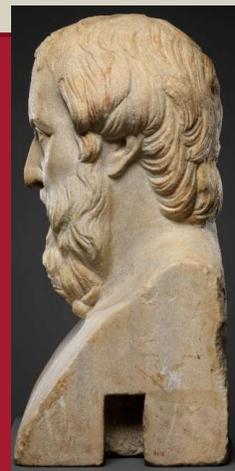
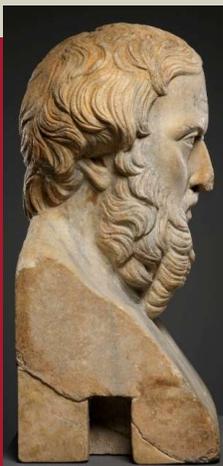


Herodotus, Xerxes and the Persian Wars

IAN PLANT, DEPARTMENT OF ANCIENT HISTORY



Xerxes: Xerxes' tomb at Naqsh-e Rostam

Herodotus: 2nd century AD: found in Egypt.

A Roman copy of a Greek original from the first half of the 4th century BC. Met. Museum New York 91.8

History

looking at the evidence

- **Our understanding of the past filtered through our present**
- What happened?
- Why did it happen?
- How can we know?

- Key focus is on information
- Critical collection of information (what is relevant?)
- Critical evaluation of information (what is reliable?)
- Critical questioning of information (what questions need to be asked?)

- These are essential transferable skills in ***the Information Age***

- ***Let's look at some examples from Herodotus' history of the Persian invasion of Greece in 480 BC***
- Is the evidence from:
 - Primary sources: original sources; close to origin of information.
 - Secondary sources: sources which cite, comment on or build upon primary sources.
 - Tertiary source: cites only secondary sources; does not look at primary sources.

- Is it the evidence :
 - Reliable; relevant
 - Have I analysed it critically?

Herodotus: the problem...

Succession of Xerxes

7.3 While Darius delayed making his decision [about his successor], it chanced that at this time Demaratus son of Ariston had come up to Susa, in voluntary exile from Lacedaemonia after he had lost the kingship of Sparta. [2] Learning of the contention between the sons of Darius, this man, as the story goes, came and advised Xerxes to add this to what he said: that he had been born when Darius was already king and ruler of Persia, but Artobazanes when Darius was yet a subject; [3] therefore it was neither reasonable nor just that anyone should have the royal privilege before him. At Sparta too (advised Demaratus) it was customary that if sons were born before their father became king, and another son born later when the father was king, the succession to the kingship belongs to the later-born. [4] Xerxes followed Demaratus advice, and Darius judged his plea to be just and declared him king. But to my thinking Xerxes would have been made king even without this advice, for Atossa held complete sway.



