

When In Greece, Do as the Persians Don't: Defining the Identity of the Greeks Against the Persian Imperial 'Other'

"By attributing a population with certain characteristics in order to categorize and differentiate it as an Other, those who do so also establish criteria by which they themselves are represented."¹ This statement by Robert Miles is particularly true when applied to the ancient Greeks. The Greeks of the early 5th century defined themselves against the 'other' or the 'barbarian' in establishing their identity as a common people, both politically and culturally. In the wake of the Persian invasion of 480-479 BC, the Greeks reconsidered the values that gave them distinction and shaped those qualities by contrasting them with the Persian 'barbarian'. By solidifying the opposition between the governments of the burgeoning Greek *poleis* and the Persian imperial monarchy, the Greeks defined themselves against the Persians as they developed and solidified their political identity.

The ancient Greeks did not recognize a common identity amongst themselves until the time of the Persian Wars. As such, there was little ethnocentric stereotyping, derogatory or otherwise, of 'barbarians' before this period. Indeed, Homer does not use the word *barbaros* as anything except a descriptive word.² Yet there were still no Greeks, at least not in the sense of a cohesive people with a common identity. Thucydides states that the term 'barbarian' is missing from the Homeric epics because there did not exist at that period a category such as 'Greek' against which a non-Greek could be defined.³ Thus, in order for some to be Greeks, it meant that others had to be declared barbarians.⁴

The attribution of superiority "to Greeks by Greeks" provided a highly subjective definition of cultural unity.⁵ While Hellenic identity was previously aggregative, with peer groups created around various genealogies, the construct of Greek identity in the early 5th century BC was primarily 'oppositional' in nature.⁶ The general separation between a Greek and a barbarian was the possession, or lack thereof, of specific characteristics. The

¹Robert Miles, *Racism* (London: Routledge, 1989), 38-39.

² Paul Cartledge, *The Greeks: A Portrait of Self and Others*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002), 53.

³ Thuc. 1.3.3.

⁴ François Hartog, *The Mirror of Herodotus: The Representation of the Other in the Writing of History*, trans. Janet Lloyd (London: University of California Press, 1988), 323.

⁵ J.K. Davies, "Greece after the Persian Wars," in *Cambridge Ancient History: The Fifth Century BC*, vol. 5, 2nd ed. ed. David M. Lewis et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992), 16.

⁶ Jonathan Hall, *Hellenicity: Between Ethnicity and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 179.

boundary between the two was clear.⁷ Greeks had shared customs and values that could be expressed in a common language, providing a very real facet of cultural unity. These values included *hybris* (excessive pride or self-confidence), *ate* (destructive behavior leading to the person's downfall), *time* (honor), *dike* (justice), *arete* (inherent virtue or excellence), and *charis* (grace or obligation).⁸ Those who lacked those essential qualities, whether good or bad, were thus 'barbarian'. Indeed, Aristotle believed that being a barbarian meant that one simply possessed the wrong combination of both character and intelligence.⁹

Where the Greeks were rational, the barbarians were consumed by Eastern excess and luxury and lacked the typically Greek quality of *sophrosyne* (moderation).¹⁰ Where the Greeks valued freedom, the barbarians - most notably the Persians - were happy to be in servitude to their king. Herodotus makes this clear in his *Histories* with the conversation between Demaratus, the exiled Spartan king, and Xerxes, the Persian king. Though Demaratus clearly states that he only speaks for the Lacedaemonians, his words reflect a general Greek sentiment: they would resist a Persian invasion regardless of unfavorable odds, for they would not passively accept any situation that brought slavery to Greece.¹¹ The stereotypes of barbarians also included images of untidy hordes, incomprehensible speech, and the impression of immense wealth and feminization of culture. Contrasts were made between eastern luxury and Greek simplicity, tyranny and democracy, and emphasizing the idea of Greek superiority.

