

HERODOTUS' PROLOGUE AND THE GREEK POETIC TRADITION

Abstract: This article seeks to deepen our understanding of Herodotus' relationship to Homer as reflected in the prologue, while shedding new light on his relationship to other poets and poetic traditions by focussing on: (1) the poetic device Herodotus uses to structure his opening discussion of the *αἰτίη* of the Greco-Persian wars (1.1–5), i.e., the *prīamel*; and (2) his self-identification, at the end of his prologue, as a poetic sage whose understanding of historical development is informed by a fundamental principle of Greek gnomic wisdom, the transience of human prosperity.

Recent decades have witnessed a resurgence of interest in the relationship between Herodotus and the early Greek poetic tradition.¹ To be sure, the specific relationship between Herodotus' *Histories* and Homeric epic has engaged the attention of scholars since antiquity.² But within the last generation various stimuli have encouraged students of Greek literature to explore Herodotus' interaction with the poetic tradition in greater depth and breadth than previously. At the theoretical level, there is a growing recognition that narrative history is a necessarily literary artefact, a story that does not and cannot simply tell itself, but is shaped by the author's choice of what to tell and how to tell it.³ The development of narratology in particular has shed new light upon the epic roots of Greek historiography: Irene de Jong and others have demonstrated how Herodotus adopts and adapts Homeric techniques for organising a complex, polyphonic narrative, including the coordination of primary and secondary narrators and the expansion of linear discourse by means of analepsis and prolepsis.⁴ Jonas

¹ For recent general discussion of the topic see Marincola (2006); Corcella (2006) and Boedeker (2011) include Thucydides in discussions of broader scope. All three cite important earlier bibliography.

² See Kurke (2011) 382–97 for a reading of Plutarch's *On the Malice of Herodotus* as an attempt to subvert the ancient critical *topos* that Herodotus was Homeric (indeed 'most Homeric' ('Ὀμηρικώτατος), *On the Sublime* 13.3). Boedeker (2002) 97–109 offers a survey of affinities between Homer and Herodotus and concludes that Herodotus fully deserves this superlative accolade, despite the difficulty of distinguishing between deliberate and unconscious epic echoes in the *Histories*.

³ Cf. the assertion by White (1978) 58 that narrative historians build into their accounts 'patterns of meaning similar to those more explicitly provided by the literary art of the cultures to which they belong'.

⁴ de Jong (1999) addresses several Homeric narrative techniques adapted by Herodotus, including the functions of the narrator (220–9) and the 'anachronical' structure of the

Grethlein has noted how the *Iliad* and the *Histories* share both an idea of history in which the contingency of events plays a central role and an 'anachronic' narrative structure that highlights this contingency by juxtaposing character expectations and experiences.⁵ On a smaller scale, Grethlein and Christopher Pelling have explored the complex effects that Herodotus achieves by 'quotation' of specific Homeric speeches or scenarios in the context of crucial episodes of his Persian War narrative.⁶

Although the relationship between Herodotus and Greek tragedy is unremarked upon by ancient sources, it remains a popular topic of discussion and dispute among modern scholars. The divergent views expressed in recent assessments by Suzanne Saïd, Jasper Griffin, and Richard Rutherford reflect the fundamental difficulty of identifying specifically 'tragic' features (vocabulary and phraseology, literary techniques, themes and motifs) in the *Histories*—a difficulty due in no small part to the common dependence of both tragedy and historiography upon Homeric epic.⁷

Heightened scholarly focus on the representation of the past in elegiac poetry has had one obvious (not to say spectacular) stimulus. In 1992 P. J. Parsons published the *editio princeps* of Oxyrhynchus papyrus 3965, which, when supplemented by earlier finds, brought to light substantial fragments of an elegy composed by Simonides to celebrate the Greek military victory over the Persians at Plataea in 479 BC—a discovery that invited comparison and contrast with Herodotus' description of the battle in Book 9 of the *Histo-*

narrative as ordered and unified by means of analepses and prolepses (230–41); there is more detailed discussion of the Herodotean narrator in de Jong (2004), and of narrative structure in de Jong (2001) and (2002). Rengakos (2001) and (2006) focuses upon intra-textual cross-references and Herodotean means of creating 'epic suspense'; he also discusses the depiction of simultaneous events in his later article. For treatment of Herodotean speeches from a narratological perspective and against a Homeric backdrop, see Scardino (2007) 36–59 and *passim*. Baragwanath (2008) 35–54, while acknowledging the importance of Homeric precedent, emphasises the crucial difference between the omniscience of the primary Homeric narrator and the limited knowledge of the primary Herodotean narrator.

⁵ Grethlein (2010) 14–15, 203.

⁶ Pelling (2006b) and Grethlein (2006), (2010) 160–73.

⁷ Saïd (2002) recognises tragic features in many Herodotean episodes but concludes that Homeric influence ultimately outweighs tragic influence on the *Histories*. Griffin (2006), while also acknowledging Homer's long shadow, nonetheless discerns distinctively tragic situations and tragic 'moral concerns' in Herodotus. Rutherford (2007), addressing the broader subject of the relationship between ancient tragedy and history, is generally skeptical, while acknowledging affinities between the two genres that are most compelling in the context of 5th-c. Athens.

ries.⁸ In addition to numerous articles spawned by the so-called ‘New Simonides’, Carolyn Higbie has analysed several of the Persian War epigrams attributed (rightly or wrongly) to Simonides and cited by Plutarch in his *de Herodoti Malignitate* as a complimentary counterweight to the historian’s comparatively captious account of the Greek resistance.⁹

Scholars have also begun to study connections between epinician poetry and Herodotus from a variety of perspectives. John Herington has argued that Pindar offers the closest parallels in extant Greek literature to Herodotus’ ‘narrative procedures’, including the treatment of narrative time, the adoption of a critical attitude towards inherited traditions, and the application of such stories to the interpretation of the present.¹⁰ Gregory Nagy finds in Herodotean *historiê* the prose counterpart of Pindaric *ainos*, which is to say a kind of coded communication that bears one meaning on its surface and another for those ‘in the know’—enabling Herodotus to offer the Athenians of his day an oblique warning about the dangers of tyranny exemplified by the fate of Croesus and other monarchs in the *Histories*.¹¹ At the same time, Nagy is one of several scholars who have noted the significant difference between Croesus as he appears in epinician poetry and as he is portrayed by Herodotus—a topic that we will have occasion to revisit later in this essay.¹² Finally, comparison of the various traditions preserved by Pindar and Herodotus concerning the foundation of Cyrene also reveals suggestive connections and contrasts between the two.¹³

Recent scholarship confirms, therefore, that despite the few occasions on which Herodotus explicitly distances himself from the fabrications of specific or unnamed poets,¹⁴ his narrative is thoroughly and necessarily implicated in

⁸ Parsons (1992), with wide-ranging analysis by many hands in Boedeker and Sider (2001), including essays by Boedeker and Hornblower that focus on the relationship between Simonides and Herodotus. See also Bowie (2001), Sider (2006), and Grethlein (2010) 47–73.

⁹ Higbie (2010). For Persian War epigrams attributed to Simonides see n. 33 below.

¹⁰ Herington (1991).

¹¹ Nagy (1990) 215–49, 274–338. Nagy’s insight is adopted as an interpretive tool by Munson (2001) 5–8 and subjected to sympathetic critique by Kurke (2011) 372–6.

¹² See below, pp. 136–7 with n. 86.

¹³ Cf. Calame (1990) and (2003) and Giangiulio (2001). On the representation of history in Pindar see further Hornblower (2006) 103–266 (107–13, 243–7 on Cyrene) and Grethlein (2010) 19–46.

¹⁴ At 2.23 Herodotus denies personal knowledge of the river Okeanos, a name he considers the ‘discovery’ or ‘fabrication’ (εὐρόντα) of Homer or another early poet; at 2.112–20 he rejects the Homeric version of the Trojan War; at 3.115.2 he denies the existence of the river Eridanus at the western margin of the world as ‘made up by some poet’; and at 4.32 he notes the lack of reliable eye-witness reports about the far-flung Hyperboreans,

the poetic tradition. In the present article I will demonstrate that this is literally so from the outset by focusing on Herodotus' prologue, which, following Marek Wecowski, I understand to comprise the first five chapters of the *Histories* (*incipit* through 1.5.4).¹⁵ The scholarly attention that the prologue has attracted in recent decades¹⁶ engages the many challenges posed by Herodotus' opening sentence (its structure and overall significance, as well as the meaning of the key terms *ἱστορίη*, *ἀπόδεξις*, and *αἰτίη*), and by his discussion of the origins of the Greco-Persian wars (1.1–5), in which allegedly foreign accounts of primeval Greek events are rehearsed but ultimately trumped by the identification of the Lydian king Croesus as the starting point of the author's account. Scholars have analysed both the internal relationship between the prologue and the text that it introduces and the broader external relationships between the prologue and various traditional and contemporary intellectual developments, including specific works in poetry and prose.

