Herodotean Journeys: Diversity and Political Judgment in Herodotus' Histories

by

Lindsay Mahon

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Lindsay Mahon
Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Political Science
University of Toronto

Abstract

In his Histories, the ancient Greek Historian Herodotus posits that to mock other cultures is sure proof of madness, for “If there were a proposition put before mankind, according to which each should, after examination, choose the best customs in the world, each nation would certainly think its own customs the best.” (Histories, 3.38). Herodotus thus suggests how difficult it is to judge across cultures; even ‘after examination, judgment is constrained by conventional boundaries. Yet in his Histories, Herodotus himself continually examines other cultures; he is able to genuinely engage with the diversity of his world.

In this dissertation, I argue that Herodotus therefore models a way of engaging with diversity, precisely because he attends to the affective attachments that often impede such investigation. His work therefore offers a therapy of judgment for his readers, one accomplished through the way Herodotus’ artful narrative inserts his audience into his story; the spectating audience is led to inquire into difference, to feel the excitement of inquiry, and, occasionally, to suffer a chastening recognition when such looking goes awry. The inquirer can be heroic, like Herodotus, wrestling with competing logoi and saving them from the ravages of time. But Herodotus uses textual foils to demonstrate some of the pitfalls that can befall inquiry. The inquirer can be a mere voyeur; hobbled by conceptual errors; a mad imperialist; or one’s inquiries can be barren, kept private and to oneself, offering no aid or insight to one’s community. Herodotus’s example transcends these foils. Yet Herodotus does not merely show
these errors; he lets the audience ‘feel’ them, and so be implicated in these marred inquiries. These painful recognitions lead his audience to suffer vicariously with others, and so to gain insight usually won too late.

His method, which recruits and thus rehabilitates the attachments of his audience, thus helps to communicate the substance of his inquiries. To rehabilitate the attachment of his audience, Herodotus must spark the desire to inquire for its own sake. To do this, Herodotus reveals that attending to diversity matters because the multiplicity of cultures reveals the complexity of nature. Attending to diversity allows us to understand ourselves as human beings. Herodotus, the first historian, suggests that the purpose of history - in Greek, *inquiry* - is not simply to determine the facts and dates of what happened, but rather to inquire into what mankind has brought into being: not only what happened, but our stories about what happened: customs, traditions, and songs. His inquiry is into what these phenomena reveal about who we are.
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Introduction

With Truths of a certain kind, it is not enough to make them appear convincing: one must also make them felt.
-Montesquieu, Persian Letters, letter 11

Shall we never see reborn the happy times when Peoples did not pretend to Philosophize, but the Platos, the Thales, and the Pythagoras, seized with an ardent desire to to know, undertook the greatest journeys merely in order to learn, and went far off to shake the yoke of National prejudices, to get to know men by their conformities and their differences, and to acquire that universal knowledge that is not exclusively of one Century or one country but of all times and all places, and thus is, so to speak, the common science of the wise?
-Rousseau, Second Discourse, x.9

Ours appears to be an age of unprecedented diversity. Technological change promises to open up the world; we can travel the globe all while never looking up from our phones. The immediacy of the world’s goods as proffered by the online world is almost matched by vast transformations of mobility in the physical one; products and people traverse the globe on a scale unimaginable in ages past. Economically, politically, and culturally, our world seems more truly global than ever before.¹ Yet nothing marks the newness of our situation like the confusion it engenders. Uncertainty about how to approach cultural difference makes for deeply polarized public discourse. Feminists struggle with whether the cultural practice of veiling can be squared with a universalist commitment to gender equality;² the sartorial choices of a pop-star give rise to

¹ Of course this underestimates how stratified and selective mobility is. My concern here is with the perception of globalization, not its actual practices.
² See Zerilli (2009) for an overview of the debate within feminism about how to judge diverse cultural practices within the feminist rubric.
a roar of internet chatter over the difference between openness to the other and cultural appropriation; a trending news story leaves comment-boards and Facebook posts aflame with charges of cultural insensitivity, on the one hand, or of political correctness on the other. The ferocity with which these internet wars are waged suggests the difficulty we have in thinking about how to think about diversity. As technological change and globalization have opened up the world, the path to understanding difference can seem ever more obscure.

Given this, it is the contention of this dissertation that the ancient Greek thinker Herodotus offers an unexpected yet rich resource for contemporary thinking about diversity. Some might object that turning to the ancient Greeks is hardly the most promising route to expanding and clarifying our thinking on diversity. Yet such thinking is reductive, and misses out on the complexity and depth of Greek thought. As Arlene Saxonhouse has convincingly argued, a deep sense of the urgency of the problem posed by diversity animates the work of the ancient Greek poets, playwrights, and philosophers.3 Neither Saxonhouse nor I contend that the Greeks settled, or can settle, this problem; rather, I suggest that an encounter with the intensity and thoughtfulness with which the Greeks in general, and Herodotus in particular, grapples with the fact of diversity can act as a live-wire for our own thinking, shocking us into a clearer awareness of some of our own complacencies.

This does not mean that I deny the vast difference between our world and that of the ancient Greeks. Herodotus’ work, written over two millennia ago, does not employ the concepts that we generally rely upon when thinking about diversity, such as toleration and multiculturalism, which have been given to us by liberal thought and are enmeshed within a liberal understanding of the world. But this apparent lack is in fact a real strength. Engaging with

3 Saxonhouse, (1992)
alternative responses can be a productively unsettling experience, if we allow it, leading us to attend afresh to both the nuances and the obstructions in our own experience. At its best, this jostling can help us unearth some of the buried assumptions that have occluded our own understanding. Such a recalibration of our vision cannot but recast some of our old questions, perhaps even raising newer and sharper ones.

In his *Histories*, Herodotus demonstrates that substantively engaging with the diverse cultures of the world illuminates our shared humanity. Different conventions express different aspects of human potential. Because of this, other cultures offer profound alternatives to one’s own way of life, for they vivify different ways of responding to shared human problems. Engaging with diversity thus not only informs sound politics; it is key to self-knowledge, for it allows us to better understand the horizons of human possibility. In this, Herodotus is informed by the sophistic debates of his time. As Rosalind Thomas has argued, the *Histories* participate in controversies over the relationship between *nomos*, convention, and *phusis*, nature. For Herodotus, Thomas observes, “other peoples are different, but they are different in such a way as to reveal some fundamental characteristics of nature.”4 For Herodotus, then, a monocultural understanding is insufficient to grasp the truth of human nature. Self-understanding requires that we turn to others. But what illuminates can also obscure; cultural difference can shed light on what we share, yet it can also impair our ability to see each other clearly. Indeed, Herodotus is deeply cognizant of the difficulties attendant upon cross-cultural judgment. While the substance of his inquiry brings forth the potentials embodied in the diverse conventions of his world, these can remain inaccessible given the distortions that inhere in one’s own situated perspective. To

4 Thomas (2000) 71
remedy this, Herodotus’ substantive inquiry into “the things man has brought into being” (1.1) also offers a therapy of judgment; it both diagnoses impairments and offers rehabilitation.

In this, I join recent work exploring the self-reflexive quality of Herodotus’ narrative, how the Histories are also an inquiry into inquiry. His artful narrative is key to this. I therefore leave aside questions about the facticity of Herodotus’ narrative and attend instead to the way that Herodotus arranges and presents his material in order to engage his audience in his inquiry. In other words, to use Irene De Jong’s felicitous phrase, I seek Herodotus’ “authorial fingerprint.” The therapy of judgment his work provides is accomplished through the way Herodotus’ artful narrative inserts his audience into his story; the spectating audience is led to inquire into difference, to feel the excitement of inquiry, and, occasionally, to suffer a chastening recognition when such spectacle goes awry. The inquirer can be heroic, like Herodotus, wrestling with competing logoi and saving them from the ravages of time. The inquirer can also be a cowardly voyeur, like the Lydian Gyges; hobbled by conceptual errors, like the Egyptian Psammetichus; a mad imperialist, like the Persian Cambyses; or, like the Scythian Anacharsis, one’s inquiries can be barren, kept private and to oneself, offering no aid or insight to one’s community. Herodotus’s example transcends these ‘textual rivals’, to use David Branscome’s apt term for these foils. Yet Herodotus does not merely show these errors; he lets the audience

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7 De Jong (2012)
8 See especially Irwin (2014) for how Herodotus’ Ethiopian ethnography implicates the imperialist desires of his audience. Such chastening moments occur throughout the history - as I will discuss, at turns the audience is invited to become Gyges, Cambyses, and the dupes of that clever Athenian, Themistocles.
9 See Bakker (2002) for the apodexis of the Histories as a heroic endeavour; see also chapter One.
10 Branscome (2013).
‘feel’ them, and so be implicated in these marred inquiries. These painful recognitions lead his audience to suffer vicariously with others, and so to gain insight usually won too late.\textsuperscript{11}

Both the pleasure and suffering inculcated by the narrative are necessary to Herodotus’ therapy. The one draws and incites, and the other chastens and teaches. His narrative art makes such pain charming and thus palatable; Herodotus thus does not force his audience, but invites. In this way, Herodotus urges his audience to expand their situated perspective, by showing how a single, specific perspective might do the hard work of inquiring into difference. His constant authorial presence demonstrates that good judgment requires neither that we seek out a neutral perspective nor that we entirely adopt the perspective of another. When we judge, we always remain ourselves — but to judge well, our perspective must go travelling.

Herodotus’ travels thus show how a situated perspective might impartially encounter the diversity of the world. This is all the more notable because Herodotus conducts his inquiry in the aftermath of a profoundly partisan clash: the war between the Hellenes and the Persians. The proem links his cross-cultural inquiry with this recent epic war. Herodotus promises to show forth all that man has brought into being — the achievements of all peoples — but also promises to commemorate the deeds of the war and its causes (1.1). With this, Herodotus’ conduct reminds us that inquiry is never conducted from an Archimedean point; his inquiry unfurls within a situation of conflict and contestation, of partisan blame and praise. Indeed, war structures the book from beginning to end.\textsuperscript{12} The \textit{Histories} begin with the Trojan war, cover the

\textsuperscript{11} See Shapiro (1994) on how vicarious suffering allows Herodotus’ audience to learn from the experiences of others.

\textsuperscript{12} Harrison (2002) for how the work is structured by the ever-escalating series of Persian Invasions (plural).
Persian wars, and foreshadow the Peloponnesian war, yet Herodotus’ treatment of war also shows how it permeates the relationship between individuals, within the family, and even within the self. Herodotus’ inquiry into custom reveals the universal and seemingly inescapable significance of war: the temptation to war transcends cultures, and is present in the most intimate and private aspects of human life. As Elliot Bartky observes, with this Herodotus applies the methods of the pre-Socratics to the subject of the poets: war and the deeds of man. He thus applies scientific inquiry to the most pressing concerns of human communities. Yet as will emerge, what his inquiry uncovers, it will also seek to temper. The urge to war can be moderated.

Herodotus’ narrative will show that individual leaders can effect important change within their communities, and thus stave off the destruction of war. In fostering good judgment amongst his readers, he nurtures such leaders while demonstrating their necessity. But the transformation of nomoi offers an even more profound means of moderating the destructive desires and impulses of human beings. Herodotus enables this sort of transformation by helping his audience to distinguish healthy from destructive conventions. Different conventions can either unleash or restrain human impulses, and to different degrees. Indeed, as Balot has argued, despite

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13 See for example, Moles (2002) on how Herodotus’ treatment of Athens in the Histories anticipates and critiques Athenian expansionism; or Fornara (1971) for the Peloponnesian war as a catalyst of the Histories.

14 Bartky (2002) for the multidimensionality of war. Note that war within the family bookends the work - Canduales and Xerxes both are engulfed in familial violence (on this bookending, see Bartky (2002) 453.; Gammie (1986) 185-187). For war within the individual, see the fate of Kleomenes. For war as the fate of man, see chapter four.

15 Bartky (2002) 458- 439: “Herodotus’ inquiry into human affairs, that is, his inquiry into human motion, and especially into the greatest human motion, the motion of war, returns to a subject matter which the philosophers, as philosophers, had left to the poets… Herodotus transforms the philosophers’ inquiry into nature, Being, and Logos into an inquiry into human things, or as he writes in the opening lines of The History, into an inquiry into what man has brought into being.”

16 Thomas (2000) 114 notes that “Ethnic character… seems to be as changeable as the fortunes of cities great and small.
initial appearances (Herodotus’ famous quotation of Pindar that ‘custom is king of all’)

Herodotus is not a relativist. Some nomoi “achieved better results than others… [Herodotus’] History conveyed the message that once could arrive at an understanding of healthy politics through observing who won important wars, whose system was durable, and whose citizens were happier.”17 The Histories thus offer the cross-cultural perspective through which we can make these comparisons, all while nourishing our capacity to appreciate this perspective. Beyond this, however, Herodotus himself engages in the work of transforming convention, all the while modelling such work for his audience. This emerges in his treatment of Homer and the Hellenic gods. There, Herodotus will transform gods that exhort vengeance into gods that restrain it. Yet by signalling what he is doing, he teaches his audience the necessity of such transformation. Cities rise and fall. To survive this cycle, or at least forestall it, their conventions must be dynamic, continually adapted.

To do this work requires knowledge of both custom and the nature from which it springs. With the broad scope of the Histories, we can see what nomos can unleash at its best: free, flourishing citizens, and at its worst: senseless violence and cruel vengeance. To restrain our worst and achieve our best, we need an understanding of both. In showing us our destructive impulses, how they are fed or starved by different conventional configurations, Herodotus’ work offers the hope that we can restrain our worst, and sustain our communities from the vagaries of fortune and destruction — if only for a little while. But just as his account of empire and vengeance helps to restrain these human tendencies, Herodotus’ depiction of the merits of freedom and independence urges us to nourish human potential. These goods are vulnerable - as his narrative shows, the independence of the Scythians requires great sacrifice, and the freedom

17 Balot (2006)125
of the Athenians must be moderated and led by the wise judgment of its democratic leaders. The narrative of the Histories lets us taste the delights of freedom; the judgment it inculcates helps to uphold it.

*The Comparative Turn in Political Theory*

Others have recognized the richness of Herodotus’ approach to diversity. In particular, some have argued that, with his global interests and comparative method, Herodotus provides a foundation for the emerging turn to comparative political theory.¹⁸ Comparative political theory urges the necessity of articulating new conceptual frameworks more responsive to the challenges posed by our globalized world of complex diversity, hybrid identities, and ever-shifting patterns of cultural interdependency and exchange. As Fred Dallmyr insists in his call for a truly comparative political theory, “one segment of the world’s population cannot monopolize the language or idiom of the emerging... global civil society.”¹⁹ Instead, political theorists must “replace or supplement the rehearsal of routinized canons” with “lateral interaction, negotiation, and contestation among different, historically grown cultural frameworks.”²⁰ According to this view, mainstream political theory must break out of its narrow parochialism masquerading as universalism, or risk becoming hopelessly moribund.

Yet extricating ourselves from this apparent morass is not so simple as, say, elbowing Confucius’ *Analects* or the *Upanishads* into the canon. As Leigh Jenco has argued, it might be that "‘global’ thought seeks inclusion of diverse cultural perspectives, but does so by means of those very discourses whose cultural insularity is what prompts critique in the first place."²¹ That is, simply looking at what is other is not enough to overcome the biases, the myopia, of our own

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¹⁹ Dallmyr (2004) 249
²⁰ Dallmyr, (2004) 249
²¹ Jenco (2007), 741
particular cultural lens. In fact, this can simply entrench and confirm our filters, by assimilating
otherness into expected and familiar categories of thought, and thus stripping it of its own
particular character, a recasting that can soften or even void the power of these alternative voices
to disrupt or trouble ‘Western’ complacency. Yet the solution that Jenco proposes— adopting the
methods belonging to the cultures one studies— runs its own risks. Precisely because culture
binds thinking in insidious ways, adopting the perspective of others often means ventriloquizing
them, that is, representing difference in ways that merely reinforce pre-existing assumptions.\textsuperscript{22}
We cannot thus simply exchange Western for Eastern thought.

Yet ‘Western’ thought is not the monolith that it is often presented as, and thus offers an
unexpected resource in thinking through this issue. Indeed, reviving a sense of the richness,
diversity, and tensions within the polymorphous and shifting category of ‘Western thought’ can
urge us to attend more sensitively to the nuances of other traditions, by warning us from treating
any tradition as a homogeneous entity with clear-cut boundaries. An assimilating gaze is not our
fate, even if it is a temptation; the tensions and cross-currents within the ‘Western’ tradition can
produce a sort of freeing friction that grants us traction in our approach to what is other. Indeed,
Susan McWilliams has cogently argued for the vitality of one of these crosscurrents as a means
of correcting our often culturally-myopic lens: “If we look for the travellers, we discover threads
in the history of Western political thought that are among the best resources available to political
theorists who wish to contemplate globalization in the twenty-first century.”\textsuperscript{23} For McWilliams,
travel writings encourage a perspective of particular helpfulness in coming to grips with the
fluidity and hybridity that characterize diversity in our globalized age, an age where influence

\textsuperscript{22} Young (2001b)
\textsuperscript{23} McWilliams, (2014) 5
and identities meet, converge, and alter at a rapidly intensifying rate, where nothing ever seems to stand still.

Travel narratives speak to this by fostering an “intellectual standpoint... that is both wandering and rooted, that is situated between abstraction and particularity, but that neglects the importance of neither. It has a kind of global vision but remains mindful of the fact that in human affairs, singularity is intractable.” For McWilliams, then, the narrative inherent in travel-writing— that all travelling is a journey, a voyage, and must be described as such — allows us to locate the particular within a larger ‘global vision’. In this, travel-writing becomes a particularly rich vein for theoretical exploration, as it resists the sort of radical abstraction that so often characterizes liberal thought (from Hobbes to Rawls), an approach that can lead to the assimilationist tendencies that Jenco rightfully decries. As McWilliams contends, travel-writing urges a political theory that “develop[s] out of engaged consideration of world (non-ideal though it may be) abstracting only out of and within the terms of that world and its limitations.”

According to this view, then, travel-writing practices an embedded theory, one that thinks about and through the world as it is. Travellers lead us out of the original position, and into the world we actually inhabit.

Yet as McWilliams herself recognizes, travel-writing can fall prey to over-particularization and exoticism on the one hand, and generalization and levelling on the other. To practice the embedded theory that McWilliams touts, one must be able to actually encounter our ‘non-ideal’ world, an undertaking littered with often massive obstacles. (As any reader of

24 McWilliams, (2014) 21
25 McWilliams, (2014) 131
26 McWilliams, (2014) 40
Machiavelli knows, it can be quite difficult to put aside imaginary republics.)²⁷ Because of this, we must travel wisely, and attend to the obstacles that threaten to occlude our vision. Indeed, our vision itself can become our heaviest baggage; as comparative theologian Raimundo Panikkar has warned, we “cannot avoid taking a stand from somewhere when we philosophize.”²⁸ If we neglect this, we can become blinded to the sorts of filters we employ when encountering what is novel and strange. This not only immures us within a narrowed horizon— allowing everything that we see to simply confirm what we already know — but such forgetfulness can in fact occlude or even obliterate the means of shifting or expanding these limits. A narrow vision that has seen the whole world learns to dress its parochialism in universalism, and thus becomes resistant to the sort of radical perspective shift that travel at its best can prompt. The sort of sensitive and responsive intellectual standpoint McWilliams finds in travel-writing only becomes possible if we begin to interrogate the boundaries of our own vision. It is not enough to look; we must indeed look to our looking. The task, then, of travel-theory is to teach our thought itself to travel, for it too it must learn to shift and rove.²⁹

Arendtian Judgment as a School for Travellers

In this light, I turn to a consideration of Hannah Arendt’s theory of judgment, which urges that “one trains one’s imagination to go visiting.”³⁰ A quick detour into her thought here, while necessarily truncated, will help clarify some of what is at stake in adopting travel as a

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²⁷ cf. “And many have imagined republics and principalities that have never been seen or known to exist in truth...” The Prince XV
²⁸ Pamikkar, (1988) 125-130
²⁹ cf Rousseau, “Let us suppose a Montesquieu, a Buffon, a Diderot, a Duclos, a d’Alembert, a Condillac, or men of that stamp, traveling with a view to instruct their compatriots, observing and describing as they do so well... let us suppose that on their return from these memorable travels, these new Hercules set down at leisure the natural, moral and political history of what they had seen, then we would ourselves see a new world issue from their pen, and would thus learn to know our own...” 2D note 11
³⁰ Arendt, (1982) 43. Arendt’s use of Kant is controversial and idiosyncratic, but it is not my focus here. Arendt will provide a useful foil for what I am trying to get at here, so a quick detour is justified.
model for comparative political thought. According to Arendt, judgment is grounded in the subjectivity of the individual yet at the same time attempts to ‘think beyond’ its own individual limitations, in this way thinking with an ‘enlarged mentality’.

31 This means that, for Arendt, judging is both deeply attuned to the presence of others and yet is not determined or compelled by these relationships; to judge, one must think where one is not, by making absent others present to oneself through imaginative representation. 32

Because judgment requires that we be open to others without being determined by them, Arendt deemed judgment to be “one of the fundamental abilities of man as a political being insofar as it enables him to orient himself in the public realm, in the common world.” 33 Judgment, for Arendt, couples autonomy with plurality; through this creative act of ‘representation’, we can think for ourselves while living with and attending to others. 34

This emphasis on judgment as a creative and autonomous faculty gets at what is both most attractive and at times maddeningly elusive about Arendt’s theory of judgment: its rejection of any absolute grounds for judgment, and its concomitant insistence on a kind of absolute freedom. As Bryan Garsten has noted, the central preoccupation of Arendt’s thought here aims at clarifying a way of judging “without ceding responsibility to the principles or rules by which one judges.” 35

In other words, for Arendt, judging is a faculty that is both non-coercive and un-coerced, and it loses its validity as soon as either of these aspects are compromised. The groundlessness of this sort of judgment ensures that the judging agent is, in the last analysis, fully responsible for her judgments — as Arendt quotes Nietzsche, ‘my judgments are my

31 Arendt, (1982) 42-43
33 Arendt, (2001) 20
34 Nedelsky, (2001)
35 Garsten, (2010) 319
judgments’. While tying the judge to the judgment, this rejection of principles or rules also aims to let the full contours of the particular emerge. As Ronald Beiner notes, for Arendt “judgment involves attending to the particular as an end in itself— that is, as a singular locus of meaning that isn’t reducible to universal causes or universal consequences.” By rejecting any absolute final ground for judgment, Arendt hopes to in fact heighten the moral dimension of judgment: we owe it to ourselves that we judge for ourselves, but we owe it to the judged that we judge well.

We can see how this dual aspect of Arendt’s judgment might make it particularly attractive for our globalized yet fractured world, characterized as it is by complex diversity and lateral authorities, where no one tradition or metaphysics can conclusively ground our experiences. To wend a path through these often fraught interstices, thought must be sensitive yet penetrating, yielding yet not capitulating, and Arendt’s theory of judgment seems to offer a promising suppleness appropriate to the mental dexterity our world requires. Indeed, as Beiner has observed, Arendt’s preoccupation with judgment arose out of her deep concern with the potentially disorienting and enervating quality of the groundlessness of late modernity; the relativization and fracture stemming from an increasing subjectivization, and the intellectual or moral imprisonment that she believed resulted from a dogmatic belief in a fixed human nature. Here becomes apparent the kinship between Arendt’s emphasis on the political importance of judgment and the turn to comparative political theory; both in part stem from a recognition of the partiality, the incompleteness, of any tradition’s metaphysical frame, an awareness that is shaped, amongst other things, by liberal modernity’s rejections of ultimate grounds. Arendt’s judgment

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36 Friedrich Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil § 43
37 Beiner (2001) 94
38 Beiner (2001) 92
seems to offer a means out (and, in this, a method for comparative theory) by promising that we can judge with validity without the burden of traditional frameworks and principles. We are promised the freedom to truly compare, the freedom to engage our world without losing ourselves.

_Herodotean Journeys and the Possibility of Judgment_

Yet for all the attractiveness of this picture, Arendt is notoriously elusive on what her image of judgment might actually entail. An imagination gone visiting is as likely to ventriloquise or misconstrue as an imagination that sits by itself at home in sweatpants and slippers. As Iris Marion Young has noted, “[i]f you think you already know how the other people feel and judge because you have imaginatively represented their perspective to yourself, then you may not listen to their expression of their perspective very openly.” What is needed is a sense of the work that is required in any perspectival shift, what must be overcome as much as what is promised.

If Arendt argues that one must train one’s imagination to go visiting, Herodotus’ narrative shows what this would demand. His complex narrative grounds our attention in the diversity and unruliness of the political world. Much of its true character resists capture in straightforward articulations. In order to overcome this, and so to better approach the elusive truths of human experience, Herodotus offers a narrative tour of the diversity of his world, one that recreates the experience of alternative visions of human goods, and allows us to draw nearer

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39 “Regardless of how much individuals may come and go, it would seem that Philosophy does not travel.... One cannot open a travel book without coming upon descriptions of characters and morals; yet one is utterly astounded to find that these people who have described so many things have said only what everybody already knew, that all they were able to perceive at the other end of the world is what they could perfectly well have observed without leaving their street, and that the telling traits that differentiate Nations and strike eyes made to see have almost always escaped theirs.” Rousseau, _The Second Discourses_, n x.8. trans. Gourevitch

40 Young, (2001b) 215
to the particularity of each. The digressive quality of his narrative allows us to see the diversity of customs in action; his account spans the globe and time itself, allowing us to trace the rise and fall of cultures, the way that customs interact and influence each other, and how human lives unfold within conventional horizons. Such an expansive account avoids abstraction, and grants us a fuller picture of the complexity of the world. Through this, we can see some of the overlap between Arendt and Herodotus; as Seyla Benhabib has urged, narrative is key to Arendt’s ‘enlarged mentality’: “narrativity, or the immersion of action in a web of human relationships, is the mode through which the self is individuated and acts are identified... To identify an action is to tell the story of its initiation, of its unfolding, and of its immersion in a web of relations constituted through the actions and narratives of others.”\(^\text{41}\) The teeming and expansive quality of Herodotus’ narrative plots the complex causality of political deeds by attending to the manifold aspects and causes of an individual action. Herodotus’ narrative suggests that to understand a thing, we have to strive to see it in its entirety— the whole story of its unfolding.

This sort of complex, multilayered narrative also allows us to develop a nuanced understanding of the power of convention. The narrativity of Herodotus shows how human lives both influence and are influenced by culture; he thus suggests the importance of attending to custom without granting it absolute authority. Custom rules, but not despotically.\(^\text{42}\) This resonates with Amartya Sen’s contention that while culture is powerful, it is not an absolute fate— it is something that we are continually negotiating, thinking about and through.\(^\text{43}\) Sen argues that the more we treat culture as an absolute, and human identity as a “choiceless

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\(^{41}\) Benhabib (2001) 188

\(^{42}\) 3.38: Nomon panton basilea. Basileus (king), not tyrant. For how Herodotus distinguishes between kings and tyrants, see Ferrill (1978) 385-398.

\(^{43}\) Sen, (2006)
singularity”, the more likely we are to become engulfed in violent conflicts of identity. Herodotus’ narrative suggests the truth of this, as it demonstrates how the fatalism and absolutism of Persian cultural identity helped spur them to empire and war. Indeed, the Histories demonstrate that overly rigid cultural identities inhibit human flourishing in a variety of ways: in addition to fuelling violence, such rigidity undercuts human agency by denying human generative power, and thwarts the development of complex individuality and self-reflection by insisting on a narrowed account of communal identity. By showing a range of human cultures, Herodotus reveals to his audience the myriad possible configurations of human customs. He thus suggests that culture is not simply ‘given’ to human beings, but is rather something which human beings can and must negotiate. As Thomas has observed, in the Histories, “ethnic character… seems to be as changeable as the fortunes of cities great and small.” Hellenic cultures, in particular, was decisively formed by such negotiation, and is thus especially receptive to reshaping— a conventional trait the Histories will exploit.

The narrativity of the Histories therefore accomplishes its therapy of judgment. It shows us the world in its fulness, causality in its complexity, and culture as both the horizon within which human beings dwell, and that which human agency interrogates, negotiates, and transforms. Yet key to Herodotus’ account of judgment is the way he foregrounds the difficulty of judging across cultures— even as he is doing precisely that. Commenting upon the madness of Cambyses, Herodotus proclaims that “if there were a proposition put before mankind, according to which each should, after examination (διασκεψάµενοι), choose the best customs in the world,

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44 Sen, (2006) 16
45 See Chapter Three
46 See Chapter Two
47 See Chapter Four
48 Thomas (2000) 114
49 See my discussion of Homer in Chapter Two
each nation would certainly think its own customs the best” (3.38.) Herodotus underscores the
difficulty of relying on one’s judgment. Even “after examination”, judgment is constrained by
conventional boundaries, thus foreclosing impartial inquiry into difference. The preference for
one’s own shapes one’s thinking. That we are affectively attached to our own perspective does
not foreclose the possibility of judgment, however. Rather, it requires that we attend to the ways
in which we always inhabit a particular, situated perspective.

Herodotus’ use of his authorial presence reminds us of this. Herodotus does not practice
perfect objectivity. Instead, the Herodotean narrator both revels in and problematizes the
particularity of his perspective; his persona pervades the work.50 As recent work on the contested
quality of Herodotus’ narrative has demonstrated, by constantly reminding his audience of his
personality and positionality, he incites the judgment of his audience.51 Yet while the jostle of
the conflicting perspectives present in the work undoubtedly destabilizes and provokes his
audience, the Histories will also show that merely encountering difference and disagreement is
not enough; being confronted by the limits to one’s perspective can inflame rather than moderate
attachments. Because of the power of attachment within our thinking, it must be recruited rather
than opposed.52

The charm of Herodotus’ narrative— its artfulness — is key to this. Herodotean
storytelling recreates the experience of diversity, bringing forth a multitude of perspectives on
the contested truth of the world. By inviting his audience into his text, Herodotus allows them to

51 see especially Schlosser, (2014), 239-261,
52 For a cogent discussion of affect in discourse, see Krause (2008). Krause turns to the work of Hume to
explore the role of affect in public deliberation, but is attuned to the intersections between political theory
and cognitive science on the way that affect suffuses thinking. Herodotus’ treatment of the way that
preference for own’s own persists despite examination demonstrates his cognizance of this aspect of
human experience.
taste delights that they might otherwise not taste. His storytelling thus overcomes the obstacle identified by the Spartans Sperthias and Bulis in their encounter with the Persian general Hydarnes: “You counsel us as one who has tried one condition but knows nothing of the other. You know what it is to be a slave, but you have no experience of freedom, to know whether it is sweet or not” (7.135). Through Herodotus, his readers experience a range of possible human goods, so that they can better ascertain which are truly sweet. This sweetness, what was once dismissed as its charm, not only leads us to sense the incompleteness of any one perspective, but engages our concern with what is other. It is one thing to know that one’s perspective is incomplete, that there are counter-narratives to one’s own. It is another thing altogether to care.

Herodotus’ example in the Histories thus suggests the affective dimension of good judgment, the drive that motivates the sort of ‘imaginative travelling’ that Arendt describes. Inquiry must be interested in the right way. We care about the knowledge of others because such knowledge offers an important corrective to our own limited perspective. By dramatizing these limits — and showing the enticements that await outside our narrowed purviews — the Histories motivate its audience to do the hard work of inquiry for themselves. In this, the cross-cultural judgment on display in his text offers a substantive vision of what it means for one’s imagination ‘to go visiting’, thus surpassing the elisions and gaps in Arendt’s unfinished work on judgment.

53 As I shall discuss in my third chapter, an inability to surmount this obstacle might have proved fatal to Otanes’ defence of isonomia in the Persian debate of the regimes.
54 Ralph Waldo Emerson perspicaciously noted both the traditional disdain for Herodotus and the modern world’s re-evaluation: “Herodotus, whose history contains inestimable anecdotes, which brought it with the learned into a sort of disesteem; but in these days, when it is found that is most memorable of history is a few anecdotes, and that we need not be alarmed that we should find it not dull, it is regaining credit.” “Books” in Society and Solitude
55 Contra Christ (1994), who argues that Herodotus posits himself as a model of disinterested inquiry. Irwin (2014) suggests that Herodotus shows how difficult and rare disinterested inquiry is; I take this approach further by suggesting that ‘disinterest’ isn’t the goal at all.
Yet the differences between Arendtian and Herodotean judgment go beyond method; the role of nature (or lack thereof) is key to grasping the ways that Herodotus’ judgment responds to the problems in Arendt’s account. While Arendt seeks to avoid the appeal to nature, the problem of nature, of *nomos* versus *phusis*, is central to Herodotus’ work. As noted above, Thomas has shown how Herodotus’ inquiries were informed by 5th century intellectual debates about the interplay between *nomos* and *phusis*, convention and nature. Against those sophists who use nature as an absolute standard by which to denigrate human convention and morality, Herodotus appreciates custom for its ability to both reveal and restrain nature. He is, in other words, interested in the symbiosis of *nomos* and *phusis*. Indeed, Thomas notes that *nomos* is central to the fates of cities and societies; in the *Histories*, decline and growth are ultimately attributed to custom, habit, political constitutions: that is, *nomoi*. The right *nomoi* can allow human beings to become better than their natures, in the judicious phrase of the Carian general Pixodarus (5.118).

Herodotus’ famed account of the battle of Thermopylae provides a striking — and bloody — example of this. Herodotus makes plain that the resilience of the Spartans in the face of waves of Median and Persian warriors is not due to the inborn or natural superiority of the Greeks: the Spartan performance “was that of skilled soldiers against unskilled...” (7.211). Yet Herodotus claims that it was quite clear that, amongst Xerxes’ warriors, “though they had many men there, there were few *men*.” (7.210). The civic virtue nourished by the Spartans allows them— *each* of them—to be better than their nature, to become *andres* (men) rather than mere *anthropoi* (human beings.) Convention can perfect nature. In this, the Spartans vindicate their

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56 Thomas (2000) 2-3; Thomas cites Herodotus’ disdain for those who argue from nature for the rejection of convention.
57 Thomas (2000) 104
former king’s argument in his debate with the Emperor Xerxes about the military threat posed by the Lacedaemonians. When asked if the Greeks will stand against Xerxes’ invasion, Demaratus replies “For their numbers, ask me not how many they are... If there are a thousand of them ranged to fight you, they will fight you— or less or more than a thousand.” For the Spartans, number does not factor. They will fight regardless, because of their “imported courage”— the courage made, not born, from “a compound of wisdom and the strength of their laws” (7.102), in other words, their nomoi. In Demaratus’ understanding, number does not matter to the Spartans because the character of their courage— something crafted, rather than natural — means that their worth cannot be calculated as if all human beings were interchangeable units. Where nature is the same, convention makes the difference.\(^{58}\)

Xerxes cannot believe this. He laughs at Demaratus (rather than becoming angry) because he cannot credit what Demaratus is saying. This is because he in fact cannot really understand what Demaratus is saying, as his reply reveals. “Tell me. You say that you yourself were the king of these people. Would you be willing to fight with ten men?” (7.103). Xerxes here demonstrates that he cannot see the differences that convention can make upon human nature. For him, 1000 against 10000 is the same as 1 against 10: both are utter impossibilities. The Persian belief that “multitude is strength”\(^{(1.136)}\) in fact depends on a view of the individual as isolated, as a basic atomic unit of counting, interchangeable with all others — of human nature, stripped of the difference that convention makes. Demaratus could not fight off 10 men by himself- because he is by himself. The strength of the Spartans lies in their collectivity. Again, their courage is not native but cultivated. It is as Spartans and not as individuals that they excel. Convention allows the Spartans to become better than their nature.

This does not mean that natural potential was not to be found amongst the Persians. In his survey of the dead after the climactic battle of Thermopylae, Herodotus commemorates the “men worthy of record,” (7.223), including two Persians, whom he lists by name. Virtue is plainly possible amongst the Persians. In contrast, however, Herodotus notes that he has learned the names of all 300 Spartans, although he does not list them. Each one of the 300 deserved to have his name remembered, but what is notable about all of them is that they are all alike Spartans—‘Spartan’ is the only name that matters. Where the Persians had two notable individuals, the Spartans had an extraordinary commonality. What is exceptional amongst one set of conventions becomes ordinary amongst another. Although convention can blind or limit our world, at its best it can allow us to excel in ways impossible without it.

Yet to understand the power of convention, we have to grasp the nature upon which it acts. The importance of a complex concept of nature— for both judgment and politics—becomes evident through Herodotus’ Egyptian logos. Egyptian custom downplays or denies the importance of nature, resulting in a fatalism that inhibits their full agency. This suggests that the concept of nature grants the critical distance necessary to examine one’s own conventions: it prevents one’s customs, conventions, one’s culture, from becoming an inescapable fate. Custom is not all there is. Arendt’s rejection of nature, which is intended to uphold human agency and hold the individual responsible for her actions and judgments, might thus in fact inhibit the exercise of judgment by undercutting the motivation to turn to others. Because of this, although Arendt’s account of judgment aims avoid the quicksands of relativism, her avoidance of nature threatens to let relativism creep silently back in. As she admits, in the last analysis we might
have nothing to say to Bluebeard, only that we wish not to keep company with him.\textsuperscript{59} Without some sense of a shared ground out of which diverse customs grow, we might be left with little to say to others— and with the belief that they have little to say to us.

Herodotus, however, shows that a nuanced understanding of the interplay between nature and convention can nurture openness toward others, as well as a more profound sense of which conventions unleash the best of human nature, and which restrain its worst. Thomas’ discussion of the influence of medical ethnography on Herodotus’ writing shows that these writers — and Herodotus too — turned to others to better understand human nature.\textsuperscript{60} Attentiveness to nature inspires the turn to others. In \textit{The Histories}, human nature expresses itself through myriads of different conventions. It is not a fixed standard, but rather is glimpsed only in motion, as it were; it is expressed or thwarted through convention, through the practices of diverse human beings. For Herodotus, judgment is required not because nature offers no standards, but because these standards are necessarily elusive, expressed only through the conventional. We must hang loose from convention so that we can better grasp the horizons of human possibility, and so better know how to work within them. Herodotean judgment rejects conventional standards so that it can better grasp what is necessarily oblique and elusive— a human nature that is expressed through the myriads of human conventions and so can only be grasped comparatively. Nature is thus an elusive concept, but not an absent one. The elusiveness of nature invites our imagination to go travelling, for travel promises to deepen our understanding of its possible ways and means. Banishing nature from political judgment, however, undercuts the impulse to turn to others by denying the relevance that the lives of others might hold for one’s own way of life. For Herodotus, nature and custom interpenetrate; one cannot examine one without the other.

\textsuperscript{59} Arendt, (2005).
\textsuperscript{60} Thomas (2000) 44-71
His philosophical interest in the nature of the world thus supports his political judgment. In the *Histories*, Herodotus shows that other cultures offer substantive alternatives to the Hellenic way of life; the problems posed by nature can be responded to in other, perhaps superior, ways. Knowledge of these can help correct the follies of the Hellenes and strengthen their virtues, in particular their unique openness to the other.\(^6\) His global vision thus informs his commitment to free speech and equality (5.78); the wisdom attained through his openness to the other thus informs his defence of a democratic way of life.\(^6\) Furthermore, the cross-cultural narrative with which he communicates these insights allows him to foster a similar openness within his audience, thus better equipping them to exercise the kind of judgment required for the sound functioning of democracy. The *Histories* nurture respect for diversity by showing that such respect is the condition of wisdom. Openness to the other opens up the truth.

**Review of Recent Literature**

This project has benefitted from recent work that treats Herodotus as an origin point of comparative political theory. As Von Vacano has observed, Herodotus models comparative political theory because he possesses a “nomadic and aesthetic sensibility” that presents theory as a “call to movement”.\(^6\) McWilliams treats Herodotus as an exemplar of the ‘travel’ genre discussed above.\(^6\) Euben, in her work on comparative political theory and travel, likewise argues for the timely untimeliness of Herodotus; in her view, he “moved through [a] world... unbounded by the modern nation-state, [and thus brings] into particularly sharp relief a dialectic between local urban allegiance and attenuated membership in a trans-regional *Oikumene* particularly

\(6^1\) Munson (2001) 168-172  
\(6^2\) Thomas (2000) 117 “Democracy helped Athens grow powerful and it is therefore a most important thing, one of those *nomoi* which helped the Greeks defeat the Persians… But it is not a monopoly of the Greeks, or the Asians…”  
\(6^3\) Von Vacano (2015) 464  
\(6^4\) McWilliams (2013), (2014)
evocative of the ‘postnational’ implications of globalization…”.65 In this view, Herodotus reminds us of the lingering salience of local culture and community within a globalized world, thus reminding us that political science must think beyond the state.

Others focus on the substantive political theory on offer in the Histories. Ward has insightfully argued that the Histories offers a defence of Athenian democracy as the best regime, praise moderated by Herodotus’ depiction of its inclination towards empire.66 Ward persuasively shows that Herodotus’ praise of Athens is not mere opportunistic flattery, but born of Herodotus’ sophisticated political science. Other recent work takes its cue from the eddying cross-currents of disagreement and contestation that mark Herodotus’ complex and comprehensive work. Baragwanath has persuasively argued for the ways that Herodotus’ complex and elusive authorial presence elicits an active readership, although she does not attend to the political consequences of this.67 Noting the tensions that Herodotus preserves in his narrative, Apfel has recently urged that Herodotus was a ‘pluralist’ in the spirit of Isaiah Berlin.68 In Apfel’s view, his habit of reporting multiple accounts of stories suggests “the sometimes plural nature of reality itself.”69 Apfel is right to highlight the care behind Herodotus’ reportage of contesting narratives, although I instead contend that Herodotus’ attentiveness to multiple versions of the truth reveals his belief that the truth is obscure, not plural or relative.70 Schlosser further draws out the consequences of Herodotus’ use of competing narratives. According to Schlosser, “this use of stories within the Histories prevents the surreptitious emplotting of a singular narrative, instead

65 Euben (2008) 50-51
67 Baragwanath (2008)
68 Apfel (2011) 114-206
69 Apfel (2011), 179
70 See especially my discussion of the Egyptian clerk at Sais (2,28)
creating a contest among different narratives that the reader must adjudge for herself.”

Schlosser, Herodotus thus originates a political realism that captures the shifting and open-ended nature of the ‘real.’ Schlosser and Apfel provide much-needed attention to the theoretical consequences of Herodotus’ elusive and evocative prose. Schlosser is especially cogent in his analysis of the ways that Herodotus invites the reader to adjudicate between multiple readings. In a similar vein, Thompson argues that Herodotus’ interest in fantastic and often contradictory stories and tales lies in what they reveal about the communities that tell them. According to Thompson, Herodotus records these narratives in order to investigate the ways in which stories and myth are constitutive of political community, thereby granting stories a ‘truth’ all their own, outside considerations of historical factuality.

These recent works all take seriously the narrative sophistication of Herodotus, and show the carefully calibrated effect that his techniques have. Yet taken too far, a focus on the ‘elusiveness’ of Herodotus neglects the substantive insights yielded by his inquiry. As Packman has shown, Herodotus’ stories continually show actors coming to accept new information that they were previously resistant to. Herodotus complicates the truth, not to relativize it, but so that we might become more open to the difficult and perhaps surprising insights his narrative communicates, and thus benefit from the understanding his own exercise of judgment has afforded him. The nature of the truth is hazy, yet it is not altogether opaque. In this work, I hope to show how Herodotus’ use of competing narratives helps to realize his substantive political theory. Herodotus adopts a multiplicity of perspectives in order to deepen and complicate the truth, not to relativize it.

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71 Schlosser (2014) 241
72 Thompson (1996)
73 Packman (1991)
Plan of the dissertation

To show Herodotus’ cross-cultural judgment at work, each chapter of this dissertation centres around one of his main cultural narratives: Lydia, Egypt, Persia, and Scythia. Because every convention is born out of humanity, each is thus a product of human nature in some way, expressing some aspect of human potential. Yet each set of conventions also works to occlude nature in its own particular way. Therefore my reading hopes to combine an account of Herodotus’ therapy of judgment—his diagnosis and rehabilitation—with a substantive account of what each culture reveals about human possibilities and limits.

In Chapter One, I explore the Lydian logos, which introduces the Histories. The Lydians are the people most similar to the Hellenes; they thus work as a sort of ‘introduction’ to difference. They are different enough from the Hellenes to provide a critical distance from the Hellenic, yet not so different that they seem simply ‘Other’. Because of this, the problems that emerge in the Lydian account are the most basic obstacles to judgment: the insufficiency of convention to guide our judgment, and the inadequacy of one’s untutored vision to see past convention. Of central importance to this chapter are the short tableaus of Candaules and Gyges, as well as Arion’s encounter with the pirates. The Candaules drama turns on the limitations of sight; yet these limitations are made more pronounced by the eros that suffuses this story. Eros distorts vision, inhibiting the ability to see well and judge fairly. Yet it also motivates inquiry, inviting one to look in the first place. By opening with a story that highlights the obstacles to judgment, Herodotus has set his audience on guard. Yet by imbuing this story with an erotic charge, Herodotus has both enticed his audience and asked us to reflect on what motivates inquiry. The erotic attraction to the beautiful can inspire us to look beyond the bounds of our own conventions. This emerges when we contrast Herodotus with the Corinthian pirates
who attempted to destroy the musician Arion, silencing his beautiful song forever. The Corinthian pirates are thus the inverse to Herodotus; through their travels, they become untethered from local mores, and act according to brute self-interest alone. The traveller Herodotus, however, goes beyond convention yet is not reduced to the most base impulses. He saves the human things, rather than destroying them.

In Chapter Two, I turn to Herodotus’ Egyptian *logos*. The Egyptians are among the most ancient of people; they have preserved their traditional ways almost unchanged. In this, they demonstrate a ‘radical’ conservatism; they imbue culture with a profound importance. Because of this, however, they neglect the human nature which they share with others. This leads not only to a radical mistrust of outsiders, but also to the neglect of their own human powers of generation. They preserve, they do not create. While this denial of human power tends to deflate the most hubristic and self-deceiving human aspirations (as becomes evident when Herodotus contrasts the Egyptians to the Hellenes, who appear facile and childlike in comparison), it also undercuts more noble and salutary ones, too. I close this chapter by turning to Herodotus’ account of the Egyptian influence on Homer and the other poets. The profundity of the Egyptian gods circumscribe human action at home, but inspired the work of the Hellenic poets. Human agency transforms the Egyptian gods that, in their mysteriousness, thwart and dwarf human aspiration, into ones that support and uphold human agency. This shows the ways in which cultural contact can spur human ingenuity; that culture is something that can be negotiated and translated according to the needs and ends of human beings.

Chapter Three explores the perils of hyper-rationalism, both for cross-cultural judgment and for political communities. The Persian custom of truth-telling leads them to valorize neutrality, thus impeding them from interrogating their own assumptions and leading them to
dismiss or destroy what appears to them as irrational: the differences of others. At the same time, by insulating their own communities from critique, their hyper-rationalism supports their imperial project; they see politics as zero-sum game, which they must win at all costs. Other people offer not alternatives, but plunder. This become especially clear through the madness of the despot Cambyses, who through his mad acts seeks to unveil what is hidden or mysterious, and so appears a dark mirror of Herodotus. The need for inquiry to attend to the limits of its situated position is made plain through Cambyses’ neglect of his.

In Chapter Four, I delve into Herodotus’ understanding of the threat that violence and vengeance pose to society, thus helping to contextualize his superlative praise of the Scythians, who, by, completely dedicating themselves to the common good, and thereby submerging their individuality almost entirely, accomplish that rarest of human things: independence and the preservation of the community against the ravages of time. Herodotus’ praise of the Scythians thus demonstrates the inescapably political orientation of his thought; it also shows that his cross-cultural judgment is able to appreciate what is antithetical to it, for while Herodotus is ‘open’, Scythia’s excellence depends on its ‘closed’ character. It is precisely the strength of the common amongst the Scythians — the total demands of the Scythian identity — that leads to a rigidity that inhibits the development of the individual. Their collective freedom represses individual freedom. Indeed, their suppression of individual identity for the sake of the collective explains their hostility to other cultures. Openness to others raises the possibility of cultural exchange and influence, of transformation. Yet the rigidity of the Scythian conception of identity denies that one can have multiple allegiances, that one’s individual identity can transform or become hybrid yet still remain within the boundaries of ‘Scythian’. Their collective freedom, which rests on their strong collective identity and concomitant rejection of others, leaves no
room for the individual—and the individual’s judgment. Good judgment requires conventional support, a cultural identity that permits a degree of fluidity; in lacking this, the Scythians demonstrate its importance.

Scythian excellence thus comes at a great cost, and it is in the light of this paradox that we must understand Herodotus’ fulsome praise of Athenian democracy. His cross-cultural inquiry has shown different attempts to order the relationship between the community and the individual, as well as the costs attendant on these differing configurations. Amongst these, the Greek polis, at its best, offers a balance. But like all balances, it is delicate, and thus in need of support. The conventional strain of Herodotus’ work is, in part, meant to strengthen or support what is best about the Greek balance, while at times subtly correcting what threatens it: the human capacity for violent vengeance, and the ever present temptation towards empire. Through his openness to the diversity of his world, Herodotus has gained the wisdom necessary to protect or uphold the singularity of his own; without such openness, the Greek balance threatens to collapse in on itself. But without conventional support, its fundamental framework is undermined by the human tendency for overreach. Herodotus’ work, which is at times both radical and conventional, challenging and reaffirming, does the delicate work of maintaining this balance.

With this brief summary of the plan of the dissertation, I hope to have shown that it is only by understanding both the method and the substance of Herodotus’ cross-cultural inquiry that the merits of his cross-cultural inquiry become plain. To foster judgment, Herodotus incites us to both question and consider what he has to say. In this, there is something profoundly democratic about Herodotus’ craft. He insists on the freedom of his audience, yet does not abdicate the responsibility of sharing the wisdom he has gained through his travels. This duality is key. He does not rule over his audience, but neither does he hide from them; he invites, rather
than commands. There is a parallel, then, between Herodotus’ methods and his famed praise of Athenian democracy: “when freed, they sought to win, because each was trying to achieve for his very self.” Mastery inspires tutelage, and this is as enervating in thought as it is in practice. Herodotus’ education to inquiry must begin by troubling the mastery that convention has over our thinking. Yet he does not simply trouble or provoke; he promises too. His work shows forth the wisdom of others, and thus motivates us to learn from the diversity of the world. In this too does his prose mirror democracy. In Herodotus’ telling, democratic freedom does not simply remove impediments; it energizes. Freedom motivates human action. The democratic quality of Herodotus’ prose lies then in the way he evokes his own characteristic wonder in his audience. We wonder at what is unclear or not straightforward, but we also wonder at what beckons to us. This wonder is the beginning of thinking.