Visual representations of the distinctions between Greeks and barbarians were plentiful. The clothing in most of these representations clearly differentiates the two. Greeks, usually depicted as hoplites, are shown unclothed and clean-shaven, with the typical weaponry of the period.¹² The barbarians are almost always clothed in pants and long-sleeved garments that are decorated with animal stripes or spots; they also have soft hats, full beards, and a quiver and bow.¹³ Attic vases that depict these differences have a general pattern, though variations on the image do exist.¹⁴ The message is apparent: the Greeks are militarily superior to the barbarians. Yet the more telling portraits of barbarians

⁷ Robert Browning, "Greeks and Others: From Antiquity to the Renaissance," in *Greeks and Barbarians*, ed. Thomas Harrison (New York: Routledge, 2002), 259.

⁸ Davies 1992, 17.

⁹ Cartledge 2002, 56.

¹⁰ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 57; Hall 2002, 177.

¹¹ Hdt., 7.101-102.

¹² Erich S. Gruen, *Rethinking the Other in Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2011), 40.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

include ones that depict them as weak and effeminate. The “Eurymedon vase,” in particular, from the first half of the 5th century serves as a prime example of this type of imagery. The description of the vase by Erich Gruen describes it in vivid detail:

The red-figure oinochoe . . . portrays on one side a nude, evidently Greek, male striding forth, with phallus in right hand and left hand outstretched, and on the other side a figure in oriental garb . . . in frontal pose, bent over, and hands raised. The inscription, extending between the figures, appears to read “I am Eurymedon, I am bent over”.¹⁵

Gruen does not see the imagery as a depiction of the superiority of the Greeks over the barbarians.¹⁶ Yet the vase does show a difference in how the two people are portrayed. While the imagery may be comedic in essence, it does follow the more martial trope of the oriental-garbed barbarian and the naked Greek. This fits with the vase’s supposed reference to the battle of the Eurymedon River, an Athenian victory over Persian forces in the mid-460s.¹⁷ Regardless, it is likely that the artist was making a reference, albeit one of a crude and sexual nature, to the contrast between Greeks and barbarians.

In the early 5th century, references to, and representations of, barbarians multiplied rapidly.¹⁸ Stereotyping of the ‘barbarian’ by the Greeks added to the sense of a growing Pan-Hellenic identity. The Persian War of 480-479 and its aftermath organized the stereotypes of the barbarian, solidifying the polarity between the luxury and tyranny of the East and the austerity and democracy of the ‘superior’ Greeks.¹⁹ It was around this time that the contrast between Greek and barbarian came to mean the contrast between Greek and Persian.²⁰ By the time of Aeschylus’ *Persians*, first performed at the Athenian Great Dionysia festival of 472, the process of ‘othering’ was fully established in the Hellenic mindset.²¹ The contrast between Greek and Persian was brought to the forefront, a decisive change in the way the

¹⁵ Gruen 2011, 42.

¹⁶ Ibid., 44.

¹⁷ Gruen 2011, 42.

¹⁸ Hall 2002, 175.

¹⁹ Thomas Harrison, “General Introduction,” in *Greeks and Barbarians*, ed. Thomas Harrison (New York: Routledge, 2002), 4.

²⁰ Hartog 1988, 323.

²¹ Cartledge 2002, 54.

Greeks conceived of their own identity.

The symbolic equivalence of Persian with barbarian plays a large role in Herodotus' *Histories* amidst his discussion of the Persian Wars. According to Herodotus, when the Greeks blocked the expansion of the Persians at Salamis and Plataea they proved themselves superior to the “barbarian, despotic slave state.”²² Herodotus, through dialogue, makes the comparison between “soft” and “hard” peoples: the soft people being the decadent barbarians, the hard being the fierce Greeks.²³ The Persians begin as hard people, but after conquests of soft peoples they too weaken and become interested in wealth and luxury.²⁴ His *Histories*, written for a Greek audience, categorizes peoples according to a Greek mindset.²⁵ In this vein, it is necessary that there is a natural distinction between Greeks and barbarians, and more often between Greeks and Persians.

This attitude reigns throughout the narrative. Much of the comparison between the two peoples occurs within a political context, as he discusses the tyrannical nature of the Persian governing power. Within the narrative, a process develops by which Herodotus equates all Persians, and thus all barbarians, with tyranny. As the Persians obey the Great King, there is an inevitable link between barbarians and royal power.²⁶ This connection allows for royalty to be essentially barbaric in nature, and thus every king - barbarian or not - resembles the Great King, the *ho barbaros*, to some extent.²⁷ This process establishes a tangible opposition between the Persians and the Greeks, with royal power portrayed as thoroughly non-Greek.