In the wake of Rosalind Thomas' influential study, *Herodotus in Context: Ethnography, Science and the Art of Persuasion* (2000), much Herodotean scholarship has explored the common ground that Herodotus shares, in his prologue and its aftermath, with late fifth-century Sophistic and 'scientific' prose writers.¹⁷ I believe, however, that much remains to be said about the prologue with regard to Herodotus' perspective on the Greek poetic tradition. In this article I hope to deepen our understanding of Herodotus' relationship to Homer as reflected in the prologue, while shedding new light on his relationship to other poets and poetic traditions. I will focus much of my attention upon: (1) the poetic device Herodotus uses to structure his opening discussion of the *αἰτίη* of the Greco-Persian wars (1.1–5)—namely, the priamel; and (2) his self-identification, at the end of his prologue, as a poetic sage whose understanding of historical development is informed by a fundamental principle of Greek gnomic wisdom, the transience of human prosperity.

Herodotus' engagement with the poetic tradition begins in his opening sentence:

Ἡροδότου Ἀλικαρνησέως ἱστορίης ἀπόδεξις ἦδε, ὡς μήτε τὰ γενόμενα ἐξ ἀνθρώπων τῷ χρόνῳ ἐξίτηλα γένηται, μήτε ἔργα μεγάλα τε καὶ

despite their mention in the poets Hesiod, Homer (if he is the true author of the *Epigoni*), and Aristeas (previously cited at 4.13.1).

¹⁵ Wecowski (2004) 147–8.

¹⁶ Rather than compile a lengthy miscellany of previous scholarship at the outset, I cite works important for my purposes with regard to specific issues in the notes to follow.

¹⁷ See now the stimulating argument by Kurke (2011) 361–97 that the tradition of Aesopic prose fable—older, more popular, and less decorous than the prose of 5th-century *historiē*—is another important component of Herodotus' narrative.

θωμαστά, τὰ μὲν Ἑλλησι, τὰ δὲ βαρβάροισι ἀποδεχθέντα, ἀκλεᾶ γένηται, τὰ τε ἄλλα καὶ δι' ἣν αἰτίην ἐπολέμησαν ἀλλήλοισι.¹⁸

Here are produced the results of the research carried out by Herodotus of Halicarnassus, intended to prevent deeds of human origin from fading away with the passage of time, and to preserve the fame of the important and remarkable achievements produced by both Greeks and non-Greeks, with a special focus on the reason why they went to war against one another.

Tilman Krischer has argued that in this sentence Herodotus both closely imitates and pointedly remodels the Homeric (especially the Iliadic) *prooimion*.¹⁹ Syntactic details aside, the most obvious reference to Homer and the subsequent poetic tradition is found in the second half of the purpose clause, where Herodotus announces his intention to prevent the great and marvelous achievements of Greeks and non-Greeks alike from becoming ἀκλεᾶ, from losing their fame or κλέος. Simon Goldhill has noted that '[i]n ancient Greek culture of all periods, the notion of *kleos* is linked in a fundamental way to the poet's voice',²⁰ beginning with Homeric epic. Thus in claiming to preserve the *kleos* of remarkable deeds Herodotus audaciously appropriates for his ambitious prose work what had long been recognised as an essential function of poetic song.²¹ The military context of warfare between Greeks and a formidable Eastern foe underscores the special relevance of Homer's *Iliad* as a model, which will be confirmed by numerous features in the narrative to follow. The appearance of the adjective ἀκλεής in prominent passages of the *Iliad* may also be relevant in this regard.²²

¹⁸ I cite Hude's Oxford Classical Text of Herodotus (3rd ed., Oxford 1927); all translations are my own.

¹⁹ Krischer (1965) 159–60, elaborated by Nagy (1990) 217–20 and Bakker (2002) 6–7.

²⁰ Goldhill (1991) 69, with refinements by Thomas (1995) 113–7, who discerns a significant contrast between the claim of the Homeric bard to preserve heroic *kleos* and that of later archaic poets (specifically Theognis, Simonides, and Pindar) to create *kleos* by means of their poetry. In this regard, Herodotus' statement of intention strikes a distinctly Homeric note.

²¹ Cf. Erbse (1956) 213: 'Die erste historische Prosa, die sich hier anheischig macht, menschliche Taten der Vergessenheit zu entreissen, übernimmt augenscheinlich mit nicht geringem Stolz die Aufgaben der hohen Poesie.' [The first historical prose, which here undertakes to rescue human deeds from oblivion, appropriates manifestly, with no small pride, the duties of high poetry.]

²² As Romm (1998) 19–20 notes, the adjective appears in Sarpedon's memorable rationale for Homeric warrior heroism—specifically, in his litotic description (as 'not without *kleos*', 12.318) of Lycian nobles who justify the social privileges they enjoy by distin-

At the same time, from the first word of his text Herodotus also underscores crucial differences that set his account apart from Homeric epic and establish its affinities with the intellectual milieu of the fifth century BC. With that first word Herodotus identifies himself by name as the origin and guarantor of his inquiry (*historiê*)—an authority fully human and independent of the Muses, the divine source and guarantors of the poet's tale, who are conspicuously absent from an introduction that otherwise evokes the epic *prooimion*.²³ A similar emphasis characterises Herodotus' broad description of his subject matter as human deeds, τὰ γενόμενα ἐξ ἀνθρώπων, rather than the primeval deeds of gods and their heroic offspring (though both gods and heroes will have important roles to play in the *Histories*). So too at the end of the prologue Herodotus promises to traverse small and great cities of men (ἄστυα ἀνθρώπων, 1.5.3), and professes a knowledge of human prosperity (ἀνθρωπιήην... εὐδαιμονίην, 1.5.4) that informs his narrative as a whole.²⁴

Beyond this emphatic anthropocentrism, certain key words in Herodotus' opening sentence with contemporary connotations make the *Histories* not merely a product but indeed a fundamental document of what Goldhill calls the 'Greek Enlightenment'—an intellectual revolution embracing a variety of fields (history, philosophy, natural and political science, rhetoric, and medicine), conducted in prose, and engaged in a 'contest of authority' with divinely inspired poetry, the traditionally privileged medium of expression in archaic Greece.²⁵ As Thomas has demonstrated, in describing his own work as *ἱστορίην*, Herodotus associates it with other works of contemporary Ionian science understood in a broad sense to include the work of natural philoso-

guishing themselves in battle. Cf. also, however, Menelaus' disparaging description (7.100) of his fellow Achaeans, who decline to accept Hector's challenge to a duel; and (in adverbial form) Hector's determination to die 'not without *kleos*' (22.304), but only after performing a great deed for future generations to hear of (a point of obvious relevance for Herodotus' commemorative purpose). Of its three appearances in the *Odyssey*, two (1.241, 14.371, both adverbial) contrast the *kleos* Odysseus would have won for himself and Telemachus by dying at Troy with the oblivion that enveloped him before returning to Ithaca; the third (4.728) describes Telemachus as having left Ithaca 'unbeknownst' to the distraught Penelope (although the adjective also marks a contrast with his father's *kleos* throughout Greece and Argos, 4.726).

²³ As observed by (*inter alios*) Krischer (1965) 162; Calame (1995) 77–80; Romm (1998) 20–1; and Goldhill (2002) 11. For Hecataeus as similarly evoking and distancing himself from the epic tradition in the opening sentence of his *Genealogies*, see Bertelli (2001) 80–2 and Fowler (2009) 24–5.

²⁴ Hellmann (1934) 21–2; Wecowski (2004) 147–8 understands these correspondences to mark the boundaries of Herodotus' prologue. For the Odyssean echo in ἄστυα ἀνθρώπων, see below, p. 123.

