

Introduction: The Impact of the Persian Attack on Athens on the Study of Ancient Greece

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With their power to reshape political, societal, and cultural landscapes, wars can—in retrospect—mark the end of eras and the beginning of new ones. For the Greek world, the Persian attack on Athens in 480 and 479,¹ a decisive event in Xerxes' invasion of Greece during the Graeco-Persian Wars, has traditionally been seen as such a turning point.

By the beginning of the fifth century, much of the Near East, including all of Anatolia and Egypt, in addition to parts of the Balkan, had come under Persian control. In 490, the Achaemenid king Darius launched an invasion of Greece, as a response to punish Athens and Eretria for their support of the Ionian Revolt of 499–493. The Persians landed on the Attic coast at Marathon, where they were defeated by a mainly Athenian army. In September 480, Persian armies, this time led by Darius' son Xerxes, returned to Attica. Large parts of the Athenian population had already been evacuated. After a difficult siege, the Persians plundered the Athenian Acropolis and destroyed the buildings on it. Soon after, the fighting continued at sea in the nearby strait of Salamis where the Persian armada was defeated. The Greek success led to Xerxes' departure from Greece. However, the land army commanded by the Persian general Mardonios stayed and set up its base in Thebes. The victory at Salamis roughly coincided with the victory of Sicilian Greeks against Carthaginian forces at the battle of Himera.

In 479, following failed diplomatic endeavors, Mardonios led the Persians in another assault on Athens. What was left of the city was then destroyed. The Persian invasion of Greece ended in August of that year with the battle of Plataea. At some point afterward—the exact timeline remains uncertain—the Athenians started restoring and rebuilding their city including, from 450 onward, the buildings on the Acropolis.

The fullest account of the events surrounding the Persian attack on Athens is found in Herodotus' *Histories*, written in the second half of the fifth century.² This work, along with a few testimonies by other ancient authors (not always

¹ All dates are BCE unless otherwise indicated.

² Siege of the Acropolis: 8.51–56; the battle of Salamis: 8.57–112; destruction of the lower city: 9.13.

independent from Herodotus),³ attests to the enduring prominence of these events in the collective memory of the city and Greece at large. Consequently, the text is foundational for our knowledge about these events.

Since the nineteenth century, modern scholarship sought and recognized material evidence for the Persian attack on Athens in excavations of the Acropolis and the lower city. Given the total destruction of the city reported by Herodotus as well as its reconstruction and rapid growth in later years, the year of the attack, 480, became a caesura marking the end of the Archaic period (800–480) and the beginning of the Classical period (480–323). Accordingly, the attack itself seemed to have paved the way for the great advances in Athenian, and by extension Greek arts, architecture, literature, and society. In other words, the attack on Athens became a defining moment in a grand narrative about innovation in ancient Greece. This point of view also had concrete consequences. In archaeology, for example, Greek objects from the late sixth or early fifth century are often dated by a terminus before or after 480, depending on assessments of their Archaic or Classical appearance. Thus, the Persian attack on Athens has left deep marks on the physical structure of the city and on collective memory, both in Antiquity and in modern historical and archaeological scholarship.⁴

However, in recent years scholars have been reassessing the cultural changes in the Greek world during the late Archaic and early Classical periods, putting less emphasis on the attack as a caesura, i.e., as the impetus for a grand cultural revolution.⁵ A divide between the Archaic and Classical periods based on this event alone, they say, is superficial. Judy Barringer even dismisses any link between stylistic developments in Greek art and the year of the Persian attack on Athens.⁶ Indeed, to associate Classical innovations with this event and year alone, is misleading. As the Anchoring Innovation program shows, innovation does not happen in isolation: if an innovation takes hold and proves successful, it likely builds on something familiar.⁷ With twenty-first-century scholarship leaving the grand historical narrative behind, new research can focus afresh on the underlying question of how the Persian attack on Athens has shaped discourse, both in Antiquity (for example in historiography) and in scholarship today.⁸

3 Other ancient authors mentioning the Persian attack on Athens and Attica include Thucydides (1.89), Diodorus Siculus (11.14, 11.28) and Pausanias (1.1.5, 1.27.2, 10.35.2).

