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THETIS IN THE 'OVENS': A RECONSIDERATION OF HERODOTUS' TOPOGRAPHY OF MAGNESIA

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Abstract: While scholars have long acknowledged the limitations of Herodotus' *Histories* as a historical source, Herodotus' topography of the Persian Wars is still usually seen as historically reliable information. This article, by contrast, aims to show that memory studies offers an attractive means to understand this layer of information, as the alleged locations of events do not, in many cases, necessarily reflect the historical situation. Instead, these places may, for various reasons, have been designated as such in local traditions in the *ca*. 50 years between the wars and Herodotus' research. As a case in point, this article discusses the topography of Herodotus' story of the Persian shipwreck along the coast of Thessaly before the Battle of Artemision in 480 BC (Hdt. 7.183, 7.188, 7.191–92). It argues that the attitude among scholars automatically to regard the locations in this account as historically correct has created various problems. In doing so, it identifies the elusive place of Sepias with the coast near the town of Veneto where a remarkable cluster of sea caves (the so-called 'Ovens') plausibly formed an 'anchor' for the myth of the abduction of Thetis by Peleus, as well as for the Persian shipwreck.

Keywords: Herodotus, Persian Wars, Greek religion, ancient geography, memory studies

The topography of the Persian Wars has been a constant source of fascination for scholars, travellers and even, to a degree that is rivalled by only a few other episodes of ancient history, the general public. Today, monuments and signs have been set up at various locations in Greece that entertain passers-by with claims that, right where they are standing, Xerxes dug a canal, Leonidas died or the Persians were finally defeated. What is rarely explicitly acknowledged, however, is that, in most cases, the only source for the topography of these wars is Herodotus' *Histories*. Although our knowledge about the genesis of this work, as well as of its aims and literary qualities, has increased substantially in recent years, comparatively little attention has been paid to the ways in which Herodotus may have come up with his indications of *where* the events of the Persian Wars happened. As a result, while scholars have long acknowledged the limitations of Herodotus' *Histories* as a historical source, atlases, popular history books and even scholarly literature persist – almost invariably – in taking Herodotus' topography at face value. This article, therefore, proposes to look at this topography anew by focusing on a particular area of Greece – the Thessalian peninsula of Magnesia – where this attitude among scholars has created an obvious problem for the location of Sepias, which appears in Herodotus' account of the movements of the Persian armada before the Battle of Artemision (480 BC). It aims to shed new light upon the location of Sepias by means of an avenue of study that has been until now unexplored in Herodotean research: mnemotopes.

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In this article, the term mnemotope (literally 'place of memory') is used to designate a concrete, physical place that is traditionally claimed as the location for a significant event. It therefore describes the process by which people come to *associate* significant events with certain places, rather than confirming that events actually *happened* at these places, which is the traditional preoccupation of much historical scholarship. The term is readily applicable to a plethora of 'holy sites' in many religions that designate places where significant religious events are thought to have occurred. A straightforward example is the alleged birthplace of Jesus inside the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, marked by a silver star. For mainland Greece, many such examples can be found in the work of the traveller Pausanias, who was apparently fascinated with places where important historical or mythological events had allegedly happened. A similar passion shaped the attempts of early archaeologists, perhaps most famously Heinrich Schliemann, who set out to unearth Troy in order to see where his childhood heroes had fought. The beholding of such places holds a powerful grip on the imagination, and is a crucial part of what we may call 'the tourist gaze':[1] while pilgrims continue to visit the holy locations of events commemorated in their respective religions, historical 'celebrities' are commonly connected to landmark monuments in touristic folklore, and battle-site touring has become a serious industry in various parts of the world. Yet the historical authenticity of these locations and the events which they mark, while always claimed by someone, is often difficult to prove and sometimes implausible or completely absent. Even fictional works that are set in the real world may acquire mnemotopes: following the success of Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* (2003), special tours in Paris and other places allow tourists to follow in Robert Langdon's never-made footsteps.

The desire of people to interact with mnemotopes may safely be thought of as universal. It is perhaps strange, then, that there has been little explicit recognition of this process; neither is there a universally accepted term. In his pioneering 1941 book, *La topographie légendaire des évangiles en Terre Sainte*, a study of the interaction of pilgrims with places mentioned in the New Testament, Maurice Halbwachs attempts to discover to what kind of 'laws' these sites are subject.[2] He points out that such sites often move about, 'accumulate' at locations with a pre-existing Jewish pedigree, cluster together and are altogether highly inauthentic. Halbwachs stresses the 'sacred' character of these places, as evidenced by his appellation *lieu saint*, 'holy place'. However, as just indicated, the concept can be applied across a much vaster area than simply the religious sphere. More recently, some authors have described the process using the term *lieu de mémoire*, 'place of memory', but this term was coined to describe a plethora of cultural phenomena and is now used in divergent ways.[3] Therefore, I have chosen to use the Greek calque mnemotope instead; this word is used by the eminent scholar of cultural memory, Jan Assmann, in the sense set out above.[4]

Although the recognition of the existence of mnemotopes is not new, some important historical sources have yet to be subjected to new assessments along these lines; Herodotus' *Histories* is one of these. Herodotus arguably had a 'topographical' passion; visible remains and natural landmarks, which in his eyes constituted evidence that particular events had happened at these places, are a constant feature of his narrative of the Persian Wars. However, the topographical reconstruction of the invasions has proved difficult, and there is reason to believe that Herodotus, writing some 50 years *post eventum*, also encountered many problems. Within this timespan, the wars had become subject to a process of mythicization: a common result of the remembrance of wars. And although the argument usually runs that Herodotus preserves mainly accurate information about the wars because he had to satisfy an audience that could refute his claims, we know that survivors of wars (if, as is often assumed, there were any alive when Herodotus did his research) do not necessarily remember chaotic wartime events accurately.[5]

[1] This term was coined by Urry (2002).

[2] Halbwachs (1941)

[3] Hartmann (2010) especially 141–59; Hölscher (2010); Zwingmann (2012). For a succinct discussion of the development of spatial terms from physical to abstract in modern scholarship, see Günzel (2012).

[4] Assmann (1992) 59-60.

[5] See Shrimpton (1997) 55–62, which mentions

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Hesitation about the authenticity of much of what Herodotus writes is as old as the work itself (*cf*. Thuc. 1.97.2), was already vehement at an early date (*cf*. Plutarch's essay *De Herodoti malignitate*) and is a central feature of modern scholarship on Herodotus. Still, compared to the first books of the *Histories*, the account of the Persian Wars (books 6–9) seems to have received a different, less harsh kind of criticism, that has traditionally tended to focus on 'issues' which are blatant breaches of the boundaries of historical feasibility: the size of the Persian army, greatly exaggerated by Herodotus, is the best-known of these problems.[6] On the other hand, information that is regarded as less susceptible to corruption, such as the topography, is rarely questioned. Perhaps part of the explanation for why the information in this part of the *Histories* is usually taken for granted is the circumstance that the Greek-Persian conflict – with such famous episodes as the death of the 300 Spartans at Thermopylae, the siege of the Athenian Acropolis and the Battle of Salamis – has found a firm place in the historical canon of the West. Feature films and popular books about the wars continue to captivate the general public, and, because alternative sources are rare and themselves problematic, there seems to be a demand for the *Histories* to contain, on the whole, accurate information about the conflict and especially about its topography. Everyone, it seems, wants to know 'where it all happened'.

In recent years, there has, of course, been an increasing awareness that the perspective of memory studies is crucial to understanding the Greeks' attitudes to the physical world they inhabited.[7] And it is now firmly established that Herodotus' account of the Persian invasions of Greece contains as many literary commonplaces and patterns as the other parts of the *Histories* and other works in Greek literature.[8] However, the implications of such studies for our knowledge of the topography of these invasions are only rarely pointed out. A possible explanation is that the classicists who study the text as a literary object and the historians and archaeologists who study its topography have not interacted sufficiently with each other. Hence, the topography remains by and large 'intact'. In bridging these two approaches, there is much to gain.