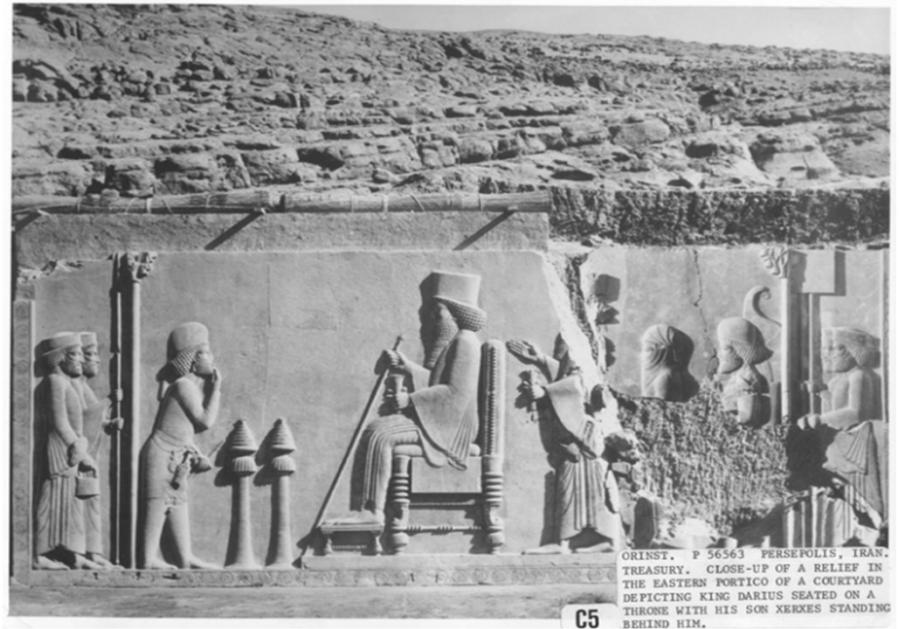
Demaratus as wise advisor

Narrative device

Greek focus in narrative



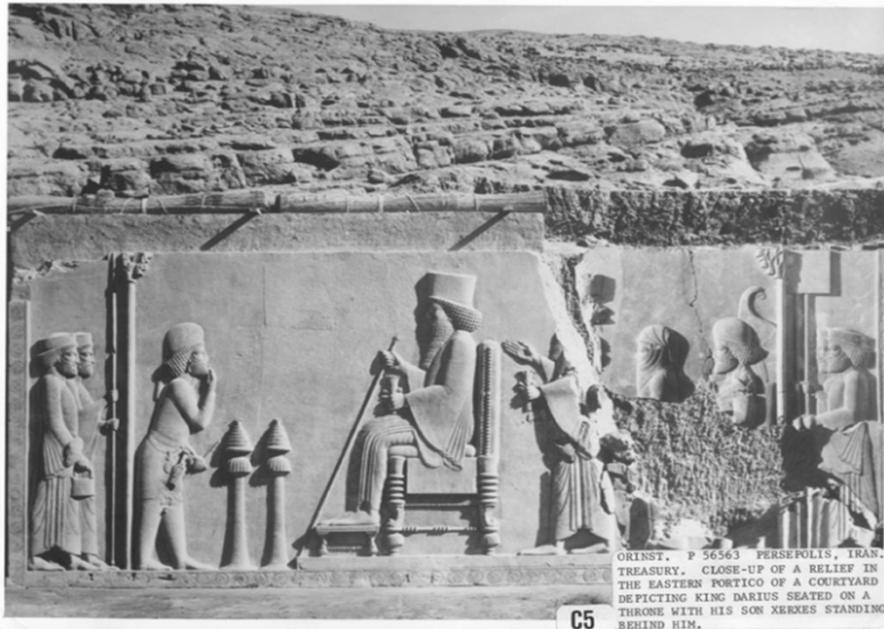
Council Hall: South jamb of east doorway of main hall depicting enthroned Darius with crown prince behind him. Image reproduced courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.



Persepolis treasury: Eastern portico of Courtyard 17 depicting audience scene with king and crown prince. Image reproduced courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago



Xerxes identified with Darius in royal imagery



Persepolis treasury: East and South porticos of Courtyard 17 depicting audience scene with king and crown prince. Image reproduced courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago

Xerxes

The King: Persian Version

Xerxes
positioned as Darius' successor
constructed in Persian imperial ideology
Stylized depiction
Dress
Posture
Size
Context

Buildings present image of Achaemenid rule
Demonstrate power and wealth of the king



Imagining Xerxes
Xerxes: South Jamb of eastern doorway of main hall: Persepolis
Rodrigo Santoro as Xerxes in *300*