4 Camp 2020 is an overview of the literary sources and the archaeological record about the Persian destruction.

5 E.g., Sioumpara and Palagia 2019; Meyer and Adornato 2020 (esp. Meyer 2020).

6 Barringer 2020.

7 Sluiter 2017.

8 E.g., van Rookhuijzen 2018; Yates 2019; Proietti 2021.

To this broad and layered historical question, the present multidisciplinary volume aims to provide a variety of answers from several angles. The individual chapters focus on one of the following three subquestions:

- (1) What responses did the Persian attack on Athens elicit in Antiquity?
- (2) How did the Persian attack on Athens become a caesura?
- (3) What role does the Persian attack on Athens still play in modern scholarship?

The remainder of this introduction elaborates on these subquestions and summarizes the contributions of each paper to their answers. Although the year 480 and the city of Athens are central to this volume, the broader chronological and geographical context is explicitly included in the discussion. This is relevant because the events in Athens have traditionally tended to dominate the discourse on the history and archaeology of this period, to the point of fostering a kind of Athenocentrism, as several of the contributions to this volume demonstrate.

1 What Responses Did the Persian Attack on Athens Elicit in Antiquity?

An investigation into the significance of the Persian attack on Athens must begin with Antiquity itself. While the distinction between an Archaic and Classical age is modern, the event was certainly a major historical turning point for the Athenians. As made clear by the wealth of literary, epigraphical and archaeological material, it caused the devastation of the city and was the subject of extensive commemoration efforts. Two contributions to this volume discuss Athenian strategies for commemorating the attack.

Giorgia Proietti (Chapter 1) approaches Athenian commemoration of the attack from the perspective of communal trauma. The Athenians attempted to make sense of the devastating events and to redefine their collective identity. Through public burials, casualty lists, and funeral orations, they de-individualized the fallen and emphasized their role as citizen-soldiers serving the common good. The preservation and commemoration of war ruins, such as in the north Acropolis wall, and the subject matter of theatrical plays played a role in healing this trauma. This communal approach to trauma helped Athens to reconstruct its identity and made the Persian sack a foundational event in Athenian collective memory.

Likewise addressing the Athenian commemoration of the attack, **Marion Meyer (Chapter 2)** focuses on the monument in the Kerameikos that features the so-called Persian War epigrams. This cenotaph honored the men lost in the

battles of Salamis and the earlier battle of Marathon (490). Meyer argues that the monument marks a shift in commemoration from the battlefield to the city. This shift coincides with a new emphasis on repatriation of the war dead, as illustrated by the transfer of Theseus' remains to Athens.

The impact of the Persian attack on Athens can also be examined in ancient historiography. **Mathieu de Bakker (Chapter 3)** studies the different depictions of the Battle of Salamis by Herodotus, Aeschylus, and Diodorus Siculus. Whereas Herodotus emphasizes the contribution of the Athenians in the battle, Diodorus glorifies the Sicilian Greeks. Diodorus is furthermore found to simplify the narrative by attributing decisions solely to Xerxes, minimizing internal Greek discord, and portraying Themistocles as the sole architect of the victory. Aeschylus, in the tragedy *Persians*, underlines the unity and heroism of the Greek forces against Persian hubris, while presenting the conflict from the perspective of the defeated enemies to explore themes of pride and downfall. De Bakker thus demonstrates the variety in narrative responses in Greek historiography as a result of the events surrounding the Persian attack on Athens—none of which, he argues, provides a clear window onto the historical details of those events, as all are shaped by literary and dramatic influences as well as genre expectations.

If the Persian attack on Athens elicited varied responses in Greek historiography, the often-criticized response by the Greek historiographer Ctesias, whose lost work was summarized by the Byzantine patriarch Photius, is of special interest. Ctesias depicts Xerxes burning Athens, including the Acropolis, but the story is very different from Herodotus' version. How can we reconcile Herodotus and Ctesias? **Hans van Wees (Chapter 4)** argues that Ctesias' narrative of Xerxes' invasion deserves reconsideration, particularly when seen in conjunction with the Ionian Revolt. Herodotus described the first revolt of 494 as a disaster for the Ionians, leading to the destruction of Athens, and the second one of 479 as the Ionians' liberation. By contrast, Ctesias reports less destruction in 494, but significant Persian damage to Ionian temples in 479 (traceable in the material record in Asia Minor, much like in Athens). If as much weight is given to Ctesias as to Herodotus, Ionia becomes more central in our view of the history in this period.

