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## War and memory in central Greece: Phokis, Thessaly and Persia

### *Phokians and Thessalians*<sup>1</sup>

In the course of his account of Xerxes' invasion in 480 BC, Herodotos recounts some stories from an earlier war, when the Thessalians and their allies had invaded Phokis in full force<sup>2</sup>. The chronology is loose: this war had happened "not many years before" (οὐ πολλοῖσι ἔτεσι πρότερον) Xerxes' expedition (8,27,2). Herodotos tells of two stratagems employed by the Phokians. First, at the suggestion of a *mantis*, Tellias of Elis, from their base on Parnassos 600 young men sallied out, after covering themselves and their armour with chalk, and attacked the Thessalians at night; the Thessalians, seized with superstitious dread, fled with heavy casualties. Secondly, near Hyampolis the Phokians dug a pit and buried pots under a screen of earth straddling a pass which the Thessalian cavalry would use; the horses' legs were duly broken and the Thessalians again thwarted. After the first victory, the Phokians dedicated captured shields at Abai and Delphoi, and with a further tenth of the booty dedicated large male statues which (presumably in Herodotos' time) stood "around the tripod in front of the temple" at Delphoi, and similar statues at Abai<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Elena Franchi for inviting me to contribute this article, and both her and the journal's two anonymous reviewers for valuable comments on earlier drafts.

<sup>2</sup> Hdt. 8,27–28.

<sup>3</sup> Pausanias mentions three statue groups regarded in his day as Phokian dedications after victories over the Thessalians (10,1,10 and 10,13,6; 10,13,4; 10,13,7; cf. JACQUEMIN 1999, 347, nos. 399–401). Whether any of these were identified by inscriptions or whether this was simply oral tradition at Delphoi, we cannot know. If there were inscriptions, they could easily have been those from the late 4th or early 3rd century discussed most recently at FRANCHI 2018a and 2018b. How the dedication mentioned by Herodotos fits in with these is not at all clear; JACQUEMIN 1999, 348, no. 409 and SCOTT 2010, 319 no. 90 remain agnostic.



In later times, these stories were further elaborated, in particular with the story of “Phokian despair (*aponoia*)”. As discussed below, the “Phokian despair” may well have been a 4th century invention: certainly that was the period in which it seems to have gained currency<sup>4</sup>. There is no reason to believe that Herodotos knew of this story. Out of Herodotos, Plutarch and Pausanias, together with some other indications, historians have perhaps been too eager to patch together a grand narrative of Phokian–Thessalian conflict in (probably) the late 6th century<sup>5</sup>. With examples such as the Lelantine War and the 1st Sacred War before us, we should perhaps be cautious<sup>6</sup>. Nevertheless, the supposed war with the Thessalians has become the explanation for the unity of the Phokian *ethnos*. JEREMY MCINERNEY expresses this view quite dogmatically: “What had transformed the loose association operating at the time of the [1st] Sacred War into a confederacy by the time of the Persian War was the hegemony of Thessaly”<sup>7</sup>.

A subtler version is that of ELENA FRANCHI, that the stories of the Thessalian war were used, retrospectively, as a form of *ethnopoiesis*, creation of an *ethnos* “on a discursive level”. Thus, FRANCHI believes, the Phokians “used the remembrance of this war to represent their emergence as an ethnic group”<sup>8</sup>. In time these stories may have come to be used for this,<sup>9</sup> but that may not have been their original purpose. In what follows I will not be concerned with the question of the historicity of the incidents reported by Herodotos<sup>10</sup>, nor with the specific ritual significance of some elements of the stories, such as the young men covering themselves with gypsum<sup>11</sup>. Rather, I will examine how telling these stories may have been one way for the Phokians of managing their memories of a recent, intensely traumatic events: the Persian invasion of 480 BC. It may well have been in this context that these stories first attained the form reported by Herodotos; questions of ethnic unity may well have come later.

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<sup>4</sup> See discussion below. The first full accounts are at Plut., *Mor.* 244a–e and Paus. 10,1,3–11.

<sup>5</sup> See, recently, MCINERNEY 1999, 173–178

<sup>6</sup> On the 1st Sacred War, see ROBERTSON 1978; LONDEY 2015.

<sup>7</sup> MCINERNEY 1999, 176.

<sup>8</sup> FRANCHI 2019, 45–46.

<sup>9</sup> Support for FRANCHI’s view might be found in Pausanias’ statement, at the point where he opens his account of the Thessalian wars, that the most famous deeds of the Phokians were done together (or as a *koinon*: τὰ δὲ ἐπιφανέστατα Φωκεῦσιν ἔστιν ἐν κοινῷ), which may suggest that this was a point his source was making with these stories.

<sup>10</sup> I have considerable doubts, but it is beyond the scope of this paper to explore them.

<sup>11</sup> These aspects are thoroughly explored in ELLINGER 1993.



### *Managing memory after the 3rd Sacred War*

Before examining the Phokians' problems of arriving at satisfactory ways of remembering the events of 480, I would like to start with a similar set of problems more than a century later. In 356 BC the Phokians, under the aristocratic leadership of Philomelos, seized control of the sanctuary at Delphoi, claiming – spuriously, I would suggest, an ancestral *prostasia* (leadership or presidency) over the oracle<sup>12</sup>. The result was the ten-year war known to modern scholars as the 3rd Sacred War. Eventually Philomelos and his successors resorted to looting the fabulous treasures of the sanctuary in order to hire mercenaries. For a brief period the Phokians enjoyed the rank of a great power, holding off their enemies who sought to restore Delphoi to the control of the Delphic Amphiktyony.

After several years of energetic fighting, the war drifted towards stalemate. Finally in 346 the Makedonian king Philip II, who had entered the war chiefly to support his Thessalian allies, achieved a bloodless victory by allowing the remaining Phokian mercenaries to slip away to fight other wars.<sup>13</sup> Philip's reward was membership of the Amphiktyony, at the Phokians' expense<sup>14</sup>. The losers were the people of Phokis. Their twenty cities were broken up into villages, they were forbidden from possessing horses or arms, and in the years that followed they were forced to pay enormous reparations, initially set at 60 talents a year<sup>15</sup>. Demosthenes' description of Phokis, in the speech *On the false embassy*, contains many elements which must in fact have been common in places defeated after long wars: houses levelled, city walls torn down, a countryside of women, children, and old men (Dem. 19, 64–65).