This article aims to provide an example of what we may gain, by offering a case study of the topography of Magnesia, the mountainous peninsula of Thessaly between the Aegean and the Pagasetic Gulf. We may safely assume that Herodotus, or at least his sources, knew the general area reasonably well, as the account of the Battle of Artemision and its prelude is very detailed.[9] It will be shown that the significance of Sepias in Herodotus' account, its purported location and its mythical association allow the place to be more successfully explained as a mnemotope than as a historical site in the traditional sense. The important realization which follows is that such

examples relating to the Second World War and points out that human memory is often factually wrong, even when it records recent events in vivid detail.

[6] Herodotus' claim of an army of more than five million people is clearly incredible; it has been pointed out that this would constitute an army column stretched over more than 2,000km (Cuyler Young Jr (1980) 217, n. 8). Many modern studies still put the number too high. Estimates can be found in most works on the Persian Wars: for recent (but too high) estimates, see Hammond (1988) 523–34 and Ray Jr (2009) 70; see Cuyler Young Jr (1980) 221–29 for convincing calculations of the original force and 230–32 for Mardonios' forces at Plataea. Scholars of the Achaemenid Empire give much lower numbers, for example 60,000: Briant (1996) 543–44; Kuhrt (2007) 240. Clearly, the Persians could not afford to have their entire army in Greece. See also Hignett (1963) 348–51 for more reasons to doubt Herodotus' numbers.

[7] Important works along these lines include Mayor (2000); Alcock (2002); Boardman (2002); Hartmann (2010); Zwingmann (2012); Steinbock (2013) especially 10. 84–94; see also Van Dyke and Alcock (2003) 5–6 with further references.

[8] It is impossible to be exhaustive here. Important realizations include: historical characters, such as Xerxes, are reminiscent of Herodotus himself as a self-conscious inquirer (Christ (1994); Baragwanath (2008)); it is nearly impossible to claim historical authenticity for any of the Delphic oracles told in relation to the wars, as they are all structurally similar (Maurizio (1997)); Herodotus' battle accounts crystallize around temples (Boedeker (2007)); and the advancing Persian army visits sites that are relevant to the theme of hubris (Bowie (2012)).

[9] Grundy (1897) 222; Lattimore (1939) 58.

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locations could have their origin in folk belief, rather than in coherent 'sources' that automatically take us back to the historically authentic locations. This idea also applies to new localizations connected to the battle which have sprung up recently in this area of Greece.[10] In addition, the example of Sepias reveals that the idea that the topography in Herodotus' account does not necessarily find its origin in a historically coherent story paves the way for new (and more plausible) localizations.

Magnesia appears in Herodotus' account at the moment when the Persian fleet turns south from Therme (modern Thessaloniki) on its way to Athens (7.183, 7.188; a catalogue of ships intervenes). Here, the Persians were surprised by a vicious storm, which destroyed many ships.

> Πανημερὸν δὲ πλέοντες οἱ βάρβαροι ἐξανύουσι τῆς Μαγνησίης χώρης ἐπὶ Σηπιάδα τε καὶ τὸν αἰγιαλὸν τὸν μεταξὺ Κασθαναίης τε πόλιος ἐόντα καὶ Σηπιάδος ἀκτῆς ... Ὁ δὲ δὴ ναυτικὸς στρατὸς ἐπείτε ὁρμηθεὶς ἔπλεε καὶ κατέσχε τῆς Μαγνησίης χώρης ἐς τὸν αἰγιαλὸν τὸν μεταξὺ Κασθαναίης τε πόλιος ἐόντα καὶ Σηπιάδος ἀκτῆς, αἱ μὲν δὴ πρῶται τῶν νεῶν ὅρμεον πρὸς γῇ, ἄλλαι δ' ἐπ' ἐκείνῃσι ἐπ' ἀγκυρέων· ἅτε γὰρ τοῦ αἰγιαλοῦ ἐόντος οὐ μεγάλου πρόκροσσαι ὅρμεον τὸ ἐς πόντον καὶ ἐπὶ ὀκτὼ νέας. Ταύτην μὲν τὴν εὐφρόνην οὕτω. Ἅμα δὲ ὄρθρῳ ἐξ αἰθρίης τε καὶ νηνεμίης, τῆς θαλάσσης ζεσάσης, ἐπέπεσέ σφι χειμών τε μέγας καὶ πολλὸς ἄνεμος ἀπηλιώτης, τὸν δὴ Ἑλλησποντίην καλέουσι οἱ περὶ ταῦτα τὰ χωρία οἰκημένοι. Ὅσοι μέν νυν αὐτῶν αὐξόμενον ἔμαθον τὸν ἄνεμον καὶ τοῖσι οὕτω εἶχε ὅρμου, οἱ δ' ἔφθησαν τὸν χειμῶνα ἀνασπάσαντες τὰς νέας· καὶ αὐτοί τε περιῆσαν καὶ αἱ νέες αὐτῶν. Ὅσας δὲ τῶν νεῶν μεταρσίας ἔλαβε, τὰς μὲν ἐξέφερε πρὸς Ἴπνους καλεομένους τοὺς ἐν Πηλίῳ, τὰς δὲ ἐς τὸν αἰγιαλόν· αἱ δὲ περὶ αὐτὴν τὴν Σηπιάδα περιέπιπτον, αἱ δὲ ἐς Μελίβοιαν πόλιν, αἱ δὲ ἐς Κασθαναίην ἐξεβράσσοντο. Ἦν τε τοῦ χειμῶνος χρῆμα ἀφόρητον.

> And after sailing all day, the Barbarians reached the land of Magnesia at Sepias and the beach that is between the city of Kasthanaia and the coast of Sepias ... So when the fleet, having set out, sailed and put into the land of Magnesia at the beach which is between the city of Kasthanaia and the coast of Sepias, the first ships moored next to the land, and the others after them at anchor. As the beach was not big, they anchored in rows into the sea at a depth of eight ships. That night was spent as such, but at dawn from the clear sky and windlessness, when the sea was boiling, a strong and mighty wind from the east surprised them, which the people who live there call 'Hellespontian'. The men who realized that the wind was coming and those that were moored in that manner, pulling their ships up the beach, remained ahead of the storm and they survived, as well as their ships. Those ships which [the wind] caught at sea, it carried off; some it brought to the so-called Ovens in Mount Pelion, others to the beach; some wrecked near Sepias itself, others at the city of Meliboia, yet others were cast to Kasthanaia. The force of the storm was unbearable.

The intervening actions of the Persians are outlined in 7.191–92.

> Σιταγωγῶν δὲ ὁλκάδων καὶ τῶν ἄλλων πλοίων διαφθειρομένων οὐκ ἐπῆν ἀριθμός, ὥστε δείσαντες οἱ στρατηγοὶ τοῦ ναυτικοῦ στρατοῦ μή σφι κεκακωμένοισι ἐπιθέωνται οἱ Θεσσαλοί, ἕρκος ὑψηλὸν ἐκ τῶν ναυηγίων περιεβάλοντο. Ἡμέρας γὰρ δὴ ἐχείμαζε τρεῖς· τέλος δὲ ἔντομά τε ποιεῦντες καὶ καταείδοντες βοῇσι οἱ μάγοι τῷ ἀνέμῳ, πρὸς δὲ τούτοισι καὶ τῇ Θέτι καὶ τῇσι Νηρηίσι θύοντες ἔπαυσαν τετάρτῃ ἡμέρῃ, ἢ ἄλλως κως αὐτὸς ἐθέλων ἐκόπασε. Τῇ δὲ Θέτι ἔθυον πυθόμενοι παρὰ τῶν Ἰώνων τὸν λόγον ὡς ἐκ τοῦ χώρου τούτου ἁρπασθείη ὑπὸ Πηλέος, εἴη τε ἅπασα ἡ ἀκτὴ ἡ Σηπιὰς ἐκείνης τε καὶ τῶν ἀλλέων Νηρηίδων. Ὁ μὲν δὴ τετάρτῃ ἡμέρῃ ἐπέπαυτο.