Herodotus becomes even more specific with his distinctions as he brings tyrants into the narrative. The king and the tyrant are “two of a kind,” as the portrayals of both are contrived in relation to one another.²⁸ For Herodotus, monarchy is, at its essence, tyrannical. In the speech of Otanes, one of the Persian co-conspirators of Darius, the words *mounarchos*, *mounarchie*, and *tyrannos* are used interchangeably.²⁹ The first person to speak in the so-called Constitutional Debate, Otanes takes a stand against monarchy

²² Kurt Raaflaub, *The Discovery of Freedom in Ancient Greece*, trans. Renate Franciscono (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 59.

²³ Hdt. 9.122.

²⁴ James Redfield, “Herodotus the Tourist,” in *Greeks and Barbarians*, ed. Thomas Harrison (New York: Routledge, 2002): 40; cf. Hdt. 1.74, 126.

²⁵ Ibid., 30.

²⁶ Hartog 1988, 323-324.

²⁷ Ibid., 324.

²⁸ Ibid., 325.

²⁹ Hdt., 3.80; Hartog 1988, 326.

because the single ruler has no constraint on his powers. The King can violate the law, kill people without trial, rape women, and conduct themselves in a corrupt and selfish manner without any sort of repercussions.³⁰ Rule by the people prevents this; it provides equality before the law and is free from the base desires of one man. In that same interchange of dialogue Darius speaks about his preference for the “rule of one,” as he states:

What government can possibly be better than that of the very best man in the whole state? The counsels of such a man are like himself, and so he governs the mass of the people to their heart’s content; while at the same time his measures against evil-doers are kept more secret than in other states.³¹

When Darius speaks of this, his message is one that both Persians and Greeks would understand. He “speaks Greek” when he refutes the arguments for oligarchic and democratic rule, as he believes that those give rise to power struggles that lead to monarchy.³² The key difference here occurs in the definition of monarchy. As Herodotus’ narrative details, monarchy is inherently linked to tyranny in the Greek mindset. A Greek would see Darius’ explanation as oligarchy and democracy giving way to tyranny, whereas a Persian would see power in the hands of a single individual as a positive form of governing.³³

The Greeks, of course, have their own storied history with tyrannical rulers, fleshed out to some degree by Herodotus through individual portraits of tyrants within the *Histories*. In all of the stories, the description of the sole leader as a *tyrannos* is used in a negative capacity.³⁴ The best example of a discussion of Greek tyrants is in the speech of Socrates, in which he attempts to discourage the Lacedaemonians and their allies from returning a tyrant to power in Athens.³⁵ His story is primarily anecdotal, but serves a purpose in the larger narrative: the process of tyranny, not the tyrant himself, is the problem. Tyranny may not seem bad at first, but once it matures it becomes inherently

³⁰ Hdt., 3.80; cf. Carolyn, Dewald, “Form and Content: The Question of Tyranny in Herodotus,” in *Popular Tyranny*, ed. Kathryn A. Morgan (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2003), 29.

³¹ Hdt., 3.82.

³² Hartog 1988, 326.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Dewald 2003, 27.

³⁵ Hdt., 5.92.

unjust and unrestrained in its corruption.³⁶

The stories of tyranny in Herodotus typically focus on the evils of a single ruler. Any man, Otanes states, could not remain accountable to his subjects in a position of sole power, as “such license is enough to stir strange and unwonted thoughts in the heart of the worthiest of men.”³⁷ The Greek tyrants receive the same treatment as the Persian and other ‘barbarian’ tyrants do, as Herodotus records the outrageous deeds of all. Indeed, he mentions around fifty Greek tyrants, of which about fifteen are developed in some detail.³⁸ The stories of both Persian and Greek tyrants show the general moralizing tone Herodotus takes when dealing with tyranny. With the exceptions of Amasis and Darius, he fits the tyrants into a conventional mold, which he uses to prove the folly of autocratic rule.³⁹ One such tyrant is Pisistratus of Athens, who is used to provide background of the governing of Greek *poleis* during the end of the sixth century.⁴⁰ The Pisistratids are the focus of Socles’ impassioned speech against tyranny and are denounced as corrupt murderers. Herodotus does praise some of Pisistratus’ actions: it is noted that Pisistratus “administered the state according to the established usages, and his arrangements were wise and salutary.”⁴¹ Nevertheless, by the time Herodotus was writing, Greeks were accustomed to viewing tyrants in a negative light.

