How and why do Timotheus and Simonides use history in their poems?

The use of historical events and especially the Homeric tales is a rather common topic of inspiration and reference for lyric poetry. By commemorating historical events directly or indirectly in their poetic creations, they can stimulate their audience, remind them of their familiar and common Greek heritage and create connections to present situations and events. Especially when taking into consideration the performance of a poem, the use of historical information can engage the audience and make them recollect memories of the past, thus creating an artifact worth to be remembered and granting fame to the poet who composed it. In addition, the use of history can be used in order to build up the praise of a city or a person by creating connections with widely known tales of the past.

Simonides' *Plataea elegy* contains numerous Homeric references as he attempts to create a connection between the Trojan war and the Persian wars. By commemorating the men that fell during the war in Troy he is honouring the men who died during the Persian wars. By asking for the Muse's assistance, he reminds the audience of the Homeric tales and in a way informs them that what they are about to hear is of similar importance and glory. The common factor between those wars is the panhellenic character and identity. In the Trojan war all major Greek cities sent their armies and fought an enemy who was from Asia and who was non- Greek. It was placed in the collective narrative as a panhellenic war against one common enemy. Similarly, the Persian wars are being paralleled to that event, as the enemy is still of Asian origin. Thus, Simonides' poetry uses history as a way to record historical events, praise the magnificence of a war against an enemy, who is common for all Greeks, and at the same time bring fame to the commissioner and the performer of the song.

Regarding the performance context, it is known that Simonides was a quite famous poet of the Greek world, who would be commissioned by a sponsor in order to compose a poem commemorating a city, or in the context of a festival or for an official occasion. Even though one cannot be completely certain of the original performance context of the poems, Simonides' poems suggest a public performance context, taking into consideration that this was his profession and means of income. So, by using historical narrative, he leads the audience to make the connection among the present and past glorious events and even link them to specific places as well.

In the *Plataea elegy*, Simonides begins with a hymn to Achilles, distinguishing him from the rest of the Greek army as the greatest warrior. Similarly, he mentions the men who fought bravely from Sparta and Greece, emphasising their Spartan origin and differentiating them from the rest of the Greeks as a way to give them a special honour in the narrative. He manages to draw a parallel among Achilles and the Spartans as the greatest elements of the Greek army. In *fragment 531*, Simonides celebrates those who died in Thermopylae, while also naming and praising Leonidas in the poem as well. This could be an indication that Simonides was commissioned by Sparta in order to compose a song that would link Sparta to the historical events of the past and would also highlight their triumph and significance for the Greek world. Additionally, by including such aspects of recent history in the poem patrons might want to make some political messages, such as Sparta's panhellenic dominance against Athens, its greatest competitor at the time.

Timotheus' composing style in *Persians* is more dramatic and innovative as he uses sensory language and creates a poem with very vivid images and vocabulary. Throughout the poem he recites battle scenes both in land and in the sea in order to commemorate Greece's rich naval and cavalry forces, as well as the number of battles they have fought. The poem generates a chaotic feeling to the reader through the confusing metre and the direct speeches it includes. Timotheus belongs to the supporters of the New Music, which means that through their work they tried new methods of composition, challenged existing poetic forms and use of musical instruments. In *Persians*, Timotheus uses a variety

of Homeric references, while declaring that this new form of poetry was not invented by him, but it pre-existed in the past. This draws the conclusion that Timotheus is probably trying to defend his poetic style and innovations which were often not well received by the scholars of his time. He is using historical events to reintroduce lyric poetry and establish a connection between the events of the past and the modern way to recount them.

One must take into consideration that in *Persians,* Timotheus makes some remarks which show that he probably does not favour Sparta very much, due to its conservative musical style and its attachment to the old ways. In addition, Athens during that time has begun to flourish and become a more powerful city, which is more accepting of change and new ideas than Sparta. Therefore, the concept of New Music is more fitting to exist and develop in a place such as Athens, which might be more inclusive and open to new ideas. Timotheus is not trying to narrate a historical event, but he uses it in order to make a point and introduce a different and rathe unusual poetic style, while being concerned about his relationship with the existing tradition. He is trying to construct a narrative in which new poetic forms can use historical aspects to stimulate an audience or express his own political opinions regarding tradition.

As for the original performance concept, Timotheus' poem indicates the use of a musical instrument and has a metric style that resembles daily speech, which could mean that his poem was not necessarily commissioned for an official public event but was rather composed by Timotheus to entertain and possibly take part in a festival or agon. Although, he is a keen supporter of the New Music, he is also a poet that makes their living in a court which means that behind the chosen historical episodes there could be a patron requesting him to commemorate a specific area or person, while at the same time making a political statement through the poem structure itself.