

REVIEW

EARLY COMMEMORATIVE NARRATIVES OF THE PERSIAN WARS

Giorgia Proietti, *Prima di Erodoto: Aspetti della memoria delle Guerre persiane*. Hermes Einzelschrift 120. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2021. Pp. 546. Hardback, €96.00. ISBN 978-3-515-12887-2.

This monograph, the culmination of research initiated during Giorgia Proietti's (hereafter 'P.')

undergraduate studies (1), is crucial reading for anyone who wants to work seriously on the commemoration of the Persian wars. P.'s meticulous exposition of our surviving evidence for the pre-Herodotean commemoration of these conflicts manages both to provide the experience of an ideal graduate seminar on the topic *and* to replicate the slow burn of an archaeological excavation (fully justifying her use of stratigraphy as a metaphor). After an introductory note by Nino Luraghi, the monograph comprises a preface and acknowledgements, a theoretical introduction, five main chapters, and a conclusion followed by an English summary of the entire work, bibliography, and indices *rerum et locorum*. P.'s main argument is that the Persian wars narrated in Herodotus' *Histories* are not the same as the historical events known by the same name, and that a full survey of pre-Herodotean commemoration of these conflicts reveals that they were remembered in different ways at different moments (which P. calls strata or 'layers') in the first half of the fifth century BCE: after 490 BCE; after 480–479 BCE; and during what P. calls 'the first Peloponnesian war' 460–446 BCE (this overall argument is summarised in greater detail at 456–63).¹ As I discuss further below, it is thrilling to contemplate the sorts of future scholarship that this important work makes possible.

P.'s introductory chapter ('Introduzione. Memoria e storia') clearly defines key terms (in particular, 'collective memory', 'social memory', and 'cultural memory') and embeds them in their original intellectual contexts without losing sight of their connection to the present work. With such characteristic thoroughness, P.'s 45-page theoretical introduction distinguishes itself from briefer (though still valuable) introductory treatments of memory studies in the

¹ P. follows the designation of Echeverría Rey, 'The First Peloponnesian War, 460–446 BC', in H. Sidebottom and M. Whitby, edd., *The Encyclopedia of Ancient Battles* (Malden, Mass. and Oxford, 2017) 279–85.

fields of classics and ancient history (to name several recent examples, those of Janric van Rookhuijzen, Sarah Rous, and Julia Shear²). P.'s introduction is also notably innovative for the attention it pays to collective trauma in relation to war memories (20–1, 40–3, and developed extensively in Chapter 3).

Chapter 1 ('Atene dopo il 490: Maratona come vittoria dell'esercito cittadino') builds its argument from an impressive array of evidence datable to 490–480 BCE: the tumulus on the Marathon plain; casualty lists in both the archaeological record and the manuscript tradition (*SEG* 56–430 and *Anth. Pal.* 7.257); an inscription recording the rules of the *Herakleia* at Marathon (*IG* I³.3); the Callimachus monument (Acropolis Museum No. 690 + *IG* I³.784); archaeological and literary evidence for the cult of Pan (Plut. *De glor. Athen.* 347C–D; Hdt. 6.105; and Athen. 15.694C–E = *PMG* 884–90); and the Athenian treasury at Delphi. P. argues, on the basis of this evidence, that Marathon is characterised as an Athenian victory, one furthermore that is thematised as both territorial defence and salvation from the threat of slavery.

Chapter 2 ('Dopo la Guerra contro Serse: una prospettiva "poli-ellenica"') draws its argument from a similarly broad selection of evidence (Aeschylus' *Persians*; Herodotus' Books 7–9; the poetry of Simonides, Pindar, and Theognis; *IG* I³.503/4 and *IG* VII.53; Pausanias' account of the serpent column; and the altar of Zeus Eleutherios and allied cemetery at Plataea). Overall, P. makes the case that the memorials of several Greek *poleis* converge in representing the events of 480–479 BCE as crucial for the liberty of all Greece. Particularly convincing is P.'s analysis of the dual function of the Athenian monument *IG* I³.503/4 as both a tomb or cenotaph and a war memorial (151–2). The quality of this chapter's analysis is also condensed in P.'s useful tables (of the ca. 30 dedications in Panhellenic sanctuaries on behalf of Greek *poleis* involved in the Persian wars made between the battles of Marathon and Eurymedon on 188–9; and of the slightly different lists of *poleis* inscribed on the serpent column and recorded by Pausanias as inscribed on Zeus' throne at Olympia on 200).

Chapter 3 ('Il lungo dopoguerra: fare i conti con il trauma') looks at Athenian documentation of the city's Persian sack and war dead from a trauma-informed perspective. Building on the theories of Aleida Assmann in particular,³ P. uses archaeological evidence and textual depictions for the post-war treatment of the Athenian Acropolis to read the monument as at once a

² J. Z. van Rookhuijzen, *Where Xerxes' Throne Once Stood: Gazing with Herodotus at the Persian Invasion in the Landscapes of Greece and Anatolia* (diss., Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen, 2018) 25–42; S. A. Rous, *Reset in Stone: Memory and Reuse in Ancient Athens* (Madison, 2019) 3–30; J. L. Shear, *Polis and Revolution: Responding to Oligarchy in Classical Athens* (New York, 2011) 1–18.