Herodotus’ text thus both defends democracy and educates it. His text destabilizes without relativising. This is key to the way in which he fosters judgment. By insisting that some decisions are wise and some are foolish, that some laws are just and some are foul, Herodotus insists that our judgment has importance; its proper exercise can have profound political consequences. Because of this, not only what is elusive but what is concrete about the Histories exercises and fosters the judgment of his readers. The multiplicity of readings supported by the text are essential to conveying the complexity of his meaning; they communicate rather than negate Herodotus’ own, substantive thought. Herodotus’ polyvocal, complex, and provocative text teaches as it questions, saves as it challenges. Through this, he demands that we, as readers,

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{5.78}{cf. Aristotle’s Metaphysics, Book One, 982b}
\end{footnotes}
prove better than our natures and rise to the challenge of his text, through the space he opens up for our judgment in wrestling with his evocative, rich, and profound narrative.

\[\text{76 cf 5.118, which contains Herodotus' praise for the (ignored) military advice of the Carian Pixodarus: by putting themselves in a situation of dire necessity, the Carians would be forced "to stand their ground... and prove better than their natures." A lesson is here for Herodotus' teaching: only by radically challenging us are we improved, forced beyond our inclinations and conventional patterns of thought; through provocation we might prove better than our natures.}\]
Chapter One
Problems of Perspective: Eros, Aidos, and Particularity

In the opening passages of his Histories, in short order Herodotus introduces his work, replicates the Persian perspective on Greek epic past, and then plunges into a claustrophobic bedroom drama. With these nested openings, Herodotus explores a basic problem confronted by his work as a whole: how do we discern the contested truth? These passages thus set the stage for the work as a whole. They are therefore key to understanding the oft-overlooked political dimension to the Histories. Recent scholars have recognized that Herodotus both models and teaches a mode of thinking that is particularly fruitful for political activity, for the ability to judge contested truths without giving in either to relativism or absolutism is key to a flourishing politics. In particular, through the bedroom drama of the king Candaules, his bodyguard Gyges, and his queen, this essential political problem is seen in miniature. Candaules the king famously proclaims that the eyes are more trustworthy than the ears. The events of the drama undercut the superiority of the eyes; Herodotus, who so famously relies on his own autopsis, here shows its limits. In this, the Candaules drama helps teach Herodotus’ audience how to see his work. It leads his audience to see for themselves- rather than being told- the ways that vision

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77 For the resonances between the Gyges tale and the Xerxes/Maisistes drama that closes the work, see Gammie (1986) 185-187, Bartky (2002) 453. That two so closely related dramas bookend the work suggest, not only that the work is carefully structured, but the thematic importance of these episodes. I confine myself here to exploring how the Gyges story introduces one of the basic problems that Herodotus must contend with in his Histories.

78 Schlosser (2014), 239-261; 256: Herodotean wonder is rooted “in a practice of ordinary political life: citizens need to understand one another as well as their political world; wonder is necessary to enlarge this understanding as well as to chasten judgments that might follow from it.” Schlosser cogently argues that the stance of wonder inculcated by the Histories both follows from and informs basic requirement of politics: an understanding of the provisionality of our understanding. Similarly, Ward (2008) argues that the political superiority of the Athenians lies in their recognition of “the complexity of speech and the reality that speech is supposed to represent.” (3).

79 Lateiner (1989) 241 n 83 notes the way that this narrative sets the tone for the Lydian logos; Baragwanath (2008) 73 also suggests, for slightly different reasons than mine, that it is programmatic for the Histories as a whole.

80 It has been persuasively argued that Herodotus uses rivals help clarify his own work as an inquirer; see Christ (1994) 167-202; Demont (2009), Branscombe (2013), Irwin (2014).
is impaired. Each character illustrates a different aspect of this impairment: Candaules’ vision is coloured by his eros, Gyges’ by his deep immersion within custom, and the queen by her powerful attachment to her shame. Taken together, Herodotus suggests that we have to attend to the power of these in order to see past them; we must be able to adopt each of these perspectives without ceding total authority to them. By both inhabiting and questioning partial perspectives, Herodotus leads his readers to a judgment that is both comprehensive yet situated, and attentive to context without being trapped within it.

As a story about inquiry, the Candaules drama thus reveals the connections between the meta-narrative of the *Histories* (the level of the work in which the Herodotean narrator draws our attention to the acts of inquiry and crafting a narrative), and the narrative proper (the results of that activity). Indeed, there is much scholarly disagreement on how to evaluate the meta-narrative. Some, like Luraghi and Baragwanath, tend to focus on the strictly literary quality of the Herodotean narrator. As Luraghi writes, “meta-historie is more a literary strategy than a genuine depiction of the historian at work.” Others draw a stronger link between Herodotean literary craft and the intention of the work. As Branscome notes of the Herodotean narrator, “It is a persona that Herodotus uses to communicate to his readers the task of the author in the new genre that he is creating,” echoing Dewald, who argues that Herodotus’ “alert authorial

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81 Lateiner (1989) 151 notes that to recognize the power of nomos “is to be at one remove form it, and to possess the attitude necessary for studying it.” This is likewise true of the other conditions that filter our perspective.
82 Harrison, (2002) has compellingly shown the way the *Histories*, with all its complexity and digression, is structured around a series of Persian invasions.
83 Luraghi (2006)
84 Baragwanath, (2008), (2012)
85 Luraghi, (2006) 88
86 Branscome (2013) 2
persona” acts as an “interpretative frame” through which his audience may learn to assess for themselves the complexity of the logoi and events Herodotus details.

My reading follows this emphasis on the substantive implications of Herodotus’ narrative techniques. Herodotus himself is explicit that he- or at least his narrative persona- acts in accordance with the demands of his logos. I contend that, in the drama of Gyges and Candaules, Herodotus shows that the obstacles that beset inquiry are also its subject. Whereas Candaules wants Gyges to see the nudity of the queen, Herodotus wants his readers to see for themselves the workings of custom, the ways it organizes the lives of peoples while being organized by them in turn. To see this dynamic at work, we cannot simply trust our eyes, as the action of the Gyges-Candaules drama reveals. We must challenge what we see; inquiry cannot be passive. As Irwin writes, “Herodotus claims to have written an apodeixis of his investigations so that human events might not be erased by time…, but in doing so he also requires his readers to engage in their own historiê if he is to be completely successful in his aim.” But because of this, we must be motivated to activity. Candaules fails to spark the desire for inquiry in Gyges; he forces rather than moves. Herodotus does not make this same mistake. As Schlosser has argued, he sparks his own characteristic wonder in his readers, thus moving them to inquire for themselves. I contend that the charm of his storytelling is key to this, for it is through his storytelling Herodotus grants us the vicarious experience into the lives of others that we could not otherwise gain. Through this, he leads us to wonder at- and seek to understand- the varieties of human experience. With his vivid storytelling, Herodotus elicits our interest into the thorny

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87 Dewald, (2002) 288; see also her important article (1987) on Herodotus’ authorial presence.
88 cf. 1.51, 177; 2.3, 47, 132, 171; 4.30, 43; 7.96, 139, 224.
89 Irwin (2014) 70
90 Schlosser, (2014) 241
tangle of the relation of nature and custom. The sex and murder of the Gyges-Candaules drama invites us to look all the while problematizing the act of looking.

The Proem: Perspective and What Man has Brought into Being

Herodotus wrote before the conventional boundaries between disciplines that we are familiar with today, and thus without the set expectations of genre and practice that we often carry with us in our approach to texts. We thus are misled if we try to apply modern categories to Herodotus’ activity. This leaves the question of just what it is that he is doing. The proem is key to clarifying this as best we can. The proem reads in full:

Ἡροδότος Ἀλκαρνησσέος ἱστορίης ἀπόδεξις ἢδε, ὡς μὴ ὁταν τὰ γεγομένα ἐξ ἀνθρώπων τὸ χρόνῳ ἔξεστιλα γένηται, μὴ ὡς ὑπάρχει μεγάλα τε καὶ θωμαστά, τὰ μὲν Ἑλλησὶ τὰ δὲ βαρβάροις ἀποδεχθέντα, ἀκλεῖα γένηται, τὰ τε ἄλλα καὶ δὲ ἦν αἰτίην ἐπολέμησαν ἄλληλοισι.

Herodotus of Halicarnassus here sets forth his inquiry, that time may not draw the colour from what man has brought into being, nor those great and wonderful deeds, manifested by both Greeks and barbarians, fail of their report, and, together with all this, the reason why they fought one another.

Breaking down this misleadingly simple proem will help us glean what we can of Herodotus’ conception of his own activity.

91 Thomas (2000) 1-27; 270-285
92 The ‘Liar’ school (most famously, Fehling, 1989) takes Herodotus to task for failing to live up to the practices of contemporary scholarship. They draw attention to what they see as a lack of facticity in his work, without asking what standards of proof are in fact appropriate to the kind of inquiry Herodotus is engaging in. We must first grasp what he conceives of himself to be doing before criticising his failures to do so perfectly. cf. Baragwanath (2008) 5 who cogently argues for evaluating Herodotus not on his facticity (and thus according to the standards of what we consider to be historical narrative) but rather on the ways in which he combines his activity as a poet with that of a truth seeker. See also the introduction to Baragwanath, Bakker (2012) for more an overview of this approach to Herodotus.
To begin with, the phrase with which Herodotus introduces the work contains both his personal identity and his activity: Ἑροδότου Ἀλικαρνησσέος ἱστορίης ἀπόδεξις ἦδε” (Herodotus of Halicarnassus here sets forth his inquiry) (1.1). In the text that follows, Herodotus, a particular individual with specific origins, engages in an activity (ἀπόδεξις), which means to show forth or display. In this case, what is shown forth/displayed is ἱστορίης, an inquiry. Key to grasping the intention and purpose of the Histories is to grasp these two activities, as well as their relationship. What is it to show forth/display an inquiry? There is, of course, much scholarly dispute over what to make of ‘histories apodeixis’. Gould reads it as “performance [literally, ‘display’] of the enquiries”; Nagy as “public presentation” and Thomas brings out the resonances of Herodotus’ proem with the display lectures of the sophists, and so underscores the orality indicated by ἀπόδεξις. Lateiner highlights the complex stance toward what is contained in the ἱστορίης, the content of the inquiry, indicated by ἀπόδεξις: “the noun apodeixis in the proem asserts a mediating intelligence, the personal intervention of Herodotus in the presentation of the facts of the past. The historian has the power to distance himself or the reader, or both… or to invite the audience to observe the researcher at work or to participate in the drama.” Bakker emphasizes the ways in which apodeixis connotes accomplishment: Herodotus’ recording of great deeds “cannot fail to become a great accomplishment itself, a mega ergon…” Although the views surveyed above differ on the degree to which they emphasize the literal public performance suggested by apodeixis, they all underscore Herodotus’ authorial presence—what we call the Histories are performed by Herodotus, either, quite literally, in

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93 see Bakker (2002) for an overview of the issue and different scholarly perspectives on the proem.
94 Gould (1989) 17
95 Nagy (1990) 217
96 Thomas (2000)
98 Bakker (2002) 28
public, or at a textual level as Lateiner’s ‘mediating intelligence’ that presents, forms, and somehow relates ‘the inquiry’. By foregrounding his performance, his mediating presence, Herodotus creates a distance between the showing forth of inquiry and the inquiry itself.

This distance cultivates a specific sort of relationship between Herodotus and his audience — he mediates our experiences of the inquiry, as a sort of intellectual ringmaster. Whether this performance exists on the stage or merely within the text, there is an individual between us and what is relayed; we do not have immediate access to the content of the inquiry but are receiving it through Herodotus. To this end, Schlosser suggests a profoundly educative effect to the performative aspect of Herodotus’ inquiry. “Herodotus puts evidence on display for his audience themselves to evaluate. Apodeixis has a sense of live performance, of competing to persuade an audience, that elicits the judgment of its readers or auditors.”99 Schlosser is quite right to note the way that performance and display invite the judgment of the Herodotean audience (whether the live audience of the court and stage, or the written word.) Key to this is the way that the proem foregrounds Herodotus’ situated perspective in this ‘showing forth of inquiry’. In the very first sentence of this epic work, Herodotus identifies himself as a Greek, one who is investigating the recent, calamitous war between the Hellenes and the Persian Empire, for a specifically Greek audience.100 Herodotus reminds us that he, an individual of particular origins (Hellenic, Halicarnassian), is marshalling, selecting, shaping, and choosing the content which he displays, shows forth, to his audience.101 He insists, in other words, on the rootedness and specificity of his perspective. This has the effect of highlighting the relationship between the

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99 Schlosser (2014) 244
100 That Herodotus anticipates a pan-hellenic audience, see Moles (2002) 35; Raafflaub (1987) 235.
101 Gould (1989) 110-112; Herodotus’ authorial presence marks his departure from the folk tale, and also accounts for much of the difficulty in reading him. Dewald (1987) is especially good on the authorial presence of Herodotus.
speaker and his audience. He is one person, displaying his inquiry to an audience, showing them what he has done and found, inviting them to follow him or not, agree with him or not.\textsuperscript{102} He does not speak from nowhere but from somewhere— and thus to someone. Display implies audience. As Thompson has rightly observed, this intimacy is a key part of Herodotus’ voice and narrative technique.\textsuperscript{103}

This intimacy, Herodotus’ invocation of his personal name, his insistence on the specificity of his perspective, invites a contrast with Homer’s divinely inspired one. It is important to remember here Herodotus’ immediate literary context.\textsuperscript{104} As Baragwanath has observed, “the expectations and response of Herodotus’ audience- themselves steeped in Homer- were doubtless shaped by the familiar contours of the Homeric background.”\textsuperscript{105} Herodotus’ work about an epic war between the barbarians and the Hellenes contains myriad resonances and overtones with Homer’s tale of such a war. But where Herodotus invokes only his authority, Homer, however, was able to ‘guarantee’ his work with the authority of a divine muse.\textsuperscript{106} Herodotus thus substitutes his own explicitly human (and thus fallible and limited) guarantee for the divine authority of the muses.\textsuperscript{107} If we take seriously his claims as to the universality of his

\textsuperscript{102} Thomas (2000) 168-212
\textsuperscript{103} Thompson (1996) 64 observes the role that this personal intimacy has in Herodotus’ distinctive voice: he “recognizes his own and his audiences involvement with the characters in his history, establishes points of contact with them, and trusts this contact to guide him in his depictions.”\textsuperscript{104} cf. Dewald on conscious homeric overtones (2012) 64, Fowler on attitude to past as marking historie as different from both poetic and prose predecessors, Fowler, (1996), (2001), (2006) Boedeker (2002), Marincola (2006). Thomas (2000) 267 - the poem as a “daring mixture…. of Homeric reference and hints of the currently fashionable language of intellectual activity.” Bakker (2002) on combining stance of sophistic science and epic storyteller to create something entirely new.\textsuperscript{105} Baragwanath (2008) 35
\textsuperscript{107} Herodotus’ relationship with his poetic predecessors is fascinating and complex, and although I do not have the time to develop it adequately here, it will play a key role in my later chapters. For now, it is interesting to note, however, that Herodotus at times seems to suggest that the poets in some ways ‘created’ the Greeks; fascinatingly, he sees these activities not as taking place in some mythical lost past, but only “the day before yesterday” (2.53), as it were. In some ways, then, Herodotus agrees with Shelley that the poets are the ‘unacknowledged legislators of the world‘ - although as we shall see, it will emerge
subject, his vision might needs be equally boundless, like that of the gods, looking down from their box seats on Mount Olympus. Importantly, however, there is no divine illumination here. Herodotus is only one particular man, surveying the universality of human things through looking at the particulars. Herodotus relates the stuff of epic—war and its great deeds—but without the divine perspective of Homeric poetry. His text approaches epic from a prosaic, human perspective.

With his apodeixis, his performance, Herodotus thus plays with resonances both old and new, Homeric and sophistic. The intimacy of being one man performing (either in person or through text) his ἱστορίης defuses some of the awe that might be felt before the words of Homer; even though he covers much of the same subject as the Homeric muses, assigning kleos to great deeds and events of war, he invites his audience to hear of these great stories as if they were taking in the persuasive lecture display of the sophistic orator. While some, like Nagy, emphasize the Homeric aspirations of the Histories and foreground Herodotus’ apportioning of kleos, and others, like Thomas, emphasizes its sophistic or rationalist elements, what is distinctive about Herodotus lies in the way he blurs these categories. Deeds and stories worthy of kleos become the subject of human inquiry. Given that Athenians, perhaps his most receptive audience, were already in the habit of being asked to judge for themselves, Herodotus’ apodeixis invites his audience to apply their critical faculties not only to law-cases and medical rhetoric, but to the stuff of epic. Herodotus is thus playing with literary genre on several layers,

that Herodotus’ task involves troubling some of the more straightforward ways in which this rule might work.

108 Nagy (1987) (1990) emphasizes the ways in which Herodotus is taking part in the epic tradition; for Nagy, the Herodotean apodeixis is primarily concerned with the conferring of kleos.

109 Thomas (2000) 168-269
111 cf. Pelling, (2006a) 116. Obviously we cannot trace the precise performance history of the Histories, but Herodotus undoubtedly spent much time at Athens. The Athenians were probably not his only audience, but they were an important one.
not only invoking and contrasting his personal name and judgment as compared to Homer’s
divinely inspired poetic muse, but also inviting comparison between his speech and the prosaic
and motivated speeches of the courts and polis.\footnote{Thomas (2000) 249-269 for the performative context of oral persuasion.} With this, Herodotus invites his audience to
apply their already honed critical senses, sharpened in the highly disputatious settings of the
courts and medical lecture, to the grand narratives of war and justice— the great deeds of the war
and who was responsible for it.

This is compounded by the complexity of the narrative he presents, in which
disagreements, contestations, and tensions abound. As Baragwanath urges, “Herodotus
foregrounds the fact that history is contested territory.”\footnote{Baragwanath (2008) 2} A muse can tell a single story from a
reliable divine perspective; Herodotus the human being reports the contested stories of multiple
peoples, suggesting that a single perspective cannot decisively and finally settle matters. Unlike
the divine perspective of poetry, human inquiry into the past must traffic in uncertainty. This
uncertainty performs an educative function. As Schlosser has persuasively argued, that the
stories Herodotus tells do not cohere with each other invites the audience to negotiate and judge
between them.\footnote{Schlosser (2014) 241: “This use of stories within the Histories prevents the surreptitious emplotting of a singular narrative, instead creating a contest among different narratives that the reader must adjudge for herself.”} Herotodus’ authorial presence has problematized the subject of epic, and
recruited his audience as active partners into the difficult and fraught search into the truth of
things. By enlisting Homeric resonances, Herodotus uses poetic authority seemingly in order to
trouble it. Herodotus has effectively invited us to ask what it means for one man to attempt to see
all that human beings have brought into existence; he thus asks us to look to his looking. Because
of this, in setting out his subject, Herodotus has simultaneously drawn our attention to the problem of his method.

The *apodexis*, performance, thus draws our attention back to what is being displayed, the *historie*, the inquiry. The *Histories* is a display of an inquiry — it is a performance that has content. The particular, limited human being performing that content is also responsible for what he is revealing — his inquiry is his. While I have just highlighted the important ‘distancing’ effects of the apodeitic quality of the *Histories*, we should thus not forget that, for all his problematizing of matters of perspective, Herodotus does not disavow the validity of his inquiry entirely. Schlosser, Dewald, and Baragwanath are all quite right to attend to the psychological and educative effects of his distancing. But this can be pushed too far. Indeed, as Thomas has cogently argued, Herodotus at times both distances himself from his material and at others seems to quite sincerely want to persuade his audience of the truth of what he says, employing sophistic reasoning and rhetorical techniques in order to invite agreement.115 This resonates with Packman’s exploration of incredulity in the parables of the *Histories*, which suggests that Herodotus repeats the motif of chastened skepticism in his stories in order to “manag[e] his own reception.”116 The motif of corrected disbelief, of skepticism coming to accept novel information, shows education at work. As Packman surmises, “Perhaps he believed that there was more risk of his audience's remaining impervious to information which failed to confirm existing prejudices than of its accepting uncritically all manner of nonsense.”117 Herodotus’ narrative does not simply destabilize — it troubles our own complacency so that we can better attend to wisdom that we might otherwise discount, either because it fails to cohere with our

115 Thomas (2000) 235-248
117 Packman (1991) 406
common place assumptions, or because it comes from a source we might not accept as trustworthy. The unfamiliar, the novel, the strange: Herodotus’ inquiry traffics in all of these. Surprising or discomfiting information is often hardest to accept; we invest a good deal of mental energy in trying to reinforce our own biases. The complexities of Herodotus’ narrative does not thus seek to simply relativize the truth, but rather awaken us to dimensions of it we might otherwise doubt or dismiss.

This reminds us that judgment does not simply involve critique; it also invites informed assent. Indeed, by nurturing the judicious doubt of his audience, by showing them how to judge for themselves, he equips them to better appreciate— and so be more thoroughly persuaded by— the truth of what he relates. As Thomas notes of Herodotus’ use of dubious or competing stories: “they imply judicialness and enhance the truth of the rest of his narrative.” When Herodotus highlights the uncertainty of the truth or its multiple causality, he thus invites us to take him seriously when he urges the validity of what he has to say. Herodotus’ performance educates his audience, by fostering their judgment of competing and complex narratives. But his inquiry educates too — it has a content that is rich with important insights into the human world.

The substantive content of Herodotus’ inquiry therefore matters as much as its complex and contested character. Thomas has argued cogently for the ways in which Herodotus’ inquiry is an attempt to understand the nature of man through understanding the diversity of human customs, and is thus a part of the intellectual controversies and interests that marked 5th century Hellas. The proem indicates the broadness entailed by such an inquiry: Herodotus states that

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118 Confirmation bias is a widely studied phenomenon in contemporary psychology and cognitive science. For an accessible overview of recent literature on this topic, see The New Yorker “Why Facts Don’t Change Our Minds,” February 27 2017
119 Thomas (2000) 245
120 Thomas (2000)
his performance of inquiry will immortalize (save from time) “τὰ γενόμενα ἐξ ἀνθρώπων,” what man has brought into being. To grasp the book’s subject, we must ask just what it is that man has brought into being— that is, what has been generated by the activity of human beings. The teeming abundance of Herodotus’ narrative suggests that what man has brought into being is nearly everything — events and deeds, but also cities and cultures, stories and songs, laws and thoughts.121 As Lateiner observes, τὰ γενόμενα “would theoretically include all human practices, customs, beliefs, and historical actions.”122 Obviously, just as there can be no exact and perfect map, the book cannot contain everything human. As Lateiner clarifies, the phrase ἔργα μεγάλα τε καὶ θρυσσεῖσα refines this comprehensive scheme to include only the memorable or significant.123 Yet by beginning with τὰ γενόμενα, Herodotus has indicated the ambition of his project; he will inquire into all things human, and record what is worth recording. His scope is potentially boundless; what remains is the product of his discretion, his understanding of what is significant.

Indeed, while τὰ γενόμενα signifies that Herodotus will study everything human, it also suggests that everything he studies is, indeed, human or of human origin. What is in his book is what human beings have generated out of themselves, and what that is seems to be nearly everything. Indeed, since Herodotus makes no mention of the gods in the proem, and yet includes them quite frequently in the work, it is possible that they too are part of the γενόμενα of human beings: that they have the same status and power as stories, songs, and concepts, that they

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121 Herodotus, for example, famously quotes Pindar that ‘Custom is king of all’. If custom itself is a thing generated out of human beings, it speaks to the pervasiveness in being of that which is generated out of man. Cf. also Dewald (2002), 276-277: Dewald speaks of logoi as “themselves part of the phenomenal world.” Not only are works and deeds part of the generated world, but what we think and say about these works and deeds. The genomena of mankind are seemingly boundless. Thomas (2000)
122 Lateiner (1989) 14
123 Lateiner (1989) 14
have been created out of men.\textsuperscript{124} This ‘secular’ orientation is significant, for what human beings have created, they can transform. Where stories of the divine inspire awe, Herodotus’ inquiries into what has issued forth from human beings therefore urge an active, critical stance— not that of piety, but of politics. As Stanley Rosen urges, Herodotus’ “teaching about man and the gods, is fundamentally a political teaching.”\textsuperscript{125}

This political orientation suggests why, as Benardete observes, while Herodotus promises to speak of the \textit{genomena} of human beings, he begins not with abstract claims about human beings and their works but by talking about particular human beings or culture: Lydians and Persians, not human beings, for “human beings always come to sight as members of some nation or tribe; they never come to sight as human beings.”\textsuperscript{126} One does not know human beings in the abstract;\textsuperscript{127} one knows them through their particularity, through their history and their culture— that is, through \textit{nomos}, custom, rather than through \textit{phusis}, nature.\textsuperscript{128} If custom is what has come out of human beings, it both obscures and expresses what is human. Pace Benardete, who claims that “Customs are the obstacle to understanding directly the nature of human things,”\textsuperscript{129} I insist rather that for Herodotus, they are both obstacle and path. If we are to know what is human, we must look to the doings and the makings of human beings. Nature and convention will prove to be deeply intertwined for Herodotus; already here in the proem, the question posed by the complexity of his main subject- \textit{ta genomena}- has indicated the intractability, and the centrality,

\textsuperscript{124} See chapter two and my discussion of Herodotus’ treatment of the Hellenic debt to Egypt.
\textsuperscript{125} Rosen (1992) 336
\textsuperscript{126} Benardete (1969) 9.
\textsuperscript{127} A point well-illustrated by the sitcom \textit{Community}. The fictional community college depicted by the series attempts to come up with a mascot equally representative of all peoples: the result is a grotesque featureless monster named ‘Human Being’- something indisputably unrecognizable as such.
\textsuperscript{128} Davis (2000) 637 notes the double intent of the proem, its broad goal of saving all from time, while at the same time giving renown to particular deeds. Davis suggests that this encapsulates the problem of history more generally- how to give an account of change in terms of fixed principles
\textsuperscript{129} Benardete (1969) 9
of this question. Because of this, we must note that by setting out to save what human beings have brought into being, Herodotus has set quite a task. What human beings have done seems to be almost everything human; to inquire into what human beings have done requires an inquiry into what human beings are, and vice versa.

Furthermore, the prominence of war in the proem—“the great and wonderful deeds, manifested by both Greeks and barbarians, and… the reason why they fought one another” (1.1)—suggests its primary importance as one of the things generated by man. The particularity of human beings—that they appear not as neutral entities, but as Lydians, Egyptians, Persians, Scythians, and Greeks—seems to ensure their partisanship. The Histories thus suggest that the particular and conventional quality of human beings, their divisions into groups and ethnicities, leads to conflict. War is something that human beings do—and the destruction this wrecks is precisely why a prophylactic against time, such as the Histories itself, is required. Indeed, war sets the scene for many of the great deeds that come into being out of man. In commemorating these great deeds, Herodotus reminds us that not only do human beings wage war, they tell stories about it.

The importance of Homer for understanding Herodotus emerges here again. In inquiring into what man is and what he has done, Herodotus must inquire into the deeds of war—and its songs, its poetry. To understand man, Herodotus must be both scientist and epic poet; to grasp the cause of war, we must understand the human beings who wage it; war must be subjected to inquiry. But to communicate and commemorate these causes, to save from time this understanding, Herodotus must use art; Herodotus must sing his science.\footnote{Ward (2008) 14 calls Herodotus a “poetic historian”.

130 As Baragwanath
notes, “Herodotus the poet…. [is] wholly compatible with Herodotus the truth seeker.” The poetic science of Herodotus accomplishes the ‘saving’ aspect of his work. His work is poetic in its commemoration of human greatness, its assigning of *kleos*; it is scientific in inquiry into the nature and character of man. Indeed, its peculiar blending of science and poetry lies in the way he inquires into the subjects of poetry, all the while employing the narrative techniques of poetry to communicate his science; this judicious blending is how Herodotus accomplishes his *apodeixis historie*, his showing forth of inquiry. Because of this artistry, method and result are thus inextricably intertwined.

The proem tells us that, with the *Histories*, Herodotus both commemorates and investigates great deeds. Yet as Bakker has suggested, this in itself is a great deed: inquiry, as Herodotus shows us, requires a broad scope yet is conducted by limited and partial human beings. It is thus a heroic effort, something worthy of commemoration- and something itself worth being inquired into. If Herodotus’ *apodeixis historie* is itself an accomplishment, a doing that shall be remembered into the future, it must investigate itself. Inquiring, looking, is both a means of uncovering human activities and a human activity itself. Looking, too, is something that humans do. As Herodotus moves forward from his proem, and begins his display of *ta genomena* of human beings, he will begin by showing competing ways of looking. Through this, he will spark his readers to inquiry themselves— and warn them of the dangers that attend such a path.

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132 Bakker (2002) for the role of *kleos* in the proem
133 See Bartkey (2002) for the way that Herodotus rivals poetry and seeks to better the sophists by applying sophistic methods to poetic subjects.
134 Bakker (2002) 28
The Persian Chroniclers and Rationalized Epic

Herodotus begins with the gentlest sort of exercise: he simply listens to others and repeats their accounts, neither accepting nor rejecting what emerges (“I am not going to say about these matters that they happened thus or thus” 1.5). Immediately after promising to set forth his own inquiry, he instead presents what "the chroniclers among the Persians say" (1.1). He then proceeds to retell - without casting aspersions - the Persian take on the cause of the war, which appears to be simply a prosaic version of Greek epic. We have the rape of Io but no Zeus, and Helen of Troy without the Judgment of Paris (1.1-5). This is myth without gods and Homer without heroes. The effect is disconcerting, to say the least: with this narrative, we hear the most familiar stories of Greek myth cloaked in decidedly unfamiliar garb. Herodotus here asks his Greek audience to see their own through Persian eyes. In a gloss, he even explicitly underscores the way these stories conflict with the more familiar Hellenic accounts: “that is not how the Greeks tell it” (1.2).

Indeed, these paragraphs are rife with distancing effects. Herodotus is forever repeating ‘the Persians say’, ‘so they say’, ‘as they would have it’. (1.1-5). While it is striking that Herodotus begins his account to the Greeks with Persian stories, at this juncture they remain decidedly that - just ‘Persian stories’. As Dewald notes, these Persian tales might startle the Greeks, but yet they still appear ridiculous.136 This suggests that, this early on, Herodotus deems the effort to enter fully into alien stories to be too much for his Greek audience. Instead of a story that fully immerses us in the deeds of the Persians, inviting us into their thoughts, he simply retells their own words. He does not ask his audience to envision their stories, but merely passes

136 Dewald, (2012). 66
on barbarian hearsay. As an audience, we can remain outside, looking at what is foreign, secure in the knowledge that it is other, and therefore not fully credible. The otherness of this account is further underscored by its explicitly partisan character- it is propaganda for the other side, for here the Persians retell Greek stories in order cast blame on the Greeks for the enmity between East and West.\textsuperscript{137} Only foolish men, the Persians say, would go to war over a bunch of women. We are not only insulated from buying into this account, but, as Dewald observes, “Herodotus has clearly warned us, his readers, to be suspicious of \textit{logoi} purporting to come from the past of myth and legend...”\textsuperscript{138} We are engaged, but still outside of these accounts. Our critical antennae are up, but perhaps they would have been already - for this is only what the Persians say, after all.

Yet if this critical rejection is what we take to be the reader’s response, we must ask whether it is that of Herodotus. As I noted above, he does not engage with the Persians here- but neither does he outright reject or criticize them. He gives their account a hearing. In some ways, then, it appears that Herodotus is doing what we will shortly see Gyges do. He merely accepts and unquestioningly repeats someone else's account of the truth of things- in other words, he listens to the speeches of ‘men of old’ (1.8). There are, however, telling discrepancies between Herodotus and Gyges. Unlike Gyges, Herodotus recounts the wisdom of elders that are not his own. Moreover, these stories serve, in fact, as the most stark contrast to his own that his Hellenic audience could imagine. Instead of the doings of gods and heroes, we get a knocked-up teenager skipping town with a pirate. What really matters here, however, is that he recounts these competing accounts without condemnation. As he says, "these are the stories of the Persians and the Phoenicians. For my part I am not going to say about these matters that they happened thus

\textsuperscript{137} Munson (2001) 100-7
\textsuperscript{138} Dewald (2012) 66
or thus..." (1.5). Speaking in his own voice for the first time since the proem, he emphasizes that these accounts are the truths of another and that he will not oppose them (but neither will he approve them). Such toleration, if not sympathy, is shocking from a Greek who is inquiring into "the reason why they [the Persians and the Greeks] fought one another"(1.1) and speaking to Greeks who have fairly recently suffered through that war. Instead of disdain, Herodotus displays curiosity. If this is not yet an examination, it is at least a 'glancing-around.' In contrast, Gyges had to be compelled to look at what was not his own, for the very thought of doing so made him let loose "a sharp cry" (1.8). Herodotus cannot yet truly examine that which he looks at, since his readers, like Gyges, might still be so close to their own that they cannot bear to look at anything else. We need to be made familiar with looking at the unfamiliar. Otherwise, both attachment and inexperience will impede our seeing clearly. To his inexperienced audience, it is shocking enough that Herodotus looks without censure, that he looks just for the sake of looking.

**The Lydian Logos: Candaules and the Perils of Eros**

By opening with a Persian account of Greek stories, Herodotus has led his audience to look at what is foreign, while allowing them to remain coddled by the knowledge that it is foreign. This ‘warm-up’ prepares his readers for what comes next: that is, a look at at the foreign which is incredibly familiar. He takes us from what the Persians say to what the Lydians do. (Here we should remember that the Lydians, as Herodotus later notes, are the barbarians that the

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139 Nagy (1987); (1990) 221-34 on the similarities between the Persian chroniclers and Herodotus himself. A comparison is useful, but we should be careful not to assimilate Herodotus and those he appears similar to.

140 An interesting parallel could be drawn here from war films. Often, the ‘enemy’ might be given a sympathetic hearing, but, revealingly, the audience response is often filtered through or coached by a more familiar character’s interactions with such characters and stories. The television show *Orange is the New Black* has employed a similar strategy, using a familiar character type- an upper middle class white woman- as a way of inviting viewers into confronting stories from groups underrepresented on most television screens.
Hellenes consider most similar to themselves).¹⁴¹ That is, from what would appear to his Greek audience as the ridiculously prosaic stories of nameless barbarians, stories so obviously petty and wrong that a Greek audience might comfortably dismiss them outright, he turns to Candaules, his queen, and Gyges, individual actors grappling with universal yet intimate themes: desire, shame, and revenge. These are the human things that Herodotus spoke of in his proem. All feel these things, yet all experience them in a particular way: as my desire, my shame, or my revenge. They are profoundly universal because most human beings feel them and they are painfully intimate because all feel them as their own.

Fittingly then, he does not present this story as a folk tale, something that occurred to indefinite people at an indefinite time.¹⁴² Neither does he merely recount this drama, as he summarized the Persian view of things immediately preceding this tale. Instead, he shows us the whole. He invites us in, letting us hear the actors speak for themselves and allowing us to see each detail for ourselves: the nude queen, the reluctant assassin, the king murdered in his bed. Sex and death: every human being can understand those themes. Yet this is the particular bedroom of a particular man; Herodotus emphasizes this by fully tracing Candaules' ancestry.¹⁴³ This is not just anybody, Herodotus suggests. This is a man with history and lineage, a man who actually existed in time and in relation to others. So too for his usurper: Herodotus precedes him with his descendant, making mention of Croesus before we even hear of Gyges. He gives us both ancestors and descendant so we can plot these men onto the matrix of real time. They are individuals, not types: not all kings and all usurpers, but this king and this usurper.

¹⁴¹ See Cohen (2004) for the role of folkloric motifs in this episode
¹⁴² Flory (1987) 30
He further cements the particularity of this story by having Candaules vividly describe its setting for us. As he tells Gyges: "there is a chair that stands near the entrance. On this she will lay her clothes, one by one, as she takes them off..." (1.9) When the king, in his obsession, lingers over the details of his wife's achingly slow undressing, he also describes, for both Gyges and his readers, the particular furnishings and arrangements of his own bedroom.\footnote{Flory (1987) 35} The erotic charge evident in Candaules’ description brands these details on the reader's mind. This is not simply stripping, an abstract verb with no tie to a particular subject, but one woman discarding her clothing, piece by piece, onto a particular chair that is placed just so in one man's own bedroom. These details brilliantly render a private and individual scenario. As an audience, we are most definitely looking at a particular one's own - someone else's, at that. This very particularity places us squarely in Gyges' dilemma. We are being forced to look at another's own and we are compelled to see the tensions and conflicts- and excitement- inherent in such looking. This suggests a potentially fecund parallel between Gyges and the audience, and then again, between Candaules and Herodotus. Candaules compels Gyges to look at what he would not otherwise; Herodotus likewise compels his audience. Yet Candaules’ failures as a teacher will serve to clarify Herodotus’ own successes.\footnote{Travis (2000) notes the ways in which spectation moves the Gyges narrative while doubling as a metaphor for Herodotus’ activity as an inquirer.}

The way in which Candaules begins his project, however, already suggests its inevitable collapse. Candaules here instigates the action of the plot simply by being too closely attached to his own, and because of this, unable to see himself or his world for what it is. As Herodotus says, "this Candaules fell in love with his own wife; and because he was so in love, he thought he had in her far the most beautiful of women. So he thought." (1.8). The repetition of the root word

144 Flory (1987) 35
145 Travis (2000) notes the ways in which spectation moves the Gyges narrative while doubling as a metaphor for Herodotus’ activity as an inquirer.
νομίζ - for thought/believed - underscores Candaules' mistakenness. He did not have; rather, he
thought he had. So as to completely emphasize Candaules' blindness to his wife's actual degree
of beauty, we are later told that "he was forever overpraising the beauty of his wife's body" (1.8).
Herodotus specifically identifies the cause of his misapprehension, for it is 'because he was so in
love' that he saw her beauty falsely. The vehemence of his passion distorts his looking; his eros
colours his perception, and rather than seeing things as they are, he sees them as he wants to. He
is over-attached to his own, and because of this, he cannot see it truly.

If Candaules cannot see his wife truly, Herodotus can. This is worth noting, for it clarifies
my contention that through his storytelling Herodotus grants us the vicarious experience into the
lives of others that we could not otherwise gain. This does not mean that we simple ‘become’
someone else, adopt their view and see as through their eyes. If we were to fully and completely
immerse ourselves in Candaules’ perspective- if such a thing were even possible- we would cede
all responsibility for judging his claim ourselves and merely grant his word full authority. To see
as if we were Candaules would mean that we would see wrongly. What is at stake in entering
into Candaules’ story is not to adopt his view or grant him full epistemic privilege for his
experience, but rather to cultivate a duality to our vision, to be both inside and outside his view at
once. Bakhtin is helpful here:

There exists a very strong, but one-sided and thus untrustworthy,
idea that in order better to understand a foreign culture, one must
enter into it, forgetting one’s own, and view the world through the
eyes of this foreign culture. . . . Of course, a certain entry as a living
being into a foreign culture, the possibility of seeing the world through
its eyes, is a necessary part of the process of understanding it; but if
this were the only aspect of this understanding, it would merely be
duplication and would not entail anything new or enriching. 146

146 Bakhtin (1986) 6-7
Neither the ‘true insider’ nor the ‘complete outsider’ can claim full authority into the understanding of culture- to gain traction into a deeper understanding, something else, something blended is required. Indeed, as Uma Narayan has noted, the perspectivist emphasis on the epistemic privilege of the ‘authentic insider’ gives rise to the fantasy of ‘going native’, so to speak, as the condition of judgment. Not only does this insulate our own (unexpressed) judgment from scrutiny, it can give rise to a type of ethnocentrism that holds that we cannot see things from a perspective that is not our own.147

Rather than, on the one hand, false dreams of ‘going native’ and completely inhabiting the perspectives of others, or, on the other, the abstract rationalist fantasy of the completely objective viewpoint, what is needed is an in-between. In this vein, Zerilli posits ‘outsideness’ as “the enabling condition of political understanding and judgment of cultures and practices.”148 For Zerilli, this ‘outsideness’ ‘is a way of expressing the specificity of one’s own rootedness elsewhere as the condition of understanding and judging what is foreign.”149 Herodotus’ presentation both models this and shifts this emphasis in helpful and potentially fecund ways. As Dewald150 has argued, Herodotus’ multiple narrative modes allows him to occupy shifting space within his own work - for even when the Herodotean ‘I’, at times vividly present, disappears in the midst of a particular story, he is always tacitly there as the shaping/guiding presence corralling and organizing his material. He is both insider and outsider, the Herodotean ‘I’ that shows forth all we survey and yet disappears into the background, allowing the voices of his work to speak and act for themselves. To see what he is doing, we must live within this dislocated vision, experiencing what is not our own yet never ceasing to be ourselves, much like

147 Narayan (1997) 150
148 Zerilli,(2009) 312
149 ibid.
150 Dewald (1987); (2002)
Herodotus shows the lives of others while never completely ceding his authorial, independent presence. Herodotus’ example shows the ways that judgment requires this kind of duality of vision, the ability to be both outsider and insider at once.

And this is something that Candaules entirely lacks. His tight hold on his erotically-charged picture of his wife is not merely an aesthetically questionable mistake; it is rather like a sort of erotic astigmatism that distorts his view of all he surveys. He focuses only on what is closest to him, and all else blurs into obscurity. One of his relations- that of husband to wife-predominates, thus obscuring his other no less important ones, such as that of a king to his subjects. He is not blind, but he cannot see accurately; he can neither see the actual appearance of things nor his proper relation to them. This relational myopia manifests itself in his interactions with Gyges. Candaules is king, and Gyges is his bodyguard and subject. Although a king is a human being, and thus by nature like other persons, law and tradition give him power over them, elevating somehow as if he were of a different category of species- like a god over human beings.\footnote{cf. Deioces (1.96-101) Pisistratus, (1.60)} This is a conventional relation, not a natural one, an experience among one set of humans, but not another. This conventional quality would be immediately clear to a Greek reader, as they are reading a particularly barbarian story that takes place under a specifically barbarian form of rule. Yet the strength of conventionality rests on its being treated as nature, as an incontrovertible law. Convention interprets how things are for a people. For this to have full authority, it must be treated as necessity: as description rather than interpretation. Since Lydian convention has made Candaules king and Gyges subject, it also informs the rules governing the social relationship between the two. Emotional distance befits the discrepancy in power between them. One rules and the other must obey. According to this logic, since one is above the other, it
follows that they should not be close, so that familiarity will not compromise reverence. In a story that Herodotus later presents of another barbarian king, we see great insight into the logic of power and necessity at work within social and political conventions. Deioces, (1.96-101) after becoming king and thus ascending from one man among many, to one man above the many, institutionalizes and sacralizes this difference, in an attempt to obscure the origins he has in common with his subjects (1.99). He thus transforms something made by human beings (structures of power) into something that they must obey. Thus convention, a thing made, gains the force and inevitability of law, a thing that rules.

Candaules, on the other hand, made king by convention rather than through his own efforts, undermines this same convention through his behaviour. Even before he invites his bodyguard into his bedroom, he appears to invite him into his kingship. As Flory surmises, "Herodotus also hints that Candaules has been neglecting affairs of state in his infatuation and relying overmuch on Gyges," for he writes that "Candaules used to confide all his most serious concerns to this Gyges" (1.8) Rather than ruling from afar, Candaules shares all his 'most serious' thoughts with a person devoted to protecting his body. Candaules, as his bodyguard, already has exceptionally close access to his person. One might think that this necessary compromise in physical distance would invite increased emotional remoteness, so as to safeguard their relative positions in the conventional hierarchy. By sharing his private thoughts-his interiority- with a person already so close to his body, Candaules effectively treats Gyges as co-ruler, especially if these 'serious concerns' are political ones, the concerns that are his and his alone, through his role as king. Perversely, Candaules refrains from stopping there. After having

Gammie (1986) 177 further observes that in violating convention - (specifically, his unlawful command) - Candaules fulfills Otanes’ claim in the constitutional debate (3.80) that a monarch will inevitably violate convention.

Flory, (1987) 32
already invited his subject into his kingly thoughts, he then invites him into his royal bedroom. Candaules wants Gyges to see what he sees; he wants to illuminate the privacy of his marital bed. But as Davis has noted, for Gyges to see what Candaules sees, it is not enough for Gyges to occupy the same space as Candaules. Candaules’ vision is coloured by his *eros*; to see as Candaules, Gyges would need to position himself with Candaules’ head.

How Candaules phrases this invitation, this wish to reveal his wife to Gyges, effectively reveals himself to Herodotus’ audience. It displays both his desires and his insecurities, both what he assumes about his position and what he forgets. He tells Gyges that "I do not think that you credit me when I tell you about the beauty of my wife; for indeed men's ears are duller agents of belief than their eyes. Contrive, then, that you see her naked" (1.8). This statement, which both commands a subject's submission and pleads for his approval, strips Candaules to Gyges and to us. He doubts both the legitimacy of his authority over Gyges and the accuracy of his own vision. Evidently, Candaules fears that Gyges does not believe what he says. Indeed, that he desires Gyges' confirmation at all suggests that he doubts his own ability to discern the truth (and rightfully so, as Herodotus has suggested); he doubts the authority of the eyes while at the same time proclaiming it.

Candaules' under-valuation of his own authority effectively corrodes it. Davis observes that "his [Candaules’] desire for Gyges to confirm his judgment of his wife's beauty is tantamount to a desire that there be no distinction between his experience of the world and the

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154 Lateiner (1989) 141 cites Candaules' behaviour, as well as the parallel ways that Xerxes violated the family of his brother Masistes as an illustration of Herodotus’ moral principles. “Disregard for that nearly universal rule of private property, the exclusive enjoyment of a wife by her husband, opens and closes the *Histories.*” While there is much to this, it is worth noting that Herodotus is not bothered by the customary practice of polygamy when he encounters it. Martial exclusivity is less the point than the violation of nomos.

155 Davis (2000) 642: “thinking himself into the king's head would be an act of poetic imagination.”
His insecurity about his judgment suggests that he is, perhaps, unconsciously aware of the conventional and limited power of his own authority. According to the logic of convention, a king’s word is law. Just as he rules like a god over humanity, so should his words be taken as a revelation of truth. They are not to be looked at— that is, inquired into and debated— but heard and obeyed. By implying that he doubts the authority of his own words, and thus appealing to Gyges to use his eyes rather than his ears, Candaules implies that the authority granted to him by convention, by what has been heard rather than what has been demonstrated, is lacking. He wants Gyges to look for himself rather than to obey. He whose position is based on unquestionable authority orders his favourite to question his authority; and the same man that proclaims that ‘men’s ears are duller agents of belief than their eyes” wants his own eyes confirmed by another man’s report. As Packman notes of this episode, “A monarch who insists that a subordinate validate his conclusions on the basis of independent observation has in a sense abdicated - appointed, in a sense, his own successor.”

Candaules emerges here as a mass of contradictions. He senses a dissonance between what convention holds to be the truth— namely, his own political superiority— and what is. In his attempt to affirm his own position by appealing to the eyes of another, he only undermines it. His authority relies precisely on that it should not, and cannot, be tested. By seeking to test it, even if with the intent of confirming it, he reveals his own fear that his authority isn't really all that authoritative.

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156 Davis (2000) 641-642. Davis further notes that Candaules’ desire “ is, unwittingly, but essentially, a tyrannical desire for truly universal empire.”
157 Packman (1991) 404. Packman, however, insists that the Gyges story is a political parallel, and thus without implication for issues of Herodotus’ method. I assert, instead, that the two issues are closely intertwined.
158 Saxonhouse (2005) 59 suggests that “Candaules sees himself as free from submission to the laws, thus showing no reverence about what must be hidden from view.” In his freedom from law, he subverts its grounding. It is fitting then that he dies at the hands of one who, at least initially, avows his loyalty to the law.
Although Candaules acts in a way that suggests he doubts his own authority, he still assumes that he has power over others. He orders Gyges to "contrive, then, that you see her naked" (1.8). From all this, it is evident that Candaules cannot even see himself clearly. Just as he mistakes his conventionally proper relation to his wife and to his subjects, he fails to see the contradictions inherent in his own actions. With the same command, he both assumes his authority and denies it. Perhaps it is this lack of self-knowledge that Herodotus refers to when he says that "it was fated that Candaules should end ill" (1.8). This is a very ambiguous statement. Who or what did the fating? Herodotus' phrasing is open-ended - 'for it was fated.' Who fated? The gods? But they are absent from this tableau until its conclusion, and even then, they only appear in the form of a politically convenient oracle. Potentially, then, Candaules might have been fated by his own character, that is, through the tension between his over-attachment to his own and his desire to expose it. This has plausibility, for the actions stemming from his contradictory desires undermine both the universal rules of kingship- inequality between the ruling and the ruled- and the particular conventions of Lydia- the great shame surrounding nudity. A Lydian king who undermines principles of both kingship in general and Lydian beliefs in particular instantiates insurrection in his own person. This creates such a massive dissonance in the logic of these laws that it demands resolution. Either this king survives and thus proves fallible the laws and conventions, the *nomos* that make sense of his particular existence, or he dies and with his death demonstrates the inevitability of these things. Either they underlie and frame human things, and are thus are prior to them both in time and in importance,

159 Scholars are divided on the issue of fatalism in Herodotus. Some, like Fornara (1990) and Harrison (2000) 223-42 assert that Herodotus is deeply fatalistic. Others, such as Lateiner (1989) 189-210, Mikalson (2003) reject this. As I am persuaded by the more rationalist account of Herodotus’ attitude towards divinity (cf Scullion (2006) and Lateiner (1989) - see chapter two and three for more), I suggest that the fating agent is of a natural rather than supernatural sort- the course of things, human nature, etc.

160 See chapters two and three for more on the place of the Hellenic gods in the work.
or they themselves are the things that humans create, and thus can be created and re-created again, so as to suit the humans that make them.

Importantly, Herodotus refuses to resolve definitively this question of fate. He leaves it open-ended as to whom or what fated Candaules to destruction, and why. This ambiguity works in several ways. If Herodotus does not specify the agent of fate, neither does he explicitly rule out any reading. As readers, we can supply an agent for ourselves: we may select ‘the gods’, if we are pious and conventional but not overly attentive, or we can chose ‘character’, being the sophisticated and sensitive audience that of course we are. What brings us closer to Herodotus’ purpose is to seize hold of this very ambiguity. Here again, Herodotus refuses to rule over his audience (unless, of course, we craft our own yoke) but rather prompts us to think, and look, for ourselves- if we are so willing.

