

SETH BENARDETE

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# HERODOTEAN INQUIRIES



MARTINUS NIJHOFF / THE HAGUE

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*by*

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*To*  
*Leo Strauss*

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Les anciens historiens sont remplis de vues dont on pourrait faire usage, quand même les faits qui les présentent seraient faux. Mais nous ne savons tirer aucun vrai parti de l'histoire; la critique d'érudition absorbe tout; comme s'il importait beaucoup qu'un fait fût vrai, pourvu qu'on en pût tirer une instruction utile. Les hommes sensés doivent regarder l'histoire comme un tissu de fables, dont la morale est très appropriée au coeur humain.

J.-J. Rousseau *Émile* II  
(on Herodotus I.94)

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## INTRODUCTION

Herodotus has so often been called, since ancient times, the father of history that this title has blinded us to the question: Was the father of history an historian? Everyone knows that the Greek word from which 'history' is derived always means inquiry in Herodotus. His so-called *Histories* are inquiries, and by that name I have preferred to call them. His inquiries partly result in the presentation of events that are now called 'historical'; but other parts of his inquiry would now belong to the province of the anthropologist or geographer. Herodotus does not recognize these fields as distinct; they all belong equally to the subject of his inquiry, but it is not self-evident what he understands to be his subject: the notorious difficulties in the proemium are enough to indicate this. If his work presents us with so strange a mixture of different fields, we are entitled to ask: Did Herodotus understand even its historical element as we understand it? Without any proof everyone, as far as I am aware, who has studied him has assumed this to be so. In the writings of Felix Jacoby, *honoris causa*, we can see the difficulty that such an assumption leads to: "Whoever makes of the historian (Herodotus) a philosopher, moralist, preacher, folk-psychologist, ethnologist, 'morphologist of human fate,' or anything else, puts in the middle what belongs at best to the periphery; his mistake about the character of his (Herodotus') great achievement is worse, in my opinion, than he who insists that the historian has still not completely understood the methodical foundations, the nature, of his science. That he is and wishes to be an historian, Herodotus in his proemium has said with the same clarity as Thucydides has in his; this must be agreed upon."<sup>1</sup> Herodotus then would be an historian who did not fully understand what an historian must be: "His

<sup>1</sup> Charon von Lampsakos, p. 235, fn 81, *Studi italiani di filologia classica*, N.S. 15, 1938 (1939) = p. 200, *Abhandlungen z. Griech. Geschichtsschreibung*, ed. Bloch. The rest of Jacoby's opinions here referred to are found in his article on Herodotus in *R.E.*, Suppl. II, coll. 205ff.



critical sense," Jacoby says, "still stands in children's shoes." Had Herodotus fully understood the "methodical foundations of his science," he would have written a different work; but perhaps Herodotus did fully understand them and hence wrote the work we have. Perhaps his foundations are not those of modern historiography but foundations that suited the intention he had in mind. His intention may not only appear in the proemium but in his whole work. To consider the proemium alone without comparing it to the whole might be like regarding the first lines of the *Iliad* or *Odyssey* as sufficient for understanding the whole poem. One may have to consider the proemium in light of what follows rather than the other way round. Herodotus' intention may be far from clear.

Jacoby can only conclude that the proemium presents Herodotus' complete intention by assigning parts of the *Inquiries* to different periods. He is convinced, for example, that Book II, on Egypt, has no place in the whole work, but that it was conceived of and written as an independent study; and he goes so far as to claim that none of the first four books has anything to do with the Persian Wars. "No longer will anyone seriously assert," he says, "that the books on Egypt and Scythia, that the Lybian, Babylonian, Mesopotamian, and Libyan λόγοι, have any inner relation with the conflict between Asia and Europe—to make the basic theme of the present work as wide as possible—and that the historian of the Persian Wars would have needed or even desired those journeys."<sup>2</sup> Instead of starting with the most obvious, the presence of a four hundred page disquisition on those countries, Jacoby tries to explain it away; he does not stop to consider that an interpretation of these books might explain Herodotus' intention more adequately than a single sentence. He does not consider this possibility because he does not believe Herodotus has to be interpreted; but in spite of this belief he does interpret Herodotus. To interpret an author implies that his argument is not immediately clear to us; either because his suppositions are unstated, or because his work invites us to think out his argument, which may lie as much in the stories he tells as in what he openly says. Jacoby at once decided on the first and rejected the second possibility; it never oc-

<sup>2</sup> *R.E.*, col. 365, 11. 32–41. Those who have been less extreme than Jacoby in denying a connection between Books I–IV and V–IX, have not, I think, made a strong case; see especially, Pohlenz, M., *Herodot, der erste Geschichtschreiber des Abendlandes* (Leipzig, 1937); also: Fritz, K. von, *TalPhA*, 1936, pp. 315–340; Regenbogen, O., *Die Antike*, VI, 1930, pp. 202–248; Schadewaldt, W., *Die Antike*, X, 1934, pp. 144–168; Reinhardt, K., in his *Von Werken u. Formen* (Godesberg, 1948), pp. 163ff.; Focke, F., *Herodot als Historiker* (Stuttgart, 1927); Hellmann, F., *Herodots Kroisos-logos* (Berlin, 1934); Pagel, K. A., *Die Bedeutung des aitiologischen Momentes für Herodots Geschichtsschreibung* (Leipzig, 1927). For more recent work on Herodotus see now *Herodot, Eine Auswahl aus der Neueren Forschung*, ed. Marg, W. (München, 1962).