³ E.g., A. Assmann, 'Three Stabilizers of Memory: Affect—Symbol—Trauma', in U. D. Hebel, ed., *Sites of Memory in American Literatures and Culture* (Heidelberg, 2003) 15–30.

continually reactivated and interactive memorial and, in not being immediately reconstructed, a source of collective guilt. The latter part of the chapter powerfully examines early Greek drama—testimony for Phrynichus’ *Sack of Miletus* (which P., ultimately following Ernst Badian,⁴ dates to shortly after the 480–479 BCE sacks of Athens) alongside Aeschylus’ *Seven Against Thebes* and *Persians*—as an instrument of cultural therapy for the destruction of broader Athens and the lives lost to war. P. concludes this chapter by reading monuments for the fallen in Athens and funeral orations as another kind of cultural therapy, characterised by the simultaneous collectivisation of grief and depersonalisation of the war dead.

P.’s final two chapters focus on the Athenian political use of the Persian Wars. Chapter 4 (‘La memoria di Maratona e l’egemonia ateniese’) reconstructs the role of Marathon in Athenian politics of the 470s and 460s BCE, arguing that the battle was reinterpreted, along with the events of 480 and 479 BCE, as the basis of Athenian hegemonic discourse enabling continued military engagement in the northeast Aegean. To substantiate this, P. (re)examines Aeschylus’ *Persians*, Athenian epigrams, the *Stoa Poikile*, Bacchylides 17–18, and monuments at Delphi. Chapter 5 (‘La “prima guerra del Peloponneso”: il fronte ateniese e l’inizio della riconfigurazione anti-spartana delle Guerre persiane’) traces a narrative of Athenian supremacy among the Greeks in the wars against the Persians through its transformation into a specifically anti-Spartan discourse during the first Peloponnesian war. In making this argument, P. deeply contextualises Pausanias’ descriptions of the Athena *Promachos* (1.28.2), the battle of Oinoe in the *Stoa Poikile* (1.15.1), the arch of Pleistarchus (1.15.1), Argive votives at Delphi (10.10.3–4), Athenian statues dedicated at Delphi (10.10.1–2), and the Plataean temple of Athena Areia (9.4.1–2), before turning to Herodotus’ depiction of the battle of Marathon as a proof of this concept.

P.’s conclusion (‘Verso una stratigrafia delle *Storie* di Erodoto’) drives home the diversity of early commemorative narratives surrounding the Persian Wars and the forms these narratives take. Some particularly attractive features of this conclusion are: its revisitation of the theories surveyed in the introduction after their application in the five body chapters of the work (438–45); and a refinement of the strata of pre-Herodotean commemoration of the Persian Wars (445–8). The conclusion’s final section (‘Prospettive di ricerca: verso una stratigrafia complessiva delle *Storie*’) lays out an ambitious agenda for P.’s subsequent work on Herodotus (448–55).

I had a few criticisms as I read through this impressive work. At times it could have engaged more fully with relevant scholarship. The lexicon P. cites to support her interpretation of Herodotus’ use of *ἀναμνησκω* at 6.21.2

⁴ E. Badian, ‘Archons and Strategoi’, *Antichthon* 5 (1971) 1–34, at 15–16 n. 44; id., ‘Phrynichus and Athens’ *oikeia kaka*’, *SCI* 15 (1996) 55–60.

(<http://biblehub.com/greek/363/htm>, 252 n. 125) is not mainstream in ancient history or the state of the art for Herodotean diction.⁵ P.'s point that the verb *δαμάσειας* at Bacchylides 17.44 connotes both erotic and political-military subjugation (326) could have cited Elizabeth Irwin's very similar point.⁶ Relatedly, P. has a tendency to relegate the bulk of her supporting evidence for fairly major points to footnotes, as, for example, her reasons for disagreeing with the American School's identification of *Stoa Poikile* (309 n. 100).

Errors are almost inevitable in a manuscript of this size, and it is to P.'s credit that those I noted are few and far between. *Persians* 402–405 is mistakenly attributed to the chorus when the lines are the messenger's (133). In addition, I noted several minor typographical errors and omissions that I list in order of their appearance: 'open of' (48); 'dweel' (58 n. 1); 'casualy' (270); 'Graeat' (298); a line of a translation lacks spaces (334); 'figther' (372); 'Pennsylvania' (413); the running header of the bibliography reads 'Summary of the book' and 'La stratigraphia della memoria pre-erodotea' on facing pages through its whole length (466–536); 'Furtehr' (498); 'Fifthy' (509); 'Ther' (510); Deborah Tarn Steiner's work is listed under both 'S' (527) and 'T' (528); and some bibliographic information is missing from Bradford Vivian's book (533).

These quibbles aside, P.'s work is an important and original contribution to a still-vital research topic, as indicated, for example, by a July 2022 University College London conference ('Ancient and Modern Narratives of the Greco-Persian Wars'). Despite the preface's self-effacing epigraph by Hans Delbrück (who already in 1887 was expressing fear about not having anything new to say on the Persian wars),⁷ this work is poised to generate fresh perspectives on the narratives surrounding these conflicts.

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⁵ Short of carefully examining a full *TLG* search of Herodotus' text for a given word, the state of the art for Herodotean diction is still, to my knowledge, J. E. Powell's *A Lexicon to Herodotus* (Cambridge, 1938).

⁶ E. Irwin, 'Bacchylides 17: Theseus, Minos and Delian League Ideology', in *IV Simpósio de Estudos Clássicos da USP* (São Paulo, 2011) 60: 'the verb *δαμάσειας* in line 44 is perfectly chosen: suitable for describing both sexual and political subjugation, it evokes at once both the plot of the mythic narrative and its historical referent'.

⁷ H. Delbrück, *Die Perserkriege und die Burgunderkriege* (Berlin, 1887).