Tyrannicide was a celebrated and widely popular topic by the 5th century BC. Indeed, a statue of the Tyrannicides, Harmodius and Aristogeiton was erected in Athens soon after the end of the Persian Wars.⁴² A previous statue of the two men had been removed on Xerxes’ orders, giving credence to the thought that the Athenians already placed significant value on the Tyrannicides before the early 5th century.⁴³ Songs were sung in honor of Harmodius and Aristogeiton at the Panathenaic Festival, and of the heroes from Phyle who brought down the “Thirty Tyrants.”⁴⁴ One stanza of the song about the

³⁶ Dewald 2003, 31.

³⁷ Hdt., 3.80.

³⁸ John Gammie, “Herodotus on Kings and Tyrants: Objective Historiography or Conventional Portraiture?” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 45 (1986): 188.

³⁹ Ibid., 189-190.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 192.

⁴¹ Hdt., 1.59.

⁴² Kurt Raaflaub, “Stick and Glue: The Function of Tyranny in Fifth-Century Athenian Democracy,” in *Popular Tyranny*, ed. Kathryn A. Morgan (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2003), 63.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius of Tyrrana*, 7.4.

Tyrannicides likens them to Achilles and Diomedes, heroes of the Trojan War.⁴⁵ By the late 5th and early fourth centuries, elite Athenian families claimed to be “anti-tyrannists” and tried to connect their history to those who expelled tyrants in earlier centuries.⁴⁶ This was not just an Athenian sentiment. Thucydides’ Alcibiades of Sparta makes a statement that shows anti-tyranny to be more universal among Greeks: “For my family have always been at variance with tyrants, and as all that is opposed to despotic power has the name of democracy, so from the fact of that opposition of ours the leadership of the people has remained with us.”⁴⁷

This aversion to tyranny explains the aversion to the threat of monarchy brought by the Persians. By 480-479 the association of monarchy with tyranny was commonplace amongst the Greeks, and thus the Greeks sought to distance themselves even farther from their own history with tyranny. The Greek tyrants became part of the case against Persia, acting as examples of the larger problem of imperial despotism.⁴⁸ Isocrates, writing in the late 5th and early 4th centuries, discusses the Greek tyrants in his *Panegyricus*, saying, “Whom did these tyrants not reach? Or who was so remote from public life that he was not compelled to come into close contact with the calamities into which such creatures plunged us?”⁴⁹ He speaks similarly of the Persians, showing fierce animosity towards their governmental structure and his perception of their general cowardice. The connection between tyranny and the Great King is certainly clear in Isocrates’ work, which speaks to the pervasive nature of the Greek views on the Persian barbarians:

For how, with their habits of life, could either a skillful general or a good soldier arise amongst them, seeing that the greater part of them are a disorderly mob without experience of danger, enervated for war, but for servitude better trained than our household slaves? Those, again, who are in greatest repute among them have never yet lived a life of equality, common intercourse, or citizenship, but spend all their time either as oppressors or as slaves - the surest way for men to have their characters corrupted; their bodies

⁴⁵ Raaflaub 2003, 65.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 68.

⁴⁷ Thuc., 6.89.4

⁴⁸ Dewald 2003, 48.

⁴⁹ Isoc. 4, 13.

they pamper through their riches, and their souls they render abased and fearful through their monarchical government; they are subjected to inspection on the very threshold of the royal palace, fall prostrate before the King, and in every way practice humiliation, worshipping a mortal man and addressing him as a deity, and holding the gods of less account than men.⁵⁰

The term *despotes* is used somewhat interchangeably with *tyrannos*, as well as with the King, the gods, even the law.⁵¹ The description of the Great King as a *despotes* fits well with the political and cultural stereotyping of the Persians of the 470s and onwards. The *despotes* exercises his power over the bodies of his subjects, mutilating their bodies as he sees fit.⁵² Likewise, the Persian king motivates his army with the whip. In the Greek mindset marks on the body is a sign of slavery, making the lashed and branded Persians the slaves of their King.⁵³ The Great King has ultimate power over his subjects: life or death. In Aeschylus' *Persians*, first performed in 472 BC, it is explained that Xerxes's forces will die if they allow the enemy to win and escape his clutches.⁵⁴