curred to him that the second might allow the only approach to the first. He knows, for example, that “no great historical work has ever arisen *sine ira et studio*.” He denies what Tacitus explicitly says was the spirit in which he wrote, and he knows that Herodotus was a “Periclean,” though Herodotus never says he is. He knows that Herodotus’ opinion about the gods was the same as Sophocles’: but we do not know what Sophocles thought about the gods. He does not mean Jocasta’s but the chorus’ opinion was Sophocles’ own, just as he identifies Solon’s speech to Croesus with Herodotus’ opinion: he knows that Herodotus disagreed with Cambyses. Admittedly, the difficulty of the *Inquiries*, where Herodotus sometimes speaks in his own name, is less than in the plays of Sophocles, where Sophocles never speaks; and yet Herodotus contradicts himself. To accept as his true opinion what we find it convenient for him to believe is arbitrary. To wrench a sentence out of the context in which it appears, without paying attention to what precedes or follows it, completely destroys the argument of the *Inquiries*. It replaces a whole with a series of fragments that can be shuffled about at will. It has led to the study of the lost sources of Herodotus but not to the study of what we have before us. One passage is labelled a ‘folk-tale,’ another is ‘sophistic,’ a third an ‘Ionian rationalization’; but it is rarely considered how these passages fit together. In order to verify or refute what Herodotus says, he has been compared with other authors who report the same episode; but few have considered how Herodotus understood it. To say that Herodotus borrowed his description of the crocodile from Hecataeus does not help us to discover why Herodotus described it. If Herodotus thought of his work as an encyclopaedia, which contains everything that he knows, perhaps such an analysis would be impossible. But Herodotus tells us again and again that he omits what he knows, and he sometimes justifies his omissions by referring to the necessity of his λόγος.<sup>3</sup> It is important to take seriously this necessity, which implies that everything that is told has a place in the *Inquiries*. Its apparent lack of necessity shows only that there is a problem; it does not show that a necessity does not govern it. That every sentence belongs by necessity to the work, we should hesitate to affirm. Many facts are simply facts that had to be mentioned though they do not contribute directly to his argument; but that almost every paragraph belongs we have set out to indicate. We can, indeed, only indicate that the argument is a perfect whole, for there are many things that still remain obscure for us and others that only require a hint from us for the reader to see their connection with the whole. In trying to exhibit the argument we have concentrated on Books

<sup>3</sup> Cf. I.51.4; 177; II.3.2; 47.2; 132.3; 171.1; IV.30.1; 43.7; VII.96.1; 139.1; 224.1.

I-VII, since it will be clearly seen that VIII and IX are only the culmination of what has preceded them. The victories at Salamis and Plataea are Marathon and Thermopylae writ large, and they complete without altering the argument of the *Inquiries*.

We shall try to show that the argument of the *Inquiries* is crudely this: Books I-IV present the thinking of Herodotus himself, Books VI-IX reflect and supplement that thinking in the great and marvelous deeds of Greeks and barbarians, and Book V is the transition between Herodotus' thinking and Greek-barbarian deeds. Herodotus' thinking, however, is only presented through the thinking of Greeks and barbarians, but the plan and intention of the *Inquiries*, once understood, will explain why Herodotus did not explicitly state it. The *Inquiries* present the evidence for an argument that is in the evidence and not imposed on it. The universal λόγος which Herodotus tries to uncover lies completely embedded in the particulars that he narrates. To understand the particular evidence is to understand the universal argument. The power of Herodotus' argument is shown in its ability to understand the given without destroying the given. The argument is not only an understanding of things but the way to that understanding. It shows both what it is and how Herodotus arrived at it. It contains both a teaching (λόγος) and an inquiry (ἵστορίη): they are inseparable. A story is told in such a way that we not only understand how the characters in the story understood themselves but how Herodotus understood them. A custom is presented in such a context that we see the interpretation both its practitioners and Herodotus gave it. In order to show this doubleness in his argument, our inquiry will have to show that Herodotus was more serious and more playful than has been realized. It might be recalled that Rabelais is said to have planned a translation of the *Inquiries*.

An example perhaps may better explain Herodotus' way, for it is precisely his way to proceed by examples. In the eighth book (118-119) Herodotus tells a story that he himself finds unconvincing about Xerxes' return to Asia after his defeat at Salamis. Xerxes is said to have sailed home from Eion, and when a storm came up which the captain warned would swamp them unless the ship were lightened, Xerxes requested the Persians on board to show their concern for his safety by jumping into the sea; and when they obeyed him and the ship made port, Xerxes "because the captain had saved the king's life rewarded him with a golden crown, but because he had lost the lives of many Persians cut off his head." If we accept Herodotus' reasons for rejecting this as a fable, we might then wonder why he should bother to tell it. As it cannot be true, we can only account for it by considering its "meaning": only what it says, as opposed to its veracity, warrants its inclu-

sion. What it says is simple. Xerxes is shown acting out a perfect caricature of justice. Either of his actions, taken by itself, is just, but together each just action cancels out the other, and absurdity follows. The story is told, then, because it points to a truth about justice: the strict application of a just rule, to pay back what is owed, leads to a contradiction. That this misunderstanding of justice peculiarly belongs to the Persians will become clear later, so that we shall see that even so false a story tells the truth about the Persians (cf. III.36.5-6).