²⁵ Goldhill (2002) 1–9 and *passim*.

phers, sophists, and medical writers.²⁶ More controversially, Thomas also discerns in the term ἀπόδειξις distinct overtones of rhetorical persuasion—implications of demonstration, display, and proof that encourage her to assimilate ἀπόδειξις with ἐπίδειξις, the term for the Sophistic display speech.²⁷ Finally, at the end of the opening sentence, with the word αἰτίη, causality emerges as a focal point of Herodotus' treatment of the Greco-Persian wars. Now there can be no denying that Homeric, and specifically Iliadic, precedent is relevant here, with regard to subject matter as well as syntax:²⁸ *Iliad* 1.8 poses the question, 'Which of the gods, then, brought the two of them [sc. Agamemnon and Achilles] together to fight in strife?' The Homeric question addresses the divine level of causation only, and has a straightforward answer in Apollo (although the human dimension of the quarrel will be explored in depth in the remainder of *Iliad* 1). While Goldhill overstates the simplicity of the Homeric treatment of causation, I share his view that the search for *aitiê*, the cause of things, assumes a new significance in the fifth century as 'a foundational gesture of the new self-reflexive scientific thinking'.²⁹ Herodotus' use of the term to mark the climax of his opening sentence and the special focus of his narrative needs to be seen in this context.

In his opening sentence, therefore, Herodotus situates his work with regard to both the poetic tradition and contemporary studies that comprise the beginnings of the Greek prose tradition. And while Herodotus tacitly acknowledges the *Iliad* as a key cultural co-ordinate from the beginning, we should not imagine that Homer is the only poetic predecessor or rival whom Herodotus has in mind. Among the lyric poets, Pindar places special emphasis on the ability of his poetry to preserve from oblivion the deeds of his

²⁶ Thomas (2000) 135–67, esp. 161–7, seconded by Goldhill (2002) 12. Bakker (2002) 14–5 resists identifying Herodotus' project with the natural and medical science of his day, while granting the possibility that Herodotus 'borrows contemporary terminology to establish the authority of an enterprise that is entirely his own' (i.e., scrutinising traditions about the past rather than accepting them uncritically). For a fundamentally different view of *historiê* as a juridical concept evoking the role of the archaic arbitrator in Homeric and Hesiodic poetry, see Nagy (1990) 250–62.

²⁷ Thomas (2000) 249–69, esp. 260–4; by contrast, Bakker (2002) 9–10, 20–2 emphasises the differences between the two terms.

²⁸ Krischer (1965) 162, followed by Nagy (1990) 220 n. 34 and Bakker (2002) 6 with n. 7, finds a precedent for the syntactic link between the first and last clauses of Herodotus' opening sentence in *Iliad* 1.1–6. Nagy (1990) 227 and Goldhill (2002) 13 note the concern with causality shared by Homer and Herodotus. Pelling (2006b) 81–3 emphasises how in both the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* initial suggestions of simple causation (in the divine and human spheres, respectively) are 'swiftly complicated'.

²⁹ Goldhill (2002) 8; cf. Bakker (2002) 13–4, Fowler (2006) 31–2.

clients, victors in the Panhellenic athletic games;³⁰ in this way he extends to humans of the present day the privilege bestowed by Homeric poetry upon the primeval heroes of the remote past. By specifying the Greco-Persian wars as the focus of his account, Herodotus also calls to mind those poets (and perhaps even visual artists³¹) who participated in the 'celebration culture' of the 470s and beyond—Oliver Taplin's name for the plethora of memorials created in honour of the great Hellenic victories over the Persians.³² These will have included epigrams like those quoted by Herodotus at 7.228, inscribed on the memorial for the soldiers who fought and died at Thermopylae. One of these epigrams (like many other epigrams that commemorate the Greco-Persian wars³³) is attributed to the poet Simonides, whose elegiac poem on the battle of Plataea is now known to us in significant fragments; ancient sources attribute to him poems on the battles of Artemisium and Salamis as well.³⁴ A lyric poem by Simonides (*PMG* 531) also survives in which he praises those who died at Thermopylae, singling out by name the Spartan king Leonidas as 'having left behind a great adornment of *arête* and ever-flowing *kleos*' (ll. 8–9).

³⁰ As, e.g., at *Ol.* 10.91–6, contrasting the fate of a man who dies, his noble deeds unsung, with that of the *laudandus* Hagesidamos, for whom the Muses nurture widespread glory (εὐρὸν κλέος) by means of Pindaric epinician (cf. also *Nem.* 6.28–30, *Pyth.* 3.112–15, and *Isthm.* 7.16–19, as cited by Thomas (1995) 115–6). De Romilly (1985) 60 emphasises Herodotus' connection with Pindar in his concern to immortalise excellence; Marincola (2006) 16 observes the common ground with epinician as well, while noting that unlike Pindar, Herodotus seeks to demonstrate causal connections (not merely continuity) between past and present.

³¹ For treatment of the Greco-Persian wars in the visual arts see Csapo and Miller (1998) 117; Boedeker (1998) 187–9; Hölscher (1998) 163–9. (Cf. Castriota (1992) for the 'analogical' rather than literal celebration of these wars in fifth-century Athenian civic art, through representations of mythical precedents and parallels.)

³² Taplin (2006) 3 numbers 'shrines, statues, altars, inscriptions, lapidary epitaphs, and longer poems' among the memorials. For additional detail see Barron (1988) 616–22, Raaflaub (2004) 60–5, and Boedeker (2011) 130–1.

³³ Cf. Page (1981) nos. VI–XXIV, with general (sceptical) assessment of their attribution to Simonides at 119–23 in addition to individual discussions preceding each epigram. In fact Page (123) considers the epigram that Herodotus attributes to Simonides at 7.228 the only such epigram likely to have been composed by the poet. For more recent but equally sceptical assessment, see Higbie (2010).

³⁴ For bibliography on Simonides' Plataea elegy see n. 8 above; for his poems on Artemisium and Salamis, Bowie (2001) 54–5 and Rutherford (2001) 35–8, who underscores the uncertainties of the ancient testimonia and the possibility that these two works might have comprised a single poem. Indeed, Kowerski (2005) argues that what most scholars recognise as Simonides' Plataea elegy was itself part of a single large poem that included references to several battles; in the judgement of Grethlein (2010) 51, Kowerski's critique 'successfully challenges the *communis opinio* that there was a Plataea-elegy'.

In Athens, the Greco-Persian wars were treated in at least two plays written by the early tragic dramatist, Phrynichus (one of them, the *Capture of Miletus*, mentioned by Herodotus at 6.21.2).³⁵ Also, the Athenian naval victory at Salamis was the focal point of our earliest extant tragedy, Aeschylus' *Persai*, produced in 472 BC. Thanks to all these poetic works (and doubtless many others known to Herodotus but not to us), the outcome of the Greco-Persian wars will scarcely have gone unsung in their immediate aftermath. Nonetheless, by the second half of the fifth century, growing tensions between Athens and Sparta will have threatened the memory of their triumphant collaboration against the Persians. Hence Herodotus is concerned not so much to create κλέος for past triumphs as he is to maintain it and prevent its disappearance in the future. His repeated emphasis on this point³⁶ implies that his own *historiê*, now presented and preserved in writing, will outlast the relatively transient media with which he is competing—above all, poetry that is orally composed and performed on specific occasions. Although (as many scholars have insisted) the word *apodexis* may acknowledge the original oral performance of Herodotus' research,³⁷ it is their preservation in writing, the 'memory of all things' as described by its mythical inventor Prometheus,³⁸ that guarantees their survival for generations to come. Showing no

³⁵ Cf. further discussion of Phrynichus below, pp. 127–9 with n. 56. For Athenian tragedy as a historical genre see Boedeker (2011) 131–3.

³⁶ Herodotus publishes his inquiry so that human deeds may not 'fade away with the passage of time' (τῷ χρόνῳ ἐξίτηλα γένηται), and more specifically so that the great deeds of Greeks and non-Greeks may not 'come to lose their *kleos*' (ἀκλεᾶ γένηται). The associations of the adjective ἐξίτηλος are disputed. Herodotus uses it on only one other occasion, to describe the extinction of the family line of the Spartan Eurysthenes (5.39.2). Nagy (1990) 225 also notes its use in later sources to describe the fading of colour in fabrics (Xen. *Oec.* 10.3) or paintings (Paus. 10.38.9) and the failure of vegetative seed to grow in foreign soil (Pl. *Rep.* 497b); he therefore associates it with the adjective *aphthiton*, a traditional poetic epithet of *kleos*, and concludes that Herodotus' purpose clauses 'amount to a periphrasis of what is being said in the single poetic phrase *kleos aphthiton*.' By contrast, Luce (1997) 26 discerns a metaphor involving 'a stone inscription whose letters fade with weathering.' (Cf. Svenbro (1993) 148–50 for Herodotus' shift from third-person self-reference to use of the first person as reflecting the discourse of funerary or votive inscriptions.) Moles (1999) 49–51 acknowledges this version of an 'inscriptional' reading while proposing another he deems more likely: 'if *exitela* is a recognisably genealogical term (= 'extinct'), this might align Herodotus' work with funerary inscriptions'. In either case Herodotus could be understood to imply that his text, which is capable of being copied and widely disseminated over space and time, is superior to inscriptions, which are located in a single place and subject to physical decay.