Naturally the war and its aftermath prompted a certain amount of mythologising of the distant past. Most notably, Noel Robertson long ago argued that the whole story of the so-called 1st Sacred War, notionally fought in the early 6th century, was concocted at this time, most likely by partisans of Philip to justify his entry into the Amphiktyony as its saviour<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Diod. 16, 23, 5; for discussion, see LONDEY 2010, 34, 37–38.

<sup>13</sup> On the war, see especially BUCKLER 1989.

<sup>14</sup> For discussion, see LONDEY 1995.

<sup>15</sup> Diod. 16.60.2. From inscriptions (*CID* 2, 37–42) we know that payments were soon reduced to 30 talents per year, but continued at that level for the rest of Philip's reign. Payments continued under Alexander, though at a reduced level of 10 talents per year. See also discussion at MCINERNEY 1999, 235–236.

<sup>16</sup> ROBERTSON 1978; see LONDEY 2015 for reactions to ROBERTSON and further discussion.



But the need both to rewrite recent history and to shift the focus to stories of the distant past must have been strongest among the Phokians themselves. They had committed sacrilege on a vast scale, to the point where the suggestion could seriously be made that they and their arms should be thrown off the cliffs at Delphoi as the proper punishment for temple robbers<sup>17</sup>. The war had thrown up its share of famous victories over powerful opponents<sup>18</sup>, but these were tainted both by sacrilege and by ultimate failure. The Phokians had suffered much, both in war losses – not all their soldiers were mercenaries – and in the destruction of their cities and impoverishment of their people in the aftermath.

How could such difficult memories be managed? There must have been varied local and oral commemoration, but the evidence has not survived. One time-honoured strategy, used by many peoples before and since<sup>19</sup>, may have been to place the blame on the aristocratic leaders who had taken Phokis into the war and then resisted efforts to come to a settlement. It is a notable fact that, in general the sources ascribe the plundering of Delphoi to Philomelos, Onomarkhos, Phayllos and Phalaikos rather than to the Phokians at large<sup>20</sup>. A close ancient parallel is provided by Thucydides' Thebans who, in the debate at Plataiai in 427, claim that Thebes medized in 480 because it had been neither democracy nor oligarchy, but in the clutches of a *dynasteia* of a few men.<sup>21</sup> Thus could blame be shifted elsewhere.

Later in the 4th century the Phokians began rehabilitating themselves, a process which was certainly complete after their re-entry into the Amphiktyony following their distinguished role fighting the Gauls in 279/8, but which may have begun considerably earlier<sup>22</sup>. At some point in this

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<sup>17</sup> Ais. 2.142. In the event, it seems just the arms were thrown off: Diod. 16, 60, 3.

<sup>18</sup> Most notably, two victories over Philip himself in 354 (BUCKLER 1989, 67–68), as well as numerous smaller victories over Lokrians, Thessalians and Boiotians.

<sup>19</sup> Modern parallels are too numerous to mention. In addition to the obvious examples regarding wars and genocide, one might cite contemporary governments' reluctance to accept collective responsibility for past ill treatment of indigenous peoples. Future refusal to take responsibility for our own collective failure to take adequate action over climate change will likely follow a similar course.

<sup>20</sup> For discussion, with references, see LONDEY 2010, 33–34; cf. MCINERNEY 1999, 202. In LONDEY 2010 I assumed, with MCINERNEY, that the domination by aristocratic leaders was a fact. It is possible that that was true, without eliminating the possibility that those “strong” leaders enjoyed widespread support among ordinary Phokians. But given the clear motivation in the aftermath for other Phokians to isolate responsibility to the leaders while absolving themselves, I would now be more cautious in reading the evidence than I was in 2010.

<sup>21</sup> Thuc. 3, 62, 2–3. I thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing out this parallel.

<sup>22</sup> See discussion at MCINERNEY 1999, 236–244.



period, one Phokian commemorative strategy seems to have been to turn away from recent events and focus on heroic aspects of the distant past. And here the late Archaic defence against the the Thessalians, with its dreamlike setting and entertaining anecdotes immortalised by Herodotos, provided an obvious topic for elaboration.

By the time we get to later writers such as Plutarch and Pausanias, new elements have been added to the stories told by Herodotos. Thus, for example, Pausanias tells Herodotos' stories, but adds a Phokian defeat and then the story of the "Phokian despair (*aponoia*)". Before a final battle with the Thessalians the Phokians gathered their women, children and property together and arranged that, if they lost the battle, a band of men would kill and burn the women and children before dying, heroically or through suicide, themselves. But the Phokians won the battle, so this desperate sacrifice was not needed (Paus. 10, 1, 3–11). This latter story had earlier been told by Plutarch (*Mulierum virtutes*, *Mor.* 244a–e), who also reported that on one day the Phokians had massacred all the Thessalian *archontes* and *tyrannoi* in Phokis. Indeed, Plutarch evidently had enough source material to write a life of Daïphantos, the Phokian leader who had proposed the desperate plan<sup>23</sup>. PHILIP STADTER postulates a common source used by Plutarch and Pausanias. STADTER also argues that the story itself goes back to the 4th century BC, citing a verbal reminiscence of Plutarch's source in Aiskhines<sup>24</sup>. Whether or not Aiskhines in 343 BC was already aware of the story of Phokian *aponoia*, ELENA FRANCHI has recently provided convincing arguments that it is to this period, during or after the 3rd Sacred War, that the story belongs. Partly on the basis of the ambiguity of the word *aponoia* ("madness" or "desperation"), she proposes that the narrative strategy was rehabilitative, as the Phokians sought to regain respectability. Harking back to this claimed event in the distant past could surreptitiously hint that their recent "impiety was due only to desperation – *hybris* and *asebeia* are easier to forgive if those committing them are desperate"<sup>25</sup>. This deflecting narrative, reminding people of Phokian sufferings at the hands of the Thessalians, could then later (presumably when the Phokian *koinon* was again fully

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<sup>23</sup> Plut., *Mor.* 244b. For a discussion of Plutarch's sources for the story, see STADTER 1965, 34–41.