If the reader, however, now admits the relevance of the story, he may still doubt whether its place in the *Inquiries* has any connection with its surroundings, since he might think it had to appear where it did if it were to appear at all. If this were so, to try to work out the plan of the *Inquiries* would be hopeless, even though Herodotus clearly had less freedom in the last books than in the first four. But on glancing back at what precedes this story, we see that a well-ordered series of stories leads up to it. Herodotus tells how a Delphic oracle made the Spartans send a herald to Xerxes to ask a recompense (ἀλτῆριν δίκας) for Leonidas' death, and that the oracle advised them to accept whatever Xerxes offered (114). The Spartan herald addressed him thus: "King of the Medes, the Lacedaemonians and Heraclidae from Sparta ask a recompense (δίκας) for a death, because you killed their king who was trying to save Greece." Xerxes laughed at his speech and then, after a long silence, pointed to Mardonius saying: "Then Mardonius here will pay a penalty (δίκας δώσει) of the kind that suits them." Xerxes tells a truth unwittingly, for Mardonius later dies at Plataeae; but we should not be so taken with this coincidence as to neglect Xerxes' initial laughter. Does it mean that he is indifferent to Mardonius' fate, as Artemisia's advice suggests he should be (102.2-3)? Or rather does it mean that the Spartans' request for justice is absurd? The oracle's command seems as much a caricature of justice as Xerxes' reward and punishment of the captain; indeed, one might ask whether it illustrates the Spartans' understanding of justice as much as the other illustrates the Persians'. It seems to assume that the justice which almost everyone would admit a city justly exacts from its own citizens equally applies to its foreign enemies. Again we are forced to think about justice.

Now between these two episodes there occur at least two more that concern justice. Xerxes had left his sacred horses and chariot in Macedonia, and though the Paeonians gave them to the Thracians, they claimed, when Xerxes asked for them back, that some Thracians had seized them while they were grazing (115.4). A clear case of injustice, if as the Persians believe lying is always unjust, proves difficult because of the circumstances. What

justice if any obtains between victor and vanquished? This same difficulty in fact lay behind the Spartans' request for recompense. Following at once on this account, Herodotus tells of an "unnatural deed" that the king of the Bisaltae did (116). He had forbidden his sons to take part in Xerxes' invasion of Greece, but they "disregarding him as they especially wanted to see the war" joined Xerxes' army; and on their safe return, all six of them had their eyes dug out by their father "for this cause." Once again we have a caricature of justice. The father's prohibition apparently came from his desire to keep his sons from harm, but in spite (or because) of their safe return he regarded their disobedience as more important than the reason for his prohibition. A just rule—obey one's father—overrides all sense of justice.

These six paragraphs, then, though they do not prove our claim to the presence of a plan in the *Inquiries*, at least suggest that it is not absurd to look for one. They make one look back, for example, to the story of Herotimus, who obtained the greatest recompense for an injustice that Herodotus knew of (105-106), and forward to the way in which the Greeks estimated the worth of Themistocles (123), to say nothing either of Aristides, whom Herodotus held to be the best and most just man in Athens (79.1), or of Timoxenus, whose betrayal of Scione went unpunished lest the Scioneans be forever held treacherous (128). These stories, then, begin to look as if they form part of a reasoned whole, a whole that is only presented in partial stories. They begin to reveal how Herodotus has marshalled particulars, and even a false particular, into a coherent whole that compels us to reflect on a universal question; how an inquiry and a λόγος are made to join; how Herodotus combines an insight into the actors' point of view with his own point of view; and how much that depends on his ability to combine and distinguish the playful and the serious.

\* All references are to C. Hude's Oxford text.

\*\* The commentaries of Stein, How-Wells, Sayce (Books I-III), Macan (IV-IX), and the notes of Legrand to his translation (Budé) have been consulted, but I have usually not repeated what can be found in these works.

\*\*\* In noting linguistic peculiarities of a statistical kind in the different books, it is to be understood that, as the book-divisions are not Herodotus' own, we have only used them (especially V-IX) to indicate roughly the limits within which a part of Herodotus' argument is contained.

\*\*\*\* In each chapter all references are to the Book under consideration unless otherwise stated.

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## I. HERODOTUS

La pudeur sied bien à tout le monde; mais il faut  
savoir la vaincre, et jamais la perdre.

Montesquieu

The first sentence of Herodotus' *Inquiries* runs: "Here is the showing-forth of the inquiry of Herodotus of Halicarnassus, so that neither what human beings have done might disappear in time, nor the deeds great and admirable, partly shown forth by the Greeks and partly by the barbarians, might be without fame: his inquiry shows forth both other things and through what cause they warred against one another."<sup>1</sup> The so-called Persian wars were wars of Greeks against barbarians; not all the Greeks nor all the barbarians, but primarily the Athenians and Spartans, who were by far the best of the Greeks, and the Persians, who were the best among the barbarians.<sup>2</sup> The war between them might be thought to have been between natural enemies, a war between men with different natures: but they are equally human beings. Although they are human beings, that might seem less important than that some of them are Greeks and some barbarians. Their deeds as those of human beings are neither great nor admirable, they are simply τὰ γινόμενα, which Herodotus does not wish time to eradicate; but as Greek or barbarian deeds they are to be famous, since they are great and admirable. Not human beings but Persians ruled over all Asia, not human beings but Greeks won at Salamis and Plataeae. The difference between Greeks and barbarians overrides their sameness as human beings when we consider the war. It overrides their sameness when we consider the justice or injustice of those who fought. The Greeks fought against the Persians for the sake of their freedom. It appeared to them as it appears to us a just defense. The Persians would seem to have been responsible for that war; but the Persians deny their guilt (1-5). They say the Phoenicians were responsible for the original antagonism—they abducted Io—but the Greeks were "greatly responsible" for its permanence. Instead of weighing their own seizures of Europa and Medea against the Phoenicians' seizure of Io and Alexander's of Helen, they

