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Cross-Cultural Interactions in Herodotus' *Histories*

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Classics

by

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June 2023

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PUBLICATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Cross-Cultural Interactions in Herodotus' *Histories*

by

Anne Lorraine Phillips

While the *Histories* is telling the story of the Persian wars, it still contains significant ethnographic passages that have not yet been fully explored or explained. This dissertation explores the narratives surrounding all the meetings between different cultural groups in the *Histories*, and proposes a typology for examining these different types of interaction. This typology focuses on three categories relating to cultural information that is shared between groups: information assimilated, information distorted, and information hidden. By sorting interactions into these categories, it is possible to see more clearly the kind of systematic ethnographic thinking underlying Herodotus' presentation of other cultural groups, how their interactions with one another propel his narrative forward, and finally, they offer a new way to define the construction of the *Histories* as a narrative.

Cross-Cultural Interactions in Herodotus' *Histories*

Introduction:

Readers of the *Histories* have long appreciated Herodotus' keen interest in various cultures and their differences. In his introduction to the work, he declares the essence of his project, "...μήτε ἔργα μεγάλα τε καὶ θωμαστά, τὰ μὲν Ἕλλησι τὰ δὲ βαρβάροισι ἀποδεχθέντα, ἀκλεᾶ γένηται, τὰ τε ἄλλα καὶ δι' ἣν αἰτίην ἐπολέμησαν ἀλλήλοισι," "...so that the great and marvelous deeds, those displayed by Greeks and those by barbarians may not become inglorious, even those other things because of which they went to war with one another" (1.1).¹ The very core of the *Histories* is cross-cultural, wherein the causes of war are explicitly connected with the deeds and marvels of Greeks and "barbarians," including the inter-cultural interactions that eventually lead to the Persian Wars. As a native of Halicarnassus, Herodotus is ideally situated to write such a work as he originates from the edge of both the Greek and the Persian world. He has access to multiple perspectives and traveled to verify his impressions of the world as an Ionian Greek. James Redfield writes, "Herodotus notes points which distinguish this people from others, and especially points which a Greek finds odd, and therefore repellently interesting."² Redfield begins with distaste for what he originally thought was pedestrian "tourism" on the part of Herodotus, but comes to the conclusion that his "interests were not micro-systemic, in the internal

¹ All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

² Redfield (1985): 97

coherence of particular cultures, but macro-systemic, in the patterned display provided by range of cultures.”³ Redfield grew away from his initial disgust for what seemed like mere intellectual “provincialism” on the part of Herodotus but was actually more a desire to systematize human activity and show the range of patterns and possibilities when discussing all of the aspects of different cultures, even when done on the basis of the Greek perception of the world. It is impossible to conduct such a survey without the lens of one’s own culture, and Herodotus seems aware of this, and sometimes turns it on its head at times. Like Redfield, I appreciate the attempted (albeit imperfectly) systematization in Herodotus’ thought, which I seek to expand our overall understanding of it. Such a study should demonstrate that Herodotus was more sensitive to cultural dynamics than previously thought, and that ancient attitudes towards different cultures are more complex and dynamic than it might seem on the surface.

In this dissertation, I propose to explore one specific aspect of Herodotus’ work: different types of cross-cultural interactions. Throughout the *Histories*, Herodotus frequently narrates what happens when the representatives of different cultures meet and exchange information in some way. In my examination of these stories, I have noted three broad categories that dominate these cross-cultural encounters:

- 1) Cross-cultural information borrowed, harmonized, or adapted in some way.
- 2) Cross-cultural information distorted or abused.
- 3) Cross-cultural information kept hidden.

³ Ibid: 106

Some of these encounters take place between Greeks and “barbarians” such as Solon and King Croesus of Lydia, but many of them are between Persian kings and some other group they are aiming to subjugate, such as Cambyses and the Ethiopians or Darius and the Scythians. In my first chapter, I show how cultural borrowing can lead to new beginnings, such as the founding of the Persian nation when Cyrus the Great integrates the disparate threads of his multicultural background in order to found a new nation, or even when King Darius takes advice from a deposed Spartan king on the succession crisis, leading to an instance where Spartan culture has a palpable influence on Persian history. In my second chapter, I explore how distortions or cultural misunderstandings can lead to their own unique consequences, particularly when it comes to stopping or delaying imperial expansion. Cultural expression and customs become a mechanism that has direct consequences upon the unfolding narrative. In my final chapter, I examine the ways that cultural secrets play an important role in his historical narrative, or as a way for Herodotus to bolster his authority and control over his narrative, and shed light on his mindset about other cultures. Considering the previous two categories of cultural adaptation or distortion, the third category about how Herodotus deals with cultural secrets has two sub-categories: secret knowledge that is shared with his primary audience (for example, he shares the location of Scythian burial sites with his readers while that information remains opaque to the Persians), and knowledge that is hidden from his primary audience. The information Herodotus hides from his own audience serves two main purposes: 1) to form an interpretive bridge between Cyrus the Great (a successful cultural adaptor) and his successors who are abusive and disrespectful to other cultures, and 2) to demonstrate clearly that his agenda as a

historian does not possess the same transgressive nature as the inquiring Persian kings. In my third chapter, I will round out my discussion of the cross-cultural dynamics by arguing that Herodotus gives us many examples in the “closed system” of his narrative, but finally we see how he applies it to himself in Book 2 and his treatment of Egypt and their cultural secrets.

These categories help shed even more light on how Herodotus understood the connection between culture and history, and seems to have separated these cultural interactions into distinct subgroups. This categorization gives us a greater conceptual framework for understanding his thinking. My particular contribution to Herodotean studies is my introduction of these three distinct categories as another avenue into Herodotus’ thinking about history and culture, while building upon previous scholars’ understanding of the ethnographic and anthropological elements of the *Histories*. Another significant element of my work is exegeting a distinct narrative reason for the placement of Book 2, which has often been separated out from the rest of the *Histories*, or considered to be a significant distraction from the main narrative. I will argue that Herodotus embarks upon Book 2 and his Egyptian narrative in service of his cross-cultural thesis, both to distinguish himself as the historian from his inquiring Persian kings, and to draw a greater distinction between successful cross-cultural adaptation and the failures and destruction of intercultural abuses and distortions.

This dissertation relies on the intersection of literary and narratological analysis with some of the more recent work on Herodotus’ approach to ethnography and culture. I also assume the majority position that the *Histories* is fundamentally a unified subject, which has

been the subject of most Herodotean debate for several decades after Jacoby's essay in the *Pauly-Wissowa*, wherein he argues that much of the *Histories* is various types of *Exkurse* that have nothing to do with the rest of the work.⁴ There are many other successors to Jacoby in this debate, particularly well-summarized by Irene J.F. de Jong in *Brill's Companion to Herodotus*, who are less important to this introduction.⁵ More relevant to my thinking here is Immerwahr in his monograph *Form and Thought in Herodotus*. He writes at the very end of the work: "The importance of the ethnographic *logoi* in the work is already adumbrated in the proem, where we find a number of stories implying travel over the known world... This treatment of geography in the proem would suggest that Herodotus thought of geographic and ethnographic breadth as a necessary element in his work...."⁶ Immerwahr's primary focus (and the focus of most Herodotean studies at the time) was on discovering the unity of the *Histories* as a text, or finding reasons for the seemingly disparate elements in the first four books especially. Immerwahr focuses on the *Histories* as a work of "archaic parataxis, by which short individual items are placed in a row to build up larger compositions."⁷ By analyzing the *Histories* in this light, Immerwahr concludes that even these many seemingly unconnected parts are part of a greater, unified whole, though he is not always clear how each individual episode he highlights relates to the larger whole. His notion of parataxis has since been nuanced by others, such as Irene de Jong, whose analysis I value highly for this study. However, Immerwahr remains an important stepping stone in

⁴ Jacoby (1913): 381

⁵ De Jong (2002): 246ff.

⁶ Immerwahr (1966): 317

⁷ Ibid: 7

the scholarship towards our present understanding. Another important study along these lines is Donald Lateiner's *The Historical Method of Herodotus* wherein he analyzes and elucidates Herodotus' techniques for testing his material, including his omission of certain details or his unwillingness to share religious details. Lateiner's main usefulness to me is all of his numerous lists of all the different occurrences of ideas and themes. Lateiner sees Herodotus' use of themes as his main ordering principle. He writes, "It [the *Histories*] gains coherence as the reader becomes acquainted with the themes and the main frame of the structure, hinted at repeatedly at the beginning, here by Gyges, Solon, Croesus, and Tomyris. The order of presentation is deliberate and habitual. Herodotus made Persia's skein of victories provide a thematic and historical principle. To this chain he attached the discontinuous, memorable actions and non-historical actions of other peoples, Greek and barbarian."⁸ All of the ethnographic passages still serve a broader purpose in the *Histories* as a whole, which is part of my own interpretive foundation moving forward. I also rely on the work of Irene J.F. de Jong in her analysis of the narrative units in the *Histories*.⁹ She identifies Herodotus' narrative technique as "anachronical," wherein he is not being merely paratactic, but has placed a limit on the timespan of his main narrative and augments it with prolepses and analepses as he sees fit, and to inform his audience more fully about the context of any given episode.¹⁰ This is important for my conceptualization of Herodotus' treatment of various ethnographic accounts, especially his narratives of the meetings of

⁸ Lateiner (1989): 224

⁹ See also her survey of the "unity debate" beginning with Jacoby up to the present (2002): 247-55.

¹⁰ De Jong (2002): 254

different cultural groups which are often situated very carefully in a broader cross-cultural context. I also occasionally refer to de Jong's narratological categories as laid out in her article in *Brill's Companion to Herodotus*, such as narrator and "narratee." I also borrow her understanding of the "anachronical" nature of Herodotus' narrative, particularly with an eye to his prolepses and analepses. Many of these cross-cultural encounters take place in these prolepses, which serve as "explanatory" notes in the prelude to the main episode (usually an imminent Persian invasion). I argue that Herodotus will often use these prolepses to foreground the cultural issues at play during an encounter between different groups. It can be helpful to view even a long digression such as the Egyptian *logos* as a piece that serves to expand our view of Herodotus' techniques and understanding of cross-cultural matters. Egypt is especially useful for that because it is the one book of the *Histories* where he emphasizes his *autopsy* and *akousis* of Egypt. He experienced it for himself, and uses the opportunity to dive deeply into Egyptian culture for his audience, and reinforcing his authority on cultural matters before diving into the main matter of the Persian Wars which is, as he suggests in his proem, driven by cross-cultural interactions of various kinds.

Outside of the "unity debate" and connected concerns, scholars eventually began to open new avenues of study into Herodotus' anthropological and ethnographic practice. This largely began in the 19th and 20th centuries, as scholars grew more self-conscious as observers of other cultures and developed a new paradigm of observation and direct experience as the basis for what they considered "true" anthropology. Instead of writing ethnographies based only on reading the accounts of others, anthropologists, ethnographers and sociologists began to develop methodologies and philosophical foundations for their

overlapping (although still distinct) fields, which could then be reflected back to study ancient authors and their approaches to cultures and the “other.” John van Maanen writes in his book *Tales from the Field*:

“To write an ethnography requires at a minimum some understanding of the language, concepts, categories, practices, rules, beliefs, and so forth, used by members of the written-about group. These are the stuff of culture, and they are what the fieldworker pursues... While records of ethnographic fieldwork are sometimes traced to the unknown sources of the Greek historian Herodotus, modern versions of fieldwork did not begin to emerge until the nineteenth century.... A problem faced by the early (and self-conscious) fieldworkers was how to set off their own work as different in kind from the writings of other travelers who also wrote about what they saw and heard.”¹¹

Van Maanen goes on to write a comprehensive summary of the practice of ethnography and anthropology in the 19th and 20th century, much of which has a bearing on the developments in Herodotean scholarship, particularly the push for ethnographers and anthropologists to leave the “armchair” during the decades after World War I. One such anthropologist was Bronislaw Malinowski, a Polish expat, who spent years under house arrest by British authorities in the Trobriand Islands, part of modern-day Papua New Guinea, where he immersed himself in their language and culture. He was eventually joined by the US sociologist W.E.B. Dubois in laying the foundation for “fieldwork” as we

¹¹ Van Maanen (1984): 13-14

know it today, emphasizing the importance of autopsy and laying a groundwork of set, preliminary questions. He also questions the various “styles” in which ethnography is written, and the epistemological questions inevitably raised depending on the style and the rhetoric and the questions asked, much of which emerged during the early 20th century.¹² This background is important because it gave modern classical scholars new ways to examine the work of the “proto-ethnographer” Herodotus, which led to important titles such as Francois Hartog’s *Le Miroir d’Hérodote*, who approaches Herodotus through a more distinctly sociological and anthropological lens which questions the pervasiveness of cultural viewpoints in the building of narratives about “others.”¹³ In its time, this book laid an important groundwork for future studies in Herodotus’ understanding of ethnography and Greek self-conception, namely the idea that Herodotus uses the Scythian *logos* in part as a “mirror” of Greek self-identification. Hartog’s ground-breaking work has led to other useful studies by scholars such as Rosaria Vignolo Munson in books such as *Telling Wonders: Ethnographic and Political Discourse in the Work of Herodotus* or *Black Doves Speak: Herodotus and the Language of Barbarians*. In her work, Munson is particularly interested in how Herodotus’ *Histories* stands on “a dialectic between traditional notions of the Greeks, on the one hand, and Herodotus’ more or less overt disruption of these notions, on

¹² Ibid: 17

¹³ Hartog (trans. Lloyd): 7. Cf. “The purpose of comparing the statements in the text with the shared knowledge of the Greeks is neither to evaluate Herodotus’ description nor to gauge the quality of the information but, rather, to scrutinize the way the description is purveyed and to study how the information is treated. It is a question of *how* it is done: how are the relationships between the statements in the text and the shared knowledge of its recipients established?” p. 9. These are some of the fundamental questions emerging from the contemporary fields of anthropology and sociology, which should not be conflated but they share many of the same concerns.

the other.”¹⁴ She also examines how Herodotus’ use of narrative and “metanarrative” link the diachronic and the synchronic elements of the *Histories*, while the synchronic generally belongs to the ethnographic comments and the diachronic belongs to the events of history and Munson demonstrates how those two elements are closely related.¹⁵ Her work has been useful for clarifying many elements of my own analysis when it comes to how Herodotus treats other cultures in the course of his narrative, as much of what interests me lies in the “metanarrative” moments of his ethnographic discourse and its intersection with the historical narrative as a whole. The diachronic elements are informed by many cross-cultural “metanarrative” moments which offer foreshadowing or clarifying information for what is about to occur. This also relates specifically to the observations by Irene de Jong and her understanding of the relationship between his prolepses and the main narrative events. Munson makes a similar point about the relationship between the cultural explanations and the main event, understanding that much of the cross-cultural background is contained in these “metanarrative glosses.” Thus, the historiographic and ethnographic elements are deeply informed by one another, in my view, and I have added the concept of a typology into the discussion by exploring the potential for Herodotus to have created these categories

¹⁴ Munson (2001): 8

¹⁵ Ibid: 18ff. I also include her definition of metanarrative is as follows: “In my definition, ‘narrative’ includes both the recounting of events in the past and description...In Herodotus’ ethnographic descriptions, the present tense describes circumstances that may also obtain at the time reached by the historical narrative to which the description is attached...Whereas narrative represents the story as it is manipulated by the discourse, metanarrative speaks about the narrative and exists as a function of the discourse. Minimally narrated narrative consists of passages that approximate the concept of pure narrative, or objective mimesis, of external facts. Certain propositions, however, fall partially or entirely outside of the narrative and are equivalent to or contain titles, proems, repetitions, postscripts, or explanations that fulfill the role of glosses to the narrative itself” (pp.21-22).

to aid in our understanding of his project. My typology unifies some of the narrative elements found in Munson and De Jong's analysis, and puts them into a larger context of the whole *Histories*.

Finally, I must now turn to some of the more recent scholarship on the topic of race and ethnicity in the *Histories*, especially within the world of classical studies over the last few decades. The last few years have seen an increase in analyses of Herodotus' *Histories* through various lenses such as postcolonial theory, as there has been heightened debate about the categories of race and ethnicity, especially the problems that have arisen as a result of modern ideological categories being imposed on ancient texts without due consideration to the texts themselves. Edith Hall's book *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition Through Tragedy* explores the various categories that Greeks created when it came to defining *themselves* against the "barbarian." She argues that the Greeks subsequently reinterpreted the world through their created lenses of "Greek" vs. "barbarian," causing many to take this conception of the world for granted when it may not always have been so. She deals specifically with tragedy, but it is still tangentially related to my work because Greek self-definition and Herodotean subversion of ethnographic categories are an important part of the *Histories*, and Hall's work gives some additional literary context for it. Hall argues that tragedy is *the* venue for the expression of this political ideology and its imposition on earlier myth, while other scholars argue that Herodotus did in fact interact with Greek tragedy and as such would have been aware of this ideological trend in ancient

Athens.¹⁶ Herodotus himself has at times been read as ideologically motivated, but even his treatment of the Near-East and the rise of Persia gives us a more complicated picture.¹⁷

Jonathan Hall takes up this subject in a number of books and articles but specifically *Hellenicity: Between Ethnicity and Culture*, which provides a list of theoretical concepts and ideas that help define the topic more carefully, particularly the complex ways in which Herodotus constructs ethnicity primarily through cultural expression and secondarily through phenotypic appearance. Hall also argues for the primacy of literary evidence as the best way to understand ancient ethnicity. “Ethnic identity is not a ‘natural’ fact of life; it is something that needs to be actively proclaimed, reclaimed and disclaimed through discursive channels.”¹⁸ Similarly to the conclusions of Erich Gruen most recently, Jonathan Hall understands ancient ethnicity through how various ethnic groups understand themselves; this is in part a reaction against past generations of scholarship that drew inappropriate conclusions based on archaeology and notions of kinship or consanguinity, while discounting or downplaying literary sources that saw such things as much less concrete and more fluid.¹⁹ Jonathan Hall’s work redefined the discussion of ethnic identity

¹⁶ Cf. Chiasson (2003) and Griffin (2006).

¹⁷ Cf. Jonas Grethlein’s examination of the “orientalizing” stereotypes and its subsequent undermining in foundational Greek texts: “Unser heutiger Gebrauch des Wortes „Barbar“ zeigt an, wie prägend die griechische Stigmatisierung ihrer östlichen Nachbarn für die Geschichte des „orientalism“ ist. Ein genauere Blick auf die Gründungsurkunden des „orientalism“ zeigt aber, dass die Dichotomie keineswegs stabil ist, sondern immer wieder unterlaufen wird. Gerade die Unberechenbarkeit der Götter und die menschliche Fragilität weichen die Polarisierung auf. Im Horizont der *conditio humana* verliert die Alterität der Barbaren an Bedeutung – der „Andere“, der dem gleichen Los unterworfen ist wie man selbst, wird zum Mitmenschen” (2021, 146). Herodotus here intentionally undermines stereotypes, in service to the broader task of demonstrating a growing divide, as Grethlein confirms.

¹⁸ Jonathan Hall (1997): 182

¹⁹ Also cf. work by Phiroze Vasunia (et al.), who seeks to approach authors such as Herodotus from a postcolonial perspective which tries to distinguish between the genuine elements of a culture and those imposed by other, more dominant cultures. His book *The Gift of the Nile: Hellenizing Egypt from Aeschylus to*

among the Greeks, moving us away from biological or linguistic determinism. Common or shared myths of descent are a better hallmark of ethnic identity, if they are generally agreed upon by a particular people group. It is this that Herodotus seems to be particularly interested in developing, and remains most pertinent to my own discussion. Based upon these scholarly books, and a reading of Herodotus himself, he is often subversive in his depiction of cultures. He deliberately undermines various cultural self-perceptions such as Athenian autochthony in Book 1.57, asserting instead that they are a branch of other groups such as Ionians and Pelasgians and thus part of a larger cross-cultural pattern that occurred in prehistory. He subverts the expected stereotypes of Greeks and Persians by having individual characters from each group behave in ways that one might not expect, such as the cautious wisdom of Artabanos in Book 7, who brings in surprisingly Hellenic insights into the nature of life and death, echoing the advice provided by Solon the Athenian all the way back in Book 1.²⁰ As I hope to show in my own work, Herodotus sees cultures and their interactions as fluid and adaptable. Identities often overlap and cause considerable complications and anxieties, such as in the case of King Scyles of Scythia with his mixed Scythian and Greek lineage. His cultural context as the King of Scythia forces him to choose one over the other, but the deep conflict within himself about such a choice is evident and leads him to his own death. Herodotus himself was likely a man of fluid ethnic identity, being an Ionian Greek from Halicarnassus who likely had interactions with many other

Alexander seeks to explore the elements of a Hellenizing narrative of Egypt that are self-reflexive for Greeks more so than an accurate representation of Egypt itself.

²⁰ Cf. 7.46.3 and Solon's advice to King Croesus in 1.30-34

cultures, and presents himself as a traveler and observer in places such as Egypt. Nevertheless, he is perhaps the ideal cross-cultural guide for a monumental work such as the *Histories* because of his multiethnic background.

The fluidity of ancient ethnicity here is borne out somewhat by Erich Gruen's 2020 book *Ethnicity in the Ancient World: Did it Matter?* I am particularly interested in his chapter on Herodotus and the concept of "Greekness," wherein he attempts to argue that Herodotus did not recognize the concept of "ethnicity" as such.²¹ While he is right that modern ideologies concerning race and ethnicity do not map well onto ancient texts, he undermines his own argument by suggesting (or heavily implying) that it did not in fact matter to the ancients. Clearly it did, and he fails to account for this fully in the textual evidence that we have. However, his view of the concept of ethnicity and race as culturally-driven and fluid is more clearly evidenced, and one helpful concept for my own argument because I hope to demonstrate Herodotus' treatment of ethnic identity and how the interactions between cultures can sometimes create something entirely new, such as we will see in the example of Cyrus the Great and his biracial background. His Persian-Median heritage is heavily associated with the customs and practices of both groups, but he combines and expresses the two in order to create the new Persian Empire. This sort of understanding is bolstered by Kostas Vlassopoulos' *Greeks and Barbarians* wherein he interacts with more recent theories as well as the material evidence as it pertains to more than just Herodotus. Vlassopoulos focuses heavily on the cultural cross-pollination in the

²¹ Gruen (2020): 42ff

Mediterranean using many different sources of evidence, bearing out the notion that archaeological records also show cross-cultural adaptability and fluidity, rather than always being strictly defined as “one thing or another.”

Other perspectives on the issue of race and the reconstruction of various perspectives are found in postcolonial scholars such as Phiroze Vasunia who analyzes themes such as dislocation and mobility as guiding stars in the *Histories* as a whole. He writes in one article about the opening of the *Histories*:

“...the proem appears to be arguing as well that historical meaning itself is generated through dislocation, that cultural identities are not necessarily stable, and that nations and peoples share more pasts than their memories of conflict might lead them to believe. Yet, for Herodotus, these are not points that can be stated unequivocally, for the powerful opening sentence, through a highly compressed use of language, opens out onto a tension that remains palpable and real, a tension between identity founded on a plural understanding of culture and identity based on polarity. Nor is it fortuitous that the many dense and unsystematizable features of Herodotus' composition fail, in the end, to wipe out the dichotomy between Greeks and barbarians that remains central to his Hellenocentrism. From the beginning, strikingly, the *History* leaves open the causes of war and the cultural logic that drives people to violence.”²²

²² Vasunia (2012): online article with no page numbers.

Vasunia approaches Herodotus from a postcolonial perspective, which adds some additional layers to my understanding of the *Histories* as a whole. In this case, he assumes a Hellenocentrism on the part of Herodotus that other authors such as Gruen are less willing to admit, and seeks to amplify the perspective of non-Greeks in the narrative, such as he attempts in his analysis of the proem of the *Histories* as I quoted above. It is, however, as I noted above, still an analysis based on polarity and a necessarily Hellenic perspective because we do not have organic narratives arising from non-Greeks in this context. Herodotus seems to hold that paradox in his hand of polarity and fluidity between various ethnic groups, often merging to form new ethnic groups and branches. However, that “cultural logic” is what I am seeking to explore more, and how Herodotus discusses it despite the difficulties of the paradox that he is working with. As I also seek to understand the ethnic narratives of non-Greeks, Vasunia’s analysis helps inform my own ability to analyze non-Greek narratives and how they intersect with Greek identity.

Also related to issues of identity, a compendium edited by Thomas J. Figueira and Carmen Soares addresses these questions of collective self-identity and the influence of the *Histories* on questions of ethnicity and identity, which has direct relevance to this dissertation. This collection deals with more “technical” matters related to cross-cultural interactions, such as language barriers, translation and representation. This collection contains an article by Stephen Brandwood on Herodotus’ use of interpreters, which is particularly relevant because I also argue that Herodotus is very careful in his understanding of language barriers and the various methods used to get around them during cross-cultural encounters, which adds increased depth to my analysis of Herodotus’ interest in cultures and

highlight elements of the *Histories* that have been overlooked.²³ Interpreters are a somewhat rare phenomenon in the *Histories*, as Herodotus does not generally problematize language barriers except in a handful of notable instances.²⁴ The times when Herodotus mentions interpreters tend to be very marked and involve when elements of cultural expression are being translated from one culture to another. The most prominent example of this is the Ethiopian *logos* where the Fish-Eaters serve as the mediator of cultural understanding between Ethiopia and Persia. Other essays in the collection, such as Figueira’s article on the nature of language as a marker of ethnicity add further detail and depth to the larger-scale analyses of scholars such as Gruen (2020) or Sarah Derbew (2022) when it comes to understanding cultural dynamics in terms of cultural expression, language, and custom, and “recentering” the intellectual perspective of cultures. Sarah Derbew’s 2022 book touches upon several of the episodes I analyze here, particularly the Ethiopian and Scythian *logoi*. She writes, “An ensuing exploration of Herodotus’s frequent pairing of Egypt and Aithiopia serves as another example of people whose skin color does not overdetermine their race. As part of this inquiry of race beyond skin color, Herodotus’s Scythian *logos* (4.76–80) offers a useful comparandum of the ways that visual and nonvisual markers can undercut the expansive category of externally derived categorizations of peoples – that is, race. The Hellenocentric practices of Scyles and Anacharsis challenge other Scythians’ rigid adherence to xenophobia. Lastly, a foray into twentieth-century literature places Herodotus in a wider context of thinkers whose characters interact with perceived foreigners even in

²³ Brandwood (2020): 15ff.

²⁴ Argued very thoroughly in Munson (2005): 70-83

their absence.”²⁵ Derbew also makes extensive use of the idea of internal vs. external narrators within these narratives, especially how the internal narrators engage in a kind of “performance” of their respective cultures, and how Herodotus uses this to “reshape” the concept of the “foreigner.” Marginalized or fringe groups can still play a role in the shaping of discourse, which is essential to my own argument here which fleshes out narrative mechanics for how such marginalized groups have an influence through the exchange of cultural information.

While resting on the work of many brilliant scholars before me, my goal is to expand our understanding of how Herodotus thought about culture and historiography, especially as he seeks to capture the ways that cultures interact with one another and cause various historical events to unfold.

²⁵ Derbew (2022): 100

1. **Cultural Interactions in Herodotus' *Histories*: Borrowing, Adaptation or Adoption**

This chapter will explore the first category of my typology: the adoption or blending of customs and ideas between cultures, which I may also term “borrowing” or “exchanging.” These instances of cultural borrowing often affect the unfolding of the narrative or serve to illustrate some broader underlying idea Herodotus is exploring, including the ways in which entirely new cultures are created. In this chapter, instances of cultural borrowing or the harmonization of multicultural customs are closely linked to the expansion and the exploitation that results from an imperialist project. The examples in this chapter largely center around kings, especially the Persian kings. It would appear from many of these encounters that Herodotus views cultural interactions and cultural change as major drivers of his historical narrative, especially as he chronicles a growing divide between East and West. In this chapter I will explore episodes involving the Persian kings Cyrus, Cambyses, and Darius, as well as the Scythians Anacharsis and Scyles. These narratives all offer examples

of the adoption or blending of a foreign custom and these often function as markers of the success or failure of a particular military campaign, especially in the case of the Persian kings and their ever-expanding empire. Or conversely, as in one of my examples, we see a culture (i.e., the Scythians) successfully maintain societal isolation due to their willingness to punish any incidents of borrowing from other groups such as the Greeks. For the Persians, however, success in their military objectives depends on the success of their cross-cultural encounters, and when their cross-cultural encounters are ambivalent or unsuccessful, so also are their military achievements. The nature of a multicultural encounter also serves as a commentary on the character of the groups or characters involved, especially the Persian kings who are seen interacting with other cultures in a variety of ways. Erich Gruen remarks that “Herodotus’ kings play multiple roles, take surprising actions, shift between the objectionable and the admirable, and often upset expectations. Their pronouncements and behavior could as easily be ascribed to Greek as to Persian figures.”²⁶ There is no one single way in which Persian kings interact with all other cultures, but instead we see a complex and sometimes surprising web of motivations and interests that provide additional insight into Herodotus’ own understanding of the development of Persian imperialism.