³⁷ Cf. Nagy (1987) 182, (1990) 220; Thomas (2000) 221–8, 249–69 (esp. 257–60); Bakker (2002) 11 with n. 21. Note that Bakker himself (2002) 12 questions whether the term *apodexis* refers as such to 'its own, oral, mode of presentation'.

³⁸ Aes. *PV* 461.

less concern than his successor Thucydides for the future reception of his work,³⁹ Herodotus envisions that the spread of literacy will enable his prose account to perform poetry's traditional commemorative function more effectively than poetry itself.

Just as Herodotus acknowledges the Homeric *Iliad* at the beginning of his prologue, so too he acknowledges the Homeric *Odyssey* at its end in describing himself as *ὁμοίως σμικρὰ καὶ μεγάλα ἄστυα ἀνθρώπων ἐπεξιόν*, 'traversing alike the small and large cities of men' (1.5.3). This is a clear allusion to what is said of Odysseus in the proem of the *Odyssey*, *πολλῶν δ' ἀνθρώπων ἴδεν ἄστυα καὶ νόον ἔγνω*, 'He saw the cities of many men and came to know their thought' (1.3).⁴⁰ One obvious function of this allusion is to suggest the geographical sprawl of Herodotus' work, which actually transcends the travels of Odysseus in mapping or seeking to map the entire known world and its culturally diverse inhabitants. More broadly, John Marincola has discussed at length various aspects of the Homeric Odysseus' character and experience that are relevant to the persona Herodotus constructs for himself throughout the *Histories*. These include Odysseus as the prototypical explorer, whose travels and inquiry produce extraordinary knowledge; and Odysseus as a storyteller who recounts his own adventures, with a special sensitivity to the possibility of reversals of fortune, and a sophisticated sense of the complicated relationship between truth and falsehood.⁴¹

Within our immediate context, it is important not merely to acknowledge the Homeric reference, but also to observe how Herodotus modifies it to reflect a defining principle of his own historical perspective. Expanding upon the Odyssean theme of reversal of fortune, Herodotus explains his decision to discuss small and large cities alike as follows (1.5.4):

τὰ γὰρ τὸ πάλαι μεγάλα ἦν, τὰ πολλὰ αὐτῶν σμικρὰ γέγονε, τὰ δὲ ἐπ' ἐμεῦ ἦν μεγάλα, πρότερον ἦν σμικρὰ. τὴν ἀνθρωπήην ὦν ἐπιστάμενος εὐδαιμονίην οὐδαμὰ ἐν τῷτῳ μένουσαν ἐπιμνήσομαι ἀμφοτέρων ὁμοίως.

(I will traverse small and large human cities equally,) because most of those that were large long ago have become small, and those that were large in my own time were small in times past. And so I will mention both equally, because I know that human happiness never remains in the same place.

³⁹ Bakker (2002) 31–2 (with additional bibliography at 31 n. 67).

⁴⁰ As noted recently by Moles (1993) 92–8; Pelling (1999) 332–3; and Marincola (2007) 13–5.

⁴¹ Marincola (2007); cf. Moles (1993) 96–7.

While Odysseus' remarks on *peripeteia* in the *Odyssey* concern individual reversals of fortune that take place within the span of a single lifetime,⁴² Herodotus broadens this perspective in two ways. First, he highlights the fates of cities or civic communities rather than individuals; second, he expands the chronological horizon, in a significant if unspecific way, to include the time span from 'long ago' (τὸ πάλαι) to his own day (ἐπ' ἐμεῦ) and indeed beyond: by describing the cities of his own day with a past tense (the imperfect verb ἦν), Herodotus anticipates the temporal perspective of his future readership.⁴³ Of particular interest is Herodotus' final explanatory statement that he will mention both great and small cities alike because of his knowledge (ἐπιστάμενος) that human prosperity never stays in the same place. Although ἐπίσταμαι is by no means a rare verb in the *Histories*, its participial form, when used to introduce words of gnomic wisdom, evokes the special status enjoyed by performers of song during the archaic period, poetic σοφοί or ἐπιστάμενοι, 'sages' who were revered as sources of authority and expertise.⁴⁴

To begin with a striking internal parallel, Herodotus introduces the Athenian lawmaker and poet Solon into his narrative as one of several Greek wise men or sages, σοφισταί (29.1), who visited the court of the Lydian king Croesus in Sardis. Before Solon has demonstrated his disregard for the king's wealth, Croesus too makes much of the wisdom (σοφίη) that Solon has gained through his travels. However, when Solon proclaims his fellow Athenian Tellos and the Argive brothers Cleobis and Biton to be more prosperous than his fabulously wealthy host, Croesus demands to know the basis for Solon's rankings, to which the Athenian replies (1.32.1):

ὁ δὲ εἶπε· ὦ Κροῖσε, ἐπιστάμενόν με τὸ θεῖον πᾶν ἐὸν φθονερόν τε καὶ
ταραχῶδες ἐπειρωτᾶς ἀνθρωπήϊων πρηγγμάτων πέρι.

⁴² E.g., *Od.* 16.207–12; 17.415–25; 18.130–7, cited by Marincola (2007) 37–8.

⁴³ Cf. Rösler (2002) 92–3. This awareness of a future audience is paralleled in more explicit statements by Homeric characters (e.g., Helen at *Il.* 6.357–8, Hector at 22.304–5) as well as by Thucydides himself (1.22.4).

⁴⁴ Griffith (2009) 72–5; cf. Leshner (2009) 21–3. Thomas (1995) 117–23 emphasises the aristocratic background of those (relatively few, in her opinion) poets who came to be recognised as community spokesmen. As such poets belonged to the more general category of 'sages', a designation indicating extraordinary skill in a wide variety of practical and theoretical activities, including (*inter alia*, and in addition to poetry) statesmanship, philosophy, science, medicine, and rhetoric. For this broader concept see Lloyd (1987) 83–102; Martin (1993); Nightingale (2000) 140–3, (2007) 173–7.

‘Croesus’, Solon replied, ‘you are asking me about human affairs, as one who knows how utterly resentful and disruptive [sc. of human prosperity] the deity is.’

Solon’s self-description as *ἐπιστάμενος*⁴⁵ is underscored by the emphatic placement of the participle immediately after his direct address of the king. As I have argued elsewhere,⁴⁶ the explication of this gnomic generalisation by the Herodotean Solon incorporates several references to surviving pieces of the historical Solon’s poetry, beginning with his statement that he sets the limit of a human’s life at 70 years (32.2 W², cf. 27).

If we look beyond Herodotus, external parallels confirm the use of *ἐπιστάμενος* to describe the skill and wisdom of the archaic singer/poet. At *Odyssey* 11.367–8, Alcinous praises the arrangement (*μορφή*) and good sense (*φρένες ἐσθλαί*) that characterise Odysseus’ tale of his travails while traveling from Troy: ‘You have told your story in expert fashion, like a singer’ (*μῦθον δ’ ὡς ὅτ’ ἀοιδὸς ἐπισταμένως κατέλεξας*).⁴⁷ Solon’s longest surviving poem (13 W²) contains a generic description of a poet as ‘instructed in the gifts of the Olympian Muses, expert in the full measure of lovely skill/wisdom’ (*ἱμερτῆς σοφίης μέτρον ἐπιστάμενος*, 52). The parallel with the most striking Herodotean resonance, however, occurs in four lines from the Theognidean corpus, describing the poet’s responsibility to his audience (769–72):

*χρῆ Μουσῶν θεράποντα καὶ ἄγγελον, εἴ τι περισσόν
εἰδείη, σοφίης μὴ φθονερόν τελέθειν,
ἀλλὰ τὰ μὲν μῶσθαι, τὰ δὲ δεικνύειν, ἄλλα δὲ ποιεῖν·
τί σφιν χρήσεται μῶνος ἐπιστάμενος;*

The attendant and messenger of the Muses, if he should know
Something extraordinary, must not be grudging of his wisdom,
But must seek out knowledge, display it, and compose it.
What good will it do him if he alone is knowledgeable?

⁴⁵ It is worth noting the use of this evocative participle to describe other warner figures who follow in Solon’s wake and like him articulate gnomic wisdom while attempting to curb the ambitions of a heedless ruler: the Egyptian pharaoh Amasis, who shares with Polycrates his knowledge (*ἐπισταμένω*, 3.40.2) that the deity is resentful of his continual successes (a virtual quotation of 1.32.1); and Xerxes’ advisor Artabanus, whose knowledge (*ἐπιστάμενος*, 7.18.2, 3) that it is wrong to desire many things proves ultimately powerless in the face of divine duress, manifested in the king’s persistent dream.