[10] In a striking example, the village of Vasilika in the northwestern corner of Euboea was named, according to several websites aimed at promoting tourism in this area – but in complete discordance with the ancient sources – because of its identification as the place where Xerxes' ships had moored (see, for example, http://www.evia-guide.gr/town/βασιλικά.html).

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> The number of lost grain ships and of the other ships was beyond counting. As the generals of the armada feared that the Thessalians would attack them in their miserable state, they constructed around them a high fence from the wrecks. The storm lasted for three days, but finally the Magi, sacrificing to the wind and singing chants to appease it, and moreover offering to Thetis and the Nereids, stopped it on the fourth day, or perhaps it stopped because of its own will. They offered to Thetis after hearing from the Ionians the story that she would have been abducted from that place by Peleus, and that the entire coast of Sepias belonged to her and to the other Nereids.

It is striking that Herodotus is able to provide the exact locations where the Persians were stationed and where the shipwrecks occurred (fig. 1). Meliboia and the 'Ovens' (Ἵπνοι) have now been reasonably securely located: Meliboia (which appears in the catalogue of ships at *Il.* 2.717) has been located at Skiti or at Kastro Velika.[11] The 'Ovens' have been identified with 18 large sea caves near the modern village of Veneto, close to the modern church of Agios Nikolaos. Their semicircular shapes resemble a traditional Greek oven (see figs 2 and 3).[12] The location of Kasthanaia is less secure; the best guess seems to be in the area of the modern towns of Sklithro and Keramidi.[13]

Most discussion has surrounded the location of Sepias. One factor clouding its localization is the considerable uncertainty about what kind of place it was. Herodotus describes Sepias as an ἀκτή, as does Strabo (9.5.22). This word may either mean 'coast' or, more specifically, 'promontory, cape'. The latter option seems preferable, because Apollonius (1.582) and Athenaeus (*Deipnosophistae* I 30d) describe Sepias using the word ἄκρη, while Pliny has the place as *promontorium Sepias* (*NH* 4.32). But it has also been argued that Herodotus' ἀκτή means 'coast', and I have adopted this more general term to describe Sepias in this article.[14] At the same time, Sepias seems to have been the name of a town, too (it appears as such at Strabo 9.5.15 and perhaps in the inscription mentioned below). But these various terms are not incompatible: it is, of course, possible that the name of the town was loosely applied to the surrounding coastline, which may or may not have featured a cape.

Scholars have tried to locate Sepias on the basis of Herodotus' chronological indications, assumptions about sailing speeds and the idea that the Greeks who were at Euboea could see the shipwrecks, as Herodotus seems to state at 7.192.[15] Accordingly, it has been formerly identified

[11] For Skiti (where tiles stamped Δημ[οσ]ία Μελιβοιέων have been found), *cf.* Hignett (1963) 169; Pritchett (1963) 2; Müller (1987) 344–45 with further literature. The coastal site of Polydendri may have functioned as a predecessor or port town of Skiti; the name may have applied to both the town and the port in Roman times, but the port seems to be oldest (fifth-century sherds and fourth-century masonry have been found here): Müller (1987) 344–45. For Kastro Velika as the identification (which led to the modern renaming of the town of Athanatou to Melivia), see Hansen and Nielsen (2004) 720.

[12] Georgiadhis (1894) 19, 142 (cited in Bowen (1998) 356, n. 49); Pritchett (1963).

[13] Kasthanaia has been located at Zagora (Tarn (1908) 211; Hignett (1963) 169; still Borgeaud (1995) 27; Green (1996) 119–20) or at modern Melivia (Bowen (1998) 357); but Zagora and Melivia do not have any substantial ancient remains. However, at the 'kastro' of Keramidi there are remains of a Classical town (Bursian (1862) 99; Pritchett (1963) 3; Müller (1987) 332–33), recording that the former Turkish name of the nearby village of Sklithro was Kestaneköy ('Chestnut' village), perhaps echoing the ancient name. The area is today noted for its chestnut production. Also *cf.* Hansen and Nielsen (2004) 719.

[14] See Bowen (1998) 353 for reasons to consider Sepias as a coast; Bowen identifies it as the entire coast between the 'Ovens' and Kasthanaia. In fact, the interpretation of it as a coast was already made in Philipsson and Kirsten (1950) 161, n. 1 (cited in Bowen (1998) 353, n. 29), more specifically the entire coast between Cape Katigiorgis (the southeastern point of the Magnesia peninsula) and Cape Pouri (further north). Borgeaud (1995) makes an unnecessary distinction between the actual Sepias (a cape) and Herodotus' Sepias; on this basis he dismisses Cape Pouri because this localization depends on the assumption that the Persians sailed for one day from Therme.

[15] Lazenby (1993) 5 argues that it would have been impossible for the Greeks on Euboea to see the shipwrecks at Sepias.

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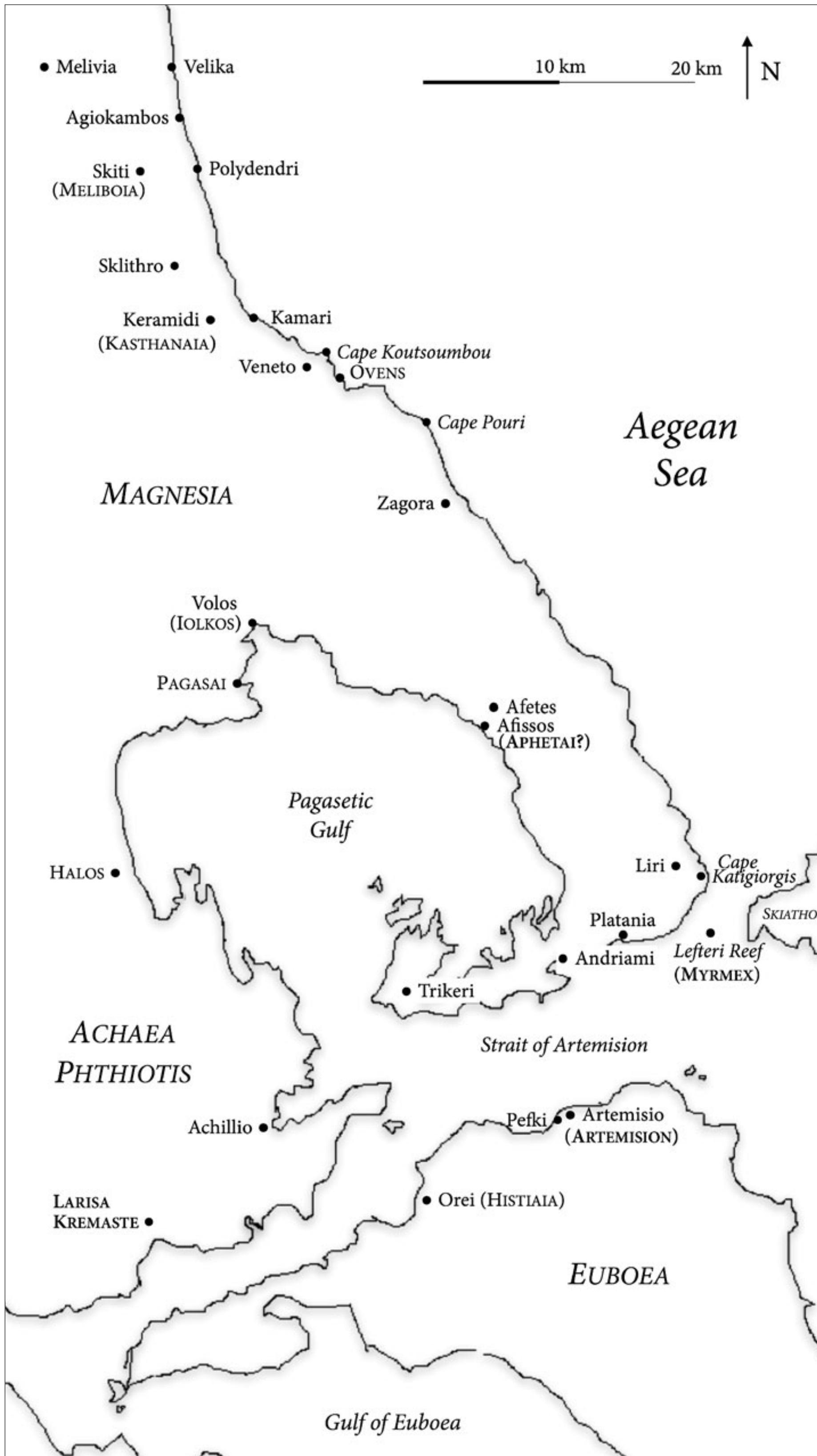

Fig. 1. Map of Magnesia and northern Euboea: the scene of the Battle of Artemision and its prelude (drawn by the author).

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Fig. 2. The sea caves at Veneto (photograph by author).

with the cape near the town of Katigiorgis,[16] but the alternative, more northern, Cape Pouri (or Pori) is preferred in most recent literature.[17] The argument runs that this cape is much more prominent than Cape Katigiorgis, and hence more likely to have been used as a landmark. In addition, it would be easier to understand that the Persians had waited here, because the cape of Katigiorgis would simply have been rounded to find a more suitable, protected site. It is thought that the identification of Sepias with Pouri, as opposed to Katigiorgis, may be further supported by a second-century AD tombstone found on the hill opposite the 'kastro' of Keramidi, on which the word Σηπιάδι appears.[18] However, it will be explained below that this is not possible.

Herodotus tells us that the beach where the Persians first anchored was situated between Kasthanaia and the Sepias coast (which was presumably further south).[19] There are not many beaches along the inhospitable coasts of Magnesia large enough to qualify as this beach, but there is one just east of Keramidi, called Kamari.[20] This beach is some 300m in length and cove-shaped, which makes it conceivable that a fleet anchored here, or rather was *imagined* to have done so. However, those who place some credence in Herodotus' numbers point out that the inlet is too small to have accommodated an armada as large as the one Herodotus suggests.[21] Instead, they put forward the beach of Agiokambos, north of Keramidi.[22] However, one of the most active topographers of

[16] Mézières (1853) 62–64; Macan (1908) 1.271; Tarn (1908) 211; Köster (1934) 61, n. 1; still Borgeaud (1995) 23–25 n. 11, 28 (connecting it with ancient remains at Liri found by Wace and Droop (1906–1907) as well as with the proximity of the Myrmex reef (Hdt. 7.183): 'qui attire les Barbares vers les lieux des catastrophes', not realizing that Aphetai is already very close to the Myrmex); also Green (1996) 120. One of the reasons for this identification has been a reference in Apollonius Rhodius (1.582), in which the Argonauts encounter Sepias just before Aphetai, which is usually identified with Platania on the southernmost point of Magnesia (although it is my surmise, for reasons which cannot be explained here, that it was actually located at modern Afissos). The cape is now also called Sipiada, whence the historically incorrect name 'Sipiada' for the former municipality here. Moreover, Apollonius' account has a garbled topography and should not be used to locate Herodotus' Sepias.

[17] Wace (1906) 146–47; Wace and Droop (1906–1907) 311; Pritchett (1963) 3–4; Müller (1987) 361–63; Talbert (2000); Morton (2001) 73, n. 8.

[18] Woodward (1910) 158.

[19] Discussion has focused on the meaning of the word αἰγιαλός; but see Pritchett (1963) 4–5 for convincing arguments to interpret it as 'beach'.

[20] Pritchett (1963) 5; Müller (1987) 363–64.

[21] Müller (1987) 344–45; 363; *cf.* Tarn (1908) 212: 'the burden of proof would be on anyone who should assert that the "Sepiad strand" ever existed. The topography then lends no support to Herodotus' narrative'.

[22] Bowen (1998) 352.

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Fig. 3. The sea caves at Veneto (photograph by author).

Herodotus, Pritchett, rightly points out that the length of the Agiokambos beach (6km) would not have required the clumsy πρόκροσσαι (row) formation that Herodotus explicitly mentions. Nevertheless, Pritchett's trust in Herodotus' calculation of the size of the armada has led him to doubt that Kamari beach was the *only* place where the Persians were stationed: 'In suggesting that the beach of Keramidi was Herodotos' strand, we are once again reminded of a practice of his referring to a point on the map, so to speak, as the assembly place of a large body. In this case, he obviously has in mind only the fighting force which accompanied the high command.'[23]

In this traditional strand of scholarship, it is assumed to be sound practice to judge locations solely on the basis of historical feasibility. But this may not work in all cases, as we are sometimes at the mercy of the tradition's (and historian's) imagination. Whatever happened in 480 BC, a place such as Kamari beach, whether it could really have accommodated the Persian armada or not, could easily 'acquire' the story because it stands out as a safe haven on the inhospitable Magnesian coast. Moreover, the mention of the πρόκροσσαι formation serves to explain that the fleet was far too large for the beach. The alternative beach, Agiokambos, is not only too big, but is also simply situated too far north to have been associated with Sepias. Thus the beach at Kamari remains the best match with Herodotus' indications.

The shipwreck at Sepias and the ensuing Battle of Artemision were important in later commemoration of the Persian Wars, as these events were thought to have contributed to the Greek victory at Salamis by diminishing the size of the Persian fleet.[24] Strabo relates (9.5.22): ἡ μέντοι Σηπιὰς ἀκτὴ καὶ τετραγῴδηται μετὰ ταῦτα καὶ ἐξύμνηται διὰ τὸν ἐνταῦθα ἀφανισμὸν τοῦ Περσικοῦ στόλου, 'However, the Sepias coast was sung in tragedies and hymns after this because of the disappearance of the Persian fleet there.' Unfortunately, most of these references are now

[23] Pritchett (1963) 5.

[24] Meyer (1954) 361, n. 2 and Gauer (1968) 11, 120 stress the sparsity of commemorative efforts, but they did exist. Plutarch mentions Artemision as a source of pride for the Athenians, quoting Pindar (*De gloria Atheniensium* 7; cf. *De Herodoti Malignitate* 34, in which Plutarch criticizes Herodotus for downplaying the glory of the Athenians), and it is also referred to by Aristophanes (*Lys.* 1251) and Isocrates (*Paneg.* 90). Gauer (1968) 27–28 hypothesizes that spoils were taken from this battle, although there is no concrete indication for this. Nevertheless, Herodotus does offer surprisingly vivid descriptions of the Persians' armour (7.89–99). Apparently, the Peparethians had got hold of two Carian battleships (see Gauer (1968) 74 with literature), presumably from this episode. Gauer (1968) 40 advocates the alternative view that these ships were captured during the Persians' northward flight.

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lost, but Strabo's words hint at the sort of information on which Herodotus may have based his account, which shows signs of dramatization.[25] As the Greeks attached so much importance to the storm, its occurrence was linked to the actions of various deities (though, as we have seen, Herodotus himself hesitates to accept this).[26] In particular, the story forms part of the lore surrounding two particular instances of Greek invocation of the winds. The first is the worship of Boreas (the North Wind) and Oreithyia (the Lady of Mountain Storms) at Athens (7.189). The temple of Boreas on the Ilissos river in Athens was supposedly founded to thank this god at the very spot where he had kidnapped Oreithyia for his help in decreasing the Persian forces. As the story about the storm was one of the aetiologies for the founding of this temple, it is well possible that Herodotus received most of his information about the shipwrecks here.[27] The second instance of a Greek wind cult connected to the Sepias storm scene is the worship of an obscure nymph called Thyia at a place with the same name in or close to Delphi (7.178).[28] While the nymph had a local Delphic pedigree (Paus. 10.6.4), we may surmise that she was simply the Delphic manifestation of the Lady of Mountain Storms (the name looks like an abbreviation of Oreithyia).

In addition to the wind gods, the sea gods were also thought to be responsible for the disaster: the Persian Magi are said to have tried to appease Thetis and the other Nereids in order to calm down the sea.[29] This cult reflects local Magnesian mythology: Herodotus notes that Sepias was 'of' Thetis and the Nereids, and describes Sepias as a mnemotope for a particular mythological narrative: allegedly, Thetis was abducted here by Peleus (7.191).[30] This leads to the obvious question of why Thetis and the Nereids, as well as Peleus, were associated with this rather obscure locality.

[25] *Cf.* Cawkwell (2005) 93–94. Examples of questionable anecdotes are the Greek retreat to Chalkis, which Herodotus says happened after the Greeks first observed the size of the Persian fleet (Grundy (1897) 217–18), and the story of the bribery of the Euboeans (Wallace (1974) 22–23). Most importantly, the various storm scenes are thought to have been invented or exaggerated (for example Hammond (1988) 548; Cawkwell (2005) 104). There are also several problems with the chronology: see Grundy (1897) 229; Hignett (1963) 379–85). Munro (1926) 284 suggests that the account of the Battle of Artemision is confused, and that Herodotus used three different eyewitnesses.

[26] It has been remarked that the storm at Sepias 'is the best and most developed example of such divinely motivated phenomena that Herodotus offers for the Persian Wars and is a splendid example of Greek polytheism in practice' (Mikalson (2003) 61–62).

[27] This cult was allegedly inspired by an oracle which advised the Athenians to worship the 'brother-in-law'; this was interpreted by the Athenians as a reference to Boreas (7.189). The location of the temple is still elusive. It may have stood just south of the Olympieion: *cf.* Müller (1987) 631; Plato (*Phdr.* 229b–c) offers an anecdote in which Socrates and Phaedrus are busy looking for the temple. The oracle, the storm at Sepias and the kidnapping are three different aetiologies for essentially the same cult, and the narrative transmitted by Herodotus seems designed to encompass all three. On the cult of Boreas, see Hölscher (2010) 136; Parker (2011) 273. The myth of Boreas and Oreithyia was popular in fifth-century Athens, as attested by its use by Aeschylus and Sophocles and in many other texts, its depiction in the sculpture of the Temple of the Athenians at Delos, as well as its popularity in post-479 Athenian vase painting (Agard (1966) 241). For different versions of the myth and local Athenian perspectives, including that of the temple on the Ilissos, see Finkelberg (2014).

[28] The location of this shrine (if we may call it that) has been hypothesized at Arachova, whose ancient name was Anemoreia, or near the monastery of Agios Ilias northwest of Delphi (Müller (1987) 590); but these suggestions cannot be substantiated.

[29] Various rationalizations of the Persians' worship of the Greek Nereids have been offered. Burn (1962) 316 hypothesizes that the Persians considered Thetis one of the Zoroastrian water-spirits who feature in the Avestan *Yasna Haptanghaiti* – a wild guess, given our limited understanding of Zoroastrian religion in the fifth century BC (on Iranian wind and water gods, see de Jong (1997) 101–02). According to Haubold (2007) 56, however, the Persian Magi would have worshipped Greek divinities for the purpose of propaganda directed at the Greeks. This is only one of his examples of Persian propaganda, but it does not stand up to scrutiny; even if we assume the Magi did in fact sacrifice to the gods, Herodotus' account makes clear that they did this from fear. See below for the idea that the story of the worship was a means of dramatization. For the role of chanting in Zoroastrian religion, and examples of those in other Greek texts, see de Jong (1997) 362–67. Note that detailed knowledge of the Magi was available in fifth-century Greece, as evidenced by the Derveni papyrus, in which a Greek mystery cult is compared to rituals performed by the Magi, including incantations (for example Tsantsanoglou (2008)).

[30] The Sepias coast has two additional, but much weaker mythical associations. As discussed in n. 15, Apollonius Rhodius mentions it in relation to the journey of the Argonauts (1.582), but his reference to Sepias may

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Two answers to this question have been offered. First, folk etymology may have been at work. The resemblance between Πήλιον, the mountain range that dominates Magnesia, and Πηλεύς is striking, and Sepias itself may have been associated with σηπία or 'cuttlefish': from Tzetzes (*ad Lyc.* 2.175, 2.178) we learn that Thetis turned into a cuttlefish when Peleus attempted to carry her off. Scholars have used this cuttlefish imagery to explain why Thetis was associated with Sepias.[31] However, it does not stand up to scrutiny: there are no early references for the myth that Thetis turned into a cuttlefish and the cuttlefish does not appear a single time in the various depictions of the myth in sixth- and fifth-century vase painting. Here, Thetis is usually turned into a lion, snake or sea monster in order to escape Peleus.[32] In addition, Tzetzes cannot be used to substantiate the claim, as his testimony may easily involve later 'learned' aetiology of the toponym Sepias. These considerations need to be accounted for by those who believe in a folk-etymological explanation for Thetis' association with Sepias.

The second explanation for the myth's association with Sepias is the assumption of the existence of a real cult of Thetis at Sepias. By virtue of the lack of any material or literary evidence for a temple of Thetis in the area (despite a claim in this direction),[33] it is maintained that Sepias was sacred to the nymph in a more general way.[34] However, as set out above, a characteristic of mnemotopes is that they are specific: visitors (especially from the sea) would need a *particular* place, an anchor point, to localize the story.

A more straightforward approach, which to my knowledge has not been attempted so far, is to look at natural landmarks. Easily the most striking natural feature of the area is the aforementioned concentration of sea caves at Veneto, known to Herodotus as the Ἴπνοι or 'Ovens'. It is possible,

well be a 'learned' one, based on Herodotus. In addition, Mount Pelion was particularly famous for its mythical connection to Cheiron, teacher of Achilles. A cave sacred to him was here: a scholion on *Il.* 16.144 describes it as a west-pointing ἄκρα above the ἄκρα of Sepias; see Aston (2006) for an appraisal of these sites. The wedding of Peleus and Thetis took place in this cave according to Euripides (*IA* 705–07): he connects the rape and the wedding geographically (earlier the wedding had been located at Pharsalos: Borgeaud (1995) 25). Aston (2009) 89–94 also suggests that there is an opposition between Thetis, as a 'mobile' sea goddess who does not need a specific cult site, and Cheiron, who was associated with a cave on Mount Pelion. However, whether such vague thematic dichotomies between the cults of Cheiron and Thetis truly existed in Greek thought is questionable; not only is the link between the two mythological figures rather indirect (the wedding of Peleus and Thetis takes place in Cheiron's cave, but this is only one of many myths in which Thetis features), more importantly, as we will see below, Thetis did have a fixed mnemotope.

[31] Morton (2001) 73–74, n. 8 explains the myth as a secondary aetiology, either for the name or for a possible abundance of cuttlefish here (*cf.* Ath. *Deipnosophistae* I 30d: ἐκαλεῖτο … Σηπιὰς ἄκρα ἀπὸ τῶν περὶ αὐτὴν σηπιῶν, 'Cape Sepias was named after the cuttlefish around it'); Nagy (1979) 344 asserts that Herodotus also says that Cape Sepias was named after the myth, but this does not seem explicit. He also connects Thetis with the concept of μῆτις, 'wisdom' ((1979) 345). Similar approaches are found in Borgeaud (1995) 23 and Aston (2009) 83, 103–06; these scholars maintain that the cuttlefish imagery fits the myth, in which Thetis tried to escape Peleus by turning into the animal that hides by ejecting a black liquid into the water. It is also felt that the cuttlefish's combination of white and black fits the benign and malevolent actions of Thetis. However, it is not certain whether there was any knowledge (let alone *wide* knowledge!) in ancient Greece about the function of ink for cuttlefish.

[32] Cf. *LIMC s.v.* 'Nereides', 'Peleus' and 'Thetis' and Gantz (1996) 229 for discussions of the transformation in early versions of the myth.