While his presentation of the Persians throughout the *Histories* is complicated and impossible to reduce to any one set of traits, Herodotus does also speak in broad ethnic generalizations when he considers it important or illuminating, especially when he is setting up an important interaction. He remarks in 1.135: ξεινικὰ δὲ νόμια Πέρσαι προσίενται

²⁶ Gruen (2011): 79

ἀνδρῶν μάλιστα, “More so than anyone else, the Persians are very prone to adopt foreign customs, particularly those that come from the Greeks.” Much of the development of the history of the Persian kings concerns their interactions with other ethnic groups, and we can see a range of behaviors when it comes to encountering foreign cultures. Persia is a society of fluctuating culture because they have so much interaction with foreigners, and their ability to adapt foreign customs allows them to continue in their expansion. In some cases, they are shown adapting a custom or a cultural mindset for their own purposes, as we will see with Cyrus, Cambyses, and Darius when confronted with cultural barriers. Cyrus the Great is perhaps the clearest and most successful at his exploitation of aspects of both his Persian and Median heritage, using it to his advantage to gain power and establish a prestigious new dynasty. His multi-ethnic heritage was originally intended to be a disadvantage that would prevent him from attaining power (according to the reasoning of his grandfather Astyages in marrying off his Median daughter to a low-ranking Persian and thereby causing her to produce less powerful or “pure” offspring). Cyrus, however, converts the disadvantage into the very thing that propels him forward. His son and successor Cambyses proves to be far more erratic, and his military campaigns stand or fall based on the success of his communications with other groups. I will examine his successful borrowing of Arabian custom which allows him to conquer Egypt, but also his subsequent failures in cross-cultural interaction which spell doom for his ultimate success in Egypt and elsewhere. The result of Cambyses’ various cross-cultural interactions on a narrative level is to display his true mental state as well as the intimate connection between cultural communication and successful expansion. Of the three Persian kings I examine in this

chapter, Darius has the highest number of ambivalent cross-cultural encounters which lead to mixed results, or (if one takes the larger view) are part of a longer chain of events that end in ultimate failure as his invasion of Greece falls short of the mark. These encounters are reflective of Darius' general style of leadership and his mixed legacy. The example of the Scythians is a useful "foil" to the examples of the Persian kings; in the case of the Scythians we get to see the opposite extreme and that provides a very useful counterpoint to Persian expansionism. The static Scythians remain fixed in their culture and never expand beyond their borders, always at the cost of cultural interactions and the possibility of adapting the customs of other groups. Scythian culture is a paradox within the *Histories* that serves to prove my broader point about the importance of cross-cultural interactions, and how they demonstrate the notion that history "halts" at the fringes of the world. We will see their renowned philosopher Anacharsis and their king Scyles suffer the death penalty for daring to adopt Greek thought and custom, but ironically this attitude is what enables Scythia to resist Persian expansionism. Meanwhile, the constant Persian interaction with cultures closer to the "center" is the main driving force of the overall narrative, which adds further weight to Herodotus' point about the Persian Empire and the mechanisms by which it expands.

Scholarly interpretations of the examples I listed above are varied, and often not concerned with the overall narrative function but rather their abstract philosophical purpose, reflecting on Herodotus or his audience (however that audience may be identified). I believe that the narrative function of these examples carries the most weight and is the basis upon which further philosophical purpose can be explored. The Persian kings are in the most privileged position to inquire into other cultures and to absorb or misuse the customs of all

the people groups they meet, which provides valuable insight into how Herodotus views cross-cultural interactions and their effect on his narrative. It is this cross-cultural contact *as narrative* that has received less attention in these sorts of analysis, which I aim to remedy by bringing in the aspect of how these cultural interactions themselves function on a narrative level. I suggest that these articles accurately capture certain aspects of these interactions but not the important element of cross-cultural interactions and the unique ways in which they are connected and drive the narrative. Many scholarly analyses do not elaborate on the position of Scythian cultural isolation as a foil to Persian expansionism, or the subtle explanation of ultimate Persian failure in Greece through the lens of their cross-cultural interactions. This study which I am conducting is also unique for the grouping of examples under these different headings, which have not been considered together through the lens of cultural interaction.

On a purely literary level, encounters with foreign customs are closely linked to privileged “figures of inquiry” as Paul Demont calls them in his article *Figures of Inquiry in Herodotus*’ Demont here means “inquiries”, stemming often from a “desire to know” and then mediated through delegates sent on behalf of the king.²⁷ The mere process of inquiry becomes a “wonder” in and of itself for the reader, and it allows Herodotus the opportunity to explore and describe the entire world and all the people groups within it, while also setting it within the larger context of the ancient enmity between East and West. The “desire to know” is also intimately connected to the desire for conquest and control, which in turn

²⁷ Demont (2009): 179–205.

can serve as a softened analog to the practice of this historian himself in capturing knowledge and understanding. However, I think this “desire to know” is part of Herodotus’ larger idea about how rulers interact with other cultures which propels the narrative forward, especially as these encounters are all connected by a larger theme of cross-cultural interaction as a mechanism of expansion as well as commentary on individual Persian kings. Matthew Christ also writes on the connection between kingly inquiry and the role of the historian, especially using the example of Darius’ inquiry into the Paionian woman in 5.12-13 as Herodotus’ paradigm for cross-cultural interaction.²⁸ In a seemingly unimportant narrative, Darius notices that the Paionian woman is not following any customs he recognizes, thus sparking his curiosity. Using this paradigm, Christ goes on to examine the various ways that Herodotus sees his own historical project, and how historical inquiry can be distorted. Christ argues that Herodotus sets this forth as the paradigm for himself, but encourages his readers to consider their own role as analogous and fraught with the same danger of distortion. The ultimate result of this is that Herodotus uses these reflections on historical inquiry via Persian kings to define and bolster his own inquiries, giving them more authority on the basis of his superior understanding. This line of argument represented by Christ and Demont can be illuminating, but it is limited and secondary to what I believe is the bigger point about culture being the main driving force behind the narrative.

In another and somewhat broader area of the secondary literature, scholars have shown how Herodotus sows the seeds of an early ideological (also cultural) difference

²⁸ Christ (1994): 167-202.

between autocratic Persians and the self-governing Greeks, beginning with Solon and Croesus, where we see the earliest evidence of serious differences in their cultures' respective outlooks on life and the abstract nature of government. Croesus represents the autocratic dictator in all his excess and self-absorption, while Solon represents the life of contemplation, embodying the philosophical basis for Athenian democracy. We will see this ideological divide grow over the course of the *Histories*, and cultural interactions and their consequences are one way that Herodotus enables us to see this divide. Ann Ward summarizes one of the issues at play here by writing that "The Persian intellect seeks to understand a nature that transcends the varying and changing customs of particular peoples. Persian kings, in their drive for empire, also grasp at a universal that denies the particular."²⁹ The Greeks (or more specifically, the Athenians) represent the opposite pole, namely the individual in a self-governing society as the only legitimate regime. They have access to the universal without acquiring it at the expense of the particular and the individual as the Persians do. Ann Ward makes this argument more based on political theory and prioritizes narratives of political philosophy while I am prioritizing cross-cultural issues instead, nevertheless this distinction is useful for my own analysis. Kostas Vlassopoulos expands on the dynamics of Greek vs. Persian examples while relying more on a combination of historical and archaeological records in his book *Greeks and Barbarians*. His book focuses on Hellenic identity as it often contrasts with other cultures and how Panhellenism spread throughout the Mediterranean, particularly through cultural interactions and borrowing. He

²⁹ Ward (2008): 65. Cf. 108ff.

writes in his introduction, “The Panhellenic world affected the interaction between Greeks and Barbarians in two contrasting ways. On the one hand, the Panhellenic world was to an important extent the outcome of such interactions....Attempts at Panhellenic hegemony by Greek states, such as the Athenian fifth-century empire, were constructed in opposition to the Persian Empire, but were also shaped by constant interaction and borrowing from it....”³⁰ Vlassopoulos goes on to elaborate a complex tapestry of historical evidence, narratives, and art to shed more light on the interactions of Greeks and Barbarians that draws on evidence of all kinds, literary and material, whereas I am taking his broad observations and applying them more narrowly to my literary argument.³¹ One point Vlassopoulos makes is the paradoxical nature of the relationship between East and West which has two poles of either conflict and struggle, or interaction and exchange; Vlassopoulos himself seems to hold the two in balance, though he emphasizes the aspects of “interaction and exchange.”³² While Vlassopoulos is dealing with a much broader pool of evidence, including material evidence over a much broader period of time than I am dealing with, his argument helps undo much of the hard polarities constructed in previous eras of scholarship, and gives me a foundation upon which to build my more narrow literary argument. Herodotus is clearly playing with this supposed polarity in his presentation of cross-cultural interactions, and the

³⁰ Vlassopoulos (2013): 16-17.

³¹This is especially important in light of the post-colonial trends stemming from works such as Edward Said’s *Orientalism* or Martin Bernal’s *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*, which have given scholars a different lens through which to examine the presentation of “Greek and Other.” Said criticized the way that Western imperialism merely used its knowledge of the Orient as a tool for its imperialistic project Said (1978): 13ff. Also cf. Edith Hall in her book *Inventing the Barbarian* took on the topic of Greco-Barbarian relations and argued compellingly that Greek tragedy and the stereotypes developed for the stage form the foundation of the Greek idea of the “barbarian.” Hall (1989): 17-18.

³² Vlassopoulos (2013): 3.

division between varying types of cultural interaction may also hint at an attempt to categorize or even reconcile the paradox, or at least explain why certain kinds of interactions lead to certain results. This is perhaps the area of the scholarship that has the most bearing on my work moving forward, since I am concerned with cultural differences and how Herodotus describes them, which is why I have explored it in greater detail and after the more specific discussion of Persian kings as literary figures (qua Demont and Christ).

According to my interpretation, Herodotus uses cross-cultural interactions as devices to propel the narrative forward and show how culturally-driven the East-West conflict really is in the *Histories*. While the Solon and Croesus episode is one of misunderstanding, I mention it here because it is part of the larger context for the episodes that I will look at here in this chapter on cross-cultural borrowing. In reading the *Histories* as we have received it, we may already have the Solon and Croesus encounter in mind in the backdrop as we meet later Persian kings who behave in different ways towards different cultural groups. Croesus misunderstands Solon's advice, and this misunderstanding later proves to be his own undoing. For Herodotus' immediate audience, Croesus becomes the archetype of kingly excess and the vengeance it can bring down upon the arrogant ruler, and this is especially apparent in his dealings with other cultures and their customs. The subsequent Persian kings will all be reflections in various ways of Croesus the kingly archetype. The first and most notable of these later kings is of course Cyrus the Great, who represents the most "successful" type of cross-cultural figure because of the peculiar way in which he assimilates his two heritages to form the new Persian Empire after years of Median repression. Successful cross-cultural adaptation manifests itself in one single king with a

double heritage, and results in the most important cultural birth in the entire narrative. This cultural birth of the Persian Empire is of course of central importance to the *Histories*, but it begins with the disparate elements of two different cultures that must merge into one.

Cyrus the Great

The “real” Cyrus the Great in the archaeological and historical record is somewhat different from the literary Cyrus of Herodotus’ *Histories* who sometimes appears to be a random mixture of different literary tropes and character traits.³³ In the archaeological and literary record of West Asia (constituting modern-day Turkey, Iraq, Iran et al.), much of the record concerning Cyrus and his rise to power is obscure, hence why Herodotus is such a valuable source on his reign even with its inherent interpretive difficulties. Herodotus himself likely would not have had extensive eye-witness information on Cyrus.³⁴ I am primarily interested in how Herodotus presents Cyrus, especially as a multi-cultural figure whose liminality is the quality that propels him forward to his destiny. In the overall narrative of the *Histories*, Cyrus has an important role to play in establishing Persian *nomos* and that Herodotus sees this as fundamental to the trajectory of history and the path to war with the “West.”³⁵ Part of the way that Cyrus establishes Persian *nomos* and character is his

³³ For a fuller discussion of the precise relationship between the “real” Persians and Herodotus’ Persians, see Munson (2009): 457–70. Another discussion of this topic can be found in Waters (2004): 91–102.

³⁴ On the difficulties of the archaeological and epigraphic tradition concerning Cyrus the Great, see Stronach 2013: 55–69.

³⁵ “His [Herodotus’] attitude on the differences between Greeks and *barbaroi*, including in the sphere of ideas about freedom, is complicated by his overarching view of culture (expressed in *nomos*), which he considers to be the most crucial area of ethnic differentiation – more important, that is, than other characteristics such as ancestry, race, language, religion, or territory” (Munson; 2020: 143). This is why it is important to bring out the important differences in ideas about freedom, and the role that *nomoi* play as a part

own deployment of his multi-ethnic background. I will specifically examine how Cyrus uses his multi-cultural background to his own advantage, and the demonstration of the way in which he uses his own double-heritage becomes an important strategy for his success. This is something that sets him apart from both his predecessors and successors, and establishes him as the “founder of Persian freedom.”³⁶ Elsewhere in the *Histories* we see Cyrus depicted by other Persians as their liberator and the guarantor of Persian “freedom” but that does not necessarily translate into a concept of freedom that applies to anyone but themselves and their own sense of superiority over other cultural groups.³⁷ The notion of “freedom” and its meaning will become one of the most significant cultural differences that emerges later in the *Histories* when the Greeks are rallying to fend off a Persian invasion. Rosaria Munson Vignolo argues that the difference in the understanding of “freedom” (*eleutheria*) revolves around both external *and* internal freedom for the Greeks, whereas the Persians see freedom primarily as freedom from being ruled by any other group.³⁸ Later rulers will be defined partly against the legacy of Cyrus and his achievement of establishing Persian identity and supremacy, especially as it is foregrounded in their own notion of “freedom.” This Persian freedom simply means being without any external controls on their movements, while internal slavery is still an accepted and normal part of Persian identity. The Greeks eschew

of different ideas about freedom. Cyrus, in founding Persian *nomoi* also has a distinct role in determining the Persian definition of freedom.

³⁶ This notion does exist in the extant sources such as the Cyrus Cylinder, wherein Cyrus is presented as the liberator of Babylon from the “tyranny” of the king Nabonidus, whose tyranny appears to be based primarily on his religious interference and his attempts to unify religious practice; see Kuhrt (2007): 50ff.

³⁷ Cf. Xerxes in 7.1 claiming his right to the kingship because of his genetic connection to Cyrus as the one who won the Persians their “freedom.”

³⁸ Munson (2020): 149ff.

external control *and* internal enslavement (for their free citizenry, of course), at least according to their own definitions. These distinctions, I argue, are integral to understanding the cultural differences between the “East” and “West,” which particularly pertain to this category of cross-cultural interaction. Herodotus presents this cultural difference and the adaptation of various cultural artifacts as one major driving force behind the entire conflict.

Another important aspect of scholarship on Cyrus the Great focuses on how Herodotus “repackages” Persian history and characters for a Greek audience, or at the very least demonstrates the intentional “permeability” of the boundaries between myth and history according to Boedeker. This ability to play with such boundaries can serve to illustrate issues important to a culture, as she writes, “because both [myth and history] are generated in the same cultural climate and reflect its categories and concerns, whether psychological, social, or political.”³⁹ In this case, the Cyrus narrative with its semi-mythic and semi-historical elements perhaps embodies the nature of Cyrus himself as a man of seemingly irreconcilable elements. Immerwahr recognizes Cyrus as a character who fits into the “rise and fall” pattern, which is a pattern among the Persian kings that gains momentum and culminates with Xerxes. Immerwahr also notes an interesting way in which Herodotus “employs human motivation” for the first half of the story, namely the entire narrative *up until the point* when Harpagos writes his letter to Cyrus and states that the gods are watching over him. According to Immerwahr, this is the moment when Cyrus adopts the notion of his divine mandate, whereas up to this point the narrative is characterized by terms such as

³⁹ Boedeker (2002):116.

“moira” or the admission of the Magi that Cyrus demonstrated his kingly nature “by chance” (in Immerwahr’s view).⁴⁰ There is also a “geographical” pattern in Cyrus’ story arc, associated with the fact that Herodotus views the world as geographically limited while Persian conquering ambition is “boundless.” The moment Persian geographical ambition becomes boundless, it spells out its own doom.⁴¹

Related to the pattern of a king’s “rise and fall,” Suzanne Said identifies two distinct phases of Cyrus’ life, with the story of his rise to power having at least a “cousinly” relationship with motifs in Greek tragedy in that he will enjoy a meteoric rise only to fall tragically later.⁴² Fayah Haussker more recently argues that Herodotus derives “heroicity” from Cyrus’ exposure as an infant, which contributes to the “divine” nature of Cyrus’ kingship as a particular focus of Herodotus that distinguishes him from later Athenian authors like Isocrates. Haussker contrasts this with other accounts that bastardize Cyrus, using the same incidents to prove his illegitimacy.⁴³ As Haussker writes, “Herodotus’ choice of narrative detail does not immediately indicate that he believed that Cyrus was a hero in the standard Hellenic model of mythological semi-divine beings, particularly because he also chose to include an ignominious version of Cyrus’ death during his last campaign against the wild Massagetai. However, one cannot rule out the possibility that the narrative, which employs both pre-existing folktales and mythical patterns, appealed to both Herodotus and his audience because it incorporated well-known biographical characteristics

⁴⁰ Immerwahr (1966): 75-8; 164-65.

⁴¹ Bichler (2018): 152-3

⁴² Said, “Herodotus and Tragedy” (2002):116.

⁴³ Haussker (2017).

pertaining to heroes destined for an unconventional fate, many of them kings or founders of nations and dynasties, in Greek as well as in Eastern folk narratives.”⁴⁴ Hausker goes on to articulate the “flip side” view of Cyrus taken by Isocrates in his *Philippus* where he insinuates that Cyrus was merely a “bastard child” and therefore inferior to make his argument most effective to his presumed audience, thus allowing us to see different facets of Cyrus in the literary tradition. However, here in the *Histories* we seem to see a merging of the Greek and Eastern traditions in Herodotus’ historical view, which is entirely fitting for the nature of Cyrus himself who is a merging of different bloodlines and cultures. His origin story in the *Histories* is apparently an intentional marriage of different mythological traditions, as Cyrus himself is a “marriage” of different heritages in his very essence. Charles Chiasson’s article “Myth and Truth in Herodotus’ *Cyrus Logos*” analyzes how Herodotus counterbalances true and false narratives throughout Herodotus’ presentation of Cyrus.⁴⁵ By holding these true and false narratives in tension, Herodotus seeks to arrive at a more reasonable middle ground while emphasizing the absurdity of either extreme. Chiasson asserts that Herodotus considers the humanity of Cyrus to be of paramount importance to his narrative to blend near-Eastern stories into a Greek paradigm.⁴⁶ Carolyn Dewald also touches on this idea in her article in the same volume. In her article “Myth and Legend in Herodotus’ First Book,” she writes: “Herodotus uses genealogies that stretch back to legendary times to introduce and order both personal and ethnic lineages and to integrate

⁴⁴ Ibid: the article on Cambridge Core had no page numbers.

⁴⁵ Chiasson (2012): 213-232.

⁴⁶ Cf. Immerwahr 1966: 165-6.

them with genealogies already familiar to Greek audiences.”⁴⁷ This is true, but I also believe there is another purpose of underlining the multiplicity of Cyrus’ genealogy that will reflect on the complex inner workings of cultures; it is never quite as polarized as one might expect. Cyrus challenges traditional ideas of polarity. Anise K. Strong’s article “Mules in Herodotus: The Destiny of Half-Breeds” takes the view that Cyrus and his Persian-Median double heritage is a crucial symbol for revolution and new dynasties, along with all the attendant dangers of such things. Strong also argues that Cyrus is meant to be a warning to the readers of the “advantages and risks” of intermarriage and reproduction among different people groups.⁴⁸ I argue instead that this view is a little too simplistic and detracts from the larger context of the work and how Herodotus has placed Cyrus into the long history of Persia. Cyrus is important to the buildup of the ultimate tension of East and West, and is a part of Herodotus’ argument about the role of culture in this tension. Rather than a warning, I think Herodotus identifies Cyrus as a moment of highly successful cultural harmonization that results in the founding of Persia, and his successors will all be defined by their relationship to that legacy and the paradox of cultural polarity that appears so often elsewhere.

Related to Persian and Greek ideological tension, another important scholarly thread is the one that analyzes Cyrus as a part of Herodotus’ political thinking. Avery adds that there are two sides to Cyrus in the *Histories*, one as the founder of Persian freedom and prosperity, then there is the man with vice and virtue like two sides of the same coin.

⁴⁷ Dewald (2012): 68.

⁴⁸ Strong (2010): 455–64.

Herodotus develops both sides, especially with the notion that the virtues are what bring his successes, while his vices lead him to failure. Avery further argues that it is the freedom to rule others that comes to define Persian “freedom” whereas Greek freedom desires neither to rule nor be ruled.⁴⁹ Now, it is worth noting yet again that more recent scholarship is moving away from these kinds of black-and-white distinctions when it comes to what constitutes a “slave society,” especially as modern scholars move away from distinctions made by Moses Finley which stated that Greece and Rome were the only “genuine slave societies” (meaning that the labor of enslaved people constituted a large portion of the economy and the wealth of the elite classes). Lewis explores the paradigm of slavery and “freedom” as laid out by Finley and carefully points out its flaws, especially Finley’s tendency to paint with too broad a brush and contradict his own assertions.⁵⁰ The reason this is important is simply to clarify the position of modern scholarship on the topic and its relation to my present argument, as I am actively unwinding polarities that have been historically present in the scholarship of the past two centuries. The actual reality of the enslaved in the ancient world was quite different, as Lewis argues, and there was considerable “cross-pollination” between the Eastern Mediterranean cultures (i.e., Persia) and the Hellenic world. Both Lewis and Vlassopoulos would affirm a paradigm that allows for more cross-cultural adaptation when it comes to the legal concept of slavery, or “cross-pollination” as Lewis terms it. Herodotus,

⁴⁹ Avery (1972): 532.

⁵⁰ Lewis (2018): 2ff, 15, 57-58. Cf. Finley (1981): 114-15, in which Finley develops the idea that there are only a few “genuine slave societies.” Based on the evidence provided by Lewis, this assertion is simply untrue. Lewis simply reframes the question within the larger context of the Mediterranean world as a whole, which allows him to take into account the evidence provided by texts such as the Mosaic law which prescribed rules for Israelite slavery (200-22), or Assyrian and Babylonian legal documents (223ff).

despite his clear interest in cross-cultural interactions and their complications, is also clear in his advancement of two different paradigms of “freedom” vs. “enslavement.” Both concepts exist in both the “East” and the “West” but they would view each concept very differently. It is not quite as simple as it seems on the surface, despite the rhetorical arguments found in the speeches later in the *Histories* where characters such as Miltiades argue based on polarities such as “freedom” vs. “slavery.”⁵¹ Even Cyrus the Great makes a similar argument to his followers about gaining their “freedom.” Ideas about “freedom” or “slavery” are a part of their cultural expression, yet we can clearly see that Herodotus himself undercuts any simplistic notions of them outside of the passionate speeches of his characters, but the concepts play a role throughout the entirety of the *Histories* beginning with the character of Cyrus and his own ideas of what it means to be “free” or “enslaved.”

Ann Ward argues in her book *Herodotus and the Philosophy of Empire* that Herodotus is steering us to an understanding of Persians vs. Greeks that centers on their political understanding of *themselves* as presented by the historian. Beginning with Cyrus, the Persian kings believe they have a divine mandate to conquer others and rule them while the Greeks take a fundamentally different view of themselves and their political role in the world. Ward writes:

“In Herodotus’ survey of actual historical regimes, Athens stands at the peak of the political possibilities that he explores. It is Athens, not Sparta, which is responsible for preserving Greek freedom against Persian attempts to incorporate

⁵¹ Hdt. *Hist.* 6.109.3-4

Greece into a Persian empire ruled by a single Persian king. Crucial for Athens' service to Greek freedom is the Athenian mind's inclination, like that of the Persians, towards universal truths, such as the nature of human beings unclothed by custom or regime. Herodotus demonstrates the Athenian grasp of the universal in his account of the battle of Marathon. The Athenians are victorious over the Persians because they approach the latter not as divine conquerors destined to rule but as human beings like themselves who share the same nature."⁵²

If that is true, then I aim to show how these threads are clearly present throughout the *Histories* as a conscious narrative pursuit; the Athenian ideal of the individual is culturally derived from Solon and we can see what happens when this ideal interacts with the Lydian idea, prevalent at the time, of subjugation to an autocrat like Croesus. The cultural dialog between Athens and Lydia gives us the building blocks, and then Herodotus builds on this via Cyrus, Cambyses and successors, and develops a thesis around showing this ideological development in contrast with other cultures.⁵³ All of these threads will appear in my analysis of Cyrus hereafter, despite the length to which I have gone to explore them.

⁵² Ward (2008): 107.

⁵³ Rosaria Vignolo Munson writes that, "...it combines the idea of independence of a state from other states with that of the constitutional freedom of the citizens within the state. The most frequent antonym to the internal type of freedom is 'tyranny', meaning subjection to autocratic rule. Scholars, especially Raaflaub, have convincingly argued that the second meaning of *eleutheria* is older than the idea of state independence. It goes back to the sixth century and has its root in the constitutional development of the Greek poleis, many of which experienced a period of autocratic rule not connected to a previous tradition of hereditary kingship." Munson (2020): 146-47. Raaflaub discusses this at length as a special feature of the Greek *polis* (2004): 75ff.

My primary focus hereafter is to examine Cyrus as a multiethnic figure, being of both Median and Persian heritage, an element that gives him the ability to adapt and use those two different cultural backgrounds to his own advantage; this constitutes cultural borrowing according to my interpretation, and it provides an important ideological foundation for later Persian identity and self-justification. In this way the Persian Empire is formed and Cyrus cements his place as the “founder of Persian freedom.” Cultural interaction and borrowing is the reason that this happens at all, according to the narrative we have in Book 1. Most of the scholarship does not focus on this unique aspect of Cyrus’ ascension, although it does provide valuable background information for my analysis as I have hopefully shown above. Strong focuses heavily on Cyrus’ identity as biracial, but she identifies this as a symbol for revolution and the dangers of revolution. She also argues that Cyrus is meant to be a warning to the reader of the “advantages and risks” of intermarriage and reproduction among different people groups. As I also mentioned above, I am not sure this is the most fitting explanation of Cyrus and his role in the *Histories*. He is rather a picture of the most extreme kind of adaptation, in being two different kingdoms melded into one person and thus the only person able to create something new and begin again.⁵⁴ He sets the paradigm for all the different types of cross-cultural interactions yet to come.

⁵⁴ A tangentially related point can be found in Hans-Joachim Gehrke’s article “Heroen and Grenzgänger zwischen Griechen und Barbaren” in Gruen, ed., *Cultural Borrowings* which examines the nature of ethnicity in terms of Greek vs. barbarian and through the lens of Greek heroic figures who represent the social mobility that can come through cultural interaction. While not explicitly focusing on Herodotus, Gehrke’s analysis is useful insofar as Herodotus seems to present Cyrus in a similar “heroic” mold and attaining social mobility by using cultural interaction as a tool.

The narrative about Cyrus is sometimes difficult to analyze because of the ways in which Herodotus weaves it together with the story of Croesus along with long digressions about Greece (i.e. Athens and Sparta). As a result it can be difficult to address the Cyrus narrative without reference to the other narratives that are connected to it. However, there are important moments throughout this entire complicated narrative that play a role in Herodotus' portrayal of Cyrus as a "mule" and his blending of his Median and Persian heritage, particularly in how Herodotus prefigures Cyrus in the narrative. I will focus primarily on those important moments and fit them into the larger context as necessary, especially considering Cyrus as an important cultural foundation for all future Persian kings.

Cyrus is first prefigured as a "mule" to King Croesus of Lydia in 1.55, when the latter asks a third question of the Oracle at Delphi. This is within the larger context of Croesus testing which of the oracles gave him true answers or not. From the Oracle at Delphi Croesus receives the famous prophecy about how his own reign would end when a "mule" sat on the throne of the Medians which he of course takes extremely literally (1.55.2). Immediately after this, Herodotus digresses to explain the background and history of Greece, particularly Athens and Sparta including the various cultural dynamics that operated in the backdrop that allowed Athens and Sparta to come into being. I will here engage in a slightly Herodotean digression to express a reason why Herodotus inserts the Athenian backstory *here* rather than somewhere else in the narrative. The most notable part of the Athenian digression is the discussion of the Pelasgians, and what makes it so notable is the way in which it *challenges* the autochthony narrative of the Athenians and states instead that they were of Ionian stock originally and that the later Spartans were Dorians

(1.56).⁵⁵ Since much of Book 1 concerns origin stories, it makes sense that Herodotus would include this in his introduction to the Athenians and Spartans, but the particular aspects of cultural dynamics that he chooses to highlight are interesting for my purposes. The Ionians and Pelasgians *merged* and eventually formed another group (1.56.2), which strongly prefigures what is to come in the culmination of the book: the rise of Cyrus.⁵⁶ These mentions of merging cultural groups all appear to be a part of how Herodotus weaves together his prelude to the culmination of Book 1, which is arguably the character of Cyrus. It is hinted at here even on a smaller, more “mythological” scale in the prehistory of the Athenians and Spartans, who also loom large in the later narrative beyond Book 1 as the eventual antagonists of Persia. All of the foregoing is set against the background of King Croesus as well as the upcoming Cyrus narrative, informing the reader of how Herodotus understands the cultural dynamics at work. It is *not* simple, and often involves quite a lot of cultural cross-pollination, culminating in the foundation of Persia itself. Cyrus prefigured as “mule” is aptly symbolic of his ethnic hybridity and the fusion of two separate cultures, which we come to realize fully when he has reached his apex as the ruler of Persia.

