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### Thucydides's Agamemnon

“Most people in fact will not take trouble finding out the truth but are much inclined to accept the first story they hear” (Thucydides 20,47)

Thucydides, together with Herodotus was pioneer of western history; He played an important role in shaping, guiding and influencing modern historian's ideas and technique. Thucydides's treatment of Agamemnon's myth is one such case where he took trouble to reexamine, reconsider first story (as told by poets) of Agamemnon. Thucydides records in “History”, events of Peloponnesian war, which according to him, was greatest war for all Hellenes, as well as for “whole of mankind” (Thucydides 1,35). He also clarifies that his method is of thorough analysis, are unbiased, and his “history” lacks any “romantic element” as it was not written “to meet the taste of immediate public, but was done to last forever” (Thucydides 22,48).

Modern readers, though appreciates his endeavors, knows the limitation of his work. There is no mentioned chronology in Thucydides so called “Archaeology” and no distinctions between mythological and historical times. Modern historian Places Trojan war around 1100/1200 BC<sup>[1]</sup>, Then, Homer records this action in his famous epic around 700/800BC<sup>[i]</sup>, while Thucydides wrote his history during 400/500 BC<sup>[ii]</sup>. Thucydides, then treats this distant past/dimly remembered past (700years), based on his “better evidence” (Thucydides 21,47) and

“most reliable tradition” (Thucydides 9,40). According to which Agamemnon was most powerful ruler of his time who rose force against troy, and though with difficulty, eventually succeeded. Here Thucydides, neither eliminates Homeric description completely nor comments on supernatural aspect of it, but tries to form logical argument from it and also, accommodate it, or rationalize it.

In this process then Agamemnon’s myth in “Archaeology” serves to introduce Thucydides’ themes, his philosophical and moral concern, that permeates and gets further developed in his “History”. According to Dr. Viselike Zali’s analysis, Agamemnon’s myth could be used to accentuate either theme of panhellenism or used to problematized idea of power struggle and internal war. In first case Agamemnon becomes a symbol for “collective enterprise” of Greek against Trojan to be emulated by both Athens and Sparta against Persian army. In second case, he becomes a powerful tyrant with imperialistic ambition, whose fear rather than oath to Tyndareus (9) lead others to join him in his expedition of troy, and even after his success, Greece again fell into disorder. Here, as said by Zali, “The mythological example of Agamemnon is thus used by Thucydides to establish a wider pattern of human behavior which applies to people and cities (Athens and Sparta) yearning for power” (Zali, par.54).

This understanding may give us some insight in, how Thucydides tackled myth of Agamemnon and also encourage as to scrutinize him, in hands of statesman and ruler like Gelon and Agesilaus, rhetorician and historian like Herodotus, and also poet and tragedian like Aeschylus. One would see how myth of Agamemnon is reshaped, reused, redefined or manipulated, discarded, ignored according to purpose. In relation to this we can say that Thucydides use of Agamemnon’s myth is one of the earliest examples of myths being transformed, transferred, or intermixed with other form of knowledge like history. Here

Agamemnon from Homer's mythical grounds becomes ready to embark a epistemological journey of his self introspection , his role in shaping ideas of future generation ,where ,starting from Thucydides several historian ,critics ,professor ,student will question him ,analyze and evaluate him .

Works cited

Thucydides. *History of The Peloponnesian War*. Translated by Rex Warner, Penguin Books, 1954

Zali, Vasiliki. "Agamemnon in Herodotus and Thucydides: Exploring the historical uses of a mythological paradigm." *Electra* [Online], 1.1 (2011): 61-98. Web. 28 Oct. 2018