<sup>1</sup> For the syntax see Erbse, H., *Festschrift Bruno Snell* (München, 1956), pp. 209–233.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Strabo XV.3.23 (735).

destroyed Troy in order to recover Helen; and from that time on the Persians have regarded Greece as their enemy, "for they regard as their own both Asia and the barbarian tribes that dwell there, while they believe Europe and Greece are separate."

The Persians sharply distinguish between Europe and Asia, between what is their own and what is alien. They say the origin of their hatred stems from the Greeks' conquest of Troy, for the rape of Io was a slight injustice, about which no sober man would care, but the destruction of a city—and for so trivial a reason—awakened their desire to punish the Greeks on a large scale. Now Herodotus refuses to say whether or not the Greeks were originally responsible. Instead he seems to make a new beginning: "I am not going to say whether it was in this way or some other, but who I know first began unjust deeds against the Greeks, with just an indication of who he was I shall go on in my *logos*, going alike through small and large cities of human beings." It seems that Herodotus does not think the question of justice very important; practically, to be sure, he counterposes the injustice of Croesus toward Greeks against the injustice of Agamemnon; but he will only indicate Croesus' guilt before he passes on to another theme. This other theme is the small and large cities of human beings, not the cities of Greeks and barbarians. "Cities that were in ancient times great have now become small, and those great in my time were formerly small. Knowing, then, that human happiness never remains in the same place, I shall make mention of both alike." He has in mind the Lydian and Persian empires, of which he shows the Lydian in its destruction (the first half of Book I) and the Persian in its expansion (the second half). He disclaims that his interest lies in determining who was guilty of the Persian wars. Not the small and large unjust deeds of Greeks and barbarians, but the small and large cities of human beings plot the course of his first *logos*. His indifference to small and large injustices appears in our own uncertainty about whom he thought to be the first wrongdoer among the barbarians. If we believe that the payment of tribute is unjust, then Croesus was the first; but if we believe that even the capture of a city is unjust, as the Persians do (with regard to Troy), then Gyges was the first (6; 14.4).<sup>3</sup> Since all Greeks were free before Croesus' reign, he might be thought more guilty than Gyges; but it remains unclear whether he was not justified in some of his conquests, even if in others he brought forward petty complaints (26.3). Unless the enslavement of a city is never justified, Croesus' responsibility might be only slightly more than Gyges': Herodotus

<sup>3</sup> Consider Thucydides I.15.2; cf. Maddalena, A., *Interpretazioni Erodotee* (Padova, 1942), pp. 1–16.

does not give the grounds for either's actions. His silence makes it impossible for us to judge the injustice of either Lydians or Greeks. He deliberately turns us away from a particular question of right and wrong to the universal question of human happiness. He chooses Croesus because his reign brought the independence of Lydia to an end, and not because he enslaved Greek cities. Human happiness, however, cannot be considered apart from all other human things. Herodotus would have to understand somewhat the horizon and the character of human things before he could say something important about human happiness. The first sentence tells us that his *Inquiries* would prevent the things that human beings have done from disappearing; and his narrative about the fall of Lydia and the rise of Persia would seem to fulfill that promise. And yet he talks about Lydians and Persians and not about human beings. Human beings always come to sight as members of some nation or tribe; they never come to sight as human beings. To reveal to us the nature of human beings, Herodotus must first reveal to us what kinds of human beings there are. If he abandons the attempt to discover who first wronged whom, in order to discover the nature of human things, he must first still begin with Greeks and barbarians. He cannot bypass that difference even if it no longer has the same importance for him as it has for the Persians.

What distinguishes barbarians from Greeks is the difference in their customs. Customs are the obstacle to understanding directly the nature of human things. Human beings disagree about the nature of human things. They disagree about what is just and unjust. What each nation considers just is embodied in their customs. The Persians believe (*νομίζουσιν*) that only unjust men would abduct women, but only foolish men would retaliate, while sensible and sober men would not care. The stories they tell are meant to illustrate these beliefs, and for Herodotus to agree with their version would entail his agreement with their beliefs. He would have to agree with Persian laws about what is just and unjust, what is folly and sobriety. He is now in no position either to agree or disagree. He knows that Persian customs do not agree with Greek customs, just as their version does not agree with the Greek. The Greeks say that Hera drove Io to Egypt, Zeus brought Europa to Crete, and Aphrodite gave Helen to Paris. Not men but gods were responsible for what the Persians believe unjust. The question about justice, which depends on what Greek or Persian laws say is just, proves to conceal the question about the gods. The Persian gods and the Greek gods are not the same. Not only do human things first appear clothed in customs but divine things as well. Neither men nor gods appear as what they are; indeed, men do not appear as what they are because not all men have the same



gods. The difference in gods prevents Herodotus from showing forth at once human things. Human things look different in the light of different gods.

