



A preview of Mages and Ionians revisited

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A preview of Mages and Ionians revisited

December 21, 2018 By Gregory Nagy listed under [By Gregory Nagy](#), [Guest Post](#)

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2018.12.21 | By Gregory Nagy

In *Classical Inquiries* 2017.06.26, I published an online essay entitled “[Mages and Ionians](#).” This piece drew on the same research that I presented, in part, for the panel “Ethnicity and Multiculturalism in Herodotus: Through Others’ Eyes,” at the Ninth Celtic Conference in Classics, University College Dublin, June 2016. The proceedings of the discussions linked to that panel are to be published in a forthcoming volume edited by Thomas J. Figueira. My contribution to the volume is entitled “Mages and Ionians revisited,” and the posting that I present here is a preview of that contribution, which will be a rethinking of the earlier essay “Mages and Ionians,” in further exploration of Greek ethnic identity.



Ionians depicted in the Apadana relief, Persepolis. [Image](#) via Wikimedia Commons.

Introduction to the Preview

Many of my comments in the forthcoming retrospective essay “Mages and Ionians revisited,” edited by Thomas J. Figueira, can be seen as responses to my friend, Tom, who had read my original essay “Mages and Ionians” and who had shared with me, by way of annotations, his relevant thoughts as a social historian. That was back in mid-July 2017, less than one month after my original essay had been published online, 2017.06.26. Ever since then, I have been trying to find the best way of responding to those annotations written by Tom, who had opened up for me so many new possibilities for further thinking. My formal response, in the end, will be my forthcoming retrospective essay, “Mages and Ionians revisited.” In the meantime, however, for better or for worse, I have come up with a preview, presented here as an interim dialogic response to Tom’s original annotations, which are also presented here.

A word about the formatting of the Preview

The text of the Preview that follows includes restatements and epitomes based on my original online essay of 2017.06.26, but it excludes all the footnotes. For convenience in future cross-referencing, I have preserved the original paragraph-numbers and have included the page-numbers of a printed version that appeared over a year later, in 2018: *Antichi Persiani: Storia e Rappresentazione*, edited by Clelia Mora and Cesare Zizza (with an introduction by Antonio Panaino), *Biblioteca di Athenaeum* 60, 2018 Edipuglia (Redazione: Valentina Natali) pp. 97–121. The page-breaks of that printed version were retroactively inserted into the online text of 2017.06.26.

(Corrigenda for the printed version:

§5, delete “Persianate”

§40 number 1, in “Lydian Empire, which had dominated Ionia”, insert “mainland” before “Ionia”

§41, not “obliteration” but “capture”

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§53 number 3, not “the navy of this city was” but “the forces of this city were”.)

For the sake of clarity, I will where necessary prefix with my initials, GN, the restatements and epitomes and comments that I make in the Preview, while the relevant annotations by Tom Figueira, as written in mid-July 2017, will be preceded by his initials, TJF.

The restatements and epitomes, together with comments and annotations

GN §0:

In introducing the essay “Mages and Ionians” I asserted that the meaning of the Greek word μάγος (μάγος), which was borrowed from the Old Persian word maguš, needs to be analyzed by way of tracing the historical contexts of the borrowing, and that such contexts involve primarily a sub-group of Greek-speaking populations who called themselves Ionians.

TJF, in his introduction to his relevant annotations, comments on my overall essay:

This is most original and provocative, and stakes out much new ground, especially for those uninitiated into Nagyian thought. At more than one point, the stages of your argument clicked into conviction for me. I do feel some of the further steps of the argument pressed too far, lacked sufficient substantiation, or needed tweaking. Please take my suggestions as constructive criticism and use your own best judgment. I do not want to lose the freshness of your piece.

GN comments, responding here to TJF by making three points, listed in the order of ABC:

A. I treasure the praise and I happily accept the criticism. In further annotations by TJF, which will appear below, he gives some telling examples of situations where I may well have taken my arguments too far. “A bridge too far...”

B. I feel both honored and intimidated by the term “Nagyian thought.” One of these days, I should try and figure out, in some definitive way, if there really is anything distinctive about my thinking. For now, let me just take a preliminary step in that direction... What perhaps sets me apart, at least to some extent, is the effort I make in analyzing the linguistic aspect of any problem where the original wording needs to be analyzed in its historical contexts. I should stress that such analysis needs the application of both synchronic and diachronic perspectives. I think I say it best in Nagy 2011a, as listed in the Bibliography. In this context, I need to comment on a missed opportunity, dating back to an early phase of my publications. In *Best of the Achaeans*, Nagy 1979, I had decided to avoid using the terms synchronic and diachronic. As time went by, I came to regret that avoidance, and, twenty years later, I tried to make up for the missed opportunity. This was in the new Introduction to the second edition of that book, Nagy 1999, where I explain how my overall thinking is shaped by combining synchronic and diachronic perspectives.

C. I should put on record that the criticisms of my work by TJF have always been for me a model of collegial debate.

TJF comments on point C:

In other words, any sharpness here is meant as fun between friends.

GN §§1–15:

GN comments on these fifteen paragraphs:

There is not much that I can add at present to what I originally said in §§1–15 about the μάγοι or ‘mages’ in the Persian Empire—except perhaps to cite an article by Kai Trampedach (2017) about the role of these μάγοι in the overall narrative of Herodotus. As Trampedach argues in terms of this narrative, the μάγοι who advise Persian royalty—especially in the case of Xerxes—are programmed, as it were, to fail. That is to say, the narrative makes them suffer the same patterns of mistakes that are suffered by their royal advisees. Herodotus delineates these mistakes as offenses against the cosmic order that takes shape in his narrative.