“Each should look to his own”: Gyges and the Passivity of Convention

Fittingly, Gyges' response to Candaules' command reveals himself almost entirely. Indeed, everything else we learn about him in this episode further confirms and expands upon what we can observe here. He cries out in violent protest, saying

Master, what a sick word is this you have spoken, in bidding me look upon my mistress naked! With the laying aside of her clothes, a woman lays aside the respect that is hers! Many are the fine things discovered by men of old, and among them this one, that each should look upon his own, only. Indeed I believe that your wife is the most beautiful of all women, and I beg of you not to demand of me what is unlawful. (1.8)
With his first word, Gyges reminds Candaules of the proper order of things.\textsuperscript{161} Candaules is his master, and should remember what is appropriate to that relation, even especially when giving orders. The word Candaules has spoken is 'sick' because it is an order that undermines his basis for ordering. It allows for an intimacy that upends the hierarchical distance which enables one man to rule another.

The consequences of this 'sick word' are profound. If, as I have earlier suggested, Herodotus has inserted the audience into the narrative by situating them within Gyges’ dilemma, it follows that the 'sickness' of this order must colour our reading of Herodotus. Because Herodotus here shows us the ways in which Candaules’ order has unwittingly inverted the hierarchical space between ruler and ruled, this suggests that he might be consciously attempting to 'trouble' the potentially hierarchical relationship between himself and his audience. With this, he opens up ruptures within the logic of rule. That is, not only does his speech bring forth the contradictions that inhere within the political relations between human beings in this case, the rulership of Candaules over Gyges- but more profoundly, he suggests the ways in which these same dilemmas are at play within the relationship between 'beautiful speech’ and its hearers. His 'beautiful speech’ reveals what other beautiful speeches attempt to cover over - that words are not revelations of truth, fundamental realities in the world, but rather interpretations of how things are, and like all interpretations, they are partial, they cannot get at the whole, the what-is.

Herodotus’ speech, then, brings forth the contradictions that lie within the ‘fine things’, the beautiful speeches of the ‘men of old’ that Gyges clings to so fiercely. Words, Herodotus suggests, are not the immoveable boundary stones that \textit{nomos} sets forth, but pathways. The rule exercised by Herodotean art, then, aims at opening up the world, not closing it off, and thus is

\textsuperscript{161} Arieti (1995) 18-19.
more properly called an education to inquiry. Because of this, there is something profoundly egalitarian about Herodotus’ craft - he insists on the freedom of his audience. We may look with him, but we are not compelled to see what he sees. With this, he opens up the possibility of something like friendship between himself and his reader; that is, with his investigations into the problems of rule he seems to put aside or at least mitigate rule in favour of an invitation to dialogue.\textsuperscript{162}

Candaules, however, has ordered Gyges. Gyges protests: “With the laying aside of her clothes, a woman lays aside the respect that is hers!” In setting aside her clothes, a woman set aside her aidôs, her shame. Saxonhouse observes that, with its connection to hiding and the gaze of others: it “sets us immediately into a social context, one where we are aware of others who can gaze upon us, and where we are furthermore dependent on the community for our understanding of what is to be hidden and revealed.”\textsuperscript{163} To be naked is to be exposed, not only in the literal sense, but to be placed outside the strictures of the community. Benardete suggests that to see human bodies naked "is to see them as they are, stripped of the concealment of clothes. And laws are like clothes: they too conceal from us the way things are."\textsuperscript{164} Yet this misses out on the complex function of clothing, and thus the way it is a perfectly dexterous

\textsuperscript{162} It is important to keep in mind here that Candaules too attempted to set aside rule in favour of something like friendship between himself and Gyges; yet the political structures both were enmeshed in thwarted this possibility of friendship, and indeed made its attempt the root of Candaules’ destruction. It might appear then that Herodotus is rejecting the realm of the political in favour of the aesthetic; that he is a storyteller and not a statesman would seem to confirm this. I caution against this reading, partly because it imports modern theories about the glorious sanctity of art into an ancient context that is quite alien to them. But moreover, while a certain kind of egalitarian freedom becomes possible in Herodotus’ storytelling that cannot flourish politically, Herodotus’ narrative as a whole suggests that, as he sees it, Hellenic excellence- and indeed, its cultural survival - depends on fostering this kind of storytelling - and indeed, this kind of listening.

\textsuperscript{163} Saxonhouse (2005) 58

\textsuperscript{164} Benardete, (1969) 12
metaphor for understanding laws and their relation to human things.\textsuperscript{165} Clothing covers our raw, delicate humanity. But this covering is not merely an encrustation, a dead weight to be sloughed off so that one can be free - although perhaps it is that at times. Instead, clothing protects us from the elements of an often hostile world, cushioning and warming us, providing a means for fragile human beings to act and live in a world that is large, confusing, and dangerous. Clothing humanizes the world, in that it makes it safe for us to enter into it.\textsuperscript{166} Nowhere is this more keenly felt than in Canada in January. An unmediated experience of the world, equipped only with what inheres in our human nature, is a dangerous endeavour indeed. Clothing protects us and thus enables us to interact with what is outside. The sociality of clothing and shame integrates us into a community, protecting us from hostile elements and enabling capacities that require that we work and live along with others. So too do the laws. They provide a basis for acting and a framework for understanding the world. Laws bring the world down to a human scale by dictating what must be and what is right. They limit the world by carving out the boundaries between one's own and not one's own, between should and should not, between proper and improper. Both clothing and the laws make the world hospitable for humankind by acting as a necessary buffer.

Paradoxically, as much as both clothing and laws obscure the universally human, they both reveal the particular. What one wears says much about what is current to one's time and place and one's position within a particular context. Clothing can display one's class, income, values, and taste. It shows one's own to the world. A clothed queen displays herself qua queen;

\textsuperscript{165} see also Cairns (1996) 78-83 on the stripping of clothes and the social norms governing the proper relationship to a queen.
\textsuperscript{166} Nowhere is this more keenly felt than in Canada in January.
crown and cloak mark out her status for the world to see. Naked, she is just another body.\textsuperscript{167} She can be any-body. Clothed, she appears as the \textit{nomos} of the land has made her: separate, distinct, and elevated.\textsuperscript{168} Compare Phye, who briefly parades through Herodotus' narrative. A tall, strikingly beautiful woman, she is undoubtedly possessed of a beautiful nature (and indeed, her name is cognate with \textit{physis}). Yet the \textit{nomos} of her attire enhances her nature and thus obscures it. Dressed up as a goddess, her Athenian audience misreads her as one (1.60).\textsuperscript{169} \textit{Nomos} has taught them what to look for in a goddess, and when it manifests, they recognize it as such. Or rather, they interpret her according to the expectations inculcated in them through \textit{nomos.}

Clothing thus simultaneously obscures one's \textit{phusis} and reveals one's \textit{nomos.} However, by placing one in a context, it effectively locks one into it. Greeks appear as Greeks, and barbarians as barbarians. The cues that clarify within one's own context mislead within another. What is human appears foreign and inscrutable.

Continuing his protest, Gyges tries to rebut Candaules with his reverence for the "fine things discovered by men of old", "that every man ought to look to his own" (1.8). Gyges, in looking to what he considered his own, that is, received opinion and the authority that governs him, believes what he has been told without needing to look for himself. He believes Candaules' wife to be the most beautiful without needing to see her, for he believed Candaules' word to be true because convention holds it so.\textsuperscript{170} As Benardete so succinctly puts it, "Gyges believed in the

\textsuperscript{167} Of course, one's health, income, and class can all be marked into the naked body, through diet, exercise, labour and work, child birth, etc. In some ways, then, the body is as particular, as conventional as our clothing is. This only further suggested the interpenetration of custom and nature that, as I will later suggest, is what marks the particularly human for Herodotus.

\textsuperscript{168} Here's a generational example. I might be able to read the social cues that reveal someone of my age and income group to be a hipster, whereas to my grandmother, we all just look like silly young people.

\textsuperscript{169} And for falling for this stunt, Herodotus lambastes the Athenians as 'simple-minded' (1.60).

\textsuperscript{170} As is often noted, the relationship between convention and beauty is itself incredibly fraught; all sorts of things filter what one holds to be beautiful. Still, one should grasp hold of the irony of Gyges' claim that he believes in the supreme physical beauty of Candaules' wife because he has been told of it - physical
beauty of Candaules' wife in the same way he believed in ancient maxims: they were both equally beautiful and equally unseen”. Gyges feels no need to test either. Still, Gyges’
cautiousness is not without merit. As Lateiner observes of the edict that ‘every man look to his own’: “Nearly the first aphorism in the Histories, the personal warning will find extensive application to international war and imperialism.”172 Lateiner is right that Gyges’ conservatism can be a source of restraint on hubris and the drive to empire. The shame that Gyges insists on is, as Saxonhouse suggests, civilizing: it socializes human beings and fits them for each other’s company.173 Yet it is an obstacle to philosophic thought. As Saxonhouse observes, Gyges’ dedication to the beautiful things of old - the beautiful nomoi of Lydia -would have prevented him from viewing that which is beautiful by phusis- the eidos, body of the Lydian queen.174 He may see only what convention dictates he should- convention thus rules all that he sees. In looking to his own nomos, Gyges is prevented from looking into what is more deeply yet obscurely his own - nature.

To that end, of particular note is his use of the word 'discovered'. This discovery was something done by 'the men of old' and is therefore the fruit of human activity- yet Gyges holds these findings to be ‘discoveries’, not inventions, and thus in some indistinct way, to Gyges they appear natural. This ambiguity in his words is important, in that it suggests the ways in which we can both see and not see the artifice in our own conventions. ‘Discovery’ suggests both that these ‘fine things’ are natural, but that there was a time that they did not yet exist for us. Human

171 Benardete (1969) 11
172 Lateiner (1989) 141
173 Saxonhouse (2005) 58-60
174 Saxonhouse (2005) 59. Saxonhouse also observes the suggestive word play between the aidôs, which must be put away so that the eidos might be seen.
agency, then, is responsible in some indistinct way for them. Both necessity and choice are involved here. Gyges here wants to make a choice to uphold the fine things of old - yet he simultaneously wants to deny in some ways the human agency involved in these things. The verb he uses, ‘discovered’, is in the past-tense. This describes its position in time, but also connotes his attitude towards this activity. It is a thing finished. Gyges does not want to look too closely at what men have discovered; he accepts unquestioningly their validity. He refuses to look directly at these commands, just as he refuses to look at Candaules’ wife. In both cases, he is content with report. He wishes to only look upon his own.

Yet he is stuck. The law in this case demands two contradictory things from him. He cannot both follow his king and remain within the law that demands that “each look only upon his own”. A choice must be made, and Gyges eventually betrays what he professes to hold most dear, that is, his own laws, and follows the unlawful commands of Candaules. Because of the contradiction in the law, however, Gyges could protest to us that he was still looking to his own; in this case, his own loyalty to the king. But by placing his loyalty to the king above his loyalty to the laws, Gyges strips himself of any defence for his later actions, in which he gives into the queen's demands and avenges her shame (1.11-12). He cannot say that he was acting to right the wrong done to nomos, as Mrs. Candaules might, since he himself was the agent of that harm. More dammingly, as Herodotus says, he was “in dread least some evil should come to himself out of these things” (1.9), and then, later, "he chose his own survival." (1.11). When seen in the light of his later choice to kill the king rather than be killed, his original decision to obey the king reveals itself not as a careful choice of one loyalty over another, but rather as the blind animal impulse to survive. He does not act qua man but rather qua animal. In this, Gyges exemplifies
the most basic sense of his claim - that “each should look to his own” - in this case, his own survival.\(^\text{175}\)

Compare his behaviour to Arion's, whose story follows shortly upon Gyges’. Arion, when faced with death at the hand of Corinthian pirates, choses to be most fully and completely himself. Before plunging into the sea to drown, he dresses himself in his heavy bardic costume, which is guaranteed to be an incredibly effective anchor, and sings his 'shrill tune', that which he is most known for, that which is most fully his. He embraces his art, his creativity and ingenuity, when he is closest to the extinguishing of these particularities in death (1.24). Because of this, Arion is saved from drowning by a dolphin. Arion’s dolphin seems able to carry a whole host of readings on its back. If one wishes, this dolphin can represent the mercy of the gods, and it so upholds the moral order. Yet it is important to keep in mind here some of Herodotus’ more explicit spurs to interpretive ingenuity - as when he tells us that he does not believe everything that he reports, and when he asks his readers to ‘use these stories as one will’.\(^\text{176}\) Benardete has suggested that this dolphin represents the way in which Herodotus’ art might save his narrative;\(^\text{177}\) Thompson reads it as representing the saving power of culture and creativity in moments of crisis;\(^\text{178}\) Packman sees it as the prime example of Herodotus managing audience credulity.\(^\text{179}\) To my mind, it is important to note the ways in which Arion, by dressing in his bardic costume and singing the shrill tune, calls upon the peak of his talent while still remaining within the bounds of convention- the modes and rhythms of a particular music. Convention does not stifle his art, this expression of his nature; it enables it. Its limits and particularities make

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\(^{175}\) Pelling (2006b) 144-5; Baragwanath (2008) 73
\(^{176}\) 2.123 and elsewhere
\(^{177}\) Benardete,(1969) 14-16
\(^{178}\) Thompson (1996) 167
\(^{179}\) Packman (1991) 399-408.
possible his freedom. There is a lesson here for readers of Herodotus: understanding the power of convention seems key to unleashing one’s nature. Herodotus himself uses the particular modes and genres of his time (epic, persuasive speech, and chronicles) in his quest for nature; he attends to the old to make something new. Like Arion, Herodotus finds the revelatory in the particular.

In contrast to Arion, however, whenever Gyges is faced with a choice, he choses not what is particularly his, those 'fine things' of old, but what he shares with all men, animals, and plants: mere life. It may be the most inextricably his own, but it is the least uniquely him. Arion gets a dolphin because he bravely embraces poetry and leaps into the unknown; no magic dolphin, as it were, comes for the passive Gyges. He survives, but at the cost of his most intimate and rich bonds to his community, for he is forced to murder his king and his friend. He saves part of what his own, but damages what is his in another sense: his nomoi.180

Because of this, it is difficult to speak of Gyges as 'acting'. Instead he is used. First by the king, who uses Gyges to confirm his own judgment, and then by the queen, who uses him to rectify Candaules' breach in nomos by committing a far more fundamental crime, that is, regicide. Both wield him as a tool in order to achieve their respective ends. Gyges' own desires or concerns, such as those 'fine things' he cited to Candaules, have no role to speak of. Whether it is the dictate of nomos, the order of his king, or the illegitimate command of his queen, he never actually does; he only obeys. The only action he is capable of is that which he was compelled to do. Consider Herodotus' descriptions of Gyges' part in both crimes. In both cases, he is led into the room (1.10, 1.12). In his first crime, all that Gyges has to actually do is keep his eyes open. For the second, which admittedly requires active participation on his part, Herodotus emphasizes his passivity. The queen originates all action: "she gave him a dagger and hid him

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180 Baragwanath (2008) 74 similarly notes that in choosing his own life, he gains what “is not remotely his own: another’s wife and kingdom.”
behind the very door" (1.12). The action hinges on her will; Gyges only acts because he feels "that necessity truly [lies] before him" (1.11). From this, it is evident that Gyges' love for the laws results from his unwillingness - or inability- to think about them, to test them for himself.

He loves them insofar as they can compel him and thus relieve him of the burden of choice. When their force is challenged by a more immediate and direct force- like the order of a king whose power he is in, or a threat to his own physical person- he always follows the stronger. Indeed, the strongest force exerted upon him is the life-force, which is in the end what drives him. Although this originates within him, this too is compulsion. At no point does Gyges act for himself.

We see this manifested when the queen calls for him. Herodotus writes that "he gave never a thought to her knowing anything... and came on her summons, since he had been wont before this...to come in attendance whenever the queen should call" (1.11). This is further proof of Gyges' essential passivity. He does whatever he is commanded, giving it little thought. Moreover, he has a long history of doing so, having 'been wont before this' to obey. Even his kingship was more given to him than taken by him, since it was only after the oracle proclaimed him king that he truly became so (1.13). Gyges is moved first by the laws, then by the king and the queen, and finally by the gods. He never moves himself. As though to underline this, Herodotus quickly sketches us for us the remainder of his kingship. His only real act is an invasion, the uniqueness of which Herodotus immediately erases by mentioning that this was done "like others" had (1.15) After this, "no other great deeds [were] done by him, although he reigned thirty-eight years." (1.15). Gyges does nothing that he is not compelled to do. Even as a

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181 Danzig (2008) 182 sees this as Herodotus' hint that Gyges had already been conspiring with the queen. Yet there is no textual evidence for this, and it does not fit with what Herodotus has sketched of Gyges' character.
despot, he acts as befits the subject of one; his conventions have shaped his nature. In this, he is a more fitting spokesman for the power of convention than even he realizes.

*The Power of Shame: Protection and Spur*

So far in this tableau, Herodotus has unfolded competing ways of seeing. Candaules looks to his own, but because he is too close to it, too erotically attached to it, he is unable to see it clearly. Gyges wants to look only to his own, but really prefers hearing about these things from others to looking for himself. Herodotus here contrasts myopia and blindness. Yet there is another seeing within the confines of this story which is unlike both of these. Everything Herodotus relates to us about the queen suggests that she sees more keenly than either Gyges or Candaules. Quite literally, she sees Gyges as he exits their bedroom; her sight reveals that she has been shamed (1.15). However, not only does she see Gyges' presence clearly, but she sees through the agent to the perpetrator. She can recognize the hand of Candaules behind the body of Gyges.

Clearly, she sees her husband better than he sees her. His thoughts are so transparent to her that she knows immediately that her shaming "had been done by her husband" (1.10). Through her insight, we know her. She is clever enough to see into the natures of both her husband and Gyges. She knows Candaules is an insecure braggart who would expose her to satiate his own 'sick' desires. Furthermore, she also intuits that Gyges is defined by his obedience, and thus could not be capable of such insurrection on his own accord. This same quality, instrumental to her shame, also enables her revenge, since she knows that the tool wielded against her can be used by her in turn. With all revealed to her, she too knows that she must reveal nothing, since "though she was so shamed, she raised no outcry nor let on to have

\footnote{Flory (1987) 35-37}
understood, having in mind to take punishment on Candaules." For her to have revenge, she must cloak her intentions, although she could not cloak her body.

All that she sees, however, is illuminated by her particular nomos. At the moment of her insight, Herodotus interrupts with a gloss emphasizing the exceptionality of the barbarian shame surrounding nudity. He stops the narrative to explain that "for among the Lydians and indeed among the generality of the barbarians, for even a man to be seen naked is an occasion of great shame." (1.10). Herodotus withheld this information earlier. He only now unveils it, at the moment of the queen's shamed reaction to her nudity. By revealing this particular detail so close upon the queen's reaction, Herodotus shows how inextricably her response is tied to the particularity of her culture.\(^{183}\) The twinning of her response with its conventional explanation suggests how deeply, for Herodotus, nomos shapes 'what man has brought into being'. As Saxonhouse observes, Herodotus urges that nature does not establish what is shameful: "it is rather the knowledge gleaned from life in Lydia, from exposure to the values of the particular society in which one lives, that defines those boundaries."\(^{184}\) Her shame is conventional, and thus so is her interpretation of her situation.\(^{185}\) The explicative necessity of this ethnographic detail demonstrates how nomos, out of which human things appear, can also obscure them. Without knowledge of other laws and conventions, human behaviour can appear so decidedly foreign, so inscrutable, as to be unrecognizable as human. Yet human it is. Herodotus here reminds us that the human things appear in a myriad of ways.

From this, then, perhaps we can say that a particular quirk of Lydian law- the horror of nudity - was what fated Candaules’ doom. This would suggest that this story has significance

\(^{183}\) Munson (2001) 39-40
\(^{184}\) Saxonhouse (2005) 58
\(^{185}\) Benardete (1969) 13
only within the Lydian context, that it might remain interpretively inert. If we look more closely at the queen’s actions, however, it emerges that this story has more traction than as merely a criticism of a particularly Lydian law. For although the queen acts to repair what she sees as an insult to her own - both the laws of Lydia, and her own dignity as defined by those conventions - her actions also fundamentally undermine rather common laws concerning kingship and marriage. Generally, one should not destroy one's own spouse, nor murder one's own king. Both of these relations demand loyalty. Although the Lydian nomos can explain her actions, it cannot fully account for them. Conventions contradict themselves. Blind adherence to them cannot adequately explain human action, although it can highlight the contradictions and cross-currents eddying under every act.

Perhaps something mediates - or is mediated by- these competing influences: why uphold or enact one convention but ignore another? Herodotus does not say. Instead, he does display the contradictions inherent even in the keenly-sighted queen. Consider the results of her revenge. By destroying the man who had exposed her to another, she averred that only one man might see her naked, thus affirming the power of Lydian shame. Yet by avenging a breach of her privacy, she made it visible to all. She avenged a breach of her privacy by making it public; she toppled a regime to uphold the intimacy of the bedroom. Would Herodotus been able to tell this story had she simply closed her eyes to one convention and chosen to uphold another? If the queen was angry at Candaules, she must be furious with Herodotus. She keenly sees the details of her own context and yet seems unable to see the consequences of her own actions. She has precise knowledge of the private and personal but cannot understand the further, public ramifications of her own actions. In aiming to protect the sanctity of shame, she opens it to the world.
Conclusion: The Contradictions within One’s Own and Inquiry’s Desire for More

This tableau thus suggests that serious and potentially debilitating tensions exist within any given set of conventions. Perhaps there is something to be said for Gyges' reluctance to look too closely into things. Shame, which averts our eyes, protects these contradictions from being discovered and thus minimizes the strife and confusion that results from an experience of these tensions.\(^{186}\) Shame acts as a sort of mental saran-wrap: it keeps fresh the conventions we have received from the 'men of old'. Peel it away and these leftovers can start to smell. When shame loses its hold, that is, when these conventions become detached from their sense of inevitability, of being an inescapable part of the nature of things, this can unroot the human from its place in the world. Conventions that appear arbitrary lose their worth as a map and guide. They lose their power to either compel or inform.

This can be freeing and thought-provoking, but it can also be ethically corrosive. Witness the experience of the Corinthian sailors that attempted to murder Arion (1.24). Once they leave port, and with it the norms and conventions of home, they turn pirate. Benardete writes that "they lost all sense of justice as soon as the possibility of punishment disappeared."\(^{187}\) This is true. But they also illustrate the dangers of seeing what is not one's own. As travellers, they saw as many different customs as places. Having witnessed so much difference in what is held to be good or bad, they were overwhelmed by multitudinousness and concluded that since there was no one, universal account of good and bad, there must therefore be neither good nor bad. The myriad varieties of human things they saw blinded them to the human underlying these diverse manifestations. Since they could not see anything that was truly human, they concluded that all

\(^{186}\) cf. Tarnopolsky (2010)

\(^{187}\) Benardete (1969) 14
human experience was relative. Because of this, they ceased to behave ‘humanely’ at all, as shown by their attempt to silence individual genius by murdering the inventor-musician Arion (1.24). Unanchored from the human, they held nothing sacred.

Gyges’ traditionalism, then, protects against this sort of destructive relativism. Lateiner notes that while his piety has “its self-serving aspects” Herodotus uses his character to “voice a general truth” - violations of nomoi “disturb the natural, social, and political order.” Yet maintaining a sense of shame and looking only to one's own cannot protect one from the contradictions and tensions within any given nomos. As demonstrated in the Gyges-Candaules episode, loyalty to one's own can place an individual in direct conflict, not only with others, but with one's own competing loyalties. Candaules loved his own wife at the cost of his own power; Gyges loved his own life over his own professed values; and the queen loved her own dignity more than her marriage, her king, and even her own privacy. In looking to their own, all three were blinded to the whole. With this, Herodotus suggests the importance of adopting multiple perspectives, of looking at what others see. Throughout the History as a whole, he shall present multiple and contested stories, recreating diverse perspectives on the contested truth. As the meta-narrative reminds us, while Herodotus recreates multiple perspectives, he is always himself- his is always a situated perspective, one human being looking at human things. Yet he has shown the limitation to this- and in that, he has shown the way forward. One must look to the limitations of one’s own- and the promise and limits of others, as well. Thinking within the cave requires that we maintain a stance of openness while never ceding’s one’s own authority to judge. To do this, one must be both insider and outsider at once, moving between perspectives, attending to the potentials and limitations of each.

188 Lateiner (1989) 141
189 Schlosser (2014)
Inquiry, which requires moving between situated perspectives, seeing as both outsider and insider, is therefore active; it cannot be passive. We must be moved to do this activity, for it cannot be done for us or to us. This suggests that the erotic charge that distorted Candaules’ looking must be altered, not abandoned. Eros distorts judgment, but it can also motivate it. Herodotus’ narrative awakens this urge, by leading us to sense the limitations of a single perspective and tantalizing us into yearning to see more. His storytelling awakens our affective concern with what he shows us. This helps differentiate Herodotus’ embrace of diversity from the relativism of the Corinthian pirates. Like them, he has looked at various manifestations of what is human. Both he and they have lost their shame; they look to that which is not their own, they look without constraint.

But the pirates saw that many things were allowable and thus concluded that all things were. They loved nothing in particular and therefore loved nothing at all. Because of this, they were able to break the promise of safe-passage they gave Arion and silence the beauty of his song in death. In contrast, the breadth of Herodotus’ inquiry suggests his wider understanding of what it is to love one’s own. He is moved to look at all human things so that he can save what man has brought into being from the ravages of time. If inquiry is a kind of saving, it is also a kind of love. It is worth noting the deep disapproval Herodotus expresses about the ways in which inquiry can become utterly corrosive - as is the case with the Corinthian pirates, or the psychotically violent zeal with which the mad King Cambyses conducts his own investigations (3.1-3.38). Herodotus’ own behaviour, in contrast, and moreover, his own stated intention, suggests a dual concern with both knowing and saving. Indeed, given Herodotus’ assertion of the

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190 Lateiner (1989) 141 aptly notes that “those who exceed their own nomoi or violate others’ are either mad or foolish- or philosophical like Herodotus when he invites the Hellenes to question their own values, as he has.”
shifting quality, the delicacy of human things, ‘knowing’ and ‘saving’ might be, in their fullest sense, one and the same for him. Nothing reveals this more than his revealing; rather than silence Arion, he preserves him for all time in his narrative, so that “time may not draw the colour from what man has brought into being” (1.1). Herodotus wants to see all, but moreover, he wants to save all. By his results and by his methods, he demonstrates his love for human things- whatever they may be- by saving them from time, for all tim
Chapter Two
Culture as Fate? Herodotus’ Egyptian Logos

In his Egyptian narrative, Herodotus moves from the near to the far, from the familiar to the strange; for “the most of what [the Egyptians] have made their habits and their customs are the exact opposite of other folks” (2.35).\(^{191}\) The emphasis on difference in the Egyptian logos has led some to charge Herodotus with ‘Othering’, crafting an image of Egyptian difference to suit Hellenic purposes. In this view, the Egyptian logos is an Hellenic (and Herodotean) construction.\(^{192}\) Yet as Ian Moyer has persuasively argued, this approach to Herodotus rests upon modern examples of ‘othering’ which have been spurred and informed by contemporary practices and beliefs quite alien to Herodotus’ historical context.\(^{193}\) In Moyer’s account, Herodotus’ Egyptian narrative is the product of “co-penetration”. He elaborates: “In Herodotus’ description of Egypt, the Greek encounter with another culture is not purely a textual mirage constructed from the elaboration of Greek cultural ideas and oppositional self-definitions. Herodotus confronted not only the vast antiquity of an Egyptian Other, but also – through the mediation of the Egyptian priests – the Egyptian historicity of a particular moment, a characteristic set of relations with the past.”\(^{194}\) According to Moyer, then, the Egyptians actively shape their representation in the text, as witnessed by their privileged status as informers in the

\(^{191}\) Harrison (2003) 147 notes that the number and size of the wonders of Egypt provide justification for the great length of the digression; Lateiner (1989) 147 observes that, through their ‘peculiar’ character, the Egyptians “furnish data by which to contrast and measure other settled societies, particularly the Greeks.”

\(^{192}\) Hartog (1986); Vasunia (2001); Harrison (2003).

\(^{193}\) As Moyer asks, “Are there not other ways of figuring the relations of knowledge and power between Greece and Egypt? Ones that do not recapitulate, but rather disturb and dislocate those modern genealogies and histories in which the “other” serves merely as an object to be incorporated into the intellectual and territorial domains of the West?” (2011) 10

\(^{194}\) Moyer (2011) 34, 50.
text of the Histories. Herodotus does not, therefore, construct an Egyptian Other, but rather depicts and interrogates Egypt as it existed at a precise historic moment.

The defining characteristic of that moment is, as Moyer suggests, its particular relationship with the past. It has long been noted that Herodotus foregrounds the antiquity of Egypt, yet this is often cast as aspect of Herodotean ‘Other-ing’. For example, Harrison has charged that through Herodotus’ account, Egypt has been “transformed into a kind of museum…” In this view, Herodotus creates an Egypt which offers an arrested and ossified image of human history displayed for the Hellenes’ viewing pleasure. Against this, Moyer offers evidence from both Herodotus’ text and Egyptian historical records that suggest that the centrality of the past in the Egyptian logos stems from its centrality to Egyptian self-conception: “Herodotus did not confront the archaic civilization of ancient Egypt, but rather the archaizing civilization of his own era.” As Moyer and others have noted, in encountering the sophisticated and cultivated historic memory of these people, Herodotus disrupts Greek complacency, urging them to think through and reassess their own preconceptions. The profundity and age of Egyptian custom renders the Hellenes jejune and thoughtless in comparison. The complexity of Egyptian relations with the past thus further the therapeutic aspect of the Histories by leading the Hellenes to sense the inadequacy of their own culturally-mediated sense of time.

Yet the particular way that the Egyptians conceive of the past casts a long shadow on their present. Herodotus’ narrative will show how the reverence of the past can stifle and inhibit

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195 Moyer (2011) 52 counts 19 explicit and “some two dozen implicit” references to the Egyptian priests as sources/informants.
197 Moyer (2011) 74
198 Rood (2006); Munson (2001); Moyer (2011).
human agency in the present. In Egypt, the past becomes fate. The extreme archaizing of the Egyptian cultural imagination is a particular convention — but it is a convention that leads them to deny the distinction between *phusis* and *nomos*, between nature and convention. In the Egyptian *logos*, Herodotus will demonstrate that both cross cultural judgment and a sound politics require this distinction. In lacking a conception of nature, the Egyptians ‘naturalize’ custom, and in so doing, they undercut their own agency by denying their human, generative powers.\(^\text{199}\) Downplaying natural human capacity leads them to cultural determinism. As Lateiner observes of them, they are “trapped in their *nomoi*. ”\(^\text{200}\) Herodotus’ Egyptian *logos* thus illustrates the dangers of what Amartya Sen terms ‘civilizational confinement’ - the belief that one’s culture is a non-negotiable, given fate.\(^\text{201}\)

The contrast offered by the Hellenes is telling. In negotiating and interpreting Egyptian customs, the Hellenes exemplify the benefits of cultural fluidity and exchange, revealing our natural capacity to generate or transform convention, even as convention shapes us. This becomes especially apparent through the transformation of the Egyptian gods into the Hellenic ones. Homer and his ilk transform gods that circumscribe and undercut human agency into those that support it; through this, Herodotus shows how customs can be reimagined so as to better support human ends. Indeed, Herodotus’ meditation on Homer’s poetic re-shaping alerts us to the ways in which Herodotus aims at such a re-shaping of his own. Through his exegesis of Homer, Herodotus shows his audience the ways in which poetry is a thing made, a thing shaped, thus drawing our attention to the scaffolding of human effort that the beauty of poetry obscures.


\(^{200}\) Lateiner (1989) 150

\(^{201}\) Sen (2006) 40-58
Through this, we are invited to scrutinize the effects and intentions behind this human
endeavour, and invited to consider more seriously Herodotus’ intentions in shaping his narrative.

Natural Language? Psammetichus’ experiment and Egyptian exceptionalism

Herodotus opens the Egyptian logos by foregrounding the pre-eminent place of the past
in Egyptian self-conception, noting that “the Egyptians, before Psammetichus became their king,
thought that they were the oldest of mankind” (2.2). To cast light on this claim, however,
Herodotus recounts the way in which it was tested through Psammetichus’ inquiry.202 Christ
includes Psammetichus as one of the inquiring kings, those rival inquirers whose activity
clarifies the character of Herodotus’ own through the contrast that they offer.203 While some, like
Christ and Sulek, read Herodotus as approving of Psammetichus’ inquiry,204 I argue instead that
Herodotus shows us its flaws. And yet Psammetichus’ flawed inquiry will help further the aims
of Herodotus’ own, for its failings reveal the role that the past plays in Egyptian self-
conception.205

Psammetichus undertook his experiment when “he could not in any way discover by
inquiry which were the first people” (2.2) Psammetichus, like Herodotus, grasps the difficulties
of inquiring into the past. It cannot be viewed through autopsis, that is, it cannot be seen in itself,
for it is a thing completed and therefore vanished, erased by time.206 Because autopsis in the
strict sense is impossible, one must seek out other methods for inquiring into the absent past.
Psammetichus tries to re-animate the past and thereby make it a subject for autopsis; he believes

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202 Lateiner (1989) 241 n 83 notes the way that this story “enjoys a privileged position at the beginning of
its logos,” comparing it to the Gyges tale in how each is programmatic for the logos that follows.
203 Christ (1994) 167-202
204 Sulek (1989) 645-651
205 Lloyd (1976): 5-10 asserts that the tacit assumptions of Psammetichus’ inquiry are Greek; I emphasize
the ways in which they are particularly Egyptian.
206 cf. 1.1
that the historical will emerge from newborn children if they are left to themselves. For Psammetichus- and for the Egyptians more generally - the past is not simply past; it is somehow eternally present within human beings, and thus capable of being re-vivified. The historical thus appears akin to the natural.\textsuperscript{207}

Psammetichus takes two ordinary newborns and gave them to a shepherd so that they could be brought up amongst the flocks.

The manner of their upbringing was to be this: the king charged that no one of those who came face to face with the children should utter a word and that the children should be kept in a lonely dwelling by themselves. At a suitable time the shepherd was to bring the goats to them, give them their fill of milk, and do all the necessary things. Psammetichus did this and gave these orders because he wished to hear from those children, as soon as they were done with meaningless noises, which language they would speak first. (2.2)

The premise of this experiment rests on Psammetichus’ belief that speaking is natural to man, that, outside of the family and community and all human bonds, human beings will still speak. More precisely, he believes not that speech is natural but that \textit{a particular speech} is: that there exists, not the natural capacity for language, but a natural language. As Benardete observes, this shows that the Egyptians “fail to distinguish between speech and this speech, between logos and glossa.”\textsuperscript{208} The human capacity for speech disappears behind the words of a particular language.

After a few years, Psammetichus’ experiment appears to bear fruit.

...as the shepherd was performing his tasks, he opened the door and went in, and the children clasped his knees and reached out their hands, calling out ‘bekos’. At first, when the shepherd heard this, he remained silent about it. But as he came constantly and

\textsuperscript{207} Ward (2008) 34, remarks of this attitude of the past that the Egyptians “believe that one can learn what is universally true by looking to the beginning of history.”

\textsuperscript{208} Benardete (1969) 31-32
gave careful heed to the matter, this word was constantly with them. So he signified this to his master and at his command brought the children to his presence. When Psammetichus himself had heard he inquired which of mankind called something ‘bekos.’ On inquiry he found that the Phrygians called bread ‘bekos.’ So the Egyptians conceded and, making this their measure, judged that the Phrygians were older than themselves. (2.2)

Let us briefly put aside the obvious difficulties with Psammetichus’ experiment, and take it on its own terms. Because the first word the children say appears to be ‘bekos,’ the Phrygian word for bread, the Egyptians conclude that the Phrygians are therefore the oldest people, and they themselves the second oldest (2.2). Yet while Psammetichus’ ‘evidence’ appears to confirm the first verdict, it gives no basis from which to draw their second.

Indeed, the experiment, if valid, can recover only the first language; it gives no evidence, one way or another, for determining which language comes second, third, or thousandth. Psammetichus assumes that there is one language that is inborn or natural, which means that all others are alike non-natural, or conventional. Since the experiment only recovers the ‘natural’ language, there is no way of accounting for the existence of the other, non-natural languages, no way of tracking their genesis and thus ordering them. Psammetichus has failed to attend to any capacity that might allow for the transformation of the original language, or, alternatively, the creation of totally new ones. By insisting that the oldest language is also the natural language, he has elided the question of how even the oldest language came to be. Language appears given, rather than generated.

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209 Benardete (1969) 31 “The Egyptians appear to be so reluctant to abandon their supposed priority that they console themselves with second place with as little evidence as they once had had to arrogate to themselves the first.”

210 Munson (2005) 20 rightly observes that Herodotus does not corroborate Psammetichus’ findings.

211 Harrison (2003) 149 and Munson (2005) 20 also note that this experiment provides no evidence whatsoever that Egyptian is the second oldest language.
Yet the children did say *bekos*; they somehow learned a Phrygian word. Note that, although the children were cared for by silent shepherds, they did not live in complete silence; for those shepherds had goats.\textsuperscript{212} Rather than speaking Phrygian, the children appear to have been speaking ‘goat’. They were hungry; the bleating goats appeared, and the children’s needs were satisfied. The children learned to speak goat the way children all over the world, all through time, learn to speak any language - exposure and imitation.\textsuperscript{213} Indeed, Herodotus’ post-script to the story confirms this: he lambastes the Greeks for telling, “among many other foolish stories, one to the effect that Psammetichus had the tongues of certain women cut out and made the children live with these women” (2.2). The story the Greeks tell is more vivid, more poetic, yet it removes the one thing needed to make sense of the outcome of this experiment, the prosaic presence of the bleating goats.\textsuperscript{214}

That the children were speaking ‘goat’ suggests an ironic twist to Psammetichus’ experiment - the children did not speak the natural human language, but rather the natural goat language. And yet there is no such thing as a natural goat language- to anticipate a distinction later drawn by Aristotle, goats have voice (communicative sounds), but not speech (discourse with its complex and conventional web of meaning). Elsewhere in the Egyptian narrative, Herodotus similarly distinguishes between animal sound and human speech. This emerges through the contrast between two versions of the foundation of the oracle of Dodona. The Egyptians hold that the famed Greek oracle was founded by an enslaved Theban priestess, who introduced prophecy to the Greeks during her captivity amongst them. The Greek Dodonaeans,

\textsuperscript{212} Benardete (1969) 31
\textsuperscript{213} Sulek (1989): 649 adduces the presence of the goats to account for the children learning to speak. Munson (2005) likewise observes that this story “ironically confirms that humans grow up learning speech from what they hear...”
\textsuperscript{214} Benardete (1969) 32
on the other hand, claim that their oracle was founded by a black dove “who settled upon an oak tree and with a human voice proclaimed that there should be there, in that place, an oracle of Zeus.” (2.55). Herodotus tells us his own “judgment” (γνώµη) (2.56) on the story, in this using the unembellished Egyptian version—not to discount the poetic Greek one, but to account for it. “I believe that the women were called by the Dodonaeans ‘doves’ because they were barbarians, and so they seemed to the people of Dodona to talk like birds..... How, after all, could a dove speak with a human voice?” (2.57).^{215} For Herodotus, the ability to speak is specifically human. Humans speak; doves chirp. The black dove is therefore a metaphor. The capacity for speech provides a natural standard by which we can interpret and correct the poetic story told by the Greeks.

Yet there is another aspect of human nature at play here, one that sheds further light on Psammetichus’ dilemma. The Greeks of Dodona could not recognize the woman’s speech as speech, for “as long as she talked her own barbarian language, she seemed to them to speak like a bird.” (2.57). In appealing to nature to decipher this story, Herodotus suggests that the untutored human response to difference is a profound incomprehension, an inability to see it as rooted in shared human capacity - in nature.^{216} Only the Greek language appears to the Greeks to be of a human voice - the equally human barbarian tongue is to them merely the song of birds. This parallel with the Egyptians, who call barbarians those who cannot speak their own language

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^{215} This question, by invoking the standard of nature, raises a tacit criticism of the whole premise of an oracle - for how could a human speak with a god's voice?

^{216} Munson (2005) 67-69: with this story, “Herodotus communicates his own understanding of the linguistic aspect of the psychology of otherness.....linguistic ethnocentrism entails a claim to the privileged and absolute status of utterances: for the Greeks, only Greek has meaning and what has meaning is Greek.”
suggestions that this view is rooted in a broader human tendency: to see one's own as natural, as properly human, and all others as somehow not. The natural capacity for language can be eclipsed by the likewise natural proclivity to see only one’s own as truly, fully human. Greek and Egyptian alike fail to see the humanity of others, although both speak equally human languages. Herodotus’ therapy of judgment helps his readers recognize this fallacy- and through that, overcome it.

For Herodotus, then, speech is a defining human characteristic. Goats bleat and doves chirp, and these bleats and chirps emerge as spontaneously from them, as naturally, as Psammetichus imagined Phrygian had emerged from the children. Yet while human beings do not naturally bleat, they can associate external sounds with specific things- and thus can fashion language. This story might not reveal the original language, but read correctly, it can suggest something of how language originates, through the human ability to fashion meaning out of natural surroundings. This resonates with Herodotus’ account of a cave-dwelling people, who “speak a language not like any other, for it is like the squeaking of bats.” (4.183). A people that dwells in caves, amongst bats, speaks a language that recalls nature but is not itself natural; so too do children dwelling with goats speak in a way that recalls the bleating of goats but yet is not mere bleating. Taken together, both stories suggest that human beings have a natural ability to craft conventions from the stuff of nature, although the fruits of this ability tend to obscure their source. The conventional products of nature can appear natural themselves.

The word the children allegedly spoke - bekos- further complicates this tangle of nature and convention. The children could only have been speaking Phrygian- and thus, a natural

\[217\] Thomas (2000): 131 notes that this suggests the subjective quality of the definition of ‘barbarian’. Rood (2007) 298 likewise notes that this counters Hellenocentrism by inviting the Greeks to think about “how they as Greeks appear to others in much the same way that foreign peoples appear to Greeks,” while Munson (2005) 65 cites this as an example of foreign culture “confound[ing] Greek subjectivity.”
language- if, in uttering the word ‘bekos’ they had intended its meaning, bread. Yet this cannot be the case. Herodotus has carefully specified the details of the children’s rearing. They were not fed with bread, but with goats’ milk. The children thus had never been exposed to bread, and therefore could not have intended to specify ‘bread’ with their calls of ‘bekos’. This highlights a problem with the natural language thesis: it requires that there be natural names for things, eternally fixed words for everything in existence. Indeed, for something to have a natural and eternal name, it must itself be natural and eternal. Bread, as Herodotus is well aware (3.22) is not a natural substance, but something invented. It is the product of human activity, and thus its name too is an invention. A language can only be natural if all the things its words specify are themselves natural, themselves as eternal and fixed as as a natural language would needs be.

Indeed, not only can there be no natural name for a conventional object, but there can be no natural name for a natural object. If we interpret Psammetichus’ experiment correctly- that is, if we read it as Herodotus indicates that he does - we have learned something of how language is generated by human beings out of our own capacities- our ability to imitate, change, and shape. If language is natural to man, all languages are thus equally natural to him- and therefore equally conventional. Words themselves are therefore conventionally created artifacts; they are generated out of human beings and our relationship to the world in which we find ourselves. Like all conventions, they carve out and separate the world, limiting it and so rendering it manageable; ‘Bread’ specifies bread, not milk or honey. By defining and thus limiting meaning, this constraint enables other human capacities. The convention of bekos/bread enables us to

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218 Munson (2005) 21-22 likewise notes that the children could not have meant bread, and so this story suggests Herodotus’ conventionalist view of nature.

219 Indeed, Demont (2009) 199 and Irwin (2014) 32 both note that bread, for the Greeks, is particularly suggestive of human progress.
speak of bread, whether to ask for a slice or to ponder its human significance. The constraint of this convention allows other capacities to grow.

Yet as the Psammetichus story reveals, the generated, conventional quality of words can easily be eclipsed. Most people do not create language, but rather learn an already existing one. We are socialized into language as we are socialized into living. Because of this, we become blinded to the local and particular quality of speech, and are therefore more deeply entrenched within its parameters. Melzer observes that “the issue of speech and communication - perhaps because it is so basic to our humanity- awakens in us a stubborn and atavistic ethnocentrism.”

As Psammetichus’ experiment and the story of the Dodonaean oracle reveal, one’s own language can appear natural, objective, or in other words, right. But to forget the conventionality of language is to forget the particular quality of our perspective, its partiality. When we take our methods of communication to be natural or objective, we lock ourselves within narrowed and ethnocentric horizons. We become trapped within a convention and lose sight of the humanity out of which that convention sprung.

Precisely if the capacity for speech- and not a particular language- is the defining human characteristic for Herodotus, to mistake nature and convention in understanding speech is to mistake them in understanding what is human. The consequences of this emerge in the narrative that follows. Psammetichus’ inquiry conflates the oldest with the natural, one particular historical expression of humanity for the simply human. Yet his error, although illustrative of a general human tendency, is rooted in the particularly Egyptian veneration of the past. By most fully embodying this tendency, the Egyptians more effectively reveal its consequences. Through his

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220 Melzer (2014) 52.
221 cf. Persian incomprehension at the inscrutable Scythian message-which the Scythians took to be transparent.(4.131-132)
study of Egypt, Herodotus shows how the veneration of the past can stultify the present. *Arete*,
the word for human excellence, does not appear in the Egyptian subsection.

Preservation of the ancestral is concomitant with the Egyptians’ profound piety, for the
divine is revealed to man, and its names and worship are preserved into the present. In discussing
the past with the Egyptian priests, Herodotus is also led to discuss the divine. These
discussions prompt Herodotus to his most infamous statement about the gods: “Now, the part of
their account that deals with the divine, and to which I listened, I am not anxious to set forth,
save only the matter of the gods’ names; for *I think that all men know equally about the gods.*
When I do mention the gods, it will be because my history forces me.” Although Herodotus
proclaims that he will only mention the gods when his history ‘forces’ him to do so, he will in
fact mention the gods quite frequently. As set out in the proem, the subject of his history - its
guiding logos that ‘forces’ Herodotus to include or exclude material as warranted - is the works
and deeds of human beings, the human things. To talk about the human things will thus
necessitate talk about the divine.

To clarify this, we must parse Herodotus’ ambiguous claim about the divine: “all men
know equally about the gods.” This sentence could be taken to mean ‘equally much’ or ‘equally
little’. To clarify this, note the consequences of the equality of human knowledge about the
divine. This means that the Egyptians, who are profoundly pious (2.91), meticulous and thorough
in their record-keeping (2.145), and who are, in Herodotus’ judgment, amongst the oldest of
peoples (“they have been ever since the race of man was” 2.15), know as much about the divine
as the Greeks do- the Greeks, whose gods came into existence “the day before yesterday” (2.53.),

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222 It was to confirm this story that Herodotus extends his travels in Egypt: “it was because of this that I
went to Thebes and Heliopolis: I wanted to know whether the people there would tell me the same story
as those in Memphis.” (2.3)
and who “tell many stories that show no manner of thought.” (2.45.) The depth and age of Egyptian piety does not mean it has greater knowledge of the divine. Nor, on the other hand, does Herodotus privilege his own native (if comparatively jejune) piety; all know equally about the divine. Yet, as Scullion aptly observes, “where genuine knowledge is possible, disparities in knowledge are inevitable.”

This resonates with one of the key problems in Psammetichus’ experiment- that bekos, sitos, and bread are all alike equally words for bread. They are all alike words for bread because they are all alike conventional- of human creation. If the divine has no natural, true name - if all men know equally about the gods - the divine names are therefore as conventional, and the divine therefore as essentially nameless, as bread. That which purports to be given to man instead was generated. This casts light on Herodotus’ statement at 2.50 that “the names of almost all the gods came to Greece from Egypt.” While there is debate about what precisely Herodotus means by ‘names’ - whether he intends to refer to the actual vocables or something more like ‘designation’ - Scullion convincingly argues for a minimalist reading of ‘designation’, noting Herodotus’ demonstrated knowledge that different peoples designate the same gods by different vocables, and his claim that much of what is known of the Greek gods was invented by the poets Homer and Hesiod ‘the day before yesterday’.

223 Scullion (2006) 200
224 Thomas (2000) 80-85 connects Herodotus’ discussion of the names of the continents to the sophistic distinction between nomos and phusis: “The current names in use are names only by convention.” (84). The problem of ‘naming’ and nomos applies as well to the divine as it does to the continents; both heaven and earth are named through convention.
225 Munson (2005) 41: for Herodotous, “names entail conceptual representations (as the names of the gods), but they are autonomous from the sphere of concrete fact.”
226 Scullion (2006) 198-200
These ‘designations’ too, then, are customary; they are transmitted between peoples, transformed and changed by the poets (2.53). As Scullion observes, it appears that Herodotus “regarded his cross-cultural cast of divine characters as itself a product of human invention.” Indeed, it is only when Herodotus has specified that he has moved on to speak of human things (‘But as far as human things go...’ 2.4) that he discusses more specifically the names of the gods and the practices of piety. If the names of the gods, and the appropriate form of their worship, are included amongst the human things- the works and deeds of human beings- it becomes difficult to say what precisely counts for Herodotus as a ‘divine thing’. This highlights an irony in Egyptian piety. While its very profundity threatens to circumscribe the realm of human action, Herodotus has here suggested that this piety is itself a human invention, itself a product of human action. If it has been generated, it can be transformed. The full scope of this will become apparent when we attend to the Greek inheritance of Egyptian piety. To clarify this, in the next section, I turn to Herodotus’ review of the wonders of Egypt - its land, and its exceptional customs. In comparison with the Egyptians, the jejune and almost frivolous quality of the stories told by the Greeks becomes more readily apparent; yet, as will shall see, the depth of Egyptian piety can become oppressive. The kinship between these different customs underscores the differences of their effects.

*Autopsis and the Wonders of Egypt*

Psammetichus’ experiment has inadvertently brought to light two major and related dilemmas with which Herodotus’ inquiry will have to contend. Both have to do with what cannot

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227 Contra Harrison (2000) 192 who claims that the invention of the gods by the poets does not ‘devalue’ their traditional sets of attributes.

228 Scullion (2006) 199.

229 These authorities also say that the Egyptians were the first to use the names of the twelve gods, and that the Greeks took these from them, and that the Egyptians were the first to assign altars and images and temples to the gods and to carve figures on stone.” (2.4)
be seen by the naked eye: the past, those works and deeds that are the subject of his inquiry; and the distinction between nature and convention, a distinction that, as I argued above, is necessary to clarify the character of those works and deeds. The character of these two unseens is different-the past has vanished, leaving only traces,²³⁰ but the distinction between nature and convention is perhaps even more elusive, given that the naked eye sees particular peoples and their practices, not the nature out of which these arise. One sees Greeks, Egyptians and Persians, but not human nature itself. Psammetichus’ error, however, combined these failings. He thought he saw the past become present, because he took a particular language (or the appearance thereof) for the origins of language itself. By showing us Psammetichus’ errors, Herodotus has alerted us to his refusal to make those same errors himself.