Not only human things in general but justice in particular depends for its interpretation on the gods. Homer offers a beautiful illustration of this. Hephaestus puts on the shield of Achilles a city at war and a city at peace. The city of peace has no gods, the city at war shows Athena and Ares leading the troops, and Strife, Din of Battle, and Doom mingling among them (*Iliad* XVIII.515,535). In the city of peace a court is shown in session, where both parties to the dispute have agreed to abide by the decision of the judges (497-508). Since the law of the land is not in question, the gods, who are directly or indirectly the founders of the law and the interpreters of justice, do not have to appear. But in the city of war the very existence of its way of life is at stake, and no agreement underlies the dispute between it and its enemy. The gods, therefore, must appear in order to support the laws and customs which they have sanctioned. In a struggle between cities each side must appeal to the gods who support them (cf. I.26.2). Herodotus, however, cannot as Homer does call upon the Muses to let him know who the gods are and what they have decreed. He must come to the gods through the customs and laws of men. He must come to an understanding of justice and human things through what men say about the gods and divine things. Medea's association with Persia (VII.62), Europa's and Helen's with Greece, and Io's with Egypt are the first indications that these three countries form the basis of Herodotus' analysis of human things, for they differ most in what they believe about the gods. What Cicero has L. Furius Philus say in his *Republic* sums up their differences in an Herodotean way: "The justice we are discussing is something political, not natural; for if it were natural, just as hot and cold, bitter and sweet, then just and unjust things would be the same for all. Now, however, if anyone, drawn in that famous Pacuvian chariot of winged snakes, could survey and examine with his own eyes many diverse peoples and cities, let him first look at the Egyptians, who have in writings the memory of the most centuries and happenings, and though the most uncorrupted of men, they believe a certain kind of bull to be a god, whom they call Apis; and many other monsters among them and animals of every kind are numbered among the gods; secondly, let him look at Greece, where there are, as among us, magnificent temples dedicated to images in human shape, which the Persian believed impious; and solely on this account Xerxes is said to have ordered the Athenian sanctuaries to be burnt, because he believed it impious for the gods, whose home is the whole world, to be shut up and imprisoned within walls," (III. 13-14; cf. *Leg.* II. 26). Furius contrasts the Egyptians, Greeks, and Persians just as Herodotus himself

does: most of what he says comes from Herodotus. The Greeks (we might think) hold a somewhat middle position between the “excessive piety” of the Egyptians and the impiety of the Persians; but Herodotus cannot rest content with their apparent superiority. He must show the how and why of it. The opinions each nation holds about the gods affect the way each understands all things, including human things. Herodotus must understand and judge their customs and laws if he is to go beyond a mere presentation of their incompatibility. Here the greatest difficulty confronts us in reading his *Inquiries*. Herodotus says that everyone would choose his own laws and customs as the most beautiful, even if he could choose from the customs of all others, but he himself does not follow his own opinion: he praises laws that do not agree with Greek laws (two Babylonian, two Persian, one Egyptian and one Scythian), and he blames one of the Babylonian laws that is also found among the Greeks.<sup>4</sup> We might attribute this inconsistency to Herodotus’ forgetfulness, but unless we assume that Herodotus was extraordinarily loose in his thinking, we have no right to do so. When he makes a mistake in calculation, it can be simply corrected, but his praise and blame of customs which are not his own, in spite of his belief that Cambyses was obviously mad because he blamed Egyptian laws, cannot be corrected. The contradiction between his own activity and his criticism of Cambyses can only be understood. We try to arrive at such an understanding.

Candaules was in love with his own wife and thus believed her to be the most beautiful of women (8-14).<sup>5</sup> To his most trusted bodyguard Gyges he constantly praised her, and finally he ordered him to behold her naked, so that Gyges could more truthfully agree that she was the most beautiful, “for human ears are less to be trusted than eyes.” Gyges was appalled at this command and shouted out: “O master, what unhealthy words have you spoken, bidding me to behold my mistress naked? When a woman removes her clothes she removes her shame as well (i.e. the respect we must have towards her). Long ago the beautiful things (morality) were discovered by human beings, from which you must learn; and among them is this one: let each man look at his own. I am persuaded that she is the most beautiful of all women, and I beg you not to demand unlawful things.” Candaules believed the eyes more trustworthy than the ears, Gyges was content with report. If the king insisted that his wife was most beautiful, then she was; for beauty was not to be tested but authority trusted. Gyges believed in the

<sup>4</sup> III.38; cf. I.137.1; 196–197; 199; II.64–65.1; 177.2; IV.46.2.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Pomp. Trogus I.7.15–17; pseudo-Dionysius *περὶ λόγων ἐξέτασεως* XI,4 (378, ed. Usener-Radermacher); Harder, R., *Studies Presented to D. M. Robinson* (St. Louis, 1953), vol. II, pp. 446–449.