GN §15:

In *Oedipus Tyrannus* 387, the king Oedipus refers to the seer Teiresias insultingly as a μάγος. It is commonly thought that the king in this context is accusing the seer of acting like some kind of a magician. But is Teiresias here really a practitioner of magic, as we think of magicians? Or is he more of a usurper?

TJF comments:

Here is a line of accusation along which Oedipus also abuses him.

GN comments:

I agree. Also, as I go on to argue in GN §16, Oedipus himself suspects Teiresias of being a usurper.

GN comments further on his §15:

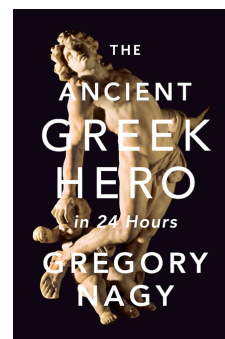
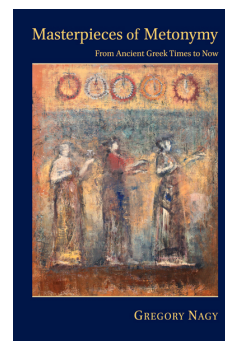
The knowledgeability of Teiresias about the cosmos—both physical and political—is viewed here at *Oedipus Tyrannus* 387 as a potential threat, not only as a potential aid, to kingship.

TJF comments:

Isn't it significant that this expertise also has received Apolline endorsement?

GN comments:

I agree.



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GN §16:

Now I shift gears and consider the Ionians as primary mediators of the reception, in Greek cultural contexts, of the Persian word *mágos*. I launch already here into my main argument: that speakers of the Ionic dialect were transmitters of a world view that was different from other world views as reflected by speakers of other Greek dialects, and that this difference in world views is exemplified by the use of the word *mágos* by Ionians during a specific period of their history, from around 550 to 330 BCE.

TJF comments:

The assumption, in the writings of Herodotus, of the seamlessness of translation reflects a peculiarly Ionian attitude toward distinction by language.

GN comments:

I agree. As we will see further on, Herodotus views the *mágoi* as a priestly class, and his narratives about these *mágoi* consistently reflect this basic understanding of his.

GN §17:

I highlight here two major early Greek sources of information about the *mágoi*. One is the historical writings of Herodotus, whose prose is basically Ionic, and the other is the Derveni Papyrus, which shows traces of Ionic transmission. Throughout my comments, I make a distinction between Ionians a dialect of Greek and Ionians a speaker of this dialect. And I show that speakers of Ionic based their identity on the distinctness of their dialect.

GN §18:

Both Greek sources just mentioned, Herodotus and the Derveni Papyrus, provide essential pieces of information about the role of *mágoi* in the era of the Achaemenid dynasty, which ruled the Persian Empire from around 550 to 330 BCE.

GN §19:

According to Herodotus (1.101), the *Mágoi* (Μάγοι) were one of six social subdivisions (*éthnea*) of the Iranian people known as the Medes (Μήδοι). Accordingly, we may at first sight think of the *mágoi* as a priestly class within the overall framework of the Persian Empire as represented by the dynasty of the Achaemenids. A closer look, however, suggests that the *mágoi* were already a priestly class in the pre-Achaemenid empire of the Medes, which preceded the more multiethnic Persian Empire of the Achaemenids, and that the status of *mágoi* as imperial priests in this later empire was no longer so strictly linked to their earlier status as an "ethnic" grouping that was also sacerdotal within the empire of the Medes themselves.

TJF comments:

Maybe the narrative of Herodotus implies that the *mágoi* had lost their status as a clerical caste in the Achaemenid empire?

GN comments:

I agree that the *mágoi* cannot really qualify any more as a clerical caste in the Achaemenid empire, but I think they still functioned as imperial priests, as we will see in what follows.

GN §§20–21:

As we see from the relevant wording in Herodotus (1.132.2–3) and in the Derveni Papyrus, the priestly functions of the *mágoi* involved the performing of *thusiai* 'sacrifices' and the singing of *epaoidai* 'incantations'.

GN §22:

The content of incantations sung by the *mágoi* is described by Herodotus (1.132.2–3) as a *theogoníē* 'theogony'. Here we see the idea of singing about the *cosmos*—even singing the *cosmos*—linked with the idea of authorizing a sacrifice. From a comparative point of view, as we know from surveying a wide variety of cross-cultural evidence, the performance of a theogony can function as an authorization of kingship. Also, *mágoi* are viewed as coefficient with the king of the Persian Empire in sustaining cosmic order by way of sacrifice and incantation.

TJF comments:

We may compare what happens in the Hesiodic Theogony, where the narrative about the genesis of divinities is followed by catalogues of female heroes who were impregnated by male divinities and gave birth to founders of royal lineages.

GN §23 quoted here in full:

Even more relevant is what we read in Herodotus (7.191.2) about *mágoi* who are described as 'sacrificing' (*éntoma poieúntes*) and 'singing incantations' (*kataeidontes boëisi*) in response to a violent wind that had at that time seriously damaged the fleet of the Persian Empire by destroying many of its ships anchored in the shallows at Cape Sepias. The context here makes it clear that the *mágoi* were performing these rituals in order to salvage the royal project of Xerxes, successor to Darius as king of the Persian Empire, who was attempting to conquer the Greeks inhabiting the mainland situated on the European side of the Aegean Sea. In the same narrative of Herodotus (7.191.2), these *mágoi* are described as also sacrificing (*thúontes*) to the goddess Thetis, mother of Achilles, and to her sister goddesses, the Nereids. Herodotus says more (again, 7.191.2): the *mágoi* sacrificed (*éthyon*) to Thetis because of what they had heard 'from the Ionians' (*parà tôn Iōnōn*). What they heard, as Herodotus recounts (again, 7.191.2), is a sacred narrative about Cape Sepias, the place situated on the European coast where the fleet of the Persian Empire was damaged

by the violent wind: it was at this same place, the Ionians told the mágoi, that Achilles was conceived when his immortal mother Thetis was impregnated by his mortal father Peleus.