The way in which Cyrus comes about as a “mule” stems from his grandfather Astyages’ fear of being overthrown, after having prophetic dreams that forewarned him about the offspring of his daughter Mandane, such as the vision of her offspring being a vine

⁵⁵ See Hill (2020): 76-77, which explores the precise definitions and uses of terms such as *ethnea* and *genea* and how it directly contradicts the Athenian notion of an unbroken *genos* connecting them to the past. Herodotus implies that there was cultural fusion, which is not generally how the Athenians preferred to conceive of their history.

⁵⁶ The murky, mysterious Pelasgians appear in a handful of other places throughout the *Histories*, often in their capacity as a cultural and ethnic bridge between current Hellenic society and the mythological past (e.g. their role in disseminating Dionysiac rites in Egypt and Greece in 2.51ff. and 2.171).

that spreads over all Asia, or a stream of urine that fills the entirety of the continent.⁵⁷ His response to these dreams is to marry his daughter off to a man belonging to a supposedly “inferior” race and social class: a Persian man named Cambyses. This, ironically, is the very thing that enables Cyrus the Great to become great because it allows him to utilize his double-heritage. As one would expect, this story is a well-known trope. Despite Astyages’ best efforts, the infant Cyrus survives thanks to the intervention of a Median noble named Harpagos, and is raised among the shepherds. This is another important intersection of different societal vectors for the character of Cyrus as well, where his natural kingly nature is juxtaposed with the humility of his upbringing. Presumably both of these aspects of himself play a role in his later success as well, as we will see when he manages to incite the Persians into revolt. This can only happen, however, after certain events lead to the *anagnorisis* of his true identity. After an incident amongst his playmates gains the attention of Astyages, the Media tyrant realizes that his grandson is still alive. However, the Magi come up with a clever way of convincing him that the prophecy has been fulfilled already and that Cyrus is no longer a threat.⁵⁸ Now reassured, Astyages sends Cyrus away to live with his father in Persia where he grows into the legendary leader and fulfills his true destiny.

The main evidence for my argument is the particular way in which Cyrus convinces the Persians to rise up against the Medes, beginning in 1.125. First, Cyrus considers the

⁵⁷ See *Histories* 1.107. The first dream was that his daughter urinates so much that it flooded the entirety of Asia, which he correctly interprets as a symbol of her offspring conquering Asia.

⁵⁸ See *Histories* 1.114, concerning the exact incident that leads to this moment. Cyrus was elected “king” amongst his playmates, and this is how the Magi decided that the prophecy about Cyrus had been fulfilled.

wisest or shrewdest way to incite the Persians into revolt (ἐφρόντιζε ὅτεω τρόπῳ σοφωτάτῳ Πέρσας ἀναπέσει ἀπίστασθαι). He announces to his fellow Persians that Astyages has made him general over them, and orders them to assemble with a scythe (to prove his power over them). In 1.125.3 Herodotus says that Cyrus only managed to convene a few of the various Persian tribes but that these included the Pasargadae, the most noble of all the tribes amongst the Persians. The detail of the “most noble” tribe lends significance to Cyrus’ achievement already as he is nobility himself. First Cyrus orders the assembled tribes to clear a plot of land with their scythes as if they were enslaved; this is certainly meant to symbolize the lowest possible form of work in an empire like Media and it signifies that they can go no lower in their social status. However, on the second day Cyrus orders them to attend a lavish feast where they eat as equals, with rich food furnished by Cyrus’ biological father from his own wealth. This feast signifies participating in the highest echelon of society and elevates men who were slaves yesterday to the noblemen of today; he shows them his power without ever explicitly saying so. Cyrus is offering them the chance to elevate Persia as a subjugated nation to liberated nobility. Cyrus asks the men which of the two situations they prefer, and the answer is resoundingly that they prefer the feast, leading Cyrus to promise that they will be treated like free men if they follow him and revolt against the Medes. He has given them a taste of the punishments and the rewards, in a didactic move that proves his cleverness and his willingness to act. The tribes enthusiastically agree to his proposal and rise up against the Medes. The ensuing narrative of their revolt and success is quickly dispatched and leaves no doubt that it was a thorough defeat for the Medians, and an unequivocal success for Cyrus. Cyrus manages to capture his grandfather alive, but does not

put him to death out of mercy; thus Astyages lives out the rest of his days in comfort but not in power. This is the culmination of Cyrus' identity as a mule, in that he has equal access to either side of his heritage and uses it wisely and to his advantage.

Considering the fact that the two tasks Cyrus assigns to the Persians can be mapped onto two major components of his ethnic identity, the episode therefore can be interpreted as an example of "code-switching." On the first day, he demonstrates one "side" of his heritage so to speak, as it manifests in Median culture. He demonstrates his Median side wherein he is a brutal enslaver who forces his subjects into hard labor with no tangible benefit. This represents the experience that the Persians have had thus far. The second day, however, he identifies himself with his Persian heritage by offering them a feast out of his father's abundance.⁵⁹ He is pointing to their future of wealth and prosperity as Persians in this instance. Herodotus is expansive in his terminology here, listing the different types of flocks that Cambyses (Cyrus' father) possesses, but he also hints to Cyrus' piety by mentioning the sacrifice and preparation of the animals (ἐς τὸντὸ ἔθυσε καὶ παρεσκεύαζε). By acting piously in this way, Cyrus reinforces his claim to being divinely ordained, and he also reaffirms belief that the Persians are in no way inferior to the Medes by feeding them like nobility (1.126.6). Because of his time spent amongst the Medes, and amongst the lowest tier of Median society while being raised by shepherds as well as the highest in the court of Astyages, he has the most thorough acquaintance with all levels of Median society.

⁵⁹ *Hist.* 126.2: ἐν δὲ τούτῳ τὰ τε αἰπόλια καὶ τὰς ποιμένας καὶ τὰ βουκόλια ὁ Κῦρος πάντα τοῦ πατρὸς συναλίσσας ἐς τὸντὸ ἔθυσε καὶ παρεσκεύαζε ὡς δεξιόμενος τὸν Περσέων στρατόν, πρὸς δὲ οἴνῳ τε καὶ σιτίοισι ὡς ἐπιτηδεοτάτοισι. "At this time Cyrus, collecting his father's goats and sheep and oxen in one place, sacrificed them and prepared a feast as if for a Persian army, complete with wine and grain and everything else that was most suitable."

However, he is also Persian via his father and the time he spent in Persia. He shows here that he can switch easily between envisioning Persia as a free nation, and the harsh present reality of Astyages' brutal repression. By showing these "two sides" of his background, Cyrus is able to prove to his followers that he is conscious and capable of being a good king. In this case, the main metric for being a "good king" appears to be having the willing service of his followers rather than followers who have been brutalized and compelled into service. In this context, Astyages looms in the background as harsh and willing to resort to violence to ensure that his subjects do his bidding. In this regard I disagree with Strong's conclusion that Cyrus' "mule" state is primarily meant to be a warning. I think in this case, Strong overlooks this example, namely how Cyrus propels himself into power in a more credible fashion by winning the loyalty of his followers rather than compelling them to do his bidding. Cyrus can speak with authority by warning the Persians what they will receive from the Medes, while also giving them a preferable alternative in his capacity as a Persian. This is also a brilliant way for Herodotus to explain why the terms "Persian" and "Mede" will soon be used interchangeably, as seen in the verb form "medizing" to refer to anyone who collaborates with the Persian Empire in their conquests. It is an expression of how Herodotus understands the fluidity of cultures when they interact with one another, and an expression of the tremendous generative power that cultural adaptation has.

Another interesting issue that appears in the *Cyrus logos* is the recurrence of that unique definition of "freedom" which I explored at length in previous paragraphs. This definition first appears in Cyrus' first address to the tribes, wherein he encourages them to win their "freedom," or more accurately, "to become free" (γίνεσθε ἐλεύθεροι) from the

Medes (1.125ff). This is another subtle element that marks Cyrus as different from the Medes, since just a couple chapters before this, we read Harpagus' letter to Cyrus encouraging him to lead this revolt. Harpagus in 1.124 argues first and foremost that Cyrus will "rule" over everything that Astyages now rules over (...τῆς περ Ἀστυάγης ἄρχει χώρας, ταύτης ἀπάσης ἄρξεις: 1.124.2). Harpagus is thinking like a Median here more than anything else; he is consumed by revenge and addresses Cyrus on the basis of the Median paradigm of what it means to be a ruler. Cyrus, however, takes a different approach when he appeals to the tribes, and that is to encourage them to think of themselves as ἐλεύθεροι, or "free." And by becoming free, they will become partakers of feasts and riches with him. In this way, we can see the subtle differences between Cyrus' Median side and his Persian side, as these details make clear. Cyrus emphasizes the freedom of his followers, perhaps merely as a ploy to gain support and one can debate as to the precise nature of this "freedom." In its context, it mostly seems to mean throwing off the Median yoke, but there is a strong element of persuasion because Cyrus had to woo the tribes into accepting him as a worthy leader, and to prove that he had divine providence on his side (1.126.6). He navigates this potentially explosive path cleverly and wins the loyalty of the Persian tribes, and thus becomes the founder of Persian "freedom." And he does it in a way that is subtler than the deliberative Greek speeches before major battles such as Marathon, where Miltiades makes his impassioned plea for freedom. He enacts it rather than speaking it.

After the accession of Cyrus to power, there is another notable digression on Persian custom wherein Herodotus says that ξεινικὰ δὲ νόμια Πέρσαι προσίενται ἀνδρῶν μάλιστα... "The Persians especially adopt foreign customs" (1.135). I mentioned this

passage earlier and wish to “return full circle” as it were, and return to the theme of Persian imperialism and its immediate association with Cyrus the Great as its founder. The Persians are most inclined to “accept” or “admit” or even “submit to” foreign customs, but this is enmeshed in a strange paradox about Persian life. Herodotus tells us in 1.134 that they consider themselves the center of the world and they have less and less respect for various people groups as they appear farther from the Persian center of the world. The farther they are from home, the less they respect the inhabitants of that place. And yet, at the same time, Herodotus tells us in 1.135, as we have seen, that the Persians are very open to adopting foreign customs, particularly those that have to do with pleasure: “...καὶ εὐπαθείας τε παντοδαπὰς πυνθανόμενοι ἐπιτηδεύουσι, καὶ δὴ καὶ ἀπ’ Ἑλλήνων μαθόντες παισὶ μίσγονται” “...and learning about all sorts of pleasures they pursue them, and most especially they practice pederasty after learning it from the Greeks” (1.135.1).

This susceptibility to foreign custom while also reserving a self-centered disdain for others seems to reflect the paradoxical character of their founder Cyrus, who represents a blending of two people groups and their customs and beliefs, with all the possibilities and contradictions inherent in that kind of situation. Nevertheless it still does not quite stop Herodotus from speaking of the Persians here in very general terms, even though we can surmise from elsewhere that it is certainly not simple. And Herodotus has no trouble undercutting such sweeping statements with subtle indications that all is not as it immediately seems.

From the foregoing we can see that Cyrus is the foundational example of cultural borrowing or adaptation, which he consciously uses to his own advantage and this quality

reflects in Herodotus' later summation of Persian character, as a part of Cyrus' legacy to the Persian Empire as a whole. The result of this is the most historically significant event in the *Histories*: the rise of the Persians. This event is spurred by a moment of cultural borrowing and its consequences on the merging of the Persians and the Medes into one larger cultural phenomenon. From this we can see that cross-cultural interaction is key to Persian success, and a successful adaptation of two cultures is the key to Cyrus' success.

Cambyzes and Arabia

Cyrus' son Cambyzes II assumes the Persian throne in 2.1 after Cyrus falls to the Massegetai and is killed in action by Tomyris. However, the digression on Egyptian customs intervenes and the narrative about Cambyzes is delayed until 3.1, with the enormous digression about Egyptian culture intervening. Strange as it may seem, the intervention of the Egyptian *logos* at this juncture does seem to have an important architectural purpose (which I will explore more definitively in Chapter 3). However, in this present chapter, I believe that Herodotus constructs this narrative to create a decisive break between Cyrus the Great and his son Cambyzes, primarily revolving around cultural dynamics and how each ruler deals with different cultures. The conquering Persian kings have a disproportionate amount of influence because of their constant interactions with other cultures, and Herodotus is also someone who has traveled to other places, and spoken to representatives of other ethnic groups. He is therefore careful to construct his narrative in such a way to emphasize the cross-cultural nature of his project and even of history itself. There is a very distinct difference between the shrewdness of Cyrus and the obtuseness of his son Cambyzes when it comes to other cultures. However, this chapter is focused on cross-cultural

adaptation, which we will witness from Cambyses towards the beginning of his narrative. The narratives of Cambyses' cross-cultural failures will appear in Chapter 2.

At the end of Book 2, Herodotus tells us about the Egyptian pharaoh Amasis, whose reign coincides with the accession of Cambyses. Book 3 opens with Cambyses' dealing with the duplicitous Egyptian pharaoh Amasis, who tricks Cambyses by sending a substitute for his own daughter as a concubine for Cambyses.⁶⁰ I will focus on that misunderstanding in Chapter 2, which will become the very encounter that unravels Cambyses' entire venture. However before that there is a narrative of cultural borrowing woven into the larger narrative where Cambyses willingly participates in an Arabian custom in exchange for safe passage across the Arabian desert. This short passage has not received very much comment, though perhaps because it is more of a passing mention than a fully fleshed-out narrative. It does however demonstrate once again the importance of a successful borrowing of custom to achieve success, even one that is mediated by multi-cultural figures such as Phanes, a Greek mercenary in Egypt. All of Cambyses' encounters with other cultures are heavily mediated by culturally liminal figures, though with varying degrees of success generally tied to their instructions from Cambyses. Herodotus also uses the divergence in types of cultural interaction to underline the erratic behavior of Cambyses; he has no consistent policy in his interactions with other groups and he only grows increasingly erratic as the narrative progresses. He attains success when he willingly exploits the customs of another ethnic group when it is necessary, but reaps failure when he abuses customs. One of the lowest

⁶⁰ "So say the Persians..." 3.2.1. The Egyptian account claims that Cyrus and not Cambyses had asked for the daughter of Amasis in marriage.

lows for Cambyses is the moment in 3.16 where he orders the body of the dead pharaoh Amasis to be removed from its tomb (a horrific abuse of Egyptian custom) and subjected to all kinds of indignities. Finally, because the embalming was such that the body would not fall apart, Cambyses orders the body to be burned (a horrific abuse of *Persian* custom as well as Egyptian, as the Persians believe that fire is a god and that it is unclean to expose fire to a corpse). Cambyses will later suffer the consequences of his abuse of the Egyptian god Apis when he suffers a thigh injury very similar to the injury he inflicted on the cow that was supposed to be the epiphany of Apis (3.28ff).⁶¹ After 3.16, however, Herodotus points us to the episode of his interactions with the Ethiopians via mediators, which leads to a multi-layered cross-cultural interaction that results in the Ethiopians correctly interpreting his desire to rule them while at the same time incorrectly interpreting the purpose of the various gift objects Cambyses sent as a bribe. The various kinds of cross-cultural interactions throughout this complex narrative serve to highlight Cambyses' character, but they do so differently than we have seen in the case of Cyrus who made full use of his own multi-cultural heritage and played his hand well, at least in his ascension to power. Cambyses inherits a secure throne and proceeds to engage in various conquests but without the same kind of cleverness or circumspection, showing himself to be cut from different cloth than his father as well as showcasing the delicate nature of an autocratic empire when it passes into less-capable hands. Herodotus uses Cambyses' interactions with other cultures

⁶¹ All the foregoing is what Munson (1991: 45) describes as converging to make Cambyses the “paradigm of human dysfunction.”

to make that very clear, and the fate of his own expansionist agenda is intimately tied to the success or failure of his dealings with other cultures.

On the material Herodotus may have used, Truesdell S. Brown argues that Herodotus altered his sources, or cherry picked what fit best into the narrative he wanted to tell. Disappointingly, the most compelling conclusion Brown reaches is simply that Herodotus' account is more multifaceted than that of Ctesias which is fairly obvious.⁶² Brown mostly tries to separate Herodotus from his source material, and comes to believe that Cambyses represents a "transition" in Herodotus' historical writing as he moved from a mere lecturer to a historian. While it is next to impossible to conclude anything about Herodotus' relationship to his sources, it is still clear that Herodotus emphasizes the multicultural dynamics at work in this section and sees them working within the larger context of his narrative. Regarding this section of the narrative, Rosaria Vignolo Munson points out several different converging "codes" at work, namely the theological codes (i.e. what the gods are, what they expect from humans) and socio-cultural codes. Cambyses' violations of these codes pertain especially to cultural knowledge. Munson also argues that Herodotus includes a number of meta-narrative statements about the madness of Cambyses by alluding to previous incidents in his life within the main narrative such as his marriage to his sister or crimes against fellow Persians (3.31.4; 3.35.5). He is also seen offering us a perverse picture of cross-cultural observation while in Egypt, by entering all kinds of sacred spaces like tombs and temples (3.37) or even simply inquiring into various customs (3.27.2-3 - largely

⁶² Brown (1982): 403.

as a prelude to his inquiry into Ethiopia). Munson concludes that Herodotus is giving us a picture of a unified reality where all things work together and “break down” together, when it comes to converging cultural codes and the madness of Cambyses.⁶³ I would say that the conclusion drawn from this narrative may be far simpler than that; not that Herodotus is operated in “codes” (consciously or subconsciously) but that he is very deliberately designing his narrative around cross-cultural dynamics. Mabel Lang points out that the presence of Nitetis the Egyptian princess/concubine is a constant across all versions of Cambyses’ Egyptian campaign, leading her to connect the campaign to the rape theme found elsewhere (eg. Helen, Io, Europa, etc), transforming a woman “from an instrument of peace to an agent of war.”⁶⁴ If this is true, then it ties this narrative together with the opening of the *Histories* and the themes of rape and cross-cultural Cambyses launches a campaign to conquer Egypt and eventually Ethiopia. Much of what Cambyses does after his conquest of Egypt amounts to a kind of cultural rape, to continue using Mabel Lang’s terminology. As I said in my introduction to Cambyses, Herodotus uses these narratives to show how he is fundamentally different from his father and precisely why the net result of his military career is failure. However, I wish to highlight an early instance of successful cross-cultural interaction wherein Cambyses willingly submits to a foreign custom in order to gain a specific end, and this will serve as a positive example that will form the backdrop for Cambyses’ later descent into madness and highly negative abuse of other cultural customs.

⁶³ Munson (1991): 43-65.

⁶⁴ Lang (1972): 414.

Key to the exchange between Persia and Arabia is one Phanes of Halicarnassus who serves as a mercenary for Amasis in Egypt. Herodotus tells us that he is one of the most important of the mercenaries. For reasons we are not told, Phanes became offended by Amasis and defected to Persia (3.4.2). After his defection, Amasis spared no effort to track him down because of his importance to the Egyptian army and his valuable inside knowledge. Phanes, it is reported, arrived at Cambyses' court just in time for the Persians to begin their march against Egypt. However, we are also told that Cambyses was still unsure how he was going to traverse the desert despite his plan to march his army to Egypt. This is where Phanes enters and explains the *status quo* in Egypt *and* how to gain safe passage through the Arabian desert. This implies that Cambyses would face failure without securing safe passage, since the Arabians could catch his army at a severe disadvantage without water and supplies. Herodotus tells us that Phanes gives Cambyses the information that enables him to cross the desert, which entails sending messengers to the king of Arabia and asking for safe passage for his army. In order to do this, he must inquire into and adopt a custom peculiar to the Arabians. In 3.8, we are told that the Arabians have a special reverence for pledges and require a special ceremony, and that the friends and family of the pledging parties must serve as the guarantors (3.8.2). The messengers of Cambyses undertake this ceremony with the Arabian king, as the representatives of the Persian king. As such they are required to enter into the cultural space and mindset of the Arabians for the sake of their larger objective. This is especially important because of the religious aspect of these pledges – the parties must invoke Dionysus and Ourania, the only gods the Arabians acknowledge as real (under the Arabian names Orotalt for Dionysus and Alilat for Ourania). Herodotus here

translates Arabian deities into Greek terms, though it is clear that he regards them as the same gods just with different names. Nevertheless, the cross-cultural importance of names remains a prominent feature of Herodotus' ethnographic writing, especially considering that the names given to things are a prominent feature of the Ethiopian *logos*.

After this pledge is completed in 3.9, Herodotus tells us that the Arabian king helps Cambyses' army pass through the desert by supplying them with water. There are two accounts, according to Herodotus. The first and most believable is the story that the Arabian king loaded camel skins with water and sent them via caravan to meet the Persian army in the desert; the second and less believable is that the Arabian king made crude pipes out of cowhides and piped water into the desert from the river Corys in Arabia. The main point is that this instance of borrowing or affirmation propels Cambyses forward into his ultimate plan of conquering Egypt and he even receives assistance in achieving that goal. This episode of borrowing also has some rather gruesome closure in 3.11. We learn in 3.10 that Amasis, the pharaoh who first offended Cambyses, is now dead and his son Psammenitos has taken the throne and commands the army. The Egyptians, out of anger at Phanes for leading a foreign army into their land, ritually slaughter his sons before the opposing army. After this horrific act, both sides fight and lose a large number of soldiers. Herodotus marks this closure in this narrative segment afterwards by digressing into cultural custom again, this time about differences between Egyptians and Persians as seen through the skulls left behind after this battle (3.12). The skulls of the Persians are soft because they wear caps and shield their heads from the sun, whereas the Egyptians expose their heads to the sun which

supposedly hardens them and prevents baldness. After this brief digression, we enter into a new phase of the narrative that I will address more thoroughly in Chapter 2.

Cambyes is noticeably more erratic in his behavior as the narrative unfolds, and that can also be seen in his various inconsistent interactions with the Arabians, Egyptians and Ethiopians. He meets his end in what is likely (according to Herodotus) a divine retribution for mocking the Egyptian god Apis and stabbing the sacred bull in the thigh (3.29). However, we see that, in the beginning of his campaign, his borrowing of Arabian custom is key to his success, as is his cultural mediator Phanes of Halicarnassus. The name Phanes of course is a pun on the word “φάινω,” and it displays his role as the one who “enlightens” or shows the way to Cambyes in this situation. On another level, Nino Luraghi argues for the widespread use of mercenaries in the archaic period who played a large role in the dissemination of culture in the Near-East through language and artifacts.⁶⁵ Thus, Phanes is a plausible sort of person to facilitate this kind of cross-cultural borrowing. It is important to remember, of course, that this is just one part of a larger narrative that features more cultural mediators such as the Fish-Eaters who appear as Cambyes’ representatives later in the narrative. Phanes himself is a foil to the later Fish-Eaters, who are part of a much more spectacular example of cultural misunderstanding. His story does not end with his instruction to Cambyes about Arabia, but when his sons are ritually slaughtered in front of him. This ritual slaughter of his sons seems like a deliberate inversion of the blood pledge

⁶⁵ Luraghi (2006): 22; 18ff. He does not mention Phanes by name, but argues that someone like Phanes could have been one former pirate enticed into mercenary service in Egypt. There appears to be archaeological evidence to support the claim that Egypt hired former pirates as mercenaries.

taken between Cambyses' messengers and the Arabian king, and it adds a sense of grim symmetry to this section of narrative. One commentary blames this on practices of reciprocal ritual slaughter among mercenaries, but I think it is more likely that this is meant to be a deliberate inversion of the moment of ritual bond with Cambyses and Arabia to punish Phanes, using his sons as his representatives.⁶⁶

The reason, I argue, that Herodotus includes this narrative in his account of Cambyses' passage into Egypt is to give us one positive example of a successful cross-cultural interaction, insofar as Cambyses is willing to accept the terms the Arabians offer him in exchange for safe passage through their desert. This example will help provide the backdrop to Cambyses' descent and his later severe abuses of Egyptian and even his own Persian customs. Furthermore, they provide more compelling cultural reasons underlying his military strategy and his ultimate failure as a king. This example is fairly unambiguous in its overall results; Cambyses is well-established as a failure and a madman. Other, later examples will prove a little more ambivalent and Herodotus continues to use their interactions with other cultures as a way to gauge their success, failure, or some middle ground between the two. Darius is another such example.

Darius and Democedes of Croton

Another interesting character who appears in a lengthy cross-cultural interaction with

⁶⁶ Asheri, Lloyd, Corcella (2007): 409. "This macabre act probably stems from a blood rite. On the one hand, it imposes on the participants in the crime a reciprocal obligation, as if they were conspirators. On the other, the action of the Greek and Carian mercenaries seems to reveal the resurrection of a repressed, but never suppressed, practice of human sacrifice: a practice common to all the peoples in antiquity including the Egyptians."

a Persian king is Democedes of Croton, the Greek physician who becomes captive to Darius because of the superiority of his medical skills, even beyond that of the Egyptians. One commentary says, “The story [of Democedes] is well incorporated, using a chronological and aetiological link (ch. 129), into the stories of Polycrates and Oroetes and that of the Persian conquest of Samos (139-49). The period is around 520 BC, the disorders have passed, the empire is at peace, the king is free to plan new conquests (134)...However, Herodotus shows himself perfectly capable of understanding the direct relation between political exile and foreign military intervention, and thus expressing the story’s final denouement: ‘these were the first Persians who came from Asia to Greece’ (138,4).”⁶⁷

Herodotus is once again elucidating the connection between cross-cultural interaction and historical movement. This particular episode occurs in a brief moment of peace while Darius is still deliberating about his next conquest. He is open to suggestion, and Democedes enters the picture to change the course of Darius’ plans, especially through his interaction with Atossa. In this case, a cultural difference between types of medicine is the immediate inciting cause. Greek medicine is shown to be superior to Egyptian medicine in this case, which shows Democedes treating a range of issues from an ankle sprain to some kind of breast tumor. Democedes, as a representative of Greek identity and ideas in his capacity as a physician, interacts extensively with King Darius and has some influence over the course of events through that interaction. The interaction ends up reflecting more on Darius, as he

⁶⁷ Asheri, Lloyd, Corcella (2007): 511.

appears indecisive and open to suggestion, and thus subject to some manipulation on the part of Democedes.

The general scholarly consensus on this episode is that it is largely fictitious or that it is an emphasis on the theme of power dynamics.⁶⁸ According to Malcolm Davies, the theme revolves largely around the notion of the powerful Persian king being outwitted by the resourceful Greek or the clever servant outwitting his master as a common folktale trope.⁶⁹ In the context of my thesis, this cross-cultural adaptation is somewhat ambivalent in its results. It sparks a dubious venture into Greece leading to further failure in Marathon but the whole episode gives further weight to the picture of Darius as an ambiguous ruler whose successes and failures are not quite as spectacular as those of someone like Cyrus or Cambyses. Darius occupies this middle ground as a ruler because of the shadows surrounding his own legitimacy and legacy as a Persian king. Herodotus himself seems rather ambiguous as to the real legitimacy of Darius, and hence the overall narrative about him is often ambivalent in its results. Darius' general ambivalence or changeability towards other cultures is the main focus of this section, as it illuminates the nature of his situation as Persian king. The interaction here between the Grecian Democedes and Persian Darius provides another view into the "Greece vs. Persia" dynamics, especially considering the fact that Democedes is uncorrupted by the golden manacles given to him by Darius (among all the other treasures) and still wants to return to his homeland more than anything else. We can see the superiority of Greek medicine (and perhaps we are meant to think back to the

⁶⁸ See Griffiths (1987): 37-51.

⁶⁹ Davies (2010): 39.

superiority of Solon's wisdom back in Book 1), but we also see another Greek who is not impressed by wealth (much like Solon) and a Persian king who is not able to understand how a Greek would not think like a Persian. In this regard, this episode has more resemblance to the episode of Solon and Croesus as an early glimpse into "East vs. West" dynamics, whereas the Cambyses episode was focusing more on the nature of Cambyses as a ruler and how he set the tone for future Persian imperialism. In the case of Darius, we see his use of Greek medicine spark a chain of events that leads to the first Persian invasion of Greece, with mixed results.

Democedes of Croton, first appearing in 3.129, fits into a similar pattern as someone like Solon or the Scythian wise man Anacharsis. Democedes shares their wide travels as a part of his background, while being a native of an Achaean colony in Magna Graecia. The notion of a well-traveled character taking part in some kind of cultural shakeup is somewhat familiar in the *Histories* as we see in the case of Solon or Anacharsis (whom I will address later). In the course of this particular narrative, we learn that Democedes has spent considerable time in Greece and Ionia, and then wound up being a captive of the Persian satrap in Sardis. This provides a plausible reason for him to be comfortable interacting with Persians and having a level of understanding of their culture beyond the norm. We learn from Herodotus' previous narrative of Polycrates and Oroites that Democedes was a companion of Polycrates who ended up in Sardis as a slave of Oroites. Democedes had accompanied Polycrates on his ill-fated journey to Magnesia where the Persian Oroites

killed him, which is how Democedes enters Persian custody (3.125ff).⁷⁰ By the time Darius sends agents to collect Democedes, Oroites had already been killed by a stratagem cooked up by Darius to punish him for interfering in his consolidation of power (3.126-27). This then accounts for the wretched state of Democedes when Darius orders his men to find him.