beauty of Candaules' wife in the same way he believed in ancient maxims: they were both equally beautiful and equally unseen. Although he had not beheld Candaules' wife nor discovered for himself these maxims, he believed both were what they were said to be. He identified the beautiful with what he had heard, whether it was the voice of Candaules or the voice of the past. Convention and authority were for him the standard: each laid down with equal force what was to be regarded as true. Gyges, who feared what might happen were he to consent to the king's proposal, knew that Candaules' desire to be confirmed in his view was at odds with his power; for his power could guarantee the only answer he wanted. If his love made him believe his wife most beautiful, he wished Gyges, without being in love, to believe it as well; for to believe without passion would be to believe what was true. Candaules loved what was his own, and because it was his own he thought it most beautiful. He ranked his own wife as Herodotus says men rank their own laws; but his love led him to violate one of those laws, which commands that things not one's own ought not to be seen. He but not Gyges may see his own wife naked. The unlawful thing was for Gyges to see what was not his own—to see what the law says was not his own. The law not only establishes what is one's own, but it itself is one's own: it establishes that one may look only at one's own laws. Gyges violates Lydian but not (in so strict a way) Greek law when he looks at Candaules' wife: "Among the Lydians, and almost among all other barbarians, even for a man to be seen naked leads to great shame."<sup>6</sup> Candaules cannot persuade Gyges by appealing to Greek law; he must only look to Lydian laws, which forbid the Lydians to look at women or men naked. To see them naked is to see them as they are, stripped of the concealment of clothes. And laws are like clothes: they too conceal from us the way things are. All laws say that certain things cannot be seen; before certain things one must have shame. Shame (*αἰδώς* occurs nowhere else in Herodotus), which underlies all laws, says each must look to his own laws and no other. The almost universal prohibition among barbarians, that human beings are not to be seen naked, only expresses in a particular way the truly universal prohibition that things alien are not to be seen. But if Gyges unwillingly violates a Lydian law, Herodotus willingly violates the universal prohibition which Gyges himself has formulated. The *Inquiries* of Herodotus continually show him looking at alien things. He looks at the customs of non-Greek people. He agrees with Candaules and not with Gyges that eyes are more trustworthy than ears; but he does not look in order to confirm but to test the beliefs of others. He has lost his

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Thucydides I.6.5–6; Plato *Republic* 457a6–b5.

shame. He has followed the gods who came to look, and not the goddesses who stayed home out of shame, at Ares and Aphrodite ensnared in the net of Hephaestus (*Od.* VIII.324). He has taken to heart the advice of Athena, who told Telemachus when they had landed in Nestor's kingdom: "No longer do you have need of shame, Telemachus, not even a little, for you sailed over the sea to learn of your father" (III.14ss; cf. VIII.322-327). A traveller, in leaving home, leaves behind all that is familiar and customary; but he still may not be open to the unfamiliar. His purpose might be, like Telemachus', to find his father, to buy or sell goods, like the Phoenicians', or to take vengeance, like Paris'.<sup>7</sup> Only if he has come like Herodotus to look and for no other reason might he learn how to comprehend both the known and the unknown. Only then might he be able to discover the human beneath the infinite disguises of custom.

Herodotus first showed himself as indifferent to the truth of the Persian account about Io, Medea, Europa, and Helen. He was as indifferent as the Persians say sober men should be to the rape of their own women. He was indifferent to their radical interpretation of Greek stories. He did not become indignant and shout as Gyges did when Candaules urged him to violate Lydian law. He could hear and be silent about what was his own. He now shows that he can also see what is not his own. A story about Gyges turned out to be also about himself. We were able to see this because in a particular story were embedded the universal statements of Gyges and Candaules, whose universality demanded that we compare them with Herodotus' own particular doing. The comparison told us that he would not follow the advice of Gyges. He would not look at his own. He began with Gyges because his Greek readers would see at once that the dilemma of Gyges arose from Lydian laws. They could laugh at Gyges and Candaules, Gyges who had to choose between killing Candaules or himself, and Candaules whose blind love compelled him to violate the law. When Herodotus says, "For it had to turn out badly for Candaules," the reader knows that the necessity is only the necessity of Lydian law. If they had all been Greeks, there would have been no necessity. Herodotus has made his Greek reader look at a Lydian law, which differs from Greek law; and the Greek law, or rather the absence of any such prohibition among the Greeks, would seem as superior as it is. Herodotus has not yet made the reader look at Greek laws in the light of better laws. He has not yet converted him to see even his own as doubtful. He began with the Persian account of the enmity between barbarians and Greeks, which turned on the question of justice, but he soon replaced it with another, the question of human happiness; but that again has been partially

<sup>7</sup> Cf. III.139.1; Iamblichus *de Pyth. vita* XII.58.

replaced with the question of custom. He chose Lydia for two reasons. First, one of its customs pointed to the difference between most barbarians and Greeks, and hence to the difference between Gyges and Herodotus; second, “The Lydians use almost the same customs as the Greeks, except that they prostitute their daughters” (94.1; cf. 35.2; 74.6). The Lydians have the same gods as the Greeks: the oracle at Delphi allows Gyges to retain the throne of Candaules. Thus Herodotus can use the Lydians to show the Greeks to the Greeks. Before he can persuade the Greeks to look on everything as not their own, he must let them look on what resembles and yet differs from their own; for that slight disparity affords the necessary purchase for a complete conversion.<sup>8</sup> The Lydian *logos* will subtly lead us away from the Greek to Herodotus’ own perspective. It will bring us round to the seeing of the naturally self-evident.<sup>9</sup>