GN §24:

Given the fact that the native Greek narratives attributed cosmic powers to the goddess Thetis, I argue that we see here another example of a link between the idea that the mágoi have the power to sing the cosmos and the idea of their authorizing a sacrifice by way of their incantations.

GN §25:

But who were these Ionians who had narrated for the mágoi the sacred narrative that led to the magian sacrifice to divine forces worshipped by the Greeks? It is clear from what we read in Herodotus (7.191–2) that these Ionians were Asiatic Greeks fighting on the side of the Persians and against the Greeks of Europe who were defending their homeland from the invasion initiated by Xerxes. These Ionians were serving in the invading navy of the multiethnic Persian Empire.

GN §26. By studying the political and cultural identity of these Greeks who called themselves Ionians, I argue, we can develop a holistic explanation for the meaning of the word mágos in Greek. And that is because these Greeks, as Ionians, were the primary transmitters of Persian civilization beyond the Persian-speaking world.

TJF comments on my wording “the primary transmitters”:

The definite article here disquiets me. What about Iranian estate-holders in the satrapies (such as those in Anatolia or Syria, for example, as interacting with Xenophon in Asia Minor) or the Jews returning to Jerusalem?

GN comments:
Point well taken.

GN §27:

What I said a moment ago about Ionians as transmitters of Persian civilization beyond the Persians is I think the most consequential aspect of my overall argumentation. When I say Persian civilization in this context, I use the term in an inclusive rather than exclusive sense. Such a civilization was not at all exclusively Persian in its ethnicity, since the Persian Empire promoted a multiethnic world view that prided itself on its Greek-speaking constituency as a singularly prestigious aspect of its overall civilization.

GN §28 quoted here in full:

I am arguing that the civilization of the Ionians was a jewel in the crown for the Persian Empire, and this argument of mine requires a rethinking of four subjects, three of which are ideas and one of which is a historical fact:

- (1) the idea of ‘Ionians’ as defined by the so-called Ionian Dodecapolis, a confederation of twelve states, which took shape in the late eighth and early seventh centuries BCE;
- (2) the idea of a Debate of the Constitutions, as dramatized by Herodotus (3.380–384), which supposedly took place among Persian elites in 522 BCE;
- (3) the historical fact of an Ionian Revolt against the Persian Empire in 499–494 BCE;
- (4) the idea of ‘Ionians’ as viewed after the sea battle at Salamis in 480 BCE.

GN §29. I listed these four subjects in chronological order here, but the order of my analysis will be 1-4-3-2.

GN §30 quoted here in full:

The name of the region Ionia (Ἰωνίη), and the name of the people, Ionians (Ἴωνες), are hardly even recognized in the popular cultures of the “West.” Nor are they all that well understood by experts in the history of Greek civilization. The name Ionian is ordinarily used today with reference to populations that spoke Ionic, which was a dialect of the unified language that was Greek. This Ionic dialect, as linguists can tell us, was closely related to another dialect, Attic, spoken in Attica, which was the name given to a region dominated by the city-state of Athens in the classical period of the fifth century BCE and beyond. Linguists think of Attic as a dialect spoken in one part of a larger dialect-area that they describe as Attic-Ionic, while Ionic is understood to be the dialect spoken in the other part. But how to define that other part? Whereas Attica, the original area where Attic was spoken, can be defined easily, since it is situated on the mainland of what we know as Europe, it is much more difficult to define the areas where Ionic was spoken.

TJF comments:

It is perhaps worth noting that this undeniable linguistic classification may be obscuring ideological and cultural differences between the Athenians and Ionians. (Particularly evident are the differences in economic practices.) The process of equation drew force from the 5th- and 4th-century championing of the Ionians by the Athenians against the Persians. Anti-medism was accompanied by mythological and cultic syntheses of Athenian and Ionian tradition, which provoked some passionate resistance. I would differ from you in emphasizing that the less Athenocentric myths about the foundation (ktisis) of Ionian cities might have been promoted by some archaic (and even classical) Ionians. I think particularly of the variants about the settlement of Samos that highlight the Argolid instead of Attica.

GN §§31–32:

The fact that I need to say plural areas and not singular area at §30 is already an indication of the

difficulties that await us. Contributing to these difficulties is the fact that the Ionians who were most active and influential in defining Ionian identity were exclusivistic in using the name Ionian. As we are about to see, these exclusivistic Ionians were the proud inhabitants of a region they called Ionia, situated in what we know as Asia Minor, on the east side of the Aegean Sea. They mythologized themselves as descendants of adventurers who had followed kingly leaders stemming from Athens, capital city of Attica in Europe, in crossing over from the west side of the Aegean Sea and establishing on the east side twelve states at sites located along the central coastline of mainland Asia Minor and on two important offshore islands. These twelve states were consolidated into a confederation known as the Ionian Dodecapolis. Herodotus (1.142.3) lists all twelve states: of these twelve, the ten Asiatic mainland city-states were Miletus, Myous, Priene, Ephesus, Colophon, Lebedos, Teos, Klazomenai, Phocaea, and Erythrai, while the two Asiatic island-states were Samos and Chios.