Herodotus has thus shown that sight, autopsis, must be supplemented with judgment. In what follows, Herodotus’ own judgment will come to the fore like nowhere else in the work: in the Egyptian subsection, Herodotus uses ‘I’ and its declensions more often than in any other narrative arc in the History. This suggests that Egypt, the land that Herodotus describes as containing “more wonders in it than any country in the world and more works that are beyond description than anywhere else” (2.35) especially calls for the careful use of judgment. Wonders require explanation; they invite inquiry because their meaning is elusive.²³¹

The wonders Herodotus first studies are the land and the Nile. Notably, in his attempt to understand the unique nature of the geography of Egypt, Herodotus departs from both the Greek

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²³⁰ Thomas (2000) 238-246 observes that Herodotus highlights the uncertainty about tales of the past by contrasting his hesitant and cautious treatment of these with his more sure-footed and firm observations and judgment. The past is an arena of knowledge that cannot be proved - whereas other situations might be capable of full and complete knowledge.

²³¹ Schlosser (2014) 241
understanding and the Egyptian.\textsuperscript{232} Indeed, he departs from the Greek understanding precisely by taking seriously the Egyptian;\textsuperscript{233} unlike his fellow Hellenes, he \textit{listens} to the stories that the Egyptians tell about themselves. His account of Egyptian geography begins with his concurrence with an Egyptian opinion about the nature of the land (“These people who so describe the country seem right to me,” 2.5). But Herodotus does not simply take this claim at face value. His agreement with the Egyptians is based on his reflections on their remarks; he comes to agreement with them through a combined use of ‘sense’ and ‘eyes’: “for it would be clear to anyone of sense (σύνεσιν ἔχει) who used his eyes (ἰδόντι), even if there were no such information” (2.5). Judgment and sight together corroborate this Egyptian story.

Egyptian understanding provides more than a point of departure for Herodotus’ own reflections; it helps him correct the folly of the Greeks. The Hellenes believe, against the opinion of the Egyptians, that Egypt consists only of the Delta. In coming to refute this, Herodotus considers and evaluates two major claims of the Egyptians: not only that they are amongst the oldest of peoples (2.2, 2.15), but that most of their land “has come, through time, as an addition to the original Egypt.” (2.10). Here again, as he must throughout the \textit{Histories}, Herodotus contends with clashing opinion. To navigate this, Herodotus uses his own judgment. Since the Egyptians’ claims about the Delta depend on their claims about the invisible past, Herodotus considers instead the natural processes that worked in the past and continue to work in the present; the gradual processes of the flood and ebb of the river. To do this is grasp the uniformity

\textsuperscript{232} Gould (1989) 86-7 cites Herodotus’ account of the geography of the Nile valley as demonstrating his “astonishing breadth of imagination and open-mindedness and remarkable powers of analytic thought.” Thomas (2000) 81 observes that the Ionian view shows its parochialism by deeming ‘Egypt’ only that part of Egypt most familiar to the Greeks.

\textsuperscript{233} Harrison (2003) 148 notes that Herodotus, unlike other extant Hellenic writings on Egypt, does not patronize or sneer at the Egyptians.
of nature; as Herodotus puts it, “to compare these small things with big ones” (2.10) and to understand that a similar natural process is at work in each case.

Consideration of these natural processes - at work everywhere, in things both small and large - leads him to an awareness of the great expanse of time: “How then, in the huge lapse of time before my birth, would a gulf not be silted up - a gulf even much larger than this one - when the river concerned was so vast and so hard-working?” (2.11). Herodotus’ attentiveness to natural processes has led him to consider geologic time; he has expanded his scope further into the past than even the Egyptians, and, in so doing, has vindicated, and surpassed, their claim about Egypt. Herodotus is aided in his judgment, however, by attention to visible things. These would otherwise seem miraculous without his awareness of the unseen natural processes at work over millennia: “So I believe those who say these things about Egypt and am myself convinced that it is so; for I have seen that Egypt projects into the sea beyond the neighbouring land, and that seashells show up on the mountains, and that brine-salt comes to the surface so that even the pyramids are corroded with it...” (2.12). Through the exercise of judgment, mountains dotted with seashells become evidence for a natural phenomenon, rather than wonders to behold.235

Having corroborated Egyptian opinion through his own judgment, Herodotus then refutes the judgment of the Ionians. “For the Delta, according to the Egyptians themselves (and I certainly agree), is alluvial silt, and one might say, a contribution of the day before yesterday. If the Egyptians had no land of their own at all, why should they be troubled about whether they were the first of mankind or not?” (2.15). One cannot understand Egypt unless one takes into

234 Gould (1989) 86-7 notes Herodotus’ envisioning of geological time, and is thus led to praise Herodotus’ ‘relaxed open-mindedness’.
235 Thomas (2000) 200-212 for Herodotus’ use of analogy from the visible to the invisible, and its connections to philosophical and medical thinkers in the fifth century.
account the opinion of the Egyptians. By disregarding Egyptian opinion, the Hellenes ignore valuable evidence with which they could correct and adjust their own views.

Moreover, this disregard leads them into abstraction; rather than think back to the unseen causes of what is before their eyes, they become untethered from reality and thus engage in fanciful theorizing. In this case, by denying that Egypt is more than the Delta, the Hellenes seek to impose an artificial symmetry onto the earth by dividing it into three clearly delineated entities: Europe, Asia, and Libya (2.16). They ignore both the actual geography of the land and the opinions of the people they so cavalierly divide. Herodotus does not make this error: “I can show that the Greeks and the Ionians themselves cannot count when they say the whole earth is in three divisions.” (2.16). Abstraction, in the case of the Ionians, leads to flights of fancy that are not beholden to things as they are. This becomes even more evident when we turn to Herodotus’ account of the Nile.

The Nile is Egypt’s greatest mystery. As Herodotus observes, “Neither from the priests nor from anyone else was I able to learn about the nature of this river” (2.19). Despite the paucity of information— and perhaps encouraged by it— some of Herodotus’ fellow Hellenes have derived elaborate theories about this extraordinary river. Herodotus, however, is deeply critical of these attempts: “some of the Greeks who want to be remarkable for their cleverness have advanced three explanations about the river.” (2.20.) Note the potshot at their motivations- their theories are motivated, not by Herodotus’ own ‘exceeding anxiety’ to know the truth (2.19) but by their desire to be known for their cleverness. Because of this, they are guided less by attention

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236 As Benardete (1969) notes, “the nature of a land cannot be understood unless its opinions and customs are understood... Even if sight has priority over hearing, it should never become so divorced from what men say that one could not explain their error.” (35).
237 Munson (2001) 84 suggests that Herodotus has “a fear of the ideological consequences of oversimplification.”
to observable facts and are thus freer to unleash their interpretive ingenuity, without the
constraint those facts impose.

Two of the three interpretations Herodotus excoriates for lack of attention to natural
processes (2.20, 2.22). The third, however, has “even less knowledge to it... but is certainly more
wonderful in the telling” (2.21). This theory, that the Nile flows from the river Ocean, which
itself flows around the world, is a poetic fabrication: “for myself, I do not know that there is any
river Ocean, but I think that Homer or one of the older poets found the name and introduced it
into his poetry.” (2.23) This is the first explicit mention of Homer in the History, and the great
poet is found wanting. Homer does not appear as a divinely inspired seer who told the truth as it
was whispered to him by the Muses, but as a theorist who lacked facts, and thus invented them
(in order to be known for his cleverness). This anticipates Herodotus’ later exegesis of Homer: in
both cases, attentiveness to Egypt— and more generally, to other perspectives— grants
Herodotus the critical purchase necessary to correct the Hellenes.

Yet Herodotus does not simply accept Egyptian claims. Rather, he engages with them.
His treatment of the claim that the land is the ‘gift’ of the river is an excellent example of this.
As I argued above, Herodotus validates the Egyptian claim about the nature of their land by
corroborating it with his calculations based on natural processes and his awareness of the huge
expanse of geological time. Yet Herodotus demonstrates that their remark is far truer than they
realize.239 The Egyptians, Herodotus notes, like to mock the Greeks for their dependence on the
rain, for “one day the Greeks would be deceived in their great hope and would all miserably die
of hunger.” (2.13) The Egyptians, who rely on the apparently eternal ebb and tide of the Nile to

239 Lateiner (1989) 150 observes that Egyptian respect for and knowledge of the past “developed
Herodotus’ own scale of earthly time.” Herodotus’ sense of time may have been nurtured by his sojourns
in Egypt, but his remarks here shows that he far exceeds their conception of time. The concept of nature
helps him view time outside of what is recorded in the Egyptian annals.
water their fields, face no such threat. But Herodotus reminds them that the same natural processes that made their land can also engulf it: “For if the land below Memphis shall increase in height, as I said before, and in proportion with its increase in past time... what will be left for the Egyptians that live there but starvation?” (2.14). The Egyptians see their past, but not their future. They do not see the natural processes behind this gift of the river, that what was active in the past has generated their present, and continues to act and generate now and into the future. They take the eternity and stability of their world for granted. Remarkably, behind the appearance of fixity and eternity that marks the Egyptian way of life— not only their agrarian habits, but their customs— there is remarkable change and flux.

Just as the seashells in the Egyptian mountains would remain mysterious wonders without an awareness of the natural processes that left them there, the Egyptian disregard for nature leads them to see inescrutable mysteries where Herodotus sees questions. This attitude is exemplified by the Egyptian clerk Herodotus encounters at Sais. As Herodotus notes, the clerk is the only one of those “who have come to speech with me” (2.28) who claimed to know anything about the sources of the Nile. According to the clerk, the springs of the Nile are unfathomable. This had been proven by that great experimenter, King Psammetichus: “the king had twisted a cable thousands of fathoms long and let it down there to the depths but could not find bottom.” (2.28). Herodotus concludes that the clerk is jesting, for the story seems to be targeted at Herodotus himself. This story, which purports to reveal the sources of the Nile exactly, in fact seems designed to demonstrate to the ever-questioning Herodotus the uselessness of inquiry. The moral that the clerk intended to teach Herodotus is that the depths are un-soundable; it is thus useless to seek for them. All his questionings will come to naught.
Herodotus, however, proves a recalcitrant student, and refuses to learn this lesson. Instead, he questions a story that was designed to show the futility of questions, and so attempts to find an interpretation that can make sense of it. In this, he debunks its mysteriousness. As Herodotus says, “if, then, the clerk were speaking of these things as things actually happening, he showed, I believe, that there are certain strong eddies there and a countercurrent, and, as the water rushes against the mountains, the sounding line let down cannot reach bottom.” (2.28). Herodotus has thus shown that this story that purports to deny the intelligibility of nature in fact only becomes comprehensible if one takes into account natural processes. The denial of nature inhibits inquiry.

In using his own judgment, Herodotus thus departs from both the Hellenes and the Egyptians, although he has learned from attending to both. In his own account of the unique land of Egypt and its apparently mysterious Nile, Herodotus has supplemented his *autopsis* with judgment. To do this, he compares and he proportions, for what was at work in the past is at work in the present and will work into the future; similarly, what holds one place can shed light on what occurs somewhere else. In comparing and reasoning, Herodotus has accounted for the uniqueness of Egypt. In accounting for it, however, Herodotus has debunked it; he has shown that what seemed to thwart the rules of nature and thus resist explanation only becomes comprehensible when those natural processes are attended to. The mysteries of Egypt should not be a stumbling block to interpretation, but rather an invitation to it.

But it remains to be seen if the lessons Herodotus has learned about geological phenomena can come to bear on his understanding of human beings. At 3.35, Herodotus draws a parallel between the unique nature of Egyptian climate and the uniqueness of its customs: “Just

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as the climate that the Egyptians have is entirely their own and different from anyone else’s, and their river has a nature quite different from other rivers, so, in fact, the most of what they have made their habits and their customs are the exact opposite of other folks’.” Herodotus has accounted for the uniqueness of Egypt’s land and river; despite their apparent mysteriousness, one can ‘think past’ these visible wonders by contemplating the unseen processes that generated and shaped them. Yet unseen processes of nature are even more elusive when it comes to tackling the human things; for convention permeates the human so deeply that it is hard, if not impossible, to separate the two. Herodotus will thus have to begin by simply observing what is most visible about Egyptian convention- what gives it its particular character, in order to ‘see’ the unseen processes that have generated and shaped these conventions.242

As noted above, the veneration of the past is a hallmark of Egyptian convention; “those of them who live around the sown part of the country are great in cultivating the memory of mankind and are by far the greatest record-keepers of any people with whom I have been in contact.” (2.77). In this attention to the past, the Egyptian chroniclers might seem to operate on a Herodotean plane.243 Yet there is a difference between record-keeping and inquiry. Egyptian memory is concomitant with Egyptian conservatism; not only do they preserve the memory of the past, they attempt to preserve its ways as well, for “they follow their fathers’ customs and take no others to themselves at all.” (2.79). For the Egyptians, fidelity to their past becomes a marker of Egyptianness. As Moyer observes of the Egyptians, “[t]he human past became not only a paradigm of cultural perfection, but also a discursive means of constructing identity and

242 Munson (2001) 73 notes that, in ethnography, differences are most visible: “relating a fact is generally a declaration of difference with respect to some other fact that the audience assumes to be in the normal order of things.”
243 Rosen (1988) 34 also points out this parallel with Herodotus.
legitimacy.” To be Egyptian is to maintain Egyptian ways, but in rejecting the foreign, they also reject the new. As Herodotus reports, they only possess one song, the Linus chant: “It is clear that they have sung it forever... this was their first and only song.” (2.79) In cleaving so closely to their father’s ways, they repress the possibility of generating new ones.

The cultural primacy of the past thus means more than the affirmation of identity— it becomes an inescapable fate. Herodotus observes that “the Egyptians have discovered more monstrous happenings than any other people in the world. When one such happens, they write it down and watch for the outcome, and, if anything like it happens again hereafter, they think that the same result will take place.” (2.82). This motivates their famed record-keeping. The events of the past take on a determinative character; rather than accidental happenings, the outcomes of human activity or natural processes, they regard the past as constituting the present. What happened once will happen again. Because of this fatalism, the Egyptians direct their human agency towards preserving the past, regarding it as an inescapable fate. In this way, the past stifles the future. As Lateiner observes of the Egyptians, “They are trapped in their nomoi.”

The story of the Egyptian Deserters illustrates this, for in deserting Egypt the deserters make plain precisely what it is that they are leaving behind. After having been left on guard duty on the far reaches of the Egyptian border for several years without relief, the soldiers had had enough:

So they took counsel together, and by general decision they all deserted and made for Ethiopia. Psmmetichus heard of it and pursued them. When he came up with them, he entreated them mightily; he would have them, he said, not desert their

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244 Moyer (2011) 74
245 Ward (2008) 34: “By looking only to the past and not to the future, these Egyptians look only to that which is already determined and cannot change.”
246 Lateiner (1989) 150.
household gods and their wives and children. At this, it is said one of their number showed him his shameful part and said “Wherever I have this, I will have wives and children.” (2.30)\textsuperscript{247}

Whereas Psammetichus urges the deserters to cling to what they have, their gods and wives and children, they insist on their ability to make new lives elsewhere. They have the capacity within themselves to begin anew; they do not have to cleave to the past. The Deserters remind Psammetichus of the human capacity that generated the past, the capacity he neglected in his earlier experiment. Such capacity can generate new futures too. In asserting this, they are not only deserting Egypt; they are deserting Egyptian ways.\textsuperscript{248} Note that they begin by taking counsel together and coming to a general decision- they debate and deliberate, in one of the pre-political moments that Herodotus records as taking place outside the Hellenic poleis.\textsuperscript{249} Rather than accepting their predicament as something fated and predestined (cf 2.82: the Egyptians believe that “on whatever day a man was born depends what events he will encounter and how he will die and what manner of man he will be”), the Deserters come together and take their lives into their own hands.

Furthermore, what one of them literally takes into his own hands- “the shameful part”- suggests the depth of their divergence from Egyptian ways. As Ward has argued, Egyptian rituals make sexuality the prerogative of the gods; it is something divine, not properly belonging to the natural processes of the human body.\textsuperscript{250} Suggestive of this alienation from the body is the single change that the Greek Melampus institutes in his almost wholesale appropriation of an Egyptian ritual for Greek purposes; in the Egyptian Dionysian progression, it is the women, not the men,

\begin{footnotesize}
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{247} Slightly emended from Grene’s translation - Grene translates τὸ αἵδοῖον as ‘prick’, thus losing the connection to shame and privacy.
\textsuperscript{248} Lateiner (1989) 150 notes that the “material and spiritual culture” of the Egyptians “precludes freedom.”
\textsuperscript{249} This is true. But the Deserters demonstrate that this is not by \textit{phusis} but by \textit{nomos}.
\textsuperscript{250} Cf. 1.97, 3.80-83
\textsuperscript{250} Ward, 23-38, also Keith, 122.}
\end{footnotesize}
who carry the phalluses and sing in honour of Dionysus (2.48-49). That Melampus intentionally transformed this aspect of Egyptian piety suggests the significance of this difference; in Egypt, male sexuality seems to be separated from the human males who embody it, whereas Greek piety encourages the celebration of one’s own body and its powers. In this light, we can more plainly see how the Deserter’s open flaunting of his sexual parts constituted a shocking disruption to Egyptian ways and norms. Indeed, that Herodotus refers to the male anatomy as ‘the shameful part’ emphasizes how un-Egyptian is this flagrant assertion of sexual power; for only paragraphs later, he tells us that the Egyptians believe that “what is shameful but necessary should be done in secret.” (2.35). By insisting openly and frankly on his own generative power, the Egyptian deserter has shown just how profoundly he has deserted the ways of the Egyptians. In so doing, he has also shown that, despite the awesome power of convention, the experience of living within a human body can never be entirely silenced. If the rule of convention is never absolute, even the most static traditions, the oldest ways, may be disrupted. If Egyptians can become deserters, convention is not fate.

Yet Psammetichus had reminded the soldiers, not only of their wives and children, that is, of reproduction, but of their household gods. The soldier’s response does not mention these. His silence is ambiguous; it could mean that the soldier, in deserting Egypt, has likewise deserted its signature piety; more radically, it could also mean that, wherever there are wives and children—wherever human beings have come together and generated new settled ways of life, so too will they generate the gods. In this reading, the origin of the gods too lies within human generative power. But much like Herodotus’ silence about the role of the gods and fate in the Gyges story, here too he says nothing, offering no gloss on the deserter’s statement. He leaves it to us to think

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251 Ward (2008) 38: The Egyptians “do not believe their sexuality… belongs to them for their use, but rather belongs to, or comes from, their gods- and thus is subject to control by them.”
through the implications of this remarkable claim, and to judge for ourselves its significance. He has raised a question; it is up to his readers to delve into its potentially unsettling answers.

But what can be definitively said is that, in leaving the Egyptian gods behind, the deserter has left behind what is most distinctively Egyptian. Herodotus repeatedly emphasizes the uniquely extreme character of Egyptian piety: “In their reverence for the gods, they are excessive, more than any others in the world.” (2.37- cf. 2.64) Indeed, when viewed in the light of the precepts of Egyptian piety, we can see the truly revolutionary character of the deserter’s frank assertion of the power of his body. One of the most prominent features of Egyptian piety is its mortification of the body. This emerges through Herodotus’ account of the “religious tasks they accomplish (I might say) past numbering.” (2.37). What unites these practices is their common emphasis on erasing from the body the signs of change and growth. They shave constantly, thus obscuring the natural growth of hair, only letting their hair grow when they are in mourning (2.36). The body as it is naturally— that is, hairy— is thus treated as something ugly and shameful, fitted for mourning but not for everyday appearance. They wash several times a day (2.37) and are “especially careful” to wear “always new-washed” clothing (2.37). The signs of sweat and grime that emanate from a body acting in daily life are continually banished. They act, that is, in order to remain clean - in order to seem free from the effects of action.252 The obsession with cleanliness thus not only obscures the workings of the human body, but inhibits the human spirit from acting through that body; not only physical but psychological processes are arrested by the attempt to remain clean, unsullied. The concern with purity binds both body and spirit.

252 Keith: “The Greeks do not consider cleanliness a particular mark of goodliness since their gods have a human nature which cannot always stay clean.” (126.)
This becomes clearer when we turn to the practice of circumcision. According to Herodotus, only the Egyptians (and those who, Herodotus believes, have learned from them 2.36) practice circumcision, “for they would rather be clean than fair-seeming” (2.37). This preference reveals much about the attitudes toward the body and the natural engendered by Egyptian piety. Cleanliness, Herodotus makes plain, is practiced for the sake of the gods, and not for the pleasure or ease of human beings. The quality of ‘fair-seeming’— the preference for what is beautiful in the eyes of other human beings, or in one’s own eyes— is grounded in the human senses and perspective. By privileging cleanliness, the purity demanded by the gods, over the human pleasures of the fair-seeming, Egyptian piety alienates its practitioners from one of the most fundamental and intimate of their bodily experiences: sexuality.253

Piety thus demands that the nature of Egyptian bodies is to be transformed, not celebrated, for the Egyptians experience themselves not as natural phenomena but as impure entities to be scrubbed clean (2.36-37). The conventions of cleanliness seek to obscure the humanity of the body. Since the body can be a powerful reminder of the shared humanity that underlies cultural difference,254 the mortification of the body demanded by Egyptian conventions suggests their disdain, even denial, of what they share with other human beings: the body, that sweats, smells, grows hair; that moves and acts, that exists in time and bear the marks of time. The hyper-groomed body of convention— scrubbed, cut, and shaved, changed so as to appear changeless— obscures the natural body; what the Egyptians have in common with other peoples, physicality, the natural body, is transformed and obscured by convention.

254 “hath not a Jew eyes? hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions?” asks Shakespeare’s Shylock
Even the bodies of beasts are subject to scrutiny. Before sacrifice, the beasts must be inspected to see if they are pure by nature, the anti-naturalism of which Benardete notes: “to be clean is to be... *kata physin*, not to diverge from what the law requires.” In this, the standard becomes not nature but purity, the lawful. In assimilating the two, the natural disappears. Yet that beasts can be pure by ‘nature’ suggests, again, the disregard the Egyptians have for the human body. The ‘tasks beyond numbering’ practiced by the Egyptians in the pursuit of cleanliness mean that no human being can naturally meet the standard of purity. Beasts require no such ablutions. Indeed, the Egyptian gods deem beasts more suitable vessels for the divine presence than human beings. Theban Zeus wears the head of a ram as a mask (2.42), and the Egyptian Pan masquerades as a goat (2.46). Yet unlike the Hellenic version of Pan, this animal-appearance is only a seeming, only a mask for its divinity. Still, there is an evident closeness between the god and his animal mask, for the worshippers of the god Pan regard all goats as holy (2.46). The goats somehow partake in the divinity for which their appearance acts as a mask.

Human beings, on the other hand, are not intimately connected to the divine; the Egyptians deny the existence of semi-divine human heroes (2.50), and find it laughable that a human could be descended from a god (2.142-143). The Egyptians hold that the human and the divine cannot mate, for they do not share the same nature which could make such couplings possible. The Egyptians believe in a vaster gulf between the human and the divine than do the Hellenes. Instead, the Egyptian gods hold the beasts dearer than they do men; perhaps this can explain the “monstrosity” (*τέρας*) that occurred in Herodotus’ time: “a he-goat coupled with a woman, plain, for all to see. This was done in the nature of a public exhibition.” (2.46). This ‘monstrosity’ does not seem to be an official ritual, but its public nature is suggestive of

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255 Benardete (1969) 43
ritualistic overtones, an act, perhaps, of spontaneous piety.\textsuperscript{256} Perhaps in copulating with a goat, the woman, in her humanity so far from the gods, sought to draw nearer to them. The precepts of Egyptian piety thus teach the Egyptians to abhor their own nature, while encouraging the worship of that of their beasts. While the wild animals of Egypt are all considered sacred (2.65), no human being is.

This is made plain in Herodotus’ debunking of one of the “many stories that show no manner of thought” (2.45) that the Greeks tell about the Egyptians. When Heracles came to Egypt, the Egyptians laid garlands upon his head and began to take him away to be sacrificed. Upon realizing the intent of the Egyptians, Heracles slaughtered them all (2.45). According to Herodotus, “the Greeks who tell this story know absolutely nothing about the nature (φύσιος) of the Egyptians and their customs (νόµοι)” (2.45).\textsuperscript{257} Note that (unlike Psammetichus) Herodotus distinguishes between the customs and the nature of the Egyptians. Yet this only compounds the thoughtlessness of the Hellenes, for this story demonstrates their ignorance on both counts. But while the Hellenes come off badly, so too do the Egyptians. The particular Egyptian custom at question reveals the disregard that the Egyptians have for their own nature: “Here is a people for whom the sacrifice of beasts themselves is unholy, except [for those] such as are pure… how could they sacrifice human beings?” (2.46) It is not that human beings are more sacred than animals or somehow more worthy of cherishing — it is that they fail to be pure. Select beasts, in certain circumstances, can be ‘pure’ by nature; human beings categorically cannot. Because of this, human beings do not live up to the standards of piety demanded by the Egyptian gods, and

\textsuperscript{256} Munson (2001) 95 reads Herodotus as interpreting this as a public ritual.
\textsuperscript{257} Thomas (2000) 243 cites Herodotus’ criticism of Hellenic ignorance here as a telling example of Herodotus’ polemical style, demonstrating his fluency in the norms of fifth century intellectual controversy. Munson (2001) 141-44 notes the ethnic dimension of Herodotus’ polemic; he corrects Greek prejudice against non-Greek peoples.
are therefore unworthy of sacrifice. The Egyptians could not have attempted to sacrifice Heracles, for such a sacrifice would have been impure and thus impious.

If the Egyptians disdain their human nature, however, the Greeks chauvinistically disregard the humanity of the Egyptians. “Since Heracles was still only one, and also only a human being, how can it accord with nature that he should slaughter many tens of thousands?” (2.45). The Greek story would have that Heracles, who was, after all, ‘only a human being’, was able to slaughter tens of thousands of Egyptians as if they were ants or insects. This denies that Greeks and Egyptians share the same nature. The Greeks too, then, appear to confuse *nomos* and *phusis*; in a galling display of ethnocentrism, the cultural differences between the two people is taken to herald a natural difference. A pious Hellene might object, however, that we are not talking about all Greeks: we are talking about Heracles, the son of a god, and thus someone who truly is super-human. Such superiority displayed by the son of a god is thus perfectly appropriate. According to this, the Greek story does not cast the Egyptians as sub-human; it only testifies to the obvious superiority of the semi-divine over the merely (but fully) human.

Yet Herodotus, who knows this story about about Heracles’ semi-divinity (2.43), here denies it. Heracles is, after all, ‘only a human being’. Herodotus sides with the Egyptians in denying that a man could be born from a god; a denial he confirms later, when he skewers the earlier Greek historian, Hecataeus, for believing that he was descended from a god, a fancy that Herodotus makes plain does not share (2.143). According to Moyer, Heracles is thus “central to Herodotus’ reconciliation of Greek and Egyptian chronologies, and his renegotiation of the boundary between *illud tempus* and *hoc tempus* in the Greek consciousness of the past.”258

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258 Moyer (2011) 79
and metrics apply. Yet this reorientation does more than simply trouble the Hellenic sense of the mythic past. By denying the traditional Hellenic concept of the hero, Herodotus has also subtly undermined the Hellenic gods as such. If human beings with divine characteristics are an impossibility, we might wonder at the tenability of divine beings with human characteristics. With this, then, he skewers both Egyptian and Hellenic piety; the Egyptians for their tendency to revile their humanity while elevating the beasts, and the Hellenes, for their opposing habit of divinizing human beings—or of humanizing the divine. For both Egyptian and Hellenic piety, true humanity is obscured.

This story, then, suggests the great gap between Egyptian and Hellenic understanding on the status of the human, and, furthermore the ways in which this difference is rooted in piety, or their contrasting perceptions of the character of the divine. This difference becomes clearer when we turn to a sacred precept that Egyptians and Hellenes share, against all others, and which Herodotus praises:

The Egyptians were the first of mankind to feel religious scruples in certain matters—notably, not to lie with women in holy places nor yet to go into the holy places after lying with a woman without first washing oneself. For nearly all the rest of mankind, except for the Egyptians and the Greeks, have intercourse in holy places and rise from intercourse with a woman and go into a shrine without washing, for they think that men are much as other beasts; they see the other beasts and the tribes of birds riding one another in the temples and sacred precincts of the gods. If this were not pleasing to the gods, the beasts would not do it. But this kind of reasoning that they bring forward is one, that for me, especially, is distasteful. Still, certainly, the Egyptians, in this and in all other matters of the holy things, are excessively given to religious scruples. (2.64).
For the rest of the known world, ‘men are much as other beasts’. What is permitted for the beasts, therefore, is also permitted to men, reasoning that Herodotus finds ‘distasteful.’ Not so for the Egyptians and Hellenes. The beasts may do what human beings may not. Both peoples draw a distinction between the bestial and the human. Yet the rationale behind this distinction differs for the Hellenes and the Egyptians. For the Egyptians, the beasts are sacred to the gods, and therefore closer to them. Human beings do not share this closeness to the divine, and so what the divine allows to beasts, it denies to man.

Although Herodotus does not spell out the rationale behind the Hellenic separation of man and beasts, his distaste for those who contend that men and beasts are much the same is illuminating. This recalls Herodotus’ criticism of the Egyptians for their preference for the ‘clean’ over the ‘fair-seeming’ (2.37) and his refusal to share Egyptian myths which he finds unseemly or unpleasant (2.46, 2.47). As Benardete has observed, “the pleasant and the becoming belong to Greece”; concern with seemliness, with the fair and noble, is a particularly Hellenic trait. This is because the criterion of seemliness is rooted in eudaemonia, the well-being or flourishing of human beings. A flourishing, fully, and happy human life is not simply a pleasant or an easy one, but one that is fair or noble, as Solon’s tale of the life of Tellus revealed (1.30). Solon raised the ire of Croesus when he named Tellus the Athenian as the happiest of men. Tellus is blessed, not because his life was most hedonistic or pleasurable, but because he lived his life in a good city, with a full and flourishing family, and came to a glorious end on the

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259 Benardete (1969) 46
260 See Dewald (2011) for a discussion of the view of happiness revealed by Solon’s praise of Tellus. Tellus’ life combined private and public pleasure, and it was lived out in a good city. As Ober (2010) 244-246 notes, the character of Tellus’ happiness depends on a flourishing and wealthy city, thus proving that Athens as a whole was relatively well-off. But while prosperity matters, it is not the defining matter. Tellus lived well as a whole - and ended in a way that earned him kleos. Dewald thus suggests that Tellus’ happiness combines Iliadic and Odyssean features.
battlefield for his city — and was rewarded with a public funeral for his sacrifice.\textsuperscript{261} Tellus is most blessed because of the fulness of his life— and the noble nature of its end. He lived in a good city, died for that city, and was recognized by that city. Not the animal pleasures but civic flourishing count. Tellus avoided suffering, but more than the absence of pain, the active nobility of his life made it good.

Neither the Egyptians, who deny the worth of human beings, nor the Persians, who deem concern with the seemly as a sort of obfuscating self-flattery,\textsuperscript{262} share this concern. The becoming belongs to the Hellenes because the Hellenic notion of happiness hinges on human dignity. Indeed, the centrality of dignity to seemliness means that the humanity of this concern lies not only in its appeal to human beings, but in its demands on them. A concern with the seemly suggests that man is capable of appreciating what is fair— and more, that humanity is capable of itself being fair or noble. This capacity is dependent upon restraint; to behave fairly or nobly is in someway to rise above the base, to act or to refrain from action in accordance with what is noble.\textsuperscript{263}

In this light, the reason for Herodotus’ distaste becomes clear. It is distasteful to allow men to do as beasts do because this laxity ignores the capacity of human beings for restraint.\textsuperscript{264} Man is capable of seemly behaviour; to ignore this is itself unseemly, and in fact encourages the sort of distasteful behaviour— behaviour without restraint or moderation— to which man is all

\textsuperscript{261} Flory (1978) 153 likewise notes that “if the lives of Tellus, Cleobis, and Biton have value (1.31-32), it is not because they have experienced pleasure nor because they were wise-for Herodotus does not say that they were-but merely because they have completed a satisfactory struggle with life.” The activity of living, well and nobly struggled, makes for a good life - not the pleasant.
\textsuperscript{262} This aspect of Persian nomos began to emerge in the very opening of the Histories, as I argued in the first chapter. I shall develop this theme at greater length in the next.
\textsuperscript{263} cf. Plato Republic 586a1b4; Gorgias 482c4-486d1
\textsuperscript{264} Thomas (2000) 2-3 notes the sophist tendency to appeal to animal behaviour to license human behaviour: Herodotus here demonstrates his distaste for such justifications.
too prone.265 Hellenic notions of nobility and restraint insist that human beings can rise above their instincts, that they are capable of governing their behaviour in line with what is becoming. But to do this is no easy thing. The human capacity for restraint can be nourished or thwarted by convention. Thus conventions, while not themselves natural, interact in important ways with the growth and processes of human nature. To wit, the self-regulation that Hellenic moderation entails is neglected in Egypt—given that Egyptian customs seem to swing from extreme self-repression to extreme license, without any middle ground.266 Egyptian piety, with its inscrutable gods and disregard for the human, discourages self-regulated moderation and circumscribes the aspiration to dignity.267

This becomes evident when we turn to the story of the Egyptian king who tried to be good, Mycerinus. Mycerinus became king after two generations of wicked and impious kings (Cheops and Chephren), who drove the Egyptians to “the extremity of misery” (2.124-129). When Mycerinus became king, “his father’s acts were not pleasing in his eyes” (2.129), and, finding such wickedness unbecoming, he strove, successfully, to behave better. Because of this, “he is praised by the Egyptians above all that were ever kings among them.” However, after several misfortunes and an ominous oracle foretelling his early death (2.129-2.133), he sent a “reproachful message” to the god: “his blame on the god… was that his father and grandfather had shut up the temples and regarded the gods not at all, and furthermore, they had murdered men, yet they had lived a long, long time. He himself had been pious, and so now he was to die so quickly!” (2.133). The oracle replied that “it was just because of this that his life was shortened. For he had not, said the message, done what was fated. Fate was that Egypt should be

265 See my discussion of vengeance in Chapter Four.
266 2.37, 2.60
267 Indeed, as Lateiner (1989) 149 notes, “Herodotus does not admire many aspects of Egyptian life and history.”
afflicted for one hundred and fifty years…” (2.133.) To find impiety and wickedness unbecoming is to go against fate, and thus is itself impious and worthy of punishment. The Egyptian gods quash Mycerinus precisely for his aspirations to decency, a humane aspiration not sufficiently nurtured by his particular conventional milieu. In this, they erode all basis for his noble behaviour and moderation: “When Mycerinus heard this- that he was already condemned…. he took himself to drinking and enjoying himself, ceasing neither night nor day, wandering into the marshes and groves and wherever he knew there were places most suitable for pleasure.” (2.133.) Finding his aspiration to decency pointless, he lost himself in an unceasing orgy of pleasure, recognizing no distinctions of time or place, of becoming or unbecoming.

Compare Mycerinus’ interaction with the god to that of the Hellene Aristodicus. The men of Cyme, when pressed to give up a suppliant to the Persian army (an act of gross impiety), sent an oracle to the god, asking what they should do. In response, the god gave an oracle advising them to surrender their suppliant (1.157-158). After hearing the oracle’s endorsement of ignoble wickedness, Aristodicus, a man of note amongst the Cymeans, distrusted the answer. First he put the question to the oracle again; receiving the same response, he then went to the god’s temple drove from it the birds nesting there:

As he did so, the story goes, there came a voice from the shrine… saying, ‘Wickedest of men, what is this that you dare to do? Would you ravish my suppliants from the temple?’ Aristodicus was not at a loss but said: ‘My lord, do you succour these suppliants of yours but bid the people of Cyme to surrender theirs?’ Then the god answered him again: ‘Yes I did so bid you, that you may the quicker sin and be destroyed and thus come no more to consult this oracle about the surrender of a suppliant.’ (1.159)
Aristodicus would not accept the god’s unjust answer. What the Cymeans had asked of the god—to surrender a suppliant under political pressure—went against the nobility demanded by Greek piety. Compounding the fault was the attempt to give their unseemly lack of self-regulation divine licence, to make the ugly becoming. This confounds the two, and thus dissolves the rationale for restraint and moderation. The god’s apparent assent was in fact a reproof to their baseness: “I did so bid you, that you may the quicker sin and be destroyed.” The god holds the Hellenes to account. Most telling, however, is the very fact of Aristodicus’ reproof of the god. His sense of the noble is strong enough that it persists despite apparent divine injustice; the humanity of Hellenic piety is such that it enables Aristodicus to challenge the oracle, the very fount and voice of that piety. Rather than repressing his humanity, the Hellenic gods have nurtured it.

The difference between the Hellenic pantheon and the Egyptian seem vast. This in itself would not be so striking, except for how emphatic Herodotus is that Hellenic piety is a derivation from the Egyptian (2.43, 44, 49, 50, 52). Through a combination of influence, accident, and outright theft, the Egyptian gods were introduced into Greece. Yet in bringing the Egyptian gods to Greece, the poets — Melampus, Homer, and Hesiod— transformed them. Herodotus is explicit about the relative recentness of their introduction, and the key role played by the poets in shaping the Greek pantheon:

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268 Packman (1991) 405-406 notes that Aristodicus is incredulous because the oracle “fail[s] to match his expectations.”

269 Indeed, Brown (1978) 72 rightfully observes “It is not the god who comes off second best, but the Cymeans!” Brown is if anything, too soft on the Cymeans.

270 See Thomas (2000) 180-181, 192-3, 274-82 also Gray, (2007) 212 “The idea that Greeks were civilized by borrowing barbarian inventions is of course part and parcel of Herodotus’ view of their development, as he shows in recounting their numerous borrowings from the highly civilized Egyptians.” I would further clarify that Herodotus highlights the transformation as much as the debt; intercultural exchange is a dynamic thing.
But whence each of these gods came into existence, or whether they were for ever, and what kind of shape they had were not known until the day before yesterday... for I believe that Homer and Hesiod were four hundred years before my time- and no more than that. It is they who created for the Greeks their theogony... (2.53).

How and, more importantly, why the Greek poets transformed the Egyptian gods in the way that they did will prove essential for understanding the particularities of Hellenic piety, and with it, the Hellenes themselves.\footnote{Lateiner (1989) 149 observes that Herodotus “examines Egyptian religion primarily for the differences between the myths and cults of the two nations, because these will reveal how the two cultures have diverged.”}

\textit{Homer in Egypt: Herodotus and the Poetic Scaffolding of the Greek World}

The character of this transformation becomes clearer through Herodotus’ exegesis of the story of Helen in Egypt, which reveals the great poet’s complex relationship with Egyptian sources.\footnote{While many assume Stesichorus to be the source of Herodotus’ version of the tale (Dale, 1967: xix, Heubeck, West, and Hanisworth 1988, Burian 2007:7) Greethlein rightly notes (2010, 153) that Herodotus is engaged in polemic with Homer, not Stesichorus. My reading is concerned with how Herodotus chooses to present his reading, and so focuses on Herodotus’ relationship to Homer.} This takes place through an extended treatment of the events of the Trojan war, told from the Egyptian perspective.\footnote{The story is originally Egyptian, but as De Jong has argued, it “reveals the hand of Herodotus everywhere.” De Jong (2012) 141} This is the second re-telling of the Trojan war that Herodotus has so far offered; in the first, Herodotus simply summarized without comment what the chroniclers among the Persians said. Yet just as the version told by the Persian chroniclers revealed something essential about the Persian worldview, so too will the Egyptian version of these events help clarify their understanding of the world. Haunting both the Persian and the Egyptian telling of the Trojan War, however, is the more familiar Homeric story, in which, unlike both the Egyptian and Persian versions, the gods play a key role. Herodotus has asserted that the Greek gods were an Egyptian import, having undergone a substantial makeover at the...
hands of Homer and Hesiod, only ‘the day before yesterday.’

If we are to better understand the particularity of the Greeks, it is vital to understand the character — and intention — of the Homeric reshaping of Egyptian piety. In his treatment of Helen’s excursion in Egypt, Herodotus makes plain the scaffolding of this Homeric renovation.

After earlier detailing the land, culture, and conventions of Egypt, Herodotus turns to a chronicle of its history. In this, he alerts his audience to a shift in his methods: “So far it is my eyes, my judgment, and my searching that speaks these words to you; from this on, it is the accounts of the Egyptians that I will tell to you as I heard them, though there will be, as a supplement to them, what I have seen myself” (2.99).

These Egyptian stories will be filtered through Herodotus’ active intervention, arranging, supplementing, and commenting upon the work of the Egyptian chroniclers. This interplay should be kept in mind when we encounter ‘intersectional’ moments: figures or stories who originate in Egypt but also dwell within the landscape of Greek myth. Egyptian stories allow Herodotus to ‘make strange’ the Greeks.

Midway through his chronicle of Egyptian history, one such figure appears: Proteus, but one far different from that familiar to the Greeks from the *Odyssey*. There, Proteus was a shape-

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274 Thomas (2000) 5 notes that Herodotus here fits the gods “into the long chronology of human history.”

275 Cartledge and Greenwood (2002) contend here that Herodotus is “competing with the allure of epic, while paying lip service to the standards of rigorous inquiry...” I assert, rather, that he is investigating epic- and the rigour of his inquiry lies in his investigation of its political or salutary effects.

276 Much of the scholarship on the Proteus story focuses on its relationship to the Greek sources; most obviously Homer, but also Hesiod, Hecataeus, Hellanicus, and Stesichorus: see, inter alia, A.B. Lloyd (1988) 46-8, Austin (1994) 118-36. Herodotus however attributes this story to the Egyptians. Although scholarship is divided on how ‘Egyptian’ this story is (see de Jong 2012 128-129 for a good summary of the debate), it is worth remembering that Herodotus presents this part of the narrative as ‘edited Egyptian’: stories told by the Egyptians with a Herodotean supplement. De Jong helpfully attends to the story ‘synchronously’, as it appears in the text, in an effort to suss out Herodotus’ ‘fingerprint’ (129).


278 Thompson (1996), 64- “Herodotus recognizes his own and his audience’s involvement with the characters in his history, establishes points of contact with them, and trusts this contact to guide him in his depictions. His audience is challenged to judge him in this endeavour in a way that cannot hold for Homer or Hesiod...”
shifting sea-god, a divine-being that could assume whatever form he willed. Here, Proteus is emphatically mortal, and of one (human) form; he is simply a ‘man of Memphis’ (2.112), one of a long line of Egyptian kings (2.4, 2.99-2.100, 2.143-144). In comparison with the multi-shaped splendour of the Homeric Proteus, the mere mortality of the Egyptian king seems dull and flat.\(^{279}\) As he did with the Persian chroniclers in the opening of the work, Herodotus signals that he is operating in a different, prosaic register than that of the Greek poets. As Moyer notes, Herodotus “sets the legendary figures of Homeric poetry in a temporal landscape where the principle of… ‘likelihood’, or ‘reasonable probability’ operates – a landscape continuous with the present day.”\(^{280}\) Rendering Proteus prosaic changes the metrics we bring to bear in understanding him and the story within which he acts. The distance afforded by the stories of others allows Herodotus to urge his readers to think critically about their own stories and myths.

But although Proteus is merely mortal, the Egyptians seem to regard another Homeric figure as divine. In the precinct of Proteus Herodotus remarks on the shrine dedicated to the Foreign Aphrodite: “My guess is that this shrine is the shrine of Helen, daughter of Tyndareus” (2.112). Herodotus notes the strangeness of this: “Of all the other temples of Aphrodite, not one is called after the goddess as ‘foreign’.” (2.112). In light of everything Herodotus has shown us of the Egyptians, this appears deeply bizarre. Not only do they reject foreign ways and cleave to those of their ancestors, but they are particularly cold to the beauty of the body — and thus cold to humanity itself.\(^{281}\) Of all peoples, then, they are the least likely to be moved to worship the beauty of a human woman, and it is nigh impossible that they should deem a beautiful human divine. It is possible that Herodotus’ judgment is questionable; perhaps he has reverted to a

\(^{279}\) de Bakker (2012) 11 notes that, of all the mythical figures that Herodotus historicizes, none “is so far removed from his mythological counterpart as Proteus.”

\(^{280}\) Moyer (2011) 78

\(^{281}\) Ward (2008) 31 astutely notes that their “contempt for the body… means contempt for the human.’
typically Hellenic chauvinism, the kind he lambasted earlier as “showing no manner of thought” (2.45) for its ignorance of the Egyptians and its over-evaluation of human heroes. The Greeks might have made a goddess out of a beautiful woman, but such behaviour seems entirely uncharacteristic of the Egyptians.

Herodotus is clear that he is ‘guessing’ here; he cannot ascertain the facts for certain. But yet by hazarding this guess— when he was not compelled by the facts, or by what the Egyptians have said— Herodotus has highlighted just how amazingly, divinely beautiful Helen is. Indeed, the fact of Helen’s beauty, and how it is read and experienced by the various peoples she encounters, will prove key to the unfolding of the narrative Herodotus is constructing. Since it is a beauty that cannot be experienced firsthand, for we cannot see Helen but rather hear about her, we face the problem earlier outlined by Candaules: how to credit the report of beauty without seeing it ourselves (1.8). Herodotus therefore must suggest her beauty by reporting its effects, by showing her beauty at work. The first example of this shows just how powerful and transformative it must have been: that the Egyptians, they for whom the human is so infinitely below and separate from the divine, were so struck by Helen as to treat this mere human being as a goddess underscores the extremity of her beauty— and the profundity of its effect.

Moreover, that Helen’s human beauty could have such an effect on the Egyptians shows that convention’s rule is capable of being disrupted; an extraordinary experience can jostle forth unconventional reactions. Indeed, similar to the Deserters’ frank assertion of their sexuality, the disruptive effects of Helen’s beauty on those Egyptians who behold her suggest the ways in which the body resists perfect and total acculturation. The Egyptians who beheld Helen are not as radically transformed as the Deserters; they remain Egyptian. Nevertheless, her beauty draws

them out of their characteristic conventional categories. The inadequacy of their conventional lenses become, temporarily, imperfectly, apparent, for those conventions could not contain or explain a beauty such as Helen’s. The Egyptians, who regard culture as fate, were led outside of their conventional categories by the human beauty of Helen; those who denied the beauty of the body and the humanity of the gods judged a beautiful woman to be a goddess. This shows the powerful ways that the body can motivate action, even ones we might otherwise resist. The Egyptians shun the foreign, but Helen’s beauty leads them to worship a foreign Aphrodite. Her human beauty has led them to transgress the boundaries of their own conventions by attracting them to what is foreign. The human body can therefore show the very conventionality of cultural boundaries, precisely by drawing us to transgress them. Helen may be Greek, but her human beauty resonates with the Egyptians, reminds them that they are not just Egyptian but human, too.

Indeed, Helen’s beauty sparks a host of transgressions and boundary-crossings. Most notably, it led Alexander to break the bonds of xeinia by kidnapping her in the first place. If Helen could have such an effect on the Egyptians, the kidappings and war she inspired might seem less fabulous, more humanly plausible.\(^{283}\) If this does not make it just to kidnap, and then keep, the divinely beautiful Helen, it might, however, make it understandable. Helen’s beauty leads those who behold her to break rules, behave irrationally, and transcend their cultural horizons. Her beauty destabilizes; for better or for worse, it motivates unexpected and unusual action from those who behold it. Helen’s exceptional beauty, then, both initiates and symbolizes the human capacity for the extraordinary and unexpected. Helen’s beauty is rare yet still humanly possible, and the responses it provokes leads her beholders out of the rote and

\(^{283}\) see my treatment of the oracle of Dodona, above, for the role of the humanly plausible in Herodotean judgment
everyday. Helen reminds us that human nature has within it the capacity for the surprising and unexpected, whether it be rare beauty or unconventional acts. To judge the events of the Trojan War, as Herodotus does in this micro-narrative, we have to attend both to the common and everyday—as the Persian chroniclers did in their version—and the unusual and unexpected.

Still, even if Herodotus’ ‘guess’ about the effects of Helen’s beauty has shed some light on Alexander’s actions, his servants do not credit such excuses. After ‘wrecking winds’ carry Alexander off course to Egypt, his servants desert their master and, sitting suppliant at the shrine of Heracles, accuse him of ‘injustice’ toward Menelaus (2.113). Benardete observes the striking fact that the Hellenic or Trojan servants speak of Alexander’s injustice, whereas the Egyptians speak of his impiety. This suggests that the Egyptians conceive of human behaviour solely (rather than partially) through the lens of the divine; to be virtuous is to be obedient to the divine, to be vicious is to transgress against it. Virtue is only an aspect of piety for the Egyptians—what they owe to the gods, not what they owe to themselves or others—not, in other words, what is decent or becoming.

Even so, although the Hellenes speak of justice and the Egyptians speak of piety, their outrage is shared. Justice and piety here make the same demand. Relevant are Herodotus’ comments earlier in the Egyptian narrative about the relativity of measures: “men who are pinched for land measure by fathoms; those who are less pinched by furlongs; those who have much by parasangs; those who have plenty, by schoeni.” (2.6) Different situations prompt diverse means of measurement, of understanding one’s world. The same actions are here measured by different yardsticks—piety and justice. Indeed, there seems to be a common ground

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284 Note that in the Egyptian story, there is no hint that these wrecking winds are a punishment, sent by some irked god or goddess to punish Alexander.
285 Benardete (1969) 47
286 Ward (2008), 39-40
for this shared outrage, even though it is differently understood: the sacred importance of hospitality.

The importance of this becomes clear if we delve into the premises underlying hospitality. Hospitality rests on the recognition that safety is not protected or guaranteed, that both hosts and guests are at risk in their interaction. It also insists that we can overcome this need. If we were powerless to overcome it, hospitality would not be a duty; for something to be a requirement means that it must be possible. Hospitality thus recognizes the vulnerability of others and the power that we have to redress that vulnerability, that as desiring and greedy human beings, we could exploit others, but that we likewise have the capability to refrain from such exploitation. I earlier noted the importance of restraint for Herodotean eudaimonism, that the fuller flourishing of humanity requires the restraint of some of our impulses. The content and orientation of that restraint now becomes clearer: restraint rests on the recognition of both human weakness and of the human power to mitigate that weakness. The violation of hospitality exploits the former and fails to uphold the latter. Here, the impious and unseemly collide.

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287 de Bakker (2012) 117 suggests that Herodotus depicts xenia as yet another religious observance of Egyptian origin. While I agree with de Bakker that Proteus is far more scrupulous than either the Trojans or the Hellenes (especially considering Menelaus' later actions in Egypt), all exhibit an awareness of the imperative of hospitality, whether or not they uphold it.