Gyges could persuade neither Candaules nor his wife to desist in their intentions; he felt there was no choice but to obey Candaules and then to kill him. They compelled him to prefer his own life to the maintenance of the law. Herodotus tells shortly afterwards how Arion overcame a similar dilemma (23-24; cf. 141).<sup>10</sup> Arion was the best luteplayer of his day, and “the first human being of those we know who made the dithyramb, gave it its name, and performed it in Corinth.” Having spent some time at Perian-dilemma (23-24; cf. 141).<sup>10</sup> Arion was the best lute-player of his day, and then wished to return to Corinth. Since “he trusted no one more than he did Corinthians,” he hired a Corinthian ship, but the sailors decided to throw him overboard and keep his money; Arion begged for his life even at the loss of his money; they refused and gave him the choice of killing himself on board ship (“so that he might obtain burial on land”), or jumping into the sea; he chose the latter with the further request that he might first sing, dressed in all the garments of his art. The sailors, turned pirates, graciously allowed it, “as they were going to hear the best singer among men,” and retreated from the stern into the middle of the ship. Arion then sang a song, and dressed as he was threw himself into the sea, and they say a dolphin

<sup>8</sup> That the Heraclidae obtained the Lydian kingdom “from an oracle” (6.4), whereas Gyges was confirmed in his usurpation by the “oracle at Delphi” (13.1), shows how far Herodotus’ account has moved within the orbit of Greece; compare ταῦτα μὲν νυν Πέρσαι τε καὶ Φοίνικες λέγουσι (5.2) with ταῦτα μὲν νυν Κορίνθιοί τε καὶ Λέσβιοι λέγουσι (24.8); about Io οὐκ ὁμολογέουσι Πέρσῃσι οὐτῶ Φοίνικες, but about Arion ὁμολογέουσι δε σφι [Κορίνθιοισι] Λέσβιοι; cf. 1.3; 2.1; 7.2.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Aristotle *Physica* 184a16–b14.

<sup>10</sup> The story seems to be a reworking in human terms of the *Hymn to Dionysus* (VII); consider especially vv. 5–8, 48, 53; the dithyramb was sung in praise of Dionysus. On the nome see Proclus *Chrestomathia* (ed. Severyns, vol. II); Wilamowitz, U., *Timotheos* (Leipzig, 1903), pp. 89–105.

taking him up on its back brought him safely to Taenarum. Arion trusted Corinthians the most, for he had become familiar with their customs and believed that they would practise the same uprightness at sea as they did at home. He discovered that they lost all sense of justice as soon as the possibility of punishment disappeared. He discovered that he could not put his trust in customs (νόμοι) away from home. Finding that he could no more persuade the sailors than Gyges could Candaules, once they were set on violating the laws, Arion turned to another kind of law. He put his trust in “the shrill tune” νόμος ὁ ῥοθιος—nowhere else in Herodotus does νόμος mean “tune”—, which persuaded a dolphin to save him. A dolphin (δελφίς) not Delphi saved him (13). Arion had greater resources than Gyges. Gyges could only appeal to the beautiful things discovered long ago, Arion could appeal to the sailors’ pleasure in his excellent singing, and rely on his own inventiveness to attract a dolphin. Arion was a poet, and it is not too fanciful, I think, to consider Herodotus as another Arion. He too has his music, even though it is less powerful than Arion’s. To us there is something childish and superstitious in Herodotus’ attributing to Arion the magic of Orpheus. If he had said that his singing made the pirates relent, we could have readily accepted such a change of heart; but for a dolphin to come to his rescue hardly adds to the charm of the story as it taxes our credulity. The story seems to point to Arion’s powers and then to cast doubt on them: in looking to his own in a non-Gygean way—his own νόμος—, his self-reliance is suggested to be inadequate. Arion, however, needed this fabulous savior because he was in an extreme ἀπορίη, where no ordinary music could have saved him. But if Herodotus is another Arion, could it be that the dolphin is meant to indicate the lesser risk Herodotus ran, who therefore did not have to employ so magical a Muse? For Herodotus too was faced with an ἀπορίη. He has shown in the story of Gyges that he no longer can trust customs; he has set sail on the open sea where customs cannot be a guide, and he wishes to persuade the reader to abandon his trust in them as well. He must entice us to listen to his own *logos* and not to the familiar tunes of our laws. He must sing to us and so charm us that we will not object to our own conversion; or if he cannot convert us, we shall at least be charmed enough to let him pursue his inquiries. Everybody knows that he has charmed all his readers, but his great success has hidden the purpose of that charm. We are not immediately aware of the way his *logos* is taking us. The stories of Gyges and Arion, taken together, indicate his way.<sup>10a</sup> Herodotus tells us through them that he will

<sup>10a</sup> That a connection exists between the Gyges and Arion stories is indicated by Plato in the *Republic*. After Socrates has proposed the first of the three waves, the common education of men and women, he compares the ridicule it will encounter with that which

proceed both cautiously and boldly. His caution arises from his unwillingness to offend the customary beliefs of his Greek reader, who may not wish to be anything more than entertained;<sup>11</sup> his boldness arises from the necessity to expose those beliefs to the test of truth; but he cannot be both cautious and bold without resorting to “poetic” devices. These devices are his stories which, by standing halfway between fact and invention, untie as they unite them. It is a monstrous union that because of its monstrosity lets us understand that belief, error, and custom have precisely the same character as Herodotus’ stories. They imitate belief, error, and custom. They reveal as well as conceal their “meaning.” They are indebted for this doubleness to Arion’s νόμος, which showed Herodotus how he could remain within Greek νόμος even though he had broken with it. Arion saved himself in the midst of lawlessness by poetry, Herodotus saves himself and his *logos* in the midst of contradictory laws by the same means. His *logos*, however, requires more than poetry to save it. It requires, as we shall see, nature, φύσις, whose discovery shapes the argument of his *Inquiries*. Before he embarks on its discovery he prepares us for it with the story of Croesus. It is Herodotus’ “shrill tune.”