GN §33:

The self-mythologizing of Ionian states as offshoots of settlements originating from Athens can be seen as the most prominent feature of a much broader set of myths that can be categorized under the heading Ionian Migration, where the Greek word that I translate as 'migration' is apoikiā (as used in Strabo 13.1.3 C582 and elsewhere). Although the mythmaking of the Ionian Dodecapolis must have screened out or at least minimized alternative myths that would have aetiologized the founding of other Ionian states that were not members of the twelve-state confederation, we have evidence for the survival of such alternative myths, as we see for example from a passing remark made by Pausanias (7.3.3) concerning an Ionian migration from Athens to Naxos—which was one of the most important islands in a chain of islands known as the Cyclades. Evidently, the Ionian populations of the Cyclades were excluded from the confederation of the Ionian Dodecapolis. Another example of exclusion is Euboea, a large and most important Ionian island situated offshore to the east of Attica.

TJF comments on the self-mythologizing of Ionian states as offshoots of settlements originating from Athens:

This formulation can work in terms of the final reckoning, which was shaped by classical political realities.

GN comments:

Very attractive, the hermeneutics of the term "final reckoning"!

GN §34:

Even if we define the Ionians narrowly, restricting the field of vision to the Asiatic Greeks of the Ionian Dodecapolis, I maintain that their importance was still paramount in the history of Greek civilization. But the problem is, the achievements of these Ionians, especially in science and in philosophy, are today generally seen as merely an aspect of Greek civilization viewed as a unified whole. It is almost as if the localization of such achievements by Ionians inhabiting the Asiatic region called Ionia were simply a historical accident. Or, to put it another way, it is as if the Asiatic Greeks of the Ionian Dodecapolis were no different from European Greeks.

TJF comments:

Instead of saying European Greeks, I would suggest the Attic, Euboean, and Cycladic Ionians.

GN comments:

I agree that the wording of TJF is more accurate, as we reconstruct backward in time. But I would still say, as we reconstruct forward in time toward what we may call the "final reckoning," that the term "European" works in the long run.

GN §§35–38 epitomized, without citations of many of the primary sources cited in the original argument: The fact is, the Asiatic Greeks of the Ionian Dodecapolis had their own distinct Greek identity—or, as I would prefer to say, their own self-defined ethnic identity. For these Ionians of the Ionian Dodecapolis, this ethnic identity was formalized by way of celebrating a seasonally recurring festival named the Paniōnia, the venue for which was a place named the Paniōnion. As Douglas Frame has shown in an important book about the myth of Nestor, king of Pylos ([Frame 2009](#)), the apogee of this Ionian confederation—and of the festival of the Paniōnia as celebrated at the Paniōnion—can be dated to the late eighth and early seventh centuries BCE. As Frame ([2009: ch.10](#)) has also shown, in considerable detail, the original leader of this twelve-state confederation was the city-state of Miletus, and the rulers of this state claimed that they were descended from Neleus father of Periklymenos, who was a brother of Nestor, and that Periklymenos was an ancestor of Kodros, a king of Athens, who in turn was the father of a second Neleus. The Athenian Neleus founded not only Miletus but also, ultimately, the entire confederation of the Ionian Dodecapolis—according to the mythology propagated by Miletus about the Ionian Migration. Alternatively, however, as we read in other sources, the leader of the Ionian Migration from Athens to Ionia was another son of Kodros the king, Androklos of Athens, who was known as the 'legitimate' son of Kodros and who was the founder of the city-state of Ephesus. So, the city-state of Ephesus, which as we have already seen is listed by Herodotus as a member of the Ionian Dodecapolis, was a rival of Miletus in claiming to be the city-state that dominated the new homeland of the Ionians in Asia Minor. What we see here are two mutually contradictory versions of an overall myth about the Ionian Migration. According to one version, the state of Miletus was clearly in the forefront of a grand movement of Ionians traveling from Athens to their new home in Asiatic Ionia, while in the other version it was the state of Ephesus that took the lead—and became the dominant city in Ionia.

TJF comments:

If you are correct, the advancement of Ephesus must have been managed by the satrapal regime in Sardis. Ephesus appears otherwise so much less significant than Miletus—until the eclipse of Miletus under the Athenians in the mid-5th century. Even then the two cities seem to be on the same level of wealth and power.

GN comments:

On the management of Ephesus by the satrapal regime in Sardis, I have something to say in what follows, at GN §40.

GN §39:

Here I begin to explain the emergence of Ephesus, at the expense of Miletus, as the dominant city of the Ionian Dodecapolis. As I will argue, this dominance took shape in an era that postdated by around two centuries the apogee of the Ionian Dodecapolis, which I date, following Frame (2009), to the late eighth and early seventh centuries BCE. During those two centuries, as I will also argue, it was still Miletus and not Ephesus that maintained a position of dominance over the Ionian Dodecapolis.

GN §40:

The question for now is this: how did Ephesus emerge as a serious rival to Miletus? The answer, as we will see, has to do with the fact that the entire region of Ionia was for a long time under the domination of the Persian Empire, which was exerting its control over the cities of Ionia through the primary agency of the satrap of Lydia, stationed in the inland city of Sardis, which was the capital of what had once been the Lydian Empire. For further background, here are two basic historical facts about the era of Persian domination over Ionia:

—The Persian domination of Ionia got underway in 546 BCE, when the Persian Empire overwhelmed the Lydian Empire, which had dominated mainland Ionia beforehand.