<sup>24</sup> Ais. 2, 140, using the rare word *κατηλόησαν*, which recurs at Plut., *Mor.* 244b; see STADTER 1965, 37–38.. The argument is, in truth, fairly thin. Aiskhines makes no mention of the Phokian *aponoia*, even though the context, which is sympathetic to the Phokians, might have made it a useful story. Nevertheless, Aiskhines' familiarity with some elements of the story does suggest that it was being further elaborated; STADTER proposes Ephoros as Aiskhines source, but that is pure conjecture.

<sup>25</sup> Franchi 2015, 59–64; Franchi 2018b: 45–50, 60–61 (quotation at 61).





functioning) be given material form with dedications at Delphoi, dated by the very fragmentary inscriptions to the late 4th or early 3rd century<sup>26</sup>.

### *Remembering and not remembering 480*

If FRANCHI is right, and part of the Phokian rehabilitative strategy was to focus historical attention back onto the easily mythologised war with the Thessalians, then part of the effect may have been to elide memories of a very real Phokian disaster, that of 480, when Xerxes' army pillaged its way down the Kephisos valley<sup>27</sup>. Coming down the valley, Herodotos tells us that the Persians "laid waste everything" (ἐδηΐουν πάντα). They burnt Drymaia, Kharadra, Erokhos, Teithronion, Amphikaia, Neon, Pedieis, Triteis, Elateia, Hyampolis, Parapotamioi, and the sanctuary at Abai. Then part of the army marched back along the south side of Mt Parnassos, once again ravaging everything (πάντα ἐσινάμωρον), and burning Panopeus, Daulis and Aiolidai. The only parts of Phokis to escape destruction were the southern areas of Ambryssos, Steiris, Medeon and Antikyra.

Despite the sudden collapse at Thermopylai, the Phokians probably had a few days' warning: large armies move slowly. Herodotos details that many of the population took themselves and what they could carry up onto Parnassos from Tithorea<sup>28</sup>. A greater number evacuated to the territory of Amphissa, below Delphoi. But there will have been a limit to how much the refugees could carry, and no evacuation is complete. Herodotos gives the tabloid headlines: the Persians captured (and presumably killed or enslaved) those who did not reach the mountains in time. Some women were raped until they died. But Herodotos makes no attempt to catalogue the breadth of destruction and loss.

Phokis was the first territory the Persians entered whose inhabitants had resisted. The consequent destruction was calculatedly severe. The towns destroyed were mainly along the northern or southern edges of the Kephisos valley: the Persian army must have split into two or more columns to pillage and destroy as thoroughly as possible. Moreover, the logistics of ancient warfare make it certain that the Persians will have taken the opportunity to resupply themselves with all the stored grain and other food and livestock they could find. Whatever the inhabitants were unable to carry away to

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<sup>26</sup> FRANCHI 2018a and 2018b.

<sup>27</sup> Hdt. 8, 32–35.

<sup>28</sup> The *koryphe* to which Herodotos refers at 8, 32, 1 may be the sloping plateau directly above Tithorea or the much higher peak of the mountain itself, just past which there is a large valley still used for grazing. Either way, it was a stiff climb up mountain tracks.



safety was lost. There is no hint of Phokian resistance (which would, indeed, have been suicidal, especially without cavalry), so the ravaging could proceed unhindered. The Phokians who had escaped to Parnassos will have looked down on the valley of destruction – smoke rising from the towns, bands of soldiers scurrying over their farms – every bit as bitterly as the Akharnians in 431 (Thuc. 2, 20–21).

Though some Phokians evidently continued to use Parnassos as a base from which to harass the Persians<sup>29</sup>, others (out of necessity, Herodotos says) joined the Persian cause<sup>30</sup>. To what extent the populace could return to their farms and houses while the Persians remained in Greece cannot be known. South of Parnassos, there was probably no problem. North, in the Kephisos valley, if Mardonios still found himself being harassed by raids from Parnassos, then it is likely that the Persian forces will have made life difficult for any Phokian farmers who dared return. In addition to the loss of one or two years' crops, and the consequent hunger and hardship, the people returned to burned and devastated towns and farms. It must have taken years to recover from such losses.

We remember this, because Herodotos tells the story in some detail. In 343, it is not clear that Demosthenes remembered it. Demosthenes paints a pitiable picture Phokis after the 3rd Sacred War: houses levelled, city walls torn down, a countryside of women, children, and old men (Dem. 19, 64–65). Demosthenes' aim is to paint a picture of the Phokians, deceived by Aiskhines and his allies, putting their trust in Philip and suffering the consequences. Yet he does not reach for the obvious comparison, between Xerxes in 480 and Philip in 346<sup>31</sup>, but instead reminds his audience that the Phokians had voted against the enslavement of the Athenians at the end of the Peloponnesian War (Dem. 19, 65). With a certain amount of rhetorical hyperbole, he comments that, "no greater or more terrible fate than this has befallen anyone among the Greeks in our time, nor I believe even in times past"<sup>32</sup>. This is a surprising statement: Phokis in the aftermath of the Persian invasion was probably much worse off than it was even in the years following the 3rd Sacred War.

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<sup>29</sup> Hdt. 9, 31, 5.

<sup>30</sup> Hdt. 9,17, 1. On the anecdote at 9, 17–18, see below.

<sup>31</sup> One possibility (as ELENA FRANCHI has commented to me) is that Demosthenes simply did not want to deflect attention away from the disaster of 346. Yet surely a chance to paint Philip as Xerxes would have been too good pass up.

<sup>32</sup> Dem. 19, 66: τούτων ... δεινότερ' οὐ γέγονεν οὐδὲ μείζω πράγματ' ἐφ' ἡμῶν ἐν τοῖς Ἑλλησιν, οἶμαι δ' οὐδ' ἐν τῷ πρόσθεν χρόνῳ.