⁴⁶ Chiasson (1986); cf. Harrison (2000) 36–8.

⁴⁷ M. L. West (1978) cites this passage as a parallel to Hes. *Op.* 107, where the poet introduces the Myth of Ages as a story he will tell *εὖ καὶ ἐπισταμένως*, ‘well and knowledgeably/expertly’.

The recurrent emphasis on the poet's special knowledge/wisdom/expertise culminates in the pointedly deferred participle, *ἐπιστάμενος*. Robert Fowler calls special attention to the penultimate line, with its triple admonition to 'seek out, display, and compose knowledge'.⁴⁸ Fowler suggests that these activities comprise precisely what Herodotus means by that much-discussed phrase in the first clause of his opening sentence, *ἱστορίης ἀπόδειξις*. In Fowler's own words, '[Herodotus] sought knowledge and, good Greek that he was, shared it publicly'.

In fact Fowler's formulation fails to do justice to the specificity of this text, since by its criteria what Herodotus proves himself to be in sharing the results of his inquiries is not merely a good Greek, but more precisely a good Greek *poet*. In other words, at the end of his prologue—an unmistakably prominent juncture in his narrative—Herodotus not only invokes the precedent of the *Odyssey* but also, and more broadly, promises the kind of generalising insight into the nature of the human condition traditionally professed by poets. It is as if Herodotus anticipated Aristotle's criticism in the *Poetics* (1451a–b) that history—and indeed, explicitly Herodotean history—is less philosophical than poetry because it tends to focus on specific past events rather than universal human truths.⁴⁹ On the contrary: from the outset Herodotus frames his account of historical particulars as a manifestation of the sobering universal truth that human prosperity is fleeting. In other words, Herodotus brings to historical narrative a poet's eye for an issue of fundamental importance, mankind's place in the universe at large.⁵⁰ This is also reflected in the tendency of prominent advisor figures in the *Histories* to utter gnomic generalities when offering counsel in the face of specific crises, as they warn their powerful interlocutors about divine resentment of human prosperity and mortal liability to misfortune (Solon to Croesus, 1.32); or the

⁴⁸ Fowler (1996) 86–7.

⁴⁹ Cf. Marincola (2006) 24. Scardino (2007) 28–35 demonstrates the inadequacy of Aristotle's criticism of history, arguing that Herodotus and Thucydides alike were in a sense 'poets' as Aristotle understood the term, in that they organised their material in a causally meaningful manner and by means of recurrent patterns and motifs emphasised issues of general validity.

⁵⁰ Cf. Herington (1991) 8, who finds Herodotus assuming the archaic Greek poet's function 'to evaluate the ancient stories, to seek in them patterns applicable to human life at any date, then or now, to trace there the principles that govern our happiness and our unhappiness' (similarly Raaflaub (1987) 232, (2002) 180–1). In a different context that is not without relevance, Most (1999) 333–4 identifies 'essentiality of content' as one important aspect of the heritage of Greek epic reflected in early Greek philosophy, manifested by (*inter alia*) 'mytho-historical explanatory models that set the lot of mankind as a whole into a larger and more intelligible framework'.

cycle of human affairs that prevents anyone from enjoying continual success (Croesus to Cyrus, 1.207.2); or the deity that cuts down whatever is outstanding and allows no one but himself to 'think big' (Artabanus to Xerxes, 7.10ε).

To this point I have focused on the beginning and the end of Herodotus' prologue. What lies between them is one of the most enigmatic and disputed passages in the *Histories*,⁵¹ a passage that traces the origins of the Greco-Persian wars to the abductions of familiar female figures from Greek mythology. Yet the perils of these familiar heroines are recounted in decidedly defamiliarising fashion. For the stories are thoroughly rationalised,⁵² so that no divine agents are involved in the intercontinental transportation of Io from Argos to Egypt, of Europa from Phoenicia to Crete, of Medea from Colchis to Iolcos, or of Helen from Sparta to Troy. Moreover, the stories are linked in causal relationships as two pairs of reciprocal abductions: Io and Europa on the one hand, Medea and Helen on the other.⁵³ Finally, and to the disbelief of several modern scholars,⁵⁴ Herodotus attributes these stories in their causal succession to non-Greek sources: to Persian *logioi* in the first instance, as amended in the second instance by Phoenicians who defend their national honour by insisting that Io was not kidnapped, but sailed away from parental wrath of her own volition after being impregnated by the ship's captain (1.5.2). For his part, after recounting at some length these allegedly foreign versions of primeval Greek stories, Herodotus refuses to state an opinion about them, and begins his own account by fixing blame or responsibility (*αἰτίη*) upon a more recent figure whom he knows to have committed unjust acts against the Greeks, the Lydian king Croesus.

⁵¹ In the vast bibliography on the passage, I have found the following discussions most helpful: Drews (1973) 88–91; Erbse (1979) 181–2; Cobet (1986) 3–6; Flory (1987) 24–9; Fehling (1989) 50–9; Pelliccia (1992) 74–80; Moles (1993) 92–8; Fowler (1996) 83–6; Dewald (1998) 596–7 and (1999) 221–33; Pelling (1999) 331–5; Thomas (2000) 267–8; Goldhill (2002) 14–5; S. West (2002) 8–15; Wecowski (2004) 149–54; Asheri (2007) 73–4; Saïd (forthcoming).

⁵² Cf. S. West (2002) 8–11.

⁵³ In the Persian account (as alleged by Herodotus), the injustice of Io's abduction is redressed by Europa's abduction, leaving the score even (*ἴσα πρὸς ἴσα*, 1.2.2) between the two sides—i.e., between Europe and Asia. Again in the view attributed to Persian *logioi*, the Greeks were guilty of the second injustice (1.2.2), and in two ways: first, by abducting Medea from Colchis, which disrupted the even score; second and more consequentially, by overreacting to Paris' subsequent abduction of Helen and invading Asia, in response to what was merely another in a series of abductions (*ἀρπαγὰς μούνας*, 1.4.1).

⁵⁴ Those who consider the stories mostly or entirely Herodotean invention include Flory (1987) 25; Fehling (1989) 50–9; Moles (1993) 95–6; Corcella (2006) 45–7; and Asheri (2007) 74.

What can we say about the relationship between this extraordinary sequence and the Greek poetic tradition? As far as content is concerned, Antony Raubitschek, believing that the stories of Io, Europa, Medea, and Helen were best known to Herodotus from Greek tragedy, ventured to identify a single play as the true source of the ‘foreign’ traditions in 1.1–5—namely, the *Phoinissai* of Phrynichos.⁵⁵ The assumed co-existence in this play of Persian imperial counselors and a chorus of Phoenician women⁵⁶ creates a context in which competing national perceptions of Greek mythological material might be aired. This speculative but ingenious suggestion was recently revived by Stephanie West, who thinks it more credible that Herodotus was indebted to a Greek poetic source claiming to reproduce foreign traditions than that ‘Persians with a smattering of Hellenic culture defamiliariz[ed] Greek legend either for their own amusement or, more seriously, by way of addressing problems of war-guilt in the aftermath of Xerxes’ invasion.’⁵⁷ However, there are other passages in the *Histories* in which Persians are represented as citing Greek mythology for the sake of persuading Hellenic audiences. At 6.97.2 a herald sent by Datis assures the frightened Delians that they need not flee from the Persian fleet: as the birthplace of two gods (sc. Apollo and Artemis), their island is sacrosanct. In a matter of greater military and political weight, Herodotus reports a story told throughout Greece (7.150.1), according to which Xerxes’ herald invoked local myth as a means of dissuading the Argives from joining the Greek resistance, citing the Persians’ descent from Perses, son of the Argive hero Perseus.⁵⁸ As Fowler has seen, this episode is especially telling, since its currency throughout Greece demonstrates a general Hellenic belief, right or wrong, that (some) Persians

⁵⁵ Raubitschek (1993).

⁵⁶ This assumption is based on the ancient hypothesis to Aeschylus’ *Persai*, which describes Phrynichus’ *Phoinissai* as beginning with a prologue delivered by a eunuch as he arranged seats for a meeting of Persian counselors. Lloyd-Jones (1966) 23–4 challenges this assumption, believing that the hypothesis misidentifies as *Phoinissai* another play from the same trilogy—in all likelihood, one featuring a chorus of Persian counselors, which would suit the tragedy identified by three alternative names (*The Just Ones* or *The Persians* or *The Counsellors*) in the *Suda*’s life of Phrynichus. Sommerstein (2008) 3 n. 8 concurs.