The king-subject dichotomy is thus inherently similar to that of the master-slave.⁵⁵ Aristotle believed that the Greeks were 'naturally' free and that barbarians were 'naturally' slavish, allowing Greeks to rule barbarians simply for their own good.⁵⁶ Most slaves in the Greek world by the early 5th century were originally 'barbarian'. The ideology that barbarians were made for servitude existed even amongst Greeks who owned no slaves themselves.⁵⁷ Such a philosophy was not held by the Persians, especially not by the Great King. Herodotus indicates that Xerxes' desire to bring the world under his rule is akin to bringing the whole world into slavery.⁵⁸ In Xerxes' view, the Greeks who are not driven by the threat of the lash had no chance at being braver than the Persians, who by the nature of

⁵⁰ Isoc. 4, 150-151.

⁵¹ Hartog 1988, 334.

⁵² Hdt., 3.48; 3.69, 79; 7.35, 238; 9.172.

⁵³ Hdt., 5.6.

⁵⁴ Aesch., 369-371.

⁵⁵ Hartog 1988, 335.

⁵⁶ Cartledge 2002, 55.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ann Ward, *Herodotus and the Philosophy of Empire* (Waco, TX: Baylor UP, 2008), 163.

their relationship with the state are obligated to serve bravely.⁵⁹ Demaratus, in Herodotus' narrative, counters this statement by asserting that "though [the Greeks are] free men, they are not in all respects free; Law is the master whom they own, and this master they fear more than your subjects fear you."⁶⁰ Later in the *Histories*, a Persian commander questions why the Lacedaemonians refused the friendship of Xerxes. The Spartan delegates reply with a simple condemnation of the Persian master-slave system: "A slave's life you understand, but never having tasted liberty, you cannot tell whether it be sweet or no. Had you known what freedom is, you would have bidden us fight for it, not with the spear only, but with the battle-axe".⁶¹

Opposition between the free Greeks and the suppliant barbarians is freely explored in literature. Early in the *Persians* the queen Atossa, Xerxes' mother, relates her dream in which two women are forced to pull Xerxes' chariot. One woman, dressed in Persian clothes, is obedient to the yoke, but the woman wearing Dorian garb struggles so much that the yoke snaps and Xerxes is thrown from his chariot.⁶² The dream is simply an act of foreshadowing. At the moment when Xerxes tries to incorporate Greece into his dominion, he learns that he cannot succeed.⁶³ It is interesting to note that the two women are described as "sisters . . . of the same stock"; Aeschylus is alluding to a common genealogical root between the Greeks and the Persians.⁶⁴ The dream points to the problem as being Xerxes' goal to harness east and west to his empire, not to any similar lineage between the two peoples.⁶⁵ It is the difference in ideology rather than ethnicity that divides the Greeks from the Persian barbarians.

The Greeks, like the woman in Atossa's dream, refused to be servile to any man. As the Messenger states: "O songs of Greeks, go on, / Bring freedom to your fatherland, bring freedom to / Your children, wives, and seats of your ancestral gods, / And your forbears' graves; now the struggle is for all."⁶⁶ Indeed the expression "yoke of servitude" occurs repeatedly in the tragedy, signifying the horror with which Greeks viewed the servitude

⁵⁹ Hdt., 7.103.

⁶⁰ Hdt., 7.104.

⁶¹ Hdt., 7.135.

⁶² Aesch., 181-199.

⁶³ Christian Meier, *A Culture of Freedom: Ancient Greece and the Origins of Europe*, trans. Jefferson Chase (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011), 34.

⁶⁴ Aesch., 185-186; Gruen, 20.

⁶⁵ Gruen, 20.

