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HERODOTUS VIII. MARDONIUS ACCORDING TO HERODOTUS

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Second offensive and retreat. After Xerxes' retreat, Mardonius prepared his offensive on land. He also wanted the higher powers to be on his side and asked his close friend, Mys of Europus, to consult the local oracles of Boeotia (8.133-35). At the same time, Alexander of Macedonia was to try to draw the Athenians onto the side of the Persians (8.136). Mardonius was also aiming at naval supremacy—on land he already considered himself as the most powerful—and wanted over and above his actual task to win mastery over both elements. Alexander's mission was unsuccessful, yet it provided Herodotus with the opportunity to show the sense of freedom of the Athenians in its true light (8.140-44; for Alexander I, cf. Badian, 1994; Rosen, 1987; Gschnitzer, 2001). Mardonius's vanity was also shown on other occasions. Without any necessity, depopulated Athens was occupied for the second time (9.3). Mardonius dismissed the advice of the Thebans to win the Greek cities by giving them money and to make the leading men turn against each other (9.2). Herodotus uses Mardonius's attempt to win over the Athenians, who had left for Salamis (9.4), in order to emphasize again their love of freedom (9.5); and he describes the Athenians as being furiously ready for war, while the Lacedaemonians remained hesitant (9.7-8). Finally Pausanias was sent off with

a contingent of 5,000 Spartans and 35,000 Helots (9.10.1). These were joined by 5,000 Perioikes (rural freemen; 9.11.3). The decisive factor was the warning of Chileus of Tegea that the Athenians might otherwise form an alliance with the Persians (9.9-11). Warned by a long-distance runner sent from Argos, Mardonius went back to Thebes, where he thought he might better use the cavalry (9.13.2); but first he reduced Athens to ruins and ashes (9.13.2). The westernmost point which the Persians reached in this campaign is pointed out by Herodotus himself—Megara (9.14).

Preparing for the decisive battle. Near Thebes, Mardonius had a huge camp set up (9.15). In describing the banquet of the Theban Attaginus, Herodotus now offers one of the most impressive stories in the line of the emerging battle (9.16). An unnamed Persian reveals the tragic future of Mardonius and his army to his Boeotian drinking-mate. That which is to happen according to the will of God cannot be prevented by any man, but insight is useless without the power to change things. Mardonius meanwhile is busy with the preparations for the battle. Like Xerxes, he appears in the posture of the capricious-magnanimous despot. When he ordered the now unreliable Phocians to be massacred, and the latter decided to defend themselves, he changed his mind and praised them for their courage (9.17-18). The Greek forces first entrenched themselves on the lower slopes of the Cithaeron mountains (9.19). Mardonius managed to lure them towards the plain of the Asopus River and attacked them with his cavalry (9.20), whereupon the Greeks got into great difficulties (9.21). Things did not change until the leader of the Persian cavalry, Masistius, wearing golden armor and a purple cloak, fell in the melee (10.21-22). The Persians were too quick to call the Greeks women (9.20). The Greeks also won the fight for Masistus's body (9.23). This loss led to deep mourning in the Persian camp. Mardonius had horses and draft animals shorn (9.24). The Greeks put the corpse on display (9.25.1) and decided to try fighting on the plain (9.25.2-3). Here Herodotus inserts an intermezzo, describing the dispute between Athenians and Tegeans for the honor of forming a wing in the battle line (9.26-27). The case was decided for the Athenians with the acclamation of the Lacedaemonians (9.28.1). As a decisive argument, the Athenians put forward their merit in having beaten 46 nations at Marathon (9.27.5; cf. Bichler, 2000b, p. 351, n. 122, who points out that the Behistun inscription, with 23 peoples over which Darius ruled, mentions precisely half of that number).

