must clearly remain Persian (hence the Persian word *akinakas*) and we are dealing with stage one ('material appropriation').

Part of the spolia is dedicated to the gods, but not before they have first been turned into Greek works of art, a clear instance of stage four ('transformation').

The most interesting stage is represented by the figure of Pausanias, who right away uses the Persian spolia for a festive meal. The meal is meant by him to point up Persian foolishness in attacking the poor Greeks but it betrays his being attracted to Persian luxury. Pausanias starts to look differently at the frugal Spartan meals he is used to and to contemplate the more luxurious Persian ones (such as we know he will later actually come to consume); this is exactly the process covered by stage three ('incorporation').

If we include an earlier remark by Herodotus, we even have an instance of the second phase ('objectification'): the Tegeans are the first to enter the Persian camp at Plataea and plunder Mardonius' tent. One of the objects they capture is the bronze manger of Mardonius' horses, which they dedicate in the temple of Athena Alea in their home-city (9.70.3).

Where does this leave Herodotus? Later spolia texts, starting with the Roman ones, will stress the corrupting effect of Eastern booty on morals and manliness. Herodotus, however, associates wealth and luxury not so much with decadence, as with the political system of autocracy. The rejection of a Persian meal by the Spartan heralds signals their love of freedom, whereas the trying out of such a meal by Pausanias signals his latent interest in tyranny. Herodotus' negative framing of the Persian spolia from Plataea therefore is, in the final analysis, not a sign of orientalism<sup>39</sup> but of his abhorrence of autocracy.<sup>40</sup>

39 For Herodotus' nuanced view on Persians, see e.g. Pelling 1997.

40 See also the chapter on Herodotus in Gorman and Gorman 2014, in which they argue that the notion of 'pernicious luxury', as they call it, is not yet to be found in the *Histories*.



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