### *Phokian problems with remembering 480*

In an important new book, *States of memory: the polis, panhellenism, and the Persian War*, David Yates mounts a persuasive case that, despite occasional gestures towards what he labels “transcendent panhellenism”, in the years following the Persian War individual states guarded and contested their own individual histories of the war<sup>33</sup>. Even notionally panhellenic commemorative monuments, such as the Serpent Column at Delphoi, were framed as a commemoration of the achievements of a series of states rather than of a collective whole<sup>34</sup>. The problem for the historian, however, is that while individual cities and smaller “communities of memory” within states will have created, maintained and revised their own memories of the Persian invasion, in almost all cases those memories are lost to us. Apart from Athens and Sparta, it is only occasionally that local narratives or commemoration of the war come into view. After a discussion of the complexities of memory at Plataiai, Yates comments: “Surely the Thespians, Phocians, Ionians, and islanders had as much cause as the Plataeans to tell more complex Persian-War stories. But occasion does not guarantee a corresponding memory. Without corroborating evidence, we are left with Plataea alone”<sup>35</sup>.

As YATES hints at, the Phokians are indeed an interesting case. Having suffered so much, there will have been a need for the community to arrive at a language for talking about such a series of traumatic events. Yet the difficulties for the Phokians transcended those of many other states: first, how to construct any sort of heroic narrative out of their part in the war; and second, how to justify to themselves the decision, ultimately disastrous, to stand against the Persians at all.

It seems to be a sad feature of states which are not born through war that, at a fairly early stage in their history, they feel a need to prove themselves militarily. My own country, Australia, born peaceably enough (leaving aside the ill-treatment of the indigenous population) in 1901, had failed in some people’s eyes, to pass a certain test of nationhood. When

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<sup>33</sup> YATES 2019, 3–8 and *passim*.

<sup>34</sup> In the case of the Serpent Column, this occurred as a reaction to an initial attempt by the Spartan Pausanias to define the monument in terms of the collective response to Persia (albeit in terms of his own leadership). The initial inscription was replaced with one listing 31 poleis which had fought against the Persians (the earliest source is Thuc. 1, 132, 2–3). See YATES 2019, 29–60, who concludes that in its revised form the serpent Column “did not transcend the state, but was rather defined by it” (60).

<sup>35</sup> YATES 2019, 178.





World War I came in 1914, many Australians saw it as a chance to prove themselves. The war became a performance of nationhood, one soon mythologised<sup>36</sup>. Similar processes may be found in antiquity, most notably in Athens, whose triumphant victory at Marathon came around 15 years after Kleisthenes' effective creation of the Athenian state<sup>37</sup>. We do not know the processes by which the Phokian *koinon* came to be created<sup>38</sup>, but it is likely enough to have been in the late 6th century, a time of fertile political development in Greece<sup>39</sup>. If so, then the chance to be part of the coalition defending southern Greece from the Persians may have seemed like an attractive opportunity for self-assertion. Unfortunately, it did not go so well.

Other states had narratives of loss which could be given dramatic shape as pointers to ultimate victory<sup>40</sup>. The Athenians were forced to abandon their city to be sacked, at the time surely a humiliating loss. For decades, the Athenians chose to leave the Acropolis as a set of ruins: the city walls could be rebuilt with exemplary speed, but a stark reminder must be left of the Persians' sacrilegious sacking of temples<sup>41</sup>. Only in mid-century, with Athens now the great power in the Aegean, did reconstruction commence. Presumably many sanctuaries in Phokis were burnt, though the only one to be left unreconstructed (according to Pausanias) was Abai<sup>42</sup>. But the Athenians could place all this within a narrative of conscious sacrifice leading to ultimate victory at Salamis, the battle which even Herodotos is willing to claim was the key to defeating the Persians<sup>43</sup>.

In Thermopylai the Spartans also had memories of a disaster to cope with. We have no real evidence for how this was done in the immediate

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<sup>36</sup> There is a large literature; see, recently, HOLBROOK 2014 and FATHI 2019.

<sup>37</sup> Adopting the view of the formation of the Athenian state put forward by ANDERSON 2003.

<sup>38</sup> It will be clear below that I am skeptical of the idea at MCINERNEY 1999, 176 (quoted above) that the *koinon* was the product of opposition to Thessaly.

<sup>39</sup> Herodotos appears to show the Phokians acting as a group, though this may be him simplifying, and it will depend to some extent on how his sources expressed themselves. WILLIAMS' dating of the earliest Phokian federal coinage, on stylistic grounds, to the very late 6th century would support this (WILLIAMS 1972: 11).

<sup>40</sup> On the problems of remembering defeat in general, see references at FRANCHI 2019, 37 n. 5 (though, as I note below, the Athenian example after 404 is more problematic than FRANCHI allows).

<sup>41</sup> Pausanias 10, 35, 2 tells us that this was the general decision of Greeks whose temples had been burnt by the Persians, but the number of examples he cites is fairly small.

<sup>42</sup> Pausanias (10, 35, 2–3) is under the impression that the temple of Apollo at Abai, despite further destruction by the Thebans in the 3rd Sacred War, had never been rebuilt.

<sup>43</sup> Hdt. 7, 139. The Athenians also, of course, exaggerated the degree to which they alone had won at Salamis.



aftermath, though one would imagine that redemption came through Spartan leadership at Plataia and with it the final defeat of the invasion. But by the middle of the century Thermopylai had been cast as a glorious feat of arms which, although a total defeat, had in some way contributed to the resistance to Persia<sup>44</sup>. This was the version we find in Herodotos, who almost certainly heard it at Sparta. The clue that this was not necessarily an immediate process is Pausanias' statement that forty years after the battle the Spartans recovered Leonidas' body from Thermopylai and gave him a hero's burial at Sparta<sup>45</sup>. There are problems with Pausanias' exact dating, but the important point is that some decades after the battle itself the Spartans were finding new ways to commemorate it, and that makes it very likely that at the same time they were finding new ways to tell the story. These will no doubt have been aimed at Athens which, in its rising power, was now inclined to make for itself the claim of having saved Greece in 480<sup>46</sup>.

