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Scattered Fragments of a Western *Iliupersis*.

The Ghost of Sybaris in Herodotus' *Histories*

Herodotus, in 5.44-45, is the earliest account of the defeat and capture of Sybaris by Croton and certainly one of the most authoritative voices on this historical event¹. His account is sparse and essential when compared to much later sources which tell of the disaster and destruction of Sybaris.

Indeed, local historical memory has reworked the tragic end of the Achaean colony, an unexpected and epochal collapse in the scenario of Late Archaic Magna Graecia, to the point of making it a kind of *Iliupersis*, evoked with dramatic tones and didactic or apologetic intentions². From this

¹ Τὸν χρόνον δὲ [44] τοῦτον, ὡς λέγουσι Συβαρίται, σφέας τε αὐτοὺς καὶ Τήλυν τὸν ἔωντῶν βασιλέα ἐπὶ Κρότωνα μέλλειν στρατεύεσθαι, τοὺς δὲ Κροτωνιήτας περιδεέας γενομένους δεηθῆναι Δωριέος σφίσι τιμωρῆσαι καὶ τυχεῖν δεηθέντας· συστρατεύεσθαι τε δὴ ἐπὶ Σύβαριν Δωριέα καὶ συνελεῖν τὴν Σύβαριν. ταῦτα [2] μὲν νυν Συβαρίται λέγουσι ποιῆσαι Δωριέα τε καὶ τοὺς μετ' αὐτοῦ, Κροτωνιῆται δὲ οὐδένα σφίσι φασὶ ξεῖνον προσεπιλαβέσθαι τοῦ πρὸς Συβαρίτας πολέμου εἰ μὴ Καλλίην τῶν Ἰαμιδέων μάντιν Ἠλείον μῦνον, καὶ τοῦτον τρόπῳ τοιῶνδε παρὰ Τήλυος τοῦ Συβαριτέων τυράννου ἀποδράντα ἀπικέσθαι παρὰ σφέας, ἐπεὶτε οἱ τὰ ἴρα οὐ προεχώρει χρηστὰ θυομένῳ ἐπὶ Κρότωνα. Ταῦτα [45]†δ' ὧν οὗτοι λέγουσι. μαρτύρια δὲ τούτων ἑκάτεροι ἀποδεικνύουσι τάδε· Συβαρίται μὲν τέμενός τε καὶ νηὸν ἔοντα παρὰ τὸν Ξηρὸν Κραθίν, τὸν ἰδρῦσασθαι συνελόντα τὴν πόλιν Δωριέα λέγουσι Ἀθηναίη ἐπωνύμῳ Κραθίη, τοῦτο δὲ αὐτοῦ Δωριέος τὸν θάνατον μαρτύριον μέγιστον ποιεῦνται, ὅτι παρὰ τὰ μεμαντευμένα ποιέων διεφθάρη· εἰ γὰρ δὴ μὴ παρέπρηξε μηδὲν, ἐπ' ὃ δὲ ἐστάλη ἐποίηε, εἶλε ἂν τὴν Ἐρκίνην χώραν καὶ ἑλὼν κατέσχε, οὐδ' ἂν αὐτός τε καὶ ἡ στρατιὴ διεφθάρη. [2] οἱ δ' αὖ Κροτωνιῆται ἀποδεικνύουσι Καλλίη μὲν τῷ Ἠλείῳ ἑξαίρετα ἐν γῆι τῇ Κροτωνιήτιδι πολλὰ δοθέντα, τὰ καὶ ἐς ἐμὲ ἔτι ἐνέμοντο οἱ Καλλίεω ἀπόγονοι, Δωριεῖ δὲ καὶ τοῖσι Δωριέος ἀπογόνοισι οὐδέν. καίτοι, εἰ συνεπελάβετό γε τοῦ Συβαριτικοῦ πολέμου Δωριεύς, δοθῆναι ἂν οἱ πολλαπλήσια ἢ Καλλίη. ταῦτα μὲν νυν ἑκάτεροι αὐτῶν μαρτύρια ἀποφαίνονται· καὶ πάρεστι, ὅκοτέροισι τις πείθεται αὐτῶν, τούτοισι προσχωρῆειν.

² See LOMBARDO 2002a, esp. 52 ff.



articulated narrative, later traditions only return us a few confused anecdotes, marked by pathetic tones or hideous cruelty, in a crescendo that sees the final annihilation of the flourishing city which was even said to have been wiped out by the Crotoniates by diverting the course of the River Crathis and flooding it³. Herodotus more simply reports a war waged by Sybaris against Croton at the behest of Telys, an autocrat who ruled the city, a war which ended in the defeat of the Sybarites and the capture of the city by their enemies.

In this passage, the historian says nothing about the fate of Sybaris after the defeat: only later, in Book 6.21, does he report that, after the capture of their city, the Sybarites lived scattered in two colonies they had founded⁴, Laos and Scidrus, two sites whose location for us is uncertain, on the Tyrrhenian coast of Calabria⁵.

The peculiarity of Herodotus' account is that the war event is reported according to the conflicting versions of the Sybarites and Crotoniates, concerning the presence and contribution of an important figure from mainland Greece, the Spartan Dorieus, cadet son of King Anassandridas and half-brother of Kleomenes, *basileus* of the Lacedaemonians at the time of the Ionian revolt. Indeed Dorieus, who had left his homeland to found an *apoikia* first in Libya and then in western Sicily, and who died there with the men who accompanied him, is the protagonist of Herodotus' narrative from chapters 42 to 48 of the Fifth Book⁶.

As scholars have widely noted, this series of events, particularly interesting for the history of Greek colonisation⁷, constitutes one of the few narrative nuclei devoted to the Western Greeks in Herodotus' *Histories*⁸. But within the framework of this western diversion, which is precisely defined as a *diegema* included in a larger *diegesis* from the main axis of his narrative⁹,

³ Main sources for the collapse of Sybaris are Ps.Scymn. vv. 336-360; D.S. 10.23.1; 12.9.2-5; 12.10.1; Strabo 6.1.13, collected by CALLAWAY 1950. See DE SENSI 1983; ELLINGER 1992; LOMBARDO 1993; 2002a; LURAGHI 1994, 64-5; BUGNO 1999, 36-45, all with bibliography. See more recently GORMAN-GORMAN 2014 for a radical sceptic approach to the whole tradition.

⁴ LOMBARDO 1993, 278-83; BUGNO 1999, 45-47. On the political characterization of the Sybarite refugees in Laos and Scidrus see AVERSA 2008, 15-16; 31-36.

⁵ FRISONE 2009; 2023. On Laos GRECO 1990, 17; INVENTORY 2004, 272-273. Scidrus: BTCGI XVIII, 467-75 (C. Parra).

⁶ On Dorieus and his companions also Hdt.7.158.2; Diod. 4.23.3; Paus. 3.16.4-5.

⁷ See the main bibliography on Dorieus' colonial ventures in MALKIN 1994, 193 n.6, to be completed with BÉRARD 1963, 249-54; DOMINGUEZ 1989; GANCI 1995; DE VIDO 1997, 172-189; BRACCESI 1999; PAYEN 2010.

⁸ NENCI 1990; MUNSON VIGNOLO 2006.

⁹ HORNBLOWER 2013, 451; 473 with references.



Herodotus plays like a game of Chinese checkers, fitting into a double level of digression. Indeed, the unresolved dispute between the Sybarites and the Crotoniates over the events of 510 B.C. points to a controversy that continued for many years after the fall of the Achaean city¹⁰. The importance of Herodotus' passage on the defeat of Sybaris is thus defined on several levels: as a historical source for an event, as an indirect witness to events related to and following that event, as an opportunity to reflect on the way the historian of Halicarnassus uses his sources and on the meaning of his historiographical construction.

Shortly afterwards, Herodotus will return to his narrative of the great conflict between the Hellenes and the Persians, which in Book Five focuses on the first moment of this conflict, the revolt of the Ionians. Recently, therefore, some scholars have also raised the question of the coherence of this complicated insertion with the general architecture of the Histories, and we shall see how¹¹.

This paper, which is based on a seminar given by the author for the Herodotus Helpline¹², is intended to be an opportunity to weld together an in-depth study of Herodotus' text and a theme that has become increasingly consistent, especially through the non-literary historical and material evidence, Sybaris in the season of its power, which may have appeared to some as a 'great absentee' not only in the pages of Herodotus but in all Greek historiography up to the 2nd century B.C.¹³

I will examine the text of Herodotus, 5.43-45, and a few other passages of his Sixth Book which refer to Sybaris, in the light of some recent critical insights, with a view to clarifying the framework in which the historical records of the Achaean city collected by the historian *Alicarnesseos kai Thuriiou* are placed. This approach may help to reconsider some strongly negative critical positions regarding the historical consistency of the fame, wealth, and power of Sybaris in the Archaic period. The starting point will be a close reading of the passage 5.44-45 offered by Maurizio Giangiulio in his 1989 book on Archaic Croton and his proposals for historical reconstruction¹⁴. We will only touch generally on questions of historiographical analysis of the

¹⁰ GIANGIULIO 1989, 195-197.