Democedes appears in Darius' court because the Persian king had sprained his ankle on a hunting trip, and none of his own physicians could heal it. Out of desperation, he summons a Greek he had heard about, namely Democedes, and orders his men to search for him. After the threat of torture, Democedes finally heals the injured ankle and resumes his life of slavery, but under a different enslaver: Darius himself. To drive the point home, Darius gifts Democedes with enormous amounts of gold, including a pair of golden manacles to symbolize the sort of gilded servitude that he is now under. Democedes, meanwhile, longs to return home but is not allowed to do so because his skills are so highly valued. Hence, all of his actions in this narrative are motivated by his desire to return home and this is what leads him to engage in manipulation. Rachel Friedman explores Democedes alongside Arion the singer from Book 1 as belonging to a class of *demiourgoi* or "workers for the people" who possess superlative skills. She writes, "Herodotus' account of Democedes is, like his account of Arion, filled with superlatives which suggest that there is something paradigmatic about his skill: He was 'the best practitioner of medicine in his time' (3.25.1), he is able to cure Darius when none of the Egyptian doctors are (3.129), and it was because of him that the people of Croton, his hometown, first earned the reputation

⁷⁰ Cf. 3.120ff. Oroites was a Persian whom Darius had appointed as governor of Sardis whose impious deeds against Polycrates of Samos are the focus of the previous narrative.

for being skilled physicians (3.131). This story, too, occupies a prominent position in the narrative because it is the story that Herodotus tells to trace the original cause of the first Persian campaign against Greece.”⁷¹ She goes on to argue that the desire for *nostos* or homecoming is a part of how Herodotus “dislocates” his characters, which indicates the ways in which the borders and boundaries of the world are shifting and changing as the narrative unfolds. “Dislocated” far from home and enslaved to Persians, Democedes displays skills that are first portrayed in contrast to the Egyptians. His medicinal skill far exceeds that of the Egyptians, which he proves when he is able to heal Darius and the Egyptians are not.

The reward Democedes receives for his “superlative” skill is the two golden chains, which of course leads him to ask what Darius meant by this.⁷² Darius responds simply by rewarding Democedes with even *more* gold, giving him everything he thinks the man could want, except permission to return home. This episode is just one example out of many of Persian rulers using objects, especially valuable objects, to communicate in some way. One of the most notable examples is Cambyses’ use of valuable Persian objects as an attempt to bribe the Ethiopians earlier in Book 3 when he sends valuable gold bracelets. The Ethiopians interpret these gold bracelets as shackles; on one level this is because Ethiopia does not see gold as valuable and, on another level, it is because they correctly interpret Cambyses’ intentions behind the gifts. So golden bracelets become a symbol of slavery to the

⁷¹ Friedman (2006): 169.

⁷² “...δωρέεται δὴ μιν μετὰ ταῦτα ὁ Δαρεῖος πεδέων χρυσεῶν δύο ζεύγεσι” “...besides these things, Darius gifts him with two golden chains made of gold” (3.130.4).

Ethiopians earlier in Book 3, and perhaps we are meant to recall that episode here as well. Darius here shows how little he understands Democedes and his desire to return home by assuming that his gifts of wealth would have any hold over him. It is a similar mistake to the one Croesus makes in his conversation with Solon, thinking Solon would be impressed by his enormous wealth. It is a little out of character with other moments where Darius demonstrates higher sensitivity towards other cultural groups, such as in 3.38 or his investigation of the Paionian woman in 5.12ff, but this possibly serves to illustrate the more ambivalent and often indecisive nature of Darius. In this case he gives Democedes a symbolic object, which does not quite work as Democedes rejects the idea of being a slave and rejects the idea of being bound by wealth. He is enslaved but he is wealthy even in his captivity, a fact reinforced by the fact that Darius gives him even *more* gold besides the golden manacles. Gold is of course symbolically associated with the rich Near-East, according to the library of symbols and images Herodotus has built for his readers beginning with wealthy Croesus in Book 1. Furthermore, Croesus also encountered a Greek who was not impressed by wealth in the form of Solon the Athenian, who predicted the downfall of the Lydian king because his vision was unclouded by considerations of wealth and luxury. Using golden manacles, Darius effectively tells Democedes that he is a captive albeit a very wealthy one. He is also effectively telling Democedes that he should not try to return home, both because he is a captive and because he will always be wealthier where he is in Susa. There is also, perhaps, some humor in the narrative associated with the idea that “fashionable” physicians are wealthy as pointed out by How and Wells in their commentary on this chapter.

When Democedes is presented with the opportunity to heal Atossa, the wife of the king, he is able to ask for a condition in exchange for his help. He asks Atossa to encourage Darius to pursue a military campaign against Greece, with the implication that he might find some way to be on the expedition (3.134.5). Later in the narrative, during a private scene between husband and wife in the bedroom, Darius agrees to change his plans as long as he can send spies ahead into the area to learn as much about the Greeks as possible.

Further stress on the cultural issues comes in the form of Democedes and his interaction with Atossa.⁷³ Atossa had avoided seeking treatment out of shame (αἰσχουμένη) but eventually she is forced to seek treatment, which provides Democedes with an opportunity to indirectly influence Darius. In their conversation, Atossa then tells Darius that he would best prove his power over the Persians by conquering the Greeks instead of his planned expedition against the Scythians. The phrasing used is that she was “taught” what to say by Democedes (...ἐνθαῦτα δὴ διδαχθεῖσα ὑπὸ τοῦ Δημοκίδεος ἡ Ἄτοσσα προσέφερε ἐν τῇ κοίτῃ Δαρείῳ λόγον τοιόνδε 134.1). The choice of διδαχθεῖσα seems to imply that she was coached by Democedes on what to say, but also perhaps that she learned something from him that would make her argument stronger when presented to Darius such as what Greek ladies were like, inspiring her to desire Greek women for ladies-in-waiting. Atossa reminds Darius that a king’s strength is most apparent in his conquests, making implicit comparison with Cambyses and Cyrus. Additionally, Atossa tells him that she longs to have Laconian women in particular as ladies-in-waiting, as well as ones from other parts

⁷³ Scholars debate over precisely what this affliction is. See Davies (2010): possibly some kind of mastitis is considered a likely cause. In any case, it does not matter much for my overall point.

of Greece. She seems to view these women almost as set-pieces for her own private museum of cultural curiosities, her own idea of conquest and the collection of subjugated people groups.⁷⁴ However most importantly, this narrative is “aetiological” in its function, explaining a complicated multi-cultural matrix that influenced Darius’ next decision as a ruler.

Democedes the Greek is appointed as the guide for fifteen eminent Persians, since he put himself forward as a logical choice. Darius asks Democedes to take some of his wealth with him to give to his family and promises that he would replace everything Democedes gave away when he returns to Susa, which was evidently a miscalculation on the part of Darius. Democedes manages to escape because a certain king named Aristophilides decided to imprison the Persians he was with as spies, allowing him to escape to his home of Croton. The Persian spies he was later with came after him and were unable or unwilling to recapture Democedes, and they were shipwrecked and subsequently enslaved on their way home (3.138). The only reason they returned home is because an exiled man named Gillos rescued and returned them. This is the group of Persians Herodotus identifies as the “first” Persian spies who were sent to spy on Greece (3.138.4), thus blazing the trail for later invasions of mainland Greece.

The cultural borrowing and interaction in this whole episode is somewhat mild, with the immediate result being Darius “appropriating” Greek medicine to heal himself, and some

⁷⁴ See Asheri, Lloyd, Corcella (2007): 514. They assert that Atossa could not possibly have known anything about the different types of Greek women, especially since Darius had not spied out Greece in any meaningful capacity yet.

extensive interactions between the Greek doctor and the ruling family in a very intimate setting. When Darius “appropriates” Greek medicine for his own ends, it eventually leads to the later healing of Atossa and the subsequent manipulation of Darius into launching an expedition to spy on Greece for an invasion. It fits into the general pattern of Persian acquisitiveness, which Rosalind Thomas characterizes as follows: “Though multitude signifies masculine strength and though acquisitiveness is part of Persian desire for domination, acquisitiveness also represents the most indulgent and feminine side of Persian culture....The Persians are accumulators of consumption goods. In the historical narrative, Atossa desires accomplished Greek maids and Mardonius praises the orchards of Europe in the text of imperialism schemes.”⁷⁵ Herodotus displays different aspects of Persian cultural borrowing here, as it is driven by a desire for further consumption of the commodities belonging to other cultures. The appropriation of Greek medicine leads to further desire for Greece itself and Greek handmaidens. This section also may recall one of the first episodes of the *Histories* wherein King Candaules encourages his servant Gyges to view his wife in a state of undress, which compromises her modesty (αἰδώς; 1.10ff).⁷⁶ Here, the scene changes to simply “in the bed” (προσέφερε ἐν τῇ κοίτῃ Δαρείω...) and the audience alone is directly privy to the scene, though Democedes is also the inciting reason for this scene in the first place because of his overwhelming desire to return to his homeland. He looms large in the background as the reason that this scene is reported to us at all. However, it is notable that

⁷⁵ Thomas (2001):152-53.

⁷⁶ This situation is very interesting, especially when viewed in contrast with the episode of Candaules and Gyges. As Alex Purves points out in an article about the bedroom in Herodotus, the room is described in great detail and Gyges’ precise position in the room is described via the use of various prepositions. See Purves (2014): 101-102.

Herodotus reports the scene for another reason. He is also likely recalling the dangers of the situation Gyges was in when a previous intimate space was invaded by an outsider. Purves writes on the bedroom scene in 1.10: “A story that has ramifications for the entire geography of Asia begins in the narrow space determined by the dark shadow of a door and its distance from a chair upon which clothes are laid in the private act of undressing... By placing his characters in the same room in three separate tellings, he uses its space to plot a micro-story of secrecy, desire, and exposure within the larger canvas of world history.”⁷⁷ Purves does not address the scene here between Atossa and Darius, but I think similar principles apply even though the physical details of the room are not spelled out and no one else is physically present. They do not need to be, since we are already acquainted with the idea of the intimate space wherein colossal decisions are made. This whole situation tells us something about Darius and his particular style of leadership, he is somewhat more ambivalent in his decision making process and this leads to somewhat more ambivalent results; he vacillates between options and wavers when given suggestions. He also does not have a consistent policy in his interactions with other cultures; he indulges in idle curiosity on occasion, but ultimately behaves in ways that are more self-serving.

The most immediate consequence of this entire narrative is that the Persian scouts are shipwrecked and temporarily enslaved on the coast of Iapygia, but after some misadventure manage to return to Persia and report back to Darius (3.138). After this Darius seizes Samos, the first city he had captured at all, out of retaliation for the debacle of his first

⁷⁷ Ibid: 109.

reconnaissance sortie into Greece. The overall result of this entire episode is neither colossal failure nor glittering success. Shortly thereafter, however, he must contend with a revolt in Babylon which takes his attention away from his planned campaigns. So the ultimate result of Darius' appropriation of Greek medicine and Democedes' manipulation of the situation is possibly a misstep on the part of Darius, but with mixed results.

Scyles and Anacharsis

Moving away briefly from Persian kings, the next narrative I will examine is that of the Scythian wise man Anacharsis and the Scythian king Scyles who are both presented as culturally liminal figures who integrate some aspect of Greek culture even when it conflicts with their own. They both pay the ultimate price for their adoption of aspects of other cultures, showing a consciousness on the part of the Scythians of the inherent dangers of cultural interaction and the possibility of borrowing certain cultural traits. Both characters appear together in the narrative and serve an important function as a foil to Herodotus' point about the role of cultural borrowing in bringing about cultural change. The Scythians represent a people group that is static, immovable, and protects their cultural isolation at all costs.⁷⁸ This lack of cultural interaction helps maintain their stasis. Anacharsis and Scyles serve to prove this point as figures who adopt aspects of Greek culture but are ultimately

⁷⁸ It is worth noting that the group I am calling the "Scythians" in this context is part of a larger web of different types of Scythians, commented upon by Klaus Karttunen and Stephanie West (2002): The group that is most pertinent is the ones Herodotus refers to as "true Scyths." Cf. West: "These true Scyths seems to be those whom he calls Royal Scyths, that is, the group who claimed hegemony (20.2, 22.3, 56, 57, 59.1, 71.2, cf. 20.1), apparently warrior-pastoralists. It is generally agreed, from what we know of their names, that these were people of Iranian stock... though the population very likely included speakers of different dialects."

unsuccessful in passing it on to Scythian culture, precisely for the reason that the Scythians themselves recognize the dangers of cultural interaction and its agents. And by this point in the narrative, the counterpoint to Persian imperialism and its tendency to borrow and adopt customs indiscriminately is especially helpful. Herodotus has told us about the Persian tendency to borrow foreign cultures and customs, and we can see by Books 3 and 4 how it is affecting their relations with other people groups. The Scythians provide a counterbalancing example of what happens in a culture that is the exact opposite: the death penalty for any Scythians who borrow the customs of another people group.

Once again I am primarily interested in the literary presentation of Scythians and less in the “real” Scythians.⁷⁹ The “real world” Scythia is complicated, especially if we examine sites like Olbia where extensive interactions took place between different shades of ethnic Greeks and Scythians and other groups. Even Herodotus seems to distinguish between a main group of “true” Scythians and the various sub-groups such as the Kallipidai, whom Herodotus himself identifies as “Greek Scythians” in 4.17.1. This indicates, yet again, that Herodotus is aware of the presence of cultural mixing, and how they might perceive themselves and how others might perceive them. He identifies a number of other sub-tribes from 4.18-20, including the “Royal” Scythians who consider all the other sub-tribes inferior to themselves (due to their “mixed” status). These “royal” Scythians appear to have kept themselves out of the orbit of cross-cultural cities like Olbia and Borysthenes where Greek religion had significant influence on the population, which Herodotus does display in his

⁷⁹ For a broad historical and archaeological survey of Scythia and their real-world interactions with other groups, see Braund (2005).

account of Scyles who spends half his time in one of these culturally liminal Greek-Scythian cities and imbibes the Greek influence.⁸⁰

The foundational literary analysis of Book 4 and the Scythians is Francois Hartog's *The Mirror of Herodotus* (translated by Janet Lloyd), who rightly takes Anacharsis and Scyles together in this analysis. He writes: "A comparison between these two 'biographies' enables us to make an observation about the logic of the narrative: the travels of Anacharsis and the bilingualism of Scyles occupy parallel structural positions in the two narratives and also serve the same function in their development. To travel and be bilingual come down to the same thing; both are dangerous, for they lead to forgetting the frontier and thus to transgression."⁸¹ Hartog argues that Book 4 is functioning in part as a mirror to Herodotus' own audience, causing them to see themselves through the inverted lens of the Scythians. I would add that they are part of a continuing argument about the nature of culture and particularly on the topic of cultural borrowing. Scyles in particular suffers because of his multi-cultural role; where Cyrus managed to balance his biracial background and use it to his advantage, Scyles leans too heavily into his Greek heritage and loses the respect of his subjects, who respond by killing him. He represents the opposite extreme from Cyrus. Anacharsis reinforces the point in his capacity not as biracial but as one who traveled outside of his own sphere and learned about the Greeks in his travels. He and Scyles together represent a different kind of cultural borrowing and also a culture in which the adoption of other customs is punished.

⁸⁰ See Rusyayeva (2012) or Solovyov, Sergey, and Millett (2019): 159–82.

⁸¹ Hartog trans. Lloyd (1984): 64.

At the outset of this discussion, Herodotus writes, ξεινικοῖσι δὲ νομαίοισι καὶ οὗτοι φεύγουσι αἰνῶς γρᾶσθαι, μήτε τεῶν ἄλλων, Ἑλληνικοῖσι δὲ καὶ ἥκιστα, ὡς διέδεξαν Ἀνάχαρσις τε καὶ δεύτερα αὐτίς Σκύλης. τοῦτο μὲν γὰρ Ἀνάχαρσις ἐπέιτε γῆν πολλὴν θεωρήσας καὶ ἀποδεξάμενος κατ' αὐτὴν σοφίην πολλὴν ἐκομίζετο ἐς ἦθεα τὰ Σκυθέων, πλέων δι' Ἑλλησπόντου προσίσχει ἐς Κύζικον, “They especially avoid practicing foreign customs belonging to any others, but most especially Greek customs, as the cases of Anacharsis and also Scyles showed. For when Anacharsis was returning to Scythia after having seen much of the world and given a display of his great wisdom, he sailed through the Hellespont and landed at Cyzicus” (4.76.1).

The first important point is that the Scythians shun all foreign customs *but the Greek customs most especially*. The phrasing is a little bit similar to how Herodotus presents Persian use of foreign customs: ξεινικὰ δὲ νόμια Πέρσαι προσίενται ἀνδρῶν μάλιστα (1.135). The word “foreign” is fronted in both descriptions, followed by the word “customs,” emphasizing the importance of the distinction between “foreign” and “not foreign” in the eyes of both groups, even though they both have very different attitudes towards other customs. As we have seen elsewhere, the Persians retain disdain for all other groups as inferior but have no problem absorbing customs they find pleasurable or interesting, whereas the Scythians view other cultures as inferior but work very hard to avoid their influence. This gives us vital context for everything that follows, especially the notion that Herodotus is using this as a foil to his earlier examples of cultural borrowing.

Herodotus presents the narrative of Anacharsis first, who is more widely known than Scyles is in the Greek world. For my purposes that is not as important as how Herodotus

narrates their stories. Herodotus mentions Anacharsis and Scyles together in this section, starting with the story of Anacharsis and his travels. Anacharsis has the opportunity to see many places (γῆν πολλὴν θεωρήσας) and demonstrates great wisdom (ἀποδεξάμενος κατ’ αὐτὴν σοφίην πολλήν). The word ἀποδεξάμενος perhaps carries some echoes from the opening of the *Histories* and the use of the related word ἀπόδεξις in connection with the work of the historian who also travels and demonstrates his own wisdom, drawing some parallel between Anacharsis and Herodotus. There is an element of “display” or ἀπόδεξις that links Anacharsis and Scyles (and perhaps Herodotus too) in having to demonstrate what they have learned, but that display is dangerous, especially in Scythia where it can end in death. Anacharsis is struck by the magnificent display in the worship of Cybele (μεγαλοπρεπέως κάρτα), which inspires his devotion to the new goddess. There ensues the difficulty of the necessity of display but the danger of discovery, leading to Anacharsis’ retreat to Hylaia where he carefully observes the local rites, which involve drum and “ornaments” (ἀγάλματα). He is “observed” (καταφρασθεὶς) and then reported to King Saulios, who personally kills him for this display of foreign custom. Herodotus notes that because Anacharsis traveled abroad and practiced foreign customs and was observed integrating them into his own personal *nomos*, the Scythians deny all knowledge of him (οὐ φασὶ μιν Σκύθαι γινώσκειν). Sarah Derbew writes, “...he refutes the xenophobia to which other Scythians firmly adhere. For Anacharsis’ fellow Scythians, the portability of these images does not lessen their impact. They understand Anacharsis’ individual performance of Phrygian Greek religion as an attempt to redefine the parameters of their own Scythian identity. Unfortunately for Anacharsis, his fellow Scythians cannot divorce his (external)

race from his (internal) identity.”⁸² Derbew comments on the sartorial elements of this passage, as clothing represents one marker of identity, including “unintended messages to viewers”⁸³ For Derbew, clothing becomes a “metatheatrical” display by which issues of ethnicity and identity are explored. In the case of the Scythians, rigid adherence to their own customs (including their manner of dress) is of paramount importance for their societal self-conception. Anacharsis transgresses this with the addition of non-Scythian ornaments (*agalmata*) to his Scythian clothing, which he adopted as a result of his travels.

As Hartog notes, Anacharsis represents one way in which a character can be exposed to foreign culture: travel, which represents another kind of transgression of frontiers.⁸⁴ The extreme reaction of the Scythians to Anacharsis is of course characteristic of their desire to maintain cultural isolation, and also plays into the Scythian paradox of being constantly on-the-move while also culturally static. In Plato’s *Republic* (600a) he is paired with Thales as a sage and an inventor. According to Strabo, Ephorus lists him as one of the Seven Sages (vii. 3.9). There is a question as to the authenticity of the character of Anacharsis as Herodotus presents him, as Diogenes Laertius and a scholium to Plato’s *Republic* 600a makes Anacharsis bilingual with a Greek mother, leading some scholars to suggest that he is conflated with the story of Scyles the Scythian, or that Scyles and Anacharsis are actually the same person.⁸⁵ Herodotus will further point to the issues surrounding cultural interaction

⁸² Derbew (2022): 114.

⁸³ Ibid: 113.

⁸⁴ Hartog (1988): 83-84.

⁸⁵ See Armstrong (1948): 18–23. Anacharsis as a character underwent a significant evolution as a philosophical figure, even up through the writings of Nestorius in the era of the early Christian church. Also see Kindstrand (1981).

and borrowing in his next story, which represents another kind of cultural mixing that is possible: bilingualism and heritage. Scyles “falls prey to words” as his gateway into dabbling in foreign customs.

The narrative about Scyles begins: πολλοῖσι δὲ κάρτα ἔτεσι ὕστερον Σκύλης ὁ Ἀριαπίθεος ἔπαθε παραπλήσια τούτῳ. Ἀριαπίθει γὰρ τῷ Σκυθέων βασιλεί γίνεται μετ’ ἄλλων παίδων Σκύλης· ἐξ Ἰστρινῆς δὲ γυναικὸς οὗτος γίνεται καὶ οὐδαμῶς ἐγχωρῆς· τὸν ἡ μήτηρ αὕτη γλῶσσαν τε Ἑλλάδα καὶ γράμματα ἐδίδαξε. “Many years afterward, Scyles, the son of Ariapithes, suffered a similar fate. Scyles was one of the sons born to Ariapithes the king of the Scythians, but he was born of an Istrian woman and not a native. His mother taught him the Greek tongue and he learned its letters from her” (4.78.1).

As reported here, Scyles, the son of Ariapeithes suffered a “similar” (παραπλήσια) fate to Anacharsis but many years later. Herodotus notes here that Scyles has a Greek mother from Istria (and “not at all a native,” denoted by the phrase “οὐδαμῶς ἐγχωρῆς”). His mother is responsible for teaching him (ἐδίδαξε) the Greek language (γλῶσσαν) and its letters (γράμματα). This sort of language of course is used elsewhere of larger scale cultural borrowings, such as the Pelasgians learning the Hellenic γλῶσσα, or the ways in which teaching is used when it comes to spreading religious ideas in Book 2. Scyles inherits his culture from his mother by learning language first, which is not the same as outward display of one’s culture but concerns the internal. The language of “upbringing” or “education” is used a little later when Herodotus tells us how dissatisfied Scyles was with his Scythian customs and preferred what he had learned from his mother as a child (ἀπὸ παιδείουσιος τῆς ἐπεπαίδευτο). This inward disposition will lead to the outward display that will eventually

prove to be his undoing. Perhaps as in the case of Cyrus, there is a hint of the idea that one's inward attitude leads to the outward display as is the case when Cyrus displays his "kingly nature" to his playmates in 1.114, despite his deceptive outward appearance as the son of a cowherd (ἐπίκλησιν). Cyrus is discovered by means of a display of his innate kingly character. Scyles, on the other hand, begins outwardly to display an inwardly Greek character.

Scyles eventually inherits the kingdom, but is "not at all content" to practice Scythian customs (διαίτη οὐδαμῶς ἠρέσκετο Σκυψικῆ). As a result, anytime he leads the Scythian army out on expeditions, he also tries to spend time with the Borysthenites and play the part by wearing Greek clothing and promenading around the agora. He manages to ensure that the Scythians were kept out of the town so that no one would observe him practicing Greek customs (4.78.4). He leads a double life among the Borysthenites, spending a month or so at a time in their town, building himself a house and even taking a Greek wife. These Borysthenites, who admit to practicing Dionysiac rites themselves in 4.79.4, finally inform the Scythians that their own king, Scyles, has been initiated into Bacchus and is practicing the rites with the requisite madness. One of the Scythian leaders follows one of these Borysthenites secretly to a tower where they can witness Scyles and the Bacchic worshipers pass by (which recalls the secret foray of King Pentheus to witness the Maenads at their Bacchic worship in Euripides' *Bacchae*). After this, he tells the Scythian army what happened, causing them to revolt and choose Scyles' brother as king instead. Scyles flees to Thrace, only to be pursued and beheaded by his own brother.

Given the potential conflation of Scyles and Anacharsis in other sources, it is perhaps noteworthy that Herodotus is intentional about separating their stories by “many years” to emphasize a continuity in Scythian culture against any sort of cultural adaptation or borrowing. The case of Scyles is even more pitiable than Anacharsis because Scyles cannot help his birth, and does not have Cyrus’ ability to make his heritage work for him rather than against him.

Hartog summarizes the situation best:

“... the schema is quite simple: he moves to and fro between the *ethea* of the Scythians (the word denotes an animal’s lair, one’s habitual domicile) and the town of the Borysthenites, namely, Olbia. He leaves the Scythian space, a space more animal than human, where he feels ill at ease (he detests the Scythian lifestyle) and sets off for the town, but the narrative specifies that he leaves his train on the outskirts (*toi proasteieoi*), in that intermediary zone outside the domain of *ethea* but not yet in that of the *astu*. It is as if it were impossible for the Scythians to progress any further, for *they* are not bilingual. The narrative explicitly notes that Scyles, now on his own, then passes through the walls which are the precise demarcation of this division in the spatial fabric, drawing the line between ‘this side’ and ‘beyond.’”⁸⁶

In the case of Scyles, bilingualism is of paramount importance in allowing him freely to pass between the two worlds, and it allows him to take a Greek wife. However, the superficial is not enough to satisfy him, and he feels that he must do more. What really

⁸⁶ Hartog trans. Lloyd (1985): 65.

destroys Scyles is his desire to be initiated into the rites of Dionysus, according to Herodotus. However, just as he is about to be initiated, his house in the city of the Borysthenites is struck by a thunderbolt. Naturally this is presented to the audience as an omen of the destruction to come that Scyles ignores. He forges on, despite the fact that the Scythians disapprove of the worship of a god who induces madness. Scyles is betrayed by the Borysthenites, who appear to occupy a middle ground between the Scythians and the Greeks. In 4.17 Herodotus refers to them as “Greek Scythians,” and they share customs with both Scythians and Greeks (4.17.1). Herodotus subdivides some of the outlying tribes who are a genetic mixture of Greeks and Scythians; he appears to treat them distinctly from the nomadic Scythians who eschew all relations with the outside world.

This Scythian episode adds more depth to Herodotus’ cross-cultural interests, and a counterpoint to the relentless progress of Persian imperialism. It also provides some vital background for another episode that will appear in Chapter 2 where Darius fails to understand the Scythians. The failure of communication between Darius and the Scythians further underscores how their cultural isolation protects them; we are likely meant to recall the example of Anacharsis and Scyles later on when the Scythians encounter Persia. The cultural borrowing amongst the Scythians is viciously punished, which reinforces their cultural isolation in contrast to the constant cultural flux in other civilizations elsewhere in the Mediterranean. On an individual level, the sufferings experienced by Scyles and Anacharsis provide a kind of foil to the various kinds of cultural borrowings that occur amongst Persian kings; on a broader cultural level these episodes reinforce the Scythian

cultural paradox that their isolation allows them to resist Persian conquest. This isolation creates an insurmountable barrier for their would-be conquerors later on.

Darius and Demaratus

My final example involves Demaratus the Spartan king who flees to Persia after being deposed in Sparta. He appears in the Persian court at a crucial time when the succession was in question, and he suggests the Spartan succession custom to Darius, who decides that it is a just precedent. The overall outcome of this is mixed as Xerxes will prove to be a somewhat indecisive ruler with a mixed track record, and he ultimately fails at his biggest ambition: conquering Greece.

Demaratus is an interesting character to introduce into the late narrative with Xerxes, given his own past in the *Histories* as a deposed king. In the scholarship on Demaratus (which is somewhat limited) there is significant trouble associated with trying to explain his presence in the *Histories* as a whole. Deborah Boedeker recognizes this problem, citing Felix Jacoby's argument that Herodotus likely drew from multiple conflicting sources on the life of Demaratus, however, she also writes, "... the Demaratus stories may derive from a number of local sources as well as from Herodotus himself, but he as *logios* finally controls their selection and placement."⁸⁷ She goes on to argue that Demaratus comes to represent certain story patterns and fits well into this episode about the Persian succession: "Herodotus masterfully uses the Demaratus stories with their underlying religious and narratological

⁸⁷ Boedeker (1987): 85–201.

patterns to suggest how narrowly Greece escaped enslavement by Xerxes.”⁸⁸ I would also add to her points simply that Demaratus is present as a part of the larger pattern of cross-cultural interactions and how those interactions can have a dramatic effect on the outcome, and they reflect important ideas about the cultures involved. Here, Demaratus’ influence helps bring about the reign of Xerxes, which is a substantial moment in the *Histories*. Demaratus is important here in his capacity as an outside cultural influence that not only has a hand in Persian’s political life but also underscores the unfortunate situation wherein a Greek finds himself in exile and helping the enemies of Greece in any way.

