

ΕΘΝΙΚΟ ΚΑΙ ΚΑΠΟΔΙΣΤΡΙΑΚΟ
ΠΑΝΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΙΟ ΑΘΗΝΩΝ
ΦΙΛΟΣΟΦΙΚΗ ΣΧΟΛΗ
ΤΜΗΜΑ ΦΙΛΟΛΟΓΙΑΣ
ΠΑΝΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΙΟΥΠΟΛΗ
ΑΝΩ ΙΛΙΣΙΑ - 157 84 ΑΘΗΝΑ



NATIONAL AND KAPODISTRIAN
UNIVERSITY OF ATHENS
SCHOOL OF PHILOSOPHY
FACULTY OF PHILOLOGY
PANEPISTIMIOPOLI
ANO ILISIA - 157 84 ATHENS

**INVITATION TO THE RESEARCH SEMINARS
OF THE DEPARTMENT OF CLASSICS**

When: Thursday, 25 April 2013, 11 am

Where: Library of Classical Literature, School of Philosophy Building, 7th floor,
Room 745, Panepistimioupoli, Zografou, ATHENS

The Department of Classics, Faculty of Philology, invites you to the lecture of
Christopher Pelling, Regius Professor of Greek, Oxford University:

“Herodotus, Thucydides and the Origins of Biography”

Stiliani Hatzikosta

Head of the Department

Contact:

Grammatiki Karla
gkarla@phil.uoa.gr
210-7277620

Andreas Michalopoulos
amichalop@phil.uoa.gr
210-7277618

HERODOTUS, THUCYDIDES, AND THE ORIGINS OF BIOGRAPHY

Christopher Pelling

We are accustomed to think of Herodotus incorporating within a single book diverse material which his predecessors and contemporaries would have handled separately that is the emphasis given by Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*On Thucydides* 5). In that case, it is reasonable to think of him *defining himself against* those other writers as well, marking out his difference of approach and his wider scope. Might we also think of him as doing the same with ‘biography’, both incorporating and defining his work against other writers who were handling individuals in separate, smaller-scope works?

Still, was there any biography (or anything ‘biographic’ or ‘biostructured’) for Herodotus to define himself against? The important strands in biography seem to go back to the fourth century rather than the fifth, whether one stresses Xenophon and Isocrates or the Socratics. There was however some significant material in the fifth century too, most identifiably Ion of Chios and Stesimbrotus of Thasos. The *On Themistocles*, *Thucydides* (i.e. the son of Melesias), and *Pericles* of Stesimbrotus is particularly thought-provoking.

In the Themistocles excursus at 1.138, **Thucydides** can be seen to be responding, perhaps to Stesimbrotus himself, perhaps to other literature along similar lines. In particular, Thucydides’ odd stress on Themistocles’ ‘lack of previous learning’ can be seen as a response to a debate on Themistocles’ education in which Stesimbrotus participated and which has left traces in Plutarch’s *Life*. There is also a broader sense in which Thucydides integrates such ‘biographical’ material within his broader scope and historical interpretation: the Themistocles material opens themes which come back with Pericles and Alcibiades. Thucydides also responds to personal material about Pericles in a similarly distinctive way.

It is harder to identify any particular contact between **Herodotus** and Stesimbrotus’ material, and the publication dates of the two authors are also problematic here. I will discuss one particular case, the possibility that Stesimbrotus *FGrH* 107 F 29 might be genuine despite Jacoby’s dismissiveness and might be connected with Herodotus’ account of Polycrates’ death at 3.125; but that suggestion must be very tentative. It is reasonable though to see Herodotus as responding to a ‘biographic’ approach and material on a more general level, incorporating his presentation of e.g. Miltiades, Themistocles, and even Pausanias within a broader exploration of the qualities of their respective cities and of the Greek resistance as a whole.

What of the suggestion made by Homeyer (*Philologus* 106 (1962): 75–85) and taken further by Momigliano (*The Development of Greek Biography*): that Herodotus knew Near Eastern biographical material, in particular works on Persian kings, and owed some of his presentation techniques to such works? Homeyer even suggested, not very plausibly, that he would have treated Miltiades and Themistocles in a more biographic manner had he had the material available. It is not implausible that he did know some Near Eastern biographic or autobiographic material; he may even have known something along the lines of Darius’ version of his accession on the Bisitun inscription (though doubtless not the inscription itself). If so, that shows how he could transpose such material when he wanted to. Why did he not do so in the case, particularly, of Cyrus? Perhaps this is itself implicitly an interpretative point, one that relates to the conversation of Xerxes and Demaratus at 7.102–4. Some Persian history can be presented in that way, because of the cohesion and shape that a single dominant figure imposes; Greek history is different, more complex and interpersonal and intercivic – more messy, perhaps, but also more glorious, because the messiness comes from freedom and all that this implies.