The path to redemption was not so clear for the Phokians. Those who fought at Plataia, apart from the resisters fighting a guerrilla war from Parnassos, were a thousand who fought on the Persian side (Hdt. 9, 31): having suffered their lands being ravaged, they were still forced by circumstances to medize. They had plenty of company there: Boiotians, Lokrians, Malians, Thessalians and Makedonians. But those groups had always made the choice to side with Persia. The Phokians had initially chosen to side with the Greeks, but had notably failed to cover themselves with glory. As noted above, Herodotos' account of Thermopylai may not completely reflect the original narrative of events, but it seems probable that failure by a thousand Phokians posted to guard the Anopaia pass (and the consequent destruction of Leonidas' force) was always a key part of the story<sup>47</sup>. As Herodotos tells it (7, 218), the Phokians and Persians came upon each other rather suddenly; both sides armed hurriedly, the Persians attacked the Phokians with arrows, the Phokians retreated uphill (presumably to gain a defensive advantage), but the Persians, in a hurry to get down off the mountain, simply bypassed them, and the defence of the path failed.

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<sup>44</sup> I hope to return to a closer analysis of the Thermopylai story elsewhere.

<sup>45</sup> Paus. 3, 14, 1.

<sup>46</sup> Herodotos' comments at 7, 139 clearly indicate the question of who had done most to save Greece was a bone of contention at the time he was writing.

<sup>47</sup> Hdt. 7, 212, 2; 7, 217–218. At very least it is plausible. If the existence of an out-flanking path was known (and most passes can be out-flanked, as the Greeks discovered at Tempe: Hdt. 7, 173, 4), then posting a force to guard it would have been obvious, and Phokian embarrassment at a failure here fits best with the way they subsequently chose to allow memories of this event to be overshadowed by others.



The story may well, as I suggest below, come from a Phokian and thus apologetic source, yet it is perfectly plausible as it stands. JEFFREY ROP has recently revived earlier ideas that this force of Phokians (whom he believes were really Delphians) deliberately betrayed the Greek cause<sup>48</sup>, but this is unnecessary. The battle was at night, with all the confusion that entails. The Phokians may well have had inexperienced commanders. Above all, it was a reasonable assumption that the Persians would want to clear defenders off the track before mounting an assault on the defenders below. Taking up a good position to make the most of what they may quickly have concluded was a hopeless defence seems like a good idea. Unfortunately Hydarnes had a better one, and kept moving.

Nevertheless, however glossed, the Phokians had failed the Greek cause, and had then nevertheless borne the brunt of Persian anger. There was little to commemorate here. The best solution to this problem was to turn attention elsewhere. The Athenians did not need to do this with the destruction of Athens in 480, because it was part of a narrative of sacrifice which led to Salamis. But, it seems to me, later on the Athenians could not deal so comfortably with their defeat in the Peloponnesian War, which lacked any element of redemption, and so they turned away from it. It is a striking fact that ANDREW WOLPERT's excellent book, *Remembering defeat*, is not about remembering defeat at all: it is about the reconciliatory handling of the memories of the Thirty. The brief tyranny of and democratic triumph over of the Thirty formed a useful, redemptive narrative, and is referred to much more often in 4th century speeches than the war itself<sup>49</sup>.

The Phokians' second major problem in managing their own memories was their need for a narrative to explain to themselves how they had come to make the – in the event – disastrous decision to stand with the southern Greeks against the Persians, when all the Greek states further north had submitted<sup>50</sup>. It is easy to overlook the human need to come up with reasons for having made poor choices, reasons which in a sense constitute an act of self-forgiveness. These reasons obviously do not have to be those which actually operated at the time of the decision. At a personal level, in a pioneering Australian work on oral history and memory, ALISTAIR THOMSON

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<sup>48</sup> ROP 2019, especially 425–431. The identification of these “Phokians” as Delphians is highly unlikely: see below.

<sup>49</sup> WOLPERT 2002. This observation would need to be argued for at greater length than I have space for here, but it is not as simple a case as implied at FRANCHI 2019, 37 n. 5.

<sup>50</sup> With the exception, it seems from Hdt. 7, 203, 1 and 7, 207, of the Opountian Lokrians, though at 7, 132,1 some Lokrians are listed among those who submitted. Whether the Lokrians then suffered at the hands of the Persians is not clear.



comments on the problems his World War I soldiers, whom he interviewed in the 1980s and early 1990s, had in dealing with the question of why they had enlisted in the first place in Australia's all-volunteer army:

«In the memories of most of my interviewees the story of enlistment is highly significant and fraught with contradictions. It reveals a struggle to make sense of a decision that may have been difficult at the time, which sometimes had disastrous personal consequences, and for which public regard has shifted dramatically, from wartime enthusiasm through to doubt, ambivalence and even opposition.»<sup>51</sup>

In similar fashion, many Phokians must have wondered why they had not taken the easy way out, like their Dorian and Boiotian neighbours, submitting to the Persians and leaving their lands unharmed. The heroic decision to resist must, in retrospect, have appeared futile, the precursor to a meaningless disaster.

Very likely the Phokians had had to make a rapid judgement whether to support the Greeks or to offer submission to the Persians. At 7, 203 Herodotos gives an account of a possible set of reasons which encouraged the Phokians and the Opountian Lokrians to remain loyal to the Greek cause, chiefly along the lines that the defenders at Thermopylai would soon be joined by more of the southern Greeks, that the plan to defend at both Thermopylai and Artemision was sound, and that Xerxes, being mortal, was not invincible. To some extent these read like *ex post facto* arguments. In the chaotic circumstances of 480, the Phokian decision to oppose the Persians may well have been made on the run, as a snap response to an unexpected situation (there had been no guarantee that the southern states would attempt to mount a defence so far north). We actually have no way of knowing how in this period "the Phokians" made a decision at all, nor how unanimous the decision was. Only 1,000 Phokians turned up at Thermopylai: this may represent a determination to use other forces to defend Phokis at other places<sup>52</sup>; but it could equally easily mean that only some Phokian cities chose to take part in the defence. The evidence is really lacking<sup>53</sup>.

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<sup>51</sup> THOMSON 2013, 82. (The first edition was published in 1994.)

<sup>52</sup> Perhaps in defending the Phokian cities, or maybe in defending other points of entry into Phokis. The Phokians could see easily enough that they were much more in the front line than the cities of the Peloponnesos.

<sup>53</sup> On Herodotos' claim at 8, 30 that the Phokians took the Greek side out of hatred for the Thessalians, see below.



