

Prophecy and Ethnography: New Light on Herodotus' *Histories*

Herodotus' *Histories* is a perpetual source of scholarly inquiry into the Greek world, sparking debate about historical method, ethnography, gender studies, myth, and many more areas. One of the most notable contributors to Herodotean studies has been Donald Lateiner. His research on Herodotus' historical method is standard reading in any class on Herodotus. To that end, we have assembled a series of papers on Herodotus for Professor Lateiner's consideration, all written by graduate students influenced by his work. The topics include ethnography, the relationship between gods and men, Homeric tradition, and the use of prophecy in Herodotus' narrative.

"Artemisia and an Anti-Carian Bias in Herodotus" argues that Herodotus' portrayal of Artemisia, the controversial figure at the Battle of Salamis, reflects Herodotus' prevailing bias against the Carians as pirates and traitors living on the cusp of the Greek world (Pelling, 2013). A close analysis of Herodotus' portrayal of the Carians reveals them to be untrustworthy, prone to savagery, but undeniably influenced by Greek culture. Artemisia matches these traits, as she willingly fights for Persia, yet attacks her own allies not to help the Greeks, but to save her own life (Munson, 1988). Like a true Carian, Artemisia is more concerned with self-preservation, rather than Greek liberty.

"Homer in Herodotus & Aeschylus: Assimilating the 'Other'" examines the influence of Homer's *Iliad* on Herodotus and Aeschylus' constructions of both Greek and Persian identities. While Homer's works serve as a foundation of Greek literature, they also provide a cultural framework for the literary construction of Greek identity (Boedeker, 2002). Furthermore, this paper argues that both Herodotus and Aeschylus echo Homer in their portrayals of the Persians

in order to warn their audiences of the dangers of arrogance and of sudden reversals of fortune, a common fate for those displaying hubris (Saïd, 2006).

“Herodotus’ Characterization of a Divine Xerxes” discusses the various depictions of Xerxes by Herodotus, particularly in regard to his characteristic arrogance (Lateiner, 1989; Sancisi-Weerdenburg, 2002). Herodotus purposely portrays Xerxes as believing himself to be a rival to the gods, although the Greeks know him to be mortal and ultimately subject to divine will. Mythical and geographical allusions demonstrate that Xerxes is one of many challengers laid low by the will of the gods for his hubris. As with the Persians, this discussion shows Xerxes as a warning to the Athenians of Herodotus’ own day against the danger that looms over ascendant powers.

“Accept What Is Given: A Reading of Herodotus 8.114” analyses Herodotus’ use of prophetic language after two of Lateiner’s articles (Lateiner, 1980, 2005). When a Spartan herald demands satisfaction from Xerxes over the mutilation of Leonidas at 8.114, the Persian king arrogantly replies that his general Mardonius will provide that satisfaction. Xerxes’ boast turns out to be prophetic when Mardonius dies at Plataea, which Herodotus describes as the “satisfaction” that the Spartan herald sought. Central to this discussion is the prevalent concept of “paying the price” or “giving satisfaction” in Greek literature, despite the ambiguity and scarcity of the phrase “*dikas dosei*” in Herodotus. Through his ambiguity in this phrasing, Herodotus intentionally challenges his readers’ understanding of the nature of prophecy.

Herodotus’ intertextual use of Homer, his articulation of Greek and foreign cultures, as well as his tragic characterization of Xerxes as a hubristic and unintentionally prophetic figure, all spoke directly to his Greek audiences in terms they would recognize. This in turn gives modern scholars a glimpse into the world of that Greek audience. It is our hope that these papers

stimulate new considerations of Herodotus' *Histories*, demonstrating the influence of Professor Lateiner's work on this subject.

Select Bibliography

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