—During the era when the Ionian Dodecapolis was dominated by the Persian Empire, it was secondarily dominated by the city-state of Miletus—and Miletus must have maintained this secondary domination of Ionia till the end—about which I will have more to say in §41.

TJF comments:

I am sympathetic to your hypothesis, and seeing Miletus as the dominant city in mainland Ionia seems unproblematic (I have written a bit about Milesian colonization). It is the period before 700 (or a little later) that gives me some pause. I would be encouraged if the traditions about the ramifications of the Lelantine War could be brought in (via Eretria)—and if some archaeology from Miletus were cited as well.

GN comments:

TJF here is far too modest in the way he cites his own research on the history of Miletus as the mother city or metropolis of numerous daughter cities. For an introduction, I recommend a reading of TJF's relevant comments in the book [Theognis of Megara](#) (1985), edited by TJF and GN, as listed in the Bibliography. About the Lelantine War, I offer some relevant observations in *Classical Inquiries* 2018.06.01, "[Lelantine War, Eretria and Chalkis, and the Contest of Homer and Hesiod.](#)"

GN §41:

The end for Miletus came with the Ionian Revolt, which lasted from 499 to 494 BCE. That revolt was started by Miletus and ended with the capture of this city by the Persian Empire in 494 BCE. This disaster, as narrated by Herodotus (6.18), was commemorated in a tragedy produced soon thereafter in Athens, composed and directed by the dramatist Phrynichus (6.21.2).

GN §42:

I will postpone till later my analysis of the Ionian Revolt, except to say this much already now: before the end came, Miletus could still claim to be the primary nexus of the Ionian Migration. Most relevant is what we read in Herodotus: when Aristagoras of Miletus went to Athens for the purpose of persuading the Athenians to come to the aid of the Ionian Revolt (5.97.1), he referred to the traditions of the Ionian Migration: or, to put it in terms of the rhetoric paraphrased by Herodotus, Aristagoras reminded the Athenians of the claim that the people of Miletus were *ápoikoi* 'colonists' originating from the city of Athens (5.97.2)—in other words, that Athens was the originator of the *apoikiá* or 'migration' of Ionians to the East.

GN §43:

The ethnic self-definition of the Asiatic Greeks who called themselves Ionians (*Íōnes*) must be contrasted with a rival ethnic self-definition of European Greeks who called themselves Hellenes (*Héllēnes*). To drive this point home, I start by asking a hypothetical question. This question centers on a major event in world history, namely, a sea battle that took place at the island of Salamis in 480 BCE, where the naval forces of Athens, combined with smaller naval forces sent by the island state of Aegina and by other allied states, decisively defeated the combined naval forces of the Persian Empire. The question is, what would have happened if the Persian Empire had won this naval battle, and if Athens and its allies had lost? Well, in terms of my argument, the Persian Empire would have conquered European Greece, and there would have been, after that, no more Hellenes in Europe. There would continue to be Greek-speaking populations there, yes, and they would even be the same populations as before, but they would not be calling themselves Hellenes any more. Instead of Hellenes, there would now be Ionians in Europe—that is, in the region of Athens known as Attica and in such outlying islands as nearby Euboea—just as there were Ionians already in Asia Minor. To put it more broadly, Greekness would have been reconfigured in terms of the Eastern Greeks, with the obliteration of Greekness as configured by the Western Greeks of Europe who had up to now called themselves Hellenes.

TJF comments:

Certainly the fact that the European enemy alliance called itself the Hellenes would have weighed in the kind of shift in nomenclature that you posit. Also, ought you not make the point right here that the Persians and other Near East peoples were already calling our Greeks 'Ionians'?

GN comments:

On the Persian convention of referring even to the European Greeks as 'Ionians'... As Rahim Shayegan has reminded me, the so-called "Daiva Inscription" of Xerxes, found at Persepolis (XPh 23–25), already refers to the Asiatic Greeks and the European Greeks together as 'the Ionians who live by the sea and who live across the sea': yaunā taya drayahiyā dā|rayatīy utā tayaiy paradraya dārayat|iy.

GN §44:

My formulation in §43 is relevant not only to the European Greeks who were Ionians but also to other European Greeks who were Aeolians and Dorians. If the forces of the Persian Empire had been victorious in the sea battle at Salamis, then there would have been a more general re-alignment affecting

- A. the Ionians of Europe, like the populations inhabiting Attica and the outlying island of Euboea
- B. the Aeolians of Europe, like the populations inhabiting Boeotia and Thessaly
- C. the Dorians of Europe, like the populations inhabiting most of the land-masses situated to the north as also to the south of the Corinthian Gulf.

TJF comments on my category A:

I have come around to the position that late 9th- and 8th-century central Greece was a sort of ēpeiros or peraiā of the island of Euboea in structural and cultural terms.

GN comments:

I find this formulation of TJF most intuitive. Perhaps a similar formulation could be made with regard to the northern coast of Asia Minor at a comparably earlier period: in this case, that area could be seen as a sort of ēpeiros 'mainland' or peraiā 'mainland-that-faces-the island' of Lesbos.

GN §45:

The populations of European Greeks, who had all been calling themselves Hellenes at this moment in history when the sea battle took place, would thereafter have been re-aligned respectively with the following populations of Asiatic Greeks:

- A. the Ionians in the central coastlands of Asia Minor as also in the outlying islands of Chios and Samos
- B. the Aeolians in the northern coastlands of Asia Minor as also in the outlying islands of Lesbos and Tenedos
- C. the Dorians in the southern coastlands of Asia Minor as also in the outlying islands of Rhodes and beyond.

