

## Claiming power in Asia: Herodotus and Thucydides on the Negotiations for Ionia

In Book 8 of Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*, we see the Persians offering treaties to both Athens and Sparta which demanded concessions in Asia for Persia's help in the Peloponnesian War. Thucydides provides the text of three treaties between Sparta and Persia (8.18, 8.37, and 8.58); the Spartans rejected the first two before accepting the final treaty in 411 BCE. Immediately before recounting the third treaty, Thucydides relates the negotiations between Tissaphernes, Alcibiades, and Athenian envoys (8.56) for a treaty between Persia and Athens, which the Athenians rejected. These negotiations required Sparta and Athens to recognize Persian control in Ionia and potentially even further afield. Both *poleis* appeared willing to accept Persian dominance of Ionia but balked a more. Athens rejects the negotiations after being asked to allow the Persians control of the seas along their territories; Sparta rejects the second attempted treaty because it could conceivably return control of several islands and northern Greece to Persia and would force the Spartans to agree to the enslavement of fellow Greeks. The third treaty specifies: "The country of the King, however much of it is of Asia, shall be the King's, and the King shall treat his own country as he pleases" (χώραν τὴν βασιλέως, ὅση τῆς Ἀσίας ἐστί, βασιλέως εἶναι: καὶ περὶ τῆς χώρας τῆς ἑαυτοῦ βουλευέτω βασιλεὺς ὅπως βούλεται, 8.58.2).

I propose that the language in this third treaty, defining the territory of the Persian king, when it comes to negotiating with the Greeks, as "of Asia" (τῆς Ἀσίας), is evocative of the extended prologue of Herodotus' *Histories* or, perhaps, that Herodotus' prologue is evocative of this potential arrangement. There, Herodotus explains that, after the Trojan War, "the Persians claim Asia and the non-Greek peoples who inhabit it as their own and consider Europe and the

Greek to be separate” (τὴν γὰρ Ἀσίην καὶ τὰ ἐνοικέοντα ἔθνη βάρβαρα οἰκιεῦνται οἱ Πέρσαι, τὴν δὲ Εὐρώπην καὶ τὸ Ἑλληνικόν ἤγηνται κεχωρίσθαι, 1.4.4).

The Greek cities in Ionia have long been a contention between Greek powers and the Persian Empire. Throughout the *Histories*, the Spartans refuse to involve themselves in Ionia whereas Athenian support triggers the Ionian Revolt. After the wars, the region is protected by the Peace of Callias (449), of debatable historicity, and serves as both a symbol of the conflict and a negotiating point between the Hellenic powers and the Persian Empire. While the idea that Herodotus is referring to the negotiations found in Thucydides is in keeping with E. Irwin’s argument to downdate the composition of the *Histories* to after the end of the Peloponnesian War (2018), the broader idea that Herodotus’ prologue encourages his audience to think specifically of Ionia is worth pursuing for its implications for understanding the structure and goals of the *Histories* as a whole, and for understanding the evolving nature of the Spartan-Persian treaties found in Thucydides.

### Bibliography

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