288 De Jong (2012) 135 notes that, in this logos, Menelaus is five times referred to as 'host' (xeinos) rather than being named, which heightens the emphasis on the violation of hospitality. Vandiver (2012: 148-149) likewise notes the way Herodotus foregrounds its importance.

289 In this light, then, we can better evaluate two of Herodotus' most explicit positive judgments; one concerning a law that is the 'wisest' (1.196), and the other, a man who was 'just... through and through' (3.148). Both recognize that we are vulnerable (less beautiful, less steadfast than we might wish) but that we can construct a way to redress those weaknesses. In the Babylonians 'wisest' law, the proceeds raised by the marriages of the most beautiful women is used to fund the marriages of the least attractive; in this way, the effects of the inequality of beauty are redressed by the redistribution of funds (1.196). This law rests on the recognition of preferential treatment of the beautiful, but also the importance, for the community as a whole, of addressing that imbalance by insuring that each woman has a space reserved for her- that no woman is left without the security of marriage. As for the man who was 'just through and through', Kleomenes - he demonstrates his justice by recognizing the power of an unjust temptation, and removing it (3.148). Both of these instances involve the recognition that we are vulnerable (less beautiful, less steadfast than we might wish) but that we can construct a way to redress those weaknesses.
Proteus is horrified by Alexander’s crime against hospitality. It is precisely his deep sense of the criminality of Alexander’s actions that makes him refrain from punishing him further: “If I did not think it of the first consequences not to kill any stranger who, under duress of the winds, has come to this land of mine, I would myself have taken vengeance on you on behalf of that Greek” (2.115).290 His lack of anger is yet another manifestation of Egyptian alienation from the human.291 A crime of impiety is, after all, a crime against the god, a god so far removed from the human that identification with the divine is simply impossible. Anger arises when we feel thwarted, even if it is not specifically we ourselves who are thwarted but rather someone or something we identify with, someone that we ‘feel’ with. The Egyptians do not primarily conceive of crime as against human beings, and are separated from their gods; because of this, they never really become enraged.292 Proteus meticulously fulfills his duties as host while redressing a crime against hospitality; he takes Alexander’s stolen goods, including Helen, and give him three days to leave the country (2.115). Yet his meticulous and calm response will also prove to have compounded matters, not alleviated them.

Herodotus here interrupts the narrative proper in order to comment upon Homer’s knowledge and methods: “And I think Homer knew the tale, but inasmuch as it was not so suitable for epic poetry as the other, he used the latter and consciously abandoned the one here

290 for this, de Bakker (2012) 121 identifies Proteus as “one of the most righteous of Herodotus’ enquiring kings”.
291 Amongst the Persians it is almost typical to meet (apparently) great transgressions with a great wrath and so it becomes customary for this wrath to itself violate custom. (And, as the subject here is the events of the Trojan war, we might note that wrath was a notable feature of a certain Achaean as well.) In contrast, the Egyptians do not seem to lose their cool - witness, for example, the response of the priests of Apis to the great outrage wrought by Cambyses- the murder of a god, perhaps the most flagrant violation of piety possible.
292 They are said to ‘hate’ Menelaos for his sacrifice of two children- yet hatred and rage are different. Indeed, there is a further possibility: that their hatred of Menelaos for sacrificing two native children is not because of the harm done to the Egyptians and their children, but is rather due to the impiety of such a sacrifice.
told.” (2.116). Several things follow from this claim. First, according to Herodotus, Homer himself decides what goes into his epic, and not some muse whispering into his ear. Moreover, the decision about what to include is made on the basis of suitability, or seemliness. The Egyptian version was somehow unsuitable for epic poetry; it did not fit Homer’s purposes, the aim or the intention of the work. Yet this indecent story, which was not fitted to Homer’s purposes, is present in Herodotus’ own work. It therefore must suit his. Indeed, raising this very question of suitability must suit Herodotus’ purpose in some way.

In raising this question, Herodotus uses Homer against Homer— for Herodotus claims that Homer “has given proof that he knew the story” (2.116). Herodotus here relies on the authority of Homer in order to subvert that very authority; as Irwin observes, his depiction of Homer here “undermine[s] the truth status of the Iliad…” Yet the consequences of this counter-reading are profound. If Homer’s authority can prove this Egyptian tale, we can toss out the rest of his account of the war with Troy, the basis of that authority in the first place. By proceeding in this way, Herodotus is leading his readers to begin to question Homer’s absolute authority, and this is a delicate task. It is worth comparing here the Hellenic relation to Homer to that of the Egyptians to their land. Herodotus uses the same phrase to describe both, characterizing each as contributions made ‘the day before yesterday.’ (2.15; 2. 53). Just as the Egyptians failed to truly grasp their dependence on the land, so too do the Hellenes fail to comprehend the ways in which their distinctiveness is a poetic creation.

293 Many take it that Herodotus is questioning the reliability of Homer here: Neville (1977) 7; Lateiner (1989) 99, Austin (1994) 118-22. I instead join de Jong (2012) 133 in emphasizing the way in which this exegesis highlights Homer’s historiographic and poetic activity
294 Irwin (2014) 69
295 Thomas (2000) 271 observes the sophistic resonances of Herodotus’ practice here; he debunks Homer by “taking the audience step by step through the stages of deduction.”
But the creation of a poet, as opposed to the product of a long-lasting geographical process, is malleable. Homer could have made different poetic choices, towards a differently construed end. Indeed, in raising the question of Homer’s authority, Herodotus draws our attention to Homer’s poem as a thing crafted. Homer consciously used some stories and abandoned others, thus shaping his narrative (which would in turn shape the Greeks.) We are looking at how the sausage gets made, in other words. A completed poem can wash over us, hypnotize us, drawing us in without our being aware of it— the more beautiful the poem, the more fundamentally, unquestionably real it seems. By disenchanting Homer, Herodotus urges that we look back to the process of making, that we think about Homer’s shaping of his material. To do this raises the question of the status of Homer’s authority: what it rests on, and what considerations informed Homer’s poetic making. Herodotus here is asking us to begin to think about the origins of Greekness, and ultimately, back again to the nebulous relation between custom and nature.

Yet by reflecting on the nature of poetic composition, Herodotus is also drawing attention to his own purposes. Again, the question of suitability is pertinent. If it is to Homer’s purposes to make a beautiful epic poem that enchants our vision of the world, we must ask why it is to Herodotus’ purpose to break that spell. As Irwin argues, with his treatment of Homer, Herodotus “provide[s] a model for engaging with his own text.” Herodotus here invites us to read him like he reads Homer: asking questions, using our own sight, in other words, judging. It is thus to Herodotus’ purpose to draw our attention to the choices that he is making as a writer, and to

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296 cf de Bakker (2012) 125: “Just as the writer of an epic had the liberty to choose from various versions the one that was most suitable, so Herodotus took the liberty to employ narrative artistry - nowadays associated with fiction -to support his authority.” In my reading, however, Herodotus’ invocation of Homer both bolsters his authority and troubles it. Herodotus shows the care and intention that have gone into his work - but also encourages his audience to think think critically about the narrative he constructs.

297 Irwin (2014) 69
make us aware of authority as something to be investigated, rather than blindly accepted. To this end, it matters what criteria Herodotus uses in his reading of Homer, the standard by which he judges the work. Herodotus evaluates Homer according to his own observation of human things, his *autopsis*. It is not enough that he can find proof of this Egyptian version of the war in Homer, or that the Egyptians testify to it. What is key is that, based on what he has seen of human things, Herodotus finds it more humanly plausible that the Trojans did not have Helen, because any right thinking people would have turned her over if they had had her (2.120). He uses his understanding of human nature to evaluate what he reads and hears. He thinks for himself rather than trusting to authority.298

It is for this reason that he believes the Egyptian story: “for Priam was not so besotted, nor the rest of his kinsfolk, that they would be willing to risk their own bodies, children, and city so that Alexander should lie with Helen.” (2.120). Herodotus escalates the Persian view presented at the beginning of the *Histories*. There, the Persians held that it was foolish to have gone to war over a women, but here Herodotus suggests that it is so absurd that it is not even credible. If it is absurd for a whole people to sacrifice itself for the supremely common desire that men have to bed women, the Achaeans’ persistence in going to war for the return of that woman appears inexplicable. With this, Herodotus has returned to another dimension of the body and its beauty, its carnal and appetitive side, evident in Alexander’s desire to ‘lie with’ Helen. This renders it something common and banal. Relevant here is his earlier distinction between human and animal in the discussion of the shared Hellenic and Egyptian prohibition on temple fornication (2.64). Carnal appetite is a base reason to go to war; if human beings can restrain

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themselves from fornicating in temples, surely they could have restrained themselves in this
great matter.

Yet all the sources agree that the Achaeans waged this war. The Persians, the Egyptians,
the Hellenes themselves all agree, and indeed, Herodotus never doubts that the Achaeans did go
to war for Helen, only that the Trojans would put up such a fight rather than give her back. To
make sense of this, it is worth remembering that, as Herodotus informed us at the beginning of
this narrative, the Egyptians, so disinclined to value the human, worshipped the human Helen as
a goddess (2.112). If she could have such a disruptive effect on the customs and practices of one
people, it becomes less altogether unbelievable that she could inspire irrationality in others, that
the Achaeans would go to war over her, and the Trojans would refuse to hand her over. This
brings forth another aspect of the appreciation of beauty: its humanity, as well as its animality.299
Beauty is an aspect of human grandeur, a kind of excellence that the Greeks are so sensitive to.
Appreciation of this beauty stems from pride in the human; our species appears more dignified
because it can produce such a creature as Helen (with a little help from Zeus). In one light, a
human being is just another beast, and a beautiful woman is nothing to get too excited over, but
in another, a divinely beautiful human being supports belief in the beauty of mankind.

Herodotus here appears to ‘uglify’ Helen, just as he has been uglifying Homer by
disenchanting epic poetry. Yet in uglifying Helen, he has also urged us to think critically about
the power of beauty— to recognize and reflect on its power, rather than simply become
entranced by it. To do this, we have to see both sides of it, its grace and its banality. Neither tells
the full story. Helen’s beauty led the Egyptians, however briefly, out of their cultural isolation. It
led the Hellenes to war, and the Trojans to their destruction. Beauty can provoke and uphold

299 Ward (2008) 32
human agency, for both good and ill. It can prompt grand deeds — or occasion disaster. Herodotus’ treatment of Helen reminds us of the power of this beauty, its creative and destructive aspects. To grasp it in its entirety, the ugly and the beautiful must somehow be brought together.

Something similar occurs with his ‘uglification’ of Homer. Until this point, Herodotus’s version appears closer to the Persian and the Egyptian accounts of the Trojan War: the Greek gods are nowhere to be found. Yet the gods give the tale scope, grandeur and dignity; without them we have left only senseless, irrational violence on an unbearable scale. The only meaning we can draw from the tale is that human beings are cruel and foolish. The Greeks fail to investigate the Trojans’ claims that they do not have Helen, and because of their laxity destroy an entire city (2.118). Even the scrupulous Proteus comes off as paltry and powerless, since his attempt to act well made the whole mess worse: if the Trojans had had Helen, they would have handed her over, thus avoiding all that bloodshed and destruction. Instead, the innocent Trojans suffer for the mistakes of others. Such foolishness and ineptitude has the effect of lowering our estimation of all involved. This lowering of the mythic characters, however, effectively lowers our estimation of humanity as such; it is difficult to feel pride in our humanity after having witnessed such meaningless violence. Herodotus has made our species out to be repugnant lot.

Yet in the midst of this secular tale, the gods suddenly re-emerge: “No, the Trojans did not have Helen to give back, and, when they spoke the truth, the Greeks did not believe them; and the reason of this, if I may declare my opinion, was that the Divine was laying his plans that, as the Trojans perished in utter destruction, they might make this thing manifest to all the world: that for great wrongdoings, great also are the punishments from the gods.” (2.120) Yet this

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300 de Jong (2012) 138
301 Benardete (1969) 47-48
exemplary punishment makes no sense.\textsuperscript{302} As the Trojans (according to Herodotus) protest: “It would be very unjust…. that we should be punished for what the Egyptian king Proteus possesses” (2.118). The whole city —its men, women, and children— was destroyed for the crime of just one of its citizens, a crime that was not in their power to redress. The Trojans thus unjustly became the example of divine justice at work; without any great criminality on their part, they became a lesson to deter all future criminals.\textsuperscript{303}

Noting this tension, Benardete observes that “By becoming an example, the destruction of Troy can no longer be regarded as itself either merited or unmerited punishment. It becomes the symbol of justice without itself being just. It loses its surface meaning as it gains significance.”\textsuperscript{304} By so obviously making Troy the unjust example of justice at work, Herodotus has prodded us to think about what it is to make an example out of something. He has thereby drawn our attention to the political or salutary effects of justice, rather than its intrinsic worth. For in an act of exemplary justice, the intended beneficiary of the example is not the perpetrators of the crime(s), but its audience, those who witness the example, not the person or people being made into an example. Generally speaking, the application of justice must have something to do with giving what is due, and so it has to do with the merits or faults of the implicated party. But an example is intended to display a lesson. The internal merits of the case disappear. What counts is the effect, the spectacle of it all.

\textsuperscript{302} Despite this, this is often read as Herodotus simply returning to the orthodox Homeric view, e.g. Waters (1985) 101 and Vandiver (2012) 150-151. Others more convincingly see this is as a revision of Homer (De Jong, 2012). I emphasize the ways that Herodotus’ revision of Homer is purposefully problematic.

\textsuperscript{303} Baragwanath (2008) 112 notes that the Helen story as a whole “call[s] into question Greek moral superiority.”

\textsuperscript{304} Benardete (1969) 48
By asking us to think about the effects of Homer’s version, Herodotus—who has so heavily foregrounded poetic choice and shaping in this section—has also asked us to think about the effects of his. These are not quite so immediately and obviously salutary, as obviously ‘just’, as the lesson that Homer (according to Herodotus) was teaching. Yet this might be key to Herodotus’ own purposes. As Benardete notes, “Homer’s version of the Trojan war makes the gods just and men foolish..... the Egyptian version, on the other hand, makes the gods unjust and men excessively distrustful of one another.”305 Herodotus’ version at first glance seems to be some sort of blend between the two, for human ineptitude and pettiness abounds, but so too does divine action. The gods, in delivering this unjust justice upon Troy, appear either to be confused or malicious.

To disentangle this apparent puzzle, it is necessary to examine the components of Herodotus’ mixture. Homer’s gods care about human affairs and act rightly and efficiently within them. The Egyptian version of this tale, however, is more dispiriting, if more plausible. As Benardete observes, “[t]he Greek understanding of the gods entails that justice be rewarded with happiness and injustice punished with misery, but the Egyptians whose gods are fundamentally mysterious, avoid the obvious difficulty of maintaining such a view by making human misery and happiness wholly independent of justice and injustice. The rules of piety are to be followed for the sake of piety itself...”306 Homer’s version is more politically salutary: the world makes sense, the good shall prosper, because the gods care. This view inspires more confidence in the world and gives more support to right action, but when this belief falters—as it will, for any clear-eyed encounter with the world will notice the ‘obvious difficulties’ with this—this ‘sunny’ view loses its salutary effects. Either complex theological acrobatics are required to

305 Benardete (1969) 47
306 Benardete (1969) 48
account for it, or we blind ourselves to human suffering, or we become disillusioned with this belief and listless in our practice of justice.

We must therefore ask if the Egyptian view is superior, insofar as it is more theologically coherent and less prone to the ‘obvious difficulties’ attendant on a belief in divine justice. Here it is key to remember that within the Egyptian view, the human world and the divine are so completely separated that human beings are without recourse. As the contrasting fates of the impious Cheops and his pious son Mycerinus demonstrated, piety does not earn the favour of the gods, nor does impiety invite their anger. Yet the Egyptians cannot rely on themselves either, for the very depth and mysteriousness of these gods leave no room for human pride, or for the promise of a particularly human happiness. The human world is completely submerged in a divinity one can neither count on nor understand. The Egyptians owe the duty of piety to these inscrutable beings, but this piety, as Benardete observes, “follows its own rules.” These rules, like the gods they stem from, are inscrutable. No inquiry will reveal them further, and there is no promise that these rules promote or speak to human happiness or have anything to do with a human nature. These rules simply are and must be, just as they have always been.

It is clear, then, that the Egyptian view is not politically superior. Yet Herodotus has blended the Egyptian and the Hellenic, and so his Egyptianizing tendency must suit his purposes in some way, as do the self-consciously Hellenic flourishes he deploys. Herodotus’s story is a combination. It is Hellenic in that it finds sense— and thus beauty— in what would otherwise be ugly and senseless. But he Egyptianizes in leaving alive this sense of the ‘obvious difficulty’ of viewing the world as organized by a divine justice that upholds the good and punishes the unjust. It is precisely this tension that entices his readers to think about these questions, to use their own

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307 Benardete (1969) 47
autopsis, their judgment of human things, in order to understand these stories that the Greeks tell about the world. The tension between this ugly story and the beautiful moral affixed to it, so apparently clumsily, reveals the importance of the notion of divine care as a political force in the human world, precisely because of its propensity towards the senseless, the cruel, and the excessive. If “for great wrongdoings, great also are the punishments,” (2.120) divine support for justice makes its practice more humanly possible.

This is important, especially with what is to come. Herodotus is priming us to read him like he read Homer. Homer’s work is, at its simplest level, about a war between the Hellenes and the barbarians. So too is Herodotus. 308 If we compare like to like, Herodotus’s divine turnabout signals that his treatment of the war will contain just such a conscious beautification, sitting at times purposefully and uncomfortably close to his desire to investigate and ferret out the truth of the matter. Herodotus has revealed just how recent of an invention Hellenic deities are— and just how much their specifically Hellenic character owes to poetic shaping, a shaping that made the distant near, the inscrutable transparent, and the inhuman something much more more humane. By underlining the role of poetic shaping in making and re-making these gods, Herodotus has invited us to take these gods a little (or a lot) less seriously. However, precisely when it matters, precisely when matters of justice and human pride are at stake, these gods are treated with the appearance of piety. Herodotus then might include all of these Homeric flourishes, not insofar as they are true or real aspects of the war, or as a stylistic tic he picked up from years of passively marinating in Homer, but insofar as they accomplish something necessary for a flourishing politics.

308 Said (2012) 97: Herodotus employs the Trojan War “as a means of deepening his audience’s understanding of the more contemporary events that are the subject of the Histories.”
Yet these beautiful stories are not sufficient or perfect in themselves. They must be corrected, as Herodotus’ correction of Homer has demonstrated. Difficulties flow from such beautiful stories, particularly those ‘stupidities’ particular to the Greeks (cf. 2.45). The Greek view of the world, while more beautiful for its poetic dimension, might be for the same reason more fragile. Herodotus therefore must strengthen the Homeric account, by offering this philosophical supplement. His version of the Trojan war upholds while complicating the salutary effects of Homer’s. In this, he teaches his audience the political value of a suitable story. Narratives are a powerful thing; they can persuade and inspire, or thwart and depress. The story Homer tells supports justice; the story told by Herodotus reminds us of the necessity of such stories, the justice of supporting justice. In urging the Greeks to think through the narrative foundations of their community, he reminds us of importance of attending to ours. Without care, the narratives that sustain us can languish. Herodotus’ Egypt shows that fatalism might await communities without a suitable story.

**Conclusion**

In Egypt, then, Herodotus has shown the ways that a profound conservatism - taking one’s past ways to be one’s fate - inhibits free action by marooning one within one’s own cultural boundaries. The Hellenes, relatively free from the weight of the past, were freer to learn from other cultures. Homer and the other poetic innovators exemplify this, as they interact with Egyptian culture and judge across its boundaries. Through this negotiation, they birthed something new; something that better supports human agency: the Hellenic gods. Judging across cultures can result in creative innovation and the transformation of convention. This capacity can be nurtured by particular cultures; the Hellenes are more open than the Egyptians. But it is not solely determined by culture, but rather a natural human capacity. Even the Egyptians, despite
their worship of the old and their rejection of human generative powers, can produce something new — as witnessed by the Deserters and the Egyptian response to Helen’s beauty. Even amongst the most fatalistic of peoples, culture is not an absolute fate. The body and its nature reminds us of the shared natural capacity for reproduction and generation we all possess within ourselves.
Chapter Three:
After Examination: Culture and the limits of reason in Herodotus’ Persian logos

Commenting upon the madness of Cambyses, Herodotus deems the mockery of “what other men hold sacred and customary” to be “clear proofs” of madness (3.38). It is sane to respect the culture of others. But this sanity is rooted in grasping how very difficult it is to view other cultures fairly: “For if there were a proposition put before mankind, according to which each should, after examination (διασκεψάµενοι), choose the best customs in the world, each nation would certainly think its own customs the best.” (3.38; emphasis added.) Herodotus here draws our attention to how difficult it is to rely on our judgment- even “after examination”, our judgment is constrained by conventional boundaries; examination does not counter our instinctive preference for our own. Yet according to Herodotus it is precisely this ‘natural’ preference for our own which grounds our respect for others; our affect, not our reason, allows for toleration. The love of one’s own thus limits judgment but enables toleration.

Examination is therefore limited by culture; custom filters and traps our judgment. It is indeed ‘king of all’, per Herodotus’ adaptation of Pindar. But the mechanism through which custom subverts our inquiry is affect; it is the affective love of one’s own that binds thought within customary horizons. Examination cannot counter this preference. Because of this, reason itself is bound by convention, foreclosing impartial inquiry into cultures that are not our own. Yet the Histories continually show Herodotus breaking his own rule; he examines other cultures, and continually finds other customs or laws to be the best or the wisest, or on the other hand, those of his own people, the Greeks, to be lacking in some way.309 Herodotus does not seem bound by the love of one’s own that, in his presentation, impedes inquiry. The question is then

309 for praise of others, see especially 1.196, 197; 2.177; 4.46; for blame of Greeks, see 1.60: cf. Forsdyke (2006) 229-233
whether he has escaped affect, somehow attaining a neutral ‘Archimedean’ viewpoint from which he can objectively view all that he surveys. In my previous chapters I have argued that Herodotus both revels in and problematizes the particularity of his perspective;\(^{310}\) he uses his situated perspective to both incite and challenge his audience into grappling with the contested stories arising out of highly politicised and disputed circumstances. Herodotus reminds us constantly of his personality; his is not a neutral voice.

We must ask then what is the role of affect in his cross-cultural judgment, how Herodotus can occupy a particular, situated perspective yet examine without partiality customs that are not his own. Recent work on the self-reflexive aspect of Herodotus’ inquiry has highlighted the ways in which Herodotean rivals allow Herodotus to more obliquely explore and expose the nature of his own inquiry.\(^{311}\) I contend that the Persian/Median kings in particular help bring out what is unique in Herodotus’ perspective, precisely because of the central emphasis given truth-telling within Persian *nomos* (1.136). The Persians hold fast to an image of the truth as objective and easily accessible;\(^{312}\) because of this, their faith in the neutrality of their own examinations surpasses that of the other cultures that Herodotus surveys. It is their custom to forget that they too are immersed in custom. Yet Herodotus’ narrative will imply that what at first appears to be a particularly Persian vice afflicts the Greeks too. The more rational a people believes themselves to be, the more hidden the attachments suffusing inquiry— and the Greeks pride themselves on their intelligence.\(^{313}\) The complexities of Herodotus’ narrative craft a story about Persian excess that proves chastening for his Hellenic audience, and all who inquire into difference.


\(^{311}\) Ward (2008). 66- “The Persian view of speech is as simple as they world that they look at; interpretation is not necessary because the truth is immediately apparent.”

\(^{312}\) 1.60, 2.20
This chapter will thus explore the subterranean role of motivation and affect in the avowedly neutral inquiries conducted by the Persian/Median despots. I will then tease out how the vice of hyperrationalism implicates Herodotus’ larger audience. As Herodotus’ treatment of Cambyses will suggest, if we become attached to the fiction of our own neutrality, we will become lost to a type of madness, entombed within the false horizons of one’s own fantasies. Yet Herodotus does not simply diagnose ills— he offers rehabilitation too, grounded in his philosophical treatment of nomos. Through the Persians, Herodotus educates his audience in the power of custom. The Hellenes, like the Persians, possess customs that urge them to empire — but Hellenic culture also enjoins self-knowledge. Herodotus thus deploys one Hellenic custom against another in order to moderate the drive to empire. If Cambyses’ madness shows, as I will argue, that subterranean passions run through the attempt to engage with difference, Herodotus’ inquiry counters this by revealing and recruiting the affect of his audience. Where Cambyses forces, Herodotus invites; he thus urges his chastened readers to follow in his path.

_Selfish Selflessness: Deiokes and Motivation in Judgment_

The Persian narrative begins with a rival inquirer: Deiokes the judge, who gained political power through his ability to discern the truth.\textsuperscript{314} As Munson has observed, not only does

\textsuperscript{314}As was suggested by the disputation recorded in the opening of the Histories, locating the origins of a thing- a war, or of a culture- is itself a matter of interpretation. Herodotus thus has considerable discretion in how he can tell a story, as he continually reminds us; because of this, his choice of an origin point colours our reading of what comes after. The most obvious origin point for of the Persian empire lies in its founder, Cyrus. Herodotus at first seems to agree with this, for he begins the thread of the Persian narrative with the declaration that “our story must now go on to inquire who this Cyrus was who took the empire from Croesus and how it came about that the Persians became the leaders of all Asia” (1.95). Before he begins this story, however, he stresses the many ways in which he knows how to tell it (1.195). The effect of this is to emphasize his discretion in telling this story in the way that he does, which means that we should assign interpretive importance to the way it unfolds. This is important, because it turns out that the story of Cyrus does not begin with Cyrus or even with the Persians, but with Deiokes, the founder
Herodotus begin the story of the Persians with this tale of a Median king, but the structures and themes it introduces become key features in Herodotus’ later depiction of the Persians.\textsuperscript{315} Deiokes’ story unfolds in the aftermath of the fall of the Assyrian empire.\textsuperscript{316} As Herodotus says, the Medes “proved themselves right good men, cast their slavery from them, and were free again.” (1.95).\textsuperscript{317} In this situation of newfound freedom, Deiokes, “a clever man”, was “seized by an eros for tyranny.” (1.96).\textsuperscript{318} Herodotus’ language here echoes his description of Candaules at 1.8, who was “seized by an eros for his own wife.” This parallel is suggestive. In both stories, eros proved disruptive to convention, to business-as-usual. Since, as I noted above, convention binds our thinking within our own native horizons, the disruptive force of eros must be attended to. Disruption can be destructive or creative, or indeed both. As I explored in an earlier chapter, Candaules’ eros led him to force Gyges to look at what was not his own, with disastrous consequences for Candaules. In contrast, Deiokes’ eros will lead him to become himself the source, the origin of those customs- those things that Gyges thought should not be so scrutinized (“each should look upon his own, only,” 1.8). As Benardete has observed, if Herodotus has

of the Median empire that preceded the Persian one. That Herodotus frames the Persian narrative with this story of the rise-to-power of the despot Deiokes suggests its importance for what follows.\textsuperscript{315} Munson (2009) 459-460, 462-463 for the ways that Herodotus’ narrative suggests the continuity between the Medes and the Persians. However, as Munson recognizes, the current scholarship generally believes that, in actual fact, Herodotus’ depiction of Median kingship is based upon Greek perception and knowledge of the current Persian empire. See Briant (2002). Yet Munson (2009) 461-462 makes a compelling case for the ways in which Herodotus’ account of the Medes is based upon Median sources.\textsuperscript{316} Most scholars doubt the historicity of this episode: see Sancisis-Weerdenburg (1988) 197-212, or Briant (2002) 26, who declares that “Herodotus’ Median tale is highly suspect.” Thomas (2012) 250 argues cogently, however, for the ways in which this story is a blend of Eastern elements reformulated in order to address Greek concerns with lawlessness and tyranny, and Harrison (2011) 34 likewise argues that “it seems unquestionable that Herodotus moulded a pre-existing logos (whether an oral tradition or a report of a Babylonian archive) to his own purposes: it is clear in other words that there are limits to his invention.”

\textsuperscript{317} Here we have yet another example of Herodotus’ sympathy with peoples not his own - the many instances of which helped earn him the label of philo-barbarian. Herodotus gives credit where credit is due, no matter where he finds it.

\textsuperscript{318} Ferrill (1978) surveys Herodotus’ use of the words tyrannos, monarchos, basileus and their variants, finding that Herodotus uses tyrannos to mean “despotic and arbitrary ruler” (391).
disobeyed Gyges’ precept in looking to what his not his own - the cultures and customs of others- the Deiokes episode has deepened his disobedience, for here Herodotus looks to the origins of a convention.\textsuperscript{319} Grasping the origins of a convention will help break its spell; allowing us to see its beginning reminds us to look for its limits. The first step to thinking outside of convention is to remember that conventions too have a history, that they have not always been- and might not always be.

In what first might strike us as the deepest contradiction, Deiokes’ great \textit{eros} for tyranny led him “to practice justice ever more and more keenly... and Deiokes did what he did because he knew that injustice is the great enemy of justice” (1.96).\textsuperscript{320} The great enmity of justice and injustice allows for the justice of his actions to completely cloak the injustice of his intentions.\textsuperscript{321} Herodotus refrains from explicitly judging Deiokes’ fraudulence, rather showing us instead the problem he poses- how the apparent implacable enmity of justice and injustice are combined in Deiokes’ person - his perfect self-interest (his erotic longing for tyranny) was expressed through his (apparently) perfect selflessness. Though Deiokes ‘knows’ the just is ever the enemy of the unjust - so suggesting the self-evidence of this statement - Herodotus’ narrative, in charting the complexities of the behaviour stemming from this knowledge, turns this obvious enmity into a problem to be inquired into, thus inviting his audience to judge this judge for themselves. What seems at first a rather straightforward description of justice will turn out to be complicated and deepened by the story that Herodotus unfurls.

\textsuperscript{319} Benardete, (1969) 25.
\textsuperscript{320} As Benardete (1969) 25 notes, “though he knew the just and unjust were at war with one another, that did not prevent him from being just in all particular cases, so that he could completely conceal his injustice in general.”
\textsuperscript{321} Although we should note that while the Greeks of Herodotus’ day and later might deem this aspiration to tyranny as the deepest injustice, this is perhaps not the case for the Greeks of just a few generations earlier - see, for example, Herodotus’ depiction of the tyrant Pisistratus. (1.59-64, 6.35).
The problem posed by Deiokes begins when we observe how he practices his fraud. “The Medes in his own village, seeing the manner of the man’s life, chose him to be a judge among them” (1.96). Deiokes’ self-conscious display of selflessness incites the Medes to judge his merit for themselves. He does not put himself forward, but trusts the eyes of the Medes to see the benefit of such justice. This seems another conscious echo of the Gyges story, given how it invokes the supremacy of the eyes over the ears- of seeing rather than being told - only to complicate this apparent supremacy. The Medes can see clearly ‘the manner of the man’s life’, but not the intent that animates that manner. They can discern one aspect of the story, but not its entirety. The self-evident cannot be trusted; more activity is required if we are to judge accurately.

But we should be clear, however, that while their judgment is not entirely correct, neither are they entirely deluded. Deiokes’ apparent selflessness, his practice of fair judgment, is noticeable because it is deeply appealing to the people: “these people had before met with unjust sentences, and when they heard the good news about Deiokes they flocked to him to have their own cases decided by him; and at last they would entrust their suits to none but him.” (1.96). We should note the play of self-interest here. Deiokes’ own extreme self-interest leads him to appear to be perfectly selfless. At no point does he put himself forward, a reticence that seems to further cement his apparent selflessness. Instead, he allows and encourages the Medes to interpret and judge his behaviour for themselves.

This suggests a parallel between Deiokes and Herodotus. Like Herodotus, Deiokes does not instruct or dictate- but rather leaves it to the people to judge for themselves, to trust their own eyes. His reticence urges people to come to their own conclusions. Because their judgment is theirs- it is not a finding urged upon them by Deiokes, but the fruit of their own activity- it is
much more strongly rooted. Indeed, Deiokes could trust that his show of merit -however hypocritical- would not go unnoticed, precisely because the sort of merit he is displaying is so eminently useful to people, and because useful, therefore noticeable.\footnote{322} In judgment, motivation matters: it is an activity, not something passive, and so must be incited, not forced. Deiokes’ reticence made space for judgment, and, as Herodotus makes plain, the Medes’ self-interest motivated it. The astuteness of Deiokes’ own judgment is confirmed by his success. Herodotus’ language suggests the rapid efficacy in which this fraud transforms Deiokes’ fortune, for within one sentence, he goes from being among his “fellow citizens” to “the one man” (1.196). The success of Deiokes’ fraudulence thus rests in large part on his understanding of the role of motivation in judgment. His reticence, coupled with his usefulness, incites the approving judgment of the Medes.

We should note the consequences of this for the account of judgment that I have been developing. That self-interest is used so ably in Deiokes’ self-interested machinations seems to suggest that motivated judgment will be faulty judgment. Yet to note an aspect of a thing is not to tell the whole story. Here we can make the preliminary observation that both Deiokes and Herodotus are persuasive, unlike that other earlier Herodotean rival Candaules. Both Deiokes and Herodotus understand the importance of motivating one’s audience- of speaking to their interests. This knowledge is powerful, but, as this story illustrates, potentially manipulative. I have been arguing that Herodotus uses his skill to educate our faculties rather than to dull them; in the light of the Deiokes’ story, Herodotus’ great persuasiveness, his charm, might seem to take on a sinister aspect. To better grasp how- and if- his persuasiveness differs from that of Deiokes, we will have to further track the ways in which Deiokes both mirrors and distorts Herodotus’

\footnote{322 Compare here Machiavelli’s comments in the Discourses on Livy, on the aptitude of the people’s judgment in discerning their immediate self-interest (1:58).}
activity as judge. At this juncture, we might find it discomfiting how akin Deiokes the fraud and Herodotus the inquirer appear.\footnote{Witness for examples, the legions who have noted Herodotus’ more subtle narrative tricks and conclude that he too is a fraud of a sort- everybody from Plutarch to the ‘liar school’ of contemporary scholarship (see Fehling, 1989)}

Indeed, this resemblance only grows when we consider how successful Deiokes is- not only at persuasion, but at inquiry itself. Although duplicitous, Deiokes is in fact perfectly adept at the difficult task for which Medes require him. After all, as all the Medes recognize, and as Herodotus never contradicts, the cases that Deiokes tries come out “according to the truth of the facts” (1.97). As the whole of the Histories can attest, getting to the bottom of things is a most difficult matter. Again, resemblances abound. If Deiokes resembles Candaules in the ferocity of his \textit{eros}, he resembles Herodotus in his ability to make sense of contradictory facts, facts contested by deeply interested parties. His is obviously an inquiry with ulterior motives, but this might precisely begin to raise the question of the motives behind any such inquiry. Deiokes’ activity as a judge- and a most excellent one, at that- suggests that we will have to think about the motivations for inquiry- and how the character of those motivations can affect the quality, the success, of that inquiry. As his inquiry unspools, we will have to consider whether the best inquiry is self-interested or selfless- or self-interested in a way that we have to recast what we think that means.

Through his practice of justice and his work as a judge, Deiokes soon makes himself indispensable to the Medes: “everything hung upon himself” (1.97.) At this point, he abruptly retires. The reasons that he gives for his retirement make for yet another tangle in this knot of competing self-interests, for Deiokes claims that “it did not profit him at all to decide cases for his neighbours all day long to the manifest neglect of his own affairs” (1.97). While this abrupt
retirement and its cited reasons are undoubtedly part of Deiokes’ scheme, he does articulate a profound challenge to the aspiration towards justice. That is, it is itself unjust to expect someone to practice justice without any compensation at all - that is, that we cannot fairly expect the practice of justice if it is completely (rather than partially) against one’s own self-interest. To put it another way: if justice in some way pertains to the common good, if someone completely sacrifices her own good for the maintenance of that common good, the ‘common’ good ceases to be truly common. One’s own good is no longer in common with the good of others; the one sacrificing everything has been excluded from her fair share of the common good.\textsuperscript{324} It is not humanly possible to practice justice without any kind of compensation. With this point made, Deiokes retires from public life completely, leaving in his wake even more disorder than before.

To deal with the increased lawlessness that results from Deiokes’ abrupt abdication, the Medes call a meeting and confer with one another about what to do. This is notable, for this looks something like the beginning of politics.\textsuperscript{325} This debate anticipates in many ways Herodotus’ account of the Persian Debate of the Regimes (3.80-84), famed as the first extant regime typology in Western literature. In both situations, extreme upheaval creates a sort of vacuum within the conventions of a people - necessitating that, in these extraordinary moments, people come together and deliberate about the fate of their community.\textsuperscript{326} The Greeks do not have the monopoly on civic debate. In both of these situations, non-Greek peoples gather and debate their common good.

\textsuperscript{324} cf, for example, Shelby (2007). Shelby uses a Rawlsian framework to argue that people entirely excluded from the benefits of a social contract are have reason to refuse to abide by that contract.

\textsuperscript{325} Harrison (2011) 34 offers that “the story of Deioces may suggest the moral that in Asia monarchy is inevitable (look, if you leave them alone in a kind of experiment, this is what happens!)” This neglects the fact that this debate occurred at all, and that Herodotus urges us to think of other ways this debate might have ended.

\textsuperscript{326} Dewald (2003) 28-29
Notably, however, in both cases this moment does not last for long - for Herodotus, then, people are not automatically political. Yet the existence of these moments suggests that all peoples are potentially political - that politics might develop, given the right circumstances or supports- the right conventions. It is then a natural potential, requiring the right customary conditions. Indeed, in this Median moment there is the hint of a suggestion that the debate could have gone another way. Although this should not be overstressed, Herodotus does suppose that ‘those who spoke most were Deiokes’ friends’ (1.97). This suggests that, absent these partisans, this debate might have gone differently- though given all the manifest benefit that Deiokes had done for the people, and the sorts of benefits they were looking for, perhaps not. What is important to note, however, is that this Median moment begins to raise the question of the status of the political for Herodotus- that is to say, that it prompts us to begin to think about what sort of complex interplay between convention and nature is at stake in political activity.

During their debate, the assessment of the situation by the Medes parallels Deiokes’ stated reasons for retirement: “If we go on as we are going now, we will not be able to live in this country at all. Let us therefore set up a king over us. The country will then be well-governed, and we shall betake ourselves to our own business and shall not be undone by lawlessness.” (1.97). First, we should note the untenability of this general lawlessness. Disorder makes daily life unbearable and makes business as usual impossible. The proposed remedy: “let us set up a king over us” so that “the country will then be well-governed” (1.97). Being well-governed apparently means being left to their own devices- betaking themselves to their own business. This fits nicely with Deiokes’ professed reasons for his retirement. Practicing justice was a hassle, and it kept him from attending to his own affairs - what was properly his own.

327 A situation not unlike Hobbes’ assessment of the state of nature.
328 For a Hobbesian problem, a Hobbesian solution.
For the Medes, their own private business is likewise primary. Now that Deiokes is gone, we see clearly just how interested their attachment to justice is - it consists, understandably, in escaping the evils of suffering injustice. A king would take away any need for them to concern themselves with the public, thus freeing them to concern themselves with what really matters - their own business. There is no sense here that that the public interest belongs to all of them, and no sense of a common business in which they all share. As Ward has noted, there is a certain equality at play here. The existence of this debate suggests that the Medes all have an equal say, and their private interests equally matter: “the legitimacy of Deioces’ rule is initially grounded in consent and the deliberation that this implies.” Yet the result of this deliberation is to close off the possibility of future deliberation; the Medes here act somewhat politically in order to reject that political concerns are properly theirs- their only business is private. The public concern is seen as an encumbrance on their business, not a different or fuller dimension of it: the Medes are equal, but they are equally private. As we shall see later in the Persian narrative, this apolitical understanding of social organization becomes deeply entrenched within the Persian empire. It becomes a self-evident truth, but in so doing, it limits the Persians political imagination: it both captures a certain truth but takes that aspect of truth for the whole. We will return to how this understanding both aids and constrains the success of the Persian empire.

Deiokes’ actions after having been declared king are revealing. Once Deiokes has been unanimously declared king, he goes about crafting a physical elevation to accompany his social one. He builds a fortress with seven walls, each higher than the next, and within the innermost circle, he hides himself away within the royal palace (1.98). The rest of the people are ordered to live outside the walls (1.99). He effects a complete separation between himself as despot and the

330 Ward (2008) 117
people he rules over. Consider that the Medes themselves live outside the city walls - suggestive enough about the peoples’ place in the concerns of the city. Furthermore, the seven concentric walls of the fortress, the innermost coated in gold, seem evocative of the Median/Persian conception of the heavens.\textsuperscript{331} By withdrawing into the innermost golden circle, Deiokes has thereby aligned himself with the gods. Whereas he had relied on the Medes’ pragmatic calculations to ensure his elevation, he now grounds and covers this pragmatic reasoning with an appeal to the divine; the effect is to suggest that this sort of reasoning is insufficient on its own to entrench and sustain his regime. Ward has argued cogently on this point: “Consent among equals may establish government, but the continuation of government, and the inequality of power that it implies, is often at odds with the notion of equality that is at its origins. What enables human beings to create or consent to government is precisely what makes them hostile to it.”\textsuperscript{332} The same calculus of self-interest that assented to the rule of Deiokes rebels at witnessing the necessary workings of that rule. The equal hired to do the people’s dirty work must be elevated above the people in order to actually do that work, and the power that enforces one’s interests in general can cut against one in particular. Since this tension cannot be easily resolved, Deiokes attempts to hide it, cloaking it by removing himself from this human calculus and becoming himself like one of the gods.\textsuperscript{333}

And like the gods, he is unseen, communicating only by messenger (1.99).\textsuperscript{334} Deiokes, who on his rise took such care that he be visible, now removes himself from sight. This

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Benardete (1969) 25
\item Ward (2008) 117
\item Munson (2009) 460 notes the resonances between Deiokes’ preoccupation with seeming to be of a different nature, and Cyrus’ later “opinion that he was beyond human nature” (1.204).
\item Compare Deiokes’ invocation of the divine with the Greek tyrant Pisistratus’ ruse with Phye/Athena. Because of the differences in Greek and Median religion, Deiokes cannot bring the god down to his human level, but can instead to assimilate himself as best he can to their heavenly status. To do this, he
\end{enumerate}
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disappearing act is suggestive. As Benardete notes, the Histories so far have suggested that “the gods constitute the heart of every set of laws and customs”.\textsuperscript{335} They are the unseen, supernatural ground for customs, the behaviours and beliefs guiding human activity.\textsuperscript{336} By assimilating himself to the gods, to the unseen source of laws and conventions, Deiokes’ actions provoke us to reconsider the nature of those origins. Benardete continues: “the forbidden things, at which one could not look, might be forbidden because they were ugly and not beautiful.... Deiokes instilled shame in his subjects so that they would not know of the defectiveness of the justice he dispensed. He hid from them the ugly basis of the beautiful.”\textsuperscript{337} Benardete suggests that while Gyges’ sense of shame would have prevented him from looking at the beautiful things of others, the deeper meaning of shame might be to keep us from seeing the ugly things of our own. Laws are easier to obey if they seem necessary and not conditional, some part of a deeper order and not the will of one man. The unknown beauty of the divine attracts more than the all-too familiar ugliness of man. In his actions here, Deiokes hides the ugly, human, contingent nature of his rules in order to make the justice he dispenses appear more perfect, more beautiful- and thus more awe-inspiring.\textsuperscript{338} Herodotus, however, has revealed this hiding, and so disenchants Deiokean justice.

Indeed, Herodotus’ description of the spectacle of Deiokes’ palace reminds us to see the human effort underpinning it: “the fact that the place chosen was a itself a hill helps the design, but it was also much strengthened by contrivance” (1.98). The nature of the space was already

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{335} Benardete (1969) 25
\item \textsuperscript{336} Indeed, as emerged in my discussion of Egypt, the gods do not only guarantee or reinforce justice, but the kinds of gods one worships shapes what kind of justice one practices.
\item \textsuperscript{337} Benardete (1969) 25
\item \textsuperscript{338} We might be reminded here of Machiavelli’s armed prophets (The Prince, XI), those founders who introduced new orders and backed them up with the appearance of the divine.
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elevated, but art- contrivance- added to it, made it something truly ‘out of this world’. The
nature of his palace recalls Deiokes’ own person. His nature is undoubtedly elevated, as was
made plain through his thoroughly savvy machinations. But this evident merit, although it was
enough to get him into power, is not be enough to keep him there. Deiokes’ palace suggests the
functions behind many of the trappings of kingship. There might be a natural difference between
one person and the next- but the sort of permanent elevation that kingship involves requires that
you add to nature, that you add art to it- distorting or exaggerating it, hiding it in some way.

And Deiokes knows this. Note how carefully he guards his presentation so as to undercut
potential resentment: “These solemnities he contrived about his own person so that those who
were his equals and of the same age, brought up with him, and of descent as good, and as brave
as he, might not, seeing him, be vexed and take to plotting against him but would judge him to be
someone grown quite different- and all because they did not see him.” (1.99) Deiokes, who was
so careful to let everybody see his merit on his way up, takes care that he not be seen now. In this
he becomes the anti-Herodotus. As I have argued earlier, Herodotus is constantly inviting the
eyes of his own audience; he challenges us to look to his looking. This suggests not only
Herodotus’ interest in educating his audience, but his confidence that his own authorial merits
can withstand scrutiny- indeed, they elicit it. But while Deiokes likewise began by eliciting the
judgment of others, he has constructed a regime that arrogates judgment to himself.

It emerges from this that Deiokean justice is not completely self evident; continued
scrutiny would undermine what he has built. The merit and logic that recommended some sort of
elevation earlier cannot support this thorough and permanent elevation. It completely outstrips
even his considerable talents, for we should note that he is concerned about the men as brave as
him, and of descent as good. To truly and fully deserve this sort of power, he would really have
to be like a god: grown quite different from himself and others. His hiddenness- and the ban on laughing and spitting in his presence- serves to erase or hide his humanity, what he has in common with the Medes. At any rate, he cannot safely rule over the Medes while remaining one of their peers, one of their fellows; he must appear to be something more entirely. In contrast, Herodotus not only begins his book by reminding his readers that his inquiry and his insight are entirely human, but reinforces this impression throughout through his narrative asides and self-commentary. The difference is striking. Herodotus’ task as an inquirer and educator requires that he reminds us of his humanity; Deiokes the despot must hide his.

Having witnessed Deiokes’ savvy relentlessness in the pursuit of his own good- his erotic striving after tyranny- we might expect him to drop the facade of justice once he had achieved the end to which it was a means. That is, since it has seemed all along that his practice of justice has been merely instrumental, once his use of justice has earned his unjust end, it seems likely that Deiokes would allow his injustice full expression. But this is not what happens: “when he had ordered these matters and had strengthened himself in the royal power, he was very exact in his observance of justice.” (1.100). Throughout his rise, Deiokes relentlessly and successfully pursued what he took to be his own good. Given this, we must wonder then if and how this continued practice of justice might further contribute to that.

At first glance, the answer is obvious, if depressingly familiar. While Deiokes continues his activity as a judge, he also takes himself to ‘matters of discipline’: “as often as he heard of someone as a man of insolent violence, he would have him apprehended and do justice on him according to the merit of each offense; and his spies and eavesdroppers were everywhere throughout the land.” (1.100) Deiokes’ network of spies ferrets out the most ‘insolent’ and

339 cf. the Egyptian Amasis’ treatment of his elevation to king (2.172). This suggests the vast gulf between the Egyptian and Persian understanding of human power.
punishes them; he runs a surveillance state that seeks out and destroys those who might threaten his own power. His justice might still be no more than a mask for his self-interest, for through its practice, he maintains his grip on power.

But his activity here might not be entirely selfish, or rather, his self-interest might coincide with that of his people. Recall that Deiokes’ practice of justice was based on the premise that “injustice is the great enemy of justice”- that justice is the opposite of injustice. The kind of injustice that Deiokes combats, both at the beginning and the end of his career, was the lawlessness that ran rampant in Media. If injustice is disorder and lawlessness, justice then becomes order and lawfulness. Note that while Deiokes’ punishment of the insolent and violent crushes those that threaten him personally, it also gets rid of those that threaten the peace and quiet of the land. The Medes might be very much content with their bargain- after all, what they wanted out of governance was the peace and stability necessary so that they could betake themselves to their own business. As I noted above, justice must somehow involve the common good, however we construe it. Deiokes’ self-interest here then coincides with that of the people - the common good of the Medes considered as a whole is only whatever conduces most to the private good of each - peace, stability, and (to maintain those) the continued reign of Deiokes.

The Deiokes story then shows not only the origins of the Median/Persian empire, but also depicts the coming-to-being of a particular convention amongst these peoples- their conception of justice: the justice of order. With this rather unsavoury origin story, Herodotus has called into question the self-evidence or naturalness of this understanding of justice. To call their

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340 The punishment Deiokes deals out then might be akin to that of Cesare Borgia’s on Remiro D’Orco- it both satisfies and stupefies the people.
341 cf Benardete (1969) 9 - “Human beings disagree about the nature of human things. They disagree about what is just and unjust. What each nation considers just is embodied in their customs.”
conception of justice conventional is not to call it true or false, but rather to pose the question of its status- its truth or falsity is not self-evident, but rather something that must be inquired into. That is to say, to call this conception of justice conventional is to hold it up as an object of inquiry, as one of the “things brought into being out of human beings” that Herodotus spoke of his proem as being his concern (1.1).

In this, Herodotus has problematized the Persian conception of justice in a way that, as I will shortly argue, would be impossible for the Persians themselves to do, even -especially- when conducting their own inquiry. In problematizing this concept of justice, Herodotus has shown his great concern with it; his inquiry too is motivated, his thinking is directed by his care. Because Herodotus does not rest content with his own cultural understanding- because he looks at the conceptions and conventions of others- it emerges that he is concerned about the truth of justice, for there would be no motivation to turn to others, to take them seriously, if he considered his own adequate. As Benardete has observed, “Herodotus’ concern with law and custom coincides with his concern for justice.”342 His inquiry into the truth might then be as motivated, as erotic, as Deiokes’ was- but with an entirely different motivation, a motivation that he must inspire in his readers if they are to develop their own Herodotean judgment.

The Conventionality of Truth-Telling: The Self-Evident truths of Empire

While the story of Deiokes has shown the origins of ‘justice as order’ and despotic rule, the Persian inheritance of this approach entrenches and deepens it. Deiokes’ selfishness helped secure the self-interests of his people, and thus, a common good obtained- albeit one that consists in each, in common, betaking themselves to their own private business. Order allows for private enjoyment. But to enjoy, one must have; Cyrus will recast this dedication to one’s own pleasure

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342 Benardete (1969) 25
as an argument for empire. He promises that the Persians will enjoy ‘ten thousand’ good things if only they follow him (1.126). In this, he not only transforms Deiokean justice; he transforms the Persians as a whole, turning their austerity into luxury, for “the Persians before they conquered the Lydians had nothing of delicate luxury nor any good thing at all” (1.71). Through their imperialism, the Persians experience cultural change, transforming from a ‘hard’ to a ‘soft’ culture. Yet this transformation of their culture is ushered in by one of its constant characteristics: its dedication to truth-telling. In this section, I will explore how this commitment to order and empire intersects with the conventional Persian dedication to truth-telling.