TJF comments on my categories B and C:

With regard to B... And we recognize that the eastern Aeolians were already aligned upon or with the eastern Ionians in politics and institutions. With regard to C... Moreover, Herodotus of Halicarnassus—a city that belonged to the Dorian Hexapolis—writes in Ionic. Herodotus was closely connected with Samos, and is saturated with Ionian thought.

GN §§46–47:

Having outlined what could have happened if the Persian Empire had prevailed in the naval battle of Salamis, I now come to the realities.: none of this happened. In the end, after the defeat of the Persian Empire's naval forces in the battle of Salamis and, later, after the defeat of its land forces at Plataea, the Greekness of the Hellenes in the West prevailed over the Greekness of the Ionians and the Aeolians and the Dorians in the East. And, hurrah, the democracy that had been the new way of life for Greeks of the West as represented primarily by Athens could now prevail over the tyranny that was the old way of life for the subjugated Greeks of the East as represented primarily by the Ionians. What I have just formulated is a common contemporary understanding of what happened after the sea battle at Salamis in 480 BCE—followed by the land battle at Plataea in 479 BCE. But this formulation is oversimplified. In the case of Ionia, for example, we are about to see that the cities of that region were at this same moment in history governed by regimes that were considered to be democracies, and such democratic regimes had been installed at the initiative of the Persian Empire. As I am about to argue, the victory of the European Greeks at Salamis and at Plataea in 480 BCE and 479 BCE may have been seen as a victory for democracy as we know it, yes, but the fact remains that an alternative victory for the Persian Empire could have been likewise ideologized as a victory for democracy—at least, for those Greeks who were Ionians. And such an ideology would have been promoted by the Persian Empire itself. In terms of the multiethnic ideologies of this empire, I argue, such a victory would have been equated with a victory not for Persians but rather for Ionians—that is, for the Asiatic Greeks who populated Ionia. At this point in history, as we are about to see, these Ionians could have promoted an alternative version of democracy that supposedly rivaled the democracy as configured in European Athens.

GN §48, quoted here in full:

Before I can proceed with my argument, I need to highlight a basic fact of history. As a consequence of the sea battle of Salamis in 480 BCE, where the navies of the Persian Empire were on the losing side while the navy of Athens was on the winning side, the dominion over Ionia and over other Greek-speaking regions in the East was lost by the Persian Empire and was won by Athens, which thereafter evolved into what we

know retrospectively as the Athenian Empire. To say it more bluntly, Athenians became the super-Greeks of the East. In the Greek-speaking world of the East, the Athenians could now dominate the Ionians in the form of the Delian League, but eventually they dominated also the Aeolians to the north of the Ionians and the Dorians to the south. And the domination extended even further, to the regions of the Hellespont and the Propontis and beyond. An architectural landmark of this new dominion of Athens over the Asiatic Greeks was the Odeum of Pericles, built to replicate the Grand Tent of Xerxes, which had been confiscated by the Athenians after their victory in the naval battle at Salamis. Plutarch (Life of Pericles 13.9–11) gives a most vivid description of this new imperial building, adjacent to the Theater of Dionysus: here was a People's Palace for all Asiatic Greeks to admire as an orientaling stupor mundi, situated in the heart of a European city that could now also play the role of an Asiatic metropolis.

TJF comments, especially with regard to my wording "the dominion over Ionia and over other Greek-speaking regions in the East was lost by the Persian Empire and was won by Athens, which thereafter evolved into what we know retrospectively as the Athenian Empire" at §48:

A crude and old-fashioned view. For one thing, this ignores the phenomenon of sub-hegemony where the major east Greek allies of the Athenians acquired sizable spheres of influence during the Attic hegemony. Was the Athenian domination as intrusive as the Persian? Judgment varies (I am skeptical). It was most assuredly not so fiscally. And there was much less room for arbitrary authority. The Athenians almost always acted (in the absence of outright revolt) through adjudication.

GN comments:

Here is one of those areas in my overall argumentation where my friend thinks I have gone too far. "A bridge too far..." I am guessing that, if I had not used the term "Athenian Empire," I would not have seemed quite so far at variance with TJF's own assessment of what happened after the Persian Empire lost control over the Greek-speaking populations in the East. I could say in my defense that the rationale for my speaking in terms of an "Athenian Empire" was not ideological but historical. Or, to put it more accurately, I was trying to take a historical approach in analyzing the conflicting ideologies, current in the ancient world, concerning a basic question: what does it mean for one city-state to have *arkhē* or 'rule' over other city-states? I offer relevant analysis of such conflicting ideologies in [Homer the Classic](#) (Nagy 2009|2008 §§174–175, §§177–180), as cited at the end of my original discussion in GN §48.

TJF also comments, with regard my statement at §48 about Athenian domination of Aeolians and Dorians in the East:

The major Aeolian states and most of the Doric Hexapolis (except for Halicarnassus) belonged to the alliance from the outset.

GN comments:

Point well taken.

GN §49, quoted here in full:

The new domination of Eastern Greeks by Athens was viewed by most Greeks as tyranny—a new form of tyranny that superseded the old domination of these same regions by the Persian Empire. Yes, Athens could still be considered a democracy on the inside, but it had now become a tyranny on the outside (Pericles is quoted as saying this much by Thucydides 2.63.1–2). Ionia could now be controlled from Athens in Europe, not from Sardis in Asia Minor. And a parallel formula of control could now be extended to the Aeolians and to the Dorians situated respectively to the north and to the south of the Ionians in Asia.