⁵⁷ West (2002) 13. For the view that 1.1–4 represents propaganda spread by Persians seeking to blame the victorious Greeks for Xerxes’ failed expedition, see Bornitz (1968) 164–79, esp. 176–7, and Erbse (1979) 186–8.

⁵⁸ At 6.54 Herodotus reports a Persian account according to which Perseus was Assyrian by origin but subsequently ‘became Greek’ (ἐγένετο Ἕλληνα). Even if this were the true Persian view of Perseus’ descent, it would not undermine the historical plausibility of 7.150.2: the king’s herald rightly chooses the version of Perseus’ origins that his Hellenic audience will find most persuasive.

knew (some) Greek myths.⁵⁹ In view of these and other passages that reflect Greek belief in Persian knowledge of Greek myth,⁶⁰ I share Fowler's willingness to accept Herodotus' representation of Persians (and Phoenicians) as knowing rationalised versions of Greek myths, and therefore consider Raubitschek's hypothesis unnecessary. At the same time, it seems entirely likely that the raw narrative material of the prologue—i.e., the abductions of Io, Europa, Medea, and Helen—was best known to Herodotus' audience through authoritative poetic performances; and that the climactic mention of Paris, Helen, and the Trojan War will have called to mind the epic tradition above all.⁶¹

But it is not merely the mythological content of the prologue that will have evoked the poetic tradition for Herodotus' audience; so too the distinctive argumentative structure used by Herodotus to articulate both the (allegedly) non-Greek traditions and his own response to them. That distinctive argumentative structure, with deep roots in the Greek poetic tradition, is the priamel, as William Race first recognised.⁶² As defined by Race, the priamel is a two-part structure that leads from an introductory 'foil' (comprising two or more subjects or perspectives) by means of contrast and analogy to the 'climax', a particular point of interest or importance. Surveying the use of the priamel from Homeric epic through Hellenistic poetry, Race identifies five essential features of the form: 1) a general context or category; 2) an indication of quantity or diversity in the foil; 3) a 'capping' particle that marks

⁵⁹ Fowler (1996) 85 points out that even the decidedly sceptical Fehling (1989) 118–20 understands citations attributed to all the Greeks to reflect generally familiar lore rather than Herodotean fabrication.

⁶⁰ At 7.43 Xerxes satisfies his desire to see the citadel of Priam's Troy, and after learning from (presumably) local Greek sources what happened there, he sacrifices a thousand oxen to 'Athena of Ilium' (the Trojan citadel goddess in *Iliad* 6); the Magi pour libations of wine to the heroes of Ilium. On two other occasions Persians, once informed of local Greek myth, take duly respectful ritual action: during the catastrophic storm off the Cape of Sepias, the Magi sacrifice to Thetis and the Nereids (7.191.2), and in Achaean Alus Xerxes piously seeks to avoid the anger of the gods directed at the descendants of Phrixus' son Cytissorus for his interfering in the ritual slaughter of Athamas (7.197). Finally, at 9.116.3 Artayctes, Persian governor of Sestos, exploits his knowledge of the Trojan War combatant Protesilaos and persuades the unwitting Xerxes to consign to him the hero's local sanctuary and its riches. (I add parenthetically that in Xerxes' council speech to the Persian nobles (7.87.1) Herodotus sees fit to incorporate a reference to 'Pelops the Phrygian' as eponymous hero of the Peloponnesus.)

⁶¹ Cf. Bakker (2002) 28 for the stories told in 1.1–5 as 'the domain of myth, poetic memory, and the Muses'. Goldhill (2002) 14 claims that at one level 'this passage reduces the epic tradition of Greece to a dismissive paragraph'; Moles (1993) 96 sees the stories as associated with the *Iliad* in particular.

⁶² Race (1982) 111.

the arrival of the climax; 4) an indication of relative (typically superlative) merit to give the climactic term special prominence; and 5) finally, the subject of ultimate interest.⁶³

All five of these features are found in 1.1–5, although not all at once, since Herodotus' opening is an ingenious variation on the form of the priamel, and only gradually revealed as such. Race acknowledges in passing that Herodotus' priamel is 'more diffuse than its poetic prototypes', while Hayden Pelliccia, noting that priamels tend to be immediately recognisable as such, proposes the alternative label 'false-start *recusatio*'.⁶⁴ This term rightly underscores the misdirection that characterises the first four chapters, whereby Herodotus himself seems to endorse the foreigners' belief in the primeval origins of the Greco-Persian wars.⁶⁵ It is also true, however, that the common features shared by Herodotus' introduction and the priamel are brought into sharp focus in chapter 5, which demonstrates decisively how Herodotean *historiê* diverges from the stories of old cited by Persian and Phoenician authorities. By this point the general context or category (1) of the discussion is well established: namely, Herodotus' search for the *αἰτίη* of the Greco-Persian conflict, the person(s) responsible for beginning the hostilities between East and West. At the beginning of chapter 5, the Persian account of that origin, detailed in chapters 1 through 4, is summarised in a *μέν*-clause (5.1); then the diversity of the foil (2) is developed, as the Phoenician counter-claim concerning the circumstances of Io's departure from Argos follows in a *δέ*-clause (5.2). These two foreign perspectives are then summarised immediately before the climax (5.3):

ταῦτα μὲν νυν Πέρσαι τε καὶ Φοίνικες λέγουσι. ἐγὼ δὲ περὶ μὲν τούτων οὐκ ἔρχομαι ἐρέων ὡς οὕτως ἢ ἄλλως κως ταῦτα ἐγένετο, τὸν δὲ οἶδα αὐτὸς πρῶτον ὑπάρξαντα ἀδίκων ἔργων ἐς τοὺς Ἕλληνας, τοῦτον σημήνας προβήσομαι ἐς τὸ πρόσω τοῦ λόγου ...

Now this is what the Persians and Phoenicians say, but I for my part am not going to say concerning these incidents that they happened in this way or some other. Instead, I will indicate the man whom I myself know first initiated unjust acts against the Greeks, and proceed onwards with my account ...

⁶³ Race (1982) 13.

⁶⁴ Race (1982) 111; Pelliccia (1992) 78.

⁶⁵ As Pelliccia (1992) 78 notes, Herodotus fosters this impression by intervening in the Persians' account of Europa's abduction, in his own narrative voice, to identify her kidnapers as Cretans (1.2).

As the first words of the second quoted sentence (ἐγὼ δέ) demonstrate, the climax is indicated not only by a 'capping' particle (3), but also by a prominently placed pronoun, effecting a shift of person—a 'pronominal cap', in the terminology of Elroy Bundy.⁶⁶ The extraordinary merit (4) of Herodotus' chosen topic is marked by the superlative *πρῶτον*, and the relative clause within which it falls (τὸν δὲ οἶδα αὐτὸς ... τοὺς Ἑλληνας) identifies the subject of the author's interest (5)—but only to a degree, specifying his activity but not yet supplying his name. An additional common feature of poetic priamels is the deferral of crucial information until the very end, a method of achieving closure after arousing audience expectation.⁶⁷ Herodotus makes use of this technique as well, withholding Croesus' name until the beginning of the narrative proper in chapter 6, where it makes a notably dramatic entrance in asyndeton (6.1): Κροῖσος ἦν Λυδὸς μὲν γένος, παῖς δὲ Ἀλυάττεω, τύραννος δὲ ἐθνέων τῶν ἐντὸς Ἑλυσ ποταμοῦ ... (Croesus was Lydian by birth, a son of Alyattes, and tyrant of the tribes west of the river Halys ...).

The rhetorical elaboration of Herodotus' introduction is especially evident when compared to the opening sentence of Hecataeus' *Genealogies* (*FGrHist* 1 F 1a = F 1 Fowler, *EGM*)

Ἑκαταῖος Μιλήσιος ὧδε μυθεῖται· τάδε γράφω, ὡς μοι δοκεῖ ἀληθῆα εἶναι· οἱ γὰρ Ἑλλήνων λόγοι πολλοί τε καὶ γελοῖοι, ὡς ἐμοὶ φαίνονται, εἰσίν.

Hecataeus of Miletus speaks as follows: I write the following accounts as they seem to me to be true, since the stories of the Greeks are both many and laughable, as they appear to me.

Herodotus adopts many of these features in his prologue: the prominent positioning of the author's name and place of origin, the brief opening clause with a deictic form (ὧδε), the switch from third-person self-reference to first-person self-reference, and the forceful contrast between the *logoi* of others and the author's own revisionist view. It is in the framing of this last feature that Herodotus parts company with Hecataeus most decisively, and the question remains why Herodotus chose to construct his prologue on the model of the poetic priamel. We can begin to answer this question by noting the special emphasis this construction places upon three important features

⁶⁶ Bundy (1986) 5 n. 18. (Cf. n. 36 above for Svenbro's suggestion that Herodotus' change from third person self-reference in his *incipit* to first person self-reference in 1.5.3 reflects the discourse of funerary or votive inscriptions.)

