

## Philip and Alexander's Invented Tradition of the Persian Wars: Its Origin and Legacy

Philip II and Alexander the Great made extensive use of the Persian Wars to justify their invasion of the Persian Empire. This much is generally recognized. But the Macedonian kings did not passively accept the existing classical tradition of the war, which was dominated by local recollections centered on one or another polis. Rather, I argue that they invented a new tradition, one that was much more panhellenic in outlook. The novelty of their invented tradition and its long-term impact are overlooked in discussions of Persian-War memory (Jung 2006 and Bridges, Hall, and Rhodes 2007). But by shifting emphasis toward the collective effort, the Macedonians elevated the Persian Wars to the status of 'national' myth and paved the way for all Greeks and later the Romans to stake a claim.

Philip and Alexander's total interaction with the Persian Wars is too extensive to be covered fully here. In this paper I focus on one key element, their decision not to commemorate the conflict from the perspective of their Macedonian homeland. Earlier recollections of the Persian Wars – even those with panhellenic aspirations – tended to be intensely parochial. West (1970) has collected a list of states whose surviving commemorations imply that they alone had saved Greece: Athens, Corinth, Megara, Tegea, and Locris. Thucydides' Athenians are similarly myopic fifty years later even when addressing the Spartans (1.73.4-74). Well into the fourth century Isocrates can present a patently Athenocentric treatment of the Persian Wars in his ostensibly panhellenic call to arms, the *Panegyricus* (4.71-99).

I believe Philip and Alexander recognized the limitations of a tradition centered on individual states. Although they frequently referred to the Persian Wars, in only one case is Macedon mentioned (Arr. 2.14.4 and Curt. 4.1.10-11). The muted role of Macedon is most often attributed to the medism of Alexander I (Bloedow 2003), but the decision to sidestep the homeland and thus to abandon the state-centered classical tradition was much more complicated – and telling. Memories are not static, but distort easily under the pressure of present circumstances (Fentress and Wickham 1992 and Gehrke 2001). Herodotus' ambiguous portrayal of Alexander I was not the final word. Speusippus' letter to Philip speaks of him as the savior of Greece (3). Anaximenes made much of his attack on the Persians after

Plataea ([Dem] 12.21). Had the Macedonians wanted to capitalize on the Persian Wars through their homeland, they could have done so with ease. But to unify Greece behind a grand invasion of Persia, they needed a tradition that belonged to all Greece, not only or even primarily to the hegemon.

Philip and Alexander's decision to break with the classical tradition of the Persian Wars redefined how that conflict was recalled and by whom. When a century and a half later Antiochus III faced Rome for control over mainland Greece, both the self-styled King of Asia and the barbarian republic made use of the Persian-War past. Livy's narrative of their first battle (at Thermopylae of all places!) still shows signs of a contemporary polemic about who properly owned that legacy (36.16-17). And theirs was only one in a long series of such claims. It must remain an open question whether any foreign power could have appropriated the Persian Wars or would have even bothered to do so if the Macedonians had not first broadened the tradition's relevance.

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