TJF comments, with reference to my use of the term "tyranny" here:

The idea of Athens as a *turannos polis* was formulated in highly propagandistic terms, especially by the Peloponnesians. In general, this idea did push some elite contemporaries' buttons quite effectively. Recall, however, that the Athenians were generally quite effective at recovering allies after Laconizing interludes. As to being true, that is another question. Read the account of Syloson's accession to the Samian tyranny in Herodotus [especially at 3.147 and 3.149] to understand the significant difference in the natures of Athenian and Persian authority.

TJF also comments, with reference to the thinking of Pericles as reported by Thucydides 2.63.1–2:

For Pericles, it was like a tyranny in a certain way (being difficult to give up), but it was Kleon who then went the next step, and even he was acting under extreme pressure, given the danger posed by the revolt of Mytilene.

GN comments:

Again, I will say in my defense that my aim was merely to report on ancient ideologies, not to highlight my own value judgments. More in [Homer the Classic](#) (Nagy 2009|2008 §24), as cited in GN §49.

GN §50:

By contrast, if the forces of the Persian Empire had won at Salamis, the new super-Greeks would have been not the Athenians as controllers of Ionians and beyond but the Ionians as controllers of Aeolians to the north and of Dorians to the south in Asia Minor. And, in fact, the prototype for such a smaller-scale empire was already visible in the context of what historians today call the Ionian Revolt. As I argue in GN §§51–54, the aim of this revolt was to achieve such a smaller-scale empire, which could be described as an Ionian Empire in the making. But such an empire was only in the making, since the Ionian Revolt ultimately failed.

GN §§51–54, radically epitomized, on the Ionian Revolt:

Most relevant to the historical contingencies of Ionian identity was the Ionian Revolt, which lasted from 499 to 494 BCE. This revolt of Ionians from the Persian Empire—along with its grim aftermath—is documented primarily and in fact almost exclusively by Herodotus (5.23.1–6.42.2), whose narrative highlights the many successes and failures experienced by both sides in the conflict, which in any case culminated in the decisive victory of the Persian Empire. The leader of the revolt was the city-state of Miletus, which was ruled at the time by the tyrant Aristagoras. As Herodotus reports (5.38.1), Aristagoras became the main instigator of the Ionian Revolt, and he arranged for the tyrants of the various other cities of Ionia, who had formerly been installed by the Persian Empire, to be removed. I interpret these actions as indications of an overriding motive: Aristagoras and his co-conspirators, most notably Histiaios, were attempting to form an Ionian Empire, dominated by Miletus, and this empire would be independent or quasi-independent from the Persian Empire.

TJF comments on my interpretation of the rationale for the actions taken by Aristagoras and Histiaios:

Quite a bold hypothesis, given that the background to the revolt was an expedition to subjugate Naxos for Persia. What such an “empire” would have looked like has to be shaped by the sphere of influence acquired by Polycrates of Samos in the 430s and 420s. If one accepts that the limitations accepted by Polycrates would have to have been observed by Aristagoras and Histiaios (perhaps for a new satrapy governed at Miletus by Histiaios), then you may indeed have gauged their rationale.

GN comments, via an addendum at §54n17:

On the events reported by Herodotus (5.30–38) concerning the failed military expedition of Aristagoras to capture the Ionian island of Naxos... I confine myself here to noting two arguments I plan to develop in a separate project. One, with reference to the two hundred triremes that were authorized by Darius himself for Aristagoras to use in his expedition (5.30–33), I will argue that this contribution undertaken by the Persian Empire was more directly a contribution fulfilled by the cities of the Asiatic Greek world, which were ruled at the time by tyrants appointed by the empire—just as Miletus was ruled by such an appointee in the person of Aristagoras himself. Two, I will argue that the narrative of Herodotus about the double-crossing of these Greek tyrants by Aristagoras (5.36–38) leaves room for interpretations that differ from the one that the narrator himself prefers, which is, that Aristagoras feared retribution from Darius for the failure of the expedition. In terms of my own interpretation, Aristagoras seized an opportunity to capitalize on this failure by attempting to turn it into a successful revolt against his Persian sponsors. In any case, as Herodotus notes (5.35–36), Aristagoras may well have been secretly aided and abetted by his predecessor Histiaios.

TJF also comments on what I have to say at GN §§54.3 and 54.4 with regard to the reportage of Herodotus (6.42) about the initiatives taken by Artaphernes, satrap of Sardis, in setting up treaties for the Ionian cities after the failure of the Ionian Revolt:

These treaties would have bound these cities to each other.

GN comments:

I agree, but I think that such treaties could also have originally bound these Ionian cities in a special way to the Persian Empire itself.

GN §§55 epitomized, on the so-called Debate of the Constitutions:

The so called Debate of the Constitutions, dramatized by Herodotus (3.80–84) as happening in 522 BCE, is often dismissed as pure invention: many have gone on record to claim that Persian elites at this point in history could not have been thinking of three forms of government as conventionally described in ancient Greek traditions: monarchy, oligarchy, democracy. I argue against such claims of invention, showing these three forms of government—or at least the idea of these forms—already existed in the Greek-speaking world that belonged to the Persian Empire at this time, 522 BCE. My argument goes further: the Persian elites as pictured by Herodotus in the Debate of the Constitutions would have been debating in real life not the ideal form of government for the Persians as Persians but for the Asiatic Greeks who inhabited the westernmost part of their empire, especially for the Ionians, who were considered to be the dominant culture of the Asiatic Greek-speaking world by contrast with the Aeolians to the north and the Dorians to the south.

