

Homeric Narrative Technique and Herodotus' Battle of Salamis (*Hist.* 8.40-96)

My proposed topic is narrative rhythm in Herodotus' staging of warfare, focused on the battle of Salamis (*Hist.* 8.40-96), where narrative pacing serves to highlight political divisiveness among the Greeks.

A. Rengakos (2006) has argued that in portraying the Persian invasion of Greece Herodotus demonstrates what he has learned from Homer about the narration of simultaneous events. Specifically, he claims that Herodotus represents the Persian advance and Greek countermeasures by means of the so-called "desultory" (Zielinski 1899-1901) or "interlace" (de Jong 2001) technique that Homer uses in switching between two story strands, exemplified by the interlocking of the Telemachean and Odyssean stories in the *Odyssey* (Siegmann 1987). Rengakos detects the same technique in Herodotus' narrative of Xerxes' invasion, culminating in the run-up to the battle of Salamis (8.23ff.), where accelerated changes of perspective, from the Persians to the Greeks and back again, stress the close interdependence of the actions of the two sides. In the battle narrative proper, two sequences of events that have been running in parallel (the Persian approach, Hellenic defensive measures) gradually converge, to issue in a decisive Greek victory.

In fact, Rengakos' oversimplified analysis of Herodotus' narrative conceals the extent to which it deviates, intentionally and significantly, from the neat consistency of its Homeric model. For on two separate occasions (8.24-55, 66-71) increasingly quick shifts from one story strand to another seem to evoke Homeric precedent and to anticipate impending contact between the enemy forces. However, this anticipation is defused in both instances by extended debates (8.56-64, 74-83) that underscore the possibility that the divided Greeks may yet decide to abandon Salamis. In other words, rather than simply adopting Homeric technique in his

emplotment of the prelude to Salamis, I suggest that Herodotus uses that technique to build audience expectations—and then pointedly undermines those expectations, thereby emphasizing the precariousness of the Hellenic alliance against Persia.

Bibliography

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