Counting the forces. There follows the catalogue of the Greeks (9.28-30). Apart

from the 35,000 Helots, 38,700 men were mustered. In addition, there were 34,500 lightly armed men. With the additional 1,800 lightly armed Thespians, the total force was 110,000 men (9.30)—less than one-third of the Persian contingent. Among the Greeks there was also a unit of 300 Potidaeans, who rebelled after Xerxes' departure and whom the Persian general Artabazus could no longer subdue (8.126-29). Mardonius arranged his troops (9.31-32) and placed the Persians opposite the Lacedaemonians and Tegeans (9.31.1-2). On this occasion Herodotus once more counts up the numerous tribes in the Persian army and shows off the geographic scope of the empire. Together with the Greek allies estimated at 50,000 men, Mardonius had 350,000 soldiers at his disposal. Before the battle, both sides carried out the usual sacrifices (9.32-38), and the Greeks were provided with favorable signs under the condition that they did not cross the Asopus (9.36). Mardonius's specialist at sacrifices, the Elean Hegesistratus, arrived at a similar conclusion: The Persians must not attack (9.37.1). Mardonius was unable to restrain his arrogant behavior, so he ignored the pernicious river border and was defeated because of his own aggressiveness.

Last maneuvers. The armies confronted one another for eight days. On the advice of the Theban Tigamenides, Mardonius decided to block the Greek supply routes over the Cytherean passes (9.38.2-39.1); the Persians brought up 500 mounts and proceeded to massacre men and animals (9.39.2). This was how Herodotus conveyed the ugly countenance of Persian warfare before the outbreak of the battle. On the following two days, Mardonius still did not cross the Asopus (9.40). A council of war was held. Artabazus proposed a new strategy: retreating to Thebes and dividing the Greeks by means of rich presents of money (9.41); but he was only supported by the Thebans. Mardonius rejected the proposal, considering himself as greatly superior (9.41.4). In the same way as at Salamis, a prediction by Bacis comes true (9.43): the Asopus appears near the Thermodon as the scene of Hellenic-Barbarian fights. Thus the imminent clash is dyed in the colors of the Amazon fights (Hölscher, 2000a).

On the opposite side, Alexander of Macedonia warns the Athenians of Mardonius's determination, following a nocturnal ride into the hostile camp (9.44-45). Thereupon Pausanias starts a curious maneuver. Out of fear, he rearranged his army at daybreak: the Athenians exchanged wings with the Lacedaemonians, so that the latter now had Greek opponents in front of them. Mardonius, however, immediately followed suit, whereupon Pausanias re-

established the old order; but Mardonius again regrouped (9.46-47). The scene had no strategic effect. It merely flattered Athens' fame as the city, with its Marathon experience, which had once victoriously confronted the Persians; and it presented a vacillating Pausanias (Siewert 1986, 863 describes the scene as an Athenian invention).

Plataeae. Mardonius sent a messenger to the Spartans to revile the latter for their behavior. At the same time, he said that Persians and Lacedaemonians ought to fight each other alone and thus reach a decision (9.48). When he received no answer, he thought he had already won and ordered his cavalry to attack (9.49.1). The Greeks were under great pressure. Due to lack of drinking water, they decided to move into another position (9.49.2-52). At night, most of them retreated to the Hera temple outside Plataeae (9.53). Pausanias also wanted to move away with the Lacedaemonians, but this led to a dispute; because Amompharetus, the leader of the Pitanates, refused to join the withdrawal movement (9.53-56.1). Finally, Pausanias retreated farther and at dawn collected his troops near the shrine of Demeter of Eleusis, when the Persian cavalry again attacked (9.56-57). Mardonius was happy about his opponent's retreat. In his victorious mood he was already thinking of blackening Artabazus in the eyes of the king because of his hesitant behavior (9.58).

The Lacedaemonians and Tegeans standing near the shrine were now to be exterminated (9.59). Pausanias, who had now decided to fight, sent a messenger to the Athenians asking them for assistance (9.60); but the latter were checked by the Greeks who were allied with the Persians, so that Pausanias was left on his own (9.61.1). Before the immediate decision, Herodotus for the last time offers a catalogue of numbers (9.61.2). The Lacedaemonians, including the lightly armed, amounted to 50,000 men, with 3,000 Tegeans at their side. Opposite them stood the entire Persian army. In his distress, Pausanias appealed to the Hera of Plataeae (9.61.3). The battle which now broke out went on for a long time (9.62). Herodotus reports that many Lacedaemonians were killed, especially at the place where Mardonius and the 1,000 élite Persians were fighting (9.63.1). In his later obituary, he also paid tribute to the bravery of the Persian infantry, as well as the Scythian cavalry (9.71.1); but all this turned out to be in vain. Mardonius and his comrades-in-arms were killed, and Herodotus particularly refers to their light armor as a disadvantage (9.63.2). Mardonius was slain by the Spartan Aeimnestus. Pausanias won a total victory (9.64). (For the battle and Herodotus's sources,

see Hennig, 1992; Boedeker, 1996. See also Flower, 2000.)