⁶⁷ Race (1982) 22.

that distinguish his *historiē* from epic poetry, the tradition most strongly evoked by the stories of abduction and counter-abduction recounted in 1.1–5.

The first of these features is the first-person authorial voice, which proves to be a constant presence throughout the *Histories*, and as such a striking departure from Homeric narrative technique.⁶⁸ Here the priamel construction enables the Herodotean ἐγώ to make its first appearance in duly emphatic fashion, as the convention of the pronominal cap heralds the importance of the authorial ‘I’ in the *Histories*. Moreover, Herodotus pointedly modifies a second feature of the priamel in characterising his subject matter, since the climactic superlative adjective πρῶτον does not stand by itself, but undergoes crucial qualification. For Herodotus’ claim is (obviously) not that Croesus’ unjust acts against the Greeks within living memory predate the primeval abductions just recounted as foil, but rather that Croesus is the first aggressor of whom he has personal knowledge, τὸν δ’ οἶδα αὐτὸς πρῶτον ὑπάρξαντα ἀδίκων ἔργων ἐς τοὺς Ἕλληνας: ‘the one whom I myself know first initiated unjust acts against the Greeks’.⁶⁹ (I note here parenthetically that, in addition to its specialised function in this context as a superlative marking the climax of a priamel, πρῶτος also serves from the beginning of the Greek poetic tradition to mark events of primary importance for narration, even when they lack absolute temporal priority.⁷⁰) Herodotus thus delimits his ac-

⁶⁸ For the relationship between the Homeric narrator and the Herodotean narrator see de Jong (1999) 220–9 and (2004); Baragwanath (2008) 35–54. The classic study of first-person narratorial expressions in the *Histories* is Dewald (1987), augmented by Dewald (2002), citing additional bibliography.

⁶⁹ Cf. Hellmann (1934) 16–21, who discerns implicit but pointed departure from the primeval speculations of Hecataeus in his *Genealogies*. See Shimron (1973) for the use of οἶδα (‘I know’) and its plural counterpart ἴδμεν (‘we know’) in phrases qualifying superlative adjectives like ‘first’ to indicate the historical period extending from Croesus’ time (ca. 550–530 BC) to Herodotus’ own (ca. 460–440 BC). The re-description of Croesus in 6.2 as ‘first of the non-Greeks we know’ (plural ἴδμεν rather than singular οἶδα) to subject some Greeks to the payment of tribute underscores retrospectively the emphasis placed in 5.3 on Herodotus’ singular achievement in recognising the initiatory role played by Croesus in the conflict between East and West. (Chamberlain (2001) 16 argues, however, that the plural subject in this common Herodotean idiom typically has no specific group reference, but refers to Herodotus himself ‘in his role as an inquirer, as a judge, gatherer and organiser of information—as a *histor*, that is’).

⁷⁰ See Race (1992) 19–23 for the origins of this function of πρῶτος in epic usage, especially the *Iliad* (cf. 1.6 τὰ πρῶτα) and Hesiod’s *Theogony* (where πρῶτον marks various starting points at 34, 44, 108 and 113, and the superlative πρῶτιστα (24, 116) is reserved for especially important beginnings: that of Hesiod’s career as a poet and that of the cosmos itself). Race’s discussion of the *Iliad* (20–1) suggests another similarity between the opening of that poem and of the *Histories*. For just as Homer identifies the quarrel of Achilles and Agamemnon as his narrative starting-point but then moves back in time to explain the origins of their conflict, so too Herodotus announces the aggression of Croesus as his

count of the war's origins, at least, by contrast with events of the 'deep past' recounted in Homeric epic and other genres of 'high' poetry—events so distant in time that not even conscientious *historiê* can determine their causal connection to recent Greco-Persian hostilities.⁷¹ Third and finally, by explicitly opposing his own view about the origins of the Greco-Persian wars to those of the Persians and Phoenicians before him, Herodotus acknowledges that his account of the conflict is part of an ongoing conversation or dispute, a virtual tradition of international debate in which he responds to and departs from previous explanations. This explicit acknowledgement of predecessors again marks a significant deviation from storytelling convention in Homeric epic, which, although the product of long-standing oral tradition, never mentions any of the earlier alternative versions that comprise that tradition: the Homeric bard is imagined as either taught by the gods (the Muse or Apollo), or self-taught, or both.⁷² Thus Herodotus' use of the poetic priamel form also serves to highlight his role as adjudicator of the various traditions that he has gathered, as well as his discovering 'the problem of sources', which Fowler considers 'the unique element in his voiceprint' and 'an integral part of his self-perception as an historian'.⁷³

An additional possibility to consider in assessing the intent or effect of Herodotus' introductory priamel involves intertextuality of a different sort. Could Herodotus' prose version also respond, consciously or otherwise, to a specific poetic example of the structure, or more broadly to the use of the priamel in a specific genre or genres of poetry? Race has pointed out fun-

archê but then moves back in time to explain how his family, the Mermnadae, came to power—through Gyges' killing of Candaules, which (far from possessing mere antiquarian interest) has a crucial causal role to play in Croesus' downfall, as Apollo's Pythian priestess proclaims (1.91.1) with unimpeachable authority.

⁷¹ This is not to say that Herodotus casts doubt upon the very historicity of the Trojan War by consigning it to a so-called *spatium mythicum*. On the contrary, he confirms its reality (though not its causal significance for subsequent intercontinental warfare) in Book 2 (2.112–20), in the context of Egyptian history with its still deeper past, and with the help of Egyptian sources. Cf. Stadter (2004) 33–8 and Saïd (forthcoming).

⁷² See *Od.* 8.480 (Odysseus describes bards as taught by the Muse), 487–91 (Odysseus praises Demodocus as taught by the Muse or Apollo); 22.347–8 (Phemius describes himself as self-taught and a recipient of stories from the Muse). Cf. Ford (1992) 90–130 for Homer's self-presentation as a narrator with 'immediate' access to the primeval events he relates, thanks to the Muses. While acknowledging that Herodotus departs from the Homeric narrative stance by citing previous accounts of some events, Marincola (2006) 15 argues that in other instances Herodotus may have, like the poet, consciously 'erased' his predecessors in order to create the false impression of priority.

⁷³ On Herodotus as judge or adjudicator of traditions, see Dewald (1987); Nagy (1990) 250–61; Connor (1993); and Bakker (2002) 14 with n. 32. For Herodotus' proem and his discovering the problem of sources, see Fowler (1996) 80–6 (quotes in text are from p. 86).

damental similarities between *Histories* 1.1–5 and Sappho fr. 16, which he considers ‘[u]ndoubtedly the most famous priamel in Greek literature’.⁷⁴ There is in fact internal evidence for Herodotus’ familiarity with Sapphic poetry: in Book 2 Herodotus mentions that ‘in a lyric poem’ (ἐν μέλει, 2.135.6) Sappho heaped abuse upon her brother Charaxes for buying the freedom of the Egyptian courtesan Rhodopis. Both Sappho 16 and the Herodotean preface embody a particular type of priamel, attested earlier still in the first Homeric Hymn to Dionysus (lines 1–6), in which the views of others are described but then superceded by the author’s own opinion.⁷⁵ Sappho’s poem presents various perspectives on what is most beautiful (κάλλιστον), which some (οἱ μὲν) consider to be cavalry, others (οἱ δέ) infantry, and others still (οἱ δέ) ships; for her part, by pointed contrast, Sappho considers most beautiful ‘whatever one loves’, ἔγω δὲ κῆν’ ὅτ- / τω τις ἔραται (3–4). In addition to the first-person pronominal cap and the capping particle δέ paralleled in Herodotus, note too the generic, anonymous identification of Sappho’s ultimate object of interest/desire as ‘whatever one loves’, before the name of Anactoria is finally revealed in line 15 (cf. the deferred identification of Croesus in the *Histories*). In the meantime, Sappho has supported her case for the power of love with a mythical exemplum that also finds a place in Herodotus’ prologue, Helen’s fateful departure for Troy. Finally, Pelliccia notes as well the ‘pleasing coincidence’⁷⁶ in Sappho’s statement of preference for Anactoria over chariots specifically identified as Lydian (19). As noted above, when Herodotus first and at last introduces Croesus by name, he identifies him by nationality as well (6.1): Κροῖσος ἦν Λυδὸς μὲν γένος ... (Croesus was Lydian by birth ...).

