

## Abstract

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### **Europe and Asia: Aeschylus' *Persians* and Homer's *Iliad***

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It is natural, even inevitable, that people from different places misunderstand and distrust one another. Herodotos' great history of the Persian Wars presents in epic scope one of the most important conflicts between Europe and Asia. The geographical rift that Herodotos presents was deepened by differences in language, religion, and culture. The Persian military campaigns to make Greece part of the Persian empire in 490 and again in 480/79 exacerbated these natural feelings of alienation. The Persians, thus, were not only foreigners and non-Greek speakers, they were enemies of longstanding. Indeed the Greeks traced their enmity back to the Trojan War and beyond. This talk will focus on how two of Greece's greatest poets dealt not just with mistrust, but with actual warfare between Greece and her neighbors to the East. Aeschylus in *Persians* and Homer in the *Iliad* portray the eastern enemy in remarkably sympathetic terms. Each reminds his audience—and we are a part of that continuing audience—that all men, friend and foe alike, share a common humanity. They force their audiences by the overwhelming power of their poetry to empathize with the enemy, to understand that he also is a human being.