Early on in the Histories, Herodotus provides an overview of Persian customs (1.131-140), an ethnography that spurs and aids his audience in their interpretation of the Persians as a whole. He reveals here their preoccupation with the truth: according to Herodotus, the Persians educate their young men in three things only: horsemanship, archery, and truth-telling (1.136); they likewise consider lying to be the basest thing (1.138). That is, in Herodotus’ presentation the Persians are raised to consider the truth as objective and accessible by reason. It is not something contestable but rather something transparent. To this end, Ward observes that “the Persians believe that words require no interpretation, and thus it is always possible to get

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343 Munson (2009) 460: “It is by emulating his Median Predecessors that Cyrus lays the foundations of the Achaemenid policy of continuous expansion.”  
345 For the function within the work that this ethnography performs, see Flower (2006) 281; for the ways in which this ethnography bears a Persian fingerprint, suggesting the influence of Herodotus’ Persian sources, see Munson (2009) 465-466. Moreover, as I noted in chapter two, Moyer (2011) has persuasively demonstrated the ways that Herodotus’ Egyptian logos preserves a dialogue with others, rather than merely a constructed representation. The work of these scholars suggests that Herodotus appears to practice an open, discursive dialogue with his interlocutors, who thus possess a remarkable degree of influence over their presentation in the text.
underneath the surface of things through speech.”

In this view, language is transparent; it reveals the truth, and thus requires no interpretation. To tell the truth implies that one is already in possession of it, that one need not seek it. In this, the custom of truth-telling papers over the particularity that inheres within one’s own situated perspective. It is a convention that hides its conventionality. Because of this, the impetus to take the perspectives of others is removed. The belief that one possesses the truth undermines debate.

Herodotus’ narrative allows his audience to see the effects of this custom in practice. Relevant here is the disdain that Cyrus, the great founder of the Persian Empire, shows for the Greeks and their marketplaces, and with this, for political activity. When Greek envoys come to warn him against invading land that is under their protection, Cyrus responds with a revealing disdain. “I never yet feared men who have a place set apart in the midst of their cities where they gather to cheat one another and exchange oaths, which they break. If I continue in my health, it will not be the sufferings of the Ionians that they will have at their tongues’ ends, but something nearer to home.” (1.153) Although he does not use the word, Herodotus supplies it for him: what

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346 Ward (2008), 79.

347 Herodotus crafts a sympathetic portrait of Persian culture. See Munson (2001) 152-156. Munson notes that Herodotus’ narrative of the Persian Empire is absent the usual ‘orientalist’ features that dominate other Hellenistic accounts. I emphasize that the narrative quality of the *Histories* that Herodotus is telling a story about the birth, growth, and decline of this empire (cf Harrison (2002) 566-568)- is essential to the nuance of his treatment. Through narrative, we can see these customs unfold in time. This allows Herodotus to show the ways in which their imperialistic ambitions are intimately connected to their conventional mode of thought.

348 Munson (2009) 466 observes that Cyrus’ distaste for liars echoes the general Persian attitude, thus underscoring the archetypal ‘Persianness’ of Cyrus. This is for both good and ill: McWilliams (2013) 750 observes that Cyrus’ disdain here foreshadows Persian underestimation of the Hellenes later: this “crude kind of cultural hubris weakens the Persians.” See Chiasson (2012) 227 for the way that Cyrus functions as a ‘culture hero’ for the Persians.
Cyrus disdains the agora. To Cyrus, the marketplace, the agora, with its banter, its competition and haggling, is an ugly and indecent place.349

Yet what makes it so indecent to Cyrus is its dishonesty— that is, its maneuvering, its competing valuations, its differing claims on the truth. Everything that makes the agora a source for political activity and judgment makes it suspicious in Cyrus’ eyes.350 Negotiating between different claims to the truth and attempting to persuade others of the rightness of your view (‘you think this urn is cheap? Let me show you how you are wrong’) requires that you hold the truth at arms length- that you recognize that it is something that is in dispute, that must be adjudicated. In the agora, everything is up for debate- even the aims of community itself.351 This uncertainty and contestation can look a whole lot like lying to those who consider the truth to be something plain and clear.

The consequences of this become clearer if we consider the way that Herodotus’ narrative preserves competing accounts of the truth. As recent work has shown, by recounting multiple versions of stories from clashing perspectives — and refusing to settle definitively who is right — Herodotus’ narrative continually destabilizes his audience’ faith in the self-evidence of truth.352 Indeed, as I argued in chapter one, his vivid authorial presence continually reminds his audience that his perspective is partial and therefore limited.353 As I argued there, Herodotus inculcates a sense of the incompleteness of one’s own perspective in order to urge the hard work

349 ‘Persian disdain thus makes strange a cultural practice the Greeks take for granted, thus allowing Herodotus’ Greek audience to see their own practices anew’ cf. Munson, (2001) 147
350 Indeed, failing to take the raucous fractiousness of the Greeks seriously played a huge role in the eventual Persian defeat. The skullduggery of Themistocles (8.19, 22, 62, 75) allowed him to use the disunity among the Greeks to their advantage; likewise, failing to exploit this disunity cost the Persians a great deal (7.235, 8.68). Harrison (2002) 566-568.
351 cf. Honig (1993)
of inquiry. In contrast, faith in the self-evidence of truth circumscribes contestation and thus urges political consensus.

This is borne out by the narrative, which suggests that the Persians, unlike the Greeks, exhibit a remarkable consensus on the aim of politics: for them, it is the pursuit of collective self-interest.\(^{354}\) As is revealed in the speech of Xerxes during his planning of the invasion of Greece, the Persians conceive of empire as their cultural inheritance: “Men of Persia, it is no new law that I initiate among you; it has come to me from the tradition. For as I learn from older men, we have never been at peace since we took over the supremacy from the Medes, when Cyrus deposed Astyages.” (7.8) Xerxes assigns a forcefully normative power to historical precedence; imperialism is the way of his people. Balot cites this episode to illustrate that, for Herodotus, “imperialism is a phenomenon of cultures.”\(^{355}\) The cultural narratives that inform and sustain the Persian community holds forth imperialism as a shared project and collective self-interest as a common good.

Indeed, Xerxes is correct: this project has been with the Persians since the beginning, for nowhere is its principle so vividly articulated as in Cyrus’ parable of the brambles, the founding moment of the Persian empire.\(^{356}\) Cyrus has the Persians one day clear a thick patch of brambles. The next day, after this back-breaking labour is over, Cyrus once again gathers together the Persians, but this time feasts them sumptuously. Asking them which they prefer, the Persians

\(^{354}\) Munson (2001) on empire as primary feature of Persians.

\(^{355}\) Balot (2006) 147

\(^{356}\) Cyrus is in fact one of the few examples of a successful educator in a work that fairly teems with failures. But we should note that Cyrus’ education of the Persians is in the service of furthering his own rule. In contrast to this, Herodotus’ education, as I have been arguing, has the effect of disrupting rule, not entrenching it.
overwhelmingly (and quite understandably) choose the day of feasting (1.126). Cyrus’ speech to the Persians is revealing: “Men of Persia... this is how things are with you. If you will listen to me, you shall have all these good things, and ten thousand more, and no slavish work at all. If you will not listen, you shall have sufferings like yesterday’s, and that beyond counting. Listen to me, and become free men.” (1.126.) The common business of all is the attaining of private pleasure: ‘these good things, and ten thousand more.’ United under the rule of one man, the Persians might enjoy all good things; without him, there are only ‘sufferings beyond counting’. This is the common good as private pleasure; its self-evidence is as clear to the Persians as feasting is preferable to labour.

But Cyrus’ last words bring out the further implications of this conception. “Listen to me, and become free men.” To listen to Cyrus, to accept the rule of a despot, is to become free. For the Persians, freedom is a zero sum game; it is not something you experience within a community, but rather something that you take by ruling over others. In other words, you rule or are ruled- there is no ruling and being ruled in turn. That this is the Persian/Median view is confirmed throughout. As the fallen Median despot Astyages laments, “The Medes... have

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357 The manner in which this rational argument is couched is highly revealing. Cyrus did not simply tell the straightforward truth to the Persians; instead, he “thought about what was the subtlest means of persuading the Persians to revolt.” (1.125) In teaching to the Persians the rationalist principle that will come to characterize their approach to politics, Cyrus does not rely on rational argumentation alone- he motivates their assent through lived experience, the experiences of the body. These bodily experiences prompt them to reflect on the rational claim Cyrus has made in speech. The power of this should not be underestimated. Cyrus’ lesson is more deeply entrenched because the Persians experience and embody the logic of this definition of justice as collective self-interest. I say embody, because they are not simply told by Cyrus- not just given to understand through argumentation, but instead feel it through the contrast between the sweat of labour and the sweetness of repose. This irony is important, for it already suggests the inadequacy of the Persian conception of ‘truth-telling,’ which centres on the primacy of speech. For all of their emphasis on rationalism and what can be spoken of, on truth-telling, the Persian empire is kicked off by their experiencing the truth of something through their bodies. Like Herodotus, Cyrus grasps that more than rational speech is needed in order to persuade; but as I shall argue, the effect of his persuasion is to obscure an important aspect of what Cyrus himself grasps, the complexity of human judgment. The result remains, but the means is hidden; Cyrus, unlike Herodotus, does not invite his audience to think for themselves, does not teach them how to judge, but rather, he teaches only the fruits of his own judgment. Cyrus’ plain speech obscures the subtleties of his persuasion.
become slaves instead of masters, and the Persians, who were slaves, have become masters of the Medes” (1.129).\footnote{See also 1.210 and 9.122. That the very last chapter of the \textit{Histories} restates this opposition is significant; even more so that the last word of the book is ‘to be slaves’.} For the Persians, freedom does not have a civic expression; you are free if you are part of a community that rules over others. As Balot has argued, “Freedom… was for [the Persians] the freedom to rule tyrannically over a subject population of, in effect, slaves.”\footnote{Balot (2006) 146} What counts is not freedom in a community but freedom over other communities: empire brings freedom.

We should note how this follows from the conception of ‘justice as order’ introduced by the Deiokes story. Deiokean private interest is transformed into an argument for imperialism. But to accomplish this, Cyrus must expands the concept of self-interest from its use by Deiokes and the Medes; it becomes transformed from something simply private, ‘taking care of your own business’, into imperialism, ‘taking care of your own business by taking from others’. Through this, Herodotus suggests that self-interest as political motivation will rarely be satisfied with ‘its own business’ - that to continue as a motivation, it must seek ever more.\footnote{This impression is reinforced, not only by the narrative arc of the Persian empire itself, but, as I shall discuss in my conclusion, by the Athenians and the grim coda Herodotus ends his work on.} The collective self-interest of the community is to taste the ‘ten thousand good things’; order creates the peace to enjoy these things, and imperialist mastery ensures that one can have them- that one can take them from others. What this suggests is that above all else, these ‘ten thousand good things’ are conceived of in frankly tangible and material terms- these ‘good things’ are things that can be taken, rather than things that can be shared without diminishing (such as freedom, friendship, or thought).\footnote{See Konstan (1987) for the Persian emphasis on quantity.} These material goods, we should note, are no small matter: we see a concrete illustration of these benefits in Herodotus’ survey of Darius’ massive taxation of his subject
peoples (3.89-96); of all the people he rules, the Persians alone pay no tax (3.96). The empire is a massive wealth-making initiative, of which the Persians are indeed the undoubted beneficiaries: Cyrus did not lie.\footnote{Munson (2009) 465 observes that the Persian practice of lavish banquets “represent the perfect fulfillment of an early promise of Cyrus.”}

The empire then aims at acquiring the ten thousand good things, defined as tangible, concrete goods. This has consequence for their inquiries, which are often subservient to their imperialist ambitions. As Christ has compellingly argued, the inquiries of despots are often preludes to invasion;\footnote{Christ (1994) 178} as illustrated by Darius’ inquiries into the Paeonian ‘wonder woman’, apparently the hardest-working woman of the ancient world. After wondering at her prodigious work habits (an ostentatious display organized by her brothers, who desired rule) and asking after her people— thus mirroring Herodotus’ own interest in cultural ethnography— Darius orders his generals to conquer and remove her people (5.12-13). He inquires in order to take; imperialist inquiry aims at a material result. As Ward observes, this demonstrates “the type of spiritedness that is driven to transcend one’s boundaries and to look on and possess what is foreign to, and other than, oneself.”\footnote{Ward (2008) 77.} But unlike Herodotus’ attraction to the other, the Persian attraction to foreignness is destructive. Thinking in tangibles renders mercenary the interaction with difference. The Persians cannot look without taking.

Indeed, as the Histories demonstrates, the Persian empire successfully and resolutely pursues its common end. Yet its very success entrenches its animating principle, as the tangible benefits of empire appear to affirm the self-evidence of its end. The truth-telling Persians are thus doubly immured from grasping the worth and vitality of the messiness of Greek life. In the Greek civic sphere, there is the disorder of conflict rather than the collective self-interest - the
gentility— that is characteristic of the Persian banquet, the symbol of the good things that Cyrus promised the Persians (1.126).\footnote{Munson (2001) 155 for the banquet as a clarifying symbol of Persian culture.} But the very gentility of the Persian banquet table is a stumbling block to genuine deliberation.\footnote{Indeed, the only deliberating that the Persians engage in is proper to the banquet table: according to Herodotus, the Persians “are wont to debate their most serious concerns when they are drunk.” (1.133) To ‘test’ their resolutions, they debate the same subject again sober - and if they debate sober the first time, they revisit again drunk (1.133). This might seem to suggest that the Persians do not take the truth to be self-evident, for this style of debating seems to involving looking at things from different perspectives. We should note, however, that these ‘different’ perspectives are still their own; drunkenness can alter one’s state, but it does not fundamentally alter oneself. Indeed, the ‘liberation’ alcohol promises is often simply a relaxation of one’s own inhibitions - one becomes ‘more’ oneself. The Persians debate, then, by looking at things from two aspects of their own position. Herodotus makes clear that they take this to be sufficient; no other perspectives are necessary. The effects of this are likely to make their resolutions more entrenched, for their would be no need to doubt what has already been ‘rigorously’ tested in this way.} Such civility in fact harms the civil; it elides legitimate disagreement and, with it, the sort of contentiousness that can disrupt the automatic thinking characteristic of a narrow rationalism. Because of this, such complacency narrows our sense of what is properly ‘our own business’, for it takes the scope and depth of our concern as settled.\footnote{cf. Young (2001a) 43 - “putting such a premium on a common good in the sense of values and interests we all agree we share, furthermore, is liable to narrow the possible agenda for deliberation and thereby effectively silence some points of view.”}

This is the light in which we should understand the debate of the regimes, the first extant example of the regime typology, which is often taken as Herodotus’ most overt contribution to political theory.\footnote{Kagan (1965), 69; Sabine (1937), 22-23} This debate occurs after the collapse of the first Persian dynasty; several prominent Persians argue the relative merits of the different regime types while deciding on what form of rule to institute. Norma Thompson has cogently argued for the ways in which this debate illustrates the character of the Persians.\footnote{Thompson (1996). 68} Rather than showcasing Herodotus’ own attempts at abstract reason, it shows how such abstraction masks partiality, for this debate, which the characters take to be abstract and universalized, is revealed by the narrative to be deeply
particular and conventional. The coolness, the very gentility of this abstract debate impedes their ability to imagine - and thus argue for- a full-blooded alternative to their own way of life.\(^{370}\) Because of this, its appearance of radical openness is a lie; the outcome - despotism - is a foregone conclusion. Otanes and Megabyzus, the spokespeople for isonomia and aristocracy respectively, speak vaguely and without captivating rhetoric. Otanes speaks only of avoiding evils (3.80), not of the positive benefits of isonomia; Megabyzus, too, is vague about the particular benefits of oligarchy (3.81), and, as Thompson notes, fails to engage in the type of rhetoric his situation seems to cry out for- that is, flattering his audience of a few wise men by praising the merits of a few wise men.\(^{371}\) He is not used to the tumble of the agora, and so politely refrains from the skulduggery often associated with free and open debate.\(^{372}\) The bloodless and cool stories offered by Otanes and Megabyzus are narrow, plain, and without the passion of partial speech; these polite speeches do not offend but neither do they arouse. They are, as Thompson terms them, failed narratives.\(^{373}\)

Furthermore, this appearance of neutrality only papers over and renders subterranean the attachments that do animate the Persians, passions that Darius, who argues in favour of despotism, deploys while simultaneously cloaking. We should first note that Darius’ rebuttal of democracy and oligarchy hinges on universal claims about the selfishness of man.\(^{374}\) While the Histories presents much evidence to warrant Darius’ claim, Ward observes quite rightly that a counter-example is close to hand: Prexasps’ sacrifice of himself for the sake of the truth and the

\(^{370}\) Thompson (1996) 72-75
\(^{371}\) Thompson (1996) 73
\(^{372}\) In Herodotus’ treatment, the worst of Athenian life goes along with the best; the energy unleashed by Athenian equality and free speech (5.78) that is responsible for Athenian greatness is also responsible for its foolishness 5.97. Democratic verve does not exist without breeding foolishness and trickery.
\(^{373}\) Thompson (1996) 72-75
\(^{374}\) Ward (2008) 96
sake of the Persians, the interest of both having there coincided (3.75).\textsuperscript{375} Herodotus pays due attention to the merit of Prexaspes: “Such was Prexaspes, a notable man all his life and in his death also”(3.75). Yet although Darius himself had benefitted from Prexaspes’ noble self-sacrifice, only a few days later he elides its possibility.\textsuperscript{376} Darius’ universalizing thus neglects key exceptions; it levels difference rather than accounting for it.\textsuperscript{377}

Moreover, despite the universalizing rationalism of his claims, Darius’ clinching argument in favour of despotism, at the end of a debate marked by its theoretical sophistication, is a personal one: “as we were freed by one man, so we should keep this freedom through one man.” (3.82).\textsuperscript{378} Yet rather than proving that abstraction can attend to and recognize the exceptional as the exceptional, Darius universalizes the particular by turning a personal claim about the excellence of one particular man into a universal argument about the excellence of the rule of one man- he praises despotism as a whole because of the excellence of one particular despot. We must attend to why this is so. Cyrus’ influence on the Persians runs deep.\textsuperscript{379} Darius’ invocation of Cyrus is an argument, of course- and is in direct response to Otanes’ absolute denouncement of the evils of despotism, where he denies that there can be any exception to the evils of monarchy: “Take the best man on earth and put him into a monarchy and you put him outside of the thoughts that have been wont to guide him. Outrageousness is bred in him by

\textsuperscript{375} Ward (2008) 97
\textsuperscript{376} Darius himself will later come to benefit from the self-sacrifice of another Persian, Zopyrus, who mutilates himself so that Darius can take Babylon (3.153-159.)
\textsuperscript{377} Bragwanath (2008) 84 likewise notes that Prexaspes’ example undermines Darius’ claim. She ties this to Herodotus’ habit in the Histories of undermining simple generalizations. This coheres with my account of Herodotus’ attack on abstract rationalism.
\textsuperscript{378} Lateiner (1989) 169 notes that Darius’ argument invokes ancestral custom, and this is important. But what is key is the way that this invocation of custom is tied up with the emotional power of the founder of those customs- Cyrus. The ostensibly cool and calculative Persians are here moved by an emotional appeal.
\textsuperscript{379} Munson (2009) 466: “The Persians honor Cyrus because he has made them wealth and dominant and the values that he represents are also their values.”
reason of the good things he has, and envy is basic in the nature of man.” (3.80). Otanes makes a universal claim for the nature of despotism—everywhere, no matter when or where, the despot will give himself over to outrages. But his universal claim fails to respond to the particularities of the Persian context—where, within recent memory, a despot had been beloved and (mostly) prudent.380

By citing the memory of Cyrus, Darius opens a crack in Otanes’ unequivocal rejection of despotism. Otanes, arguing for democracy, speaks abstractly and without any heed of the emotional weight that the memory of Cyrus carries. Because he ignores the emotion that suffuses his interlocutors’ ostensible rationalism, he is helpless to interrogate it. Darius, on the other hand, successfully recruits the passions of the Persians because he hides the affective dimension of his argument— for the memory of Cyrus proves the clinching argument for despotism because the unacknowledged emotional attachment to his memory transforms it into a universal claim. The memory of Cyrus is conflated into a universal truth, rather than an historical incident; it does not occur to the interlocutors to ask if what is true about Cyrus is true about all other despots. By adhering to their cultural image of themselves as rational creatures, the Persians are blinded to the kinds of affective attachment and partiality that suffuses their thinking.

I have suggested that Persian customs reinforce their imperialistic ambitions. However, it will emerge that the imperialism of Persian nomoi implicate the Hellenes as well. Many have noted that Herodotus’ treatment of the Persian war foreshadows the Peloponnesian; Persian

380 Chiasson (2012) 227: Chiasson notes the way that Cyrus functions as a “culture hero” for the Persians. In my reading, Herodotus shares this respect for Cyrus, albeit with a critical distance; Herodotus is not uniformly critical of despotism but can admire what makes Cyrus so very successful as a leader. Indeed, although Otanes makes absolute claims, the complex picture painted by Herodotus suggests that despotism and one-man rule is not an absolute bad. As Lateiner (1989) 171 notes, Herodotus depicts many examples of successful or prudent rulers. The caveat is that “autocracy at best depends on the character of a talented individual.”
overreach foreshadows later Athenian expansion.\textsuperscript{381} As the Persian empire declines, the Athenian grows. Yet these historical resonances are deepened by Herodotus’ ethnographic treatment of both peoples. Redfield provides an overview of the striking similarity between the Greeks and the Persians: both peoples adopt foreign \textit{nomoi}, are prone to \textit{hubris}, and are markedly restless as a people.\textsuperscript{382} Moreover, both peoples consider themselves knowers; the Persian tell the truth, and the Greeks wish to be known for their cleverness (1.60, 2.20). The critique of the Persian use of knowledge will raise unsettling questions about the Greek love of wisdom. Is inquiry always linked to the desire to possess? The narrative of Cambyses dramatizes the consequences of valorizing one’s own perspective.

\textit{Truth telling and the Insanity of Imperialism}

Although it is often noted that Cambyses, in his madness, violates custom,\textsuperscript{383} the irony is that these violations of custom are in fact conventional.\textsuperscript{384} Cambyses’ mad acts show Persian truth-telling brought to the extreme.\textsuperscript{385} This is because Cambyses, through his invasion of Egypt, is more immersed in difference than any of the other Persian despots Herodotus depicts.\textsuperscript{386} 

\textsuperscript{381} For critique of Athenian imperialism, see Moles (2002); Munson (2001) 58
\textsuperscript{382} Redfield (1985) 111, 114-115
\textsuperscript{383} For example, Baragwanath (2008) 117 takes Cambyses’ behaviour as being unrelated to Persian \textit{nomos}, and in fact revealing the limited explanatory power of \textit{nomos}.
\textsuperscript{384} Ward (2006) 82: “Herodotus’ treatment of Cambyses reveals that the perfection of Persian customs leads to madness.”
\textsuperscript{385} Munson (1991) 43-65; 59-62 labels Cambyses “a perverse histor”; Christ (1994) 186 offers that Cambyses is a dark mirror to Herodotus’ own inquiries.
\textsuperscript{386} Many have pointed out that the historical Cambyses was, in fact, respectful of Egyptian cultural practices, as was typical practice of the Persian emperors. See, for example, Frye (1963) 84, although some try to suggest ways of rescuing the historicity of Herodotus’ treatment of Cambyses either by suggesting ways that Cambyses really could have killed Apis (Depuydt, 1995), or suggesting that the Cambyses narrative represents Herodotus’ transition from an entertaining lecturer to a serious historian (Brown, 1982). Dillery (2006) has offered a compelling reason for this discrepancy between the historical Cambyses and Herodotus’ portrayal: that the Cambyses narrative on display in the \textit{Histories} stems from the Egyptian cultural discourse ‘\textit{Chaosbeschreibung}’. The parallels Dillery draws are suggestive. Still, my interest here is not in source criticism, but in Herodotus’ presentation of his themes and material: his authorial ‘fingerprint’, to use De Jong’s phrase (2012). As argued above, I follow Thomas (2000) in emphasizing the ways in which the \textit{Histories} are part of an intellectual enterprise, intersecting with
Egypt, according to Herodotus, is extraordinarily unique (2.35). Cambyses’ mode of thought cannot comprehend the foreignness he experiences; in his mad acts, he tries to ‘Persianize’ Egypt, and turn the strange into the familiar. His fate thus illustrates a problem that Herodotus’ narrative must confront. The *Histories* expose his Hellenic audience to the diversity of the world, offering them a vicarious tour through the diverse customs practiced by different peoples. Yet encountering difference, the limits to one’s own perspective, does not necessarily teach the necessity of attending to such limits. Cambyses’ sojourn in Egypt suggests that merely encountering difference is not enough to inspire openness; exposure to other cultural traditions can in fact inflame one’s prejudices rather than moderate them. Herodotus’ narrative must attend to the attachments of his audience.

Shortly after invading Egypt, Cambyses is forced to confront the limits to the Persian belief in ‘speakable' truths; he is made to see, in other words, that there are truths that remain true even though they cannot be told. He discovers this accidentally through a cruel experiment he conducts on the Egyptian king Psammenitus, an experiment intended as a display of power rather than as a quest for knowledge. To conduct this trial/injury, Cambyses sits Psammenitus down on the outskirts of the city and parades the spoils of war before him. First Cambyses sends Psammenitus’ daughter and other royal women past him, dressed as slaves and weeping; Psammenitus looked fixedly at them and then bows to the ground. Cambyses next sends Psammenitus’ son out at the front of 2 000 strong death procession; once again, Psammenitus looks, and bows to the ground. But then, after Cambyses’ tortures had torn no response from

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sophistic debates about the power of *nomos* vs *phusis*. Herodotus’ presentation of the Cambyses narrative is, I contend, deeply invested in exploring the power of *nomos*. 387 Herodotus states that Cambyses sought to do Psammenitus “deliberate injury” by “ma[king] trial of the very soul of him” (3.14) Cf. Christ (1994) 172. Baragwanath (2008) 61 suggests a Herodotean quality to Cambyses’ interest: “interest for its own sake”. I suggest rather that Cambyses is motivated by his desire to display and enforce his own power over the conquered king.
Psammenitus, it so happened (that is, by chance, not by Cambyses’ will) that one of Psammenitus’ former drinking companions went by, reduced to begging. “When Psammenitus saw him, he burst into tears and called his old comrade by name and beat his own head.” (3.14). This shocks Cambyses, and he sends someone to question Psammenitus about his reaction. The reply: “Son of Cyrus, my own griefs were too great to cry out about, but the sorrow of this friend is worth tears; he had much, and much happiness, and has lost all and become a beggar when he is upon the threshold of old age” (3.14).388

Cambyses intended, from his position of supremacy, to ‘enlighten’ Psammenitus as to the degree of his misery, by making the conquered king’s soul open to the conqueror. Yet Psammenitus has taught the despot that not all truths can be told— that some things escape words.389 Cambyses has been brought to confront the limits to his perspective. But what he learns is not the necessity of respecting the inner recesses of the person, or the need to attend to other perspectives on the world than his own. Rather, he learns to his horror that the world is not open to him - that faces can be masks, that not all is plain and self-evident, and, because of this, that there are recesses of the person and of the world that cannot be penetrated by his power. In opening the Cambyses narrative, the Psammenitus episode thus sets the stage for Cambyses’ mad acts. In what follows, Herodotus shows us Cambyses ‘correcting’ the world — engaging with difference by trying to bring it into line with the Persian conception of the truth. Inquiry, for

388 Baragwanath (2008) 61 notes the Herodotean quality of Herodotus’ interest here: “interest for its own sake”, but it is important to note that as a rival inquirer, Cambyses’ interest here is also motivated by his desire to display and enforce his own power over the conquered king. She later notes that “Cambyses’ psychological experiment on the captures Psammenitos suggests how very strange human responses may seem, and how easily the motivation that underlies them maybe interpreted,” (109) and this is undoubtedly true. In this particular case, Persian nomos emphasizing the plain, the ‘sayable’ quality of the truth makes it especially hard for Cambyses to understand Psammenitos’ reaction.

389 Lateiner (1989) 28 points to Psammentius’ behaviour as a powerful example of Herodotus’ ability to utilize non-verbal communication.
Cambyses, is not about learning from others but rather about trying to make what is hidden or mysterious plain and ‘normal’, and thus under his control. His is an imperialist inquiry.

After this, Herodotus shows Cambyses attempting to drag the hidden into the light, and thus under Persian control.\(^{390}\) The first sign of his madness is his attempted invasion against the mysterious Ethiopians, prompted by his rage against their king’s flouting of Persian power and Persian customs, as well as by the great riches that Ethiopia has to offer (3.17-26). Cambyses’ inquiries (by proxy) in Ethiopia are a precursor to invasion. But as Irwin argues, Herodotus’ description of those inquiries places his audience in the position of the inquiring despot: “[t]he story begins with Cambyses attempting to satisfy his curiosity about a particular issue, but the curiosity actually satisfied is the one generated by Herodotus himself, namely, his readers’ own.”\(^{391}\) Rather than inviting the Greeks to identify with the brave Ethiopians driving back conquest, the narrative places them in the role of the invader, their appetite stoked by what Herodotus shows them.

The Ethiopian king mocks Cambyses’ gifts of wine and gold, customs that call to mind not only Persian luxury, but Greek tastes,\(^{392}\) and laughs at what he learns of Persian habits. He also clearly sees Cambyses’ (badly) hidden imperialist intentions (3.21). This enrages Cambyses. Irwin suggests that Cambyses is primarily enraged by the reports of riches he will never possess.\(^{393}\) The riches that inquiry reveals can provoke desire; when this desire is thwarted, rage follows. However, it is key to the mindset of imperialism that Cambyses appetites

\(^{390}\) Harrison (2011) 62 notes that contemporary Achaemenid scholarship tends to read Cambyses’ violent acts “in terms of sound motives of Realpolitik”. Although Harrison notes the way this reading requires going against the grain of Herodotus’ text, I suggest that it does capture the links between Cambyses’ madness and the demands of empire.

\(^{391}\) Irwin (2014) 30.

\(^{392}\) Demont (2009) 198

\(^{393}\) Irwin (2014) 40
are supported by his sense of justice. Cambyses undoubtedly wants the riches of others. But the Ethiopian king’s mockery of Persian practices afflicts Cambyses’ sense of the rightness of his own ways. Imperialism is at its most robust when it takes it ends to be right and just; that a foreigner could be insolent and so rich is a double injustice. Cambyses’ blindness to the culturally dependent quality of his sense of justice helps provide a moral cover to his appetites. The need to correct and the desire to take here reinforce each other. Together, they prompt a rage that leads Cambyses to invade with such haste that he neglects logistics and the needs of the human body. The invasion fails, but in narrating it, Herodotus has alerted his audiences to the way that blindness to one’s cultural lens can cover and thus justify the appetites. Self-justification spurs on conquest.

Indeed, Cambyses’ outrage at difference, the outrage that helped spur on his invasion of Ethiopia, grows deeper in Egypt. He slays the calf-god Apis, opens the coffins of the dead, enters the forbidden precincts of ancient shrines and makes “great mockery” of them (3.37), and breaks laws both Egyptian and Persian (3.16, 29-32, 35, 36). These acts of madness are all violations; he is drawn to uncover what is customarily hidden from him, whether it is to peer into the sacred spaces of another culture or to uncover the naked body of his own sisters (3.31). Cambyses learned something from the experiment that was designed to teach Psammenitus a lesson; he learned that there are truths that are not plain and objective; that there are things that are hidden or mysterious. This knowledge inspires him to act: with his mad deeds, Cambyses

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394 Brown (1982) 396 observes that “In his account of the invasion of Ethiopia by Cambyses’ army, Herodotus’ chief purpose is to explain the character of the Persian king.”

395 Thomas (2000) 129 notes that this goes against the conventions of both people, as does Baragwanath (2008) 116.

396 Ward (2008) 88 - “Truth telling reflects the Persian wish that what is internal become completely external, or in other words, the invisible become visible.”
attempts to make all open and accessible. He tries to make difference cohere with his notion of the truth, and in so doing, violates and destroys.

The rage with which Cambyses greets difference shows the threat he perceives in it, for these limits to Cambyses’ knowledge are also limits to his power. What is incomprehensible to him cannot be ordered by him. The quest to make everything intelligible and plain thus intersects with the demands of the despot in particular, and of imperial rule in general, that nothing be off limits. The logic of despotism, after all, is that the despot is above the law- that everything is open to the exercise of his power. The despot is the one supreme power, the source of the lawfulness of all laws- for if there was a law above him, a law he was beholden to, there would have to be some sort of division in power, a body invested with the power to punish the source of all punishments. In short, that would mean that the despot would no longer be the despot.

This is made explicit in Cambyses’ dealings with the Persian judges. After conceiving an unlawful lust for his full sister—we know it is unlawful amongst the Persians because Herodotus tells us so (3.31)— Cambyses convenes the Royal Judges and asks them if there is a law that orders any man who so wishes to live with his sister. The wording of this is curious, but it suggests the slyness of Cambyses- that he knows that what he wants is indeed “against usage” and so cannot ask straightforwardly if his lust was lawful. Calculation is thus not incompatible with madness. The judges, “who hold office till death or till some injustice is detected in them,” respond with an answer that is “both safe and just”. They answered that while they could not find

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397 Dillery (2006) 395 observes that, in historical fact, brother-sister marriage was not strictly frowned upon in Persia. The presentation of it as such in the Histories thus bears Herodotus’ authorial ‘fingerprint’, to borrow the judicious phrase of De Jong (2012). As Dillery observes, that Herodotus presents the law as firmer than it was in actual practices suggests that “Herodotus is at pains to demonstrate that Cambyses was violating his own societal laws, as well as those of Egypt.” (395).
a law that ordered what Cambyses wished, they did find a law which “said that he who was king of Persia could do anything he wished” (3.31).

That the judges hold office ‘till some injustice is detected in them’ suggests why their answer was ‘both safe and just.’ To oppose the whim of a despot would indeed to be acting unlawfully— that is, according to the justice of the Persians, unjustly — so their answer, which was safest for them, was also according to the justice of the land. Their judgment makes explicit the necessary weakness of judgment within despotism. This weakness plagues both the public and the private. It surfaces in the weakness of a judiciary under despotism— the judges have made themselves superfluous, so far as the despot is concerned; but it is also impairs of the faculty of judgment, for to find out the lawful, the despot need only consult his whims. Judgment means in part to weigh alternatives, to reflect upon impulses and motivations, and if every whim of the despot is legal, there is no impetus for him to reflect upon these. We see this with Cambyses; after this judgment, Cambyses consults the judges no further, but rather follows only his passion of the moment (3.32, 34-36). In making explicit this logic of despotism, the Persian judges contributed to the madness of Cambyses.398 By stating that whatever he wished was legal, the judges sanction Cambyses’ every whim. He marries his sister; he murders her too.399 Removing all external constraint on Cambyses removes the internal restraints too. If all of his wishes, all of his ends, are equally legal, equally just, the impetus for him to judge between his ends is dissolved.

This becomes manifest in one of the ‘crazy acts’ that Herodotus recounts Cambyses as committing against the Persians. Ironically, Cambyses himself takes this act to be a proof of his

398 Indeed, that this episode took place before the invasion of Egypt suggests its background importance as a contributing factor to Cambyses’ madness. Unleashed from judgment and deliberation, he was freed to indulge his every urge, no matter how destabilizing or dark.
399 See Griffith (2009) for a discussion of Cambyses’ murder of his sister-wife.
sanity- thereby confirming the extremity of his madness. Cambyses, remembering a gentle reproof from one of his counsellors, Prexaspes, seeks to prove his sanity by shooting an arrow into the middle of the heart of Prexaspes’ son. Having accomplished this cruel murder, Cambyses gloats: “Prexaspes, so I’m not mad and the Persians are! It is all perfectly clear” (3.35). For Cambyses, the mark of sanity is his ability to achieve perfectly his end- in this case, the murder of the son of his most trusted companion, a man he “honoured especially” (3.34). That Cambyses considers this proof of his sanity shows that he connects sanity with power and transparency. By shooting an arrow straight into the boy’s heart, he has shown (he thinks) that his power penetrates even the privacy of the boy’s body- nothing is hidden from him, not even the literal heart. Yet in making plain the boy’s heart, he has only made “perfectly clear” to all just how insane he really is. The inability to distinguish between sane and insane ends— not one’s ability to carry them out— is the true marker of insanity. Cambyses is not capable of judging his own ends, but he is capable of, literally, taking aim. He thus takes the objectivity of his perspective for granted; he fails to ask if his end is sane, but rather values his efficiency in achieving it.

We might blame the judges for giving explicit sanction to Cambyses’ lawful lawlessness, but we must also see that they had very little choice. Under despotism, once this question was asked — what is lawful for the despot — no other answer was possible. The logic of despotism demands that everything is open to the despot, that there be no limits to his power or to his reach. Imperialism then is despotism writ large. Witness Xerxes’ speech on the eve of his invasion of Greece. “We shall show to all a Persian empire that has the same limits as Zeus’ sky. For the sun will look down upon no country that has a border with ours, but I shall make them all one country... so those who are innocent in our sight and those who are guilty will alike bear the yoke
of slavery.” (7.8) To disregard the limits posed by the autonomy of other nations and cultures (and guilt or innocence) suggests the desire of empire to regard all as open to its reaches.\textsuperscript{400} That all should be accessible, that all should be capable of being made plain, is part of despotic and imperial logic both, and coincides with the desire of Persian truth-telling to lay all bare.

Cambyses therefore sees difference as an affront. Just as everything is legal for the despot, Cambyses thinks that everything should be open to him; both the limits posed by the bodies of others, and the inscrutability of their (to him) foreign practices. This emerges most clearly in his mockery of Egyptian religion: for this is, as Herodotus says the ‘clear proof’ that Cambyses was insane, for “if it were not so, he would never have set about the mockery of what other men hold sacred and customary.” (3.38). Cambyses opens up the coffins of the Egyptians and peers at the bodies, mocked the sacred image in the temple of Hephaestus, and enters into the innermost shrines, forbidden to all but the priest, and burns their images (3.37). In all this, Cambyses seeks to mock, debunk, and ultimately destroy the religion of the Egyptians.\textsuperscript{401} Yet the most egregious example of Cambyses’ war on the customary is his slaying of the Egyptian god Apis. Apis appears at intervals amongst the Egyptians in the form of a calf born from a cow no longer able to conceive; the Egyptians say that they recognize him by certain distinguishing marks (3.28). We should note here that the character of Persian piety cannot admit of this sort of theophany - as Herodotus observed in his overview of Persian customs, their gods are the\textsuperscript{402}

\textsuperscript{400} Lateiner (1989) 134 notes that “Herodotus’ use of the concept of boundary and transgression carries a moral criticism of aggressive war and imperialism.”

\textsuperscript{401} Gammie (1986) 180 argues that “it is Cambyses’ presumption in relation to the divine which proves to be that which the historian chooses to underscore.” In my reading, it is less his attack on the divine itself than on the customary beliefs about the divine that concerns Herodotus. See below, for my interpretation of the Apis affair. I follow Thomas (2000) 34-35 in emphasizing Herodotus’ own statements in favour of a natural causes of Cambyses’ madness.
elements in concrete form- planets, fire, waters and winds (1.131). The calf-god Apis would appear to all Persians, not just Cambyses, as ridiculous.

But to Cambyses, in his paranoia, this belief is more than ridiculous— it is malicious. Apis is born soon after Cambyses’ ignominious failed invasion of Ethiopia. At the sight of the Egyptians celebrating, Cambyses “formed the suspicion that they were making merry at his misfortunes” (3.27). When the Egyptians explained that they were celebrating the appearance of the god Apis, Cambyses held them as liars and put them to death (3.27). Cambyses held that a belief that differed so much from the austere practices of the Persians could not possibly be sincere; since he could not credit what he took to be so plainly ridiculous, he assumed that no one else possibly could either.

Cambyses reasoned that a belief that cannot be sincere must then be fraudulent- and since all owe obedience and openness to the despot, this fraudulence amounts to injustice.

When others tell Cambyses the same story, he insists that the calf Apis be brought to him. When this is done, he draws his dagger and strikes the calf; “at this, he burst into laughter and said to the priests, ‘you miserable wretches, is that the kind of your gods, things of blood and flesh and susceptible of iron? Surely this god is worthy of the Egyptians; but all the same, you will not lightly make a mock of me.’” (3.29).

Cambyses seems to believe two contradictory things at once- that the miserable Egyptians are benighted fools to worship such a god - and that such foolishness is actually malicious, intended

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402 Baragwanath (2008) 117 astutely notes that Cambyses’ paranoia here illustrates “the way in which kingly inquiry is apt to be infected by a paranoid or narcissistic state of mind (assuming a personal role for the king in the causal chain) and quick to reject divergent explanations." She draws a parallel between this incident and Otanes’ indictment of monarchy (3.80), where he claims that an absolute ruler is best at accepting slanders. Gammie (1986) 180 likewise explores the resonances between Otanes’ speech and Cambyses’ behaviour: “Without exception, each one of the characteristics of the typical tyrant is exemplified by Cambyses- and in the case of some of them, several times over.”
as a ‘mock’ of him. By slaying Apis, he takes himself to have attacked both of these possibilities at once; he thinks that he has proven that Apis is not a real god, ‘susceptible of iron’ as he is, and in doing this, he has forced the Egyptians to abandon their foolish beliefs— he has drawn them out of the darkness — or made manifest their duplicity, their hidden intentions. Yet what Cambyses thinks he has demonstrated is not what Herodotus demonstrates; Herodotus shows that he has accomplished neither of these ends. For one, there was nothing false or hidden about the beliefs of the Egyptians— they sincerely held Apis as a god — and nothing unexpected about his mortality, for after he died, they buried him in the customary way (3.29). In trying to force enlightenment upon the Egyptians, Cambyses only confirms the parochial quality of his own view, that he cannot bear what differs from his own. Encountering difference has not opened his mind; it has instead strengthened his attachment to his own and his hostility to the other.

Indeed, the Egyptians are so far from having been ‘enlightened’ by Cambyses that they take his madness as a punishment from the gods (3.30); they assess his behaviour through their own cultural lens. And indeed we can see how this makes sense - for it is hard to imagine a greater blasphemy than deicide. Yet despite the obviousness of this case of divine punishment, Herodotus demurs from labeling it as such. He takes Cambyses’ deicide as a sign of his madness, not its cause: “indeed he was not in true possession of his wits before” (3.30). His verdict:

These were the crazy acts that Cambyses perpetrated... either because of that affair of Apis, or from some other cause, as indeed there are so many ills that beset mankind. For instance, it is said that from birth Cambyses had a great sickness that some call the Sacred Sickness. It would indeed not be unnatural for one whose body suffered a great sickness to have his wits diseased also.

(3.33)
There are so many ills that beset mankind that the causality of his illness is in question. The truth cannot be clearly told, pace the Persians and the Egyptians both.\(^403\) Herodotus does offer one potential cause: Cambyses’ epilepsy. Cambyses was so bound up with his attachment to reason that he neglected the bodily root of his diseased thinking.

But Herodotus has not.\(^404\) By highlighting this natural cause, Herodotus is in fact operating in a Persian mode; much like Cambyses himself, Herodotus is debunking the claims of piety when he suggests a physical rather than divine cause for Cambyses’ madness.\(^405\) This might appear puzzling at first, given the attention that has been paid above to the limits of Persian truth-telling. Yet we must make explicit the differences between Cambyses’ attempts to debunk the claims of piety and the more subtle means by which Herodotus undermines it. By refusing to identify this most obvious case of divine punishment as divine punishment, Herodotus has tacitly invited his readers to remember that ‘so many ills beset mankind’, that is, to question all other manifestations of the divine — even, or perhaps especially, their own pieties. He has opened up

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\(^403\) Here, as he does throughout, Herodotus attends to the complex causality of everything human — a complexity that, as Herodotus shows, most actors themselves miss out on, eager as they are to affix blame and take credit.

\(^404\) Thomas (2000) 34 notes that, in attributing Cambyses’ madness to epilepsy, Herodotus seems ‘unwilling to dwell upon divine retribution.’ Yet Herodotus does not simply avoid dwelling on divine retribution; he here denies its causal power. Others do not agree. Gammie (1986) 180 cites the manner of Cambyses’ death, from a wound mirroring the one he inflicted on Apis, as ‘speak[ing] plainly enough of the ultimate source of his death.’ Brown (1982) 401 suggests that this death ‘weakens [Herodotus’] otherwise rational interpretation.’ Yet, as discussed above, we must remember the performative aspect of the Histories: Herodotus is telling a story, one with multiple layers. Herodotus does not in his own voice endorse the pious reading of Cambyses’ life and death. He explicitly debunks it. But rather than force this conclusion on his reader, he crafts a poetically fitting ending to Cambyses’ life makes space for the reader to choose how to interpret Cambyses’ life. Herodotus allows one to maintain one’s own beliefs, while also raising unsettling implications for those who wish to draw out the consequences of the rationalist verdict he gives here. See below for more.

the space for questioning, rather than forcing it.\textsuperscript{406} In this, he allows his readers space for piety, too; he does not force his own conclusions on his readers. As Scott Scullion has observed, “if the customs of foreigners are to be treated with respect, so surely are those of one’s own culture.”\textsuperscript{407} Such respect grants the space for inquiry. The evasiveness of his narrative allows his audience to engage as they will. They have the freedom to challenge their own attachments — or not. This freedom of judgment mirrors Herodotus’s own: as he famously avows, “I must tell what is said, but I am not at all bound to believe it, and this comment of mine holds about my whole History.” (7.152). Herodotus has shown that he has learned a lesson from Cambyses, a lesson Cambyses himself was incapable of seeing. He has learned about the cruelty and futility of attempting to debunk and destroy the beliefs of others. Instead, he leaves those beliefs intact but not unquestioned.

Not only is forced enlightenment futile, but to destroy or debunk a belief prevents our examining what those beliefs reveal about the world— if not the truth about the gods, the truth about the human beings who believe in those gods. The ways in which Herodotus allows a conventional or pious reading are just as important as the ways in which he radically undercuts such a reading. To better grasp the world as it is, to see what convention both reveals and obscures, the conventional must be left intact so that it can be interrogated. In order to think about something, we must learn how to see it as something strange, without fundamentally altering its character. By presenting the conventional or traditional alongside narrative strands

\textsuperscript{406} Romm (2006) 186 raises this possibility without decisively endorsing it: “does he, as an a author known for his shifting and ironic stance toward his material, actively seek to include within his text a range of views on such questions, as if to demonstrate that no certainty is possible?”

\textsuperscript{407} Herodotus “gives no sign of accepting the premise that the bull done to death is a god… Thus mockery even of unsound custom argues madness. There is a point of fundamental importance to be made here. Whatever Herodotus may have made of the conventions of Greek religion, we must no expect him to speak of them in a spirit of mockery. If the customs of foreigners are to be treated with respect, so surely are those of one’s own culture.” Scullion, (2006) 201
that challenge it, Herodotus challenges us to grapple with the complexity of the world as it is. Cambyses tries to enforce uniformity on the world. Herodotus instead preserves its diversity.

Yet there is a further effect of Herodotus’ reticence. Here we should remember that the Persians and the Hellenes resemble each other in their pursuit of empire and their desire for the foreign. If these people have similar customs, and Cambyses’ madness is an extreme iteration of those customs, his madness raises unsettling questions about the Hellenes. Herodotus’ narrative implies these parallels, but does not explicitly state them. This is for good reason. As Irwin notes, the Cambyses narrative shows the danger of speaking plainly in front of a tyrant. She asks: “Did the same hold true before a tyrannic polis and its tyrannical demos?… Just how plainly should Herodotus be expected to speak?” Herodotus’ reticence, it seems, is not only required by the powerful attachments of his audience, but also underscores the tyrannical overtones of those attachments. Alert readers will be chastened to find that Herodotus must exercise the same tact in front of Hellenes that is called for in the presence of despots. Persians and Hellenes are not so different as they appear. Both rage when their customary practices are challenged; indeed, only a madman would mock convention. Herodotus’ tact invites his audiences to see their own insanity, and thus become a little more sane.

**Conclusion: Madness and the Mockery of Others**

The proof that Herodotus offers of the madness of mocking others, the experiment that Darius conducts on cultural difference, leads to the conclusion that ‘custom is king of all’. Yet the details of the experiment suggest that, while custom rules all, the differences between

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408 Irwin, “Ethnography and Empire,” p. 68.
409 See Provencal (2015) for the sophistic features of Herodotus’ Persians.
customs matter; custom is king, not tyrant.\textsuperscript{410} A particularity of Hellenic convention will present an opportunity, however slight, for Herodotus to motivate his audience to inquiry that is neither destructive nor imperialistic.

