

Alex PURVES

Map and Narrative in Herodotus' *Histories*

As has become increasingly clear to geographers and literary critics alike over the last few decades, the map is a critical site for uncovering notions of how space is imagined and represented across different cultures and periods. Once viewed simply as a transparent, innocent document, the map has now come under scrutiny as a richly suggestive text in its own right, within which manipulations of scale and perspective combine to create a vision of the entire world in a form which is both discrete and immediate. This paper, which focuses on the world-map that Aristagoras displays before the Spartan king Cleomenes at Hdt. 5.49ff., will investigate the role of cartography in Herodotus' *Histories*, showing how it functions as a metaphor for spatial representation within the text as a whole. I will illustrate how the *Histories* borrows from the poetic model of ekphrasis in his attempt to put the map – a picture of geographical space – into words, and, furthermore, how ekphrasis can be compared with Herodotus' own descriptions of space in the 'ethnographic' sections of his work (see also Clarke, *Between Geography and History*, 1999, 37).

Having identified the Shield of Achilles as one of our earliest models for a map of the universe (Woodward and Harley, *History of Cartography*, vol.1, 1988, 130-32), I will demonstrate that Homer's surreal depiction of a visual landscape, the scope of which far exceeds the range of the naked human eye, anticipates Herodotus' vivid re-creation of the entire earth upon the surface of a bronze tablet at Hdt. 5.49ff. In addition, I shall argue that Aristagoras' rhetorical display of the map, in which he attempts to contract the external time of a three month journey into the brief period which it takes for his finger to trace the route upon the tablet, engages in several intertextual parallels with the

Iliad's ekphrastic scene. In both Homer and Herodotus, shield and map bring narrative time to a standstill, making room for a kind of hyper-space within the text in which the viewer is able to see more than is realistically possible.

Finally, the map's ability to create a space where the whole world is made visible and comprehensible within the blink of an eye contrasts with the time-bound sequentiality of narrative. Herodotus, whose text threads from one country to another as it traces the events of the Persian Wars, has long been noted for his application of space and geography to history. I shall argue, therefore, that even as Herodotus appears to reject the map's totalizing, instantaneous perspective in favour of his own successive unfolding of the world in prose, he nevertheless uses cartography to reveal a model of space that transcends the capabilities of language.