TJF comments:

I have always thought that Herodotus’ trust in the historicity of the Debate derived from the circulation of an earlier Ionian written version of the event. If it could be “Persian” as Ionian constitutional thinking that was attributed to the Persians for application to Ionia, I would find this theory most congenial. That the adding of Darius to the story is subsequent may not be problematical. The most famous transition in the period of Persian domination has drawn to itself this tradition, so powerful an ideological debate.

GN comments by epitomizing from GN §56:

Relevant, I think, is what Herodotus says (6.43) about the actions of Mardonios in 493 BCE: he established democracies in the cities of Ionia, deposing the Ionian tyrants who had been installed by the Persian Empire to rule these cities. I argue that the Debate of the Constitutions, as narrated in the History of Herodotus (3.380–384), makes sense only retrospectively. In other words, the things that were supposedly being said in 522 BCE, which was the dramatic date of the Debate, could only be understood in terms of the things that were being done by Mardonios in 493 BCE. In the Debate dramatized by Herodotus, the word

isonomiē is used to express the idea of democracy, advocated by Otanes, one of the debating nobles, as the best form of government for the Persian Empire (3.80, 3.83). Later, when Herodotus cross-refers to this passage in the context of narrating the establishment of democracies by Mardonios, he uses the word *dēmokratīē* (6.43), which is clearly meant there as a synonym of *isonomiē*. And Herodotus uses the same word *dēmokratīē* (6.131.1) in referring to the establishment of democracy in Athens by Cleisthenes in 508/507 BCE. Conversely, Herodotus uses the word *isonomiē* (5.37.2) in referring to the democracy proclaimed in Miletus by Aristagoras in 499 BCE. And there were even earlier prototypes of such democracy, at least conceptually. Herodotus (3.142.3) mentions a striking example: he says that *isonomiē* was proclaimed in Samos by Maiandrios, the new tyrant of that island state, successor to Polycrates, who died not long after 522 BCE. In this case, however, Herodotus goes on to narrate how the proclamation failed (3.142.4–3.143.2). Failure or no failure, however, democracy was an option to be reckoned with in the Greek-speaking regions of the Persian Empire.

GN comments further by epitomizing from GN §§57–58:

But now I move fast-forward in time from 493 to 480 BCE. The cities of the Ionians who were fighting on the side of the Persian Empire had presumably still retained democratic forms of government as established by Mardonios thirteen years earlier. Here I refer back to the reportage of Herodotus (6.43) as signaled in GN §56. At this point, I ask: what would have happened if Mardonios had been victorious in the grand expedition that culminated in the naval battle at Salamis? Well, if we follow the reportage of Herodotus (7.6.1), Mardonios would have become the satrap of the entire Greek-speaking world of Europe. But there is more to it. I think that the Ionians who were his collaborators would have played a major role in the political reorganization of the European Hellenes. Besides Asiatic Ionia, there could now be a European Ionia as well, with the annexation of Attica together with such outlying islands as Euboea, and the capital city of such a reconfigured Greater Ionia could have remained Athens, which was after all the original mother city or metropolis of the mythical Ionian Migration. And this venerable metropolis could even have remained a democracy of sorts—at least in name.

TJF comments:

I must remark (fondly, as always) that there is a tendency here for a major step forward in analysis to get lost as an intermediate step toward a conclusion that is somewhat over-reaching. The significant insight of yours for me is that those who were tarred with the brush of Medism and opposition to democracy during the Athenian hegemony may well have objected by offering in defense the following sequence: (1) the argument of Otanes in favor of *isonomiē* in the Debate of the Constitutions; (2) the initiatives of Mardonios in suppressing Ionian tyrants; and (3) an offer, made by Mardonios, of autonomy to Athens—as reported by Herodotus (8.140.2). (What about Gobryes, then, the father of Mardonios? Was he one of the two Persians nobles who sided with Otanes against Darius and monarchy?) Thus the Persian Debate could be seen as a living issue in the period of the Athenian *arkhē* 'rule'.

TJF comments further on the possibility I raise, that Athens could have remained a capital city, as it were, even within the Persian Empire:

Given that the Athenians were offered autonomy by Mardonios (8.140.2), the city-state of Athens could have become, as Miletus once was, an island of autonomy inside a Persian satrapy. Alternatively, the capital of such a satrapy could have been relocated to a city on the island of Euboea—perhaps to Karystos—or to the island of Naxos. In the case of Naxos, Delos would have been closely attached. Both Karystos and Naxos resisted the early Delian League.

TJF concludes:

Even in situations where they professed to abolish tyranny, I doubt that the Persians were intending to exclude one-man rule. Rather, they were simply setting up a system where one leader, appointed by them, would consult with other organs of government. Such an arrangement would not be much different from how the "king" of a Phoenician city operated under Persian control.

GN §§59–62, epitomized:

It can be debated whether the Ionians would really have become new continuators of democracy if Mardonios as generalissimo of Xerxes had defeated the Athenians. Speaking for myself, I am not certain. But I would be more certain of something else: if the Persian Empire had won at Salamis, the Ionians would have become far more important politically as well as culturally. And, leaving aside such hypothetical questions, I am even more certain about a simple fact that has emerged all too clearly in the course of this presentation: the Ionians were and always had been very important for the Persian Empire. Here we come back one last time to the *mágoi*. Because these *mágoi*, like the Ionians, were very important for the Empire, it stands to reason that the Ionians understood well the *mágoi* just as the *mágoi* understood the Ionians.

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