Xerxes' succession
Persepolis

Darius' choice of successor XPf =Kuhrt PE 7.1 p. 244. XPf., Persepolis

§1 A great god (is) Auramazda, who created this earth, who created yonder heaven, who created man, who created blissful happiness for man, who made Xerxes king, one king of many, one lord of many. §2 I (am) Xerxes, the great king, king of kings, king of countries containing many peoples, king on this great earth far and wide, son of Darius, the king, an Achaemenid. §3 King Xerxes proclaims: My father (was) Darius; the father of Darius (was) Hystaspes by name; the father of Hystaspes (was) Arsames by name. Both Hystaspes and Arsames were living; nevertheless, thus was the desire of Auramazda – Darius, who (was) my father, him he made king on this earth. When Darius had become king, much that (is) superior he built. §4 King Xerxes proclaims: Darius had other sons also; (but) thus was the desire of Auramazda: Darius, my father, made me the greatest after himself. When my father Darius went to his (allotted) place, by the favour of Auramazda I became king in my father's place. When I became king, much that (is) superior I built. What had been built by my father, that I took into my care and other work I added. But what I have done and what my father has done, all that we have done by the favour of Auramazda. §5 King Xerxes proclaims: Me may Auramazda protect and my kingdom! And what (has been) built by me and what (has been) built by my father, that also may Auramazda protect.

Xerxes' own point of view? First person text...

The Persona of the King: Xerxes = Darius

Text reproduces the one for Darius XPI; cf.DNb= Kuhrt *PE* 11.17. Darius' Tomb Inscription.(pp. 503–5).



§1 A great god (is) Ahuramazda, who created this excellent (work) which one sees; who created happiness for man; who bestowed wisdom and energy upon Darius/Xerxes the king.

§2a Darius/Xerxes the king proclaims: By the favour of Ahuramazda I am of such a kind that I am a friend to what is right, I am no friend to what is wrong. (It is) not my wish that to the weak is done wrong because of the mighty, it is not my wish that the mighty is hurt because of the weak.

§2b What is right, that is my wish. I am no friend of the man who is a follower of the Lie. I am not hot-tempered. When I feel anger rising, I keep that under my control by my thinking power. I control firmly my impulses.

§2c The man who co-operates, him do I reward according to his co-operation. He who does harm, him I punish according to the damage. It is not my wish that a man does harm, it is certainly not my wish that a man if he causes harm be not punished.

§2d What a man says against a man, that does not convince me, until I have heard testimony from both parties.

§2e What a man does or performs according to his powers, satisfies me, therewith I am satisfied; it gives me great pleasure and I give much to faithful men.

§2f Of such a kind (are) my intelligence and command; when you shall see or hear what has been done by me, both in the house and in battle – that (is) my ability in addition to thinking and intelligence.

§2g Moreover this (is) my ability, that my body is strong. As a fighter I am a good fighter. At once my intelligence stands in its place, whether I see a rebel or not. Both by intelligence and by command at that time I regard myself as superior to panic, when I see a rebel just as when I do not see (one).

§2h I am furious in the strength of my revenge with both hands and both feet. As a horseman I am a good horseman. As a Bowman I am a good Bowman, both on foot and on horseback. As a spearman I am a good spearman, both on foot and on horseback.

§2i These are the skills which Ahuramazda has bestowed upon me and I have had the strength to bear them. By the favour of Ahuramazda, what has been done by me, I have done with these skills which Ahuramazda has bestowed upon me.

Aeschylus Persians 87

With eyes flashing with the dark glare of a deadly dragon, attended by soldiers and mariners in great numbers, and speeding his Syrian chariot, [85] he leads against a people renowned for the spear **a warlike host of archers**...how Xerxes our King, [145] Darius' son, scion of our own race as his forefather's name declares, is faring. **Is it the drawing of the bow that has triumphed**, or is it the might of the sharp spear-head which has prevailed?

Herodotus is a key source for the Persian Wars

Is Herodotus a Primary Source?

No Persian sources for the Persian Wars

Herodotus writing about 430 BC : perhaps as late as 424 BC (Evans 1979)
50 years after this battle.

