

Sara FORSDYKE Pigs, Asses and Swine: Tyrannical Manipulation or Peer-Polity Interaction?

This paper argues that the cultic and tribal changes attributed by Herodotus (5.67-68) to the early sixth-century tyrant Cleisthenes of Sicyon are better understood as the product of broader forces of inter-polis interaction during the Archaic period. Previous scholars have recognized that Herodotus' narrative is colored by fifth-century anti-tyrannical ideologies and that therefore we must be careful about accepting the malicious motivations attributed by Herodotus to the tyrant (Jeffrey 1976, 164; V.Parker 1994, 406-7). Nevertheless, scholars have not acknowledged the further implications of the fact that Herodotus' account is derived from later oral traditions. In particular, one of the most common features of oral tradition is the simplification of a series of historical changes by associating them with a single figure from the past (Vansina 1985, 22; Thomas 1989, 280). Cleisthenes of Sicyon was just the sort of powerful figure around whom oral traditions tend to cluster. Herodotus' account (6.126-31) of how Cleisthenes staged a competition for the hand of his daughter Agariste neatly illustrates the process of crystallization around the central figure of Cleisthenes, since individuals from different time periods appear in the story.

Recognition of the distorting effects of later oral traditions clears the ground for understanding the changes in Sicyon in Archaic terms. Recent research has shown that hero-cult was important for articulating collective civic identities in the rapidly developing poleis of early Greece (Hägg 1999). Heroes were cultural symbols that allowed individual communities both to lay claim to panhellenic cultural heritage and establish distinctive identities for themselves (R.Parker 2005, 446). The mid-sixth century saw a proliferation of hero-cults in states near Sicyon: a cult of Orestes in Sparta (Boedeker 1993) and a cult of the Seven Against Thebes in Argos (Pariante 1992). These cults were important in articulating unified collective identities, but they were also crucial in positioning poleis competitively in the panhellenic cultural landscape (Renfrew and Cherry 1986). The establishment at Sicyon of cults to Adrastus and Melanippus -- heroes associated with the myth of the Seven -- makes perfect sense in this context. The second major factor that explains changes in Sicyon is the role of broad ethnic identities creating alliances and articulating differences between poleis. As Hall (1997, 2002) has shown, Dorian and Ionian identities do not reflect biological kinship in the prehistoric past. Rather, these identities were culturally constructed categories used strategically in the historical period to position communities alongside or against other communities. I suggest that in the late sixth century the Sicyonians chose to align themselves with the newly formed alliance of Peloponnesian states and that they adopted Dorian tribal names as part of this process (cf. Ulf 1996). Fifth-century popular traditions accommodated this change by imputing obscene double meanings to the old tribal names and attributing them to the malicious policies of their former tyrant. The older tribes were originally based on place names (V.Parker 1994), but were falsely derived in the popular imagination from animal names that also symbolized female genitalia (ἴρος, ἴς) or excessive sexuality (ὄνος) (Henderson 1991; Schmitt-Pantel 1981).