This narrative begins in 7.2 with the quarrel between the sons of Darius over the succession. We can see two cultural paradigms at work in the substance of their quarrel, namely which cultural custom gives priority to heritage or to place in the birth order. Darius had seven sons: three by his first wife (before he was king) and four more by his second wife Atossa, the daughter of Cyrus. Artobazanes was the eldest son of Darius’ first wife, and argued that it was customary everywhere for the eldest son to inherit the throne. Xerxes, however, the eldest son of Darius and Atossa argued that he was the one with the greater claim due to his more immediate connection to Cyrus the Great who had “obtained freedom for the Persians,” reminding us of earlier themes in the *Histories*. The next chapter 7.3 introduces Demaratus to us as a character in this story who has some minor influence on the succession by agreeing with Xerxes’ claim and asserting that it aligned well with Spartan custom, by which a child born while the father was king had precedence. Herodotus mildly

⁸⁸ Ibid: 193

undermines the importance of Demaratus' influence here by claiming that Atossa had great power over the situation, but Demaratus perhaps ensured a "clean" outcome by convincing Darius that this was the best course of action, and perhaps also prevented another coup like the one that put Darius in power to begin with. Demaratus appears again in 7.101ff and has a role in explaining aspects of Greek culture to Xerxes during the unfolding of Book 7 and helps illuminate the difference between Greeks and Persians in a way that adds drama and interest to the narrative. Darius assents to a Spartan custom because he is at a loss, but the outcome of the whole situation is ambivalent. Demaratus himself is a failed king, and Xerxes will eventually also be a failure in his future ventures.

The idea of hostility and discord between kings and heirs already appeared in 6.52 with mention of Demaratus and his fellow king Cleomenes, representing two lines descended from their twin ancestors Eurysthenes and Procles. This invokes memory of the mythical model of the diarchy in Sparta: Castor and Polydeuces, the Tyndarid twins who were present in battles wherever the Spartan kings went. However despite this notion of brotherly love and cooperation, Herodotus explains that the hostility between Demaratus and Cleomenes led to the new *nomos* that only one king could go out to battle at a time, thus splitting the Tyndarid brothers and the protection they were supposed to bring with them. Demaratus is part of a narrative of discord and disunity. He also is a reflection of paternity issues, given his own birth story of his mother being stolen away from her husband by Ariston, leading to some suspicion that Demaratus was not truly the son of Ariston (6.66). This suspicion ultimately led to his deposition from the kingship and self-imposed exile among the Persians. He appears several times in the rest of the *Histories*, as part of a larger

pattern of exiled Greeks who spend their exile amongst the Persians (e.g. Democedes of Croton in 3.132-135, the Peisistratids and Darius in 6.94.1 etc.). Perhaps most notable is his role as an advisor to Xerxes during his attempt to plan the next invasion of Greece (7.101ff).

Arguably all the foregoing casts the case of Darius and his own sons in an interesting light, considering Darius' own status as a usurper who came to power through a coup and now has two sons with seemingly equal claims to the inheritance. The role of custom in this narrative appears to get at something a little deeper than the succession. Broken lines of kingship and usurpations are represented both by Darius' own past as a usurper, as well as Demaratus' troubled past on the throne of Sparta. The appeal to Spartan custom is an attempt on both sides to lay claim to some kind of legitimacy, even if it is specious.⁸⁹ Demaratus was deposed from the kingship under questions of paternity and Darius is a usurper, despite his relentless campaign to prove his legitimacy. It follows then that the question of the succession is a dangerous one, and latching onto Spartan custom here allows the situation to have at least an appearance of precedent and stability. The precise terminology used is “ὑποτιθέμενος οὕτω νομίζεσθαι,” — “Darius advised that it was practiced in this way...” — which is the usual language of customary practice throughout the *Histories*. Perhaps the main other notable point about the language in this passage is the use of ἀποδείκνυμι. The first example is provided by Darius in the beginning of the chapter: “Δαρείου δὲ οὐκ ἀποδεικνυμένου κω γνώμην.” Darius is not yet showing that he has made a decision, with an emphasis on the “demonstrating” aspect of the verb. The second use is

⁸⁹ Herodotus himself does not seem to attach too much importance to whether Demaratus' claim is true, and the commentaries on this passage likewise dismiss its importance.

“ἀπέδειξε” in 7.3.4, when Darius does finally make a decision; it says that he “declared” Xerxes king, but it still has that aspect of “showing” or “demonstrating.” The implications of this word should not be overlooked, however, as it is the same word that appears in the opening of the *Histories* and also importantly in the passages dealing with Anacharsis and Scyles in Book 4. The result of cultural borrowing often results in some kind of display, and such is the case here in Book 7 as well. The outer display conveys the inward state.

Another element that we ought to consider is a return to the notion of “freedom,” which has appeared already in the development of the Persian imperial mindset and in Herodotus’ depiction of the Greeks. Demaratus here represents a different viewpoint than the more “traditional” Athenian view of freedom, and one that is more immediately compatible with Persian imperialism. This ought to give the insightful reader pause, as the situation of the Greeks is immensely complicated and much of it revolves around Athens and Sparta as the two opposite poles of the same axis. However, Sparta’s representation here presents an important counterpoint to any attempt at a simple monolithic narrative of Greek defense of their “freedom.” As I mentioned above, Xerxes presses his claim on the basis of being related more immediately to Cyrus, the founder of Persian “freedom.” Demaratus does not seem impressed by this particular argument, but instead argues from his own lived experience as a Spartan. The adoption of Spartan custom also ties into the Persian tendency to adopt foreign customs very readily, as we have already noted, but often this integration of custom leads to the cultural destruction of other groups in some way. Ann Ward sees this tendency as part of the imperialist agenda as well. She writes, “The Persian kings, in their desire for empire, destroy the particular customs of particular peoples....Herodotus also

maintains that Persian imperialism not only destroys the particular customs of the peoples that it subsumes, but also that it assimilates them to oneness or universalizes them.”⁹⁰

Xerxes exemplifies this in his statement in 7.8 that the guilty *and* the innocent alike will all bear the yoke of slavery. In 7.9 Xerxes addresses the Persian army with an appeal to custom: “ἄνδρες Πέρσαι, οὐτ’ αὐτὸς κατηγήσομαι νόμον τόνδε ἐν ὑμῖν τιθείς, παραδεξάμενός τε αὐτῷ χρήσομαι” “Men of Persia, I am not bringing in a new custom but using one that I inherited” (7.8a). He claims to be following the custom that he received before outlining all the grievances against Greece, and concludes with the statement that everything under the sun would become one country; everyone will be subject to Persia (7.8c.2). This is the culmination of all the foregoing development of the cross-cultural dynamics and the ultimate end of imperialism: it has no respect for people groups that naturally differ and practice different things and their right to govern themselves accordingly. This is what Herodotus has been building up to for his entire narrative.

Despite some scholars dismissing Demaratus’ presence in Herodotus as inconsistent or inexplicable Demaratus is an important cultural link between Persia and Greece, both in his influence on Persian succession and his later explanation of the Spartans to Xerxes.⁹¹ Demaratus’ own kingship woes are a curious mirror to the Persian situation, but it underlines the areas of similarity and of differences between Persia and Sparta. The borrowing or exploitation of custom here is a somewhat ironic and ambivalent one, which represents failure more than anything else, and reflects rather poorly on Darius in the end for being

⁹⁰ Ward (2008): 72

⁹¹ Cf. Jacoby (1913), Boedeker (1987), Waters (2004)

somewhat weak because of his own indecision. But Demaratus' presence in Persia allows for Spartan custom at least ostensibly to make a difference on the grand political stage, which has consequences for the remainder of the *Histories* as it sets up Xerxes to be the next king. Moreover it provides a more meaningful exploration of the Persian relation to their imperialism and the customs of various people groups; they "universalize" all customs and people groups, even when adapting or borrowing aspects of other cultures.

Conclusion

These are the most prominent examples of cross-cultural borrowing and the various consequences it has upon the narrative as a whole, but they indicate the degrees of success in the various military expansions of the Persians, with an important counterpoint in the Scythians who serve as an extreme example of cultural isolation. The cultural interactions and borrowings examined here often have direct consequences within the narrative, such as allowing the Persian army into Egypt, or affecting the dynastic succession, but they also indicate important aspects of the characters engaging in them (and the cultures they represent). Cyrus is an able commander because of the particular way in which he exploits both sides of his heritage, rather than choosing one side over another as Scyles the Scythian does. Cyrus is enabled to seize power because he could exploit his biracial background to win followers. We can see the progression of Cambyses' mental illness partly through the erratic ways in which he interacts with other cultures; early in his campaign against Egypt he is willing to make reasonable compromises with the Arabians and willingly submits to their blood-oath custom in exchange for safe passage. At first he has success as a commander,

and Herodotus uses his cross-cultural borrowings as a way to highlight his early success. As the narrative progresses, Cambyses will become more unpredictable, and his interactions with other cultures and their customs provide one avenue of insight into his illness. Through Cambyses, Herodotus teaches us just how quickly the imperial project can fall into less capable hands and suffer dramatically, using Cambyses' various cross-cultural uses and abuses to demonstrate it, with dramatic consequences for Cambyses personally and for Persia as a whole.

Darius occupies a kind of middle ground between Cyrus and Cambyses. Given the heavy implication that he is a usurper and not the legitimate successor to the Persian throne, there is the sense that he is less sure of himself and the results of his planned campaigns are less unequivocal. Many of his interactions with other cultures produce ambivalent results, such as the case with Democedes where both parties exploit each other. Darius exploits Greek medicine for his own ends while Democedes refuses to be persuaded by Darius' promises of wealth and influence. Instead Democedes exploits his situation to return home largely because Darius fails to recognize just how important homecoming was to Democedes and what the Greek was willing to do to achieve it. The results of this episode overall are not an unequivocal success or failure, but they are somewhat characteristic of Darius' reign. Later on, his submission to the Spartan succession custom arises from his own indecision about the situation and also has somewhat ambivalent results, especially since Demaratus comes from a less-than-ideal situation himself as a deposed king. The borrowing of the Spartan custom helps Darius assume some semblance of precedence and legitimacy for his situation, but the result of Xerxes becoming king is both enormously consequential

but also indifferent as Xerxes' main characteristic in Herodotus is failure in his main objective of punishing Greece.

2: Cultural Information Misunderstood or Distorted

Another prominent type of cross-cultural interaction in the *Histories* is the misunderstanding or distortion of cultural information.⁹² I will focus on the second category outlined in my introduction, that is: knowledge misunderstood, misused or distorted. I will be looking at several examples from the *Histories* that involve some form of miscommunication or misuse of information, usually as a means of increasing the impact of the narrative upon the audience and providing additional insight into the dynamics of each situation. My chosen examples all contain miscommunication or the misinterpretation of objects, set against the backdrop of the ethnic context at play in each situation. This study will examine cultural and linguistic misinterpretation between Solon and Croesus, Cambyses and the Ethiopians, and Darius and the Scythians, taking into account the cultural matrices present and how Herodotus uses them to tell a compelling story and fit each episode into his broader pattern of cross-cultural interactions.

Several scholars have analyzed the particular episodes I have chosen in various lights, especially as they all center around kings, particularly Near-Eastern and Persian. Matthew Christ analyzes the role of various rulers in certain cross-cultural interactions and

⁹² Cultural knowledge here being specific, practical knowledge of the customs or practices or languages of other ethnic groups.

how they provide a mirror to Herodotus' own inquiries and activity as a historian.⁹³ Paul Demont takes this approach further and suggests that these kingly inquiries are a kind of mirror to the (primarily Greek) audience and their own curiosity.⁹⁴ Going even further, Elizabeth Irwin suggest that Herodotus creates an “uncomfortable” analogy between the (again, Greek) readers and the Persian king in the Ethiopian episode (28-29)⁹⁵. These scholars all take cross-cultural interaction into account in various ways, but most particularly they seek to understand a mirror-like effect on a Greek audience, in order to draw larger considerations about the nature of ethnic identity, kingship, and the role of the historian in the *Histories*. Most recently and relevant to my own analysis, Stephen Brandwood analyzes Herodotus and his use of translators or his own role as a translator, suggesting that Herodotus is underscoring his own importance as the “arch-translator” when the narrative requires his intervention, as we see in the example of Egypt and Ethiopia.⁹⁶ Brandwood takes a more atomized approach to the text, while my approach situates these examples into Herodotus' own patterns of thought and seeks to show how they fit into a larger paradigm within the *Histories*. All of these scholarly treatments are most concerned with Greek readers and their intended response to each episode, especially how Herodotus achieves a kind of “mirroring” effect by reflecting Greek cultural ideas and preoccupations back onto his audience (one of the contentions of post-colonial analyses of Herodotus' work). I prefer instead to focus on Herodotus' representation of how foreign cultures interact and

⁹³ Matthew R. Christ, (1994): 167–202.

⁹⁴ Paul Demont, (2009): 179–205.

⁹⁵ Elizabeth Irwin, (2014): 25-75.

⁹⁶ Steven Brandwood, (2020): 31-32.

demonstrate their own agency in each encounter, rather than focusing solely on what these encounters might mean to the intended Greek audience. Such an analysis ought to leave us with greater appreciation for Herodotus' attempt to represent interactions between various ethnic groups. The examples I have chosen, taken together, show how Herodotus uses cultural information or cultural mediators as a part of his storytelling technique to tell us something more about mindsets and how people groups operate in dynamic situations. I think these stories also benefit from being analyzed with a consciousness to their overall context, rather than as isolated events. These cross-cultural interactions form an integral part of the pattern in Herodotus' thinking as it pertains to human behavior in the entirety of the *Histories*.

Lydia

The first extended narrative of the entire *Histories* begins with a conversation between Solon the Athenian and Croesus the king of Lydia. This conversation has already been foregrounded with Herodotus' famous introduction of the age-old East-West conflict, going back to the mythological past. Croesus is the first major character Herodotus describes at great length, in a narrative that is highly complex and includes a long excursus into the history of Athens and Sparta before turning again to the final events of Croesus' life and downfall. The foundation of the entire narrative about Croesus, however, is his meeting with Solon the Athenian. In this conversation, Croesus famously asks Solon to identify the most "blessed" (ὀλβιώτατον) man in the world, expecting Solon would say "Croesus." Solon disappoints him by telling stories about Greek men that he considers far more "blessed" than Croesus, who walks away from the encounter offended. The offended Croesus then

dismisses the wise advice contained in Solon's speech, which will soon prove to be the foreshadowing of his own downfall. Solon tells two stories about Greeks (particularly from Attica): Tellus, a rather ordinary Athenian man who lived a good life and died honorably in old age, and Cleobis and Biton, two Argive youths who died piously at the height of their youth. Both of these stories are dependent on a deeper understanding of Greek culture than Croesus evidently has (despite his interest in knowing more about Greece), and it is this ignorance that causes Croesus to dismiss Solon's advice. This misunderstanding and subsequent dismissal of Solon's advice is what I will analyze further. The main axis of this cross-cultural interaction is how to understand the precise meaning of the Greek word *olbos* and *olbios* which have their roots in the cultural backgrounds of each respective character.

These subtle cultural differences directly affect Croesus' ability to comprehend the information he receives from Solon. Herodotus' presentation of this conversation helps explain Croesus' behavior later on in the narrative as well, such as his attempt to circumvent the fated death of his son Atys, or his attempt to bribe the oracle of Delphi into a favorable answer, and how this contributes to his eventual demise. More broadly, the narrative helps underline the growing divide between East and West, which will become clearer at the end of the narrative when Cyrus appears on the scene and drives home the significance of his conquest of Lydia; one of the ways Herodotus highlights this is through Cyrus' sudden need for interpreters in order to converse with Croesus. This demonstrates Herodotus' concern with developing nuance in his description of the East-West conflict and also the difficulties and pitfalls of cross-cultural interactions. As the *Histories* unfolds, Herodotus appears to

employ interpreters as a means of marking particularly difficult cross-cultural encounters (though it is hard to argue that he is entirely consistent in his use of them).

From the beginning of the narrative, it becomes clear that Herodotus is presenting Solon as a cultural contrast to Croesus in a number of ways. Herodotus mentions at the outset that Croesus had received a visit from each of the Seven Sages after his conquest of Asia Minor. Solon is one of these famed Seven Sages, who epitomizes Greek wisdom and thought up to this point in the *Histories*. Croesus is already well-established in his identity as a Near-Eastern despot, although Christopher Pelling rightly points out that Croesus is *not merely* a stereotype and that Herodotus intentionally blurs the lines between East and West⁹⁷. However, I would argue that stereotyping does play some role in the unfolding narrative as it serves Herodotus' broader purpose, though East and West are still represented as culturally closer here than they will be later on.⁹⁸ By the time of their meeting, Solon already presents a rather stark contrast to Croesus even at the outset of the narrative, when Herodotus points out the purpose of Solon's trip abroad following the passage of his laws in Athens. Herodotus had already mentioned in 1.29 that the Athenians had agreed to abide by

⁹⁷ See his article "Educating Croesus: Talking and Learning in Herodotus' *Lydian Logos*" *Classical Antiquity* 25.1, 2006.

⁹⁸ In terms of more tangible cultural links between East and West in the earlier stages of the narrative, it may also be worth noting the later presence of the god Apollo in the story of Croesus. (Specifically the tale of Apollo quenching the flames of Croesus' funeral pyre, thus proving his divine presence in the life of Croesus). Lynette Mitchell argues in her book *Panhellenism and the Barbarian* that Apollo is considered in some of the literature to be "the Panhellenic god" because his geographical boundaries define what it means to be Hellenic, as his cult and worship is also integral to what it means to be Hellenic (p. 8). Now this particular element deserves examination under the heading of the typography that deals with cultural assimilation, however I bring this up here because I think it is important to mention that this element of the Lydian logos proves that there is closer kinship between East and West in the early stages of the *Histories* and that Herodotus will widen that gap as a way to further illustrate who the Persians are. It also adds further weight to the presence of Solon as someone who has accurate information about divinity in the world, while Croesus does not.

Solon's laws for ten years while he purposely absented himself from their implementation. Croesus, however, operates in the Near-Eastern despotic paradigm wherein he seeks to control his circumstances far more noticeably than Solon does, especially in how he uses his wealth. The contrast is a philosophical one; Solon's outlook on life is determined in part by his identity and background, and he is living in light of it (i.e. he is not acting the part of the tyrant in Athens, but allowing his principles of government to work without him being there). Croesus, on the other hand, implicitly displays many of the characteristics of the Near-East often criticized (or merely stereotyped) by Greek writers. One such characteristic is despotism, such as Aristotle describes in *Politics*: διὰ γὰρ τὸ δουλικώτεροι εἶναι τὰ ἤθη φύσει οἱ μὲν βάρβαροι τῶν Ἑλλήνων, "...for barbarians are more servile in their character than the Greeks are..." (*Pol* 1285a 20). Aristotle's reason for this is that the tyrants of the Near-East rule over unwilling subjects and must constantly be on guard for plots. His bodyguard is to guard *against* the citizenry, rather than being taken *from* a willing citizenry, as will become somewhat more pronounced in Herodotus' later depictions of Persian kings. Another characteristic is their "softness," a well-known stereotype within Greek literature. For example, Lydians appear in Aeschylus' *Persians*, in the opening chorus, line 41-42: ἀβροδιαίτων δ' ἔπεται Λυδῶν ὄχλος.... The interesting adjective here is ἀβροδιαίτων which means "living in luxury" a term which also appears to carry connotations of effeminacy. Euripides also mentions wealthy Lydian ladies in a chorus in *Iphigenia at Aulis*, lines 786-87. Here they are αἱ πολύχρυσοι, possessing much gold, as Croesus himself does and is eager to show off. The term "Lydian" may also be used here to refer to "near-Eastern" more generally, especially as a people group that faded into the background after the Persian

conquest. Edith Hall writes of Aeschylus' *Persae*: "The high luxury enjoyed by the Persian ruling class which was to become a central tenet of Greek belief about the Asiatic way of life is suggested by the use of certain symbols, items of vocabulary, and even possibly metrical forms, which were to become its standard poetic 'signifiers'. Their fabulous wealth, *ploutos* (see especially 842), rather than the decorous prosperity implied by *olbos*, is established in the opening sentence: the palace is 'rich and golden' (3). Gold is mentioned no fewer than three further times in the parodos alone (9, 45, 53). Even their race is 'born from gold' (79-80), as Aeschylus renders symbolically relevant the genealogy recorded by Herodotus (7. 150), that the Persians were descended from Perseus, who was conceived in a shower of gold. Later the queen leaves her: 'golden-doored palace' (159)..."⁹⁹ Hall argues that much of these Asiatic characteristics are then "read back" into earlier Near-Eastern culture and earlier mythology, though based on stereotypes already developed or hinted at in authors such as Herodotus or the Hippocratic corpus. For example we see in section 16 of *Airs, Waters, Places* that the author depicts "Asiatics" as all similarly soft and cowardly owing to the fact that there are no extremes in their climate that would cause them to become hardened; as a result, they incline towards luxury and effeminacy as an entire people group within one large climate system. Hence Croesus may be viewing *olbos* from his tyrant status and his luxurious lifestyle as a result of these cultural characteristics, and his *olbos* will become one of the central points of disconnection between himself and Solon.

⁹⁹ Hall (1989): 80.

One final point before looking more closely at Solon's stories is that Herodotus carefully foregrounds the discussion of *olbos* before the conversation even begins when he mentions in 1.30.1 that Solon has already traveled through Egypt and been shown the great wealth of Croesus in Lydia (μεγάλα τε καὶ ὄλβια), so we already have one aspect of the forthcoming discussion foregrounded for us, namely the possession of wealth and its relation to whether someone has *olbos* or not. Croesus is the one who introduces the word into the conversation, however, when he asks Solon who the "most blessed" (ὀλβιώτατον) man in the world is. It is fairly clear by now that Croesus considers himself *olbios* primarily on the basis of his wealth and power, and he will soon discover that Solon does *not* understand it that way. Rosaria Vignolo Munson writes, "The failure of communication between Croesus and Solon, for example, involves the two speakers' different notions of who should 'be called' *olbios* and the meaning of that term. But no consequence ever results in the *Histories* from Greek speakers, Lydian-speakers, Persian-speakers etc. not understanding one another because of their national languages."¹⁰⁰ However this may also be partly because Herodotus wishes to convey a cultural proximity between Greece and Lydia, and is less focused on delineating linguistic difficulties in service to his overall point about the nature of cultural interactions and the fact that the East-West divide is not as wide as it later becomes.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Rosaria Vignolo Munson in *Black Doves Speak: Herodotus and the Language of Barbarians*: pp. ?? (online text has no page numbers).

¹⁰¹ A similar dynamic will return in later portions of the text when famous families amongst the Greeks begin to fraternize with the Persians, cf. 7.6.2 when the Peisistratids and the Thessalians offer support to Xerxes. Herodotus makes no issue out of language barriers here, which perhaps underscores the treachery of the Medizers. There has also by this point been a lot of forced assimilation of the Greek islands and Greeks in Asia Minor, facilitating communication between Greece and Persia even as the ideological and cultural divide grew wider.

Related to that point, Christopher Pelling rightly points out that Croesus is *not merely* a stereotype and that Herodotus intentionally blurs the lines between East and West¹⁰². In his article, Pelling specifically explores the apparent “elusiveness of wisdom” and the “distortion of speech” present in the conversation between Croesus and Solon and argues that the reader's experience was meant to slowly come to comprehend the elusive wisdom of Solon over time as the narrative progresses. My approach focuses more specifically on cultural reasons for distortion and elusiveness than Pelling’s does. Elucidating these distinctions is important for my argument because I believe that one major point of this narrative is about cultural differences and their role in pushing cultures together or apart, especially as it hinges on the acquisition of accurate knowledge. In the case of Croesus, Herodotus gives us a picture of how Croesus fails to understand knowledge he gains from other cultures, which tells us something more about his character and his general mindset.

After being asked to choose the “most blessed” man in the world, Solon describes an Athenian man named Tellus and the blessings he enjoyed, such as living in a flourishing city, having good children who all outlived him and most importantly, dying gloriously in battle as an older man and being buried with honors particular to Athens. Many of these factors are largely out of Tellus’ own control, such as his status in Athens and his own death and burial (1.30.3-31.1).¹⁰³ Solon makes no mention of wealth except to say Tellus lived

¹⁰² See his article “Educating Croesus: Talking and Learning in Herodotus’ *Lydian Logos*” *Classical Antiquity* 25.1, 2006.

¹⁰³ The importance of burial customs as a means of understanding another cultural group is everywhere in Herodotus, notably in 3.38 where King Darius compares Indian and Greek burial customs, to the mutual horror of Indians and Greeks. Also cf. 4.73-76 where Herodotus describes the burial customs of the Scythians at length.

“decently” but not extravagantly which already suggests that while Solon and Croesus are using the same word, ὀλβιώτατον, they do not understand it in the same way at all. In a Greek context the word ὀλβος has implications that Croesus did not apprehend, although superficially the use of the term “ὀλβος” carries connotations of happiness or a state of blissful existence. This term is first attested in a Homeric context such as *Odyssey* 6.188: “Ζεὺς δ’ αὐτὸς νέμει ὀλβον Ὀλύμπιος ἀνθρώποισιν, / ἐσθλοῖς ἠδὲ κακοῖσιν, ὅπως ἐθέλησιν, ἐκάστω.” These words are put in the mouth of Nausicaa as she converses with Odysseus, but she expresses a common Greek idea that it is Zeus who allots and rescinds ὀλβος as he sees fit. The word also occurs in *Il.* 24.530ff in connection with the well-known fable of Zeus and his urn from which he determines the fates of humankind, always a mixture of good and bad. Achilles uses it here to describe Peleus as a man endowed with “ὀλβω τε πλούτῳ τε...” (*Il.* 24.536). A few lines later, Achilles goes on to say in 24.543: “καὶ σὲ γέρον τὸ πρὶν μὲν ἀκούομεν ὀλβιον εἶναι...” Achilles makes it clear that his premature death and absence from Peleus precludes him from continuing in a state of *olbos*. Tellus being outlived by his children, according to Solon, ensures his *olbos*. Like Peleus, however, Croesus will not outlive his son and will suffer a similar decline in fortune. This first story that Solon tells has a specific foreshadowing effect on the narrative immediately after Solon leaves Lydia when we watch Croesus lose his son Atys. We have already been forewarned that Croesus is likely to lose his *olbos*.

Another notable point of Solon’s description of Tellus is the term he uses to describe the children of Tellus, namely that they are “καλοὶ τε κάγαθοί” (beautiful and noble). This formulation appears in Greece as a phrase particular to the aristocracy as well as the ideals

that went along with being a member of the aristocracy.¹⁰⁴ What we might term “perfect gentlemen” would be a vague approximation of the formulation “καλοί τε κάγαθοί” in Greece. It implies a certain set of values and characteristics explored by Aristotle and Plato, and summed up by Werner Jaeger thus in his *Paideia*: “High-mindedness is in itself morally worthless, and even ridiculous, unless it is backed by full *arete*, the highest unity of all excellences, which neither Aristotle nor Plato shrinks from describing as *kalokagathia*.”¹⁰⁵ In other words, the sum total of all Greek values is contained in the term: *kalokagathia*. Jaeger explains it in terms of nobility of mind and character, but also the self’s orientation to the pursuit of “beauty” and “*arete*”, especially the latter as the central virtue of Greek education. Aristotle discusses the proper place of καλοκάγαθία in his *Politics* 1259b, specifically as it pertains to the difference between free and enslaved people. Aristotle makes a distinction between the ruler and the ruled, while arguing ultimately that καλοκάγαθία is a trait belonging specifically to the ruling class. This ideal, especially its emphasis on ἀρετή, is rooted in the Homeric world of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* where heroes of the past form a vital part of the background to the eventual meaning and associations of καλοκάγαθία. Croesus embodies a subtly different ideal despite also being a hereditary king (such as Odysseus): the prosperous near-eastern conqueror noted for his great wealth and expansionist tendencies, but somewhat separate from any particular concern for virtue recognizable to a Greek. Solon, perhaps intentionally, frames this first

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Plato’s *Apology* 21d, Aristophanes, *Knights* 227, 735; *Clouds* 101. Also cf. Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 1.2.48, and 3.8.5. The phrase in Aristophanes *Clouds* is used to describe the philosophers from whom Strepsiades is learning; in *Knights*, it occurs both times in the context of Demosthenes, Cleon and the Sausage-seller having their comic discussions.

¹⁰⁵ Werner Jaeger, (1976): 11-12

example in terms that will elude Croesus and imply that Croesus does *not* possess the quality of καλοκάγαθία since his cultural context would not enable him to cultivate it. These Greek ideals are small pieces of cultural knowledge that Croesus evidently does not possess, and thus he is unable to understand the full impact of Solon’s words even if he gets the general idea.

Perhaps another notable contrast is the importance Solon places on death and burial of Tellus, particularly at *public* expense in 1.30.5: Ἀθηναῖοι δημοσίη τε ἔθαψαν αὐτοῦ τῆ περ ἔπεσε.... The idea of “public expense” implies the democratic nature of Tellus’ burial and honors, as opposed to the autocratic nature of Croesus’ own kingdom. The honors were heaped upon Tellus by his entire community as a valued member of the polis rather than its ruler or ruling family. Even in this small way, the democratic nature of Athens and the despotic nature of Lydia seem subtly juxtaposed.

Solon’s second story is about two young brothers, Cleobis and Biton, who received the divine gift of dying in their prime without ever experiencing any sort of decline and thus are preserved as eternal youths, wherein consists their *olbos*. This story, too, has a specific foreshadowing effect in the life of Croesus, especially as it pertains to divinity and the untimely loss of one’s children. This particular story will contrast with Croesus’ later life when he experiences the most spectacular decline a human being can suffer, especially in one’s old age. In Solon’s story both Cleobis and Biton were prize-winning athletes, which is

also a noted Greek value.¹⁰⁶ They received great praise for piety because of their willingness to convey their mother to a festival for Hera in an ox-cart, an exploit made necessary because the oxen had not arrived on time. For their piety, their mother prays to Hera to give them the greatest gift mortals can have which is, ironically and unbeknownst to her, death: (διέδεξε τε ἐν τούτοισι ὁ θεὸς ὡς ἄμεινον εἶη ἄνθρωπον τεθνάναι μᾶλλον ἢ ζῶειν, 1.31.3).¹⁰⁷ Cleobis and Biton receive the privilege of dying at the height of their glory, and in that particular “liminal” phase of life between childhood and adulthood. Charles Chiasson writes, “Viewed from this perspective, Cleobis and Biton could stand beside Telemachus as legendary embodiments of the Greek male’s maturation process. At the same time, however, the maturation of Cleobis and Biton is patently aberrant since the death they die is a literal one rather than the symbolic initiatory death that typically signals the transition from one social status or category to another.”¹⁰⁸ While such initiation symbolism is not confined merely to Greece, Charles Chiasson argues for various parallels that Herodotus is intentionally drawing from Greek mythology such as Hippolytus and Lycophron, both of whom die just before reaching the fullness of adult civic status which is especially important in a Greek political context. Chiasson also writes in his conclusion, “The manner of the

¹⁰⁶ Cf. *Histories* 3.14.7-11: the conquered Egyptian Pharaoh Psammenitos mourns the most for an old friend of his who had suffered his decline in old age, which he considered to be the greatest tragedy he had witnessed, despite seeing his own children enslaved and dishonored.

¹⁰⁷ Susan Shapiro argues, “This may be the reason why Solon judged their lives as less complete than Tellus. But the point of similarity between them, emphasized by the phrases ‘the best end of life’ and ‘the best thing that can happen to a man,’ is that all three died immediately after their greatest achievement, surrounded by their family and countrymen who recognized that achievement and gave them a permanent memorial after their death. The fact that these men died at their acme means that they did not have to suffer the decline that follows a human triumph” (1996; 351).

¹⁰⁸ Chiasson (2005): 56

brothers' death combines distinctly Delphic myth with the Panhellenic mythical motif that makes a mother responsible for the mortality of her heroic sons."¹⁰⁹ This is also perhaps an ironic foreshadowing of how Croesus is, in a sense, responsible for the death of his own son not for any pious reasons but in spite of his own attempts to circumvent his son's death. But the precise connotations of their "initiation" into death by Hera is another aspect of Hellenic thought that Croesus likely would not have clearly understood. They are truly fortunate because they never had to experience a decline and are memorialized in a liminal and perfect state, quite apart from any hint of wealth or power. Their ὄλβος is defined by their piety and having the right relationship with divinity, and with their mother. Their piety allows them to be subordinated to the will of Hera, as desired by their mother. Croesus, on the other hand, will end up devastated by the tragic loss of his son despite receiving divine warning of it. As with many such stories, Croesus' attempts to circumvent fate merely create the conditions for fate to be fulfilled as predicted. All of the foregoing examples have hopefully illustrated the two complex cultural matrices at work in this narrative, which help explain the ultimate source of Croesus' misunderstanding. As I mentioned once before, this whole narrative implies that Solon was the one who had the correct understanding of the situation, as the character who foreshadows Croesus' fate.¹¹⁰

As we come to the end of Solon's speech, Croesus becomes very annoyed and declares that Solon is a "know-nothing:" (οὔτε λόγου μιν ποιησάμενος οὐδενὸς, κάρτα

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. 60.

¹¹⁰ Irene deJong writes, "Like the Homeric narrator and his singers Phemius and Demodocus, the Herodotean narrator uses the device of the narratorial alter ego: certain characters in his story seem intended as images of himself. In the first place, we may think of Solon, Artabanus, and Demaratus" (p. 113) From *Narrators, Narratees, and Narratives* eds. Irene J.F. de Jong; Angus M. Bowie; René Nünlist. Brill, 2004.

δόξας ἀμαθέα εἶναι). Solon's understanding of *olbos* has little to do with personal wealth and power, but with virtues and certain factors that are out of one's control (such as whether one outlives their children or not, or how one dies). Croesus, on the other hand, is more preoccupied with his wealth and power, and to some extent with controlling his life circumstances. Solon's "most fortunate" men in the world were not merely ethnically Athenian or Argive, they were also not necessarily wealthy or politically powerful. They instead demonstrated personal virtue (manifested in being καλοί τε κάγαθοί) rather than mere status. Croesus had spent his life thus far amassing political power and wealth, assuming that this is the extent of his *olbos* and that it is immovable. Solon presents a rather stark contrast to Croesus even at the outset of the narrative, when Herodotus points out the purpose of Solon's trip abroad following the passage of his laws in Athens. Herodotus had already mentioned in 1.29 that the Athenians had agreed to abide by Solon's laws for ten years while he purposely absented himself from their implementation. Croesus, however, operates in the Near-Eastern despotic paradigm wherein he seeks to control his circumstances far more noticeably than Solon does, especially in the use of his wealth. In part the contrast is a philosophical one; Solon's outlook on life is determined by his identity and background, and he is living in light of it (i.e. he is not acting the part of the tyrant in Athens, but allowing his principles of government to work without him being there). Herodotus presents him in the light of Greek wisdom and philosophy, while Croesus is enthralled by his personal wealth and gives his *olbos* a higher sense of security than Solon gives it. Solon sees it as fleeting and insecure while Croesus clearly does not. For these reasons, Herodotus is giving us vital context not merely for Croesus but for the entire

Histories. This passage is illuminating regarding the behavior of the Persian kings and their interactions with the rest of the world, particularly the ways in which their cultural backgrounds affect their ability to understand other cultures and interact with them effectively. As the narrative progresses, Herodotus will keep Croesus in the background as an advisor to later Persian kings until the reign of Cambyses to serve as an echo of the themes laid out in the Solon-Croesus interaction. Croesus will be ignored by Cambyses, mirroring the earlier position of Solon as the ignored advisor while also subtly underscoring the increasing Persian imperialism. All of the foregoing sets up a pattern of recurring cultural distortions and conflicting mindsets shown in action, especially as the cultural divide between East and West grows more pronounced.

As a final coda to this section on Lydia, I think it is important to draw out a final scene towards the end of the Lydian logos when Croesus is about to meet his end on the pyre at the orders of Cyrus. Croesus mutters the name “Solon” three times while he is on the pyre, which attracts the attention of Cyrus. Cyrus calls in interpreters (τῶν ἑρμηνέων) to explain what Croesus means, but they are mystified at first and require Croesus to explain himself in more detail, which he does. Through these linguistic mediators (since Cyrus evidently does not know Lydian or Greek), Croesus explains who Solon is and that he has now realized that Solon’s advice was universal and applied to everyone but especially those who consider themselves fortunate (1.86.5). Upon learning this, and seeing the miracle of Apollo present in extinguishing the fire that was about to kill Croesus, Cyrus internalizes Solon’s advice and acts upon it, fearing divine retribution. In this instance, Cyrus learns the lesson and demonstrates acceptance of new information and a willingness to acknowledge a

certain precariousness to his own situation. The role of the interpreters is marked here; Herodotus mentions them twice using the same word to underline the presence of a language barrier that was evidently not present when Croesus and Solon were interacting. This marks a new beginning in Herodotus' narrative of cross-cultural interactions. Solon and Croesus represent two cultures that are closer in proximity than the cultures of Lydia and Persia, but the rise of Persia and the sudden marked need for translators marks the beginning of a growing cultural divide between Persia, Lydia and the West in general.

Ethiopia

The Ethiopian *logos* contains another significant moment of cultural clashing, this time as a result of cultural inversions, language barriers, and the presence of mediators. The misunderstanding (or misuse) occurs between Cambyses, his cultural mediators the Ichthyophagoi, and the king of Ethiopia. This episode is even more layered than the Lydian episode because we can distinguish between types of understanding that occur, but it is all undergirded by the cultural differences of Persia and Ethiopia as Herodotus presents them. The actual historicity of this narrative is obviously doubtful, but it is helpful for understanding Herodotus on his own terms. Herodotus seeks to provide the readers with the best understanding of the situation in all its complexity, including (and especially) the perspective of the would-be conquered people of Ethiopia. In terms of the historical narrative, Herodotus merely needed to explain that Cambyses failed to achieve his conquest because of all the pragmatic reasons: the enormous desert that lay in his path, the lack of provisions for the army, the lack of thorough planning, etc. Herodotus chooses instead to paint a fuller and more interesting picture, using cultural misunderstanding as a way to

enhance our understanding of both sides and how their minds worked when they encountered each other.

I think at this point it is worth exploring first some of the previous context of this episode as it illuminates the whole of the Ethiopian *logos*. Many scholars writing on the topic tend to begin their analysis in 3.16-17, but Herodotus gives us some interesting and important information well before that as a part of a larger narrative about cross-cultural interactions.¹¹¹ There is an example of a cultural assimilation that appears to act as something of a counter-balance to the later misunderstanding between Cambyses and Ethiopia. In 3.4, Herodotus introduces a notable and culturally-liminal character named Phanes who hails from Halicarnassus (Herodotus' own hometown) but is at that time serving as a mercenary for the Egyptian pharaoh; he helps Cambyses conquer Egypt by giving him the necessary information to allow his army passage through Arabia. The name of course is a pun on the verb φαίνω, marking Phanes as the one who “sheds light” on something, as he does here. Perhaps this is a subtle nod to Herodotus' own role as the one providing enlightenment to his own readers. We are not told why Phanes apparently had some grudge against Amasis, we are simply told that there was some personal animosity, and that serves as his motivation for helping Cambyses. Phanes' employment in Egypt implies that he has enough cultural knowledge to live and work effectively there while not being ethnically Egyptian. He easily could have been ethnically Greek like Herodotus himself, however, he also is very experienced and knowledgeable about Arabia, which is the nation in question

¹¹¹ Cf. Harrison (2014), Christ (1994), Brandwood (2020).

for Cambyses. In 3.4.3, Phanes is portrayed giving Cambyses a full account of matters in Egypt with the pharaoh Amasis, so he has the political and military knowledge of Egypt that Cambyses requires to make his conquest. Most pertinently here, Cambyses must cross through Arabia before he can conquer Egypt. Cambyses decided it was more expedient to simply pass through Arabia rather than conquer it, and he utilizes his mediator Phanes to do so. Phanes then tells him exactly which Arabian customs will allow Cambyses and his army to cross: these particular customs involve exchanging pledges (3.7-8). Cambyses willingly accepts this condition and assimilates this aspect of Arabian culture in order to reach his goal, through the mediation of another person. Phanes plays a large role in the conquest of Egypt, though in 3.11 he is punished severely for his treachery when the Egyptian pharaoh has his sons slaughtered in front of him.

This section appears to act as a foil with what follows when Cambyses meets the Ethiopians and fails to interact with them effectively despite the presence of interpreters. At least in Book 3, Herodotus demonstrates the nature and importance of mediators when it comes to cross-cultural interaction and shows both a “positive” and a “negative” outcome in close proximity. The encounter with Phanes is positive in the sense that Cambyses assimilates (or learns) the custom of another culture, albeit for selfish reasons. The “negative” outcome will become more apparent later when he fails to achieve his aims with Ethiopia because he fails to assimilate information. This section of the narrative is also where the madness of Cambyses converges with Herodotus’ concern with cross-cultural interaction, because the mental illness of Cambyses also plays a role in the eventual failure of his communication with Ethiopia. Herodotus marks the intrusion of Cambyses’ mental

illness with the narrative of how he abuses the body of the Pharaoh Amasis (contrary to both Egyptian *and* Persian custom). Herodotus does try to soften this shocking episode somewhat by including an alternative Egyptian version that states that the body was switched for another one, but the marking of Cambyses' incipient insanity is important for what follows. This is the foundation for the narrative about Ethiopia, beginning with Cambyses' mad desire to launch three separate campaigns against the Phoenicians, the Ammonians, and the Ethiopians. Through this narrative, I will argue that Herodotus is building upon what came before to make a larger point about the nature of cross-cultural interactions and the importance of mediation.

Beginning in 3.17, Herodotus tells us about the three new campaigns Cambyses planned to launch but highlights the Ethiopians in particular referring to them as the "long-lived" Ethiopians living in Libya. After careful consideration, Cambyses decides to send spies to the Ethiopians ostensibly with the purpose of determining the existence of the fabled "Table of the Sun." Herodotus briefly disposes of the Table of the Sun by explaining that it is not as fabulous as reported: instead of being miraculously filled with food as claimed, the magistrates put food there for anyone who wants to eat. Instead of lingering long on this, he turns to explain how Cambyses recruited his spies, who turn out to be a group of people called the Ichthyophagoi or the "Fish-Eaters," hailing from the Elephantine City. The Elephantine is an island in the Nile famed for being something of a cultural melting pot

containing a number of both Egyptians and Ethiopians¹¹², which easily explains how Cambyses could theoretically overcome the language barrier between Persia and Ethiopia. Some of the previous context for this particular group of people comes from 2.30 when Herodotus tells the story of the “deserters” who revolted from Egypt and went over to the Ethiopians. As we learn in Book 2 these deserters, at the behest of the Ethiopian king, drove out a segment of the Ethiopian population that had become hostile to the rest, and this group of expelled Ethiopians were likely the ancestors of the Fish-Eaters. These Fish-Eaters become our audience stand-in. Sarah Derbew writes, “By embodying the intersection of spying and translation, the Fish-eaters transform Herodotus’ readers into distant knowers... Their ongoing interventions include a rejection of the discipline’s [*sic* ethnography’s] myopic portrayal of otherness. As ethnographers of sorts, the Fish-eaters dismantle the category of myopic foreigner because they are (Egyptian) foreigners interacting with the (Aithiopian) foreigners who report their findings to (Persian) foreigners.”¹¹³ Derbew goes on to argue that the portrayal of the Ethiopians encourages the reader to look beyond mere color-markers such as skin tone or hair color for categorization of the Ethiopians as an *ethnos*. Instead we find more diverse markers that reach into personality and character and cultural expression. Even their distinction as “long-lived” has more clout as a cultural marker, including the account of the Ethiopian ruler Sabacos who disrupted Egyptian rule in Egypt for fifty years (2.137-39), which also reinforces the

¹¹² The segment that was driven out learned Egyptian customs and became more civilized: “τούτων δὲ ἐσοικισθέντων ἐς τοὺς Αἰθίοπας ἡμερώτεροι γέγονασι Αἰθίοπες, ἤθηα μαθόντες Αἰγύπτια” (2.30.5). This would be an example of cultural assimilation.

¹¹³ Derbew (2022): 109

Ethiopians in their capacity as ones who resist, disrupt, or even prevent tyranny, as we see on display with Cambyses in this episode. "...it becomes clear that black skin is merely one of the several ways that Herodotus describes Aithiopians, thus underscoring the shaky staying power of skin color as it applies to race. Rather, Herodotus points out other ways to categorize Aitiopians that are not bound up in chromatic appearance."¹¹⁴ She goes on to analyze all of the other cultural markers that "define" the Ethiopian people (among other groups such as the Indians or Scythians), especially in how Herodotus intentionally tries to explore cultures from within his own text. She writes, "In the case of the Aithiopian *logos*, the Fish-eaters and Aithiopians speak authoritatively within the confines of Herodotus' *historie*."¹¹⁵ This leads her to suggest that Herodotus is intentionally reorienting his internal map, and "refashioning" the usual epic or Hippocratic formulations of Ethiopia as the land on the fringe. It is the center of the world for the internal narrators, and the perspective through which we learn about their culture.

After seeking out these Fish-Eaters, Cambyses gives them his instructions regarding the Ethiopians which includes gifts and a speech, which are all part of his deceptive scheme. The gifts Cambyses sends are a purple cloak, a gold necklace, a pot of perfume, and a jar of Phoenician date wine. These objects will become one major focal point of my analysis below. At this point, Herodotus gives us a little more context for the Ethiopians as an ethnic group, specifically their identification as some of the "tallest and most beautiful" people in the world (3.20.1). Herodotus also highlights how their laws and customs are completely

¹¹⁴ Ibid: 98

¹¹⁵ Ibid: 101

unlike anyone else's, especially regarding how they select kings: they choose the tallest and strongest man among them to be their king rather than following a hereditary line.

When the Fish-Eaters arrive, they present the gifts to the Ethiopian king who responds with a direct and vivid speech demonstrating that he sees through the ruse and recognizes Cambyses' true intentions. In response, the Ethiopian king issues a counter-challenge to Cambyses in the form of an Ethiopian bow; if Cambyses can draw the bow, then he can make war upon the Ethiopians (3.21.3). The Ethiopian king then examines each of Cambyses' gifts in detail and provides his own alternative explanation for their function, although he does admit that the date wine impresses him. The Fish-Eaters learn more about the Ethiopians such as their lifespan and their diet and burial practices (3.23-24). After learning all this, the Fish-Eaters relay it to Cambyses and he becomes enraged and begins his campaign against Ethiopia without any rational consideration for provisions or logistics, thus destroying a large portion of his army. The narrative about Cambyses' madness ends by way of returning to Egypt and explaining how he violates Egyptian religious customs again by mocking the Egyptian deity Apis and dies after a series of events that Herodotus presents as divinely-ordered. The section that seems to conclude this entire narrative is 3.38, where Herodotus takes a moment to reflect on the nature of customs and interactions using the later Persian king Darius as his point of reference (discussed more fully below). This section concludes with the well-known Pindaric aphorism: "Custom is the king of all." Darius had thus proven the truth of Pindar's words by his little social experiment, confirmed by Herodotus' own narrative.

The narrative about the interaction of Cambyses via his spies and the unnamed

Ethiopian king is multi-layered. Cambyses' (and Herodotus') perception is focalized through the culturally liminal Fish-Eaters who are seeking and providing information, variously standing in for Herodotus' readership as well as for the Persians in their capacity as spies.. They are able to do this because of their particular identity as somewhat "in between" Egypt and Greece and even Persia, as Derbew notes. In that sense, we have layers of focalization at work that we must bear in mind, namely the fact that the information is presented from the perspective of the Fish-eaters via Herodotus, distancing both the historian and audience from the action. Furthermore, there is the problem of deception and cultural information that gets translated between Ethiopia and Persia, especially as it hinges around the objects. There is also the cultural background at work in the lives of Cambyses and the Ethiopian king. It seems somewhat notable that there is another subtle contrast between Cambyses and the Ethiopian king (analogous to the subtle contrast between Solon the lawmaker and the despotic Croesus); Cambyses is a hereditary king, while Herodotus stresses the qualities required for kingship of the Ethiopians and the mechanism by which the Ethiopians choose their kings. As a result, the Ethiopian king immediately accuses Cambyses of lacking virtue as a king in his initial response to the Fish-Eaters and in his challenge of sending the Ethiopian bow. The surrounding cultural context of the Ethiopian king also allows him to see through the deception of Cambyses' "gifts," though his perception of the gifts is multi-dimensional. While the Ethiopian king understands that the gifts are meant as a bribe, he also appears (or perhaps pretends) to misunderstand their day-to-day function as objects. The objects themselves are a kind of two-way "mirror" which Derbew says "...indicates the futility of assuming strict distinctions between Athenians and Aithiopians." When the gifts

are first presented to him, the Ethiopian king immediately retorts to the Fish-Eaters that the gifts are a pretext and that the Fish-Eaters are merely spies (3.21.2). Stephen Brandwood writes, “The lies that the Ichthyophagoi tell are perhaps the clearest indicator of the ease of linguistic transfer, but its essential meaninglessness for communication and, in this case, to inquiry itself”¹¹⁶ One element of the communication has failed in the sense that the Ethiopian king immediately sees through the ruse and correctly identifies the motives at work. This is perhaps why Herodotus reports this episode as focalized through the eyes of the Fish-eaters, who are what Irwin calls the “textual double” for Herodotus himself. They are the indirect agents of his inquiry, and their indirectness keeps him somewhat removed from the situation and allow him to underscore the difficult nature of historical investigation and the acquisition of information, as well as to better narrate the layers of deception at work in the narrative. The indirect nature of the narrative also allows a better view of the objects in their context, such as the Ethiopian bow which is the first object that Herodotus specifically highlights as an object with symbolic significance attached. Stephen Brandwood points out that the Egyptian hieroglyphic symbol for Ethiopia was a bow, “possibly causing the object to stand for the country in the eyes of its own interpreter, Cambyses, while its unbendable nature would have served as its own objective form of meaning. It might have also reminded a Greek of stories from their own culture, such as Odysseus’ own unbendable bow, further compounding the shame that the Ethiopian king is heaping on Cambyses (*Odyssey* 21.1ff). By bypassing the use of language altogether but summing up his response

¹¹⁶ Brandwood (2020): 28.

in an object, the King of the Ethiopians has achieved greater power of communication than the interpreters deputized to gather information.”¹¹⁷ The Ethiopian king offers his own object first to the Fish-Eaters, and the meaning of it is pretty unambiguous and establishes the king of Ethiopia as the one who controls the communication. Herodotus establishes him as such by being the only character to speak directly, while the words of the Fish-Eaters are only reported through indirect speech.

When he goes on to examine each object sent by Cambyses, the double-meanings of most of the gifts contrast somewhat with the clear meaning of the Ethiopian bow as a challenge that Persia and Ethiopia mutually understand. On the other hand, nearly all the gifts sent from Persia have multiple functions and mean something slightly different to each respective ethnic group. The Ethiopian king recognizes their function in one sense: they are a bribe of sorts. But he will go on to question each one and provide his own interpretation of it. The dyed purple cloak is the first object that he examines, declaring it to be a deception (*dolera* in 3.22.1) because the fabric is dyed to look a different color than it actually is. The gold jewelry is likewise interpreted as “shackles” and is worthless to the Ethiopian king, and we find out exactly why later in the narrative when Herodotus explains that gold is so plentiful in Ethiopia that they use it to make shackles for their prisoners. Instead the Ethiopians come to value bronze more highly because of its relative scarcity in their own land. For this reason, Persians and Ethiopians will attach different values to gold and bronze, and thus interpret jewelry in different ways. For the Ethiopian king, the gold bracelets can be

¹¹⁷ Ibid: 29

seen as a symbol of enslavement or imprisonment. This creates an interesting layering of meanings attached to the jewelry; Cambyses meant it to be seen as a valuable adornment and an enticement thanks to his own cultural understanding, while the Ethiopian king interprets it (knowingly or not) within his own cultural framework. The Ethiopian king pronounces a similar judgment on the incense or perfume; mainly that it is a *dolera* meant to disguise something else. The only object that impresses him at all is the date-wine. The use of the term *dolera* to describe the objects points further to the underlying theme of distortion of knowledge and appearances. The Ethiopian king demonstrates mastery of the situation in the sense that he detects the deceitful nature of the Fish-Eaters' presence in Ethiopia and the gifts sent from Cambyses, and it is his cultural context that enables him to do so. His interpretation of each object draws on his own context for them; dyeing cloth is evidently not a practice in Ethiopia, causing him to see it as deceitful along with the perfume. He interprets the jewelry as shackles based on Ethiopian practice, whereas the interpretation of the cloak and perfume are based on things *not* practiced by the Ethiopians.

Through the focalization of the Fish-Eaters, we come to realize in the following sections just how strange the Ethiopians are in their diets, unusual life-spans and burial customs. The Fish-eaters are Herodotus' eyes, as well as our eyes and all of this information is presumably mediated through them. The foregoing demonstrates a sensitivity on the part of Herodotus to the influence that one's cultural background has in such interactions, which lends more importance to the narrative about Ethiopia as a part of Herodotus' exploration of the nature of culture and their interactions with one another. Rather than simply narrate that Cambyses had attempted to launch a logistically impossible campaign against the

Ethiopians, Herodotus seeks to give us a fuller, more complete picture that also encapsulates the mindsets of the parties involved and the ways in which cultural background plays a role in how events play out.

The Ethiopian *logos* weaves together two intersecting narratives: the madness of Cambyses and the story about his attempt to conquer the Ethiopians. The story about the Ethiopians in particular has a somewhat fairy-tale or fable-like quality, a feature which has led some scholars to dismiss its overall importance in the narrative because they see it as an odd diversion from the main purpose of the work.¹¹⁸ As I will argue, however, it plays an important role and is also meant to be understood along with the cross-cultural interaction between Scythia and Persia towards the end of Book 4. Elizabeth Irwin writes, “This close relationship between Cambyses’ curiosity and his desire for conquest belongs to a *topos* of the *Histories*, that of kingly inquirers, in which the desire to know about faraway peoples and places is incited by and/or conjoined with a more sinister and imperialist agenda, discussed by Christ, and most recently by Demont.”¹¹⁹ Rosaria Vignolo Munson explains this narrative in terms of cultural codes that converge, identifying Cambyses as “the paradigm of human dysfunction”.¹²⁰ She identifies three interacting “codes” that serve to

¹¹⁸ Cf. the early debates beginning with Felix Jacoby in his 1913 article in the Pauly-Wissowa *Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*. Jacoby argued that such episodes were merely the work of “scissors.” Later, one of Jacoby’s successors Wolf Aly (1921) articulated a view of the *Histories* that sees episodes such as the Ethiopian *logos* as fables fitting into a frame narrative. Perhaps the most forceful proponent of unity in the *Histories* has been Immerwahr (1966), who has set the tone for the unity debate in the following decades, arguing that such seemingly unimportant episodes *do* matter to the whole text. Irene J.F. de Jong discusses this entire debate chronologically at length in her chapter “Narrative Unity and Units” in *Brill’s Companion to Herodotus* (p. 245ff), and criticizes the tendency of scholars to dismiss episodes that do not seem to “fit” the narrative, including the Ethiopian *logos*.

¹¹⁹ For the approaches of Christ and Demont to kingly inquiries, see page 4 above with notes 2 and 3.

¹²⁰ Munson (1991):46

explain Cambyses' madness: theological, medical, and sociocultural. Eventually Herodotus indicates that the sociocultural "code" subsumes the other two as an explanation for Cambyses' insanity. Munson argues that Herodotus is identifying an odd case wherein he synthesizes divine providence, nature, and sociocultural norms to provide an account for the madness of Cambyses. This explanation probably does suffice for understanding Cambyses' madness in three different converging senses, which includes his reaction to the Ethiopians. However the exploration of cultural codes and their influence in such interactions is another element at play in this overall narrative that works with other narratives in the *Histories* and deals more broadly with cultural conflict in general, even addressing why historical action halts at the fringes of the known world. The "opposite" nature of the cultural backgrounds between Persia and Ethiopia helps explain why the edges of the world remain unconquered. Examining Cambyses and the Ethiopian king as representatives of their respective cultures helps to illuminate the ways that Herodotus understands the nature of cultural conflict.

Finally, it is worth returning to the anecdote about Darius in 3.38 as it is the capstone of the entire narrative about Cambyses and his behavior towards both Egypt and Ethiopia. Herodotus at this point launches into an anecdote about Darius which takes place sometime long after the death of Cambyses, to illustrate his point about customs and their primacy over everything else when it comes to cultural interactions. In this episode, Darius is unable to induce the Hellenes or the Indians to practice each others' burial customs, but rather the suggestion utterly horrifies both groups. Darius' social experiment is particularly interesting

because of the strictly academic way he seeks to satisfy his curiosity.¹²¹ This narrative also shows some of Herodotus' concerns when it comes to these sorts of encounters, particularly the presence of an interpreter: δι' ἑρμηνέως. "...παρεόντων τῶν Ἑλλήνων καὶ δι' ἑρμηνέως μανθανόντων τὰ λεγόμενα..." "with Greeks being present and the Greeks learning what was said through an interpreter..." The focus here is on the mutual horror between Greeks and Indians with regard to their burial customs, as Darius learns through the interpreter.¹²² Hence the Pindaric aphorism is very fitting that "custom is the king of all" perhaps even king of gods.¹²³ Herodotus establishes this passage as a τεκμήριον or a "proof" in his broader argument, and Rosalind Thomas argues that Herodotus uses the term here to signal a general inference based on previous information that he has explained already. Thomas explores the Herodotean axiom that each person will consider "his own" customs to be best when presented with alternatives. The entire encounter can only be facilitated by interpreters who mutually understand one another's cultural matrix and can interpret for Darius. This is perhaps an example of a more positive interaction with cross-cultural knowledge; Darius is

¹²¹ Rosalind Thomas (1997): 128–148.

