

## The Idea of the “Other” as Expressed through Ancient Greek Literary Forms

This paper will examine patterns of ancient Greek thought concerning autochthony and “the other” soon after and during the battles fought with the Persians by examining Herodotus’ *The Persian Wars*, Aeschylus’ *Persians*, and Plato’s *Menexenus*. It will trace the means by which these works either attempted to solidify or to bring into question the manner in which ancient Greek nationalism was reinforced in a geographical area containing no coherent, wide-scale political structure. The significance of this study lies in its comparative nature that spans three literary genres, those of history, drama, and philosophy, while examining the importance of their respective author’s position (geographical and thus also social) in relation to ancient Greek society. While each of these genres had their own stylistic individualisms, each displays a varying perspective in relation to the Persians—whether etic or emic—with both perspectives having the potential to be interpreted in a sympathetic or triumphal tone. However, in order to understand which perspective is most likely, each author must be examined briefly in his own right, especially concerning their place of birth and how they stylistically conformed the messages in their works for their audience or for their performance.

It is important to note that this overview will not precede in the chronological order in which these works were written, but rather in a conceptual order which I believe will move the reader from an etic to an emic perspective beginning with Herodotus, then moving onto Aeschylus, and lastly Plato. Yet, while the content of these passages follow this overarching organization, the authors themselves prove to be the direct opposite when considering the places of their birth and thus the perspectives *expected* of them regarding spatial proximity to the Greek mainland (with Herodotus living closest to the Persian empire and Plato being an Athenian citizen). Furthermore, the consideration that all these sources be fully factual is not

paramount since even if they were entirely fictional, they would nevertheless still display sentiments of xenophobia.

The examination of the “other” in ancient societies has received considerable attention in modern scholarly studies with the concept of the “barbarian” prevalent in literary analyses (Gruen 2010), especially of Herodotus (Hartog 1988, Hunt 1998) and Aeschylus (Hall 2010). Only recently has Plato’s *Menexenus* gained prominence and even now is still more studied by political scientists (LeMoine 2017, Collins and Stauffer 1999) as evidence for the value of cultural diversity in ancient Greek democratic societies. I postulate that a combination of political science studies, geographical origin of the authors, and thorough historical and literary analysis is necessary for understanding the implications of “barbarianism” and foreignness as defined in ancient Greece in opposition to the ideals of autochthony.

#### Bibliography

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