Solon once came to Croesus’ court (29-33).<sup>12</sup> He had made the laws for the Athenians at their own request and then stayed abroad for ten years, using as an excuse his desire to look, but in fact he went “lest he might be compelled to dissolve any of the laws he established.” Croesus does not know this; he says of him what we could truthfully say of Herodotus: “Athenian stranger, much talk has come to us about you, on account of your wisdom and wandering, how in desiring to be wise (φιλοσοφείων) you have travelled broadly for the sake of seeing (θεωρήτη).” Solon did not travel in order to look but in order to escape from an ἀπορίη. He wanted the Athenians to accustom themselves to his laws and not force him, in irritation at their novelty, to change them. As a legislator, a maker of new laws—the word occurs here for the first time—he resembles Arion who invented the dithyramb. Arion escaped from lawless sailors by singing, Solon escaped from an Athens that had not yet accepted his laws by going abroad. Arion discovered that he could not trust Corinthian laws but only a musical tune away from home, Solon left his new “tunes” at home and went to look at the laws of other nations. He even went so far as to introduce an Egyptian

greeted naked gymnastic exercises (452c4–d1); and then in going on to defend his own proposal against a possible objection, he says to Glaucon: οὐκοῦν καὶ ἡμῶν νευστέον καὶ πειρατέον σφίζεσθαι ἐκ τοῦ λόγου, ἥτοι δελφῖνά τινα ἐλπίζοντας ἡμᾶς ὑπολαβεῖν ἢ ἢ τινα ἄλλην ἄπορον σωτηρίαν (453d9–11).

<sup>11</sup> For Herodotus’ caution see Pearson, L., *TAPhA*, 1941, pp. 335–355.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Aristotle *Ath. Pol.* XI.1.

law into Athens (II.177.2). Even in travelling, then, he carried the concerns of Athens with him. He travelled not merely to see but to make use of what he saw on his return. He may have been wise, but he was not a philosopher in Herodotus' opinion.<sup>13</sup> He was one of the seven so-called wise men, six of whom Herodotus mentions in the first half of Book I: Periander, Bias, Pittacus, Solon, Chilon, and Thales.<sup>14</sup> We would seem to be presented with wisdom itself at the very beginning of his *Inquiries*. What Solon says to Croesus appears to be the definitive opinion of Herodotus himself on human happiness, just as the story of Croesus appears to confirm that opinion. All the rest of Herodotus, if this were true, would be superfluous to his argument. There would have been no need to go beyond Lydia in order to discover the nature of human things. That the Egyptian Amasis and the Persian Artabanus apparently agree with Solon seems to support this.<sup>15</sup> In spite of the fundamental differences in Greek, Egyptian, and Persian gods, a Greek, and Egyptian, and a Persian all speak of divine jealousy—it strengthens our contention that Greece, Egypt, and Persia are the major countries of Herodotus' *logos*—; and yet we soon realize that Amasis is still Egyptian and Artabanus still Persian in the way they understand divine jealousy. Could Solon then be also still Greek in his understanding? Herodotus gives us several indications that he is. He has Solon use the word ἄτη, “doom,” which often occurs in Solon's poetry but never again in Herodotus.<sup>16</sup> The word is almost entirely poetic, endowed with the meanings which Greek poets have given it, and Herodotus makes it clear in Book II that he does not always agree with them. He makes us consider, then, how much credence we ought to give to Solon. He emphasizes the Greek and hence partial view of Solon by attributing to him a mistake in calculation. Solon tells Croesus there are seventy years in a man's life, and in order to bring home to him its instability he calculates the number of days they make up. His use of the Greek calendar for his reckoning compels him to add separately the days in an intercalary month, which he says occurs every other year “so that the seasons might come out as they should.” Their addition makes the total too large by 700 days. That Herodotus deliberately had Solon make this error he indicates in Book II, where he says the Egyptians deal with the solar year more wisely than the Greeks; for they divide it into twelve equal parts of thirty days each and then add five days at the end of the year (II.4.1). The

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Plutarch *Solon* 3.6–8. Solon uses only Greek examples of happiness, though he could have used Psammetichus or Psammis (II.161.2; cf. 177.1; III.10.2).

<sup>14</sup> 20; 27.2; 59.2; 74.2; 75.3; 170; Diels-Kranz, *Vor-Sokratiker*<sup>5</sup>, vol. I, pp. 61–66.

<sup>15</sup> III.40.2–43; VII.108; 46.4; cf. pp. 133–4; 185–6 *infra*.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Solon fr. 1, 13, 68, 75; 3, 35. θεοσεβής occurs only at 86.2 and II.37.1; θεοφιλής at 87.2; the plural μοῦραι at 91.2; and πεπωρωμένον at 91.1,3; III.64.5.



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