

Assimilation to 'The Other' and Closure in the *Iliad* and Herodotus' *Histories*

In the preface to the *Histories* (*incipit* through 1.5) scholars readily acknowledge Herodotus' implicit recognition of the *Iliad* as both an analogue and foil for his own work. The end of the *Histories* also highlights the historian's adaptation of epic precedent, since Herodotus' complex clausular strategy draws upon techniques previously used to signal the end of the *Iliad*'s narrative (Boedeker 1988, Herington 1991, Dewald 1997). The similarities in question are both structural—e.g., ring composition involving multiple rings—and thematic. In this paper I will analyze the theme of "assimilation to the other," previously noted by Pelling (1997), as it is manifested in *Iliad* 24 (the discovery of common ground between Achilles and Priam) and book nine of the *Histories* (the disclosure of similarities between the Athenians and the Persians in the wake of the Hellenic victory over Xerxes). Although the theme is the same, the authors mine it for strikingly different emotional effects. For while the Iliadic example reflects deepened insight into the human condition for Achilles and his (internal and external) audience, the Herodotean example reveals the failure of the Athenians to recognize the fragility of human success, a fundamental principle of the *Histories* first explicated by the Athenian sage Solon.

In fact Herodotus uses the assimilation theme central to *Iliad* 24 for clausular effect on two different occasions: first at the end of the Lydian *logos*, and then at the end of the *Histories* as a whole. At the fall of Sardis Herodotus stages the confrontation between the victorious Persian king Cyrus and the defeated Lydian king Croesus (1.86-8) in such a way as to evoke specifically the reconciliation between Achilles and Priam in *Iliad* 24. In this instance, it is the wisdom of Solon, finally recognized and proclaimed by Croesus on his pyre, that triggers Cyrus' insight into his own mortal vulnerability. Therefore, a kind of cultural exchange, however

temporary, is suggested whereby monarchic standard-bearers for Eastern values (Croesus and Cyrus) acknowledge the superiority of *polis*-based Hellenic values (espoused by Solon).

At the end of the *Histories* the direction of the cultural exchange is reversed, in a way that Herodotus' contemporary Panhellenic audience was bound to find unsettling. The elaborate ending of the *Histories*, which creates the impression of a completed narrative that is also part of a larger, ongoing story, owes much to the sophisticated clausular technique of the *Iliad*: it looks back to earlier stages of Herodotus' account by means of several compositional rings, while at the same time foreshadowing (by means of prolepses and a focus on symbolically significant actions of 479) a world in which the Athenians will replace the Persians as oppressors of the Greek *poleis*. Events that underscore the Athenians' increasing assimilation to the Persian enemy include naval expeditions led by Themistocles against Aegean islanders for the sake of extorting money (8.111-2) and the climactic siege of Sestos, conducted by Pericles' father Xanthippus, which culminates in the executions of the Persian provincial governor Artayctes and his son (9.116-21).

The latter episode highlights the pointed discrepancy between Spartan and Athenian behavior in the wake of Hellenic victory. For after the battle of Plataea the Spartan commander Pausanias spurns the suggestion of the Aeginetan Lampon that he impale Mardonius' head upon a stake, as the Persians had done to Leonidas after Thermopylae; Pausanias pointedly rejects such behavior as befitting *barbaroi* rather than Greeks (9.79.1). Moreover, after the Theban leader Attaginus flees the Hellenic siege of his city, Pausanias elects not to punish his sons for their father's Persian sympathies (9.88). These acts stand in telling contrast to the behavior of the Athenians at Sestos, where the agonizing manner of Artayctes' death evokes both (typically) Persian impaling and the distinctly Athenian method of torture known as *apotympanismos*.

Moreover, the stoning of Artayctes' son implicates not only Xanthippus but all of the Athenians under his command (representing the Athenian community as a whole) in the "barbaric" shedding of apparently innocent blood.

The disparity between Solon's paradigmatic insight into the transience of human prosperity in the Lydian *logos* and the ultimate failure of his compatriots to appreciate this fundamental tenet of Hellenic wisdom bodes ill for the future of Athenian power exercised at the expense of their fellow Greeks.

Bibliography

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