

In Plutarch's view, Herodotus is too fond of polarizing questions of motivation into better and worse, and of emphasizing the latter at the expense of the former (cf. *de Malignitate Herodoti* 855e-856b). Plutarch's perspective is usually regarded as slapdash and casualizing. But is it really so mistaken? In this paper I will argue that Plutarch has put his finger on something important, for his praise-and-blame formulation can indeed at times be appropriate in discussing the *Histories'* presentation of motives. But qualifications are in order.

The paper contributes to the discussion of Herodotean alternative accounts of Lateiner (1989, 76-90), Flory (1987, 70-79), and Gray (2003), focusing on instances where the alternative possibilities relate to questions of motivation. It first reviews cases where Herodotus' presentation of alternative motives is not reducible to Plutarch's framework, for example, where the double explanations do not represent true alternatives, or where no ethical judgment attaches to a particular choice but the alternatives simply enrich the background of potential explanation. Next, it turns to addressing cases where Plutarch's analysis can indeed sensitize us to an important aspect of Herodotus' technique. I suggest that Herodotus' presentation of alternative motives does at times invite a morally-laden interpretation, for example when the alternatives tend towards idealistic (and other-regarding) over against self-seeking (cf. Nenci (1994) ad 5.24.8-9, observing the frequent juxtaposition of 'una motivazione ideale e una motivazione materialistica') - and such instances are significant, for they elicit an especially committed response on the reader's part. The ascriptions of alternative motives guide readers' responses by highlighting the existence of rival potential interpretations, often with serious moral implications, and by focusing a narrative's various interpretative strands. While Herodotus on occasion betrays a tendency 'to go for the worst interpretation' (cf. Plutarch, *DMH* 859c-e: the Spartans' motives in campaigning against Polycrates; 861d-e: the Phocians' motives in not medizing), his usual method is more nuanced. Rather than simply favoring a more negative reading, he molds an account in such a way as to keep different possible motives in play over its course, with the narrative inviting shifting responses on the part of readers as different factors are brought to their attention. The various possible motives do commonly fall into a polarized scheme.

Herodotus' account of the Athenians' motives in expelling the Pelasgians (6.137-139), which is focused around the question of whether they were motivated 'justly or unjustly' (6.137.1), is taken as a case study for illustrating the technique. I argue that the Athenians are viewed negatively for their treatment of the Pelasgians, but that the Pelasgians' own baser actions in turn invite a reevaluation of what the Athenians do to them. Reader-response in such instances is thus not simply a matter of making an autonomous choice between the alternatives, but of observing carefully the often complex skein of possible motivations set forth by Herodotus and their possible resolutions. Herodotus' presentation exposes the way in which polarized views of motivation do not map directly on to more complex realities.

Select Bibliography:

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