⁶⁶ Aesch., 402-405.

endured by the Persians.⁶⁷ The Persian *choros* later states that they hope Xerxes' defeat will liberate them from tribute as well as provide them with the opportunity for free speech.⁶⁸ Such portrayals speak to the servile character of the barbarians, in contrast with the Greeks who naturally shake off the yoke of tyranny and despotism. They are subject to no one but themselves.⁶⁹

Aeschylus' work, however, is written almost a decade after the defeat of the Persians at Salamis and Plataea. Pindar wrote *Isthmian VII* around 478 BC, when the victory was still fresh. His work, unlike that of Aeschylus, provides a greater sense of danger appropriate to the recent threat of a Persian invasion.⁷⁰ The beginning of the poem speaks of a newfound freedom from earlier suffering:

...inasmuch as the trouble that Hellas could not brook,
the stone of Tantalus above our head, hath now been
turned aside for us by one of the gods; but, as for me,
the passing away of terror hath caused stern care to
cease; yet is it better to look evermore at that which
lieth before one's foot, for man is entangled in a
treacherous time that maketh crooked the path of life.
Yet even this may be healed for mortals, if only they
have freedom.⁷¹

This section of the poem has been interpreted to be referencing the threat made by the Greeks to destroy Thebes for its allegiance with Persia.⁷² It is now thought, however, that Pindar may be making a statement of a more Pan-Hellenic nature: his message can be interpreted as referring to the feeling of relief at the deliverance of the Greeks from both Xerxes' attack and Persian servitude. Regardless of its intended meaning, though, the poem contains one of the earliest known uses of *eleutheria*, freedom.

The epigraphy from the late 470s and early 460s BC also makes reference to the concept of *eleutheria*. One such epigram, likely dating from around the end of the 460s, begins with the statement that, "We strove to augment the day of freedom for Hellas and

⁶⁷ Raaflaub 2004, 60-61.

⁶⁸ Aesch., 584-594.

⁶⁹ Aesch., 242.

⁷⁰ Raaflaub 2004, 61.

⁷¹ Pind., 8.10-15.

⁷² Raaflaub 2004, 61.

the Megarians.”⁷³ It is believed to have been engraved on a cenotaph that served as a memorial for Megarians who died during the Persian Wars.⁷⁴ One epitaph dated to the late 470s praises Adeimantus, a commander of the Corinthian forces at the Battle of Salamis, thanking those “to whom all Greece put on the garland of freedom.”⁷⁵ Another epitaph for men fallen in battle states, “We strove to crown Greece with freedom and lie here in possession of unaging praise.”⁷⁶ This inscription may be the one mentioned by Pausanias, making it the epitaph of the Athenians at the Battle of Plataea:

Roughly at the entrance into Plataea are the graves of those who fought against the Persians. Of the Greeks generally there is a common tomb, but the Lacedaemonians and Athenians who fell have separate graces, on which are written elegiac verses by Simonides. Not far from the common tomb of the Greeks is an altar of Zeus, God of Freedom.⁷⁷

A cup with a drinking song engraved on it has the phrase, “beautiful garland of freedom”; as it was found amongst Persian rubble on the Acropolis, scholars believe that the cup could very well be from the victory celebrations of 480-479.⁷⁸ The dates of these epigraphic examples are debatable, meaning that all could vie for the earliest example of the use of *eleutheria*.

From the epigraphic evidence it is clear that in the immediate aftermath of the wars, the Greeks saw their confrontation with the Persians through the lens of fighting for *eleutheria* and against barbaric slavery.⁷⁹ This view of freedom that existed for the Greeks was one of survival, both for the individual and for the *polis*. The line in Aeschylus’ battle cry, “now the struggle is for all,” speaks to this idea.⁸⁰ The Greeks would have had a sense of what lay in store for them if the Persians were successful in their invasion, visible in the fate of the Ionians: there would be tribute payments as well as restrictions on governmental

⁷³ Ibid., 62.

⁷⁴ Raaflaub 2004, 62.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 63.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 63.

⁷⁷ Paus., 9.2.5.

⁷⁸ Raaflaub 2004, 62.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 63.