[33] There is hardly any evidence for cults of the goddess. Some sort of worship of Thetis is recorded in Laconia, but only at Sparta and Migonion (Paus. 3.14.4, 3.22.2), and a Thetideion has been recorded at Pharsalos in central Thessaly (Strabo 3.5.6). This temple also appears in Euripides' *Andromache* (16–25); on the basis of that text, it seems that it was yet another site that claimed to be the location of the marriage of Peleus and Thetis. The slight remains of a Doric temple under a church of the Virgin in Theotokou, near Liri and Cape Katigiorgis (Wace and Droop (1906–1907)) have also been interpreted as a Thetideion (for example by Borgeaud (1995) 23–25, n. 11), but this is completely speculative. Thetis does appear on coins from Larisa Kremaste (near modern Pelasgia), in the extreme southern part of Thessaly. However, these coins cannot be used as evidence for a cult of Thetis, because she is always pictured on the reverse with the armour that she delivered to Achilles at Troy, and is therefore only his 'mythical companion'. That Achilles was the 'main message' for Larisa Kremasta is further supported by the fact that the town was located centrally in Achaea Phthiotis (Phthia), Achilles' mythical homeland.

[34] Aston (2006) 358; (2009) 85–86.

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and, I believe, even plausible that these were a mnemotope for the Thetis myth, not only because caves often have stories attached to them,[35] but also because the association with Thetis is consistent with the picture painted of the sea nymphs elsewhere in ancient literature. In the *Iliad*, our most important testimony because it predates both Herodotus and the Persian Wars, and because of its wide popularity in the fifth century BC, Thetis resides in an ἀργύφεον σπέος, 'shiny cave', (18.50) under the sea; it is also described as a σπέος γλαφυρόν, 'hollow cave', (18.402, 24.82) περὶ δὲ ῥόος Ὠκεανοῖο ἀφρῷ μορμύρων ῥέεν ἄσπετος, 'around which streamed roaringly the immeasurable stream of Okeanos' (18.50).[36] In addition, Homer regularly speaks of Thetis' κόλπος, with reference to the hiding places of Dionysos (6.136) and Hephaistos (18.398). This word could denote 'bosom' or 'womb', but was also metaphorically used for bosom-like hollows, including geographical features (cf. LSJ *s.v.*); in the Hephaistos passage the place where Hephaistos hides is both a κόλπος and a σπέος γλαφυρόν (18.398–402).[37] Another indication is that Homer (*Il.* 18.40) calls one of the Nereids Σπειώ, a name obviously derived from the word σπέος, 'cave.[38] Finally, Pliny (9.5) records a tantalizing story about dead Nereids which allegedly beached at a sea cave near Lisbon. Given the strong association of the Nereids with caves, any Greek could certainly have regarded the 'Ovens' of Veneto, some of the most impressive sea caves in the Aegean, as their dwellings.

Even though Herodotus seemingly does not associate Sepias or Thetis with caves, Euripides does so in his *Andromache* (1263–69; note that this play is more or less contemporary with the *Histories*). In this text, Thetis' abode is not only described as a hollow chamber, but is also specifically called 'the rock of Sepias'.[39]

> ἀλλ' ἕρπε Δελφῶν ἐς θεόδμητον πόλιν
> νεκρὸν κομίζων τόνδε, καὶ κρύψας χθονὶ
> ἐλθὼν παλαιᾶς χοιράδος κοῖλον μυχὸν
> Σηπιάδος ἵζου· μίμνε δ' ἔστ' ἂν ἐξ ἁλὸς
> λαβοῦσα πεντήκοντα Νηρῄδων χορὸν
> ἔλθω κομιστήν σου· τὸ γὰρ πεπρωμένον
> δεῖ σ' ἐκκομίζειν, Ζηνὶ γὰρ δοκεῖ τάδε.

> But come to the god-built city of Delphi, taking this body with you, and after hiding it in the earth, come to the hollow chamber of the old rock of Sepias and sit there. And wait, until from the sea, taking a chorus of fifty Nereids, I will come to accompany you, because what is predestined, you must carry out, for Zeus has decided about this.

If the connection is not already obvious from Euripides' wording, it is also the reading that we have in a scholion on the word χοιράς in line 1265: πέτραν οὖν φασί τινα σπήλαιον ἔχουσαν, ἐν ᾗ εἰώθει διατρίβειν ἐκ θαλάσσης ἀνιοῦσα ἡ Θέτις. Σηπιὰς δὲ τόπος περὶ τὸ σπήλαιον, ὅπου τὴν Θέτιν ἥρπασεν ὁ Πηλεὺς εἰς σηπίαν μεταβληθεῖσαν, 'he therefore says that the rock had some sort of cave, in which Thetis used to dwell, coming up from the sea. And Sepias is the place around

[35] On the importance of caves in Greek mythology, see Buxton (1994) 104–08, which discusses the common role of caves as the site of myths that were outside the norm, and mentions several examples of caves as hiding places. Caves were often interpreted as prisons or refuges: *cf.* Boardman (2002) 104–06; Zwingmann (2012) 311–13.

[36] This is also how her abode is described in later (Roman) literature: for example Ov. *Met.* 11.217–65; here it also refers to Peleus' rape.

[37] *LSJ* (*s.v.*) rather enigmatically interprets Homer's use of the word κόλπος in these passages as 'any bosom-like hollow … of the sea, first in a half-literal sense, of a sea-goddess …'. Elsewhere in Homer, the word κόλπος may indicate a bay (*Il.* 18.140, 21.125; *Od.* 4.435) or waves (*Od.* 5.52).

[38] A Nereid called Speio is found in most enumerations of the Nereids, for example in Hesiod (*Theog.* 245) and Apollodorus (1.11).

[39] Mézières (1853) 62–64 localizes this episode at sea caves near Cape Katigiorgis, further south.

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the cave, where Peleus abducted Thetis, who was turned into a cuttle-fish.' While the information contained in this scholion seems to have been ignored by previous scholars who have commented on the location of Sepias, the idea has re-emerged in modern folklore; the Veneto caves are now in use as a wedding location and the promotional literature of the company mentions that εκεί παντρεύτηκαν οι γονείς του Αχιλλέα, 'Achilles' parents got married there'.[40] On the one hand, of course, the scholion and the Greek website are too late to prove that the association existed in Herodotus' time. On the other, however, they underline that the myth of Thetis and Peleus is liable to be located at the undeniably impressive caves. The grottos allow us to understand much better why Thetis and the Nereids were thought to reside at this particular spot of Magnesia.[41]

It seems that Herodotus does not go as far as Euripides or the Greek wedding agency. He only locates Thetis and Peleus *at* the Sepias coast, a place that he seemingly distinguished from the 'Ovens', the obvious identification of the grottoes of Veneto. How can we explain this inconsistency? Might it be possible that the 'Ovens' coast is to be *identified* with or at least seen as part of the Sepias coast? Not if we follow the traditional way in which the final part of 7.188 has been explained and translated. It mentions five places as the location of the Persian shipwreck: the beach, the 'Ovens', Sepias, Meliboia and Kasthanaia. Scholars and translators have always believed that Sepias is the third of the five places, and therefore, so to speak, a different 'point' on the map from the other four places. We could hypothesize that Herodotus was simply misinformed here, but that explanation is hardly preferable. Instead, I believe there is some scope to offer a slightly different translation of the passage, in which Herodotus uses the toponym Sepias to summarize the two geographical entities in the immediately preceding sentence; the 'Ovens' (as well as the beach, notwithstanding Herodotus' earlier remark that the beach was between the Sepias coast and Kasthanaia) could therefore be regarded as forming part of the general area of Sepias. There are various arguments in support of this view. First, there is a sentence break just before Sepias, Meliboia and Kasthanaia are introduced, and both the main verb and the grammatical case of the ships change. One might claim that this is an example of Herodotus' stylistic *variatio*, and that the enumeration continues after this break because there is no second μέν in the new sentence. However, as enumerating strings of δέ can also occur without μέν, the new sentence may contain a separate enumeration; even if the enumeration continues, the five items are not necessarily separate entities. This is shown by the second point: Sepias is accompanied by the demonstrative αὐτήν, 'itself' or 'that', a focalization which would be strange if Sepias was simply the third of five separate entities, but perfectly understandable if it marks 'Sepias' as a restatement of the places mentioned in the first sentence. Third, Strabo (9.5.22), who paraphrases Herodotus, does not mention Sepias among the places where the ships landed, but only the other four locations. This suggests that Strabo, at least, read the Herodotus passage in the way I propose here.[42] Note that regardless of whether one presumes that Sepias was a cape, a coast, a town or any combination of these, the name could readily be applied to the coast around Veneto, which has a cape called Koutsoumbou that could easily (and more so than Pouri) qualify as an ἄκρη.