¹²² Herodotus shows concern with cultures and their contexts later in the *Histories* when makes the following remark: εἰ μὲν νῦν Ξέρξης τε ἀπέπεμψε ταῦτα λέγοντα κήρυκα ἐς Ἄργος καὶ Ἀργείων ἄγγελοι ἀναβάντες ἐς Σοῦσα ἐπειρώτων Ἀρτοξέρξεα περὶ φιλίης, οὐκ ἔχω ἀτρεκέως εἰπεῖν, οὐδέ τινα γνώμην περὶ αὐτῶν ἀποφαίνομαι ἄλλην γε ἢ τὴν περ αὐτοὶ Ἀργεῖοι λέγουσι: [2] ἐπίσταμαι δὲ τοσοῦτο ὅτι εἰ πάντες ἄνθρωποι τὰ οἰκῆα κακὰ ἐς μέσον συνενεΐκαιεν ἀλλάξασθαι βουλόμενοι τοῖσι πλησίοισι, ἐγκύψαντες ἂν ἐς τὰ τῶν πέλας κακὰ ἀσπασίως ἕκαστοι αὐτῶν ἀποφεροῖατο ὀπίσω τὰ ἐσενεκαίατο (*Hist.* 7.152.1-2). "I cannot accurately say whether Xerxes sent the messenger saying these things to Argos, or if the messengers of the Argives went into Susa and discussed friendship with Artaxerxes; nor do I express any other opinion than that which the Argives themselves say. I know that if all the world met and brought their own evils together with the intent of exchanging with their neighbors, and had looked at the evils of their neighbors, they would all return home again with their own evils."

¹²³ "Nomos" in the sense of an informal, perhaps even unwritten, "law" of society that is generally adhered to. Cf. Sally Humphries, *Law, Custom and Culture in Herodotus*, in which she argues against a more "formal" definition of "nomos" as written law (cf. Ostwald).

presented as merely curious rather than motivated by some other, more sinister motive. Moreover, this mention of Darius serves to tie the previous narrative to the coming one when Darius becomes king and displays his attitude to other cultures. Darius' discovery about the nature of custom should be borne in mind for what follows, especially because there will be another long ethnographic digression about another significant people group that plays a role in the unfolding of the *Histories*.

Scythia

My next example takes us to the other fringe of the world where the Scythians live. Like the Egyptians, the Scythians receive a long digression that explains their customs and culture in great detail, though for the purposes of this paper the actual historicity of Herodotus' Scythians does not present a significant issue.¹²⁴ Instead, Herodotus will provide some insight for the reader, an understanding that escapes Darius later on. Once again, Herodotus seeks to display the *how* and *why* of Scythian behavior as it applies to his narrative; he is not content to give us a mere cause-and-effect narrative. Instead, he shows us how the Scythian mindset works in a narrative situation, and he uses cultural knowledge and misunderstanding as his tool to do so. As with the Ethiopian episode, the cause-and-effect of the story is quite simple. Darius is unable to conquer the Scythians first because they are nomads and his army cannot keep up with them; when there finally *is* a meeting between the armies, the Scythians appear too easily distracted, so Darius decides they would not be

¹²⁴ Cf. Stephanie West in her article on Scythia in *Brill's Companion to Herodotus*: "As Darius' venture into Europe brings the menace of Persian expansionism significantly closer to mainland Greece, Scythian ethnography forms a bridge between the two halves of Herodotus' work, and it would be surprising if his presentation was not affected by knowledge of what was to come" (p. 456). Elsewhere in the article she tests the merits of Herodotus' various claims about the Scythians.

useful to him after all. The actual moment of cultural misunderstanding or “misfire” has some direct consequence on the narrative itself, but it also serves another purpose. It shows a concrete outworking of how culture affects mindset and responses to certain situations, such as we saw in the cases of Croesus and Solon or the Ethiopians, whose response to their respective situations were partly colored by their cultural backgrounds.

This narrative occurs after a long digression about the Scythians and their history and customs, much like the way Herodotus writes about the Persian conquest of Egypt after a long digression about their history and customs. Darius was attempting to impose his rule upon the Scythians, only to find that they are a constant moving target. Due to their nomadic nature, the Scythians merely continue doing what they have always done and keep moving. Darius assumes they are simply fleeing out of fear, because he does not understand them and their nomadic nature. The various Scythian subgroups successfully outmanoeuvre the Persians several times in 4.125. Finally out of frustration, Darius sends an unidentified horseman to Idanthyrsos the king of the Scythians, accusing them of fleeing and demanding earth and water (4.126). Idanthyrsos sends a messenger to respond that the Scythians are merely doing what they have always done and that there is nothing for the Persians to raze or capture. Through this messenger, he says they will not engage in battle unless they see fit to do so, and promises to send only the sort of gift Darius deserves (4.127). The Scythians continue to elude and trick the Persians until Darius is finally at a loss, at which point the Scythians send their gifts (4.131.1-2). The gifts are a bird, a mouse, a frog, and five arrows. The herald bringing the gifts does not give an interpretation to the Persians but merely says that they will discover the meaning of the gifts if they are wise (εἰ σοφοί εἰσι, γνῶναι τὸ

θέλει τὰ δῶρα λέγειν). Darius immediately assumes these gifts mean surrender because a mouse lives in the earth, a frog lives in the water, a bird is (somehow) like a horse, and the arrows represent the surrender of their strength in battle. Darius' advisor Gobryas reasons instead that the message was more likely to be: "unless you turn into birds and fly into the sky, or mice and go underground, or frogs and jump into the lake, you will be shot by these arrows and never return home." (4.132.3).¹²⁵

Gobyras is not proven right until sometime later when the Persians and Scythians finally do meet in battle, only for the entire Scythian army to become distracted by a hare running in between the two armies. After witnessing this, Darius becomes disgusted with the Scythians and decides that they would be useless to him. In this way Gobyras is proven right, as Darius is forced to admit in 4.134.2. The Scythians successfully repulse the Persians, largely owing to their peculiar nature and cultural background.

By the time we reach this narrative, the Scythians have already established a pattern by which they rebuff attempts at assimilation or cultural interaction. During his long digression about them, Herodotus includes the tales of Anacharsis and Scyles earlier in Book 4 and these stories are specifically meant to demonstrate how the Scythians avoid the customs of others at all costs.¹²⁶ Anacharsis is discovered practicing a Greek ritual and the king of the Scythians at that time personally kills him for that transgression (4.76.5). This story is followed closely by the story of Scyles in 4.78 who is identified as an ethnically

¹²⁵ Gobyras earns some distinction for himself as the member of the conspiratorial cabal that agrees with Darius' plan for getting into the palace and past the guards; Gobyras is also instrumental in killing the Magi who had taken control of the throne.

¹²⁶ "ξεινικοῖσι δὲ νομαίοισι καὶ οὗτοι φεύγουσι αἰνῶς χρᾶσθαι..." 4.76.1

liminal character born to a Greek mother from Istria who taught him to read and speak Greek. Because of this upbringing, Scyles becomes fascinated by all things Greek despite his identity as a Scythian king. However, his betrayal of Scythian customs in favor of Greek ones causes his army and entire kingdom to revolt and he is eventually beheaded as a result. Herodotus concludes this pair of stories by stating that this is the Scythian way of guarding their customs and penalizing anyone who deviates from them.¹²⁷ This pointedly establishes Scythian cultural isolation and ought to serve as a reminder of their mindset and habits when they encounter Darius later on.

Another notable point about the Scythians is their nomadic nature. I suggest that this particularly is meant to contrast with the static Ethiopians who thwart Cambyses simply because they are located well out of reach despite occupying one single space. The Scythians manage to avoid Darius by constant movement; thus we have the peculiar strangeness of the ethnic groups that occupy what Herodotus sees as the “fringes” of the world. Hartog hits upon this notion with his idea that the inversion is that the Scythian hunters become “the hunted” with all the non-static implications of that.¹²⁸

The issue of communication between Persia and Scythia is an interesting one, since Herodotus merely says that they sent “horsemen” to one another. The heralds are unidentified and clearly have no trouble relaying messages back and forth, but otherwise

¹²⁷ Francois Hartog observes, “...He practices the Greek religion and wishes to become an initiate (telesthenai) of Dionysus Bacchus. As in the case of Anacharsis, Scyles’ piety is the height of impiety for the Scythians. From a logical point of view, then, the two accounts establish an equivalence between traveling and being bilingual. From that point on, the number and complexity of the sequences may vary but they all speak of confusion and its attendant dangers, above all in the religious domain; only death can put a stop to such disorder” (Lloyd trans. 67).

¹²⁸ Ibid: 42.

their presence and identity is unexplained; Herodotus offers no linguistic information about how the messengers are able to communicate with Persia. However, the crux of the communication between Scythia and Persia lies primarily in the medium of objects once again, much like the Ethiopian episode. By this point, Herodotus establishes clearly that Darius has very little understanding of the Scythians as a group. Perhaps this is why the role of mediators is downplayed here: Darius has invested nothing in trying to learn more about the Scythians. At least Cambyses had made good use of spies and intermediaries before launching ill-advised military campaigns. Darius evidently expects the Scythians to behave conventionally, considering how he keeps sending his army into Scythia only to find out that they cannot keep up with the Scythians. As a result of his lack of clear knowledge, Darius finally sends a messenger to Idanthyrsos and insults the Scythians further by claiming they were fleeing out of fear. Idanthyrsos' scorching response in 4.127 is justified, and explains to Darius a crucial aspect of Scythian culture: they are nomads and do not build cities. The only sites that Scythians have are burial places, hidden deep within their territory. Idanthyrsos interprets Darius' request for earth and water as a statement that he intends to enslave the Scythians, so he sends his own gift instead. He also ends his speech by telling Darius to "weep" (4.127.4). We are not told how Darius responds to that message, but he continues attacking Scythia until he is finally tricked into a difficult position. It is at this moment that we have the "object misinterpretation" of the Scythian gifts.

These gifts are of course fundamentally different in nature to those from the Ethiopian narrative, and do not offer quite the same possibility of layered meanings. Their meaning is completely obscure until proven later on. But what we *do* see is Darius finding a

way to put his own interpretation on them, stemming from his total lack of understanding of the Scythians. He apparently does not take Idanthysos' response to him seriously, but instead assumes immediately that the Scythians sent their own version of earth and water. The actual interpretation Darius offers only explains the mouse and the frog, and is highly unsatisfactory for the bird and the arrows. Of the bird he says it is "like a horse" (ὄρνις δὲ μάλιστα ἔοικε ἵππῳ), and the arrows somehow represent the Scythians surrendering their prowess as archers. Each object is inherently a symbol, and it is this symbolism that becomes the central problem of communication here. This is made possible by Darius' own distorted lens as the conquering king and a Persian who has clearly not invested any effort in learning about Scythia up to this point. Gobryas, on the other hand, adopts a different lens of interpretation, which he himself claims comes from a place of superior understanding (he mentions that he has learned about the Scythians' reputation in 4.134.2, after he and Darius witness the Scythian army fall apart over a hare). Gobyras is less likely to assume that the Scythians were surrendering, but has gained some cursory knowledge of them already. He offers the correct interpretation, which is essentially to tell the Persians that they must escape by any means possible, whether it meant burrowing, swimming, or flying away, otherwise they would die and never return to Persia. There also seems to be a parallel here between the Scythian objects and the Ethiopian bow that we saw earlier: the physical objects represent a challenge to the would-be conqueror. Both sets of objects have specific symbolic meaning as well, and indicate a desire for their sender to be understood on their own terms rather than those of their conquerors. In this way, the Scythians gain the upper hand in this situation in the same way that the Ethiopian king did in Book 3. Darius does not understand

the symbolism at first but prefers to interpret it in the way that is most beneficial to himself. Carolyn Dewald writes: "...not until events have confirmed that the Scythians do not take the Persians seriously does he finally accept the correct interpretation of the objects given him"

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The Scythian episode maintains continuity with my other examples of cross-cultural interaction, where Herodotus demonstrates sensitivity to the influence that cultural backgrounds have on these interactions. The conversation between Solon and Croesus is an early meeting between East and West, where Herodotus shows the subtle influence that their respective cultures have on their communication and Croesus' inability to comprehend Solon, leading ultimately to the destruction of his empire and the rise of the Persians. The Ethiopians and the Scythians demonstrate an aspect of Herodotean ethnographic thought in how they rebuff Persian advancement successfully for cultural reasons, particularly when it came to communication via objects. Communication via objects is a central element to the Ethiopian and Scythian episodes, and both highlight different ways that Ethiopia and Scythia manage to gain the upper hand in those situations because of their unique understanding of those objects, thereby enabling them to elude their would-be conquerors.

CONCLUSION

The three episodes I have examined here are not often taken together in a single analysis, but there seems to be some linkage between all three as they concern an important

¹²⁹Dewald (1993): 58

aspect of Herodotus' ethnographic and historical thinking. In these episodes, Herodotus chooses to include significant instances of cross-cultural misunderstanding as a way of deepening the meaning of each individual situation. While the interaction itself may seem to have little to do with the outcome of the actual historical narrative, it is nevertheless still important for showing how characters or ethnic groups are affected by their mindset and culture. The cultural information we learn and see in action deepens our understanding of the various characters and people groups involved as they go through the narrative, such as we see with Croesus and his personal tragedy foreshadowed by Solon. Croesus' personal character and cultural background guide his thoughts as he passes through the events of his life, and Herodotus demonstrates this by showing him in conversation with the Greek philosopher Solon. Likewise both the Ethiopian and Scythian episodes concern a Persian king having an encounter with peculiar nations who occupy the fringes of the known world. Rather than simply narrating the logistical reasons for their failures to conquer these groups, Herodotus instead gives us a deeper glimpse into the mindsets of the ethnic groups involved and how their culture affects their reactions to each situation. In these situations, Herodotus uses mediators and cultural objects to add nuance to his narrative and explain in greater depth why the Persians failed to conquer these groups. Herodotus also shows sensitivity to the role that interpreters often play in these interactions, especially in the Ethiopian episode. Mediators (or the lack thereof) help to underscore the relationships between various groups; mediators were not needed in the conversation between Solon and Croesus and this indicates the relative cultural proximity between the two, whereas mediators were more prominent in the Ethiopian narrative as a way of highlighting the cultural distance between Ethiopia and

Persia. The Scythians in their cultural isolation offer no plausible way for there to be inter-cultural mediators with Persia, so the interaction with mediators is limited and the meaning of their “gifts” to Darius has to be discovered later through guesswork and experience. On the whole, Herodotus seems to be building a larger narrative through these episodes where cultural information plays a larger role in the historical narrative than has been previously thought.

Chapter 3: Cross-Cultural Information Withheld or Kept Secret

There are only a few clear examples of cultural information being withheld or kept secret but even these few examples can be illuminating for how Herodotus understands culture and his own relationship with the cultural knowledge that he acquires, including the implications for us as his readers. In the previous two chapters, I examine his view of how cultural interactions propel his historical narrative in important ways and revolve around the use or misuse of power. When it comes to borrowing cultural customs, we can see that such borrowing or adaptation has the potential to create entirely new nations and cultures. The most prominent example of this is Cyrus the Great in his creation of the new Persian identity that will be pivotal for the *Histories* as a whole. On the other hand when cultural information is distorted or abused, we see catastrophic results or are given a deeper understanding of the cultural attitudes underlying the encounter, as is the case in episodes like the Ethiopian *logos* where the entire encounter stands or falls on how individual cultures understand specific physical objects. The power differentials in these situations often turn on how well different

cultures are able to interpret one another and their behavior. The Scythians gain a measure of protection from Persian invaders because King Darius fails to internalize some key aspects of Scythian culture, namely their nomadism.

In my third and final category, I will examine a handful of examples when cross-cultural information is kept hidden or secret. The first two examples represent a situation in which cultural groups use withholding of information as a means of preserving power and agency in a situation where they could easily lose it. I will examine the Scythians and the Magi respectively as groups, and particular ways in which they use secrets as a means of preserving their agency in their contexts. In the third and final example, Herodotus uses cross-cultural withholding but to convey an entirely different point, particularly about himself and his role as the historian and not merely a transgressive cross-cultural inquirer such as Cambyses or Darius. The overall result of these three examples taken together is firstly it rounds out our appreciation of Herodotus' thinking about cultural dynamics. He has considered all the possibilities when it comes to the sharing of knowledge between different cultural groups. Secondly, he also applies his thinking to himself. He is not viewing himself as a merely manipulator of characters within a "closed system." The final example concerning the omissions of information in the Egyptian *logos* demonstrates that Herodotus sees himself as a living, breathing part of this project; he is not exempt from the various possibilities that he explores in Books 1-4. His Egyptian *logos* with its numerous and conspicuous omissions is important for its position in the *Histories* because he uses it to draw a firm distinction between himself as historian and the transgressive or abusive Persian rulers who follow Cyrus the Great, but its greater importance lies with the fact that

Herodotus sees himself as someone who is just as much affected by his theories as the characters inside his narrative. In turn, we are reassured of his authenticity and integrity as our cross-cultural guide.

Scythia

In my first example drawn from the Scythian narrative, the sensitive cultural information eludes the campaigning Persians and becomes a part of the reason for their failure in Scythia which is both a literal and a symbolic failure. In the symbolic realm we are dealing with the sensitive topic of burial sites, and in this tale, knowledge of the location of burial sites becomes both a stratagem and a symbol. Important context for the Scythian episode can be seen in 4.110ff. when Herodotus tells the tale of the Amazons and the Scythians, particularly the formation of the tribe called the “Sauromatai.” In this narrative, Herodotus begins with what Irene de Jong would identify as an instance where Herodotus as the “primary narrator” his primary “narratees” when he begins with “Σαυροματέων δὲ περὶ ὧδε λέγεται,” or “the following is said about the Sauromatai.”¹³⁰ This signals to his primary audience that he is reporting what he has heard, but also lets us know that he is exercising “tight control on all levels of the story.”¹³¹

At the beginning of this narrative, Herodotus discloses the Scythian name for them to his presumably Greek audience: “Oior-pata” or the “Man-Killers,” even providing a more precise etymology for the word: “οἴορ γὰρ καλέουσι ἄνδρα, τὸ δὲ πατὰ κτείνειν...” “‘Oior’

¹³⁰ De Jong (2004): 110

¹³¹ Ibid (2004): 110

is their word for ‘man’ and ‘pata’ means ‘to kill.’” This prefaces some of the upcoming commentary about language barriers, including the language barrier between the audience and the subject of Herodotus’ analysis. During the time of this legend, the Amazons were defeated in war by the Greeks and became lost at sea, finally landing in territory controlled by Scythia. Upon encountering the Amazons in battle, the Scythians were struck with amazement because they did not recognize the language or any other aspect of the Amazons when they encountered them in battle (4.111): οὔτε γὰρ φωνὴν οὔτε ἐσθῆτα οὔτε τὸ ἔθνος ἐγίνωσκον.... “They did not recognize their language nor their clothing nor their *ethnos*.” It was only later, after a battle and the viewing of the remaining corpses, that the Scythians discovered that they were young women and not men. The Scythians then hatched a scheme to befriend these mysterious young women, instructing a group of young men to set up a camp near them and gradually earn their trust.¹³² 4.113 narrates their steady observation of the habits of the Amazons until the two groups finally became sexually involved with each other. Eventually the two groups begin to live together. By 4.114, the Scythians try to convince the Amazons to return with them to their land, but the Amazons refuse because they do not share the same customs as Scythian women and could never give up their own warlike habits that were so incomprehensible to the rest of Scythian society. Instead in

¹³² Hartog (1988) points out the “ephebic” nature of these young men and its importance to the narrative: “So, as soon as it became clear that these were women, killing them became out of the question: the text postulates that women are excluded from the world of war and the Scythians thus implicitly ‘reason’ as Greeks do. They decide not to kill any more of them but ‘to send to them their youngest men [*neotatoi*] of a number answering (as they guessed) to the number of the women...for they desired that children should be born of the women.’ So it is that the polarity between war and marriage surfaces again: with women one makes not war, but children....Why do the Scythians make the strange decision to appeal to their “ephebes?” An ephebe does not marry, and if he does it means that he is no longer an ephebe; one cannot be both an ephebe and also married....” The principle of imitation (or cultural borrowing) is how the Scythians “win” this encounter with Amazons (pp. 219-221).

4.114.4, they convince the Scythian men to go with them elsewhere apart from the rest of the Scythians, where they will form something entirely new. Rosaria Vignolo Munson writes “If the cultural differences between Amazons and Scythian unmarried men prove ultimately to be imaginary or unimportant, the gulf separating the Amazons from Scythian women (and therefore also from the Scythian men who are married to them) is real and insurmountable. Because they are better ethnologic observers than are the Scythian youths, the Amazons realize this clearly.”¹³³ If they are to remain together, they must somewhat shed their former identities and become something new together, which results in the Sauromatai *ethnos*. Munson’s main point is proving that Herodotus elides the apparent “alterity” between Scythians and “others,” including Amazons, and points out that they have more similarities than differences. For the purpose of this chapter and building the argument about the upcoming interaction between Persia and Scythia, I am interested in how those cultural differences affect the outcome. In this case, the Amazons take advantage of the fact that they are better ethnographic observers than the young men and use that to their advantage. Related to that, another very interesting aspect of this narrative is the idea that the Scythian men were unable to learn the Amazonian language (4.114.1-2), while the Amazons were more able to learn the Scythian language. This again indicates the underlying power differential, especially that it lies in favor of the Amazons who retained power over language while the same language was inaccessible to the men. In my previous paragraph I emphasized the difficulties associated with customs, but it goes beyond that into the realm of

¹³³ Munson (2001): 129

language itself. The Amazon women are able to gain cultural access into Scythia on the basis of language, but the Scythian young men are unable to gain that same cultural access into their society, as Herodotus explicitly says that the young men were never able to fully master the language: “τὴν δὲ φωνὴν τὴν μὲν τῶν γυναικῶν οἱ ἄνδρες οὐκ ἐδυνάτο μαθεῖν, τὴν δὲ τῶν ἀνδρῶν αἱ γυναῖκες συνέλαβον,” “The men were unable to learn the language of the women, but the women acquired that of the men” (4.114.1). This is the implied reason that the Amazons retain control over the situation and are able to convince the Scythian men to leave Scythia with them and form the Sauromatai, eventually leading to a fusion of languages because no one learned either language fully. I believe this narrative must be included with the following narrative, as it provides an important commentary on how cultures interact that informs our understanding of how Scythia will interact with the Persians later on. Herodotus is considering all the possibilities of cultural interactions in a “closed system,” namely Scythian society. In the case of the Amazons and Scythians, the two groups eventually merge and form something new on the basis of the lack of complete access into one another’s culture. The Scythians, however, remain the most disadvantaged in this encounter and must therefore yield to the Amazons’ request to leave with them. Munson also concludes her analysis of this narrative, “Herodotus’ pursuit of the similar within his representation of difference confounds mythical constructs of alterity. His scientific ethnography teaches that difference pervades the world, to be sure, but not according to the schematic intellectual map devised by the Greeks.” It is this difference that particularly pertains to my argument here, and how cultural differences can affect power differentials, which is a theme we see over and over again in the first four books of the *Histories*.

The Amazon narrative with all of its rich cultural commentary takes place just before Herodotus returns to his main narrative about the Persian invasion of Scythia, which leads me to suspect that Herodotus intends for us to keep it in mind for context as he returns to the “present” time, reminding us that the Persians are attempting to invade Scythia but on somewhat different terms than the Amazons had entered into Scythian space. His authorial control is reasserted in 4.118 when he returns to the gathering of Scythian kings on the eve of the Persian invasion.¹³⁴ The prelude to this invasion narrative begins in 4.118 with a gathering of Scythian tribes and hearing from messengers that the Persians had crossed the Bosphorus and had subjugated the warlike (but highly divided) Thracians. The messengers cite this as proof that the Persians intend to subjugate everyone in their path (4.118.4). However, the kings of the various tribes are divided and they cannot come to a consensus on how to act or even what the Persians intend to do. Some believe that the Persians came to punish specific wrong-doers and not to subjugate the whole earth (4.119.4). We finally learn some of the context for who Idanthyrsos is, as the leader of one large division composed of several Scythian tribes, and the main speaker on behalf of the Scythians when Darius arrives in his territory (4.120.3). The division under his command adopted the strategy of staying just out of Persian reach, destroying any useful springs or wells along the way to prevent them from following easily. The Scythians would then attack the enemy Persians if they retreated back to their territory (4.120.4). The strategy is overall successful (4.121-22), especially as they traverse through the territory belonging to the Sauromatai

¹³⁴ De Jong (2004): 109ff

(who do not build cities or farm), which connects the previous narrative about the Amazons to the main narrative about Persian invasion where we learned about Sauromatai origins.

Finally in 4.126, Darius is frustrated enough with the unwinnable situation to send a horseman to Idanthyrsos (as I briefly discussed in another chapter). The horseman is unidentified, unlikely mediators in previous narratives (e.g. the Fish-Eaters or Phanes of Halicarnassus). There is likely enough cross-cultural pollination on the more southerly fringes of Scythian territory where one could find multi-lingual agents, as we learned in the Scyles narrative and his experience in Borysthenes where Greeks and Scythians had mingled freely and shared languages. Regardless of the identity of the mediator, Darius tries to assert his dominance by telling the Scythian king to send earth and water to his “master,” as an expression of the Persian custom of symbolizing conquest. Idanthyrsos responds that he is not doing anything differently than he ordinarily does, since the Scythians do not have towns or fields to tie them down; earth and water per se mean nothing to them. They have no arable land as represented by earth, and they are perfectly willing to destroy water sources. These symbols mean nothing to a nomadic Scythian. Idanthyrsos argues that he and his followers are just living out ordinary Scythian life. However, he says that they do have ancestral graves. These graves, he implies, are the only fixed location that Scythians value but their value is enriched by the Scythian customs about burial rites and honoring their ancestors. He invites Darius to find them, and only then will he know whether he will meet Scythians in battle or not. Idanthyrsos concludes his response by saying that he only acknowledges Zeus and Hestia as “masters.” To Darius’ claim of mastery of him, Idanthyrsos says, “weep” (127.4).

Idanthyrsos reports his thoughts in his own voice to an internal audience (his messenger and eventually Darius), which allows the primary audience (us, the readers) to share Herodotus' perspective, since we have the information that is being withheld, namely, the location of the Scythian gravesites. We have already been immersed in Scythian context, including their nomadism and general indomitable nature. More specifically Herodotus already told us, his audience and narratees, where those gravesites are in 4.71. These graves are located in the *eschata* or the boundaries, where the Gerrhi live. Herodotus tells us that it is necessary to travel up the Borysthenes until it becomes unnavigable, which is where the graves are, and beyond which the land is uncharted. These burial sites themselves occupy a kind of liminal zone between the known and the unknown, where it is unlikely that any casual reader of Herodotus would go (and a place that Herodotus himself probably had not seen). Hartog links these tombs to a Greek idea of the heroic burial, where the tomb of the hero must be protected as a symbol of the land itself; this forms a valuable point of contact between Greeks and Scythians. As such, the audience here can clearly see what is being withheld and why at the level of the narrative.¹³⁵ Herodotus' readers receive this information to drive the point home about the power differentials in this situation, and how cultural knowledge can explicitly be used as a source of power even when it is kept secret. This is especially apparent considering how important burial customs and burial sites are to every culture that Herodotus cares to describe at length. Different cultures have wildly different

¹³⁵ Hartog (1984). 139: "Idanthyrsus clearly sees a link between the royal tombs and the country. To find and violate the former would be to strike at the latter. To find the tombs of the kings would be the equivalent to finding the tomb of a hero in Greece and thereby acquiring (an at least virtual) dominion over the territory."

burial customs as we see over and over again, and these customs seem to form the most sensitive area of cultural secrets (cf. 3.38). In this instance, this particular element of Scythian culture is part of their strategy for maintaining their advantage. It is important that Herodotus has shared the information with his readers, as it allows us to see most clearly how this particular aspect of interaction is working in the text. Idanthysos tells Darius about the existence of these graves, but says that only if Darius attempts to find them will he find out whether the Scythians will fight for those graves or not (4.127.2). Otherwise, Darius will not meet the Scythians in battle unless they decide to fight. Idanthysos is telling Darius that the Persian invasion means nothing to them, since they are behaving no differently than they would otherwise. This is a cultural assertion first and foremost, and forms the basis of the conflict and gives the Scythians the power to resist. Up to this point, Darius did not know how to interpret the Scythians' actions because they did not line up with his own cultural expectations. He did not know that the Scythians are nomadic and that this behavior is normal, and up until this point they kept it from him. The cultural distance is further emphasized when Idanthysos brings up the gravesites that exist on the boundaries of what anyone in this situation can know, including Herodotus. By bringing this up, Idanthysos is saying that nothing is guaranteed to Darius, except the threat that in order to gain his conquest he will have to go fight at the boundaries of the earth in order to win. We already know from previous narratives (i.e. Ethiopia) that this is a daunting task that all but guarantees destruction. Idanthysos' words also convey something about how the Scythians conceive of themselves differently from the Persians. They do not view their culture in terms of territory conquered and held, but rather as far as they can wander and be left alone.

Therefore they must give Persia a concrete goal, namely the conquest of burial sites rather than the goal of subjugating a nomadic group with no firm geographic location. By doing so, the Scythians retain the advantage, using their own customs and Persian ignorance as their weapon. The Persians are stymied in their attempt to conquer Scythia, although the Scythians end up being deceived by the Ionians as a later development. Nevertheless, as an ethnic group the Scythians remain untouched despite their other interactions (4.134-142).