### *Solutions to the problems of memory: Phokian narratives in Herodotos*

If it is more or less impossible now to discern the Phokians' actual reasons for joining the Greek cause, we have a much better chance of seeing how they later handled the memory issues thrown up by this series of disasters. This is because, as has been observed, it seems highly likely that at the point where the Persians sweep into the Kephisos valley Herodotos has drawn on a Phokian source<sup>54</sup>. In general Herodotos' geographical knowledge of central Greece seems sketchy. There are notorious errors in his account of Thermopylai<sup>55</sup>, and he does not seem to notice that the Persians, having cleared the pass, then take a different route into central Greece. Yet suddenly, at 8, 31–35, he has at hand very precise information about the Persians' entry through Doris<sup>56</sup>, the places of refuge to which the Phokians fled, the order of Phokian cities destroyed, and the route taken by the detachment of Persians sent back to capture Delphoi. This is a far more detailed account of Persian depredations than we get elsewhere: there (at Hdt. 8, 50) we learn only that the Persians burnt Thespiiai and Plataia in Boiotia and, arriving at Athens, "had laid all of that waste too" (καὶ πάντα ἐκεῖνα ἐδήϊου). Of the Attic countryside we are only told in the most general terms: "the barbarian had come to Attika and wasted it all with fire" (ἦκειν τὸν βάρβαρον ἐς τὴν Ἀττικὴν καὶ πᾶσαν αὐτὴν πυρπολέεσθαι). At 8, 51–53, Herodotos is entirely concerned with the capture of the Acropolis. There is nothing in any of these cases to match the detailed list of Phokian towns laid waste by the Persians. Given Herodotos' general ignorance of central Greek geography, this sudden set of precise topographical information must suggest a different source, probably one written by a local<sup>57</sup>.

<sup>54</sup> NYLAND 1992, 94, 95; ROP 2019, 423 n. 39

<sup>55</sup> Most obviously his belief that the pass runs north-south (7, 176). I hope to return to the topographical problems elsewhere.

<sup>56</sup> In the past, many scholars have been inclined to dispute the accuracy of Herodotos' account of the entry through Doris, since it seems so at odds with the alleged importance of Thermopylai. But KASE-SZEMLER 1982, based on explorations conducted almost half-a-century ago, showed conclusively that this part of Herodotos' account is extremely plausible geographically; cf. KASE et al. 1991, 111–113. If there are problems with Herodotos' geography, they are elsewhere (and stem, in my view, from the fact that Herodotos almost certainly never went to Thermopylai himself).

<sup>57</sup> Thus, rightly, ROP 2019, 423. YATES 2019, 190 and n. 112, notes the repeated linkage between resistance and devastation, but does not comment on the striking difference between the Phokian account and those of devastation at other places.





If we accept the idea that Herodotos used a Phokian local source for his account of the destruction of Phokis, then we can make progress in discerning various possible lines of Phokian memory management after 480. One must immediately concede, first, that the source used by Herodotos need not represent the only Phokian approach to finding an acceptable narrative of the Persian War period. There may well have been other, discordant voices, and indeed it is possible that this source itself was attempting to combine somewhat discordant traditions. Secondly, there is probably no way of saying when exactly this source was written: given that Herodotos was still working early in the Peloponnesian War, the account he used for these events could have been written anything up to fifty years after the event. But the Phokians' need to manage their memories in the aftermath of 480 will have been immediate, so it is quite possible that the narratives embodied in Herodotos' written source were composed in the earlier part of the period.

Allowing for those reservations, what is the Phokian memory narrative that we find here? First, with its narrative of the trail of Persian destruction down the Kephisos, very possibly more detailed in the original than in Herodotos' summary, this account sought to highlight the sufferings the Phokians incurred for their loyalty to the Greek cause. The Phokian narrative of sacrifice was, internally, as strong as that in Athens, however much it failed to lodge itself in the mind of a Demosthenes. Secondly, it was very likely also an apologetic account. There can be no proof, but at a couple of points away from this passage we might imagine Herodotos using the same source. These are the account of the reasons why the Phokians failed to block the Anopaia path<sup>58</sup>, and the very strange story of Mardonios' "testing" the Phokians who, οὐκ ἐκόντες ἀλλ' ὑπ' ἀναγκαίης, were with him before Plataia, by charging his cavalry at them to see if they would flinch.<sup>59</sup> The latter story allows these thousand Phokians to exhibit exactly the steel in the face of the Persians which those thousand others on the Anopaia path had (in the eyes of some, at least) lacked<sup>60</sup>.

Thirdly, and most importantly, it would seem to be exactly this source which has provided Herodotos with his stories of Phokian–Thessalian

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<sup>58</sup> Hdt. 7, 218. As discussed above, there is nothing actually implausible about the account, but it does perhaps make the best of a story which did not bring glory to the thousand Phokians. The story, as told, has apparent access to the Phokians' thinking (though, admittedly, also to Hydarnes').

<sup>59</sup> Hdt. 9, 17–18.

<sup>60</sup> I find the idea of ROP and others such as MACAN (ROP 2019, 422 and n. 38, 430) that these were the same thousand without merit. I am sure the parallel is intentional, but ROP is reading an apologetic and very likely fictionalised story too literally.



enmity before and during the Persian invasion. The account of this enmity, and of the two stratagems (covering soldiers at night with gypsum, and burying pots in ground to be traversed by the Thessalian cavalry) by which the Phokians defeated the Thessalians, are told immediately before Xerxes' entry into Phokis, along with the Thessalians' attempt to extort money from the Phokians in return for convincing the Persians not to ravage Phokis (Hdt. 8, 27–29). Moreover, the Thessalians appear as characters both in the Persians' traverse of Doris<sup>61</sup> and in the incident with the Phokian soldiers at Plataia<sup>62</sup>.

In dealing with their trauma, there were several possible strategies available to the Phokians. One might have been to fall into back-biting among themselves, one faction or one city blaming another for having led them into this disaster. By and large, from the available sources it does not appear that the Phokians were very prone to this behaviour, compared, say, with the Athenians<sup>63</sup>. Or they might have blamed the southern Greek states for having held out the promise of support, but then abandoned Phokis to its fate after Thermopylai. This would have been quite a rational response, and it would fit with the reported anger of the Phokians and Opountian Lokrians when, before the fall of Thermopylai, the Greeks contemplated withdrawing to the Isthmos (Hdt. 7, 207). A Phokian might reasonably have asked why the Greeks had not sent forward adequate forces to defend Thermopylai, but the narrative would have been rather muddled by the Phokians' own inglorious role in the failure of the defence.