We may further consider why the identification of Sepias with the coast on which the 'Ovens' are located is more attractive than the other options. In fact, there have never been compelling arguments for any of the previous identifications that have been put forward for the Sepias coast (Cape Katigiorgis and Cape Pouri). As we have seen, these are simply guesses on the basis of, mainly, chronological indications, and they depend also on assumptions about the relation of Sepias to the other places in the text. Not only does the new identification allow us to understand why

[40] See http://www.olympusadventure.com/aegean-weddings.html. A search on the internet will reveal more examples where the myth is mentioned in relation to the caves.

[41] *Cf*. n. 30. Aston states in conclusion: 'If we knew more about the cult of Thetis, in Thessaly and elsewhere, this complexity would surely only increase' ((2009) 107). Ironically, rather the opposite is true.

[42] I am grateful to one of the anonymous reviewers for this point.

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Herodotus claims that the entire coast was 'of' Thetis and the Nereids, it also fits better with the topographical situation. First, the new identification makes it easier to understand why the Magi would have performed their sacrifices and chants to Thetis and the Nereids on Kamari beach (which, as we have seen above, is the best candidate for the beach where the Persians moored), as the Veneto caves, the abode of the Nereids, are relatively close to Kamari (the distance is 8km); Cape Pori is some 8km further southeast and the other alternatives are even further away. Second, Herodotus would hardly have described the beach as being 'between the Sepias coast and Kasthanaia' had Sepias not been as far north as the 'Ovens'; in this scenario, Sepias and the Sklithro/Keramidi area (the approximate location of Kasthanaia) are roughly equidistant from Kamari beach. Any of the more southerly identifications of Sepias make Herodotus' reference vague, if not inaccurate. Third, it should be noted that the only epigraphic mention of Sepias was found at Keramidi itself. The toponym would have travelled a long way if it applied to what is now Cape Pouri, Cape Katigiorgis or a place even further south. Finally, the many 'Ovens' are truly impressive natural wonders. While sea caves exist elsewhere in the Greek world, the size and number of the 'Ovens' is remarkable. That this stretch of the Magnesian coast would have acquired a special name (as opposed to the 'nondescript' coasts of Magnesia) is unsurprising and perhaps even expected *a priori*. The name Sepias itself remains to be explained. Although a connection with σηπία, 'cuttle-fish', is difficult to rule out completely, I suggest that we can now also look for a connection with words denoting geographical elements, for which there are several options.[43]

The new identification makes the maritime perspective of traditions about the area apparent: sailors who followed the eastern coast of Magnesia from the south would first have seen the impressive Sepias coast with its many cavities; next, Kamari beach served as one of the few safe anchor points in this inhospitable area; it was followed by the towns of Kasthanaia and Meliboia, which may also have had some function as orientation points. The mythical and historical stories connected to these sites provided an interesting and perhaps even sense-making supplement to the 'sailor's map'.[44] In this respect, note the existence of the nearby place of Aphetai, which was regarded not only as the starting point of the Persians at the Battle of Artemision, but also as the place from which the Argonauts had departed for Colchis (*cf*. Herodotus 7.193). We thus arrive at a 'memory space' which is consistent with an observation made already by Halbwachs, mentioned above: i.e. that episodes of one story often cluster together in the same general area.

[43] We may, perhaps, connect with the toponym Sepias the group of words of unclear (possibly pre-Greek) etymology starting with σπ-, meaning 'cave' (for example σπέος, σπήλαιον, σπῆλυγξ; on the etymology of these words *cf*. Beekes (2010) *s.v.*). Also note the existence of the term ἡ σπιλάς (gen. σπιλάδος), formally equivalent to the toponym ἡ Σηπιάς (gen. Σηπιάδος; *cf*. Beekes (2010) *s.v.* σπίλος). It normally means 'rock in the sea', and the association with caves is there as well (LSJ *s.v.* claims it means 'hollow rock, cave' in Simon. fr. 179). An example of its use reveals that the word is a fitting description of the Sepias area: κοῖλαι δὲ σπήλυγγες ὑπὸ σπιλάδας τρηχείας κλυζούσης ἁλὸς ἔνδον ἐβόμβεον ('the hollow caves under the sharp rock resounded with the sea washing inside': Ap. Rhod. *Argon*. 2.568). Nevertheless, these suggestions about the etymology of Sepias remain nothing more than speculations, as they cannot be substantiated (but note that Greek word groups of substrate origin sometimes show unexplained vowel elision: *cf*. Beekes (2010) xxxii).

[44] One may wonder whether there were other 'landmarks' in the area that have long disappeared but that provided additional anchor points for the stories in the fifth century BC. There could have been actual shipwrecks at the beach or in the 'Ovens' that were still visible. It is curious that Kamari beach has a huge rock that looks like a beached ship. In this respect, note the existence of 'petrified ship' mnemotopes elsewhere (Thuc. 1.25.4; Hdt. 8.107). Also note that Herodotus (7.190) relates the story about a local of Sepias, Ameinokles, who had apparently at a later point become rich from the gold and silver cups and many other Persian treasures that had beached there. Whether these treasures, and the wrecks that may have been visible still, were indeed Persian or had another provenance, and were only later reinterpreted as Persian, is an issue on which Herodotus could probably not reflect accurately. On cults that catered particularly if not exclusively for sailors, see Parker (2011) 244–46, particularly regarding the cult of Achilles in the Black Sea, which could have been facilitated by the fact that his mother was a sea nymph.

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Although the old warning of 'seek and ye shall find' remains relevant, it seems that Herodotus' topography of Magnesia is 'real', in the sense that we can always find a place in the real world that readily corresponds to his remarks. The topography may, however, not be so real in the sense that, rather than truly 'historical' sites, they could be mere mnemotopes that acquired stories about the Persian Wars due to their prominence, in much the same way as Halbwachs' *lieux saints* function. I do not claim that events during the Persian Wars as related by Herodotus did or did not happen – either case is hard to prove. I do, however, suggest that we need to refrain from *automatically* accepting their historicity, as is usual in historical and archaeological studies of the Persian Wars.

Nevertheless, in the case of the storm scene at Sepias there is scope to regard the story in part or in its entirety as suspect. First, the idea of natural disasters destroying parts of the Persian land army or fleet is so common in the *Histories* that we may regard it as a *topos* that could easily arise in post-war folklore. Examples include the storms in the Egyptian desert (3.26), at Mount Athos (6.44), Mount Ida (7.42) and the Hollows of Euboea (8.13, see also below), as well as the tsunami at Potidaia (8.129). The historicity of each of these stories is dubious, for reasons which cannot be expounded here; but, taken together, one almost begins to feel compassion for the Persians as they suffer so many natural disasters. It seems further significant that the storm at Sepias is foreshadowed in an anecdote at the Hellespont (7.49), where the 'wise advisor' Artabanos warns Xerxes about the dangers of following the Greek coast where not many safe harbours are available.[45]

A second reason to regard the story as historically suspect is that some of the scenes and even words are reminiscent of the *Iliad*.[46] The similarities have been interpreted as subtle references by Herodotus to associate the Persian Wars with the Trojan War. This is advocated by Haubold, who argues that Xerxes tried to convince the Ionians that they were Asian,[47] as well as to 'rewrite Greek epic' by 'retracing the history of the Trojan War from the sack of Troy to the rape of Thetis'.[48] This may be an overstatement; I believe that we do not need to assume that Herodotus, the Persians or anyone else tried to link symbolically Xerxes' expedition with the Trojan War. But, at the very least, it could be concluded that the account of the storm at Sepias seems to have been subconsciously (re)modelled to fit dramatic scenes which are also found in Homeric epic.