Pelliccia adduces the detail of Sappho’s spurned Lydian chariots as part of his broader argument that Herodotus consciously evokes this poem in his prologue for the sake of disagreeing with it—for the sake of reversing Sappho’s ‘rejection of martial themes in favor of the personal and erotic’.⁷⁷ Herodotus thus demonstrates his originality by ‘locating political causality in the axes of power rather than in the whims of lust’,⁷⁸ exemplified by both Sappho’s predilection and the mythical abductions rehearsed in 1.1–5. Herodotus’ opening story of dynastic change brought about by Candaules’ disastrous ἔρωσ for his own wife (1.8–12) may seem to pose an immediate obstacle to this reading. However, as Pelliccia points out, Herodotus follows a procedure typical of priamels in merely ‘demoting’ the foil rather than ban-

⁷⁴ Race (1982) 63.

⁷⁵ Race (1982) 44, 63–4, 113.

⁷⁶ Pelliccia (1992) 79 n. 37.

⁷⁷ Pelliccia (1992) 78.

⁷⁸ Pelliccia (1992) 79.

ishing it outright—a tendency also reflected in Race's characterisation of the relationship between foil and climax as one of contrast and analogy.⁷⁹ At the very least, Herodotus seems to suggest that in the realm of historical causality the distinction between war and love, between public and private spheres, cannot be drawn so stringently as Sappho has done. This exemplifies a well-known feature of Herodotus' treatment of causation, whereby important historical events are represented as originating in the personal motives of his characters⁸⁰—e.g., Darius' interest in subjugating Greece, a target suggested by queen Atossa in the confines of the royal boudoir as a source of superior serving girls (and as a favour to the Greek physician Democedes, who is eager to leave the king's court and return to his native Croton (3.133–6)).

Thus the numerous points of contact between Sappho 16 and the prologue of the *Histories* suggest that, in addition to underscoring points of significant contrast with Homeric epic, Herodotus' rhetorical strategy may also have evoked an especially well known poetic priamel, imitating its form while contesting its argument. Looking beyond Sappho, finally, I would like to propose that epinician poetry also contributes important elements to the intertextual background against which Herodotus' original audience may have understood *Histories* 1.1–5. Here I refer to both the use of the priamel in epinician and to the portrayal of Croesus in that genre. Bundy has described the priamel as manifesting 'perhaps the most important structural principle known to choral poetry, in particular to those forms devoted to praise'.⁸¹ Race has described Pindar, the most accomplished of the Greek epinician poets, as 'the undisputed master of the priamel'.⁸² Now a common function of the priamel in epinician is to intensify praise of the *laudandus* and his achievements—as seen, for example, in the pair of priamels that frame Pindar's *Olympian* 1. The first of these (lines 1–7) addresses what is 'best' (*ἄριστον*, 1) in various spheres, and culminates in acclaim of the Olympian games, where Hieron has won the single horse race; the second (lines 113–4) considers 'greatness' (*μεγάλοι*, 113) and finds its ultimate manifestation in kingship, the political pinnacle that Hieron has scaled in Syracuse.⁸³ Viewed against this background of epinician priamels that enhance the praise of the *laudan-*

⁷⁹ Pelliccia (1992) 79; Race (1982) x.

⁸⁰ Cf. (e.g.) Derow (1994) 79.

⁸¹ Bundy (1986) 5.

⁸² Race (1982) 73.

⁸³ Cf. also (e.g.) *Pyth.* 1.99–100. The common use of the priamel to enhance praise is strikingly demonstrated by the parodic example at Pl. *Grg.* 448c, where Polus lauds Gorgias' *τέχνη* as the most beautiful of the many *τέχναι* practiced by humankind (cited by Race (1982) 113).

dus, Herodotus' use of the form in 1.1–5 takes on an ironic colouring, since the general context or category of this opening is blame rather than praise—seeking the *αἰτίη* of the Greco-Persian wars, Herodotus proclaims Croesus responsible for initiating, within historical memory, the sequence of injustices that characterise the contentious relationship between Europe and Asia, the Greeks and the Persians.

This assessment of blame not only inverts a common use of the priamel in epinician, but also anticipates a radical departure from the portrayal of Croesus himself in the genre, where despite his foreign origins he serves as a positive paradigm of prosperity (*ὄλβος*) and generosity for the Greek aristocrat.⁸⁴ By dramatic contrast, in his programmatic confrontation with Solon (1.29–33), the Herodotean Croesus is portrayed as a non-Greek, Asiatic 'other'⁸⁵ with a perspective on material wealth that (for all his generosity to Delphic Apollo) proves disastrously shortsighted. For as long as Croesus possesses his Eastern riches and monarchy, he is unable to appreciate the Hellenic wisdom expounded by Solon, who defines *ὄλβος* from the perspective of a moderately wealthy citizen of a Greek *polis*, while warning of the threat to human prosperity posed by the resentful deity. Only after losing his riches and power with the fall of Sardis, as his funeral pyre burns, does Croesus recognise the truth of Solon's words (1.86.3–5), anticipated in Herodotus' own observation of the transience of human success at the end of the prologue (1.5.4). Gregory Crane has demonstrated the rarity of the term *ὄλβος* and its derivatives in Greek prose; concluding that *ὄλβος* is a marked poetic term with specifically epinician associations, he argues that in his presentation of Croesus Herodotus 'is exploring and redefining in prose the assumptions which underlay epinician poetry'.⁸⁶ In other words, one function of the

⁸⁴ Croesus makes only two appearances in extant epinician poetry (Pi. *Pyth.* 1.94, Bacch. 3.23–62), and his Pindaric appearance is very brief indeed. Nonetheless, several scholars have characterised the king's generosity as a traditional theme of epinician: cf. Nagy (1990) 276; Crane (1996) 58; Kurke (1999) 131.

⁸⁵ This is not to deny the point made by Pelling (1997) that in some important ways Herodotus presents Croesus and Lydia as 'on the cusp' between East and West, and by no means straightforwardly Asiatic. Nonetheless, I would argue that in the discussion of what constitutes *olbos* Croesus' focus on money (after giving Solon a tour of his treasuries, 1.30.1) allies him with the 'objectification or reification of value among the Persians' that Konstan ((1987) 62) has discerned in the *Histories*. At the same time, and as Pelling himself ((2006a) 143) observes, much of Solon's moralising is recognisable as 'conventional Greek wisdom'. Only over time does Croesus come to recognise the wisdom of this Greek sage and 'the god of the Greeks', Apollo (1.87.3, 90.2: for these scornful references to Apollo by a still unenlightened Croesus, cf. Harrison (2000) 215).

⁸⁶ Crane (1996) 63. For further discussion of how the divergent representation of Croesus in epinician and Herodotus sheds light upon Greek attitudes towards luxury, wealth, and power cf. Nagy (1990) 274–82 and Kurke (1999) 130–71.

Herodotean scenes involving Croesus and Solon is to explore the complex attitudes towards luxury and wealth in archaic and classical Greek culture. If I am right to suggest that the prefatory priamel of the *Histories* evokes the use of that structure and the characterisation of Croesus in epinician lyric, Herodotus anticipates from the outset of his work a dialogue with one branch of the poetic tradition that engages issues of profound social, political, and historical importance.

In conclusion, I hope to have demonstrated that Herodotus establishes in his prologue a relationship of considerable complexity with his poetic predecessors and contemporaries. From the outset he presents his monumental historical narrative of the Greco-Persian wars as simultaneously indebted and opposed to a network of poets, whose Panhellenic cultural prestige he challenges in the innovative medium of prose. Epic—specifically, Homeric epic—is tacitly acknowledged as a model of primary importance: Herodotus adopts the martial subject matter of the *Iliad* and projects the persona of the peripatetic Homeric hero Odysseus. In abandoning the deeply retrospective glance of the epic tradition to perpetuate the *kleos* of fully human warriors, Herodotus follows the example of various poets and artists who celebrated the great Greek victories over the Persians in the early decades of the fifth century. At the same time, Herodotus implies that his own new medium of prose *historiê*, committed to writing, will surpass poetry's ability to perform its traditional function of public commemoration. Herodotus constructs the entire prologue as an ingenious prose priamel, a poetic rhetorical structure that enables him to emphasise important points of contact with and departure from Homeric epic, Sappho's fr. 16, and the portrayal of Croesus in epinician poetry. Finally, at the transition from prologue to narrative proper (1.5.4), Herodotus summarises his perception of historical change as rooted in the transience of human prosperity, introducing this insight with a distinctive term (*ἐπιστάμενος*) that signals his appropriation of the cultural authority typically bestowed by his contemporaries upon the poetic sage.⁸⁷

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