In this experiment, Darius brings together the Greeks in his court and “asked them what would they take to eat their dead fathers. They said that no price in the world would make them do so.” After this, Darius summons the Kallatians, who practice this rite and, “in the presence of the Greeks (who understood the conversation through an interpreter), asked them what price would make them burn their dead fathers with fire. They shouted aloud, “Don’t mention such horrors!” (3.38).\textsuperscript{411} Several things lead to the conclusion that this experiment was not conducted to satisfy Darius’ own curiosity about the conventionality of funerary rites. For one, his own funerary conventions are not tested here; both the practices of the Greeks and the Kallatians run contrary to Persian practices (1.140, 3.16). For another, Herodotus makes the intended audience of this experiment quite clear, for it is in the presence of the Greeks that Darius inquires into the Kallatians’ practices. Darius’ own \textit{nomoi} remains unquestioned; what he seeks to prove is that the practices of the Greeks are things which elicit disgust and horror.\textsuperscript{412}

Yet what Darius proves to himself in this experiment is not what Herodotus discovers in it.\textsuperscript{413} Herodotus famously concludes this incident with a quotation from Pindar: “Custom is king

\textsuperscript{410} For how Herodotus distinguishes between kings and tyrants, see A. Ferrill, “Herodotus on Tyranny,” \textit{Historia} 27 (1978) pp. 385-398
\textsuperscript{411} Redfield (1985) 104-105 doubts that the Kallatians in fact ate their dead (although his incredulity might reveal his own cultural attachments). He suggests instead that Herodotus arranged these two diametrically opposed practices in order to fit his “macrosystemic” interests: “the pattern displayed by the range of cultures.”
\textsuperscript{412} Rood (2006) 300 notes that here “we see how ethnographic inquiry may be interlinked with imperial domination.”
\textsuperscript{413} Christ (1994) 188 takes it that Herodotus is in agreement with Darius but simply critical of his methods. I argue instead that Herodotus shows that Darius does not realize the implications of his findings for his own perspective.
of all.” The king of all — the Kallatians, the Greeks, and the Persians.\textsuperscript{414} This means that Darius’ response is as conventional, as customary, as those of the people he surveys; all alike exhibit a customary response. And indeed, as Lateiner observes, nomos “creates a basis from which each society judges other societies’ acts.”\textsuperscript{415} But this does not mean that there are no differences in the character of these conventional responses. Darius conducts this experiment to display something about his power and rationality to others; he does not interrogate his own, but instead considers his to be a privileged position from which to dictate to others. His belief in the self-evidence of his position is a mark of the particular conventions of his people; the very mode of his thinking is conventional. The Kallatians find these practices of the Greeks to be so impious that they inspire disgust; they cannot bear to hear “these horrors” mentioned.\textsuperscript{416} The strength of their attachments leads them to greet difference with revulsion. The Greeks, however, are able to bear hearing about other practices. They still prefer their own, but at least they are able to calmly talking it through. Redfield notes, “everywhere ‘nomos is king’, but only among the Greeks is nomos political rather than cultural.”\textsuperscript{417}

This suggests that, while custom is king, it is not always tyrant. Still, it rules, and this must not be understated. Although the conventions of the Hellenes permitted a certain degree of

\textsuperscript{414} Baragwanath (2008) 116 rightly observes that “Herodotus tells the story to prove the strength of belief in one’s own custom” and points to its demonstration of the customary quality of the beliefs of the Greeks and the Indians, but does not draw out its implications for Persian nomos. While this story does, as she observe depict “the clash between Cambyses’ behaviour and this affirmation of respect for nomoi”, the disregard that Darius and Cambyses have for others’ conventions is itself conventional, an aspect of the hyperrationalism cultivated by the Persians. Her assertion that “Cambyses’ behaviour cannot be predicted, or in retrospect comprehended, by the dictates of Persian custom” (117) thus misses out on the complexity of custom.

\textsuperscript{415} Lateiner (1989) 151

\textsuperscript{416} Extreme physical disgust and horror at confronting the other suggests the ways in which nomos can be embodied so as to feel almost natural, but also suggests the limitations of particular nomoi—the ways in which conventions traps you within a narrowed horizon by making a conventional barrier appear almost natural. cf Kristeva (1982)

\textsuperscript{417} Redfield (1985) 116
porousness, its fundamental boundaries were never in question. This raises a problem for Herodotus’ inquiry. If no culture exhibits true openness— if custom truly is the king of all— we must ask if Herodotus too is ruled over by it. Yet by presenting this experiment, Herodotus has shown that he, unlike each of the cultures he surveys, is aware of the problem that convention presents for vision. As Lateiner suggests, “to recognize the power of nomos is to be at one remove from it, and to possess the attitude necessary for studying it.” One must contend with the power of convention if one is to see it truly. The Persian despots, in their dedication to truth-telling, take the self-evidence of their perspectives for granted, and thus become more deeply entrenched within their conventional boundaries. In contrast, Herodotus uses his narrative to make plain what is usually hidden: the power of convention. He uses stories to bring to life the unseen ways that convention shapes our thinking. As with the story of Psammenitus, narrative can bring to life truths that cannot otherwise be told.

His audience is key to this. In the figure of Cambyses, Herodotus has shown the Hellenes an ugly image of their own curiosity. This painful parallel might inspire rage, so Herodotus must tread carefully. Yet that Hellenic nomoi permit the Hellenes to calmly hear and discuss difference opens up an opportunity for Herodotus’ narrative. This opportunity is limited; elsewhere in the Histories, Herodotus demonstrates the finite power of talk, even among the Hellenes. But it is there. The Hellenes, unlike other peoples, possess a nomos urging them to reflection: know thyself. While Socrates would use this command as a spur to philosophy, for Herodotus it prompts his travels, and the ethnographic inquiries they result in. As Thomas argues, “other peoples are different, but they are different in such a way as to reveal some

418 Lateiner (1989) 151
419 Consider, for example, that at Salamis, Themistocles had to resort to dirty tricks when he could not persuade the generals to adopt the most militarily sound policy. (8.75-83). Talking cannot always lead to the best outcomes.
fundamental characteristics of nature.\textsuperscript{420} The diverse customs of the world reveal the different permutations permitted by nature. What man has brought into being (nomos) helps reveal what he is. Herodotus can appeal to the Hellenic convention of self-knowledge to spur them to inquire into others; not to take, but to learn.

Conclusion

In the Histories, Herodotus reveals that thinking is suffused with attachment. The love of one’s own traps judgment within cultural boundaries, but Herodotus’ affective storytelling opens a path out of this dilemma. Herodotus tells stories that re-present not only the customs of others, or their modes of thinking, but that vicariously recreate the experience of diversity. In feeling what others feel, tasting what they taste (cf. 7.135), and suffering what they suffer, his narrative makes possible the sorts of human wisdom usually offered only through experience.\textsuperscript{421} Within these multiple and competing stories, his audience is invited to sense the limits of a narrowed perspective by being brought to confront the multiple, overlapping, and contradictory stories and customs that man has brought into being (1.1).\textsuperscript{422} The artfulness of his storytelling awakens our affect, leading our love of one’s own to feel with what is different. Affect here leads us to expand our partiality. Herodotus’ inquiry into inquiry has thus revealed that inquiry must be properly motivated. Christ has argued that Herodotus offers himself up as a model of a disinterested inquirer;\textsuperscript{423} Irwin has shown how Herodotus underscores the difficulty of such inquiry.\textsuperscript{424} I contend, however, that disinterested inquiry is not the goal. Herodotus does not share the aspirations of contemporary journalistic practice; he does not seek to be an objective reporter.

\textsuperscript{420} Thomas (2000) 71
\textsuperscript{421} Shapiro, (1994), 349-355
\textsuperscript{422} Schlosser, (2014) 240
\textsuperscript{423} Christ (1994)
\textsuperscript{424} Irwin (2014)
Indeed, the pervasiveness of his authorial presence suggests that perfect neutrality is not required in order to inquire well. One must be properly motivated — and one must contend with the motivations, the attachments, of others.

In this, Herodotus shows how greatly he differs from Cambyses. He does not command us to see the truths he presents; we are rather moved to understand the diverse perspectives presented in his narrative, and through this, moved to better understand ourselves. As Zerilli has argued, “it is important to put oneself in the place of the other, not because ethics calls for it (though it well might) but because seeing the world from different perspectives is the political condition of impartiality and objectivity. We should to try to see from other perspectives because these perspectives open the world up to us...” Impartiality is achieved by better engaging with the multiple and complex perspectives that inhabit our shared world. The objectivity that Cambyses fantasizes is his, is in truth a siren luring one into madness. We do not become impartial by escaping the rooted, the local, and the affective, but by working through these conditions. Our deeply personal and attached concern can potentially draw us out of a narrowed perspective and into the complexity of our shared world. To know the world we live in requires that we understand others. Herodotus’ narrative jostles us out of our complacency, our absolute trust in our vision. But it also awakens our concern with what is other. The Persians are attracted to difference because of their imperialism; in this, their attraction to the other destroys it. Herodotus demonstrates that inquiry does not have to leave affect behind. We do not have to, and in fact cannot, seek to be impartial. Rather, cross-cultural inquiry works not by papering over our affect but by bringing it into the open. We are moved to inquire into others because that is how we better grasp the complex and elusive truth about the world.

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And it is in this that Herodotean story-telling betters Persian truth-telling. The Persian despots cannot look without desiring to take; Herodotus, on the other hand, looks without conquering, inquires without destroying, for his aim, after all, is to set forth his inquiries “so that time may not draw the colour from what man has brought into being.” (1.1). The warning of Tomyris, Queen of the Massagetae, to Cyrus, before his defeat at her hands, captures this essential difference: “King of the Medes, cease to be so eager to do what you are doing... Give it over and rule over your own people, and endure to look upon us governing ours. Still, you will not follow this advice of mine, but will do anything rather than remain at rest.” (1.206). Tomyris was right. Cyrus could not endure to look without wanting to take. But Herodotus does more than endure to look; he wants to. The genius of his inquiry is the ways in which it kindles this desire within us too.
Chapter Four
Violence, Vengeance and Freedom: Scythia And Athens

Herodotus praises the Scythians for making “the most clever discovery among all the people we know, and of the one thing that is greatest in human affairs—although for the rest I do not admire them much” (4.46). With this remark, Herodotus makes the most pronounced and emphatic judgment of his cross-cultural journey, all the more notable for its abundance of superlatives: the ‘most clever’ discovery about the one thing that is ‘greatest in human affairs’. Such superlatives demand our attention. If we are to grasp Herodotus’ cross-cultural judgment, we can do no better than to unpack the consequences of Herodotus’ remarkable endorsement of this Scythian discovery. Its superlative character means that all else must be assessed in its light; clarifying it will clarify the Histories as a whole.

Equally important, however, is the qualification Herodotus attaches to his lavish praise: “for the rest I do not admire them much” (4.46). By highlighting the coexistence of the greatest thing with much that is not admirable, Herodotus invites us to question the relationship between these. We must inquire into whether the great and the ugly in Scythia co-exist accidentally or essentially; that is, we must ask if this discovery of ‘what is greatest’ depends in some way upon that which Herodotus fails to admire, or, conversely, if this greatest discovery can be stripped of its generally ignoble trappings. The answer to this dilemma will reveal whether or not this greatest human discovery—this thing that Herodotus judges to be best for human beings—can guide or inspire elsewhere, or if it is merely a wonder, locked within its local context.

The first step to properly understanding the discovery of the Scythians is to grasp its background, the human problem to which it is a response. To this end, I shall ground Herodotus’ praise of Scythia in his most comprehensive statement on the character of the world: his careful
treatment of divine providence, which appears near the end of the Persian logos and shortly before the Scythian. In this short section, Herodotus reveals the ubiquity of war; this passage thus encapsulates the primary theme of the Histories. War is an organizing principle of the natural world; as part of the divinely-ordained ecological balance, predators wage war on prey—and on their own kind. Humanity is not exempt from this natural inclination. But human beings, unlike our fellow predators, are given to excess in the pursuit of war. Indeed, we escalate the cycle of violence precisely through our misguided attempts to remove ourselves from this cycle: our vulnerability leads us to be vicious. We pursue violent vengeance as a way to smite our enemies and deter future ones, and we pursue empire because, like Cyrus’ Persians, we believe we must either rule or be ruled. But instead of insulating us from the effects of war, vengeance and empire spur us to it. The narratives we create about our actions lead us to misjudge their consequences.

Herodotus must therefore shift the narrative. First, he tempers the thirst for vengeance by recasting the Hellenic gods as deities that restrain rather than inspire human vengeance. Herodotus here acts as Homer; he reshapes the poetic images that subtly influence the Greeks for the sake of the politically salutary. Yet even if we do not pursue violent vengeance, we still inhabit a world of potentially hostile others. Cyrus posits empire as a way to subjugate those threats. His vision is compelling, yet it is not exhaustive. While Cyrus insists that one must pursue empire in order to be free, the Scythians in fact possess freedom without empire. This is their great discovery. By praising the Scythians, Herodotus encourages his Hellenic audience (already on their way to pursuing an empire of their own) to imagine a free way of life that does not require domination. Yet because of the costs of that way of life, the Scythian solution cannot
be adopted wholesale. The complex character of Herodotus’ depiction of the Scythians urges the Hellenes to think through the benefits of freedom— and the costs of protecting it.

To that end, to conclude this chapter I turn to a brief overview of Herodotus’ praise of Athenian freedom. As many have recognized, Herodotus’ treatment of Athens is complex; Moles in particular has demonstrated its nuances.\textsuperscript{426} Others have noted the ‘Scythian’ character of Herodotus’ Athenians.\textsuperscript{427} Given this, I examine how Herodotus’ Scythian logos shapes our reception of his account of Athens. The Scythian response to the ubiquity of war is to strengthen the communal by utterly submerging the individual within it; Athenian freedom, on the other hand, flourishes precisely through the primacy it grants to the individual. The space made for individual agency within Athens helps her defeat the Persians— yet it also leaves the city vulnerable to the human tendency for overreach. What makes Athens great— her individuals— also leaves her vulnerable. The energetic individuals of Athens may possess more fully flourishing individual lives, but unlike the Scythians, they are enmeshed within the human cycle of violence and vengeance. Athens is not immune from the destruction that threatens to engulf all cities.

\textit{Strife and Vengeance: Herodotean Divine Providence}

Near the end of the Persian narrative and before the Scythian, Herodotus makes a schematic observation about the character of the animal world, which he attributes to divine providence:

\begin{quote}
There is a divine providence, with a kind of wisdom to it, according to which whatever is cowardly of spirit and edible should be prolific in progeny, so that, with all the eating of them, they should not fail to exist; while things that are
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{426} Moles (1996), (2002).
savage and inflict pain are infertile. (3.108)

While others have expounded on the theme of divine jealousy — the Hellene Solon (1.32) and the Egyptian Amasis (3.40)—here Herodotus, in his own voice, explicitly endorses the notion of divine providence. Notably, he treats it as being made manifest not through oracles, myths, or visitations, the usual flourishes of the divine, but in the everyday functioning of the animal world. Herodotus here adopts a ‘rationalized’ view of the divine, rather than the mythic or poetic, for the divine here figures not as the various subjects of those stories crafted ‘the day before yesterday’ (2.53) by Homer and the other poets, but rather as wisdom exhibited through nature; the natural reveals the supernatural. As I argued earlier, Herodotus has been problematizing the divine while respecting belief; his treatment of the divine here complicates that project. Heretofore, Herodotus has treated the divine as an aspect of convention; it here appears to manifest itself apart from the conventions of human beings, in the ecology of the world. His treatment of divine providence will thus cast light on how far he takes his ‘conventional’ reading of the gods.

This providence at first seems to appear precisely in its beneficence to humanity, for it is the relative rarity of a species vicious to man that prompts Herodotus’ reflections. Because the divine limits the winged snakes of Arabia, the land becomes habitable for human beings (3.108-3.109). Though this, the care of the divine becomes evident. Yet the apparent particularity of this, which is precisely what might lead us human beings to interpret it as divine providence,

428 Thomas (2000) 141-149 details the way that this passage engages with late fifth century scientific speculation.
429 chapter two and three: see also Scullion (2006)
431 Thomas (2000) 141 has observed of this passage that “we are treated to what is almost a lecture on biology in miniature, and an almost Darwinian theory about the survival strategies of different species of animal.”
disappears when we examine the mechanics of this divine providence. Prey are in general prolific and predators in general few; the divine does not particularly loathe snakes nor does it particularly love man. The ordinary run of things, not an extraordinary particularity, makes manifest divine care.

Despite this, it first appears that nature does prefer the prey, for it has guaranteed its continued existence by granting it prolific fertility, as well as safeguarding it by the relative fewness of the fierce. Herodotus gives as an example the hare, an animal “hunted by every wild beast, bird, and man” (3.108). Victim to every predator, it procreates at an astonishing rate in order to compensate for this;⁴³² a fact made even more astonishing in comparison with the predator par excellence, the lion, which, while “the strongest and most daring of animals, gives birth only once in her life and to but one cub” (3.108). This is because, according to Herodotus, as it quickens the cub destroys the womb that nourishes it. This fiercest of predators is vicious, not only to its prey, but to its own kind. Providence has protected the vulnerable by making the predatory not only few but self-destructive.

Indeed, the distinguishing mark of the predator is not only its fierceness to other species, but its habit of making war on its own kind. Of vipers and winged snakes, Herodotus writes that “if these were born as nature is in them to do, there would be no living for man” (3.109.) This is the sole mention of nature in this statement dealing with the natural world, and it is instructive. According to Herodotus, the female viper kills the male during intercourse, and “the female pays a kind of recompense, too, to the male. For the children, while still in the womb, take vengeance for their male parent by eating through their mother’s insides…. Other snakes, which are not

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⁴³² Thomas (2000) 145-146 notes that Herodotus uses a highly technical and specialized word, meaning superfetation, to describe the fecundity of the hare. This accentuates the scientific aspect of Herodotus’ presentation.
destructive of man, lay eggs and hatch out an infinity of children” (3.109). In their viciousness, which is according to their nature, they counteract what is also ‘as nature is in them to do’. Nature seems to be at war with itself; it thwarts its own possibility through destructive reproduction. Yet this war is the mark of the beneficence of divine providence, for otherwise, ‘there would be no living for man.’ At first glance, divine providence— however ‘rationalized’ or ‘naturalized’— appears real, beneficent, and with particular concern for humanity and its vulnerability. Contra Solon and Amasis, divine providence is here apparently vindicated in the mouth of Herodotus himself.433

Yet reconsidered from the perspective of the predator, the partiality of the divine for the prey disappears. The very fecundity of prey is a blessing for the predator; while the predators are few, the sources of their nourishment (provided by the weak and vulnerable species) are many. Indeed, the very viciousness of prey guarantees its sustenance; the strength and ferocity of the lion provides it with the means to flourish, i.e., to destroy its prey. Even the fewness of the predator is a blessing, for too many predators and the prey would be wiped out. Divine providence manifests itself, then, not through particular concern with one species or another, but rather through what we might call a sustainable ecosystem. The divine does not show particular concern for prey nor for predator; it loves rather balance. Yet this balance is achieved, not by pacific cohabitation of the earth, but by war: as Benardete notes, “Nature is composed of both generation and destruction; the war between them constitutes providence, whose wisdom consists in preventing the complete triumph of either opposite.”434 The predators are checked by their own self-destructiveness, as the prey are checked by the predators. The wisdom of the divine is demonstrated through the balance that prevails.

433 Romm (2006) 182-183 reads this as a vindication
434 Benardete (1969) 91
This seems in tension with what appeared at first to be the divine’s preference for human beings, made manifest through the absence of winged snakes in most of the known world. This preference disappears if divine providence operates through the neutral balancing of generation and destruction. Still, divine favour might be expressed through the exemption of humanity from this ecosystem of strife. Yet Herodotus does mention man, if only in passing: we are included amongst the predators of that exemplary prey, the hare: ‘hunted by every wild beast, bird, and man.’\(^{435}\) The aptness of our inclusion becomes apparent when we consider man in light of the characteristics of predators. While not as infertile as the lion, we are nowhere near as fertile as the hare; human pregnancies are relatively long, difficult, and generally result in single, not multiple births.\(^{436}\) In generation, human beings resemble predators rather than prey.\(^{437}\)

But our resemblance to the predator goes deeper: we are a vengeful species. Indeed, the very opening of the Histories foregrounds the vengefulness of man. Immediately after Herodotus’ broad and generous proem, in which he promises to fairly report the great and wonderful deeds of Greeks and barbarians alike, he turns to the specifics of those works and deeds. From Herodotus’ impartial reportage, we are plunged into partisan tales of vengeance (1.1-12). The opening chapters of the Histories read as one long tally of acts of vengeance, both between peoples (the prosaic retelling of the Trojan War at 1.1-5) and within the family (the vengeance of Candaules’ wife at 1.6-12). Its prominence in the beginning of Herodotus’ record

\(^{435}\) emphasis added
\(^{436}\) we can have multiple pregnancies over our relatively long fertile life, but the prolonged breastfeeding practiced by many traditional societies tends to suppress ovulation; because of this, the traditional practices of human childrearing tend to promote prolonged space between pregnancies.
\(^{437}\) Thomas (2000) 145 suggests that Herodotus’ description of the destruction of the lions’ womb resonates with late fifth century medical opinion on the cause of human birth pangs: the infant’s struggle to emerge from the womb.
of the works and deeds of man suggest that vengeance is a particularly notable human trait. In the divinely ordained ecosystem of strife, human beings are included amongst the predators.

Herodotus signals this through his evocative anthropomorphization of the reproduction of predators. The female viper slays the male at the moment of conception; but the female ‘pays a kind of recompense’ as the children, while still within the womb, “take vengeance for their male parent” (3.109) by destroying her womb. This is the natural process of generation and destruction recast as Greek tragedy. While this is undoubtedly a compelling literary flourish, it also has the effect of ‘politicizing’ the natural reproduction (and destruction) of the animal world. Justice, punishment, and vengeance, characteristics of the complex human world of conventions, a world of dubious or unclear naturalness, all become features of the natural balance between generation and destruction ordained, according to Herodotus, by divine providence. This both ‘denaturalizes’ nature — making strange its everyday processes— while also ‘naturalizing’ these human capacities. Both the human and animal world look different after this presentation. By attributing human motivation to animal behaviour, Herodotus has asked us to reconsider our anthropocentric perspective, our understanding of our own motivations. What we magnify by calling ‘justice’, ‘punishment’, and ‘vengeance’ might simply be part of a natural process, as instinctual as the viper’s bite. This strips vengeance of its grandeur.

There is a disjuncture, then, between our perspective and that of the viper. The viper does not consider its actions in the light of justice and retribution as we do. This suggests a similar tension between the human perspective and the divine. The righteousness of human vengeance disappears if it is simply a mechanism of the divinely ordained balance. The broadness and impartiality that marks Herodotus’ perspective on the partisan entanglements of human beings

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438 Romm (2006) 183 notes that it seems like “a miniature Oresteia were played out in the snake world with each new generation of young.”
might be made possible precisely by his attempts to view us in this light, as part of the same ecosystem that impartially balances the lives of prey and predator, showing care for all by caring for none in particular. Herodotus has thus vindicated divine providence precisely by stripping it of its usual signifier: particular and partial care. No individual—not even an individual species—is the object of its affection; rather we are all cared for by its individual indifference, its care for balance on a vast, impartial, and ecological scale.

Yet Herodotus has only implied the place of the human within this larger scheme. We must ask why this is the case, how this reticence suits his purposes. First, to grasp the human position as both predator and prey—and why Herodotus highlights our vulnerability but only implies our viciousness—requires that we recognize the ways in which human beings are not like their fellow predators. No one need exhort the lion or the viper to vengeance; it is done as a matter of course. It is automatic, it is thoughtless— but, because of these qualities, it is limited. For example, the offspring of vipers avenge the murder of their father by destroying his murderer, and there, their vengeance comes to an end— it extends no further. Animal vengeance (in Herodotus’ telling) is appropriate, a direct requital for wrongs done; in this, it is moderate. Yet throughout the Histories, we see that human beings are not only inclined to vengeance, but that they are excessively given to it. Human vengeance, unlike the ‘animal’, is not appropriate or balanced. Rather, it escalates.

Consider—as just one amongst many, many examples—the vengeance of Pheretime. To avenge her murdered son (himself a perpetrator of great vengeance, 4.164), Pheretime led an

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439 We must always recall Herodotus’ insistence on the importance of suitability in storytelling—discussed at length in Chapter Two.
441 Consider the escalation characteristic of the account of the Trojan War that opens the book, or any of the innumerable and hopelessly tangled list of grievances that marks the interaction between cities in Book 3.
invasion of Persians against her former city, considering it guilty of his murder. Once the city was taken, “those of the Barcaeans who were most guilty were handed over to Pheretime by the Persians, and she had them impaled all around the walls. In the case of their women, she had their breasts cut off and set these too on the wall around. For the rest of the Barcaeans, she bade the Persians make booty of them…” (4.202). Unlike the vengeance Herodotus attributes to the animals, Pheretime’s vengeance is excessive and disproportionate. It goes beyond mere recompense and becomes brutal and senseless cruelty; in this, her quest for justice becomes itself unjust. Vipers and lions cannot equal her vengeance. The case of Pheretime shows that vengeance, which Herodotus figures as a mechanism of the balance ordained by divine providence, can become unbalanced and extreme in human hands. That which upheld balance seems rather to threaten it.

The human proclivity toward overreach explains Herodotus’ reticence in his meditation on divine providence, his refusal to underscore our predatory and vengeful qualities. As Pheretime has demonstrated, human beings are all too prone to vengeance; we require aid in restraining this aspect of ourselves, rather than the licence granted by highlighting it. As I argued earlier, Herodotus has urged the capacity for restraint as a uniquely human trait (2.64). While in that passage, he spoke of our capacity for restraining our erotic or reproductive selves, it now appears that our desire for vengeance—which is both a part of ecological balance and a

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442 For mutilation in Herodotus, see Lateiner (1987) 92-3
443 This is suggested by the oft-observed fact that the account of the reproduction of lions offered by Herodotus would, if accurate, lead to their utter destruction.
444 In a landmark study, researchers found that portraying an unwanted behaviour as common in fact encouraged it. (Robert B. Cialdini, Linda J. Demaine, Brad J. Sagarin, Daniel W. Barrett, Kelton Rhoads, and Patricia L. Winter, “Managing Social Norms for Persuasive Impact.” Social Influence Vol. 1, Iss. 1, 2006)
threat to it—is one of the key aspects of human behaviour necessitating the careful exercise of restraint.

This accounts for the way in which Herodotus, at 3.108, seems to both debunk divine providence (by suggesting its indifference to any individual or even any species in particular) while also leaving it intact (by supporting its ‘wisdom’, 3.108, and allowing the initial impression of its benevolence to man). Recall the dual currents at work in Herodotus’ exegesis of Homer (2.112-120). There, Herodotus first reduced the stuff of epic to a paltry tale of cluelessness and cruelty, then turned around and affixed an edifying moral to his tawdry and senseless story: “The Divine was laying his plans that, as the Trojans perished in utter destruction, they might make this thing manifest to all the world: that for great wrongdoings, great also are the punishments from the gods” (2.120). In this, Herodotus let the seams show in his stitching together of the poetic (divine justice) and the prosaic (the lowness of men), all the while underlining the poet’s discretion in choosing what is suitable for the story. Both strains are key to Herodotus’ work; they require each other. Herodotus’ retelling of the Trojan war showed the prosaic quality of that war; its humanity, its cruelty, and because of these, its banality. But the moral that he affixed, apparently clumsily, to that story of human ugliness suggests the importance of the notion of divine care as a political force, precisely because of humanity’s propensity towards the senseless, the cruel, and the excessive. The moral that Homer had the divine teach through the Trojan War was, according to Herodotus, ‘that for great wrongdoings, great also are the punishments from the gods” (2.120). In this light, the gods care for human beings—and this care seems to manifest primarily as a source of restraint, as punishment for great wrongdoings. In his treatment of the Trojan War, Herodotus left a notion of divine providence intact because of the ways in which such a notion might restrain the worst of our
excesses. It emerges here that that which most requires restraint is precisely our excessive love of
vengeance.

Pheretime is therefore not only one example amongst many of the excessiveness of human vengeance; she is also the subject of an exemplary punishment for this excessive vengeance, and so becomes an aspect of Herodotus’ attempt to restrain our worst tendencies. Her story concludes thus:

But neither did Pheretime end her life well. For straightway after her vengeance on the Barcaecans she went back home to Egypt and there died very foully. For when yet living she bred of herself a mass of worms, so that mankind may see that violent vengeance earns the gods’ grudges. Such and so great was the revenge of Pheretime, daughter of Battus, upon the people of Barca. (4.205).

Pheretime’s punishment echoes the exemplary character of the punishment that, according to Herodotus, the gods ordained for Troy. The intent behind both punishments is to show mankind that great wrongdoings— in Pheretime’s case, vengeance— are an affront to the divine, punishable with a highly visible and dramatic destruction. Yet there is a disparallel between these two cases of exemplary justice. Pheretime’s punishment, unlike the destruction of Troy, was earned. Whereas the inappropriateness of the punishment of Troy invited questioning, the aptness of Pheretime’s punishment discourages it. With his Trojan narrative, Herodotus underlined the rhetorical aspect of Homer’s poetry; he now adapts such rhetoric for his own use.445

With Pheretime’s fate, Herodotus thus refines Hellenic piety. That this is a conscious ploy of Herodotus is reinforced when we consider again the fate of Cambyses. There, I noted that

445 Fisher (2002) 215 notes that Pheretime’s case is the only time Herodotus speaks of divine phthonos in his own voice.
of all the cases of impiety in the *Histories*, none so called out for divine punishment as the murder of a god— and yet Herodotus insisted on explaining Cambyses’ fate in naturalist terms (3.33). That this obvious and flagrant transgression against the divine, with all of its appearances of having been met with a perfectly and poetically symmetrical punishment, is not attributed to the divine suggests that Herodotus holds that no particular human ill, no matter how much it cries out for it, can be with certainty labelled divine punishment. By casting doubt on the divine origins of Cambyses’ affliction, he has established a principle that his active readers can apply to all others. Taken together with his assertion of poetic discretion— the poet’s freedom to shape the material according to his own ends— we can never take any divine action in the *Histories* as straightforward and clear. Cambyses might simply have been mad; Pheretime might have been likewise victim of the frailty of the human body, “as indeed there are so many ills that beset mankind” (3.33). The pertinent question is why it serves Herodotus to treat one in naturalist terms, thereby casting doubt on all divine punishments, only later to turn around and treat this particular case as clear evidence of the supernatural. Both treatments must suit Herodotus’ story in some way.

To grasp Pheretime’s fate, we must attend to what Herodotus’ gods— rather than Homer’s — are specifically punishing. With his Trojan epic, Homer had his gods punish the generic ‘great wrongdoings’ (μεγάλων ἄδικημάτων). Herodotus, on the other hand, has his punish the more precise ‘vengeance’ (τιμωρίαι). The precision of this punishment suggests that Herodotus intends his vision of the gods to restrain human beings in that very dimension in which they threaten to undo the ‘divine’ balance: their excessive vengeance. The necessity of this Herodotean refinement becomes clear when considered in the light of the story of Hermotimus and his vengeance on Panionius. The Hellene Hermotimus, after having been
enslaved as a boy, was bought by Panionius, a man who “made a living from the most infamous of actions” (8.105): he would buy beautiful boys, castrate them, and then sell them for great sums. Hermotimus, after undergoing this permanent violation, grew to become the most prominent eunuch at Xerxes’ court (8.105). Encountering Panionius again later, Hermotimus deceived him by first proclaiming that he had received great benefits from his castration, and promising to do Panionius all the good he could if the latter would bring his entire household to come and live with him (8.106). When the household of Panionius was entirely in Hermotimus’ power, Hermotimus made a long speech castigating Panionius: “You thought that the gods would not notice what you did then. You have acted vilely, and they in the justice of their law have brought you into my hands, so that you cannot complain of the vengeance that will come to you from me.” (8.106). After this, Hermotimus forced Panionius to castrate his own children, and then the children were forced to castrate their father in turn.

What this dark story reveals is that gods figured as punishers of wrongdoing are not gods capable of restraining vengeance. Indeed, the gods here encourage vengeance, rather than restraining it; they provide a narrative framework within which vengeance is construed as righteous and holy. Indeed, Hermotimus conceives of himself as the instrument of divine punishment: “they in the justice of their law have brought you into my hands”. The story that Hermotimus tells about himself casts his vengeance as condoned or even urged by the gods: “you cannot complain of the vengeance that will come to you from me”. Yet Herodotus does not share Hermotimus’ appraisal of the situation.446 As an epitaph to this story, Herodotus writes that “so it was that vengeance and Hermotimus overtook Panionius” (8.106). Hermotimus and his

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446 Pace Fisher (2002) 215 who argues that “the story is told in a way that invites us to agree with Hermotimus that the god have worked to deliver Panionius into his hands...” I insist that we must distinguish between Hermotimus’ perspective and Herodotus. Herodotus withholds explicit endorsement of Panionius’ verdict. This is telling.
vengeance here are the actors of this story— not the gods. Yet this story has made a point about traditional Hellenic theology. The gods, figured vaguely as punishers of great wrongdoings, cannot effectively inhibit or restrain human vengeance. If Herodotus wishes to constrain the human predilection towards vengeance, and thus protect the balance that is threatened by our excessiveness on this front, he must recast the gods and their relationship to vengeance. The narrative that exhorts us to vengeance must be shifted. Herodotus thus minimizes the extent to which it is a human proclivity, and recasts it as belonging properly to the animals (vipers and lions) and to the divine, which, by punishing Pheretime so vividly, has shown all the world that that it begrudges the violent vengeance of human beings.

Still, this careful balancing act that Herodotus has performed in his treatment of divine providence has alerted his active readers to the nature of the world that we inhabit. Like animals, we inhabit a world characterized by constant strife. This suggests a sinister reason behind the broadness of Herodotus’ purview: “I will go forward in my account, covering alike the small and great cities of mankind. For of those that were great in earlier times, most have now become small, and those that were great in my time were small in the time before. Since, then, I know that man’s good fortune never abides in the same place, I will make mention of both alike.” (1.5). The pervasiveness of strife, the eternal battle between destruction and generation, accounts for the rise and fall of cities and the fickleness of fortune.

Viewed from the ecological perspective of divine providence (as re-worked by Herodotus) the dual nature of human beings — both predator and prey— emerges more clearly. This duality is key to understanding the place of human beings within this ecosystem of strife. That we are vicious means that we are also always vulnerable. This predicament is starkly stated in the closing lines of the *Histories*; the apparent inevitability of war thus begins and ends the
In this flashback, Cyrus warns the Persians that the nature of the world is such that they must either rule or be ruled: if they chose the comfort of an easy life, “they should prepare to be no longer those who rule but those who would be ruled” (9.122). Hearing this, “they chose to rule, living in a wretched land, rather than to sow the level plains and be slaves to others” (9.122). The final word of the book, δουλεύειν, means ‘to be slaves’. This echoes ominously, warning of the fate that awaits all who would not rule. Because human beings are both predator and prey, it might seem that we cannot help but be one or the other; and if we refuse to be predators, we will be doomed to be prey.

Yet Cyrus is not Herodotus, and the despot’s stark, either/or framing of potential human fates is not necessarily that of the writer. The divine providence section shows that Herodotus agrees with Cyrus that human beings are always vulnerable. Yet that Herodotus attempts to restrain our potential for viciousness suggests that we can attend to our vulnerability, to the ever-present potential for enslavement, without becoming predators of men, the rulers of all. Scythia holds forth this promise. It is in the way that they respond to this feature of the human world—its constant strife, and our vulnerability and viciousness—that the greatness of the Scythian discovery truly lies.

**Scythia: Land of Freedom and Forgetfulness**

Against this general backdrop of strife and violence, the particular genius of the Scythians emerges more clearly: “the Scythian nation has made the most clever discovery among

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447 Once thought to be an indication of the incompletion of the work, recent scholarship has shown that this ending evokes key themes of the Histories, thus suggesting its careful construction. See *inter alia* Pelling “east is east,” Dewald (1997), Flower and Marincola (2002), Flower (2006).

448 Raaflaub (1987) 245: with this story, “we are invited to extrapolate.”

449 Redfield (1985) 109-110 offers that the Histories sorts peoples into ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ categories; the ‘hard peoples’ conquer (112-113).

450 Moles (2002) 51
all the people we know, and of the one thing that is greatest in human affairs… This greatest thing that they have discovered is how no invader who comes against them can ever escape and how none can catch them if they do not wish to be caught” (4.46). The defensive freedom of the Scythians— their ability to evade and resist all those who would come against them— allows them to escape, not only their invaders, but the general cycle of strife that, according to Herodotus, characterizes the usual interaction between peoples. With this discovery, they have somehow contrived to stand apart from the ecology of destruction within which all beings live. They, apparently alone among peoples, are both “invincible and inaccessible”(4.46). In guaranteeing their freedom, they have ensured their continued existence as a people against the usual ravages of time (1.5) and war. And this, Herodotus avers, is the ‘one thing that is greatest in human affairs.’

With this, it becomes vividly clear how deeply political is Herodotus’ understanding of human beings and their flourishing. In praising the Scythians so absolutely, Herodotus has displayed his own understanding of what “is greatest in human affairs” (4.46). If the Scythians value freedom above all else, his superlative praise signals that so too does Herodotus. Because of this, we must bear in mind Herodotus’ Scythian cast of mind if we are to grasp his stance towards all other peoples and ways of life. Yet we should note the character of the political as presented here. The Scythians have discovered freedom, but they experience it collectively, not individually; they as a people are freed from the rule of other peoples. This is freedom understood not domestically but internationally. Because of this, the question of the regime is absent from this conception of politics; their concern is not so much with who amongst

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452 cf. 5.78
the Scythians rules, but rather with how they can collectively escape being ruled by others.\textsuperscript{453} Since Herodotus has revealed his own understanding of politics by endorsing the Scythians’ way of life, this is of vast importance.

To understand this, we must return to Cyrus’ epigrammatic statement on the basic problem of politics, with which Herodotus ends the \textit{Histories}. By endorsing the understanding of politics embodied by the Scythians’ practice, Herodotus has suggested a qualified agreement with Cyrus—and an even more important demurral.\textsuperscript{454} The understanding of politics embodied in the Scythians’ way of life suggests that escaping the rule of others is of paramount importance, and thus far is in agreement with Cyrus’ dictate. Indeed, Cyrus and the Scythians concur regarding the threat that luxury poses to freedom: \textsuperscript{455} as Cyrus told the Persians “from soft countries come soft men. It is not possible that from the same land stems a growth of wondrous fruit and men who are good soldiers” (9.122). The Scythians too scorn the luxuries of a settled way of life, and it is this, Herodotus suggests, that partially enables their freedom (4.46). Yet the Scythians manage to practice this freedom from others without actively seeking an empire in turn. That is, they have escaped the either/or dilemma that Cyrus had so persuasively urged.\textsuperscript{456} By endorsing the Scythians, Herodotus has suggested that Cyrus is right- but only to a point. The

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\item[453] In this, they differ from the Hellenes- the only other peoples in the work who evidence a plurality of regimes- and from the later Aristotle, for whom the regime is the political question. Still, despite the debate of the regimes amongst the Persians, (in which a plurality of regimes was debated in theory) in practice, neither the Persians nor any other people display a diversity of regime type. The question of the regime seems to be a Hellenic innovation.
\item[454] Pace Fornara (1971) 78, who takes it that Herodotus agrees with Cyrus’ dictum that one rule or be ruled.
\item[455] Redfield (1985) for hard and soft cultures.
\item[456] The Scythians had invaded Asia and put down the Medes, but in Herodotus’ depiction, their rule seems almost accidental: “They [the Scythians had followed the Cimmerians in pursuit and so invaded Asia and had put down the Medes from their empire… but after their twenty-eight years in Asia they went home again…” (4.1) The Scythians here seem to have stumbled into- and out of- empire. It is incidental to their freedom, not essential to it.
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greatest thing for a human community seems to lie in escaping the rule of others, not in attaining an empire. Defence does not require offence.\textsuperscript{457}

Empire and freedom thus do not necessarily belong together. Yet as I argued earlier,\textsuperscript{458} the Persians cannot but see these as combined; one avoids being ruled only by ruling others. Their self-narrative urges that freedom lies in only mastery.\textsuperscript{459} Yet the Scythians have managed to separate the two, and it is their freedom from others that Herodotus endorses. The Scythians undermine the basic premise of Persian political understanding, that one either rule or be ruled. The sense of necessity that drives the Persian invasion— and the fatalism that marks many individual Persians’ attitudes towards that war— is revealed as based upon a compelling but ultimately inadequate premise.\textsuperscript{460} The Persians are trapped within their own narrative, and inhibited from thinking outside of its confines. Here, then, Herodotus has deepened our understanding of the Persians by turning to the Scythians, once again demonstrating that cross-cultural inquiry can make plain what might otherwise remain beyond the horizon of one’s understanding.

The Scythian discovery, however, offers a counterpoint not only to the Persian way of life, but also to the Hellenic. Hartog in particular argues that Herodotus structures the nomadic Scythians as the ‘Other’ to the autochthonous Athenians.\textsuperscript{461} Yet as Dewald, Munson and Braund have argued, the contrast the Scythians offer is much more complex than Hartog suggests.\textsuperscript{462} The Scythian way of life, for all its apparent difference, resonates with the Hellenic love of

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\item \textsuperscript{457} Braund (2004) 29 notes the centrality of defence to Scythian excellence.
\item \textsuperscript{458} See chapter three
\item \textsuperscript{459} See Munson (2009) 469-470 for the ways this closing episode suggests the Persian attempt to negotiate their self-image.
\item \textsuperscript{460} 7.8, 9.16
\item \textsuperscript{461} Hartog (1988) 11
\item \textsuperscript{462} Dewald (1990) 218, 220-21, Munson (2001) 107-123; Braund (2004).
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This shared aspiration makes the differences between the two all the more critical. The Scythians are free themselves without dominating others, yet Athenian freedom will lead to empire. Given the ways that Herodotus’ narrative of the Persian war foreshadows the Peloponnesian, Cyrus’ lesson to the Persians is often read as Herodotus’ message to the Athenians, either warning them against empire or advising them on what it takes to maintain one. But Herodotus’ praise of the Scythians signals the complexity of his stance toward empire. Cyrus might be right about the nature of the world, its essential violence and instability, but wrong, or at least not completely right, about the best response to such a world. The Scythians offer the Athenians another way: freedom without empire.

Yet this way is not without its profound challenges. As Herodotus observes immediately after praising the Scythians so superlatively, their way of life has its pitfalls: “for the rest I do not admire them much” (4.46). The greatest discovery in human affairs, which is praiseworthy, coexists alongside much that is not. This co-existence will prove essential in understanding the Scythians and the role they play in the work as a whole. The crux lies in the way that what is best about the Scythians— their freedom — is enabled precisely by that which is worst. As will emerge, all that is ‘not admirable’ about the Scythians stems from that contrivance that allows their freedom: their rejection of a settled way of life and all it entails. As will emerge, their nomadic existence urges habits of thought that encourage a rigid identity; their attachment to this

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463 Munson (2001) 111: The Scythians “reflect in a direct way the Greek audience’s ideology of freedom….”
464 See Raaflaub (1987); Moles (1996)
465 Flower (2006) 287: “Cyrus’ advice points a moral and gives a warning, but one whose full significance was yet to be realized.”
466 Braund (2004) 30 notes the appeal to Athens of Scythian defensive genius, but also the tension such appeal generates.
467 Lateiner (1989) 156 observes that their topography and climate provided “stimuli for human ingenuity” - these factors inspired the great Scythian discovery of freedom. Yet, as I will show, it also cultivated what is least admirable about the Scythian way of life.
rigid common identity is so strong that it can bear neither foreignness or individuality. In Scythia, the common is all, for better and for worse.

Because of this, the paradox of Scythian excellence — its combination of the praiseworthy and the blameable — makes the challenge they present incredibly potent. The readers of Herodotus have as a matter of course already experienced the great goods of a settled way of life; they have tasted those pleasures. Indeed, their very taste for those pleasures will prove dangerous. As Balot has argued, to Herodotus, “the Athenians’ excessive desires were imprudent as well as unjust, because luxury, a consequence of imperialism, tended to sap the fighting strength of those who indulged in its pleasures.” The astringency of Scythian austerity offers a therapeutic rebuke to Athenian excess. By experiencing the Scythian life through Herodotus’ text, they are made alive to the very real and active tensions between the good of freedom and the goods made possible by the settled way of life that the Scythians sacrifice for that freedom. With his praise of the Scythians, then, Herodotus invites his audience to reflect on how these apparently contradictory goods might be combined— or at least awaken a yearning that they might be. It might be impossible to ‘turn’ Scythian. His foregrounding of the pitfalls of Scythian life suggests that Herodotus does not urge such an escapist fantasy on his readers, but his signal praise of them urges his readers to take seriously the Scythian as an alternative to the Hellenic. Scythian freedom will prove at once an inspiration and provocation to the more cultivated tastes of the Hellenes, a provocation so desperately needed because of the ways empire would prove so tempting to the Athenians.

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469 cf. Sperthia and Bulis, 7.135
470 Balot (2006) 158-159
471 Thomas (2000) 55 suggests that Herodotus "may have been correcting current idealization" by declaring that they are admirable in only one respect. While this may be true, it is precisely in keeping
The Scythian narrative thus must be taken as a whole, to see the interrelations between various aspects of their way of life. Herodotus begins their *logos* with their careless attitude toward empire: they appear to have stumbled into and out of ruling upper Asia. “These Scythians ruled upper Asia for twenty-eight years. They had followed the Cimmerians in pursuit and so invaded Asia and had put down the Medes from their empire… But after their twenty-eight years in Asia they went home again…” They invaded Asia accidentally, and returned home again not out of strategic considerations, but for no apparent reason at all, a lack of concern that foreshadows their cavalier disregard for Persian military might as displayed at one of the skirmishes during the later Persian invasion. There, the Scythians break ranks before a battle simply so that they can chase a hare (4.134). For the Persians, this lack of discipline is ominous—they read it as disdain for the might of Persia and a sign of unflappable military confidence. Yet this incident with the hare confirms the accidental quality of the Scythians' earlier rule—so easily acquired, so thoughtlessly discarded. The Scythians, unlike the Persians, do not possess an ideology of empire, a theory of rule. To seek empire requires a vision of the future, to be concerned with what one does not yet have;\textsuperscript{473} the Scythians, on the other hand, are not impelled by such visions of the future. They are thoroughly present-minded.

We should note then the connection between their lack of a settled way of life and their lack of settled aims.\textsuperscript{474} Within a settled way of life, one is keenly aware of the future, for preserving a settled community requires a forward-looking gaze. One sows so that one may reap. In contrast, a nomadic way of life tunes the mind to the present moment, where one might now

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\textsuperscript{472} Balot (2006) 157: “Imperial Athens was, to Herodotus, the successor to the Eastern imperialists.”

\textsuperscript{473} 1.126; 7.9

\textsuperscript{474} Lateiner (1986) 16 likewise notes that Herodotus’ treatment of Scythia links “habitat and habits”.

find food and water, whether this moment requires rest or motion. There is no need to plan, for
the virtue of nomadic life is its adaptability to the moment. In fact, planning compromises this. It
draws one out of the moment, thereby taking one’s attention away from its possibilities—and its
dangers. For a nomadic community, the future necessarily shrinks to the visible horizon. One
chases the hare when it appears, for unlike settled communities, with designated harvest times,
one never knows when or where nourishment will appear next.

With this disregard for the future comes a forgetting of the past. To live in the same
spaces as one’s ancestors, surrounded by their buildings, monuments, and graves, is to be
reminded of their existence, peopled by their ghosts. The nomadic life does without these settled
markers of the past. Even Scythian funerary practices seek to ignore death, thus attempting to
erase the ultimate distinction between past and present. The bodies of their dead are turned into
facsimiles of life, the distinction between what is gone and what is present is obscured as much
as possible (4.71-73). The passage of generations becomes obscured as they attempt to obscure

475 cf Cobet (2002) on Herodotus’ awareness of the culturally-dependent quality of the experience of time,
and how his logos organizes these heterogeneous experiences into “a historical temporal space that was
meaningful to the reader he had in mind.” (388).

476 Benardete emphasizes the ‘forgetfulness’ of the Scythians, but ties it to what he sees as their
thoughtless imitation of their landscape: “The Scythians, however, imitate the nature of their land without
understanding. They parrot rather than imitate… They imitate so perfectly the constant flow of water that
they cannot have any of the wisdom that comes with rest. Whatever requires memory- that is, all learning-
escares them…” (112.) While I agree with Benardete that the Scythians are characterized by their
forgetfulness, I contend that Herodotus does not equate this forgetfulness with thoughtlessness. The
Scythians’ method of understanding their world is deeply rooted to their experience of the world- nomadic
and unsettled. Yet it is still an understanding, as I am attempting to show. Indeed, that Herodotus praises
the Scythians for their ‘discovery’ reveals that he credits them for their way of life- it is not a thoughtless
and thus accidental happenstance, but rather expresses their settled decision that nothing matters so
much as freedom. To grasp their decision, we have to grasp the manner of thought that enabled them to
arrive at it. To do this, we must recognize and understand the kind of thinking the Scythians engage in,
even if it is not our own. Braund (2004) 30 likewise observes that Herodotus credits the Scythians for their
“choice”: their freedom is not thoughtless.

477 The Scythians do possess the ways of their ancestors, their customs- indeed, they cling to them
fiercely (4.76) - but ways are living, existing through practice, as a customary practice is not visible except
in the moment it is actually being practiced. It exists in being enacted. In that sense, ways and customs
belong to the present, the living rather than the dead.
the passage from life into death. Only the present, the living, matter. Indeed, in Herodotus’
telling, the Scythians have a weak sense of the past. They claim that they are the youngest of all
nations and tell a poetic if confused story about how they came to be (4.5), but the story about
their origins that Herodotus favours (supplying archaeological proof in its support, 4.12) tells
only about how they came to occupy the territory they inhabit today, not how they came to be as
a people (4.11). Their movement from one territory into another obscured their past; their motion
makes memory unreliable.\(^\text{478}\) Burdened neither by past nor future, their minds move through a
continuous present.\(^\text{479}\)

This present-mindedness urges their thinking into a distinctively non-rational channel, a
mode, that, as Benardete suggests, means that they “are ‘natural’ poets.”\(^\text{480}\) By dwelling within
an eternal present, that which links together past, present and future—cause and effect—is
rendered invisible. Deprived of the sense of time, their thinking thus does not move through the
linear mode of rationality but rather occupies a present-bounded plane. Because of this, they
think using what is present and visible—images and associations—rather than what requires
memory and an awareness of the passage of time, that is, cause and effect. In thinking through
images, however, they elide the distinction between image and reality altogether. Images become
reality, acquiring something like a causal power of their own.

Herodotus makes this plain in the first detailed story he tells about them, the story that
sets the stage for their narrative. While the Scythians were sojourning in Asia, their women, left
behind, had taken up with their slaves, and produced a new generation of half-Scythian children.
Upon the return of the Scythians from Asia, they found that they had to contend with these half-

\(^{478}\) Benardete, (1969) 112.
\(^{479}\) Lateiner (1989) 155 likewise notes that the Scythians do not possess a history.
\(^{480}\) Benardete, (1969) 100
slave children for mastery of Scythia (4.1-3). As battle after battle proved inconclusive, the Scythians were flummoxed until one of their numbers made a suggestion that, from a military perspective, seems ill-advised at best:

I think we should leave by our spears and bows. Let each one of us take up a horsewhip and go for them with that. As long as they are used to seeing us with arms, they think that they are our equals and that their fathers are likewise our equals. Let them see us with whips instead of arms, and they will learn that they are our slaves; and, once they have realized that, they will not stand their ground against us” (4.3).

The flaws of this plan are obvious. The Scythian recommends the use of whips because they are a symbol of mastery. Yet they are a symbol of mastery only because they are effective against the already disarmed, the already powerless. Whips become powerful only once the battle is already over, the enemy already stripped of his means of resistance. In themselves, they are near useless in battle. Precisely because of this, they cannot be the means of victory, only its symbol.