¹¹ HORNBLOWER 2007; 2013, 450-51.

¹² The seminar entitled *Scattered Fragments of a Western Iliupersis. The collapse of Sybaris in Herodotus' tales* has been held on 15 February 2023 and discussed again on 17 May. I would like to thank Tom Harrison for inviting me and for suggesting that I combine Herodotus' *Histories* with a central theme in the history of the Western colonial Greek world.

¹³ So GORMAN-GORMAN 2014, 8; 9-10; 13; 436-38.

¹⁴ See GIANGIULIO 1989, 188-207; 273-8.



passage, which have recently been taken up by Leone Porciani¹⁵, who has analysed the dual narrative of the Sybarites and the Crotoniates in a very interesting key, and finally we will touch on S. Hornblower's recent reflection on how Sybaris's fate can be read within the context of Herodotus' Fifth Book¹⁶.

Dorieus' departure for Italy

Let's return to Herodotus 5.43-45. As we have already mentioned, the excursus on Dorieus, from his departure from Sparta to his death in Sicily (§ 42.2-48), is framed by the explanation of the succession from Anaxandridas to Kleomenes (§ 39 ff.) of Sparta¹⁷. The Agiad royal dynasty (which, according to Herodotus, will offer Hellas the shining example of *kalokagathia* of King Leonidas, the hero of Thermopylae¹⁸) at the time of the Ionian revolt gives Sparta a king whom the historian dislikes. Indeed, Herodotus explains that he was chosen for purely dynastic reasons, and that he was reckless, if not downright insane¹⁹. Elsewhere, the historian will show him as being impious, aggressive, and unscrupulous, characterised by tyrannical attitudes²⁰. But the hidden pretender to the *basileia* at Anaxandridas' death, Kleomenes' half-brother Dorieus, who at first appears to be the best of the young Spartiates of his generation²¹, will also show impatience, recklessness, and scant respect for divine dictates, to the point of total defeat in the end²².

¹⁵ PORCIANI forthcoming. I would like to express my sincere thanks to Leone Porciani for letting me read his text, which was still in draft form, and for allowing me to use it for the present work.

¹⁶ HORNBLLOWER 2007; 2013.

¹⁷ On the succession to the Spartan kingship, see GRIFFITH-WILLIAMS 2011; LUPI 2018, 272-3. Chronologies remain deliberately fluid in Herodotus' narrative, until the surprising inconsistency regarding the length of Kleomenes' reign in § 48. If the accession to the throne is now commonly dated around 520 B.C. (*contra* MERANTE 1970a), the dates of Dorieus' two expeditions slip by a few years (CAWKWELL 1993, 509), to 515 or 514 for the African one and to the end of the decade for the venture to Sicily, which crosses the traditional date of the fall of Sybaris in 510: see DUNBABIN 1948, 349; GIANGIULIO 1989, 197-8; 276, MALKIN 1994 192-3; BRACCESI 1999, 19-20. Otherwise, only MERANTE 1970b, followed by GANCI 1995, 222-3, dates in 525/24 B.C.

¹⁸ Hdt. 7. 204-205, where the historian first solemnly presents the genealogy of the Agiad king Leonidas and then explains of his singular accession to the *basileia*.

¹⁹ Hdt 5.42.1.

²⁰ On Kleomenes see GRIFFITHS 1989; CAWKWELL 1993; BULTRIGHINI 2016.

²¹ Hdt 5.42.1 «ὁ δὲ Δωριεὺς ἦν τῶν ἡλικίων πάντων πρῶτος, εὖ τε ἠπίστατο κατ' ἀνδραγαθίην αὐτὸς σχήσων τὴν βασιλείην».

²² On the ambiguity of the figure of Dorieus in Herodotus, see DE VIDO 1997, 177-8; MUNSON VIGNOLO 2006, 261-2; HORNBLLOWER 2007, 170-172; a Spartan source not favourable



The account of Dorieus' adventure begins with the brilliant prince leaving Sparta, impatient after being deprived of the *basileia* by his elder half-brother. He attempts a colonial adventure in the territory of Cynipe, on the African coast, west of Cyrene (§ 42)²³. After this failed venture, Dorieus returns to the Peloponnese, not to stay there but to undertake a new *apoikia*, directed towards Sicily, thanks to the oracle interpretation of Antichares of Eleon (§ 43):

«Ἐνθαῦτα δέ οἱ Ἀντιχάρης [43] ἀνὴρ Ελεώνιος συνεβούλευσε ἐκ τῶν Ἰλαίου χρησμῶν Ἡρακλείην τὴν ἐν Σικελίῃ κτίζειν, φὰς τὴν Ἑρκεὸς χώραν πᾶσαν εἶναι Ἡρακλειδέων αὐτοῦ Ἡρακλέος κτησαμένου. ὁ δὲ ἀκούσας ταῦτα εἰς Δελφοὺς οἶχετο χρησόμενος ταῖς χρηστηρίῳ, εἰ αἰρέει ἐπ' ἣν στέλλεται χώραν· ἡ δὲ Πυθίη οἱ χρᾶϊ αἰρήσειν. παραλαβὼν δὲ Δωριεὺς τὸν στόλον τὸν καὶ εἰς Λιβύην ἤγε ἐκομίζετο παρὰ τὴν Ἰταλίην.»

After turning to Delphi for a second oracular answer, a solemn confirmation of the previous one, according to Hornblower²⁴, or rather, as Malkin²⁵ has lucidly pointed out, a request that has more to do with conquest than foundation, and which underlines his 'royal' image as the heir of Herakles, Dorieus departs, surprisingly, not for Sicily but for Italy. Scholars have given little thought to this detail, considered rather unimportant.²⁶ As Vignolo Munson has pointed out²⁷, this inconsistency might be due to the fact that Herodotus' account of Dorieus is elliptical and obscure. Some commentators on the passage have pointed out that the mention of Italy immediately evokes the departure for a colonial setting, emphasising the nature of the Spartan prince's journey²⁸. However, this interpretation seems to pay little heed to the fact that precisely here, in Herodotus' text, there is a suture between a section in which themes and sources reveal a metropolitan matrix, and Spartan in particular, and a section that suggests a Western setting for Herodotus' narrative²⁹ and, as Rosaria Vignolo Munson points out

to Dorieus (or to both Anassandridas' sons: MACAN 1895, II, 86) is suggested by BRACCESI 1999, 13.

²³ MALKIN 1994, 192 ff. clearly stresses the official nature of the *apoikia* led by Dorieus.

²⁴ HORNBLOWER 2007, 175.

²⁵ MALKIN 1987, 78-81; 1994, 194.

²⁶ From a different perspective, PUGLIESE CARRATELLI 1972-73 considers the land of Sybaris as a predetermined destination for the Spartan prince. See also BRACCESI 1999, 34.

²⁷ MUNSON VIGNOLO 2006, 261.

²⁸ So NENCI 1994, 216.

²⁹ On Herodotus' stay in Thurii see JACOBY 1913, 205-9, 214; 224-6; RAVIOLA 2000. Regarding the local western sources behind the texture of this section (see already MACAN 1895, II, 84), see GIANGIULIO 1989, 190-192 for an overview of the critical discussion and a complete bibliography (in part. 191, footnote 100; 192, footnotes 102-3). Suggestions for a



for a few similar passages in his *Histories*, «an audience particularly attuned to Western events and concerns»³⁰.