2 How Did the Persian Attack on Athens Become a Caesura?

Although the Persian attack on Athens left deep marks on the cityscape, commemoration practices, and historiography, it is less clear whether the Greeks themselves conceived of the event as a caesura (i.e., as an epoch-making event).

However, **Angelika Kellner (Chapter 5)** discusses an indication of a caesura in Herodotus' text: by mentioning the Athenian archon Kalliades, Herodotus gives a solid date for the Persian attack on Athens. It is on this basis alone that we know that the event happened in the year 480. The fact that the attack is the only event for which Herodotus provides a hard date suggests its extraordinary salience to Athenians and other Greeks. Herodotus' mention of this date has had repercussions: events in the Archaic period until the Ionian Revolt in 499 can only be dated by using Herodotus' relative chronological framework, in which the year of the attack is a rare fixed date.

After the fifth century, the Persian Wars remained a historical landmark, as, for instance, shown by references in Athenian rhetoric, by Plutarch's lives of Themistocles and Aristides, and by Pausanias' frequent reference to the Wars when discussing monuments throughout Greece. A rare literal testimony that something fundamental had changed after these Wars appears in Aristotle's *Politics* (8.1341a): the philosopher writes that afterwards, the Greeks, in their pride of victory, started to learn many new things. However, there are no indications that specifically the Persian attack on Athens continued to be awarded a singular status, as Ctesias and Herodotus seem to have done. Nevertheless, Kellner shows that ancient authors until Late Antiquity used Herodotus' chronology with the unique archon date of the Persian attack to construct their own chronologies.

After Antiquity, interest in the Persian attack on Athens dissipated and Athens lost much of its political and cultural status. Even if Athenian literature and philosophy were still widely studied, the city itself does not appear prominently in Byzantine writings, let alone in those of the Latin West. **Suzanne Marchand (Chapter 6)** shows that, at the beginning of European modernity, the Persian attack on Athens still did not have much currency in historical discourse, as the Roman Empire and Christianity loomed larger on history's horizon. Dutch and French thinkers of the Enlightenment appear to have been the first to emphasize its importance. Voltaire, in particular, made much of the heroic narrative of Greek victory over the despotic East. The Persian attack on Athens and the glory after Salamis thus developed into a universally relevant story of the defeat of oriental despotism by a state committed to freedom and the arts. The narrative of the Greek defeat of the Persians as a world-historical moment gained momentum through the nineteenth century, when it began influencing imperialist discourse.⁹

9 See also van Rookhuijzen 2022; Murray 2024.

Besides in general history, the Persian attack on Athens gained importance in archaeology, beginning with the history of art. As the early relevance of the Persian attack in art history is not prominently discussed in the contributions to this volume, a rough outline is in place in this introduction.

Johann Joachim Winckelmann may have been the first to associate the attack on Athens with developments in Greek art. In the *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums* (1764), he provided a foundational narrative of ancient art, in which he associated artistic developments with political contexts. He regarded Greek political freedom as the most important catalyst for advance and identified Athens in particular as the epicenter for this blossoming: the city's rise to power in the Greek world in the wake of the expulsion of the tyrants would have led to a new *Geist* promoting a remarkable cultural evolution centered here.¹⁰ He distinguished between an 'Old Style' and a 'High Style', roughly coinciding with the later appellations of 'Archaic' and 'Classical', to describe distinct styles in Greek art. Although Winckelmann supposed that the High Style itself had not appeared until the middle of the fifth century with the works of Phidias,¹¹ he directly linked this achievement to the new elan after the Greek victory over the Persians:

Here begins the most remarkable fifty years of Greece. From this time on, all the forces of Greece seemed to be in motion, and the great gifts of this nation began to show themselves more than ever. The extraordinary men and great spirits which had been formed from the beginning of the great movement in Greece now came forth all at once.¹²

In his thinking, the Persian attack on Athens became even the *sine qua non* for the Greek cultural acme:

The disaster itself, which had affected Greece, would serve to stimulate it.¹³

10 Winckelmann 1764: 315–333. See p. 319, where Xerxes' invasion is mentioned as a watershed.

11 Winckelmann 1764: 213–227.

12 Winckelmann 1764: 325: 'Hier fangen die merkwürdigsten fünfzig Jahre von Griechenland an. Von dieser Zeit an schienen alle Kräfte von Griechenland in Bewegung zu kommen, und die großen Gaben dieser Nation fingen an, sich mehr als jemals zu zeigen. Die außerordentlichen Menschen und großen Geister, welche sich von Anfang der großen Bewegung in Griechenland gebildet hatten, kamen jetzt alle mit einem Male hervor.'

13 Winckelmann 1764: 326: 'Das Unglück selbst, welches Griechenland betroffen hatte, mußte zur Beförderung derselben dienen.'

These notions, through the immense influence of Winckelmann's work, became part of the narrative of the history Greek art and Greek culture more generally.

Winckelmann would never visit Athens, but others who did began looking for locally preserved evidence for the Persian attack on Athens, hitherto only known from the ancient texts. From the mid-eighteenth century, travelers started to recognize evidence for the Persian attack in architectural blocks from a destroyed temple built into the north wall of the Acropolis.¹⁴ When in 1833 Athens was added to the growing Greek kingdom, the Acropolis, the main object of Persian aggression, was declared an archaeological site and excavations could start. The first excavator active here, Ludwig Ross, already related some of the deposits that he had unearthed with Herodotus' historical scenario of the Persian destruction. He reasoned that the objects had been deposited in the Acropolis following the clearing of the citadel shortly after 480 and, therefore, to constitute a time capsule of material antedating that clearing.¹⁵ In a burnt layer which he interpreted as destroyed by the Persians, he found a red-figure plate of the Brygos painter. He concluded that by the time of the Persian attack on Athens, the red-figure technique had already been developed.¹⁶ This reasonable argumentation would contribute to the establishment of the so-called Studniczka-Langlotz chronology of Greek vase painting. However, it was later revealed that this particular linkage of the textual record with archaeology, which underpins the chronology, was possibly circular.¹⁷

During the great excavations of the Acropolis by Pangiotis Kavvadias and Georg Kawerau northwest of the Caryatid Temple and south and east of the Parthenon (1885–1890), many objects, including pottery and broken sculptures, were discovered.¹⁸ The archaeologists assumed that these objects had been present on the Acropolis when the Persians attacked and that they had been violently destroyed along with the temples. Shortly after the war these remains would have been interred by the Athenians. By 1887, Wilhelm Dörpfeld and Franz Studniczka had baptized the newly found material '*Perserschutt*' (Persian debris).¹⁹ Dörpfeld characterized it as follows:

14 E.g., Le Roy 1758: 8 (legend to plan of the Acropolis); Leake 1821: 282–283; Stuart and Revett 1825: 12.

15 On the history of the concept of *Perserschutt* and critical assessments of these, see Tölle-Kastenbein 1983; Lindenlauf 1997: 50–54; Steskal 2004: 21–34; 77–88.

16 Ross 1855: 140–141; Graef and Langlotz 1933: 3; pl. 1, 20.

17 Studniczka 1887: 159–168; Langlotz 1920: 98–99; 177 (overview table). On the circular argument, see Steskal 2004: 21–22; 77–88.

18 Kavvadias and Kawerau 1906. See also Bundgaard 1974.

19 Dörpfeld 1887: 60; Studniczka 1887: 159–168. In 1902, Dörpfeld (1902: 392, 408–409) restric-

Herodotus describes to us how the Persians, during their two stays in Athens, set fire to and destroyed almost all the buildings of the lower city and the castle; only the houses in which the Persian leaders lived were spared. With the numerous buildings and works of art of the citadel, our temple [i.e., the temple that stood on the foundation in the middle of the Acropolis] also perished at that time. The total destruction of the citadel is eloquently demonstrated by the statues and architectural elements that have now emerged from the rubble. Everything that could be broken was smashed, the columns overturned, everything that could be burned was set on fire, and everything that was precious was stolen. The traces of the flames can still be seen clearly on many works of art and architectural pieces.²⁰

From the 1930s onwards, the excavations of the Athenian Agora added many similar deposits and wells, thought to contain remains of Mardonios' destruction of 479.²¹ As explained below, these deposits are under extensive discussion in three contributions in this volume.

The Perserschutt was most welcome evidence, as it held the promise of providing a clear and solid chronological order for Greek material culture. For the Archaic and Classical periods, many events and materials cannot be precisely dated. Chronological reconstructions for individual objects thus require intricate solutions in which they are assigned a place in a relative chronology. Such relative chronologies of individual objects are connected to those of other objects. Over time, intricate webs of relative chronologies have evolved in which indications from the textual record offer rare fixed points. The chronological caesura of 480 offered by Herodotus was applied to archaeological deposits and became such a peg in this structure, as in the Studniczka-Langlotz chronology of Athenian pottery mentioned above.

ted the term 'Perserschutt' to only one context close to the south retaining wall of the Acropolis. See also Steskal 2004: 32, 85.

20 Dörpfeld 1887: 30: 'Herodot schildert uns, wie die Perser bei ihrem zweimaligen Aufenthalte in Athen fast alle Bauten der Unterstadt und der Burg in Brand steckten und zerstörten; nur die Häuser, in denen die persischen Grossen wohnten, blieben verschont. Mit den zahlreichen Bauten und Kunstwerken der Burg ging damals auch unser Tempel zu Grunde. Wie total die Zerstörung der Burg war, dafür legen die jetzt aus dem Schutte wieder hervorkommenden Statuen und Bauglieder ein beredtes Zeugnis ab. Alles was zerschlagen werden konnte, wurde zertrümmert, die Säulen umgestürzt, alles Brennbares angezündet und alles Kostbare geraubt. Die Spuren der Flammen erkennt man noch jetzt deutlich an sehr vielen Bildwerken und Baustücken.'

21 E.g., Shear 1993.

The chronological pegging of the year 480 also happened in the more complex case of the so-called Severe Style of Greek sculpture. This style, characterized by naturalistic proportions, contrapposto poses, and stylistic simplicity, is often thought to have begun after 480. This viewpoint was first proposed by Vagn Håger Poulsen in 1937.²² However, in this case, the *terminus post quem* of 480 was not provided by identifying the Persian attack on Athens in archaeological excavations, but by a different pathway: the earliest Severe Style sculptures, the Tyrannicides, are mentioned on the *Marmor Parium* as having been installed on the Athenian Agora in the year of the archon Adeimantos, i.e. 477/6.²³ Even if the beginning of the Severe Style was not thought to relate directly to the Persian attack on Athens, it was still close enough to 480 to confirm the Winckelmannian notion of artistic advance after the Persian attack on Athens.²⁴

The Severe Style revolution has for a long time remained the clearest example of a chronological conception in which the Persian attack on Athens features as an epoch-making event. Alternative chronologies, however, could be based on the fact that the Perserschutt also contained Severe Style sculptures such as the Blond Boy and the Kritios Boy, indicating that the style had begun before the Persian attack on Athens. Yet, studies by Jeffrey Hurwit and Andrew Stewart, who both indicated that supposed Perserschutt deposits could have contained material postdating 480,²⁵ confirmed Poulsen's old view that the style was a product of the years immediately following the Persian attack on Athens. Stewart's views of the dating have led to a dense discussion. Gianfranco Adornato, in a reassessment of the onset of the Severe Style in 2019, argued that it was rather the result of a gradual development from Archaic into Classical times, as shown by many much earlier Archaic sculptures which already show traits of the Severe Style. In this view, the Persian attack on Athens did not function as a caesura for sculpture at all.²⁶

22 Poulsen 1937; Richter 1970. Earlier, Kramer (1837: 101) had defined a Severe Style dating to 460–420.

23 *IG XII 5 444*.

24 For bibliography (both old and recent) in which the Severe Style is regarded as caused by the Persian attack on Athens, see Adornato 2019: 557–561.

25 Hurwit 1989; Stewart 2008a; 2008b.

26 Adornato 2019. Response in Stewart 2021.

3 What Role Does the Persian Attack on Athens Still Play in Modern Scholarship?

As indicated above, scholars today typically do not regard the Persian attack on Athens as the impetus for a grand revolution in Athens. However, the event continues to play a role in modern scholarship on the Greek past. Two main pathways can be identified:

- (1) the identification of direct evidence for the attack in Athens; and
- (2) an indirect reliance on the attack when interpreting other material.

First, direct evidence of the Persian destruction itself continues to be recognized in Athens and elsewhere. For example, the so-called Dörpfeld foundations in the middle of the Acropolis are universally acknowledged as the former carrier of an Archaic temple destroyed in the Persian attack on Athens.²⁷ In addition, marble column drums in the north wall of the Acropolis are seen as belonging to the so-called Older Parthenon, begun shortly after 490 and also destroyed (in an unfinished state) in the attack.²⁸ The *Perserschutt* of the Acropolis is a more complex issue, which has been scrutinized in detail in recent decades. In 1997, Astrid Lindenlauf offered a close analysis of the sculptures found in these deposits. She addressed the problem of how evidence of Persian violence might be recognized in these objects and concluded that in most instances it is impossible to establish that they have been destroyed by the Persians. In 2004, Martin Steskal critically addressed the *Perserschutt* and resulting problems of chronology. He pointed out that the Studniczka-Langlotz chronology is based on a circular reasoning, which, as discussed above, depends on finds in the fills south of the Parthenon. And in 2008, Andrew Stewart's study of the deposits of the Acropolis demonstrated that the term *Perserschutt* is, at least in part, a misnomer because the fills south of the Parthenon could have been deposited in Periclean times and thus include material postdating 480.²⁹ These studies have refined the *Perserschutt* model. They leave only the so-called Kore deposit found near the Caryatid Temple as pure *Perserschutt*, i.e., as exclusively containing material predating the attack.

Beyond the Acropolis, some Agora deposits can be directly related to the Persian attack on Athens. Nevertheless, three chapters in the present volume argue that a nuanced approach is necessary when establishing chronologies using this material and that the contexts must be very closely examined to draw conclusions from them. First, **Michael Laughy and Floris van den Eijnde**

27 E.g., Ferrari 2002; van Rookhuijzen 2021.

28 E.g., Dörpfeld 1902; Hill 1912: 556–558; Korres 1997: 239–240; Rous 2019: 37, 85.

29 Lindenlauf 1997; Steskal 2004; Stewart 2008a; 2008b.

(**Chapter 7**) argue that the wells on the Agora likely remained in use for some time after the sack, at least until material from large-scale landscaping operations in the Agora from the late 470s onwards (perhaps related to the construction of the Tholos and Stoa Poikile) ended up in the wells. The reasons behind the closing of these deposits after the destruction is varied and probably attributable to practical considerations. Although it cannot be excluded that the Persians deliberately contaminated some Athenian wells, it would have been physically impossible for them to destroy all of them. Many wells remained open in the years after the invasion and some undoubtedly were still used until large-scale landscaping finally made them obsolete. This was a protracted process that probably took up to three decades.

Second, **Kathleen Lynch (Chapter 8)** argues that the Agora deposits are the result of coordinated post-479 clean-up efforts by the Athenians. While scholars initially thought that these deposits only contained 490–480 material, it has meanwhile become clear that some of these contexts included later pottery. Although this complexity challenges the traditional chronology for pottery, Lynch argues that the Persian attack on Athens can be materially recognized in these deposits and that 480 still holds as a chronological marker.

Third, **Stephen F. Matter and Susan I. Rotroff (Chapter 9)** discuss the so-called Stoa Gutter Well. Excavated in 1954, it yielded a significant Late Archaic deposit, initially interpreted as a pottery sales room destroyed by the Persians. In their article, the authors apply statistics to the material data from the well, helping to distinguish between post-Persian and pre-Persian deposits. The tests reveal significant differences in the dates of the black-figure pottery, which aligns well with other instances of Persian destruction debris. The analysis supports a date shift from 490 to 480 for the Stoa Gutter Well.

Apart from this direct evidence for the Persian attack on Athens, there are also different, more indirect ways in which the conception of the attack as a watershed in material culture is still a major influence in modern scholarship. Despite earlier attempts to revise the conventional chronology,³⁰ the concomitant caesura between Archaic and Classical Greek art is maintained in, for instance, the Studniczka-Langlotz chronology and Stewart's examination of the Severe Style. The final three chapters present other indirect channels by which traditional views of the Persian attack on Athens influence modern scholarship.

30 Francis and Vickers 1988 proposed to lower the dates of Athenian art, which had previously been based on Perserschutt, and many buildings on the Agora by approximately fifty years. See also Shear 1993; Steskal 2004 and Lynch in this volume.