Not a primary source for the Persian Wars

His work is political

Reflects the politics of the Greek world in which he was presenting his history

Herodotus' statement on his method: 7.152.3

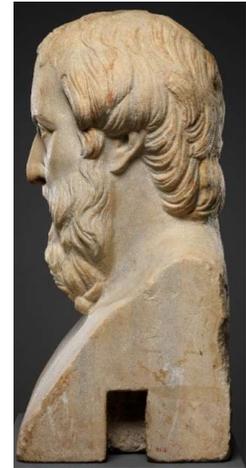
I may be obliged to tell what is said, but I am not at all obliged to believe it. And you may consider this statement to be valid for my entire work.

Narrative influenced by tragedy

Phrynichus *The Sack of Miletus* (soon after 494 BC): known by Herodotus: Hdt. 6.21.2

Phrynichus *Phoenician Women* (476 BC)

Aeschylus *Persians* (472 BC) creates characters : Darius, Xerxes and the Queen mother [not named by Aeschylus]



The Historian as story teller

NARRATIVE HISTORY

Tells a story about what happened.

Both historian and the audience know what the outcome was;

Shows how the Greeks won *the historian plays on this knowledge*

Entertains the listeners

Imparts a message through his retelling of the story – *more than the glory of Greece*

Chooses what to include and determines the significance events
Narrative History

Narrative devices:

The historian dramatises the event.

Characters: His *actors* are the historian's creations

Dialogue: with the Persian king; we are told what the king is thinking, even what he is dreaming

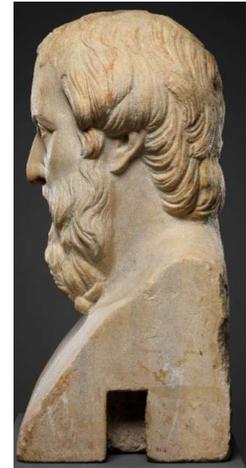
Irony: (used in Greek tragedy) Plays on audience knowledge; Persia is going to lose; the King is given wise advice but fails to follow it; fate is set: Xerxes is doomed to fail

Otherness: Greek customs explicitly or implicitly define the other

Anachrony: the chronological sequence of the narrative broken

Authorial intrusion: Herodotus expresses an opinion

Composer (historian) recreates the events for us.



Herodotus' Historical process

Human and Divine explanations: fate

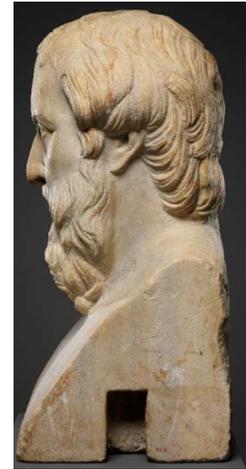
Xerxes' explanation 7.8a

Men of Persia, I am not bringing in and establishing a new custom, but following one that I have inherited. As I learn from our elders, we have never yet remained at peace ever since Cyrus deposed Astyages and we won this sovereignty from the Medes. It is the will of heaven; and we ourselves win advantage by our many enterprises. No one needs to tell you, who already know them well, which nations Cyrus and Cambyses and Darius my father subdued and added to our realm. [2] Ever since I came to this throne, I have considered how I might not fall short of my predecessors in this honor, and not add less power to the Persians; and my considerations persuade me that we may win not only renown, but a land neither less nor worse, and more fertile, than that which we now possess; and we would also gain vengeance and requital. For this cause I have now summoned you together, that I may impart to you what I intend to do.

Dyanstic expectation
Imperial policy

Divine level

Compelling Dream 7.12-18; ironic loss of crown in a dream 7.19

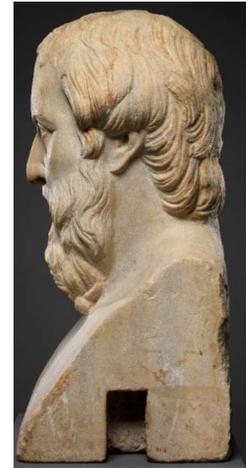


Herodotus' Xerxes

A character constructed by Herodotus

Pythios the Lydian presents Xerxes with a generous gift and is honoured by the king. But when he later asks that one of his five sons stays home: 7.39