The cultural withholding also has some relation to the misunderstandings I explored in Chapter 2, particularly that these cases share the outcome of failure on the part of the Persians. In the previous chapter, the failure of conquest or communication occurs as a result of Persian misunderstanding. The dynamic of withholding information from another culture here is somewhat similar, but the agency remains with the Scythians rather than the Persians. The Scythians maintain their agency while withholding information, and this results in Persian failure as well.

Persia - The Magi

For my second example, I will turn to the Magi as a subculture within Persian society. This represents a cross-cultural withholding that is taking place within Persia, as the Magi represent a secretive subgroup within their broader society. This instance of withholding is also one in which a minority within a nation maintains power and authority by means of hiding information from others. In this case, the Magi keep certain elements of their practice from outsiders to maintain their prestige and authority, even from the ruling class that depends on them for advice and reinforcement.

Herodotus writes about burial practices in Persia in 1.140, particularly the fact that the topic is not openly discussed (ὡς κρυπτόμενα λέγεται). However, the Magi have a peculiar practice when it comes to burying their dead, particularly the notion that a corpse must be mauled by a dog or birds before it can be buried. Herodotus contrasts this practice with the ordinary Persian practice of covering a body in wax before burial in the ground. The Magi and their practices are at odds with the rest of Persia, and even the rest of humankind in Herodotus' estimation (1.140.2). They are a class apart with their own secret orthodoxy, and bear some comparison to the Egyptian priests who are also a somewhat secretive class apart from the rest of their own society (1.140.2).

There are a number of pertinent details in this passage, many implied and not made explicit. On the level of the language Herodotus chooses, this phrase is striking: “τάδε μέντοι ὡς κρυπτόμενα λέγεται καὶ οὐ σαφηνέως περὶ τοῦ ἀποθανόντος...” These matters, namely burial practices, are discussed “as if they are secret” or “hidden.” He also uses words that mean “hidden” or “not clearly.” This refers to the entirety of Persian society, which does not like to discuss death or burial. A little later, Herodotus makes a play on words by mentioning how the Persians “hide” a corpse in the ground (κατακηρώσαντες δὲ ὧν τὸν νέκυν Πέρσαι γῆ κρύπτουσι).

Within that context, the Magi *do* practice their burial practices openly (mauling by wild animals) but without ever explaining the rationale behind it especially given the general unwillingness of Persia to discuss it. This strange practice is one way that the Magi preserve their authority to their audience of ordinary Persians who revere them, even if they may not hide their actual processes to outsiders (such as Herodotus who has no stake in whether they

stay in power or not). The Magi act as advisors to kings and even occupy a position of power apart from the kings because they command enormous religious authority and influence royal decisions on that basis. However, the stakes are high for the Magi if they are to maintain their authority over the rest of Persia.

As to the division between the Magi and the rest of Persia on burial practices, we can surmise that the ordinary Persian would have assumed that the Magi have “superior” knowledge to others. One commentary ascribes their curious practice with corpses to a “Mazdaic” practice, particular the belief that fire and earth are sacred, and thus cannot be polluted by the dead.¹³⁶ This would be a belief embraced by the Magi but not necessarily the rest of Persia. However, there is no clear picture of the Magi in most Greek sources even though it is clear that they preserved their authority by virtue of their esoteric beliefs and “hostile propaganda.”¹³⁷ Herodotus notes that they do practice these burial rites “openly” which, however, does not mean that they ever explain their reasons for doing so. Presumably they keep their reasons to themselves in order to continue exercising their sway over the rest of Persia. We know from elsewhere in the *Histories* that they wield considerable authority (cf. 7.43.2; 113/2-114-1; 191.2 et al.). All the information we have about the possible reasons for their particular rites are drawn from other sources; Herodotus merely says that they practice these things openly, which is what allowed him to learn about them. When it comes to their differences from the Egyptian priests, we are immediately drawn to comparison between two classes of priests that both possess enormous prestige and

¹³⁶ Asheri, Lloyd, Corcella (2007):171-2

¹³⁷ Ibid: 172

influence in their respective societies. However, these two priestly castes operate very differently on the basis of their superior knowledge and religious training, separating them from the rest of their *ethnos*. The Egyptians consider it sacrilegious to kill any living thing except in sacrifice; Herodotus leaves us to guess what sort of differences in belief or religious knowledge might lead to such a great divergence in practice between Magi and Egyptians on that score. For the Magi, their private religious practices are something that connect them to the divine in ways that are inaccessible to outsiders, even Persian who must rely on the Magi for advice and assistance in reinforcing their authority. The Median Magi tell Astyages that it is in their interest to keep him in power because he can in turn ensure that *they* remain in authority. This implies that they theoretically have the power to depose Astyages if they wished, but have chosen not to do so (1.120). This only works if there is some particular aspect of their power that remains out of reach for everyone else, keeping them in fear of the Magi and their special connection to the divine that are off-limits even to kings. It is an important element of how these kinds of groups maintain their prestige, namely by keeping secrets about their knowledge and practices. By way of thematic contrast, Herodotus does tell us later on about what happens when the Magi interfere in succession politics rather than staying in their usual religious realm. In Book 3, the Magi concoct a political plot to put the usurper Smerdis on the throne immediately after the death of Cambyses, but their attempt to wield authority for political gain ultimately fails with Darius and his cabal overthrow the false Smerdis and kill many of the Magi implicated in the plot (3.61ff). The exposure of this political plot leads ordinary Persians to slay as many Magi as they can find (3.79.2). Of course, the Magi still exist after this event but the

exposure of their political plot was the cause of their ill-repute amongst Persians and not the exposure of their knowledge and practices. The contrast is important to keep in mind, since the Magi exist as a religious class and they succeed better at their aims when they base their actions on their religious prestige rather than political machinations, which results in disaster when they do attempt it in the *Histories*. Thus, the Magi represent one internal withholding of information with high stakes for their identity as a group. However, the possibility of exposure of their secrets amounts to the same existential threat that the Scythians face in my previous example.

Egypt

My last discussion in this chapter takes us to Book 2 and Herodotus' description of Egyptian religion, specifically the knowledge he withholds from his own audience. This topic is especially tricky because we cannot clearly see what is being hidden, so we must instead examine what lies around the hidden knowledge to make sense of these passages. This third kind of cross-cultural withholding has multiple points of interest for my project here. One important point is the way that Herodotus uses his own cross-cultural withholding as a way to form a bridge between Cyrus the Great and his culture-abusing successors. Herodotus uses the position of Book 2 and its many omissions to establish himself as a trustworthy and respectful cross-cultural agent who respects sensitive information. Therefore, the Egyptian *logos* is architecturally important for the *Histories* on the heels of the Cyrus narrative. The founding Persian king serves as an example of a ruler who used his multiculturalism well, and will be followed immediately by rulers who failed to respect other cultures (i.e. Cambyses). Herodotus uses the interlude about Egypt to establish himself

first against the backdrop of Cyrus as a “successful” intercultural agent, and then against his successors who will use and abuse other cultures as it suits them. Matthew Christ writes, “Herodotus and his kings—Scythian, Persian, Egyptian, and Ethiopian—regularly confront in their different domains the fundamental problem of how best to gather and assess information. Like the historian, kings in the *Histories* often ‘want to know’ about various aspects of the physical and divine worlds, of human history and *nomoi*, and therefore initiate inquiries.”¹³⁸ Christ points out the sometimes uncomfortable similarities between Herodotus’ inquiries and those of his Persian kings, and argues that Herodotus uses his own inquiring techniques to set himself apart from the kings while also leveling criticism at them for failing to use those techniques. I propose here instead that Herodotus explicitly trying to distinguish himself from these kings, and that his main means of doing so is to engage in cross-cultural omissions in Book 2. Christ’s argument is broader than just Book 2, but I believe that looking at the Egyptian *logos* provides the solution to the uncomfortable similarities between the historian and the conquering king.

Herodotus is also emphasizing the exceptional nature of the Egyptian sphere, and his omissions of certain aspects of religious secrets helps bolster his case for this. Lateiner attributes Herodotus’ silence to his belief that “there was no rational way to control these stories, no tangible evidence, no system to distinguish true from false.”¹³⁹ This sort of

¹³⁸ Christ (1994): 168. I am making a similar point as Christ who divides his article into different subheadings based on different types of kingly behavior, and the criticism of the kings that Herodotus levels against them from a privileged position as an “analyzer and arbiter of principles of inquiry” (200). I am emphasizing the position of Book 2 and the omission of Egyptian cultural secrets as a subordinate part of my whole argument about different types of cross-cultural interaction. The position of Book 2 and its relationship to my other categories of cross-cultural information is key.

¹³⁹ Lateiner (1989): 65

explanation is the most common for Herodotus' reticence on the topic of Egyptian religion, and it is still a valid explanation. However, I believe Herodotus has other uses for his reticence as well that are more intimately connected to his exploration of Egypt, including proving his superior knowledge of other cultures.¹⁴⁰

John Marincola interprets Book 2 as a particularly strong and unique assertion of Herodotus' practice of *autopsy*, putting us right in the center of his *apodeixis*, especially apparent in his passage on his investigation of Herakles which is filled with details about his personal travel and contact with the priests there. Marincola goes on to analyze the distinct absence of personal contact with the cultures he discusses in later books, particularly Books 3, 4 and beyond. He writes, "...his presence in the narrative of the war is different from his presence in Book II. As I tried to show, in that book he was at the center of the action, engaging people in conversation, travelling, seeing, finding. In books other than II, Herodotus is still present but no longer participant....He is present instead by his critical accumulation and assessment, by the synthesis and explanation of the various traditions within the narrative, and by the interjection of his own beliefs, or expressions of the limit of his credulity." Carolyn Dewald asserts the power of Herodotus' project of "stitching together" all these different types of narrative (she conceptualizes it in terms of "smoothness" or a lack thereof) which allows him to present us with many different experiences of a historical narrative rather than a "smooth" presentation like we find in

¹⁴⁰ Cf. Immerwahr: "This treatment of geography in the proem would suggest that Herodotus thought of geographic and ethnographic breadth as a necessary element in his work, and that Egypt in particular was to play a major role. But the order of appearance of individual nations in the work was determined by the principle of attachment to an aggressive war, and thus allowed for choice only where several actions against a single country could be recorded" (p. 317).

Thucydides where he uses the same style of narrative throughout and does not deviate from keeping his sources and materials to himself. Both Dewald and Marincola focus on Book 2 as the most notable book for *opsis* and *akoe* and the one in which Herodotus' methods are demonstrably different from other books in the *Histories*. Marincola believes that the entire "game" of Book 2 is quite different, as does Dewald.¹⁴¹ Their points are important to my argument about the larger narrative of the *Histories*, since I am advancing a different solution to why Book 2 is situated where it is, and why Herodotus engages in such a noticeably different narrative style, relating to how he conveys particular information and where he learned it.

Herodotus went to Egypt and personally inquired about many things, which he was evidently not able to do for other parts of the *Histories*. He is particularly eager to mention that he spoke with priests from the most important religious centers in Egypt, namely Thebes, Memphis, and Heliopolis. Rogério Sousa implies, however, that the inquiring Herodotus was likely not warmly received by the priests particularly at Thebes and further infers that this "cold shoulder" from Egyptian authorities accounts for his inconsistent and sometimes "erroneous" information. Instead, Sousa posits that Herodotus was having difficulty sifting information that he learned through interpreters who had likely formed a "corpus of curiosities and stories to entertain and impress Greek visitors."¹⁴² Sousa contrasts Herodotus' relatively accurate geographic knowledge with his more inconsistent representation of various religious and cultural rites. Sousa is approaching it from the

¹⁴¹ Marincola (1987): 136 and Dewald (1987): 155ff.

¹⁴² Sousa (2020): 208

Egyptologist's perspective, however, whereas I am proposing a solution that is more internal to the *Histories*.

It is just after the accession of Cambyses that Herodotus begins his discussion of the wider Egyptian culture. After a long digression on geography and other scientific curiosities, he provides an extensive list of things the Egyptians do that he considers to be the “opposite” of everyone else (2.35ff). For example, the women of the household are the ones who take care of business in the marketplace while the men remain at home, and other similar details (2.35.2). The Egyptian priests, unlike any other priestly caste in the world, shave their heads as the marker of their class while other priestly groups grow their hair long (2.36.1). The Egyptians live in much closer proximity with their livestock than any other people (2.36.2). They have two different scripts for two different purposes; one for secular and one for sacred writing (2.36.4). As Rosaria Vignolo Munson writes, “The preliminary list of about twenty-three customs that immediately follows (2.35.2-2.36.4) is designed to illustrate what the Egyptians customarily do πάντα ἑμπαλιν (completely opposite) not just from the Greeks (as is implied of the Thracians at 5.6, cited earlier) but from the rest of mankind, οἱ ἄλλοι ἄνθρωποι.... This declaration of utter Egyptian difference gives the audience a jolt by establishing a new subdivision of the world, in which the Greeks become marginalized.”¹⁴³ This helps us see Herodotus as our cross-cultural guide as he “de-centers” us from a Hellenocentric view, rather unlike those representatives of other cultural groups who, in the *Histories*, refuse to be de-centered from their singular perspective.

¹⁴³ Munson (2001): 76

After this preamble to the Egyptians' cultural practices, Herodotus must then touch on their religious life because they are the "most religious" of all people groups including Greeks (θεοσεβέες δὲ περισσῶς ἔόντες; 2.37.1). It is in this realm that Herodotus begins to withhold certain pieces of information, especially about "sacred stories." It is difficult to explain the entirety of this section, as it seems that Herodotus is playing a tricky game. I focus on the narrative effects of this withholding as it contrasts with the withholding of my other examples.¹⁴⁴

The main examples of Egyptian secret-keeping are: 2.46.2, 47, 48, 51.4, 61.1, 62.2., 81, 86, 132, 170. and 171. For unstated reasons, Herodotus does not share certain details, "sacred stories," or the names of gods. According to Linforth, sections 2.48, 51, 62, and 81 are where he specifically mentions a "sacred story," and the other examples he lists (45, 46, 47, 61, 86, 132, 170, and 171) it is even less clear whether Herodotus conceals information out of mere religious scruples or some other reason. He breaks his own pattern when he specifically alludes to Isis and Osiris, despite his previous reluctance to disclose names, as we find in 2.61, 86, 132, and 170.¹⁴⁵ I mention this to give an idea of the breadth of his treatment of Egyptian religious matters, and some of the patterns (or lack thereof) in what he discusses. However, my point is that Herodotus is using this discussion as a way to prove his

¹⁴⁴ Irene de Jong (2002): 103 believes that Herodotus' *praeteritio* is for religious prudence, which is likely part of his rationale for the omissions. However, Linforth (1924):280 says something different: "Stein and Sourdille are united in one point. They both assume without question that Herodotus' principle of silence is due to the scruples of piety. This is, in fact, the prevailing opinion of Herodotus' attitude. There is nothing, however, in the whole context to suggest such a motive. If the Egyptian priests had told him, a foreigner, why should he be willing to communicate the same matters to his fellow Greeks? He will discuss θεῖα if his subject requires it, and, since the subject was within his own choice, his scruples could hardly have been strong enough to be called pious or religious."

¹⁴⁵ Linforth (1924): 281

authority and fair handling of cross-cultural matters in a way that will affect how we see later narratives of cross-cultural interaction (such as the Ethiopians or Scythians). When he has first-hand access to a culture, he learns and shares what he can, but without engaging in the same transgressive behaviors as the various conquerors he describes such as Cambyses.

The first divine matter in Egypt that Herodotus discusses at length is the difference between Egyptian and Greek beliefs about Herakles, particularly the “naive” stories Greeks happen to believe about him. Herodotus here tries to provide evidence in favor of the Egyptian understanding of Herakles, over and against that of Greece. Marincola singles this passage out specifically as the one where Herodotus informs us the most about his personal inquiries. He writes, “Here is the historian present throughout and the spotlight follows him. He is, we might say, right in the middle of things, the main character in the investigation of the cult and worship of Heracles. Like much of Book II, the passage above is part of a polemic by Herodotus against what he sees as the erroneous or inaccurate notions of the Greeks.”¹⁴⁶ There is no mediation of perspectives as there is in other sections, but rather we see Herodotus addressing his audience directly and placing himself in the center. This is a slightly different perspective from Fornara’s supposition that Book 2 is perhaps an earlier stand-alone work that represents Herodotus at his more undeveloped stages of historical technique, but I do not think this needs to be the case. Rather, he is using Book 2 as a way to explicate the fullest possibilities of historical writing on a subject where he has personal experience, which will then radiate into his writing on subjects where he has not engaged in

¹⁴⁶ Marincola (1987): 128

autopsy. His purpose in this passage is still a cross-cultural one, but he is applying the technique of omission here on his own audience, rather than with characters inside the narrative. One serious effect of this is the bolstering of his own authority on the subject of Egypt, and an increased respect for Egyptian prestige as Herodotus is also clearing up some common (Greek) misconceptions about the nature of Egypt.

It is at the end of this discussion of Heracles that Herodotus says: “καὶ περὶ μὲν τούτων τοσαῦτα ἡμῖν εἰποῦσι καὶ παρὰ τῶν θεῶν καὶ παρὰ τῶν ἡρώων εὐμένεια εἶη.” “And since we have said so much about these things, may the gods and heroes be favorable” (2.45.3). He is cautious here because he has ventured into potentially dangerous territory in presenting two different sides to the same divine personality and practically stating that one of them (the Greek perspective) might be wrong. From our perspective, we are reminded that there is religious information at stake that may or may not have consequences if one is careless. Throughout the following examples of his avowals of silence, it is often the “sacred story” that would explain the differences between Greek and Egyptian practice that he avoids, leaving his primary audience in the dark after establishing himself as a trustworthy guide who engages in *autopsy* for the sake of what he sees as the truth. This is the case, for example, in the explanation of Mendesian Pan in 2.46. According to the Mendesian community, he was a member of an original pantheon of eight gods. He is, however, not thought to resemble the Pan of the Greeks and the precise reason for this lack of resemblance is what Herodotus will not say: “ὅτεν δὲ εἵνεκα τοιοῦτον γράφουσι αὐτόν, οὐ μοι ἥδιον ἐστὶ λέγειν” (“...as to their reason for representing him so, it is not pleasing for me to say.”) He clearly implies that he knows the reason for the difference in the way he phrases

his avowals of silence. It is important that he presents himself as someone who clearly knows the secrets but refuses to share, because this bolsters his authority. For us as his primary audience, the effect is that we ought to have increased respect for his authority. There does not even necessarily have to be a clear pattern behind his omissions; the effect of the omissions is one of increased respect for Egypt, even if we feel as though we are being teased by his refusal to share certain things.

In 2.59-61, Herodotus discusses festivals celebrated by the Egyptians such as the one at Boubastis to Artemis and a number of others to Isis/Demeter, or Athena or Leto. For the celebration of Isis at Bousiris in particular there is a period of mourning after a sacrifice and Herodotus claims it would be impious for him to explain for whom the worshipers are mourning (οὐ μοι ὄσιον ἐστὶ λέγειν). Even in 2.62.2, Herodotus avoids explaining the “sacred story” behind the Festival of Lights in Sais. He enumerates some similarities in various Egyptian festivals that would have made sense to his Greek audience, but then provides whatever information he can about differences, such as the violent rites in honor of Ares at Papremis which are not practiced anywhere else (2.63.2). He shares some details about differences, but then certain other details (presumably details which would constitute significant religious differences) are kept secret. The way he phrases it here heavily implies that he does know the secret.

Regarding the highly sensitive area of burial practices, Herodotus also preserves a secret in 2.86.1 with regard to a particular image that is used during the most expensive method of embalming corpses, before going on in great detail about the methods adopted. In this case, he will not name the image that is used (φασὶ εἶναι τοῦ οὐκ ὄσιον ποιεῖναι τὸ

οὐνομα ἐπὶ τοιούτῳ πρήγματι ὀνομάζειν), probably meaning he will not name the god whose image it is. Later on in 2.132.2, he also avoids naming the god who is mourned during another festival that involves a gilded cow in a scarlet robe (τὸν οὐκ ὀνομαζόμενον θεὸν ὑπ' ἐμεῦ ἐπὶ τοιούτῳ πρήγματι). The final example of Herodotus refusing to name something is in 2.170.1 when he describes the temple of Athena at Sais, which contains a tomb belonging to someone whom Herodotus will not name (εἰσὶ δὲ καὶ αἱ ταφαὶ τοῦ οὐκ ὄσιον ποιεῦμαι ἐπὶ τοιούτῳ πρήγματι ἐξαγορεύειν τὸ οὐνομα ἐν Σάι...). Once again the phrasing implies that he knows the secret (οὐκ ὄσιον ποιεῦμαι... ἐξαγορεύειν), leaving us as his audience to be reminded yet again that he is keeping us in the dark. It is perhaps also important to note that he will go on in Book 4 to create situations like the Scythian narrative, where the withholding is occurring only between characters inside the narrative. He clearly wants the effect of the Egyptian narrative to be very different from his Scythian narrative, and its primary role is to convince his audience of his authority and discernment, especially in cross-cultural matters. He knows what he can and cannot share, and he knows what is important in each narrative so it reassures us that he is giving us what we need to know in order to understand the narrative.

At this point, I will set the Egyptian *logos* and Herodotus' withholding of Egyptian secrets into its larger context, or into the “macro-structure” of the *Histories*. It is important to keep in mind what came before, and what comes after. The main “event” of Book 1 is Cyrus the Great, and he represents (for my argument) an example of a successful “cross-cultural” adaptation. Cyrus is a multi-cultural figure who made the best use of his double heritage by seeking to understand “both sides,” so to speak. After the rise and fall of Cyrus,

Herodotus turns his attention to Egypt and establishes his own attitudes and techniques with regards to another culture, he is not transgressive. It still bears repeating that after Herodotus concludes the Cyrus narrative, Herodotus narrates Cambyses' accession to the throne briefly before turning to Egyptian culture. Immediately *after* the long digression about Egyptian culture and history, he returns to Cambyses and shows how Cambyses immediately violates the cultural secrets of Egypt by entering the sanctuary of the Kabeiroi and mocking the images. Cambyses will then go on to become emblematic of the greedy Persian conqueror who acquires cultural knowledge specifically for the intent of conquest. Herodotus also connects Egypt to the larger narrative in Book 3 especially in his narrative about Cambyses and the madness that leads him to violate Egyptian religious norms. For example, Cambyses violates the corpse of Amasis in 3.37 and entered a sanctuary to the Kabeiroi where no one except the priest is allowed to enter. Cambyses enters and mocks the statues contained in the temple, thereby uncovering something that is meant to be kept a secret. The punishment that Cambyses receives, however, fits the crimes he committed. He dies of a thigh wound that eerily resembles the wound he had inflicted on the bull that was supposed to be the epiphany of Apis (Epaphos to the Greeks) in 3.33-35, suggesting that there are in fact true consequences for his uncovering of Egyptian secrets and his violence against the epiphany of a god. So there are concrete narrative consequences for the violation of Egyptian cultural sensibilities and practices which may inform his understanding of Egypt as a whole. Before that narrative, however, Herodotus has inserted himself into the narrative to make sure we know that he is *not* so careless with another culture's secrets as Cambyses is. Herodotus is careful to establish himself *in contrast* with the Persian conquerors to come

later in the narrative like Cambyses, Darius, and Xerxes. It is, therefore, architecturally important for Herodotus to include this long interlude featuring prominent omissions. It is vital for Herodotus to make the distinction between himself and the imperial conquerors, when so much of his own inquiring activity can be directly comparable to that of Cambyses or Darius when they are preparing for a new conquest. Thus, the many places where Herodotus keeps secrets about Egyptian religious culture are strategically important for his self-presentation as a historian.

It is clear from my other categories that Herodotus sees much of his *Histories* as culturally-driven, when different groups exchange information, or hide information from each other. Herodotus identifies himself in his Egyptian *logos* as a cross-cultural agent who relies on a wide array of sources and demonstrates how he interacts with all kinds of different input to build a compelling narrative. From the way he deals with Egyptian religious customs and keeps back certain things, he proves himself trustworthy, careful, and reliable as a guide to his audience. It helps us trust his authority and come away from his narrative with the assurance that Herodotus is giving us an accurate and careful account even if he does not have first-hand knowledge to the same degree that he does in Book 2.

Furthermore, the position of Book 2 is very important because Herodotus situates himself in between Cyrus the Great and his successors as cross-cultural inquirers. Cyrus the Great ultimately belongs to the category of the “rise and fall of a great ruler” but Herodotus also marks him as a careful and savvy cross-cultural agent until he becomes too inflated with his own greatness. Before going on to discuss the abuses and failures of Cambyses, Herodotus uses his treatment of Egyptian secrets as a way to emphasize that he as historian

is *not* engaging in cross-cultural abuse like many of his characters, and that historical writing is not open to the same charges as a conquering Persian ruler. If he is as conscious of different types of cross-cultural engagement as I have highlighted in these chapters, then it would follow that he seeks to reassure his audience that he (and by extension his audience) are not in danger of engaging in the same kind of cross-cultural clumsiness as his kings.

The three examples I have considered in this chapter may not appear to go together very easily, but I believe that they do prove that Herodotus is seeking to consider all the possibilities when it comes to types of interaction. Through these examples, he demonstrates how his cross-cultural theories apply to himself as someone who is not merely constructing his argument in a vacuum but applying it to his own real-world experience. He demonstrates it both within his narrative, as I show with the Scythians and the Magi, but also demonstrates how it works on his own agenda as a historian. We can see the effects of cross-cultural withholding in the “fish-bowl” of the Scythians and Magi, where the historian is more distant from his narrative. However, he also situates himself in between these two examples in Book 2 as someone who is equally affected by cross-cultural dynamics. The effect of these three examples is largely one of contrast, namely the contrast between the internal vs. external but they inform and support each other as Herodotus seeks to encompass all the various aspects of cross-cultural interactions and what they mean for him as a historian who is also a cross-cultural agent with his own preconceived notions and experiences.

Conclusion:

This dissertation aims to shed more light on how Herodotus understood the intricacies of other cultures and their interactions with one another. Through my typology, we can see that Herodotus apparently had different internal categories for how individual cultures interacted and shared information. In turn, we can see how those different types of interactions also bear a distinct relationship to the overall historical narrative as well, and even to the historian himself.

I have relied on a number of interconnecting branches of scholarship in my analysis here, beginning with the literary lens of narratology paired with philological analysis when applicable. This has given me better insight into the particular ways in which Herodotus narrates each encounter, especially when he focalizes “others” in the course of a cross-cultural interaction. Many of the narrative distinctions within narratology are directly applicable to situations wherein we are dealing with communication of cultural information, and how individual perspectives can distort or adapt that information. Narratology has been applied extensively in many areas of ancient literature, but we have not yet come close to exhausting the possibilities of its use in understanding ancient historiography, especially if it can help us understand how ancient authors focalized other ethnic groups and interacted with perspectives other than their own.

I have also relied heavily on the ethnographic scholarship and theories of more recent years, which are undoing the more harmful legacy of many 19th and 20th century theoretical approaches that devalue and dehumanize other cultures and operate on the assumption that

they existed in a vacuum and did not interact with one another in meaningful and important ways. I remain indebted to the aspects of post-colonial theory that help identify ways in which marginalized cultures can still have a say in a primarily Hellenocentric narrative, and help reinforce the idea that Herodotus is himself very aware of the divergence in perspective between himself and members of other cultural groups. Scholars have been gradually coming to terms with how much work is needed to undo some of the unhelpful and inhumane narratives of past decades when it comes to reading and appreciating an author like Herodotus, who has been fairly well proven not to be a mere ideologue in his approach but consistently (albeit subtly) questions the apparent accepted ideology of his own audience.

My work here firstly approaches Herodotus with respect for his particular genius, and I think helps us emerge with a greater appreciation for his sensitivity when it comes to cross-cultural matters. My method of categorizing types of cross-cultural interaction is a new angle in studying Herodotus, and one that could easily be used as a starting point when analyzing other ancient historiographers. More broadly, it helps add more weight to the idea of Herodotus as a deeply thoughtful historian despite the clear limits of his knowledge. My work here also contributes to the growing body of work that critiques Hellenocentric perspectives both in and beyond antiquity, particularly by recognizing that even in an author like Herodotus, the concept is considerably more complicated than one might think. Herodotus does seem aware of the epistemological limitations of his project, and seeks to operate within that framework as fairly as he can, often with limits to his own personal knowledge that we can barely understand simply because we have a much broader picture of

the world than he did. In addition to uncovering a little more about his understanding of cultures, I have also noted how his understanding of cultural interactions form a key part of his understanding of history as a whole. History revolves around the axis of cultural interactions, especially in the “center” of his world where there is constant flux and interaction taking place, contrasted with the “fringes” of society where there are very little interactions and very few historical changes as a result. The interactions between Persia and these fringe cultures have far more effect on the Persians as they move about the center of Herodotus’ world and interact broadly, while the cultures on the edges retain their autonomy. If this is true, then there is even less disparity between the “halves” of the *Histories*, which was a contentious subject for much of the 20th century scholarship on Herodotus, which sought to reconcile two seemingly contradictory and unconnected sides of his work. The first four books are not unimportant to the rest of the *Histories*, but actually vital to it because Herodotus sees this extensive background in the movement of cultures as the key to understanding how the Persian Wars came about in the first place.

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