Federico Figura (Chapter 10) examines how the Persian attack on Athens currently still plays a role in the understanding of Athenian vase painting by the relatively indirect pathway of a comparison with large-scale painting. Scholars have traditionally attributed innovations in vase-painting, such as spatial experimentation, foreshortenings, polychromy, and the expression of emotions, to the influence of large-scale painting, thought to have begun after the attack with new building projects in Athens (e.g., the Stoa Poikile). Figura, however, shows that the innovative features were already present in vase-painting before 480. Contrary to the conception of the changes in vase-painting after the Persian attack on Athens as a revolution, Figura argues for a gradual evolution in which the event played no role at all, not even indirectly through the development of large-scale painting.

Another repercussion of the Persian attack on Athens is still seen across the Aegean in western Asia Minor. Traditionally, the dating of archaeological objects in this region has been based on analogies with Athenian material, by way of the chronology derived from the Persian attack on Athens. **Anja Slawisch (Chapter 11)** critiques this method. With analyses of Phokaian electrum coinage and Klazomenian sarcophagi, she argues that an overreliance on Athenian chronologies has obscured the unique developments in regional craftsmanship and alternative transmission routes for cultural change. Slawisch advocates dating and interpreting archaeological finds in Asia Minor independently, without recourse to the Athenian chronologies.

Finally, as **André Lardinois (Chapter 12)** shows, the Persian attack on Athens also still plays a role in the standard periodization of literature, where the event represented by the year 480 is considered to mark the transition from the Archaic to the Classical period. Lardinois challenges this traditional idea and argues that for literary history the date is arbitrary and ideologically driven. He proposes that, if Greek literature needs any periodization at all, 400 can be identified as the beginning of literary production specifically for reading and thus would be a more convincing caesura.

4 Conclusion

The contributions to the present volume examine how the Persian attack on Athens has affected today's understanding of a central part of the history and material culture of Ancient Greece. The attack featured prominently in Athenian discourse and was commemorated on a large scale. It is the only event that Herodotus provided with an archon date. Yet, despite its salience in the consciousness of ancient Athens, there is no firm evidence that the attack on

the city was then regarded as an event heralding a new era of innovation. Only from the Enlightenment onward, the event came to be interpreted as a world-historical moment, paving the way for a view of history in which the attack made Athens a cradle of revolutionary change.

Few scholars today would still support this sweeping reconstruction of cultural change in Ancient Greece. Instead, scholarship is taking stock of existing viewpoints and developing new ways to assess the significance of the event. Beside the destroyed architecture and parts of the Perserschutt deposits on the Acropolis, the material found in the excavations of the Agora can justifiably be designated as evidence for the Persian attack on Athens. Here, the event remains tangible in a very direct way. Less directly, in the study of Greek figurative arts and Greek literature, the attack had made its mark on chronologies and a periodization hinging on 480 as a pivotal year. The fact that the Persian attack on Athens underlies these constructions is easily lost from sight.

Despite the attack's significance for the Athenians and its archaeological visibility, it is unlikely to have been the primary cause of the cultural transformations in the Greek world during this period. Closer examination of the evidence often reveals a lack of a clear cut-off point or an unequivocal marker of innovation directly connected to the event, within Athens and even more emphatically elsewhere. In the light of these findings, the Persian attack on Athens is difficult to maintain as a chronological divide between supposed Archaic and Classical periods. A reassessment of this chronology is a huge endeavor, encompassing all the subdisciplines of ancient Greek studies. It is the aim of this volume not to conclude, but rather to advance this debate.

Finally, our volume also deals with the more general question of how new ideas, in order to gain acceptance within the scholarly community, must be anchored in existing academic paradigms—in this case, the Persian attack on Athens and the chronological compartmentalization of the Greek past based on it. Following the main hypothesis of the research agenda 'Anchoring Innovation', innovative research on the Greek past that challenges established anchors may face resistance. The present volume aims to address this resistance by critically examining the development of the Persian attack on Athens in 480 as an anchor for scholarship and offering a more nuanced understanding of its legacy. Hopefully, this will encourage scholarly acceptance of research that, with reasonable argumentation, departs from the old paradigm, as well as inspire similar discussions in other parts of the study of the Ancient World where single years have been treated as epoch-making watersheds.

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