Whatever the reasons, Herodotos' source chose to blame, not the Persians themselves but the Greeks who had supported them and, in particular, the Thessalians. Having set the Thessalians up as the villains, hatred of them could also be made the answer to the burning question of why the Phokians had made the fatal decision to take the Greek side. At 8, 30 Herodotos claims as his own the view that the Phokians resisted the Persians simply out of hatred for the Thessalians: if the Thessalians had resisted, the Phokians would have medized. How could he possibly know, if it did not come from his Phokian source? For the Phokians, the view that their hatred of the Thessalians had given them no choice but to resist in 480 solved a major problem.

But this justification for the rash act of resisting the Persians needed to be backed up by a solid narrative of historical conflict with the Thessalians.

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<sup>61</sup> Hdt. 8, 31: the Thessalians protected the Dorians from harm.

<sup>62</sup> Hdt. 9, 17, 4: the Phokian commander, Harmokydes, assumes that it is due to Thessalian hostility that Mardonios wants to kill them.

<sup>63</sup> Though see above on the possible adoption of this tactic after the 3rd Sacred War.



That narrative, with its tales of striking victories against superior forces, could then do double duty as a means of deflecting attention from the Phokians' rather unsatisfactory performance at Thermopylai. For Herodotos, the main point of the narrative of the Phokian victories over the Thessalians, apart from its intrinsic colour, is to explain Phokian resistance to the Persians. For the Phokians themselves, it provided a heroic narrative comparable with the Athenian narrative of the overthrow of the Thirty.

Presumably there was a level of hostility between Phokians and Thessalians on which this account could play, though it is possible that this hostility was engendered actually in 480, when smug Thessalians rode through Phokis as privileged allies of the Persians. The narrative presented by Herodotos' source was one which could restore some measure of pride to the Phokians through tales of defeat of an enemy who, given their medizing, could be regarded as a proxy for the Persians. But these stories did not actually need to be true, and we should be cautious in placing too much weight on them as evidence for an earlier period of Thessalian hegemony<sup>64</sup>.

### *Phokis and Delphoi*

Why pick the Thessalians as the enemy *du jour*? Part of the answer may simply be that all the medizing states were under a cloud after the war<sup>65</sup>, but another part may be connected with Delphoi<sup>66</sup>. There is no reason at all to assume that Delphoi was regarded as part of Phokis in 480. The fact that Pytho and Krisa appear in the Phokian section of Homer's Catalogue of Ships may say something about geographical ideas in the 7th century<sup>67</sup>, but nothing about the actual political situation in the 6th. There is no evidence that Delphoi had ever been seen as part of Phokis. That was soon to change.

In 480, Delphoi transparently medized. The oracle had tried to deter the Greeks from fighting the Persians<sup>68</sup>, and then when the Persians actually

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<sup>64</sup> It might be objected that Herodotos refers to spoils from these victories dedicated at Abai and Delphoi (8, 27, 4–5), which should presumably have existed as physical evidence in the 5th century. But existing dedications could too easily be repurposed to fit new narratives, especially in the likely absence at this period of identifying inscriptions.

<sup>65</sup> For a recent summary, see YATES 2019, 103–104.

<sup>66</sup> The following section sketches out ideas which I hope to develop more fully elsewhere.

<sup>67</sup> Hom., *Iliad* 2, 519–520.

<sup>68</sup> Much has been written about this. For a useful recent summary of the arguments, arriving at what I would see as the correct conclusion, see ROP 1999, 425–428. The Persian War oracles related in Herodotos are no doubt polished literary versions which do not preserve the original wording, but their tenor is clear and consistent.



came to attack the sanctuary it was saved by a series of miraculous interventions. The story is told by Herodotos at 8, 36–39, immediately following the description of the Persians' march through Phokis. It seems most likely to come from the same source: it is full, for example, of the same sort of topographical detail, of the route taken by the Persians and where exactly the Delphians had retreated to. In that case, I would postulate, the source is Phokian (and clearly, incidentally, treats the Delphoi as a group of people separate from the Phokians). Herodotos offers the account of the miracles at Delphoi without comment. Whether his source did likewise is hard to detect.

Whatever the views of the particular writer Herodotos used, the Phokians at large were perhaps not inclined to forgive Delphoi for its role in their destruction. They may have felt that a bolder approach by the oracle would have encouraged the southern Greeks to defend central Greece more spiritedly. Or they may simply have resented the sanctuary's freedom from plundering when their own cities and sanctuaries had been burnt and pillaged. The clue is in the "so-called Sacred War", related so briefly at Thucydides 1, 112, 3. All Thucydides tells us is that, apparently in the very early 440s, the Spartans marched out, took control of Delphoi, and handed it over to the Delphians, after which the Athenians marched out and reversed the process by handing Delphoi over to the Phokians<sup>69</sup>. The details of this event are not important here, though one would badly like to know more and, especially, by whom the war was called "sacred". What is important for our purposes is that clearly at some point between the Persian invasion and the date of this war<sup>70</sup> the Phokians had evidently had enough of the medizing Delphians and made a claim to some sort of control, forcible but perhaps clothed as *prostasia*, to adopt the term Philomelos is reported to have used in 356<sup>71</sup>. This may have been the point at which Philomelos' basically fraudulent claim that Delphoi had, historically, been part of Phokis (an idea which has fooled both his own countrymen and modern scholars), was concocted<sup>72</sup>.

There may be two perhaps conflicting strands of Phokian thinking here. On the one hand, the Delphians medized, while the Phokians did not.

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<sup>69</sup> See also FGrHist 328 Philochoros F 34b, differing from Thucydides mainly in suggesting a somewhat greater gap between the two expeditions. For general commentary, see HORNBLOWER 1991 *ad loc.* (pp. 181–183).

<sup>70</sup> I cannot see any way of narrowing the date down more than to say that it happened at some point between 479 and 449.

<sup>71</sup> Diod. 16, 23, 5.