Xerxes became very angry and thus replied: “Villain, you see me marching against Hellas myself, and taking with me my sons and brothers and relations and friends; do you, my slave, who should have followed me with all your household and your very wife, speak to me of your son? Be well assured of this, that a man's spirit dwells in his ears; when it hears good words it fills the whole body with delight, but when it hears the opposite it swells with anger. [2] When you did me good service and promised more, you will never boast that you outdid your king in the matter of benefits; and now that you have turned aside to the way of shamelessness, you will receive a lesser requital than you merit. You and four of your sons are saved by your hospitality; but you shall be punished by the life of that one you most desire to keep.” [3] With that reply, he immediately ordered those who were assigned to do these things to find the eldest of Pythius sons and cut him in half, then to set one half of his body on the right side of the road and the other on the left, so that the army would pass between them.



Herodotus' Xerxes

Constructed by Herodotus

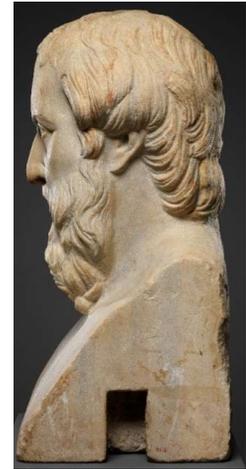
Violent, Cruel, tyrannical 8.109.3

When Themistocles...said ...[3] for it is not we who have won this victory, but the gods and the heroes, who deemed Asia and Europe too great a realm for one man to rule, and that a wicked man and an impious one who dealt alike with temples and bones, burning and overthrowing the images of the gods,—yes, and one who scourged the sea and threw fetters into it.

WICKED
IMPIOUS

PUNISHED BY THE GODS

Themes drawn out in the narrative by the historian



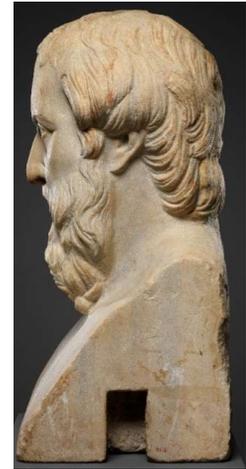
Herodotus' theme

Theme: the war is Free vs slaves

Hdt. 7.102; 7.104.1

Demaratus heard this and said, “O King, since you bid me by all means to speak the whole truth, and to say what you will not later prove to be false, in Hellas poverty is always endemic, but courage is acquired as the fruit of wisdom and strong law; by use of this courage Hellas defends herself from poverty and tyranny. [2] Now I praise all the Greeks who dwell in those Dorian lands, yet I am not going to speak these words about all of them, but only about the Lacedaemonians. First, they will never accept conditions from you that bring slavery upon Hellas; and second, they will meet you in battle even if all the other Greeks are on your side. [3] Do not ask me how many these men are who can do this; they will fight with you whether they have an army of a thousand men, or more than that, or less.” ...

So is it with the Lacedaemonians; fighting singly they are as brave as any man living, and together they are the best warriors on earth. They are free, yet not wholly free: law is their master, whom they fear much more than your men fear you. [5] They do whatever it bids; and its bidding is always the same, that they must never flee from the battle before any multitude of men, but must abide at their post and there conquer or die. If I seem to you to speak foolishness when I say this, then let me hereafter hold my peace; it is under constraint that I have now spoken. But may your wish be fulfilled, King.