The final factor that strips the story of some of its credence is the degree to which it depends on belief in divine intervention. We have already seen that the story is connected to cults in Athens

[45] *Cf.* Morton (2001) 17.

[46] This has been expounded in Harrison (2002) 561. There are good Iliadic antecedents for the storm blowing from Thrace and scattering the ships (*Il.* 9.4–7, 15.26–27). A tradition that Greek warriors returning from Troy came to grief death during a storm off this coast of Thessaly is preserved in Lycoph. *Alex.* 898–908; but this may be based on Herodotus' story. By mentioning the trivial point that the locals of Magnesia called this kind of storm 'Hellespontine', Herodotus may have been subtly attempting to blend in the possibility that the storm was a retribution for Xerxes' earlier irreverence towards the Hellespont, where Troy was located. Borgeaud (1995) 28 considers the name rather as a reference to Achilles Pontarches, who had a stele on the Hellespont; however, this runs contrary to the reality of the importance of the Hellespont in the *Histories*, where it only features as a place connected to the passing of Xerxes' army. The wall from wreckage built around the ships resembles the wall around the Greek ships in *Il.* 7.435–41 and 14.33. Tarn (1908) 214 remarks that this behaviour is strange, considering that the Thessalians had chosen to take the side of the Persians. Homeric epic may also resound in the word πρόκροσσαι which denotes the pyramidal formation of the ships in the sea (*Il.* 14.34–36): *cf.* Tarn (1908) 214; Hignett (1963) 170–71; Bowen (1998) 354–55. The image itself is repeated at *Il.* 18.68–69, where the ships of the Myrmidons are situated close to each other around Achilles. The scene of the Magi sacrificing at or near the Sepias coast bears resemblance to the images of Achilles going down to the beach and praying to his mother Thetis (*Il.* 1.349–51), of his prayer to the winds to kindle Patroclus' funeral pyre (*Il.* 23.192–225) and of the Greeks offering a libation to Zeus as he thundered (*Il.* 7.478–82). Perhaps the most striking 'coincidence' is the fact that the eastern opponents crash at the precise location from where Thetis was abducted, one of the crucial events leading up to the Trojan War itself. Bowie (2012) 277 labels the divine intervention in the passage as Iliadic, but it is also more generally a Greek (and not only a Greek) way of thinking.

[47] Haubold (2007) 58–59.

[48] Haubold (2007) 58; a similar view is found in Hartmann (2010) 217.

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and Delphi, and that it underlines the power of the wind divinities Boreas and the Lady of Mountain Storms, Oreithyia, in the creation of storms. At the 'Ovens', moreover, the story presents Thetis and the Nereids as divinities capable of both upsetting and calming the sea. Since Thetis is a fairly minor divinity, this may perhaps strike us as surprising; but she appears in the *Iliad* as a goddess one could summon for help. Herodotus' story could well reflect a real Greek cult practice near the 'Ovens'; the scarcity of mooring options along these coasts may have created a need for sailors to ask the water nymphs for protection. Given the strong ties of the shipwreck story to existing cult practises, it is possible that it arose, or became embellished, as a 'temple legend' that made one or more of the cult sites in question more remarkable and interesting. Note that there may have been a connection between the Athenian and Magnesian traditions: it seems relevant that Oreithyia, who the Athenians believed helped create a storm at the place where the Nereids were supposed to reside, was herself known as a Nereid by Homer (*Il*. 18.48).[49]

An element of irony may even be discerned. The Magi's effort to appease these essentially Greek divinities does not work, but only results in more devastation: during the battle itself, another storm was to follow, which inspired panic in the Persian base in Magnesia as the dead bodies and wrecks beached there (8.12) and caused the sinking of 200 ships at the 'Hollows' of Euboea (8.13).[50] Implicit in the story may be that Thetis and the other gods were enraged at the Persian attempt at conciliation.[51] Further note that Greeks, in this case the Ionians in the Persian army, advised the Persians to sacrifice to Thetis and the Nereids, thereby sabotaging the Persian advance into Greece. In fact, the scene is very reminiscent of Xerxes' earlier visit to Troy (7.43), which was apparently also recommended by Greeks in the army: after Xerxes' and the Magi's sacrifices to Athena and the 'heroes', panic descends upon the army.[52] Here in Magnesia, the theme of divine retribution is further underlined by the anecdote about Ameinokles, a local man of Sepias (see n. 43) who became rich from the Persian treasures after the wrecks, but subsequently suffered the tragedy of killing his own son. Stories featuring a theme of divine retribution are well known in Herodotus' work, but the reason for him recording so many may well be the theme's importance in folklore about the Persian Wars.

Conclusions

Herodotus located an important episode in the prelude to the Battle of Artemision along the Aegean coast of Magnesia. It is suggested in this article that the Veneto caves, which Herodotus knew, were a part of the Sepias coast and that they inspired the area's connection with Thetis and the Nereids. The reference to Thetis may be an allusion to the Trojan War, which Herodotus elsewhere compares to Xerxes' invasion of Greece. However, symbolic explanations are difficult to verify. Such coincidences may, additionally or alternatively, be inspired by the physical prominence of the sites themselves. The stories surely helped to supply landmarks to the 'sailor's map' of the area.

[49] Is it possible that the Athenian tradition about Oreithyia's help is somehow related to, or perhaps even the ultimate source of, the story about the Persian shipwreck at Sepias? This must remain speculation, and admittedly there is no indication that the Athenians regarded Oreithyia as a Nereid in the strict sense (she was rather seen as Erechtheus' daughter).

[50] Waters (1985) 171 notes that Herodotus makes the offerings of the Magi at Sepias ridiculous.

[51] In some of the stories surrounding Thetis, for example when she calls upon Aigaion (one of the titan-like Hecatonchires) to save Zeus (*Il.* 1.398), she appears to be a veritable cosmic power. Like any Greek divinity, Thetis could also be angered. Boedeker (2007) shows how a normally peaceful goddess, Demeter, is depicted as an aggressive force in many battles of the Persian Wars. In the Magi scene, something similar may have been the case with the depiction of Thetis: in the *Iliad* we encounter her as a *mater dolorosa* who is mainly concerned with the fate of her son Achilles; but at her abode in Magnesia, the Persians do not receive a warm welcome. See Slatkin (1986) for an overview of Thetis' thematic role in the *Iliad* and other texts.

[52] I have elaborated this point in van Rookhuijzen (2017).

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This mnemotope creation should warn us that historical accuracy cannot always be assumed for the locations of such events. This warning has gone unnoticed by previous scholarship, in which potential locations (such as Kamari beach) are disqualified because they do not seem to comply with historical feasibility. Rather, the argument should run that historical feasibility is largely irrelevant in determining where these events were situated, as folklore can easily attach significance to sites because of their physical and mythical prominence.

The events may not only be depicted at unhistorical locations; they may also be unhistorical themselves, but this is hardly ever demonstrable. From 2003 to 2006, the Persian War Shipwreck Survey (organized by the Greek Ministry of Culture, the Hellenic Centre for Marine Research and the Canadian Institute at Athens) examined the sea floor of what were believed to be the areas where the Persian shipwrecks occurred.[53] The finds, however, were minimal. It now seems that some of the studied locations were incorrect (for example Cape Katigiorgis was assumed to be Sepias). The project has demonstrated that some of the events related by Herodotus are elusive, even when they are explicitly looked for.

While it would be too rigorous to class the events on this basis alone as 'historically incorrect', we should not rule out the possibility that this *is* the right verdict. In the case of the shipwreck at Sepias, Herodotus, or the tradition on which he relied, was happy to apply the theme of divine retribution to the disaster that befell the Persian armada and linked it to real-world locations where the gods could act or wherever it was easy to picture the ships. For this reason, there is not much more reason to believe that the Persians suffered a shipwreck at Sepias than there is to believe that Thetis and the Nereids resided in the 'Ovens'. On the contrary, however, there *is* reason to believe that such historical and mythical images could arise in the minds of Greeks travelling along these coasts, and even in the mind of the Father of History himself.

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[53] A project description and finds of the surveys can be found at http://nautarch.tamu.edu/pwss/homepage/.

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