Yet the Scythians take this symbol of mastery as sufficient to ensure the thing itself. They assume that their opponents, who have proven their match on their battlefield, will become their slaves through the power of the symbol. That is, the symbol itself has power; it generates what it is itself the symbol of. Here is their ‘natural poetry’ at work; they craft beautiful images which they fail to see as images. Their poetry becomes literal, for it calls forth and shapes reality. One wields a whip, the symbol of mastery, and becomes a master; or, to use another example, the snow is not like feathers, it is feathers (4.7, 4.31). The Scythians do not recognize the distinction between the symbol and reality; rather, their symbols possess a literal reality all of their own.481

481 Consider that the Scythians do not- with one notable exception- construct images of their gods. To construct an image is to grasp that it is an image, not the thing itself. Indeed, the one case in which they do construct an image (4.59), all is not as it appears. Herodotus there uses not the typical word for image or any of its cognates, (which appears at 4.31 when speaking of the Scythians use of ‘feathers’ for snow) Herodotus speaks οὐγάλμα, which typically means statue, and thus not necessarily something intended
Because of this, they cannot recognize an image as an image; they construct images which they are unaware of as such. Their poetry is natural, unconscious. They fail to see the author that has constructed the poetry in which they live; that is, they fail to see themselves. This becomes clearer when we turn to the result of the Scythian plan: it is successful. Their half-slave, half-Scythian opponents accept the power of the imagery and flee— despite this symbol of mastery having already been proven empty by the evenly matched battles between the two. For both sides, the symbol has the power to disrupt and transform reality; the truth of things, that they were evenly matched and one side is now without the weapons of battle, is obscured by the power of the image.

We should note, then, that both of these fundamental features of Scythian thinking— poetic literalness and present-mindedness— stem from their nomadic life, the same manner of life that has enabled their discovery of that greatest good in human affairs: their independence. Yet, as will shortly emerge, these same habits of thought also give rise to what contemporary readers, at least, will find most repellant about the Scythians (or at least, most unherodotean)— their fierce resistance to the foreign. As Herodotus tells us: “These people dreadfully avoid

as a likeness. Indeed, from their treatment of the sword/statue of Ares, it seems that the Scythians treat it as itself the god- the sword does not represent Ares, but is Ares. The Scythians appear to be engaging in what anthropologists would call fetishism, a variant of animism.

Ward, (2008) 25: “The distinction between the real and the artificial, fact and fiction, collapses; in Scythia, you are what you make yourself, and therefore what is made replaces what is given.”

Compare this with the way that Herodotus brought the activity of the author, the poet, out of the shadows during his exegesis of Homer. By underlining the activity of poetry, its constructed quality, he sharpens the reflexive capabilities of his audience— they are made to be aware that they are dealing with a thing constructed. This not only invites a more active participation with Herodotus’ text, but also invites them to becomes more reflexive and critical about the entire project of Greekness— given the ways that it too has been shaped by an author, a poet.

Ironically, in ascribing that power to the symbol, the defeated offspring of slaves demonstrates their affinity with the Scythians.

The Scythians love only their own, and in praising them, Herodotus shows that he is able to praise what is most unlike his own. He who is most interested in the foreign admires those who most disdain it. His admiration transcends the common human taste for likeness, captured beautifully by Jane Austen in Mansfield Park: “Her merit in being gifted by Nature with strength and courage was fully appreciated by
the use of foreign customs, and especially those of the Greeks” (4.76). If this resistance toward the foreign is a necessary consequence of their habits of thought, habits inspired by their nomadism and thus elemental to their freedom, it suggests that their absolute freedom cannot be combined with Herodotean toleration. If we are to understand the role that the Scythian challenge plays in Herodotus’ work, as well as understand the significance of the admiration that the xenophile Herodotus holds for the xenophobic Scythians, we must better grasp the links between Scythian freedom, Scythian thinking, and the fierce resistance to the foreign.

Herodotus illustrates these through the stories of two Scythian individuals, Anacharsis and Scyles, both of whom embrace the foreign and are destroyed for it. Anacharsis, the first of the two, is yet another parallel to the author himself: “He traveled over much of the world, sightseeing, and showed that he had gained great wisdom in the course of his travels; and then he came back to Scythia” (4.76). Like the other Herodotean rivals I have discussed, the Scythian Anacharsis’ approach to wisdom will help clarify both the attitudes toward knowledge embedded in his cultural context, as well as helping us better grasp, through contrast, Herodotus’ methods. Anacharsis, although he showed forth his wisdom while abroad, had to behave clandestinely when he returned; to practice the Greek rites he had learned while travelling, he had to steal away in secret, hiding what he had learned from Scythian eyes. Herodotus shows us that Anacharsis was wise to attempt such secrecy, for when he was discovered, the king of the Scythians shot him dead (4.76). His secrecy was not sufficient to keep him safe.

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the Miss Bertrams; her delight in riding was like their own; her early excellence in it was like their own, and they had great pleasure in praising it.” It is pleasurable to praise what is like ourselves; Herodotus, remarkably, can praise what is most unlike himself.

486 Munson (2001) 118-119; n. 221 notes the parallels with Solon and with the Herodotean narrator
487 Candaules, Deiokes, Psammetichus, Cambyses
Anacharsis, in his secrecy, at first seems to stand in contrast to Herodotus, who openly shows this secrecy; Anacharsis hides while Herodotus reveals. Yet the disjuncture between the two is not as complete as it first appears. We must attend to the context in which one hides and the other shows. Anacharsis hides from the Scythians, who hate the foreign, the different, the unconventional. He reveals part of his wisdom—his understanding of his audience—by attempting to hide from them. Herodotus’ inquiry, however, is written in Greek and thus aimed at the Greeks. Herodotus’ openness here suggests that it is possible to be open with the Greeks in a way that it is not with the Scythians. Openness is a culturally dependent quality; possible in some contexts, but not others. Herodotus could not have been a Scythian, or at least could not have shown forth his inquiries amongst them, for while the knowledge he displays preserves his name amongst the Greeks, the Scythians destroy Anacharsis and refuse to remember him because of the foreign wisdom he accidentally displayed. Scythian convention is less tolerant of the foreign, of the unconventional, than the Greek.

Yet Scythia represents, not a polar opposite, but the end of a spectrum on which the Greeks too are located. Even within a relatively ‘open’ society, convention makes boundaries between the legitimate and the illegitimate, what might and might not be said. Again, custom is king of all (3.38). Part of Herodotus’ art thus lies in his discernment, his sense of the suitable. It suits him here to be open about the necessity of secrecy in Anacharsis’ situation, for this shows that sometimes secrecy is wise. Herodotus thus invites his readers to reflect on where such secrecy might be warranted, when the unconventional must be covered. In this case, Anacharsis must be secretive because of the extremity of the Scythians’ rejection of the foreign, a reaction we must grasp if we are to understand the ways in which Scythian freedom is at once admirable

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488 cf Darius’ experiment (3.38), discussed at length in chapter three.
489 see again Herodotus’ discussion of poetic suitability, discussed at length in chapter two.
and repellant. Herodotus must be open about this if he is to properly convey the character of the Scythian challenge to the Greek: the beauty of Scythian freedom, the ugliness of their rejection of foreign ways, specifically Greek ones. Indeed, that the ways the Scythians reject are specifically Greek sharpens this challenge for a Greek audience. It afflicts the Greeks’ love of their own precisely by showing them how another people’s extreme love of their own leads them to despise what is Greek. Herodotus openly shows how ugly love of one’s own can be. The Scythians are simply an extreme version of a common human tendency. By pushing it to its limits, they more fully manifest its consequences.

Yet if secrecy is at times wise, the experiences of Anacharsis shows how arid secrecy can be, and thus help us better understand Herodotus’ own, more fertile methods. As I have argued, Herodotus self-consciously opens the possibility for both conventional readings and readings that are deeply critical of convention, all the while drawing attention to these tensions. In cultivating ambiguity and raising unanswered questions, Herodotus is open about his hiddenness, thus inviting his readers to become active participants in the text, thinking through the puzzles that he poses. He is, then, elusive, rather than secretive. In contrast, Anacharsis aimed for total secrecy; he tried to hide entirely his turn toward foreignness. A more stark contrast to Anacharsis’ secrecy is found in Cambyses, who wanted to make everything open and transparent. Herodotus showed the horrors that this quest for total openness entailed, its lack of respect for inwardness, for subtlety, for difference. Cambyses revealed the quest for total openness as an attribute of despotism, for it seeks to control and order the world.

As Herodotean rivals, Anacharsis and Cambyses are both exemplary of their cultures. Cambyses’ wisdom sought order and control; its pursuit of openness was an aspect of its pursuit

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490 Munson (2001) 118 - the Anacharsis and Scyles narratives “forc[e] the audience to reflect themselves in an alien people.” See also Hartog’s discussion of these narratives (62-84).
of power. And just as the Scythians lack the ambition to rule or to wreak lasting change on their world, so too is Anacharsis uninterested in sharing his wisdom with others. His wisdom is solitary. His lonely fate shows the arid futility of such an approach. Not only does Anacharsis’ wisdom appear entirely useless and even threatening to the Scythians, but he himself, his life and memory both, are blotted out. Cambyses’ inquiry harmed himself and others; Anacharsis’, on the other hand, left no mark, no memory— except for its place in Herodotus’ *Histories*. The flaws of these extremes recommend Herodotus’ middle way, one which is elusive but inviting, allowing the freedom of the mind yet without rejecting the responsibility of teaching.

If the fate of Anacharsis has shown the extremity of Scythian resistance to the foreign (and the concomitant fierceness of their love of one’s own), the story of Scyles more clearly suggests why this resistance runs so deep. We should note first a distinction between the two: while Anacharsis was noted for his wisdom, the second, Scyles, is far more ordinary. His taste for Greek ways stems not from wisdom gained through travel, but rather through habituation and exposure. His Istrian mother taught him Greek, and because of this, “he was not pleased with the Scythian manner of life but was far more given to Greek ways, from the training he had had”(4.78). This suggests that what the Scythians take issue with is foreignness itself, not the wisdom gained through the contemplation of foreignness (as demonstrated by both Anacharsis and Herodotus). Scyles’ very ordinariness, then, better illustrates the conventional character of Scythian resistance to the foreign.

Having gained a taste for Greek ways, Scyles went to great lengths to satisfy it. As king of the Scythians, he would lead his army up to the Hellenic city of the Borysthenites and, leaving

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491 In contrast, Munson (2001) 118 suggests that the key difference between the two is that the audience is invited to identify with Anacharsis, yet in the tale of Scyles, they are instead invited to identify with the Scythians as a group.
them in the suburbs, go and lock himself within the city (4.78). What he would do there was revealing: “he would take off his Scythian cloths and take on Greek clothes… they guarded the gates that no Scythian might see him wearing Greek dress” (4.78). Scyles takes particular care that none of the Scythians see him in Greek dress. If we recall the story of the whips, the narrative with which Herodotus introduces the Scythians, the reason for his care becomes clear. There, the whips made the master; so to speak, the clothes (or rather, the accessories) made the man. Given the literalness of Scythian vision, it seems that to don Greek attire is to somehow become Greek; the Scythian Scyles disappears when he wears Greek dress. Given the power that the Scythians grant images, it is clear that, for them, one is what one appears to be.

What specifically triggered Scyles’ downfall, however, was his initiation into the rites of Bacchic Dionysus. Herodotus tells us that the Scythians are especially set against these rites: “they say that the Greeks, against all reason, discover a god who sets men on to madness” (4.79). When one of the Borysthenites allows the Scythians to secretly observe Scyles as he participated in the Bacchic frenzy, they become enraged against him and rebel. (4.79-80). It is telling that the Scythian opposition to Greek ways coalesces around the Bacchic rites.492 Not only do the rites involve a ritualized dress, one bound to perturb the imagistic thinking of the Scythians, but the rites above all invoke a transformation. Boundaries are erased and distinctions dissolved; the frenzy key to the rites ushers in a radical, yet temporary, alteration of the self.

This offends against the two key features of Scythian thought, its literalness and its present-mindedness. The temporariness of transformation depends upon one’s identity being stable across time, for one remains oneself even in an altered state. Yet Scythian present-

492 Munson (2001) 120-122 notes that the Hellenes too find Bacchus discomfiting. But the transgression involved in his worship become incorporated into Hellenic culture; its openness can encompass the contradictions and disruptions of the Bacchic rites. Hellenic identity is pliable whereas Scythian identity is rigid.
mindedness denies this. One is what one is now; their emphasis on the present, along with their belief in the power of image and appearance, denies that the self can be fluid, can transform and change and unfold in time. To lose oneself in the frenzy is to lose oneself simply. Because of this, we can see how attraction to the foreign threatens Scythian identity, for in moving towards something Other, one ceases to be what one was. Identity is an either/or for them; one is Scythian or one is not. Herodotus can remain Greek while adapting the perspective of what is Other; the Scythians cannot conceive of a self that remains cohesive through the changes and shifts involved in such perspective-taking. One’s Scythianness has to be constantly reinforced and safeguarded. Herodotus notes the extreme care they take to guard their own customs (4.80).

Because of the vulnerability of Scythian identity, even individuality is suspect. To be an individual is to be in some way different, in some way particular; yet because Scythian identity requires that one actually be what and how one appears, individuality fractures its cohesiveness irreparably by introducing difference, a particular life that unfolds across time and through change, a complex particular that destabilizes the apparent simplicity of the image. Because the Scythians think through images, what cannot be captured in an image eludes contemplation. The individual, qua individual, does not demand consideration; what is Scythian, what is communal, is all that matters. This becomes clearer when we consider again the ultimate fates of Scyles and Anacharsis.

Not only are both men ultimately killed for their attraction towards the foreign, but, strikingly, both are killed by their own brothers (4.76, 4.80). The significance of this is heightened by what Herodotus relates about their deaths; in neither case does the slaying brother hesitate or deliberate over what he ought to do. Saulius, the brother of Anacharsis, sees his brother in foreign garb and, as soon as he sees, shoots. The actions follow upon each other
almost instantaneously. Scyles, however, is able to flee; Octamasades, his brother, must barter with the Thracians to obtain him. Once Octamasades has Scyles, however, his action is immediate: Scyles is beheaded on the spot (4.80). Herodotus relates these fratricides in the same manner as they are undertaken: briskly and succinctly. His narration suggests the perspective of the Scythians, who act to protect the community without pausing to reflect on their familial bonds. This, along with the Scythian practice of killing family members with whom they quarrel and turning their heads into gilded cups (4.65), suggests the weakness of family bonds within Scythia. 493

To grasp the import of this, consider that such a story, amongst the Greeks, would have been the stuff of tragedy. Tragedy arises when the demands of the community and the bonds of the family come into conflict. These tensions arise because both matter. Both personal ties and duty make their claims upon the individual, and so when they pull in different directions, the individual is torn. The drama of the tragedy thus unfolds. Not so amongst the Scythians. Amongst them, there is no such conflict. The demands of the community are clear; that the brothers act without hesitation, without any deliberation, suggests that there are no countervailing concerns. The interpersonal bonds between them are weak, nothing compared to the strong demands of Scythian identity writ large. The individual, who can demand consideration based on his or her personal ties and value, has little place in the Scythian imagination. 494

493 Ward (2008) 60 also notes the weakness of family ties within Scythia, but reads this as stemming from their absolute individualism. I differ by focussing on the way the demands of the community limit the connections of family.
494 Indeed, the individual has such a low place in the Scythian imaginary that Herodotus is not able to tell their number with any accuracy (4.81). To count is to distinguish- the Scythians are so communal that it is difficult to count their individual numbers. This is brought out in a striking image: one of their kings wanted to know the number of the Scythians, so bade them all bring a bronze arrow head. Rather than tally each
Although this leads to the quashing of the individual—either in denying individuality full expression, or by destroying the individual who has attempted to so express himself—it also leads to a remarkable attachment to the common good. This attachment is so fierce the Scythians seem unable to comprehend that an individual’s good might be in conflict with the common good.\textsuperscript{495} This becomes evident in their interaction with the Ionians left to guard Darius’ bridge of boats (4.133-142). The Scythians urge the Ionians to abandon Darius after the allotted time and so earn their freedom; the Ionians initially agree, yet do nothing. After being urged a second time, one of the Ionian tyrants persuasively argues against freedom, basing his claim on self interest:

he said every one of these tyrants held power, each one over his city, thanks to Darius. If the power of Darius were destroyed, he himself would not be able to control Miletus, nor would any of the rest of them hold his city. Each of these cities would prefer to be governed democratically than by a tyrant (4.137).\textsuperscript{496}

After hearing this appeal to self-interest, “at once all the others turned” (4.138) to this opinion. For the Ionians, the appeal to self-interest leads them to immediately abandon freedom and the common good.

In contrast, the strength of the common amongst the Scythians renders them blind to the conflict between self-interest and the common good. They trust the Ionians and are consequently taken aback by their support of Darius. This supplies the occasion for one of the best taunts of the work: “as free men, said the Scythians, [the Ionians] were the basest and most unmanly of

\textsuperscript{495} This theme arises throughout Herodotus- discussed at length in my treatment of Deiokes. See also Maeandrius, who wished to be most just (3.142-148).

\textsuperscript{496} Slightly emended from Grene, who translates the various incarnations of τυραννεύω as prince
anyone; but if one spoke of them as slaves, they were the most subservient and staunchest in their loyalty” (4.142).\footnote{Munson (2001) 111 observes that the Scythian love of freedom, exhibited in this story, excites the sympathy of the Hellenic audience.} As stinging as this insult is, it reveals that the Scythians mistake the rationale behind the Ionians’ decision. The Scythians cannot comprehend that the Ionians rejected freedom not out of loyalty to the despot, but out of loyalty to their own self-interest, against the common good. Such conflict does not exist amongst the Scythians. In Scythia, self-interest and the common good completely coincide, because the individual is completely submerged within the common.

In Scythia, then, the common is all. By strengthening internal cohesion, the precedence of the common promotes resistance to outsiders and invaders; it is thus an essential part of their freedom. In turn, however, this internal cohesion chokes off the space for individuality to develop. With individuality comes change and transformation, the products of difference, debate, and the productive tensions between members of the group who are the same and yet different. Because of this, individuality allows for history and memory. By introducing the specific and particular, it makes possible a narrative of works and deeds that leave their mark upon the world. That is, it makes Herodotus and his history possible, the work of an individual (‘I, Herodotus of Halicarnassus) saving from time the particular deeds of human beings. But if history is the record of change and transformation, it is also necessarily the record of downfall and destruction, as Herodotus’ meditation on divine providence reminds us.\footnote{cf. “Since, then, I know that man’s good fortune never abides in the same place, I will make mention of both alike.” (1.5).} The Scythians have stepped outside of this cycle, and in this, they seem to have stepped outside time. In the cohesiveness of their eternal present, that is, without a robust sense of the individual and difference, they stay unified.
in their pursuit common good — and so preserve that good. In so doing, they achieve stability in a world of flux and destruction.

This stability, however, comes at a price: the loss of individuality and all the goods that come with it: great deeds, great works, and great discoveries, all that makes Herodotus’ work so teeming and full, his narrative — and life itself — so rich. No wonder the Scythians, so resistant to this richness as a group, seem to be drawn to it as individuals. The trappings of individuality are rich and sweet in comparison to the austere freedom of Scythian nomadism. Yet by illustrating the price of such absolute freedom — freedom not only from others but from the destruction of time — they remind us of the dangers of individuality. In bringing in difference and change, individuality introduces strife, for it introduces self-interest, which can subvert the attachment to the common good. The Scythians thus present a challenge to the Greek way of life; their existence suggests that freedom and individuality cannot be combined.

**Athens and Scythia: Freedom and the Necessity of Judgment**

Yet Herodotus’ famed praise of Athens suggests that it has managed to do just that:

> It is not only in respect of one thing but of everything that equality and free speech are clearly a good; take the case of Athens, which under the rule of tyrants, was proved no better in war than any of her neighbours but, once rid of those tyrants, was far the first of all. What this makes clear is that when held in subjection they would not do their best, for they were working for a master, but, when freed, they sought to win, because each was trying to achieve for his very self. (5.78)

Here, self-interest and the common good combine; precisely because self-interest has been unleashed does Athens flourish. The Athenian common good does not depend on the squelching of self-interest, as it does among the Scythians. The success of Athens as a whole, rather, stems
from its unleashing of its individual citizens. Its conventions of equality and free speech nurture rather than restrict the individual.

This becomes apparent through Herodotus’ fulsome praise of equality and free speech: “it is not only in respect of one thing but of everything that equality and free speech are clearly a good” (5.78). When freed, the Athenians flourished, because “each was eager (προεθυμέετο) to achieve for his very self.” (5.78). As Balot has observed: “As democracy’s very existence demanded courage of those who had expelled the tyrants and Spartans, so too did its culture produce courageous citizens, capable of defending democracy from attacks from inside or out.”

The political conventions of Athens unleash the zeal of its citizens; the common culture supports the individual flourishing of all by motivating individual striving. In this way, convention allows for the fuller expression of nature by motivating the individual to action. Human agency is encouraged by the promises of individual satisfaction. The case of Athens demonstrates that love of one’s own, which Herodotus has already shown to be a powerful motivator of human action, as well as a profound obstacle to good judgment, can be made to serve the common good. The individual is attached to what enables his or her own flourishing. The freed Athenians flourish in war, in protecting their city, because in so doing, each “achieve[s] for his very self.”

Yet the zeal unleashed by Athenian democracy also threatens it. Just as the excellence of Athens rests in the way its norms stir the vigorous pursuit of what the individuals take to be their own good, this whetting of the appetite can impair public deliberation. This is demonstrated by the way that Aristagoras was able to dupe the Athenian assembly (5.97) into aiding the ill-fated

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499 Balot (2006) 64
500 Balot (2006) 130: “Herodotus shows that the demos’ greedy desires sometimes affected their sound judgment”.
Ionian revolt. To a crowd of individuals who seek to ‘achieve for their very self’, Aristogoras made promises of great gain. He stirred the appetites that had already been strengthened by Athenian convention. The collective expression of such appetite apparently reduced the power of reflection and deliberation; against such a tide, there was little space to air doubts, voice concerns, or raise questions. The Athenians accept Aristogoras’ claims without investigation. Herodotus invites his audience to compare Aristogoras’ reception in Athens to that of Sparta’s (5.79). In his appeal to Sparta, Aristogoras likewise sought to stir the appetite, but because he spoke to a single individual, Kleomenes, his audience of one had the time and opportunity to reflect and ask questions, and so resisted Aristogoras’ attempts at persuasion (5.49-50). The crowd of Athenians, their energy unleashed by democracy, did not engage in such reflection and so fell for Aristogoras’ scheme. This incident gave rise to Herodotus’ indictment that “it seems that it is easier to fool many men than one” (5.79). The greatness of Athenian democracy lies in its energetic pursuit of what it deems good; this same zeal renders it incautious and easy to dupe. The very greatness of Athens also threatens it.

That Athens was so susceptible to the ploys of Aristogoras suggests that the city as a whole lacks judgment. Yet its equality and free speech allow for the wisdom of individuals to emerge; the conventions that breed its incautious energy also open up the opportunity for some within the city to offer wise judgment at key moments, and so guide that energy. This is not the case elsewhere. Lydian Gyges clung to the judgments of the ancestors (1.8); Anacharsis the Scythian had to hide his wisdom (4.76); the Egyptian clerk believed that inquiry was futile (2.28). Most corrosive of judgment, however, is despotism. The story of Cambyses showed that despotism removes the impetus to judgment. Under despotism, judgment is thus either silenced

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(3.36) or ignored (7.10-11; 8.68-69). However prone to heedlessness it might be, democracy at least opens up space for the exercise of judgment.

The career of Themistocles illustrates this.\textsuperscript{502} Themistocles was a new man, only recently come to prominence (7.143); Athenian democracy opened up space for such a man to exercise his capacities for wise judgment. Moreover, as Baragwanath has argued, Themistocles’ particular skills in many ways mirror those of Herodotus.\textsuperscript{503} If democracy both encourages and requires a Themistocles, the parallels between Themistocles and Herodotus bring forth the ways in which the historian too benefits the city. I suggest that Herodotus suggests these parallels in order to demonstrate the political necessity of Herodotus’ own persuasive skills, which rest on the understanding of human nature he has developed through his inquiry. Themistocles, like Herodotus, knows “the worse and the better side in man’s nature and position in the world”, the topic on which Themistocles exhorts the Hellenes before the battle of Salamis (8.83). Like Herodotus, Themistocles uses his knowledge of the worst to urge human beings to choose the better (again, cf. 8.83; 2.64). Yet Herodotus’ treatment of Themistocles is deeply nuanced and complex; Herodotus both showcases Themistocles’ cleverness while alerting his audience to its moral ambiguity. Themistocles’ knowledge of the worst suggests the possibility that he might choose it. The threats he sometimes employs to accomplish a greater good (see 8.61-2) are so potent precisely because they are real. The complexity of Themistocles thus suggests the precariousness of democracy; democracy requires such individuals, but such individuals might not always be counted on. Because of this, Athens cannot have the stability of Scythia.

\textsuperscript{502} See Moles (2002) 43-48 for an overview and defence of Themistocles’ ambiguous career, as well as a survey of scholarly controversy regarding Herodotus’ presentation of Themistocles. Much of the controversy over Themistocles is about whether we are to admire or disdain him; I insist, as do Konstan (1987) 70-2; and Romm (1998)187-9, that the ambiguity of his character is precisely the point. Themistocles both benefits and threatens the city; the same skills account for this duality.
\textsuperscript{503} Baragwanath (2008) 298-318
Themistocles appears on the scene with his cunning interpretation of the ‘wooden walls’ oracle that the Pythia had proclaimed to the Athenian envoys in regards to the coming Persian onslaught (7.141-143). This oracle at first glance appeared ominous, suggesting that Athens was doomed save for the wooden walls granted to the Athenians by Zeus. Some took this to mean that all but the Acropolis, which used to be fenced by a thorn hedge, would be destroyed. Such an interpretation hardly supports a vigorous defence. Others interpreted it in a way more conducive to human agency by arguing that the wooden walls referred to Athens’ fleet of ships, yet were stymied by the oracle’s reference to deaths at “divine Salamis”. Themistocles overcame this hurdle by suggesting that, if the destruction promised at Salamis was that of the Athenians, the oracle would have called the isle “cruel” rather than divine.\footnote{Baragwanath (2008) 291, following Stein, notes that his reading of the oracle tracked closely to that of the experts, and was thus more “likely to inspire consensus.”} Themistocles thus turned an oracle that seems to have threatened inevitable defeat into one that promised success— if the Athenians were to take action and rely on their own naval prowess. His inspiring reading of the oracle works with the motivation of the Athenians: “This was Themistocles’ explanation, and the Athenians decided that it was preferable to that of the oracle-interpreters; for the latter would not have them prepare for a sea fight or indeed, to tell the truth, put up a hand’s worth of resistance at all,” (7.143). Themistocles provides an optimistic narrative to bolster his judgment, all to accomplish sound military policy.

But hope, while powerful, is not enough. Hope led some other Athenians to stay within the wooden walls of the agora, trusting in the gods to protect them. These men met a most brutal end (8.53). Themistocles’ reading does not simply offer comforting words, but encourages action; his ingenuity worked to support the agency of the Athenians, rather than quashing it. He spoke to the desires of the people — their wish to mount a resistance— and helped give that
resistance a shape. Just as Athens flourished by unleashing the energy of its citizens, with his interpretation of the oracle, Themistocles found ways to support and channel this energy. His wisdom lies in appreciating its power. Themistocles’ wisdom, therefore, has a democratic spirit. 505

Indeed, in his behaviour at the battle of Artemisium, Themistocles exemplifies the particularly Athenian aptitude for combining self-interest with the common good. 506 There, Themistocles enticed the Hellenes to fight an ultimately successful battle by accepting a bribe, bribing others, and managing to pocket the remainder for himself (8.4-5). His conduct here has struck many as ignoble; some readers of Herodotus, aghast, have seen in it evidence of Herodotus’ reliance on hostile sources. 507 Yet as Baragwanath notes in her lucid treatment of the Athenian general, Themistocles’ actions appear to reconcile the common interest with his own; this “may perhaps have struck Herodotus’ original audience as rather enhancing his achievement.” 508 Themistocles’ selfish cunning served the greater good. 509 Perhaps only someone who has experienced such desires can know how to cater to or counter them; the Scythians lacked a developed understanding of self-interest and thus could not rally the Ionians, but Themistocles, who has felt self-interest, could wrangle and persuade the Greeks. His actions, as Baragwanath aptly puts it, ensure that “everybody wins” 510 — not least Themistocles.

In his ability to combine his good with the greater good, Themistocles shows his keen sensitivity to the ways that human agency requires internal motivation. A robust common good

506 Again, contra the Scythians, who deny that these can be combined. See above.
507 Famously Plutarch (867e); Macan, How and Wells: as Grene writes in a footnote of his translation: “They just don’t believe that Greeks of the fifth century B.C. would be guilty of conduct unsuitable to nineteenth and twentieth century English professional military men.” 559, n.4
508 Baragwanath (2008) 292
509 Fornara (1971) 72-3
510 Baragwanath (2008) 293
must attach and even excite the individual. Relevant here is his exchange with the Corinthian general Adimantus. The general, critical of Themistocles’ vehemence in urging his position, tells him that “in the games, those who get off the mark too soon are whipped.” Themistocles’ response: “but those who get left behind never get crowned”(8.59). Motivation is required for winning, whether at the races or in battles for one’s city. Themistocles grasps the importance of internal motivation, and is thus a suitable leader for the Athenians. In interpreting the oracle as he did, Themistocles recruited and guided the characteristic vigour of democracy. As a result of this, the Athenians were able to, briefly, turn ‘Scythian’. At sea, they become as nomads, able to fight or flee as they like. And Herodotus is clear: with this, the Athenians became “the saviours of Greece” (7.139).

Themistocles employs similar rhetoric at the battle of Salamis. In his attempts to persuade the pan-hellenic council of generals to adopt the militarily sound policy of fighting rather than deferring to another day (and risking the collapse of the alliance), Themistocles asserts that “it is when men make probable designs that success oftenest attends them; if their designs are improbable, not even the god is willing to lend his help to the plans of men” (8.60). In other words, the gods will not help those who will not help themselves. Piety, as we saw with the Egyptians, can encourage a fatalistic surrendering of one’s agency, or a complacent hope in the gods, as seen in those who took refuge in the Acropolis (8.53). Just as he had earlier, Themistocles’ clever speech instead recruits hope to support prudent human action.

Yet here his appeal is insufficient on its own: enticement can only do so much. Themistocles must threaten the other generals: first, he darkly proclaims that “there are no Greeks able to withstand an attack by us” (8.61), and then, more explicitly, tells the other

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511 See above for Athenian kinship with Scyth.
generals that if they refuse to do as he says, the Athenians, with their powerful navy, will abandon the Greek cause altogether (8.62). Themistocles thus manipulates the love of one’s own that the other Greeks feel to get them to fight for what is not their own. While the generals had grumbled at fighting for Attica, which was not their land and had already been taken by the Persians, Themistocles makes them grasp the necessity of Athenian power by inviting them to imagine it turned against them. \(^{512}\) In imagining this direct assault, they more keenly feel the loss represented by Themistocles’ gentler, yet more explicit threat: Athens’ abandonment of Hellas. With these layered threats, Themistocles uses the Herodotean technique of vicarious experience to teach the collected generals to appreciate Athenian power. By afflicting the generals’ love of their own, Themistocles recruits it to urge them into solidarity with others. Eurybiades, the Spartan commander, is convinced.

Yet the others are not placated— the grumbling continues. This qualification to Themistocles’ success raises questions about the power of persuasion, given the ways that Themistocles’ rhetorical gifts mirror Herodotus. As Baragwanath has demonstrated, Themistocles’ speeches bear significant resemblances to Herodotus’ methods: his reliance on evidence gained through both sight and hearing (8.109), and his emotive and persuasive effects on its audience. \(^{513}\) Indeed, as Baragwanath compellingly demonstrates, by continually underlining Themistocles’ persuasive skills, Herodotus invites such comparison. \(^{514}\) Baragwanath is right that in highlighting Themistocles’ successful persuasions, Herodotus is inviting his

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\(^{512}\) “Themistocles, like Herodotus, grasps the very real threat posed by disunity amongst the Greeks.” (Immerwahr 1966: 225-234)

\(^{513}\) Baragwanath (2008) 289-322

\(^{514}\) Baragwanath (2008) 309 - “such demonstration of the power of logos- not merely to persuade an audience to change their intellectual stance, but even to transform their mood - leaves the audience well aware that the rhetorical skills that have achieved this are also those of Herodotus himself.”
audience to be alert to the ways that they too might be being persuaded—or even deceived—by the art of Herodotus.

This is undoubtedly part of Herodotus’ education of judgment. Yet Themistocles’ failures are no less important a part of Herodotus’ treatment. That Themistocles’ verbal rhetoric is insufficient to persuade the generals teaches an important political truth to Herodotus’ audience: that persuasion has its limits.

The failure of Themistocles’ attempts at persuasion means he has to seek other, more duplicitous methods. Themistocles dispatches a member of his household to transmit a message to the Persians: that Themistocles is an ‘adherent of the king’ and so, to help Xerxes win, informs him of the dissent amongst the king and the opportunity it provides (8.75). By ensuring that the Persians will encircle the Hellenes, Themistocles puts them into a position of utmost necessity: the Hellenes now must fight. Themistocles has thus stripped the pan-hellenic council of choice. Ironically, it is at this juncture, having lost all choice about whether to fight or not, that Themistocles makes an impressive speech urging the gathered generals to “choose the better” (8.83). Themistocles thus has engineered the Hellenes into a situation where they have no choice, where they must fight or be destroyed. Once in that situation, however, the power of his persuasive speech encourages them to view their situation as a choice and thus imbue it with dignity. In doing what they must, they are made to feel that they are exercising a noble choice. Necessity forces them to fight, but Themistocles’ speech (and Herodotus’ praise of it) suggests that the proper mental framing—the right narrative—can help them to fight well.

Against those that view Themistocles’ behaviour here as disgraceful, and so suggest that Herodotus is highly critical of it, Baragwanath suggests that Herodotus views Themistocles’ morally dubious cunning positively: “in dealing with men of métis, like the Greeks (and
especially the Athenians), greater *mētis* may be the only effective tool.” And indeed, Herodotus is clear that Themistocles’ cunning served the greater good. But if Herodotus has invited us to see parallels between himself and Themistocles, that Themistocles had to rely on such cunning— that persuasion wasn’t enough— should inform how we read Herodotus. As I have been arguing, by continually alerting his audience to his authorial presence, Herodotus has been urging us to think about what he is doing. He is teaching us how to inquire, as well as how to communicate the truths uncovered by inquiry. All sorts of obstacles prevent us from seeing these clearly. Shame, passions, the love of one’s own, even one’s avowed rationality can impair our ability to see. By urging us to reflect on these, Herodotus has helped us to see more clearly. Yet even so, at times persuasion fails. One’s wisdom might resist being communicated. Because of this, Themistocles must act, must engage in cunning in order to save Hellas. Themistocles, a figure within Herodotus’ text, can act within the stage of that text. Herodotus can craft a text and act within its pages, but there his action ends. He must incite his audience to complete and continue his work. In order to save from the ravages of time, Herodotus needs to educate those who will act in the future. Like Themistocles, political actors will have to hang loose from convention, from the norms of their community, its conceptions of the base and ignoble, in order to uphold those communities and those conceptions. In freeing his alert audience of these bonds of convention, he equips them to adapt to a complex and unruly political world, one which takes great *mētis* to navigate. As both Ward and McWilliams have urged, the *Histories* teach how

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515 Baragwanath (2008) 297; See also Detienne and Vernant (1991)
516 Fornara (1971) 72-3
517 Detienne and Vernant (1991)
political problems frustrate and evade permanent solution. Given the reversals of fortune and unpredictability that characterize political life in Herodotus’ depiction, μēτις is in fact essential.

Yet such μēτις cannot be perfectly relied upon. In the aftermath of the battle, after failing to convince the other Hellenes to pursue the fleeing Persians, Themistocles changes his position and persuades the Athenians to let the Persians go (8.109). However sound this policy, Herodotus is clear about Themistocles’ less than noble motivations: “he intended that this act should be as a reserve to his credit with the Persians, that he might have a refuge if, one day, trouble overtook him at the hands of the Athenians which is indeed what took place. With such words Themistocles deceived them, but the Athenians were convinced” (8.109-110). This urges the ambiguity of persuasion. As a reminder, two of the other most successful acts of persuasion in the Histories are despotic: Cyrus’ parable of the brambles (1.125-126) and Darius’ speech in the debate of the regimes (3.82). Themistocles’ dubious manipulation helped save his democracy; its very efficacy reminds us of the ways he might have threatened it. As Baragwanath observes, “the man of μēτις, like the city he hails from, looks to his own security first.” Luckily for Athens, Themistocles (at Salamis, at least) was loyal to his city— but this loyalty has its limits. With the figure of Themistocles, Herodotus reminds his audience of the dual importance of judgment and persuasion, as well as the ambiguity of both. Moreover, the ambiguity of Themistocles forcefully brings out the vulnerability of Athens. Athens realizes the great possibility of democracy, the way its conventions of freedom and equal speech unleash the natural potential of its citizens.

518 Ward (2008); McWilliams (2013) 746.
But like all cities in the *Histories*, it too is vulnerable. Its particular brand of energy requires wise leaders, an elite capable of herodotean judgment and openness; yet it is particularly vulnerable to the excesses or failings of that elite. As Balot has argued, Athenians tend to “succumb… to the character defects of their own leaders.” This is precisely because of their sensitivity to their own self-interest. This unleashed self-interest fosters the greatness of Athens, the unique and spectacular achievements of its citizens. But the Scythians, at least in this, are partially vindicated. Such self-interest threatens the common good. The best and worst of Athens is thus interconnected; its customs are volatile, a precarious balance. Political problems, Herodotus shows, do not admit of permanent or stable solutions. But by cultivating the wise judgment of his readers through his performance of inquiry, Herodotus equips us to recognize the vulnerability of political goods, and by artfully engaging our concern, he motivates us to care. Athens might already be lost, given over to its temptation to empire, but we, the future audience of the *Histories* envisioned by the proem, might learn from its example, its virtues and its mistakes. We, the audience, are thus essential to the task set forth in the proem: “that time may not draw the colour from what man has brought into being”. Herodotus invites us to remember, and learn from, what his inquiry has set forth. The *Histories* not only invite, but require our participation.

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520 Balot (2006) 158
521 Balot (2006) 158
522 Bakker (2002) 31-32 for the way the proem suggests Herodotus’ orientation to the future: this future audience is invited to act like Herodotus.
523 Irwin (2014) 71 likewise notes that Herodotus’ task as stated in the proem requires the co-operation of his audience,
**Conclusion**

Herodotus’ *History* is not a history in the conventional sense. He wrote before the boundaries of genre and discipline that we have come take for granted. Because he was not contained by these boundaries, in reading him, neither should we. Rather than ask what Herodotus *is*—a historian, an ethnographer, a teller of tales, a partisan, a liar, or any other number of fixed and clearly delineated identities of our own making—we should ask rather what he says about himself. Herodotus depicts his activity as an inquiry. He is investigating what “man has brought into being.” As he inquires into these myriad things, his inquiry will follow multiple avenues and take on a host of forms. He knows no genre because neither does human activity; human beings create histories, ethnicities, folk tales, partisan politics, lies, and much more. To inquire into the human things, Herodotus must inquire into all of these. His inquiry must be as diverse and polymorphous as its subject matter. The diversity of human accomplishment is responsible for the bewildering complexity and richness of Herodotus’ inquiry. It is as teeming and rich as humanity itself.

But in attending to the whirling sprawl of the *Histories*, we should never forget what unites its plenary scope: the shared nature that generates *nomoi*. The nature that produces convention is then acted upon by that convention; human beings create *nomoi*, but are then shaped by them in turn. Convention allows some aspects of our nature to flourish, and inhibits others—for better and for ill—and, furthermore, different conventions act upon us in different ways. Because of this complex interplay, human matters are not stable: *nomoi* change. Of the Herodotean ethnographies I explored in this dissertation, most bear this out: the Lydians were warlike but became soft; the Persians were poor but became powerful and then luxurious; the

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Athenians were weak but became free, and because of this, became strong. Nomoi change, but as they change so too does fortune. What was once great becomes small, and vice versa (1.5). Fortune never rests in one place (1.32).

Yet despite the plasticity of nomos, two cultures surveyed by Herodotus demonstrate a remarkable stability across time: the Egyptians, who regard themselves as the oldest people (or second oldest), and the Scythians, who regard themselves as the youngest. By regarding themselves as the youngest, the Scythians are remarkably timeless. They live in an ongoing present, and possess no history or future. This timelessness, however, erases the possibility of personal history; the individual becomes subsumed within the common, the ongoing and total present of Scythian identity. The Egyptians, in contrast, have nothing but history — they are the greatest record keepers — but their obsession with the past limits the possibility of action in the present. The Deserters revealed that, in Egypt, in order to act, one has to leave Egypt and the ancestral behind. For the Egyptians, history dominates the present, and for the Scythians, the present erases history. Both of these conventional attitudes undercut human agency by circumscribing the individual’s capacity for agency and transformation. Without individual action, there is no dynamism, no change; because of this, their cultures persist, immune from the transformation and fluidity that marks nomoi elsewhere in the Histories.

Cultures can change, then, but they can also be remarkably static. Different nomoi thus permit diverse degrees of plasticity. Yet in the Histories, cultural change is not always necessarily for the better; civilizations grow, but they also collapse. The fact of change is thus itself neutral. At best, however, some cultures, at some times, can be nudged in directions that permit their survival — and the flourishing of the individuals with it. As Solon’s praise of the life of Tellus suggests, a good city seems a prerequisite for the good life (1.30). The existence of
cultural plasticity suggests that the fates of communities can be altered. *Nomoi* can tweaked so as to preserve a people.

To effect this salutary change, we must know, then, what threatens cities and civilizations, and what can be done to ward off that threat. The answer to the first question explains the second stated purpose of the *Histories*: the war between the barbarians and the Hellenes. Not only does Herodotus record its great deeds and events, but he seeks out its cause (1.1). His two subjects, ethnography and war, are related. By surveying the whirling diversity of customs his world has to offer, Herodotus shows human nature in action — as the creator of custom, as that which custom nurtures or inhibits, as the background against which the particularities of custom, deeds, and actions emerge. In showing us nature at work, he shows us the deepest cause of war. In one sense, particular events and deeds can bring war about or avert it, but in the broadest view, the view afforded by the scale of Herodotus’ work, which spans the globe and time, which even — in his theory of divine providence— spans species, it emerges that the cause of war is less an accident or action of some particular person or people, but rather the nature of man. We wage war because we desire vengeance and we seek rule. Candaules’ queen sought vengeance despite its costs, despite the publicity it brought to her private shame; each Persian despot sought to expand their empire, to rule rather than being ruled. Even the attempt to avert vengeance can hasten it, as the Herodotus’ Trojan narrative demonstrated. Proteus inadvertently helped spur on the destruction of Troy, despite his attempts to act rightly. Human beings are a violent and vengeful species; war seems to be our fate.

But the *Histories* also suggests that it doesn’t have to be. Just as the diversity of the world’s conventions show the shared human tendency to war, it also reveals alternatives. The Scythians offer one such alternative; they manage to remain independent, standing apart the
cycle of fortune. Openness to others allows Herodotus’ Hellenic audience to see the vitality and worth of this aspect of Scythian life, despite how deeply antithetical it is in many ways to the Hellenic. They are closed while the Hellenes are (relatively) open; they lack most learning where the Hellenes possess much. Openness to others can make plain what is good about the different, attractive about the strange; it can also allow hidden similarities to come into view (the profound love of freedom that animates both people, for all their differences.) In order to benefit from the alternatives offered by other ways of life, openness must be cultivated. The therapeutic aspect of the Histories, its carefully constructed and artful narrative, helps effect such openness by drawing its audience into experiencing the diversity of the world.

Yet openness itself isn’t enough. The Scythian example also reminds us of this. Despite the attractiveness of Scythian freedom, their way of life has profound drawbacks. This is why openness must be accompanied by judicious judgment; cultural difference cannot be appropriated wholesale, without regard for the ways that specific practices and norms are embedded in a complex web of culture. Sustained and serious engagement with difference is required for a robust, respectful, and beneficial cultural exchange to unfold. The Persians, for example, simply adopt the pleasures of the peoples they invade; their openness is an aspect of their imperialism. The diversity of the world becomes mere booty. Meaningful engagement requires more thought.

This is where the second aspect of Herodotus’ activity becomes paramount. The Histories are not simply an inquiry, but a performance of inquiry. In showing forth his inquiry, Herodotus not only broadcasts his findings, but models his methods and actions. In this, he cultivates judicious openness in his readers; he leads them to practice their own cross-cultural judgment, and so become the kind of leaders who can maintain their communities against the destruction
wrought by time and fortune. The precariousness of the human situation, as revealed by the inquiry of the *Histories*, requires that such judicious leadership be cultivated; the *performance* of that inquiry accomplishes this.

Through the Gyges story, Herodotus showed (without telling) the way that desire, shame, and convention pervert our ability to see clearly, thus alerting his audience to the way that these emotive states can mar inquiry. By revealing how perspective can be blighted, Herodotus taught the insufficiency of taking one perspective on the truth; one must adopt and move between many ways of viewing. Yet far from simply urging us to take the perspective of another, an awareness of the limitations of vision remind us that no one perspective is sufficient, that all are in need of correction. Judgment must therefore be exercised in attending to the perspectives of others. One must be neither an insider or an outsider, but both—and thus neither. Instead, one’s perspective must go travelling.

In the Egyptian *logos*, the ancient profundity of the Egyptians made plain the jejune conceitedness of the Hellenes. Herodotus thus moves from a general lesson about the ways that our vision is impaired to one tailored to rehabilitate specifically Hellenic hubris. The Hellenic gods are a poetic refashioning of the Egyptians; those refashioned gods might support Hellenic moderation, but they also inspired the Hellenes to tell stories that show ‘no manner of thought’ (2.45). While correcting the Hellenes, the Egyptian *logos* also demonstrated the importance of possessing a concept of nature; its lack led the Egyptians to neglect specifically human capacities and excellences. The concept of nature reminds us that judgment must consider what sorts of shared human capacities are expressed or silenced through convention. In this, nature grants traction for good judgment.
The Persians, the great antagonists of the work, also seem the most like Herodotus in their attention to the truth and their penchant for inquiry. These parallels serve to highlight their differences: the Persians show the ways that cross-cultural judgment can become imperialist if we fail to attend to the motivations that fuel it. The Persians took their inquiries to be neutral, but in reality, their neutrality masked its highly motivated and partial perspective. This not only harms the peoples subject to the Persian empire, but impairs the Persian inquirers themselves. This is made manifest in the madness of Cambyses, which revealed that at its limits, such hyperrationalism is a form of madness. Herodotus’ own methods emerge in comparison to the Persian. The Persians believe their inquiries are neutral and unmotivated; Herodotus instead shows awareness of his own situated perspective (his inquiry is his — he refers constantly to his understanding, his sight, his opinion, and his knowledge). Moreover, his inquiry does not aspire to false neutrality. It is motivated by his own ‘exceeding anxiety to know (2.19). Herodotus seeks to know, not to rule. Passion has a place in inquiry, for it can attract us to the other, and lead us to engage better with what is different. If we fail to acknowledge it, however, its subterranean presence can skew our interaction with the world.

My last chapter addressed the threats that empire, violence and vengeance pose to human beings. The Scythians pose one potential avenue out of this dilemma; at the conclusion of that chapter, I detailed how Themistocles used his wise judgment to urge a ‘Scythian’ response to the Persian threat. This shows how individual acts of wise judgment can sustain a community; it is necessary, however, for the community to nurture the capacities of such individuals, and make space for the exercise of good judgment. But while the example of Themistocles shows the importance of good judgment at a political level, Herodotus’ own example shows the necessity of transforming nomoi on a grander scale. Themistocles provided wise guidance in the face of
war; in his renovation of Hellenic piety, Herodotus goes further and recasts Hellenic nomoi so as to inhibit, as much as possible, the human desire for vengeance. War will always threaten, so good judgment will always be required to avert it or survive it, but the transformation of culture offers up the possibility that war, that cause of the cycle of fortune, might be made a little less likely, might be held off a little while yet. Fortune might never abide in one place, but perhaps it can be enticed to stay a while.

Still, the end of the Histories — the violence following the Persian retreat, and Cyrus’ dire prediction that one must either rule or be slaves— suggests the intractability of the problem of war. Indeed, the Peloponnesian War, which was to beset the Hellenes after they had successfully driven off the Persians, suggest its inevitability. If the end of the Histories was intended as a warning to the Athenians, the warning seems to have gone unheeded. Yet the Histories does not pretend to offer a permanent solution to political problems. Its broad view shows the flux and chance that beset the human things, throughout time, throughout place. To thrive in such a world, to attend to its unruliness and unpredictability, requires not fixed rules or principles but rather a supple mind— good judgment.

One must hang loose from one’s own conventions to see their insufficiency, to see how they might be fixed. To attend to the power of convention, one must not be ruled by it completely. The exposure to difference that the Histories provides helps distance its audience from the powerful love of one’s own that imperils good judgment, thus helping them to better deal with the nuances and complexity of their world. Yet, as the story of Cambyses showed, Herodotus understands that simple exposure to difference does not necessarily spur self-reflection. Love of one’s own can lead one to recoil at contact with difference. Herodotus thus uses gentler means (cf. 3 130). His graceful and artful narrative leads his audience to feel with
what is Other, to gradually immerse themselves more and more in the perspectives of those who are different. He thus does not counter the love of one’s own, but recruits it.

By leading his audience to expand their perspectives, Herodotus nurtures their judgment. Leaving behind the narrowness of one’s own situated perspective helps one better negotiate the contested truths and elusive realities of a messy political world. Yet good judgment must still aim at some good. With good habits, good laws, good constitutions — good nomoi — we can become better than our nature. Nature does not provide a fixed standard which we seek to inhabit, but rather alerts us to our potentials and our failings. Without such a concept, good judgment can threaten to go off the rails, deprived of an end which it aims at.

In my introduction, I invoked the thought of Hannah Arendt. There is much kinship between Arendt and Herodotus; both understand the importance of narrative and action for political flourishing. But Herodotus’ example shows why Arendt’s theory of judgment, while attractive, can become maddeningly vague. By rejecting out of hand any appeal to nature, we are left with little ground for our judgment. Herodotus suggests that to judge well, to live with the complexity of diversity and difference, to see that our way is not the only way, requires that there is somehow a shared human nature that grounds the diversity of human life. Nature expresses itself in different ways. For Herodotus, the concept of nature provides a bridge between the diverse traditions of the world. They are not separate, alone, adrift, but rather different expressions of human potential, the fruit of human activity. By nature we are conventional. Because of this, Herodotus shows the necessity of looking outward, for if we want to understand our natures, ourselves, we must look to others. The diversity of the world reveals us in our complexity.
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