

Le tradizioni argive sulla battaglia di Sepeia tra storiografia locale ed epos panellenico

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Abstract

This paper discusses the role that Hera and the Heraion play in the accounts of the Battle of Sepeia, a battle fought at the beginning of the 5th century between the Spartans and the Argives. This role has been ignored to date, with scholars focusing on other cults, rituals and deities referred to in these accounts, the Hybristika, the cult of Ares Enyalios and the cult of the armed Aphrodite, for example.

The main sources on the battle of Sepeia are, of course, Herodotus, Socrates of Argos, Pausanias and Plutarch. Herodotus, the *locus classicus*, mentions neither the festival of the Hybristika - begun by the Argives after their defeat - nor the cult of Ares Enyalios, nor the statue of armed Aphrodite. Instead he highlights the role of the sanctuary of Hera in Prosymna, the Heraion, where a statue of Hera, which had dissuaded the Spartan King Cleomenes from destroying the city of Argos, is situated. Herodotus recounts that when Cleomenes returned to Sparta after the battle and his fellow citizens accused him of having been bribed by the Argives not to destroy the city after Sparta's victory, the king explained that "he had supposed the god's oracle to be fulfilled by his taking of the temple of Argos; therefore he had thought it best not to make any attempt on the city before he had learned from the sacrifices whether the god would deliver it to him or withstand him; when he was taking omens in Hera's temple a flame of fire had shone forth from the breast of the image, and so he learned the truth of the matter, that he would not take Argos. If the flame had come out of the head of the image, he would have taken the city from head to foot utterly; but its coming from the breast signified that he had done as much as the god willed to happen. This plea of his seemed to the Spartans to be credible and reasonable, and he far outdistanced the pursuit of his accusers." (Hdt. 6.82). It is not by chance that the detail of the breast is also mentioned by the oracle which is an important part of Herodotus' tale of the Battle of Sepeia.

What's more, the Herodotean account, which relies more on the Argive version of events than on the Spartan, reflects a 5th Century Argive attempt to consolidate their power over the sanctuary of Hera at Prosymna. This attempt finds occasional resonance both in Pindar's poems and in some of the archaeological evidence from the sanctuary of Prosymna.