⁸⁰ Aesch., 405.

autonomy and foreign relations with other areas.⁸¹ Accepting such a fate was contradictory to every quality on which the Greeks prided themselves. Thus the freedom they were defending was considered a “basic necessity” rather than an ideology.⁸²

Yet this sense of a struggle for freedom was heightened in the years following 480-479, to the point where freedom from the barbarians became an ideal tantamount to Greek identity. Compare Pindar’s *Isthmian* 8, quoted above, written immediately following the end of the Second Persian War, to his *Isthmian* 5 written before the Battle of Plataea, which is without mention of freedom or servitude:

Full many an arrow hath my deftly speaking tongue to ring out in praise of those heroes; and even now could the land of Aias attest in war that she was saved from falling by her sailors, yes, Salamis, in the ruinous, heaven-sent storm, when slaughter thick as hail fell on unnumbered warriors. Yet, do thou drown thy boast in silence. Zeus giveth *this*, and giveth *that*,—Zeus, who is lord of all.⁸³

Many other epigraphic examples dated to the period during the wars contain no mention of slavery or liberty, and certainly no concept of victory over barbarians. Most only mention a victory “over the enemy,” and speak to the *arete* of those fallen in battle.⁸⁴ The Greek contemporaries may have been aware of a potential danger of servitude to the Persians, and were certainly concerned about the preservation of their freedom, but there was no immediate difference between the danger of this invasion and any other. The Greeks simply thanked the gods for their deliverance, and honored those who had died. Yet within a decade of the Battle of Plataea, the Persian Wars were considered to be the “freedom wars,” a notion that would dominate the Greek viewpoint for years to come.⁸⁵

This change of viewpoint likely occurred in the mid-470s, and the fact that the Greeks were victorious in stopping the invasion was probably a contributing factor. Whereas the emphasis had previously been on survival, victory allowed the Greeks to

⁸¹ Raaflaub 2004, 66.

⁸² Ibid., 67.

⁸³ Pind., 5.46-53.

⁸⁴ Raaflaub 2004, 64.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 65.

soak in the full reality of the danger they had escaped.⁸⁶ As time passed, the focus shifted from the miracle of Greek success as the Greeks “placed increasing emphasis on their achievement and adjusted its interpretation” to fit their new mentality.⁸⁷ Indeed, the Greek heroes began to be equated with those of the Trojan War. The new mentality of Greek superiority fit well with the already prominent view of the natural propensity of Persian barbarians towards servitude, leading to the addition of an inclination towards freedom to the list of ‘Greek’ qualities. This quite possibly contributed to the eventual decision to continue the war with the Persians.⁸⁸ The victory of the Greeks and the politicization of freedom allowed the move from basic survival (*soteria*) to the new, independent freedom expressed by *eleutheria*.⁸⁹

The defeat of the Persians in 480-479 was conceptualized by the Greeks as not only as a “triumphant affirmation of Greek culture and collectivity over alien invaders, but over the demon of tyranny.”⁹⁰ The cultural and political ‘other’ was crucial for the formation of a Pan-Hellenic identity, used by the Greeks to begin defining what it meant to be Greek. The Persians were ruled by despotic monarchs, so the Greeks had to distance themselves from tyranny; the barbarians were naturally slavish and submitted to servitude to their Great King, so the Hellenes fought harder for basic autonomy for their *poleis* and their individual selves. Isocrates sums up the sentiment well in his *Panegyricus*:

Our feelings are naturally so hostile to them, that the very stories that we are most pleased to linger over are those of the Trojan and Persian wars, by which we can learn of their misfortunes. And you will find that, while the war against barbarians has afforded us hymns of praise, war against the Hellenes has been a source of lamentations, and that the former are sung at our feasts, while the latter we remember in our misfortunes. I think indeed that even the poetry of Homer has acquired a greater reputation for the noble way in which he praised those who fought against the barbarians, and that it was on this account that our

⁸⁶ Raaflaub 2004, 86.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 88.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 159.

⁹⁰ Edith Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition through Tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 59.

ancestors gave to his genius a place of honor both in musical contests and in the education of the young, that by often hearing his epics we may fully understand the enmity which exists between us and them, and that, in emulation of the virtue of those who fought against Troy, we may strive after deeds such as theirs.⁹¹

It should be noted that the sources for the period are not entirely anti-barbarian. Herodotus and Aeschylus, in particular, do not entirely demonize the Persians with their works, though they do not praise them either. Herodotus writes about the despotism and brutality of the Persian rulers, but he exposes Greek brushes with tyranny as well. While being an equal-opportunity advocate for both sides, Herodotus does express a myriad of ideological differences in the *Histories* that would help explain the reasons behind the enmity between the two peoples. Aeschylus' work, while more pointed in its message, does speak from the point of view of the Persians and thus makes them a sympathetic narrator of sorts. Yet both of these works are written by Greeks for a Greek audience, and as such there is an undercurrent of the advantages of Hellenism over barbarism in the texts. Each expresses themes of order over irrationality, democracy over tyranny, and ultimately Greek over barbarian. It is these themes that became the focal point for the Greeks in creating a political and cultural separation on which to build their own identity.

Thus the collective action of many of the Greek *poleis* in repelling the Persian invasion of 480-479 solidified the concept of the barbarian. The Greeks of the early 5th century used this ‘other’ to establish their common political and cultural identity. They cemented the common qualities of the Greeks as lovers of freedom, rational thinkers, brave fighters, and obeyers of law over tyrants. In stark contrast, they created a barbarian persona of luxury, femininity, tyranny, and servitude. The Greeks, with their burgeoning *poleis*, stood at odds with the despotic Persian monarchy, allowing the Greeks to develop a sense of Pan-Hellenism with which to build their identity as a common people.

Katrina Van Amsterdam

⁹¹ Isoc. *Pan.* 158-159.

Bibliography

Primary Sources:

- Aeschylus. *Persians*. Trans. Anthony J. Podlecki. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970.
- Herodotus. *The Persian Wars*. Trans. George Rawlinson. New York: Random House, 1942.
- Isocrates. *Panegyricus*. From *Isocrates' Orations*, vol. 1. Trans. J. H. Freese. London: George Bell & Sons, 1894.
- Pausanias. *Description of Greece*, vol. 4. Trans. W.H.S. Jones and H.A. Ormerod. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1935.
- Philostratus. *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, vol. 2. Trans. F.C. Conybeare. New York: MacMillan, 1912.
- Pindar. *The Odes of Pindar*. Trans. John Sandys. New York: MacMillan, 1915.
- Thucydides. *History of the Peloponnesian War*, vol. 1 and 3. Trans, Charles Forster Smith. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1956.

Secondary Sources:

- Browning, Robert. "Greeks and Others: From Antiquity to the Renaissance." In *Greeks and Barbarians*. Ed. Thomas Harrison. 257-277. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Cartledge, Paul. *The Greeks: A Portrait of Self and Others*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002.
- Davies, J.K. "Greece after the Persian Wars." In *Cambridge Ancient History: The Fifth Century BC*, vol. 5. 2nd ed. Ed. David M. Lewis, John Boardman, J.K. Davies, and M. Ostwald. 15-33. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992.
- Dewald, Carolyn. "Form and Content: The Question of Tyranny in Herodotus." In *Popular Tyranny*. Ed. Kathryn A. Morgan. 25-58. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2003.
- Gammie, John G. "Herodotus on Kings and Tyrants: Objective Historiography or Conventional Portraiture?" *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 45 (1986): 171-195.
- Gruen, Erich S. *Rethinking the Other in Antiquity*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2011.
- Hall, Edith. *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition through Tragedy*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989.
- Hall, Jonathan. *Hellenicity: Between Ethnicity and Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002.
- Harrison, Thomas. "General Introduction." In *Greeks and Barbarians*. Ed. Thomas Harrison. 1-23. New York: Routledge, 2002.

- Hartog, François. *The Mirror of Herodotus: The Representation of the Other in the Writing of History*. Trans. Janet Lloyd. London: University of California Press, 1988.
- Meier, Christian. *A Culture of Freedom: Ancient Greece and the Origins of Europe*. Trans. Jefferson Chase. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011.
- Miles, Robert. *Racism*. New York: Routledge, 1989.
- Raaflaub, Kurt. “Stick and Glue: The Function of Tyranny in Fifth-Century Athenian Democracy.” In *Popular Tyranny*. Ed. Kathryn A. Morgan, 59-98. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2003.
- . *The Discovery of Freedom in Ancient Greece*. Trans. Renate Franciscono. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.
- Redfield, James. “Herodotus the Tourist.” In *Greeks and Barbarians*, ed. Thomas Harrison, 24-49. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.
- Ward, Ann. *Herodotus and the Philosophy of Empire*. Waco, TX: Baylor UP, 2008.