

Herodotus *Amphiktyonis*: Medism in the Thermopylae Narrative

Herodotus' narrative of the Battle of Thermopylae—especially in its sympathetic portrayal of medism—appears to be intended for an Amphictyonic audience. This suitability to an Amphictyonic audience may result from the narrative's original status as an oral performance. Scholarship has shown how Herodotus participated in the oral culture of wisdom-performance (e.g., Nagy 1987; Murray 1987 and 2001; Dorati 2000; Thomas 2000; Luraghi 2001; Giangiulio 2005). Analogies with contemporary exhibition-genres like epinician and tragedy suggest that such public displays were shaped to reflect their audience. I argue that such a performer-audience relationship has affected Herodotus' composition of his Battle of Thermopylae. By recognizing the influence of this audience, we can better understand Herodotus' battle narrative in its original context and thus his motivation for portraying certain states positively.

I propose the Pythian Games as the original venue for Herodotus' narrative of Thermopylae (7.172-233). This venue is likely for several reasons: [1] Herodotus' connection with Delphi is well-attested; [2] performances of every kind—including wisdom-performance (*epideixis*)—accompanied the Pythian games, and later traditions describe Herodotus performing in a festival context; [3] few audiences would have been more receptive to Herodotus' Persian War material than a Panhellenic audience gathered at the festival; and [4] the audience would have been likely to include many aristocrats and thus potential patrons from across the Greek world.

As to the narrative and its reflection of the Amphictyony's interests, every member-state of the Delphic Amphictyony (which hosted the games) is included positively, and many are given remarkable prominence in a narrative that appears to have been popularly "Spartanocentric" before Herodotus (cf. Vannicelli 2007). Even when an Amphictyonic member's participation

was minor, problematic, or inglorious, Herodotus advocates for that state or draws out their positive qualities in some other way (e.g., mythology or historical military success). To this end, Herodotus establishes representative-champions to accentuate that group's collective valor and deflect blame from its less praiseworthy members: thus Athens represents the Ionians, Sparta the Dorians, Thespieae the Boeotians, and—perhaps most strikingly—Thessaly represents the half of the Amphictyony that had already medized before the battle.

Indeed, the issue of medism would have been particularly germane to an Amphictyonic audience, since no group was more vulnerable to the charge of medism than the members of the Amphictyony. With the possible exception of Delphi (see Mikalson 2003: esp. 121), every member eventually fought for the Persians in some capacity. Thus Herodotus' account of Thermopylae is broadly apologetic, defending the act of medism as an inevitable misfortune which was the result of terrible compulsion (*anankaiē*; cf. Baragwanath 2008: 203-27). This defense of medism contrasts starkly with Herodotus' narratives of Salamis and Plataea, which are distinctly *unapologetic* toward medizers, reproaching the medizers for their eager and familiar cooperation with the 'barbarian' when others steadfastly refused to betray Greece—especially the Athenians, who remained loyal even as the Persians destroyed their city and temples. I argue that this contrast is in part a function of audience, the product of Herodotus originally performing his Thermopylae narrative at the Pythian festival.

Bibliography

- Baragwanath, E. 2008: *Motivation and Narrative in Herodotus*. Oxford.
- Dorati, M. 2000: *Le Storie di Erodoto: Etnografia e racconto*. Pisa.
- Giangiulio, M. 2005: *Erodoto e il 'modello erodoteo': Formazione e trasmissione delle tradizioni storiche in Grecia*. Trento.
- Luraghi, N. 2001: *The Historian's Craft in the Age of Herodotus*. Oxford.
- Mikalson, J.D. 2003: *Herodotus and Religion in the Persian Wars*. Chapel Hill.
- Murray, O. 1987 (2001): "Herodotus and Oral History." In (ed.) Luraghi, N., *The Historian's Craft* (Oxford): 16-44.
- 2001: "Herodotus and Oral History Reconsidered." In (ed.) Luraghi, N., *The Historian's Craft* (Oxford): 314-25.
- Nagy, G. 1987: "Herodotus the 'Logios'." *Arethusa* 20.1: 175-84.
- Thomas, R. 2000: *Herodotus in Context: Ethnography, Science and the Art of Persuasion*. Cambridge.
- Vannicelli, P. 2007. "To Each His Own: Simonides and Herodotus on Thermopylae." In (ed.) Marincola, J., *A Companion to Greek and Roman Historiography* (Blackwell): 2.315-27.