This is shown by the numerous details³¹, such as the precise onomastic references (Telys, whether he is considered *basileus* or *tyrannos*³²; Callias, the Iamid mantis³³, and Philippos of Butacides, the Crotoniate *olimpionikos*³⁴), topographical references (the temple and the *temenos* of Athena, known as Crathia; the bed of the river Crathis, 'now' dry; or the ἐξαίρετα ἐν γῆι τῆι Κροτωνιῆτιδι πολλά addressed to the soothsayer Callias of Elis τὰ καὶ ἐς ἐμὲ ἔτι ἐνέμοντο οἱ Καλλίεω ἀπόγονοι: 45,2), alluding not only to local sources but also to a possible audience less sensitive to the exoticism of the name *Italia* and more aware of the complex historical-geographical meaning that this name had acquired over time. As scholars have rightly pointed out³⁵, for Herodotus, *Italia* does in fact refer to the entire Ionian coast of southern Italy, where Greek *poleis* were located, up to and including Taras, which elsewhere in Herodotus' text is shown as the starting point for navigation from Italy to Greece and vice versa.³⁶

But Western Greek historiography – above all the Syracusan historian Antiochus, a younger contemporary of Herodotus, but perhaps also other *logioi* of Magna Graecia, as Mario Lombardo has shown on the basis of Aristotle³⁷ – knew another meaning for the geographical name *Italia*³⁸. A

more precise identification of these western sources: JACOBY 1913, 438-9; LEGRAND 1946, *ad loc.*; MOSCATI CASTELNUOVO 1994, 97; DE VIDO 1997, 192-5; KRINGS 1998, 161-171; BRACCESI 1999, 13-15.

³⁰ MUNSON VIGNOLO 2006, 257.

³¹ Accurately indicated by GIANGIULIO 1989, 191, n. 100; 192.

³² On Telys LURAGHI 1994, 61-71. For the use of both terms How-Wells, *ad loc.*, and, for critical discussion see CAMASSA 1987, 640; GIANGIULIO 1989, 195 and n. 108; HORNBLLOWER 2013, 474. For the use of specific terms referring to autocrats in Herodotus: FERRILL 1978; BARCELO' 1993, 126; LEVY 1993.

³³ See TAITA 2006.

³⁴ MORETTI 1957, 76, n. 115. On Philippos, himself the protagonist of a further small digression in this account (§47) and a central figure to explain Dorieus stopover in Italy (GIANGIULIO 1989, 200-204; 275-6), see FRISONE 2000 with bibliography.

³⁵ HOW-WELLS 1912, *ad loc.* V.43.

³⁶ Bibliography on Herodotus' *Italia* in RONCONI 1988-89 and FRISONE - LOMBARDO 2007, 194.

³⁷ LOMBARDO 1994.

³⁸ See an almost complete bibliography on the geographical name of *Italia* and its use in Greek historians from Hecataeus to the 4th century in DE SENSI 2015, to be supplemented with *Da Italia a Italia: le radici di un'identità*, Atti del LI Convegno di Studi sulla Magna Grecia (Taranto, 29 settembre-2 ottobre 2011), Taranto 2014, Taranto 2014.



name which was explicitly linked to the earlier history of these regions, but implicitly linked to the extension of the Achaean control over the area³⁹.

It is no coincidence that Antiochus begins his work, the earliest evidence of Western historiography known to us, with an attempt to articulate this geographical concept. Indeed, he expands and reduces it in relation to its origins, linked to the local king *Italos*, but also to the political events of his time, which were rooted in a more recent past⁴⁰. His view seems to be deliberately different from that of historians from mainland Greece, such as Herodotus' contemporary Hellanicus of Lesbos, who traced the coronym back to a mythical etymology, linked to the same background on which Dorieus' legitimation as the conqueror Heraklides was based⁴¹.

The allusion to Dorieus' departure towards *Italia* is, therefore, not a neutral element for a western audience - as opposed to a pan-Hellenic one - and could perhaps allude to a direct indication of his involvement in the affairs of this region, which in earlier times (i.e. approximately from the mid 6th century) was the land of the Western Achaeans, specifically linked to the domain of Sybaris.

What Herodotus does not tell us

Admittedly, however, Herodotus makes no explicit reference to Sybaris' power⁴².

It is curious that he does not feel the need to give any details about the protagonists of the opposite narrative he is telling in § 44-45, but this is particularly remarkable for Sybaris, which is still not mentioned in the work (except for the indirect reference to the river Krathis in 1.145), whereas previous references to Croton indicate the prestige of its doctors or some of its citizens, such as Democedes, the protagonist of the daring tale in 3.131-137, or the legendary *olympionikos* Milon, who seems to have been known even to King Darius (3.137.5)⁴³.

Further on, in 6.127.1, Herodotus will allude to the Sybaris' *akmè* (flourishing), which came at the time of the famous refined aristocrat

³⁹ LOMBARDO 2002b. See recently on the same topic GIANGIULIO 2014.

⁴⁰ FGrHist 555 F 3a and F 12 *apud* Strabo 6.1.4; F 15. For this chronological scanning between a very distant past - an intermediate one (datable to the 6th century) - and the more recent past, see LOMBARDO 2002b, esp. 265-66; 268.

⁴¹ Hellan. FGrHist 4 F 111. See FRISONE 2008, 146-147.

⁴² Insisting on this, GORMAN-GORMAN 2014, 8, 12 ff. and esp. 442.

⁴³ For a detailed analysis of the narrative of Democedes see now COCCIOLI 2015.



Smindyrides, son of Hippocles, one of the suitors of Agariste, whose betrothal dates back to around 570 B.C.⁴⁴:

Ἀπὸ μὲν δὴ Ἰταλῆς ἦλθε Σμινδυρίδης ὁ Ἴπποκράτεος Συβαρίτης, ὃς ἐπὶ πλεῖστον δὴ χλιδῆς εἰς ἀνήρ ἀπύκετο (ἢ δὲ Σύβαρις ἠκμαζε τοῦτον τὸν χρόνον μάλιστα), καὶ Σιρίτης Δάμασος Ἀμύριος τοῦ σοφοῦ λεγομένου παῖς· οὗτοι μὲν ἀπὸ Ἰταλῆς ἦλθον.

Herodotus' refined Smindyrides is usually interpreted as an indication that the reputation of Sybaris for wealth and luxury had already been defined in his times, though not in the terms in which later tradition would redefine it as a 'city of excess'⁴⁵. Other scholars point more explicitly to the great wealth and luxurious lifestyle of the Sybarites, alluded to here and greatly amplified in later sources, as a pivotal element of a moralistically oriented tradition in which the city had led to τρυφή, morally debilitating luxury, then to tyrannis and finally to destruction⁴⁶.

Herodotus' narrative contextualization, however, seems to be entirely positive. The contest for the betrothal of the daughter of Cleisthenes of Sikyon (6.126-130), despite its fable-like structure and the epic flavour of the narrative⁴⁷, represents the values of an elite that encompassed the entire Greek world in the Archaic period.

On a personal level, the chosen suitors, who seek the hand of the maiden as potentially 'the best of all Hellenes' (6.126.1), express these values at the highest level and, in some cases, stand out as paradigms embodying some of the constitutive qualities of the aristocratic way of life. The two wooers from *Italia*, Smindyrides of Sybaris, son of Hippocles, and Damasos of Siris, son of Amyris the Wise, although they appear, like others mentioned in the catalogue, as 'characters' (the refined and elegant one, the wise father of the other), endowed with a certain fame independent of Herodotus' narrative⁴⁸, thus consolidate the idea of the integration of their contexts of origin in that system of relationships and representations⁴⁹, a system that is best expressed both in the milieu of the Olympic games⁵⁰ and in the personal

⁴⁴ MORETTI 1957, n. 96 dates Klisthenes' Olympic victory with the four-horse chariot in 572 B.C. GRIFFIN 1982, 47-56, dates the contest after this, but an earlier victory, in 576, seems more probable to MCGREGOR 1941, 276-7.

⁴⁵ AMPOLO 1993, esp. 216-7.

⁴⁶ MELE 2018, 38-46, esp. 39-40.

⁴⁷ See, more recently, GRIFFITHS 2006 and HORNBLLOWER-PELLING 2017, 773-80.

⁴⁸ LOMBARDO 1981. On Smindyrides see more recently GORMAN-GORMAN 2014, 18 ff., 191-2; 200-2.

⁴⁹ FRISONE- LOMBARDO 2007, 195.

⁵⁰ HORNBLLOWER 2004.



and formalised relationships between the great lineages throughout the Greek world.

The *chlidè* in which Smindyrides the Sybarite excelled shows one aspect of this lifestyle⁵¹. As has been rightly pointed out, such a term, carefully chosen by Herodotus and used only in this passage of the *Histories*, should not be associated with the negative connotations that later sources attach to it. As Robert and Vanessa Gorman have clearly explained, it is sufficiently attested in 5th-century sources to suggest that it was related to wealth and elegance in dress and jewellery, sometimes with an ambiguous charm, but not necessarily with a derogatory meaning⁵². Literary sources, as well as the rich figurative documentation of archaic ceramics, show that they constitute an essential element of that 'magical' allure that made a powerful man recognisable, looked upon with condescension, desire and probably envy⁵³.

If the refined elegance of the sybarite suitor is not just a narrative detail, but an intrinsic part of a brilliant and pleasant lifestyle, of the 'good life' of nobles and gentlemen (*habra; habrosynai*)⁵⁴, which only in time is associated with the morally corrosive luxury, or *tryphè*, then it is a potentially informative element when generalised to the characteristics of the ruling class in a city at its height⁵⁵.

It is possible that Herodotus' account is also influenced by the reputation for wealth and pleasure associated with Sybaris and its environs, which must have been particularly well established in Athens at the time⁵⁶. However, without going into the complex issue of Herodotus' sources here, the narrative context of the marriage of Agariste seems to suggest not only a connection with those aristocratic memories and traditions that Herodotus often uses in his research, but also a perspective that is not yet radically distant from the values of that world⁵⁷.

Accordingly, this passage seems to be a valuable testimony of the characteristics and values of the elite of Sybaris at the zenith of its historical

⁵¹ On *χλιδή* see LOMBARDO 1983, 1079 and footnote 6; GORMAN-GORMAN 2014, 18-19; 28-30.

⁵² GORMAN-GORMAN 2014, 18; 30.

⁵³ NAGY 1996.

⁵⁴ On *habra/habrosynai* and other words referring to the lifestyles of the archaic aristocracies as perceived by contemporary sources, see LOMBARDO 1983, 1101-2. Cf. GORMAN-GORMAN 2014, 25-46, who hasn't read this paper (see p. 19, footnote 32) for the latest bibliography.

⁵⁵ *Contra* GORMAN-GORMAN 2014, 18.

⁵⁶ AMPOLO 1993, 214-5; GORMAN-GORMAN 2014, 18-9.

⁵⁷ DE VIDO 2011, 68. But see AMPOLO 1993, 222. *Contra* MELE 2007, 630.



development, which Herodotus places in the distant time of the legendary contest organised by Cleisthenes of Sikyon.

Equally important is the chronological context of the narrative, which places the Achaean city's heyday period that was already fading into legend. It should be noted that this season falls some sixty years before the fall of the city, a detail that cannot be overlooked. Indeed, on the one hand, it places the flourishing Sybaris at the centre of the social and political milieu of the colonial aristocracies in the full Archaic period; on the other hand, it predates the great social and political changes that profoundly transformed the *poleis* of Magna Graecia in the last quarter of the 6th century B.C.⁵⁸.

Herodotus' allusion, however, seems to suggest that Sybaris was then at the height of its splendour and wealth, rather than of any real power equivalent to what is said to have been its so-called *arché*. Let's stop for a while, therefore, to consider this legendary power.

Pace the neo-criticist approach recently expressed by Robert and Vanessa Gorman⁵⁹, literary sources, interpreted through a proper historiographical filter, continue to be essential. But the material evidence has grown considerably. An overall reading of it, and especially the cross-comparison of different sources, shows that during the 6th century B.C., the region of southern Italy which includes the northern part of present-day Calabria, Basilicata and southernmost Campania, underwent important processes of territorial organisation. It gives us a picture of an empowerment, which implied extensive contacts with Greeks and natives in the area and abroad, as well as suitable political solutions. Various forms of relationships were established between Greek and local communities. As we will see, these relationships were expressed in institutional, symbolic and also geopolitical terms (as far as the models and characteristics of the archaic geographical thought are concerned).

Ancient sources, in particular Ps.Scymn. vv. 336-360⁶⁰; Diodorus 12.9.1-2⁶¹; Strabo 6.1.13⁶² translate this organisation with the idea of *arché*

⁵⁸ GIANGIULIO 2016, 208; 2021, 157 ff.

⁵⁹ GORMAN-GORMAN 2014, 8-19; 316 ff.

⁶⁰ ἀπὸ τοῦ ποταμοῦ Συβάριδος ὠνομασμένη /Σύβαρις, Ἀχαιῶν ἐπιφανῆς ἀποικία, /δέκα μυριάδας ἔχουσα τῶν ἀστῶν σχεδόν /περιουσία πλείστη τε κεχορηγημένη /οἱ δὴ παρεξαρθέντες οὐκ ἀνθρωπίνως /αὐτανδρον ἐξέφθειραν ἐπιφανῆ πόλιν, /τάγαθὰ τὰ λίαν μὴ μαθόντες εὖ φέρειν [...] /Κροτωνιάται πλησίον δὲ κείμενοι /κατὰ κράτος αὐτοὺς ἦσαν ἐν βραχεῖ χρόνῳ /τὰ πάντα διαμείναντας ἀπταίστως ἔτη /ὡς ἑκατὸν ἐνενήκοντα πρὸς τοῖς εἴκοσι.

⁶¹... κατὰ δὲ τὴν Ἰταλίαν συνέβη κτισθῆναι τὴν τῶν Θουρίων πόλιν δι' αἰτίας τοιαύτας. ἐν τοῖς ἔμπροσθεν χρόνοις Ἑλλήνων κτισάντων κατὰ τὴν Ἰταλίαν πόλιν Σύβαριν, συνέβη ταύτην λαβεῖν ταχείαν αὔξησιν διὰ τὴν ἀρετὴν τῆς χώρας. [2] κειμένης



(dominion) and attribute it to the powerful Achaean colony of Sybaris, founded in 720 or 709 B.C. (according to different traditions⁶³) in one of the largest and richest river basins in southern Italy, in present-day northern Calabria⁶⁴.

But *arché* is a difficult term to apply to archaic Greek history⁶⁵. Scholars usually struggle to deal with similar hegemonic super-poleic organisations in the Greek world also in reference to later periods, as Moses Finley has shown in his cautious attempt to define the category of 'empire' in relation to Athenian naval power and political '*arché*' in the fifth century B.C.⁶⁶. Indeed, the recent debate has focused precisely on the definition of Sybaris' *arché*, of its models and forms, with very different results⁶⁷.

Literary sources emphasise the idea of a long-lasting homogeneous power, almost from the beginning of the colony. Modern scholarship has long accepted this idea, but it has also been strongly challenged in recent times⁶⁸. It makes more sense to try to give some historical depth to this picture, where possible, as some scholars have tried to do⁶⁹.

Firstly, the *arché* of Sybaris should not be considered trivially as a colonial domination. The institutional and military empowerment of Sybaris, of which the sources speak, was established over a long period and should be seen not before the last decades of the 7th century B.C. when, according to Antiochus of Syracuse⁷⁰, Sybaris leads the Achaeans from Italy and from the motherland to found Metapontum.

γὰρ ἀνὰ μέσον δυεῖν ποταμῶν, τοῦ τε Κράθιος καὶ τοῦ Συβάριος, ἀφ' οὗ ταύτης ἔτυχε τῆς προσηγορίας, οἱ κατοικισθέντες νεμόμενοι πολλὴν καὶ καρποφόρον χώραν μεγάλους ἐκτήσαντο πλούτους. πολλοῖς δὲ μεταδιδόντες τῆς πολιτείας ἐπὶ τοσοῦτο προέβησαν, ὥστε δόξαι πολὺ προέχειν τῶν κατὰ τὴν Ἰταλίαν οἰκούντων, πολυανθρωπία τε τοσοῦτο διήνεγκαν, ὥστε τὴν πόλιν ἔχειν πολιτῶν τριάκοντα μυριάδας [...]

⁶²... Ἀχαιῶν κτίσμα ἢ Σύβαρις δυεῖν ποταμῶν μεταξὺ, Κράθιδος καὶ Συβάριδος: οἰκιστῆς δ' αὐτῆς ὁ Ἴσος Ἐλικεύς. τοσοῦτον δ' εὐτυχία διήνεγκεν ἢ πόλις αὕτη τὸ παλαιὸν ὥστε τεττάρων μὲν ἔθνων τῶν πλησίον ἐπῆρξε, πέντε δὲ καὶ εἴκοσι πόλεις ὑπηκόους ἔσχε, τριάκοντα δὲ μυριάσιν ἀνδρῶν ἐπὶ Κροτωνιάτας ἐστράτευσεν, πεντήκοντα δὲ σταδίων κύκλον συνεπλήρουν οἰκούντες ἐπὶ τῷ Κράθιδι. ὑπὸ μέντοι τρυφῆς καὶ ὕβρεως ἄπασαν τὴν εὐδαιμονίαν ἀφηρεθήσαν ὑπὸ Κροτωνιατῶν ἐν ἡμέραις ἑβδομήκοντα: ἐλόντες γὰρ τὴν πόλιν ἐπήγαγον τὸν ποταμὸν καὶ κατέκλυσαν. [...]

⁶³ See AMPOLO 1993, 222-4.

⁶⁴ BT CGI XVII, 764-787 (P.G. Guzzo); INVENTORY 2004, 295-7.

⁶⁵ AMPOLO 1993, 247.

⁶⁶ FINLEY 1979.

⁶⁷ See in part. BUGNO 1999 and AVERSA 2008.

⁶⁸ GORMAN-GORMAN 2014, 9 and *passim*.

⁶⁹ LOMBARDO 1994, 105-6; 2008, 51-2; AVERSA 2008.

⁷⁰ *FGrHist* 555 F 12 *apud* Strabo 6.1.15.



The foundation of the two earlier (secondary) colonies, Metapontum and Poseidonia, around 630 and at the end of the 7th century B.C., plays an essential role in this process⁷¹. Antiochus relates the foundation of Metapontum to Sybaris' aim to extend the land of the Achaeans and define its borders with other Hellenic groups, such as the Tarantines. Some sixty years later⁷², the Sybarites would lead the Achaeans in expelling the 'other' Greeks, the Sirites, from the region⁷³.

The two main Sybarite colonies were settled at opposite ends of the impressive chain of roads, mountain passes, tracks and river valleys that linked the Tyrrhenian shores from southern Campania to northern Calabria, and the Ionian coasts. The foundation of Poseidonia, opposite the Etruscan sites in southern Campania, shows the growing interest of Sybaris in the Tyrrhenian coast, which was later reinforced by the establishment of some other settlements in the area (at least Laos and Scidrus, which we have seen above, foundations of uncertain date, location, and status)⁷⁴. In the decades following the foundation of Poseidonia, some of the Oenotrian communities in the area fell under Achaean's sphere of influence. This complex and solid system of contacts and relationships is documented by archaeological evidence⁷⁵, but phenomena such as the adoption of the Achaean alphabet, the minting of coins or forms of political organisation show a deep and productive circulation of models driven by Sybaris⁷⁶.

Thus, the system of Sybaris' power escapes the idea of a vast, continuous territorial dominion from the beginning⁷⁷. But territorial organisation is a fundamental issue that has stimulated recent studies and debates. The *polis* seems to have administered a composite political network including different types of settlements and communities over a vast area⁷⁸. M. Giangliulio has suggested seeing a hegemonic system that integrates local communities, similar to the perieciic communities of Sparta⁷⁹. Based on a

⁷¹ FRISONE 2009; 2023

⁷² LOMBARDO 1981, part. 217-8; LOMBARDO 1996, 20.

⁷³ Iust. *Epit.* XX.2. 3-10.

⁷⁴ GRECO 1993, 475-80 suggests that the founding of Velia also indicates the involvement of Sybaris. For Poseidonia and the other secondary colonies on the Tyrrhenian coast, see now FRISONE 2023.

⁷⁵ GRECO 1993; LA TORRE 2001; 2008.

⁷⁶ BUGNO-MASSERIA 2001, in part. TALIERCIO 2001 and LAZZARINI-POCCETTI 2001; Zavaroni 2005; POCCETTI 2015.

⁷⁷ Cfr. AMPOLO 1993, 247.

⁷⁸ Strabo 6. 1. 13: it ruled over four neighbouring ethne (τεττάρων μὲν ἔθνῶν τῶν πλησίον ἐπιήρξε), had twenty-five subject cities (πέντε δὲ καὶ εἴκοσι πόλεις ὑπηκόους ἔσχε),

⁷⁹ GIANGIULIO 1992.



study of Strabo's lexicon, M. Bugno has suggested that the *arché* of Sybaris should, from the outset, have been based on the model of the territorial organisation of the great eastern powers, Lydia and Persia, known for the mediation of Miletus⁸⁰. Recently, however, F. Aversa has rightly argued that an earlier system, based on typical aristocratic power relations, could only be reorganised in the last quarter of the 6th century, coinciding with the tyrannical period, into a territorially organised *arché* inspired by Persian models⁸¹.

As concerns the *polis* itself, the question has been raised of the scarce archaeological remains of a city which, according to the sources, would have been much larger than usual at the time⁸². Obviously, this argument is strongly conditioned by the hydrogeological situation of the plain of Sybaris and the changes that affected it, as well as the later superposition of the cities of Thurii and Copiae on the same site⁸³.

But, even without disturbing Thucydides' caveat on the misleading argument of the *opsis tes poleos* (1.10.2), it should be recalled how studies in the oldest colonial areas in Magna Grecia, especially the Tarantine and the Sybaritides, suggest the relevance of scattered settlements, conventionally defined according to the 'old-fashioned way' of habitation that Thucydides and Aristotle call *katà komas*⁸⁴. This may correspond to the social characteristics and structures of a landed knightly oligarchy in Sybaris at the height of Archaic times.⁸⁵

As far as the political organisation is concerned, some sources stress a peculiar political system⁸⁶, very generous in granting citizenship, contrary to the normal feature of the Greek *poleis* mode⁸⁷. Although this account has rightly been regarded with scepticism, due to its anachronistic and instrumental slant⁸⁸, it could hint at some innovative political solutions in the political organisation of Sybaris, at least in the second half of the 6th century⁸⁹.

Through the comparison of literary and epigraphic evidence, this complex system encompassing *politai* (citizens) - *hypekooi* (subjugated

⁸⁰ BUGNO 1999, 10-26, followed by MELE 2018, 46-56.

⁸¹ AVERSA 2008, 33-9.

⁸² GORMAN-GORMAN 2014, 11. Strabo 6.1.13: 50-stades circuit (πεντήκοντα δὲ σταδίων κύκλον συνεπλήρουν οἰκούντες ἐπὶ τῷ Κράθιδι.)

⁸³ COTECCHIA 1993; GUZZO 1993.

⁸⁴ Th. 1.10.2-3; 2.15; Arist. *Pol.* 1305a. For Sybaris GRECO 1993, 467-71; GRECO 2016, 77.

⁸⁵ LURAGHI 1994, 65-67 and now AVERSA 2008, 27-9.

⁸⁶ Diod. 12.9.2.

⁸⁷ CAMASSA 1989, 8.

⁸⁸ CAMASSA 1989, 6; GORMAN-GORMAN 2014, 8.

⁸⁹ AVERSA 2008, 36.



peoples) - *apoikoi* (colonists) - *symmachoi* (allies) - *philoï* (friends) can be discerned.

The bronze inscribed treaty (*philia*) between the native '*ethnos*' of the Serdaioi and Sybaris found at Olympia (Meiggs-Lewis 10) – whatever date we ascribe to it⁹⁰ – suggests some of these degrees of relationship.

As regards literary sources, Hecataeus of Miletus, whose geographical opera reflected a broad view of the hinterland of Magna Graecia, mentioned nine '*poleis* of the Oenotrians' located 'inland' or 'in the land in between' (*mesogeia*)⁹¹, and perhaps eight more may have been included in the work, which has come down to us only in skeletal fragments cited by later authors⁹². Many of these Oenotrian *poleis* may have been incorporated into the Sybarite hegemonial system, which involved different 'degrees' of integration, from dependence to military alliance under the leadership of Sybaris⁹³.

The most important evidence, however, comes from numismatic sources. They attest to extensive contacts and interactions through the circulation of a coin type, the incuse Sybarite bull, which began to be minted with the incuse coinage of Sybaris from 550 B.C. onwards, was then adopted by several smaller centres (Laos, Sirinos/Σιρίνος, Πυξόες, ΣΟ, ΑΜΙ, Παλ-Μολ) linked to Sybaris through relationships of dependency or alliance⁹⁴. The common standard of this coinage suggests a homogeneous economic system⁹⁵, while the choice of a precise and stable *episema*, the bull looking backwards, a kind of coat of arms of the *polis* of Sybaris, emphasises the political control of Sybaris over the system⁹⁶.

This allegoric unifying meaning also conveys an implication of territorial order, linked to the river symbolism of the bull looking back⁹⁷. As we have seen above, the establishment of Poseidonia and Metapontum, the main colonies of Sybaris, marked the boundaries of a territorial system and

⁹⁰ The well-established dating of the treaty to the second half of the 6th century (*terminus ante quem* the fall of Sybaris in 510 B.C.), has recently been questioned by M. Lombardo, who suggests a date after the fall of the city: LOMBARDO 2008, 55, with updated bibliography.

⁹¹ NENCI 1987, 332-3 assumed that this topographical reference can be traced back to the text of Hecataeus.

⁹² Hecataeus, FGrHist 1 F 64; 65-71 and perhaps St. Byz *s.vv.* Brystakia, Drys, Pyxis, Siberine, Sestion. See POCETTI 2001.

⁹³ See now GIANGIULIO 2021, 54 -56 with bibliography.

⁹⁴ SPAGNOLI 2013.

⁹⁵ PARISE 1987; 2001; SPAGNOLI 2017.

⁹⁶ LE RIDER 1989, 167-71.

⁹⁷ FRISONE 2012, 101-2.



this probably led to the definition and designation of the 'land of the Achaeans' in Italy, namely *Italia*⁹⁸. The 5th century Western historian Antiochus of Syracuse conceptualised it on the basis of the defining elements of Greek geographical thought of his time (isthmuses, rivers, etc.)⁹⁹, but there are no contemporary records of how the Sybarites defined the territorial system they ruled in the 6th century.

Various sources, however, suggest that such a concept was already being used in symbolic and ideological forms in the Late Archaic period, and this is probably also the case of the famous cloak of Alkistenes mentioned in the pseudo-Aristotelic collection of marvellous stories *De mirabilibus auscultationibus*¹⁰⁰.

This source describes a prestigious object, an embroidered purple cloak 15 cubits long, about 6.60 m., made for a wealthy Sybarite, known as Alkisthenes (or Alkimenes)¹⁰¹. It is recorded as an *anathema* of the sanctuary of Hera at Cape Lacinium, but it is more likely that it was a piece of clothing made for an official event or purpose and then offered to Hera.¹⁰² There is no reason to doubt the historical existence of this marvellous ἱμάτιον. In general terms, it is perfectly consistent with the behavioural styles, the forms of representation, and the network of potential relationships of the Magna Graecia elites of the Late Archaism. The precise references in its iconographic

⁹⁸ FRISONE 2009, 106-7; 2023, 355-9; GIANGIULIO 2021, 155-7. For the name, see also above footnote 38.

⁹⁹ FGrHist 555 F2; 3a: see PRONTERA 1992, 126-7; FRISONE 2008, 144 ff.

¹⁰⁰ Ps-Arist. *De mir. ausc.* 96.838a 15-26 (96 Giacomelli): Ἀλκισθένει τῷ Συβαρίτη φασὶ κατασκευασθῆναι ἱμάτιον τοιοῦτον τῇ πολυτελείᾳ, ὥστε προτίθεσθαι αὐτὸ ἐπὶ Λακινίῳ τῇ πανηγύρει τῆς Ἥρας, εἰς ἣν συμπορεύονται πάντες Ἰταλιῶται, τῶν δὲ δεικνυμένων μάλιστα πάντων ἐκεῖνο θαυμάζεσθαι· οὐ φασὶ κυριεύσαντα Διονύσιον τὸν πρεσβύτερον ἀποδόσθαι Καρχηδονίοις ἑκατὸν καὶ εἴκοσι ταλάντων. ἦν δ' αὐτὸ μὲν ἄλουργές, τῷ δὲ μεγέθει πεντεκαίδεκάτηχυ, ἑκατέρωθεν δὲ διείληπτο ζῳδίοις ἐνυφασμένοις, ἄνωθεν μὲν Σούσοις, κάτωθεν δὲ Πέρσαις· ἀνὰ μέσον δὲ ἦν Ζεὺς, Ἥρα, Θέμις, Ἀθηνᾶ, Ἀπόλλων, Ἀφροδίτη. παρὰ δ' ἑκάτερον πέρας Ἀλκισθένης μὲν ἔνθεν, ἐκ θατέρου δὲ Σύβαρις. The story is echoed in Athenaeus' *Deipnosophistae* 12. 541a, and Iohannes Tzetzes' *Chiliades* I. 29 (815-23 Leone). See now GIACOMELLI 2018, 709-10; 888-92.

¹⁰¹ GIACOMELLI 2018, 890. The name is Antisthenes in Tzetzes, who also mistakes in attributing it to Plutarch instead than Aristotles. The source of the story is usually considered Timaeus, not only for the reference to Sybaris' τρυφή in dress and garments but also for the notice that the cloak was stolen by Dionysius of Syracuse: *contra* see GORMAN-GORMAN 2014, 201-2.

¹⁰² VON LORENTZ 1937, 210-11 thought that it was a product of Persian or Near Eastern craftsmanship; *contra*, for JACOBSTHAL 1938, 214, it was made in a Greek city in the West (Thurii or Tarentum). Considering the links between Sybaris and Miletus, HEURGON 1966, 448 suggested that the decoration of this garment was designed and executed in Miletus.



apparatus suggest that it was realised in the period between 518 and 510 B.C.¹⁰³. Up until the first decades of the 4th century, it was an illustrious piece among the Lacinium sanctuary's possessions, so much so that it was exhibited during the *panegyreis* of Hera, the solemn festivals that gathered all the Greeks of the region in the sanctuary, and then taken away by Dionysius I of Syracuse, probably after the conquest of Croton, and sold by him to the Carthaginians.

Studies have focused on its complex repertoire of embroidered figures on the mantle. According to Pseudo-Aristotle, they were divided into five distinct sections, and were probably identifiable by inscriptions or other distinctive elements. The Persian capital of Susa was placed at the top of the cloak, the latest royal city of Persepolis in the lower section¹⁰⁴, and in the centre, various Olympic deities - Zeus, Hera, Themis, Athena, Apollo, and Aphrodite - were linked in a mythical narrative whose meaning is now lost to us. Furthermore, and more importantly, at the ends of the mantle, Alkisthenes on one side and Sybaris on the other, were in some way compared to or associated with the cities that symbolised Persian power.

The representation of places and relationships in allegorical forms can be considered part of the figurative language of the time. The cloak of Zas in Pherecydes of Syros (F 9 Colli) is an example of this type of Archaic representation, but we also have other parallels in the Achaean-Sybarite milieu, like the well-known painting of the Hero of Temesa recorded by Pausanias¹⁰⁵.

Alkisthenes' cloak may have been made in whole or in part in Asia Minor, as it probably reflects the forms of Eastern decorative art, where the use of textiles and tapestries for allegorical representations of cities, as well as of vast territorial realities, was widespread¹⁰⁶. In this way, also the *pinakes*, the synthetic 'cartes-image' of the world, also originated in the Ionian proto-cartography¹⁰⁷.

In short, Pseudo-Aristotle's account presents us with a prominent figure from the Sybarite society of the last quarter of the 6th century, who set

¹⁰³HEURGON 1966, 449 dates it in 513/12 B.C.. Formerly JACOBSTHAL 1938, 206 had been skeptical about the possibility of such an object surviving for more than a century and considered it to have been made many years after the fall of the first Sybaris, probably in the second half of the 5th century B.C. See now AVERSA 2008, 24.

¹⁰⁴ On textual problems of the text and the individualisation of the subjects on the coat, see GIACOMELLI 2018, 890-2.

¹⁰⁵ Paus. 6.6.11.

¹⁰⁶ CALIÒ 2012, 75-103.

¹⁰⁷ See BALLABRIGA 1986, 60 for the definition of 'carte-image' in Ionian proto-geographical thought.



himself up as a point of reference for the whole community in a dialogue with prestigious, distant, and exotic contexts. The chronological horizon is that of the last two decades of the 6th century, when the first structured contacts of Western Greek cities and individuals with a distant, little known but fascinating world such as the Persian Empire were established. This is the same period in which we see other figures from Magna Graecia, such as Democedes of Croton or the Tarentine Gyllos (3.138.1-3), intertwining their relations with Persia¹⁰⁸. In fact, one could say that if either of these two Herodotean figures had wanted to make such a prestigious offer in a Greek sanctuary to celebrate their extraordinary experiences, it would not have been very different from the splendid mantle of Alkisthenes.

So, to return to our discourse on contemporary and 'emic' representations of Sybaris' power, Alkisthenes' dedication shows us, between the lines, an allegory in which the city¹⁰⁹, at the behest of a prestigious member of its elite, was presented as an institutional, political or territorial identity capable of standing on a par with the seats of power of the distant and famous king of Persia.

Sybaris in Herodotus' mirror game

Herodotus could hardly have ignored such an impressive network and political system. Especially since Croton itself, as well as the other *poleis* linked to Sybaris, such as Poseidonia, and, later, even Athens itself, tried to replace Sybaris in its leadership role or, as Magna Graecia scholars are wont to say, to take over Sybaris' legacy.

The historian, however, does not give any details about this, as if it were a distant past. But what remains in his narrative, importantly, are the Sybarites. Although their defeat and the *alosis* of their city are evoked, Sybaris is for Herodotus a poleic identity that does not disappear. Indeed, it is remarkable to observe how, in his eyes, it remains a well-defined agent (the Sybarites) acting in the framework of the events following the fall of the city, not only in Magna Graecia but also on the Panhellenic stage¹¹⁰.

In fact, 'the Sybarites' not only maintain their poleic name while living in the two sub-colonies of Laos and Scidrus, but they were, in the eyes of Herodotus, still responsible for the formal commitments of their city. Thus,

¹⁰⁸ COCCIOLI 2015, 11-18.

¹⁰⁹ *Contra* GUZZO 2014, 513-4, based on Paus. 6.6.11, identifies Sybaris with the homonymous river.

¹¹⁰ Diod. 12.10.3. NAFISSI 2007, 408, and also, in a different perspective, LOMBARDO 2008, 55.



he emphasises that they failed to fulfil the strong obligation linked to the *xenia* (friendship) which bound their city to Miletus in the past¹¹¹. They should reciprocate the show of grief and solidarity that the Milesians offered them when they mourned the fall of Sybaris. But they did not return the homage after the disaster of Miletus in 494, following the defeat of Lade:

Παθοῦσι δὲ ταῦτα Μιλησίοισι πρὸς Περσέων οὐκ ἀπέδωσαν τὴν ὁμοίην Συβαρίται, οἱ Λᾶόν τε καὶ Σκίδρον οἴκεον τῆς πόλιος ἀπεστερημένοι. Συβάριος γὰρ ἀλούσης ὑπὸ Κροτωνητέων Μιλήσιοι πάντες ἤβηδὸν ἀπεκείραντο τὰς κεφαλὰς καὶ πένθος μέγα προσεθήκαντο· πόλιες γὰρ αὐταὶ μάλιστα δὴ τῶν ἡμεῖς ἴδμεν ἀλλήλησι ἐξεινώθησαν [...] ¹¹².

Herodotus was probably aware of the vicissitudes of these Sybarites without Sybaris, and also of their tragic epilogue. During the first half of the 5th century B.C., active groups of Sybarite refugees tried in various ways to return to the site of the ancient city to rebuild it, also enlisting the help of the Dinomenid tyrants who were interested in opposing Croton's power in southern Italy¹¹³.

The rebirth of Sybaris under Athenian auspices in the 40s of the 5th century B.C. (446/45 B.C.), in which Herodotus will be directly involved, again took place with the active participation of groups of exiles from the ancient city and their descendants¹¹⁴.

It is these Sybarite circles that keep a tradition alive, collected by Herodotus during his stay in Italy¹¹⁵, of the fall of their city, not only opposing them to Croton, but also trying to manipulate the narrative of the facts to their own advantage¹¹⁶. But the Sybarites, that is, the descendants of the citizens of the ancient city, who had fought to return to their land, were almost completely wiped out by the new settlers due to a stasis that occurred shortly after the founding of the new Sybaris. What remained of them found

¹¹¹ RAVIOLA 2005 highlights the links between this 'public' formalised friendship between the two cities and the private and family relations of their elites in the Archaic period. However, as AVERSA 2008, 24, has pointed out, Miletus paid its tribute to the disgrace of the Sybarites shortly after 510 B.C., when it was under the control of the *tyrannos hyparchos* Aristagoras. A framing in the diplomatic activities of two important tyrannic powers, one in the West, the other in the East, is therefore not unlikely.

¹¹² Hdt 6.21.2.

¹¹³ DE SENSI 1987; LOMBARDO 1993, 264-98, BUGNO 1999, 36-68.

¹¹⁴ Diod. 12. 10.1-4; 11. 1-3. See NAFISSI 2007.

¹¹⁵ See above, footnote 29. NAFISSI 2007, 408 rightly points out that in the opposite position of Sybarites and Crotoniates could also sound the atmosphere of the Sybarites' embassy in Athens and their request for help. See also PORCIANI forthcoming. According to GIANGIULIO 1989, 197 ff. the local versions took form between the foundation of the panhellenic colony of Thurii (443) and the outcome of the Dorieus affair (*terminus post quem*).

¹¹⁶ MACAN 1895, I, 184-6; GIANGIULIO 1989, 198-9.



place in a small Sybaris that was founded near the river Traente, on the edge of the territory of Croton, under the protection of the former rival city¹¹⁷.

The narrative that flows into the passages of Herodotus 5.44-45, probably still echoes some of these facts. It sounds like an open hostility between the Sybarites and Crotoniates, a contrast that, as scholars have rightly pointed out¹¹⁸, does not depend on Herodotus' compositional technique, but rather on the presence of two hostile local narratives whose opposing versions Herodotus immediately introduces in a story, the Dorieus' adventure, and its tragic outcome, that both versions presuppose¹¹⁹. Indeed, as Porciani has recently pointed out, the reference to the disregarded Delphic oracle and the total defeat of the Spartan prince and his companion is the pivotal element that gives meaning not only to the Sybarites' *megiston martyrion*, but also to the demonstrative evidence of their secondary argument, the temple of Athena Krathia, which Dorieus is said to have founded¹²⁰. On the other hand, as Giangiulio had already observed, the Crotonians were not able to deny the arrival of Dorieus, claiming only that they had received no help from him in the circumstances¹²¹.

The way in which the local excursus is grafted onto the more general account of the *diegema* is a further interesting element to observe.

A simple reference to the chronology is stitched together rather abruptly. According to the Sybarites, Dorieus voyage to *Italie* coincided with the war that their *basileus* Telys was preparing against the Crotoniates¹²². Importantly, this connection gives us view from the perspective of the local audience. It is the point of view that both Herodotus and the pre-existing narratives he used in his account presuppose. From this perspective the war between Sybaris and Croton, which led to the fall of the first of the two Achaean cities, seems to have been an epochal turning point, comparable to the impact of the Persian invasion on the Greeks of Ionia or Xerxes' invasion

¹¹⁷ Diod. 12. 22.1.

¹¹⁸ NIESE 1907, 426-40. See GIANGIULIO 1989, in part. 193-9 with complete bibliography, and recently PORCIANI forthcoming. *Contra* FEHLING 1989.

¹¹⁹ GIANGIULIO 1989, 194.

¹²⁰ MACAN 1895, I, 185.

¹²¹ GIANGIULIO 1989, 195.

¹²² The chronological term around 510 B.C. seems to be solid for the chronology of the fall of Sybaris, as it has been reconstructed by most scholars on the basis of literary sources, and now seems to be consistent with the material evidence. On the contrary, the date of the beginning of Dorieus' enterprise (see footnote 17 above) and its tragic end, which, according to Diodorus (4. 23.3), shifts almost at the end of the 6th century B.C., have been debated. See PARETI 1920, 4-5; VIRGILIO 1975, 150-1; BRACCESI 1999, 39-55 with bibliography.



of mainland Greece¹²³. This gives us another element, albeit a subtle and indirect one, which refutes recent totally negative hypotheses regarding the presence and importance of the fall of Sybaris in the historical record, at least of the 5th century¹²⁴.

Starting from the chronological connection with Dorieus' expedition, which allowed the narrative discourses and polemics of local matrices to be inserted, we are given a glimpse of the local articulation of the Western Hellenic world, with its heritage of differentiated traditions. It is from this composite complex of oral and performative memories¹²⁵ that the opposing versions of the Sybarites and Crotoniates carry out their mutual polemic, which, as scholars have noted¹²⁶, seems deeply unbalanced here.

Again, this does not seem to be overlooked, especially when compared with the narratives of the fall of Sybaris, which otherwise tend to emphasise the sins of the Sybarites or the *topos* of the *tryphé* as the cause of the city's destruction¹²⁷.

Rather, in the polemic collected by Herodotus, the Sybarites show no regret for their own behaviour or for the outbreak of the fatal war they admit to having waged. Moreover, they use their arguments to demean all their enemies, both local and from outside, real or supposed. The emphasis on their fear, which seems to have been the reason for Dorieus' call, insinuates that Crotoniates felt inferior to their enemies. Interestingly, this detail - the fear and hesitation in the face of Sybarite aggression - is the only one consistent with most other traditions of the war between the two cities, which present Croton not as a rival competing with Sybaris, but rather as a polis profoundly different in customs and political arrangements, called upon to defend itself against aggression and blessed with a grandiose but unexpected victory¹²⁸.

But Dorieus is also portrayed in a negative light in the Sybarite version: he was misled into siding with Croton in a local war, and so, disregarding the oracle's instructions and overlooking the will of Apollo, he showed *hybris* and implicit impiety. This was how Spartan prince's story had already been reinterpreted in his homeland, and it seems to have been the religious perspective shared by Herodotus himself: Dorieus should have

¹²³ See Senoph. Fr. 22 D.K. = 13 G.P.

¹²⁴ GORMAN-GORMAN 2014, 14; 436. *Contra* see already LOMBARDO 2002a, 57-8.

¹²⁵ PORCIANI forthcoming.