<sup>72</sup> On Philomelos and his claims about history, see discussion at LONDEY 2010.



There is no sense in Herodotos' source that the Delphians were wayward Phokians; rather they were a separate group with their own interests, not always aligned with those of Phokis. Yet at some point, certainly by 356 and probably much earlier, the Phokians perhaps rethought this problem, and decided that Delphoi was rightly part of Phokis and that the problem lay, not with the Delphians being "other", but in their being under the thumb of the Amphiktyony. That was the problem the Phokians attempted to fix in both the 2nd and 3rd Sacred Wars<sup>73</sup>.

The connection with the Thessalians is that, if we assume that the Amphiktyonic Council worked at this period as it did in the period after 346, when we have inscribed lists of hieromnemons, then the council was dominated by the Thessalians (always listed first in the 4th century inscriptions) and their medizing acolytes. There is a story in Plutarch that, after the defeat of the Persians, the Spartans proposed that all the cities which had medized should be expelled from the Amphiktyony. According to Plutarch, Themistokles spoke against the idea and it was defeated<sup>74</sup>. One would hesitate to place too much weight on a story which may well be a later fabrication or in which, even if there is a kernel of truth to it, the details may be wrong. Yet one might easily imagine that the Phokians, angry, hurt and belligerent after the trauma of 480, and possibly blaming the Amphiktyony for the oracle's appeasement, may have tried to take matters into their own hands to effect a loosening of Thessalian control of Delphoi<sup>75</sup>. Similarly, in 457 the Phokians attempted to annex the territory of the central Greek Dorians, who had also been left unharmed by the Persians, and whose territory in hostile hands had proved a vulnerability for the Phokians themselves<sup>76</sup>.

### *Conclusions*

The stories people tell when they are dealing with the aftermath of trauma are not reliable historical sources, though they may tell us much about the people telling the stories. In 480, the Phokians suffered enormous trauma. They suffered as badly as any part of Greece at the hands of the Persians, only to be forced to medize at Plataiai. Presumably because of that,

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<sup>73</sup> I thank ELENA FRANCHI for raising this problem with me.

<sup>74</sup> Plut. *Themistokles*, 20, 3–4.

<sup>75</sup> HORNBLLOWER 1991, 182–183 worries what the Amphiktyony was doing through all this. I would assume (but it requires more detailed argument elsewhere) that the whole point of the Phokian action was to weaken Amphiktyonic control of Delphoi.

<sup>76</sup> Thuc. 1, 107, 2; for general commentary, HORNBLLOWER 1991, *ad loc.* (pp. 168–170).





and despite their efforts on the Greeks' behalf at Thermopylai, their name was left off the Serpent Column at Delphoi, perhaps the most prominent public statement of which states had medized and which had not<sup>77</sup>.

Yet rather than blaming the southern Greeks who had let them down and then refused to acknowledge their suffering, they chose to lash out at those who had sided with the enemy who had inflicted this trauma on them. That led almost certainly to physical intervention at Delphoi, which had transparently supported Persia and thus escaped unscathed. It possibly also led to an attempt there to weaken the control of the Amphiktyony, most of whose members had medized. Later the Phokians attempted to annex the territory of the central Greek Dorians, who had also been left unharmed by the Persians, and whose territory in hostile hands had proved a vulnerability for the Phokians themselves.

As for the Thessalians, the Phokians could not imitate the Spartan Leotykhidas and punish them militarily<sup>78</sup>. But they could tell stories about them which emphasised their own superior martial virtue and cunning in previous wars. And, by focusing on the Thessalians' arrogant high-handedness, both in the past and in 480 when they had accompanied Xerxes, the Phokians could satisfactorily explain to themselves why they had had no choice but to resist the Persians, whatever the cost.

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<sup>77</sup> SIG<sup>4</sup> 31; MEIGGS AND LEWIS 27; list of cities at YATES 2019, 102–103. As YATES points out, the heading, “these fought the war”, was “straightforward, but disingenuous”, and a number of states which might have had claims to be included were left off (103).

<sup>78</sup> Hdt. 6, 72; YATES 2019, 104, 116.



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## Abstract

The Persian invasion of 480 BC was a disaster for the Phokians of central Greece, comparable with their defeat in the 3rd Sacred War in 346. In 480 the Phokians chose to stand against the Persians, but fought ignominiously at Thermopylai and then, once the southern Greeks withdrew, had their territory brutally laid waste by the full force of Xerxes' army. This article considers the problems the Phokians faced in managing memories of these events, and proposes that the stories of an earlier war with the Thessalians found at Hdt. 8.27–28 were created as an alternative, more heroic narrative, with the Thessalians standing as proxies for the Persians. As a consequence, the whole story of the supposed war with Thessaly should be treated with caution, as should the idea that resistance to Thessaly lay behind the unity of Phokis. As FRANCHI and others have noted, these stories were further developed in the 4th century when the Phokians faced a new set of problems in narrating the past.

Keywords: Herodotos, Phokis, memory narrative, myth making, defeat

L'invasione persiana del 480 a.C. fu un disastro per i Focesi della Grecia centrale, paragonabile alla loro sconfitta nella Terza Guerra Sacra del 346. Nel 480 i Focesi scelsero di opporsi ai Persiani, ma combatterono alle Termopili in modo disonorevole. Poi, una volta che i Greci del sud si ritirarono, il loro territorio fu brutalmente devastato dalle forze dell'esercito di Serse. Questo articolo prende in considerazione i problemi che i Focesi dovettero affrontare nella gestione del ricordo di questi eventi, e propone che le storie di una precedente guerra contro i Tessali narrate in Hdt. 8, 27-28 siano state create come una sorta di racconto alternativo, più eroico, con i Tessali come sostituti dei Persiani. Di conseguenza, l'intera storia della presunta guerra con la Tessaglia deve essere trattata con cautela, così come l'idea che la resistenza alla Tessaglia come presupposto all'unità della Focide. Come hanno notato FRANCHI e altri, queste storie sono state ulteriormente sviluppate nel IV secolo, quando i Focesi affrontarono una nuova serie di problemi nel raccontare il passato.

Parole chiave: Erodoto, Focide, narrazione della memoria, costruzione del mito, sconfitta