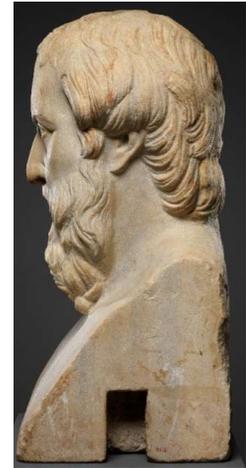
Herodotus' Spartans

A key theme

Greeks vs Barbarians = Free vs slaves; rule of law 7.102; 7.104.1

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Herodotus' Historical process

The fate of the Persians: Human and Divine explanations

The future defeat foreseen 9.16

[3] Do you see these Persians at the banquet and that host which we left encamped by the river side? In a little while you shall see but a small remnant left alive of all these." As he said this, the Persian wept bitterly. [4] Marvelling at these words, Thersander answered: "Must you not then tell this to Mardonius and those honorable Persians who are with him?" "Sir," said the Persian, "that which a god wills to send no man can turn aside, for even truth sometimes finds no one to believe it. [5] What I have said is known to many of us Persians, but we follow, in the bonds of necessity. It is the most hateful thing for a person to have much knowledge and no power." This tale I heard from Thersander of Orchomenus who told me in addition that he had straightway told this to others before the battle of Plataea.



Mutability of Fortune

1.5.3-4 These are the stories of the Persians and the Phoenicians. For my part, I shall not say that this or that story is true, but I shall identify the one who I myself know did the Greeks unjust deeds, and thus proceed with my history, and speak of small and great cities of men alike. [4] For many states that were once great have now become small; and those that were great in my time were small before. Knowing therefore that human prosperity never continues in the same place, I shall mention both alike.

Trans. A. D. Godley.
Cambridge. Harvard
University Press. 1920.

Herodotus' Historical context

Performance in Athens

Customs *of all people* violated by Athenians and Spartans by their execution of heralds
Herodotus: Persian Wars

7.133-6 Boulis and Sperthias volunteered to be sent sent to Xerxes for execution in recompense

7.136.2 Xerxes does not kill them: he sends them home

To this Xerxes, with great magnanimity, replied that he would not imitate the Lacedaemonians. "You," said he, "made havoc of all human law by slaying heralds, but I will not do that for which I censure you, nor by putting you in turn to death will I set the Lacedaemonians free from this guilt."

Herodotus: does his Persian Wars speak to Athens' 5th century empire

And the Spartan defence of the freedom of Greece in the Peloponnesian War?

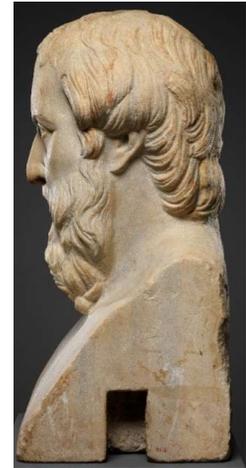
Thuc. 2.67 430 BC cf. Hdt. 7.137

Sons of Balus and Sperthias captured by Athenians and executed

Xanthippos – father of Pericles-- execution of Artayktes 9.120.4 Herodotus ends with the cruelty (?) of an Athenian general (father of Pericles).

Athens as tyrannical power; Spartans fighting for freedom of the Greeks

Athenian subjects enslaved (Raaflaub 1987; Moles 1996)



Herodotus' Historical context

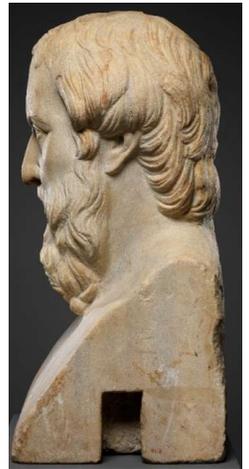
Performance in Athens: *Anachrony*

Hdt. 7.137 Sons of Balus and Sperthias captured by Athenians [Herodotus jumps from 480-430 BC]

This conduct on the part of the Spartans succeeded for a time in allaying the anger of Talthybius, in spite of the fact that Sperthias and Bulis returned to Sparta. **Long after that, however, it rose up again in the war between the Peloponnesians and Athenians, as the Lacedaemonians say. That seems to me to be an indication of something divine.** [2] It was just that the wrath of Talthybius descended on ambassadors, nor abated until it was satisfied. The venting of it, however, on the sons of those men who went up to the king to appease it, namely **on Nicolas son of Bulis and Aneristus son of Sperthias** ... makes it plain to me that this was the divine result of Talthybius' anger. [3] These two had been sent by the Lacedaemonians as ambassadors to Asia, and betrayed by the Thracian king Sitalces son of Tereus and Nymphodorus son of Pytheas of Abdera, they were made captive at Bisanthe on the Hellespont, and carried away to Attica, where the Athenians put them, and with them Aristeus son of Adimantus, a Corinthian, to death. This happened many years after the king's expedition, and I return now to the course of my history.

