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One Historical Elegy: Simonides on the Battles of Salamis and Artemisium

The papyrus fragments going under the name of the 'new Simonides' are an important source for poems on the Persian Wars. This paper considers the poems on Artemisium and Salamis by Simonides in the light of these new fragments. The current scholarly opinion is that these poems consist of an elegy and a lyric poem on Artemisium, and some kind of poem on Salamis. I argue that the 'new Simonides' does not support this opinion. In fact, none of the new elegiac fragments can be assigned definitively to a separate poem on either battle. It can be shown, however, that the evidence substantiates the existence of only a lyric poem on Artemisium and offers no proof for the existence of a poem on Salamis. I suggest that the confusion that arises from the fragments of the 'new Simonides' assigned to these battles can be explained by searching for a larger context for these elegiac verses. Epigraphic and historical evidence reveals that the so-called 'Plataia poem' of the 'new Simonides' offers a plausible context for verses on Artemisium and Salamis.

The difficulties concerning the poems on Artemisium and Salamis arise from contradictory evidence in Priscian, the Suda, and the 'new Simonides.' Priscian (6th c. CE) quotes a lyric poem by Simonides under the title, *Sea Battle at Artemisium*. The Suda (10th c. CE) lists Simonides' *The Sea-battle at Artemisium* as an elegy and *The Sea-battle at Salamis* as a lyric poem. Before the 'new Simonides,' it was supposed that the Suda had reversed the metrical attributions (West, 1992, 114). The assignment of Simonides fr. 3 W² from the 'new Simonides' to an 'Artemisium poem' makes such a hypothesis doubtful and has propagated the current belief in two poems on Artemisium (recently Hutchinson, 2000, 288-9). Such a conclusion does not solve the uncertainty over the 'Salamis poem.'

Scrutiny of the fragments assigned to an 'Artemisium poem' from the 'new Simonides' reveals that fr. 3 W² stands as the only evidence outside the Suda for an elegy on Artemisium. The reason for the assignment of this fragment, however, is a supplement that derives from uncertain evidence with little clear connection to a poem by Simonides (West, 1993, 2). As such, there is no concrete evidence for a separate elegy on Artemisium. This conclusion also perplexes our understanding of the 'Salamis poem,' because no fragments can be assigned to it with any certainty. So, the existence of a separate elegy on either battle remains uncertain.

The confusion over these poems can be explained by the possibility that these battles were not the subject of separate elegies, but were part of a larger poetic context. This conclusion accords with the evidence that supports only a lyric poem on Artemisium, an unclearly defined poem on Salamis, as well as the reference to an 'Artemisium elegy.' This larger context is found in the fragments of the so-called 'Plataia poem' of the 'new Simonides.' Epigraphic evidence, such as the 'Serpent Column' commemorating the Greek victory over the Persians, indicates a degree of panhellenism. The prominence of the Spartans, the possible mention of the Athenians, and the praise of the Corinthians in the 'Plataia poem' suggest a similar panhellenism in a poem that commemorates this same victory. This paper concludes by suggesting that the 'Plataia poem' is the source for

verses in praise of all who fought at Plataia and that within this praise, references to other battles, such as Artemisium and Salamis, are to be expected. The greater implications of this conclusion are a better understanding of Simonides' poetry on the Persian Wars and a clearer definition of the boundaries of historical elegy as a poetic sub-genre.