¹²⁶ HOW-WELLS 1912, *ad loc.* V.45; GIANGIULIO 1989, 196-8 with footnote 118 shows how most scholars sided with the seemingly stronger sybarite version.

¹²⁷ See footnote 3 above. Cfr. LURAGHI 1994, 65; LOMBARDO 2002a, 53-6, 64 with bibliography. GORMAN-GORMAN 2014.

¹²⁸ LOMBARDO 2002a, 60-5.



confined himself to doing what the oracle told him to do, and nothing else¹²⁹. For this mistake he paid the ultimate price. Indeed, this is the link between Herodotus' Sybaris excursus and the Dorieus *diegema* that frames it.

Compared to this reconstruction of the facts, that of the Crotoniates is a simple self-defence: they reply that they won by themselves, since the only foreigner on their side was the soothsayer Callias. They reverse the polemic of impiety emphasising how the Iamid *mantis* left the Sybarite camp after observing the negative sacrifices and introduce the element of the rival city abandoned by the gods, which will return, amplified, in several later sources¹³⁰.

Both the versions are tendentious and ideological, both may be untrue¹³¹, but Herodotus leaves the matter unresolved. He doesn't care to demonstrate who had Dorieus' help, it is enough to remember his fate and the sad end of the companions who followed him, among them the Crotoniate Philippos, son of di Boutakides. The local dispute remains extraneous to his main narrative, his aim goes further. After explaining the reasons for the Spartan prince's sad parable in the light of his religiously motivated moral purpose, he picks up the thread of his discourse on the Spartan *basileia* and returns to Kleomenes' meeting with Aristagoras of Miletus, the promoter of the Ionian revolt.

To conclude

Simon Hornblower has recently attempted to find a stronger link in this overall scheme, which is inscribed in the narrative of the Ionian revolt in the Fifth and Sixth Books of Herodotus, by pointing to a comparison between Miletus and Sybaris as a main leitmotif¹³². According to him, Herodotus needs the Dorieus section to introduce at length what will turn out to be a crucial element in the whole complex, the fall of Sybaris, so that it could prefigure his account of the devastating climax of the Ionian revolt. In this light he explains the similarity between the two cities expressed very explicitly towards the end of the story of the Ionian revolt, in 6.21, when, as we have already seen, Herodotus remarks that the exiled Sybarites did not repay the act of solidarity the Milesians had shown them in 510 B.C.

¹²⁹ HARRISON 2000, 155

¹³⁰ To be linked to the pro-Crotoniates reconstruction of Pythagorean matrix: AMPOLO 1992, 218.; LOMBARDO 2002a, 53-6, 64-5.

¹³¹ MACAN 1895, I, 185-6; GIANGIULIO 1989, 199.

¹³² HORNBLOWER 2007, 168-9.



Hornblower emphasises the strong formulation and a very close phrasing used to signal the flourishing of both cities, as well as the peculiar epic technique of language resemblance¹³³.

It should be noted, however, that it is precisely the fall and the terrible consequences of the defeat of Sybaris, that the historian glosses over. And, as we have seen, he is deliberately elliptical about the splendour of its power.

Rather, Herodotus leads us into a kind of mirror game in which we can glimpse the crucial moment of the fall of Sybaris through the echo that remains of it in other, later seasons of Magna Graecia's history. He focuses instead on a dispute that goes back to other times and other interlocutors, neglecting a dramatic narrative that will be widespread in the extra-Herodotean historiographic tradition echoing what represented an epochal shock for the people of Magna Graecia.

Despite the doubts expressed in this regard by some scholars, even recently¹³⁴, one can consider genuinely historical the relationship between Miletus, which was living its acme at the end of the 6th century¹³⁵ and the still powerful western city. It is to inscribe in the strong interconnection between the eastern and western Mediterranean, which we see in various other cases concerning the Greek world of the Archaic age in Herodotus. Suffice it is to think of the dense network of relationships, both personal and political, and even institutional, which emerges from the episode of Democedes' return to Croton, a story that, certainly not by chance, can be dated to the same years as the venture of Dorieus and his adventures in Libya.

Indeed, Herodotus 6.21 seems to evoke that strictly interconnected world, and we can agree that this reinforces and makes his parallelism between the fates of these two great cities more pathetic, which illustrate the consideration he expresses at the beginning of the whole work (1.5.4) about great cities becoming small¹³⁶.

Sybaris, however, remains tied to an earlier past, crystallised in a flash of splendour which Herodotus shows us through the *chlydè* of the Sybarite nobleman Smindyrides. But this legendary epoch, when the western city flourished with its *akme*, precedes by some seventy years the time, at the end of the 6th century, when Miletus became the *proschema Asies*, and coincides instead with a period of unrest and struggles that had torn Miletus two

¹³³ HORNBLOWER 2007, 175-6.

¹³⁴ GORMAN-GORMAN 2014, 13-14. But note that the closeness between the Ionian and the Italian city which they consider «unusual» is, in Herodotus' words «closer than any other we know».

¹³⁵ NENCI 1994, 189-90.

¹³⁶ Hdt. 1.5.4. HORNBLOWER 2007, 177.



generations earlier (5.28). Thus, drawing another pattern of Herodotus' fresco in which the fortunes of men and cities alternate.

But in the more recent past, whose narrative Herodotus makes room for in the most vivid part of his historical architecture, there only remains the stubborn resistance of a people without a city, the scattered Sybarites, focused on themselves and their efforts to return, oblivious of the ancient bonds and the obligations they entailed as a *polis*, as shown by the «lack of emotional display and solidarity with their friends Milesioi»¹³⁷.

These are the Sybarites who will eventually achieve what will be their final, tragic return. These groups, bound to their identity and to a *polis* that no longer existed but refuses to disperse, were the bearers of that (probably unshared) memory from which Herodotus gathered his scattered fragments of a Western Iliupersis.

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¹³⁷ ALLEN-HORNBLOWER 2020, 100.



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Abstract

Herodotus 5.44-45 is one of the most authoritative sources for the defeat and capture of Sybaris by Croton in 510 B.C., a traumatic event that marked a profound rupture in Magna Graecia in the Late Archaic period. Herodotus' narrative, because of the way in which it is presented and the events in which it is framed, has given rise to much historical and historiographical debate. But, Sybaris, framed here at the time of its collapse, also appears in Herodotus' pages with reference to the season of its greatest flowering (6.127). The present work aims to combine a detailed study of Herodotus' text, examining the above passages and a few others from his Sixth Book that refer to Sybaris, with the documentary picture of the Achaean city and its so-called 'empire' that has become increasingly consistent, especially through non-literary evidence. The aim is to clarify the framework of the historical evidence on Sybaris collected by the historian and the perspective in which it must be seen. This study will allow, on the one hand, to reconsider the critical positions that some scholars have expressed on the historical consistency of the fame, wealth, and power of Sybaris in the Archaic period and, on the other hand, to reflect on how the fate of Sybaris fits into the context of the narrative of Herodotus' Fifth Book.

Keywords: Herodotus, Sybaris, Dorieus, Magna Graecia, Archaic Greece

Erodoto 5,44-45 è una delle fonti più autorevoli per la storia della sconfitta e della presa di Sibari da parte di Crotona nel 510 a.C., un evento traumatico che segnò una profonda rottura negli equilibri della Magna Grecia nel periodo tardo-archaico. La narrazione di Erodoto, per il modo in cui è presentata e per gli eventi in cui è inquadrata, ha dato luogo a un intenso dibattito critico, sia a livello storico che storiografico. Sibari, tuttavia, qui inquadrata nel momento del suo crollo, compare nelle pagine di Erodoto anche con riferimento alla stagione della sua massima fioritura (6.127). Il presente lavoro si propone di coniugare uno studio dettagliato del testo di Erodoto, con un esame approfondito dei brani sopra citati e alcuni altri passaggi che fanno riferimento a Sibari, con il quadro delle testimonianze relativo alla città achea e al suo cosiddetto 'impero', un quadro che è diventato sempre più consistente, soprattutto grazie alle fonti non letterarie e alla documentazione materiale. L'obiettivo è chiarire il quadro dello storico su Sibari potenzialmente a disposizione di Erodoto e quello invece raccolto dallo storico nonché la prospettiva in cui ciò va valutato. Questo studio permetterà, da un lato, di riconsiderare alcune recenti posizioni critiche che hanno espresso dubbi sulla consistenza storica della fama, della ricchezza e della potenza di Sibari nel periodo archaico e, dall'altro, di riflettere su come la notizia sul destino di Sibari si inserisca nell'architettura complessiva del V libro di Erodoto.

Parole chiave: Erodoto, Sibari, Dorieo, Magna Grecia, Grecia arcaica