Only the reviled warner Artabazus was able to keep out of the way with his 40,000 men. He fled with his soldiers by way of Phocis to the Hellespont (9.66), concealing the outcome of the battle from the Phocians and Thessalians and saying that Mardonius was following with the main army (9.89.1-3); but, by the time they reached Byzantium, hunger and exhaustion had sorely decimated the troop (9.89.4). The majority of the king's Greek allies had also taken to their heels at the right time. Only 300 of the best Thebans had been killed (9.67). After Mardonius's death, the Persian army which had not engaged in the battle totally dissolved, and the Greeks went in pursuit raging among the fugitives. In this context, Herodotus established an important theory: only the Persians were able to keep the army together (9.68). On the Greek side, he particularly marked high losses by the Megarians and Phliasians at the hands of the Theban cavalry (9.69). The camp set up by Mardonius no longer offered any protection to the troops who were streaming back. The Athenians assaulted the walls (9.70.1-2), and a dreadful killing and plundering set in (9.70.3-4). Only 3,000 of the enemy remained at the end (9.70.5). Thus the Persians had 257,000 casualties to mourn for. The Greek losses were modest in comparison: 91 Lacedaemonians, 52 Athenians, and 16 Tegeans (9.70.5).

Greek booty. The victors captured much booty, which presents a lesson in the transitory splendor of Persian luxury (9.80.1-2). However, riches corrupt morals. The Helots secreted their booty and sold it cheaply to the Aeginetans (9.80.3). Together with the story (9.85) of the empty tumulus of the Aeginetans near Plataeae, the Histories here show an anti-Aeginetan tendency (Bichler 2000b, p. 354). On the other hand, the Tegeans who captured the tent of Mardonius acted correctly. They offered his fine bronze horse manger to Athena Alea and handed over the rest (9.70.3). Out of the immense booty, votive offerings were sent to Delphi, Olympia, and the Isthmus; and the rest was divided up (9.81.1). A special gift of honor was issued to Pausanias (9.81.2), who proved to be a worthy victor. He treated the Greek second wife of a Persian, who had deserted with her female servants, with great magnanimity and handed her over to the ephors to protect her (9.76). In addition, he rejected the suggestion of the Aeginetan Lampon to defile the corpse of Mardonius (9.78-79). This was not worthy of a Greek and even reprehensible for a barbarian, by which he alluded to Xerxes' atrocious deed against the corpse of Leonidas. But on the following day, Mardonius's corpse had vanished. According to a rumor, he was secretly buried, an act for which his

son Artontes later rewarded the person concerned with rich presents (9.84).

Pausanias. Pausanias was indeed harsh, but not in a blind rage when dealing with the Thebans allied with Persians. Leading friends of the Persians were executed (9.86-88), but the children of the fugitive Attaginus were spared (9.88). Immediately after the battle, Pausanias ordered a banquet to be prepared in the Persian fashion, with the bakers and cooks using the captured tableware of Mardonius. At the same time, dishes of the Laconian kind were also served. This was to reveal the foolishness of the enemy, who in fact possessed everything and yet wanted to subjugate the Greeks who lived under poor conditions (9.82). The anecdote has a special piquancy for the reader aware of the accusations against Pausanias's behavior following the Greek capture of Byzantium in 478 B.C.E., when he was accused of living like a lord in Persian fashion and of complicity with the Persians (Thucydides 1.95, 128). He was the last protagonist in the Histories who displayed that sign always ominous in Herodotus's work—exulting over others (9.82.3).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

See HERODOTUS xi. SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY.