

Suzanne ABRAMS REBILLARD

Polycrates in Prose and Poetry: Herodotus as Authoritative Historian in Gregory of Nazianzus

Gregory of Nazianzus is one of our most important sources on the events of the Council of Constantinople (381 c.e.), yet he is not considered a late-antique historian proper. Most of Gregory's ninety-nine "autobiographical" poems (grouped in the seventeenth century under the heading *De se ipso*) have the Council as their main subject, but they are so diverse in tone, meter, and length that they are generically defined by the overly broad categories of "autobiography" and "apologetic." This paper investigates Gregory's use of Herodotus's account of Polycrates of Samos (3.39–44) in *Carmina* 2.1.34.193–200, and considers why, given all the biblical and classical characters and authors in his repertoire, Gregory chooses Polycrates and Herodotus for this particular context. The paper argues that Gregory intends thereby to lay claim to historical authority for his poetry. It also considers the late-antique conception of historiography and the reception of Herodotus in the late fourth century c.e. that are revealed by Gregory's likening of himself to Herodotus.

Poem 34 describes Gregory's ascetic silence, maintained for the period of Lent in 382 c.e. Gregory, as scholars assert, intended this ascetic act to be symbolic of the silence precipitated by his resignation from the archiepiscopal throne and from the presidency of the Council of Constantinople the previous year. He claims his resignation and retreat home to Nazianzus were forced by his colleagues' envy. Near the end of the poem, he provides a brief account of Polycrates, who forfeits a beloved ring to appease the gods' envy of his good fortune, but the ring is returned. If one assumes that Gregory inserts the story for comparison with his own experience, it is possible to propose various interpretations in which Polycrates or his ring functions as a foil for Gregory or one of the two sees where he acts as bishop (Constantinople and Nazianzus). However, any interpretation must also consider that Gregory, unlike Herodotus, does not include Polycrates' death in his account. Gregory was clearly familiar with Polycrates' reported demise, as he includes it elsewhere in advice to a young man. (*Carm.* 2.2.3.421–5) One is thus led to ask first, how Polycrates is germane to a poem about a Lenten silence, and second, why Gregory does not retell the death story. This paper answers these questions by proposing it is the advisory context and concern with envy in the Herodotean version of the story that lie at the heart of Gregory's retelling. This proposed "Gregorian" reading of Herodotus supports recent interpretations of the Herodotean passages. (van der Veen, *Mnemosyne* 46 [1993].433–457) Moreover, Gregory's abbreviation of Herodotus also displays his erudition and challenges his audience: one must know Herodotus as well as Gregory to fully understand the reference to Polycrates.

In response to these questions, this paper also argues that it is not only Polycrates but Herodotus with whom Gregory wishes to be compared. Gregory elsewhere expresses a desire to write like Herodotus in order to properly rebuke an opponent. (*Oratio* 4.92; Demoen 1996, Wyss *RAC*.836) The story occurs at the climax of Poem 34. The 192 verses leading up to the passage provide the foundations for the authority of Gregory's

voice: he displays his ascetic accomplishments, which in late antiquity underpinned spiritual and moral authority; he presents his Scriptural knowledge and exegetical ability through biblical allusions; and he exemplifies his linguistic and literary prowess through rhetorical play (e.g. syllepsis) and classical allusions to Homer, Apollonius, and even Aratus. The Herodotean reference is the keystone in Gregory's support for his voice's authority; its position late in the poem and just before Gregory's statement that he will speak again after his silence suggest that Gregory wishes his voice to be heard primarily as an historian's.

This paper further supports the assumption of an intended comparison between Gregory and Herodotus with recent work on historiography in earlier (e.g. Dewald, *Arethusa* 20 [1987].147–170, Marincola 1997, Kraus 1999) and late antiquity (e.g. Cameron in Bowersock, Brown, Grabar *Late Antiquity*.1–20, and 1991; Wright 1995; Rohrbacher 2002). Gregory uses similar narrative techniques to those observed in Herodotus: various changes in the direction of the story (or the poem); addresses to the reader and commentary on the action; advisory personas within the narrative and of the author; and the use of the first person to support the writer's authority. It is specifically this use of the first person that makes Herodotus an attractive exemplar for Gregory, whose work straddles and thus defines the boundaries of history and autobiography. The similarities between Gregorian and Herodotean narratological techniques suggest that in a period when lives, chronologies, and teleological ecclesiastical histories were coming to the fore as preferred formats for historical writing, for Gregory, at least, the "Father of History" continued to be the ideal historian.

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