Killing ambassadors: breaking universal law
Thuc. 2.67.2: records this happening in 430 BC
It must have been a very recent event

At the end of the same summer the Corinthian Aristeus, **Aneristus**, **Nicolaus**, and Pratodamus, envoys from Lacedaemon, Timagoras, a Tegean, and a private individual named Pollis from Argos, on their way to Asia to persuade the king to supply funds and join in the war, came to Sitalces, son of Teres in Thrace, ... [3] He accordingly had them seized, as they were travelling through Thrace to the vessel in which they were to cross the Hellespont, by a party whom he had sent on with Learchus and Ameiniades, and gave orders for their delivery to the Athenian ambassadors, by whom they were brought to Athens. [4] On their arrival, the Athenians, afraid that Aristeus, who had been notably the prime mover in the previous affairs of Potidaea and their Thracian possessions, might live to do them still more mischief if he escaped, slew them all the same day, without giving them a trial or hearing the defence which they wished to offer, and cast their bodies into a pit...



Herodotus' Historical context Performance in Athens

Thuc. 2.67.2: 430 BC

[Herodotus finishes the Histories by noting Xanthippos father of Pericles cruelly executes Artayktes & his son 9.120.4]

[4] But Xanthippus the general was unmoved by this promise, for the people of Elaeus desired that Artayktes should be put to death in revenge for Protesilaus, and the general himself was so inclined. So they carried Artayktes away to the headland where Xerxes had bridged the strait (or, by another story, to the hill above the town of Madytus), and there nailed him to boards and hanged him. As for his son, they stoned him to death before his father's eyes.

Spartans fighting for freedom of the Greeks—in the Peloponnesian War

Corinthians in Thuc. 1.69.1 [set in 432/1 BC]

And the blame of all this rests on you; for you originally allowed them to fortify their city after the Persian War, and afterwards to build their Long Walls; and to this hour you have gone on defrauding of liberty their unfortunate subjects, and are now beginning to take it away from your own allies. For the true enslaver of a people is he who can put an end to their slavery but has no care about it; and all the more, if he be reputed the champion of liberty in Hellas.

Thuc. 1.98.4

Then the Naxians revolted, and the Athenians made war against them and reduced them by blockade. This was the first of the allied cities which was enslaved contrary to Hellenic right; the turn of the others came later.

Herodotus' Historical context

Performance in Athens

Speech of the Corinthians set in 432/1 BC [according to Thucydides]

Thucydides 1.122.3;

It may seem a hard saying, but you may be sure that defeat means nothing but **downright slavery**, [3] and the bare mention of such a possibility is a disgrace to the Peloponnese:—shall so many states suffer at the hands of one? Men will say, some that we deserve our fate, others that we are too cowardly to resist: and we shall seem a degenerate race. **For our fathers were the liberators of Hellas**, but we cannot secure even our own liberty; and while we make a point of overthrowing the rule of a single man in this or that city, we allow **a city which is a tyrant** to be set up in the midst of us.

Thuc. 1.124.3

[3] **The tyrant city** which has been set up in Hellas is a standing menace to all alike; **she rules over some of us already**, and would fain rule over others. Let us attack and subdue her, that we may ourselves live safely for the future and **deliver the Hellenes whom she has enslaved**.

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Photographs of the site at Persepolis: the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago:

<http://oi.uchicago.edu/museum/collections/pa/persepolis/persepolis.html>

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