

## CHAPTER SIX

### “THEN THE STRIFE OF WAR WILL COME TO THE WEST” SIBYLLINE ORACLE 4 AND THE CONFLICT OF EAST AND WEST

Thucydides (1.3.3) famously observed that in Homer’s poems there were neither Greeks nor barbarians. It is in response to the Persian Wars (490 and 480–479 B.C.) that we begin to see Greek authors reflecting on the characteristic differences between Greeks and the barbarian “Other”.<sup>1</sup> The Athenian tragic poet Aeschylus, himself a veteran of Salamis, explored the conflict of Greek and Persian in his *Persae*, performed in 472. Aeschylus (*Pers.* 747–8, 763–6) pinpoints the Persian king’s hubris in his desire to bring both Europe and Asia under his control. Not content with Asia, which the gods had assigned to him and his predecessors, Xerxes decides to yoke the Hellespont and cross over into forbidden Europe. The defeat at Salamis and the destruction of his forces are the result of attempting to join what nature had separated.

Some decades later Herodotus followed Aeschylus’ interpretation in his history of the conflict between Greeks and Persians.<sup>2</sup> In his famous proem Herodotus (1.1–5; cf. 7.20.2) traces the conflict between Europe and Asia back to its mythical beginnings with the rape of Io by Phoenician sailors and of Europa by Greek sailors. The back and forth continues until the Greeks overreact in Herodotus’ view and invade Asia touching off the Trojan War. According to Herodotus the Persians viewed their invasions of Greece as vengeance for the Trojan War. Though Herodotus likely did not mean for this supposed Persian

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<sup>1</sup> For a good introduction see E. Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition Through Tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989); P. Georges, *Barbarian Asia and the Greek Experience: From the Archaic Period through the Age of Xenophon* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 76–114; T. Harrison, *The Emptiness of Asia: Aeschylus’ Persians and the History of the Fifth Century* (London: Duckworth, 2000); or more generally P. Cartledge, *The Greeks: A Portrait of Self and Others* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

<sup>2</sup> Herodotus 8.109.3 has Themistocles say that it was Xerxes’ crossing of the Hellespont to unite Europe and Asia under the power of one man that invited divine displeasure and disaster upon his undertaking.

interpretation to be taken entirely seriously, the notion of eternal conflict between Europe and Asia became a cornerstone of Greek reflection on nations and peoples of the East.

In the fourth century the Athenian orator Isocrates elaborated an entire international policy on the notion.<sup>3</sup> Meditating on the internecine strife that was tearing the Greeks apart, he began a campaign to encourage the Greek cities to join together for an invasion of the Persian Empire. Departing from Herodotus' tale of rape and counter-rape, Isocrates (*Panath.* 80) saw the Trojan War as a retaliation for Asian inroads into Europe made by the mythological figures Pelops, Danaus, and Cadmus. All the Greeks needed was a leader to unify them against Persia. After considering Athens and Sparta; the Spartan king Agesilaus; the Sicilian tyrant Dionysius I; and the Thessalian leader Alexander of Pherae, Isocrates finally settled on King Philip II of Macedon (*Phil.* 8–9). Isocrates died in 338 and Philip in 336 after sending an expeditionary force into Asia Minor. It fell to Philip's heir to carry on.

Alexander the Great invaded Asia in 334 and had defeated the last Persian king by 331. During the war Alexander made many symbolic gestures which advertised it as a second Trojan War.<sup>4</sup> He also made it clear that the war was undertaken to punish Persia for its invasion of Greece.<sup>5</sup> Nor did the theme die with the last of the Achaemenids,

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<sup>3</sup> For the notion see J. de Romilly, "Isocrates and Europe," *G&R* 39 (1992): 2–13. See also L. Canfora, "L'idea di Asia in Isocrate e Demostene," in *The Birth of European Identity: The Europe-Asia Contrast in Greek Thought* (ed. H. A. Khan; Nottingham Classical Literature Studies 2; Nottingham: University of Nottingham, 1994), 156–61; S. Usher, "Isocrates: Paideia, Kingship and the Barbarians," in the same collection, pages 131–45.

<sup>4</sup> Arrian *Anab.* 1.11.5 records that before crossing to Asia Alexander sacrificed at the shrine of Protesilaus, the first Achaean ashore; for an important incident involving Protesilaus' shrine during Xerxes' invasion see Herodotus 9.116. Arrian *Anab.* 1.11.6 says that Alexander's fleet landed at the same harbor where the Achaeans had. In imitation of Protesilaus, Alexander was the first to leap into the surf from the ship according to Diodorus 17.17.2 and Justin *Epit.* 11.5.12. At Troy Alexander offered sacrifice to Athena Ilias and honored the graves of his ancestors Achilles and Ajax, for which see Arrian *Anab.* 1.11.7; Plutarch *Alex.* 15; Diodorus 17.17.3; Justin *Epit.* 11.5.12. While there he also offered an expiatory sacrifice at Priam's grave for his murder by Alexander's ancestor Neoptolemus; for this see Arrian *Anab.* 1.11.8. Strabo 13.27 (594) also records a benefaction made to the city of Ilium in honor of Andromache, an ancestress through his mother's line. Finally, according to Arrian *Anab.* 1.11.7, he dedicated his armor in the Temple of Athena Ilias in exchange for some arms supposedly dating from the Trojan War, which he had carried before him in battle.

<sup>5</sup> Justin *Epit.* 11.5.6 makes this explicit. Plutarch *Alex.* 16 recalls that after the Battle of the Granicus Alexander sent 300 captured shields to Athens, which had suf-