

## HERODOTEAN IRONIES\*

---

*Abstract.* ‘Irony/ironic’ are terms frequently used in discussion of Herodotus, whether applied to particular passages or to the text as a whole. This paper aims to distinguish different types of irony which have been or can be detected in the text of the Histories, and to map these on a spectrum ranging from those which are clearly indicated by the narrator to those which demand more by way of interpretation and supplement from the reader. Types described and illustrated include dramatic, oracular, historical, cross-cultural and situational ironies; but the idea that the entire work is in some sense ironic is rejected. Irony as a tool of interpretation seems indispensable, but needs to be handled with circumspection and self-conscious care. The paper ends with some suggestions for further explorations of the topic. Endnotes provide further documentation, principally on ironies of the oracular type.

---

*Keywords:* Herodotus, Irony, Oracle, Foreshadowing, Historiography, Reader-response

‘Is it irony, or has Herodotus lost his mind?’  
(F. Jacoby)<sup>1</sup>

‘The irresistible impression of gentle irony which Herodotus leaves on every reader arises from numerous qualities of style of which only some are capable of analysis.’  
(J. E. Powell)<sup>2</sup>

‘Such one-line judgements seem but a crude paraphrase of Herodotus’ nuanced irony.’  
(T. Harrison)<sup>3</sup>

That Herodotus is an ironic writer is a proposition which would command widespread agreement. Consensus beyond that point might be hard to achieve. The three quotations above point in different directions. In the first, arising from the problem of the concluding

\* I am very grateful to Katherine Clarke, John Marincola and Tim Rood for comments and encouragement, and also to the helpful suggestions of the *Histos* referees. At the final stage I was fortunate to receive characteristically acute and constructive comments from Christopher Pelling. I take this opportunity to thank him for all I have learned from him over the years about ancient historiography, not least Herodotus. Remaining errors or eccentricities are my own.

Besides standard abbreviations, I use the following: *CH* = Asheri–Corcella–Lloyd (2007); *H–W* = How and Wells (1913); *GGL* = Schmid–Stählin (1933). Translations are adapted from the Penguin version of de Sélincourt, revised by Marincola (2003).

<sup>1</sup> ‘Soll das Ironie sein ... oder hat H. den Verstand verloren?’, Jacoby (1913) 375 = (1956) 92.1. For a subtle defence of 9.122 as the true ending of the History, and an exploration of its implications, see Dewald (1997).

<sup>2</sup> Powell (1937) 103.

<sup>3</sup> Harrison (2000) 242.

chapter, the issues are the presentation of Cyrus and the Persians, and the compatibility of this final cameo with earlier parts of the History; it is the difficulty of reconciling different perspectives which prompts the suspicion that at least one passage may not mean what it appears to say. The second quotation introduces a short and still valuable article collecting examples of punning or witty play on words, a specific device which at least suggests a writer alive to the possibilities of language; it is implied that irony is a quality particularly evident in linguistic style.<sup>4</sup> The third provides the coda to a dismissive account of scholarly readings detecting political comment on later events implicit in the narrative of the Persian Wars and the events which precede them (such readings are cited in my discussion of ‘historical irony’ below). Here the writer does not seem to rule out such readings but to condemn oversimplifying versions. There is no suggestion that Herodotus is devoid of irony, but interpreters must do justice to it: ‘nuanced’ clearly suggests something subtler or more elusive than the readers in question have managed to detect. The warning is salutary; the following pages may well prove vulnerable to similar criticism.<sup>5</sup>

In this paper I consider a number of ways in which Herodotus can be described as an ironic author, in an effort to clarify precisely what we might mean by this term in different contexts. I distinguish a number of types of irony, but attach no special importance to my own terminology: what matters is to identify certain practices which seem characteristic of Herodotus.<sup>6</sup> But taxonomy of itself is of limited value. After organising the material it is necessary to make something of it. In the course of my discussion and particularly at the end of the paper I aim to show the

<sup>4</sup> Cf. the comment of H–W on 3.143.2 (the famous remark that the Samians evidently did not really want freedom) ‘The *δη* well expresses the irony of H.’ (similarly Stein, but interestingly on other words in the same sentence: ‘*ὡς οὐκασι*, ironisch, *videlicet*’).

<sup>5</sup> Inevitably I shall sometimes cite formulations which I find inadequate or excessively vague; that should not obscure my debt to many of the distinguished scholars cited in these footnotes.

<sup>6</sup> On the history of the concept see e.g. Abrams (1971) (and many later revisions) s.v.; also the various editions of the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, most recently 4th ed., ed. R. Greene, S. Cushman et al. (Princeton, 2013) (entry by C. Colebrook). For book-length studies see esp. Booth (1974); Muecke (1969) and (1982); Colebrook (2004). For an entertaining overview, Rosenmeyer (1996). I have discussed some related questions elsewhere (Rutherford (2011); (2012), ch. 8). A recent essay specifically concerned with Herodotus’ irony is Schellenberg (2009), but this is chiefly concerned with the speeches (on which see also the recent overview by Pelling (2006a), with more detailed studies in (1991), (2002), (2006b)).

significance of these arguments for our study of Herodotus and his subject matter.<sup>7</sup>

Herodotus himself never uses the term *εἰρωνεία* or its cognates. In his contemporaries it is associated with pretence or hypocrisy; later, in some passages of Plato and still more in later simplifications of the portrait of Socrates, the *εἰρων* is often seen as a deceiver, one who understates his own knowledge or feigns ignorance. Theophrastus' famous character is a dissembler, evasive, full of excuses and expressions of disbelief.<sup>8</sup> In all of these senses there are potential applications to Herodotus, and although Plutarch in his well-known polemic does not apply the actual term to him, he has plenty to say about the historian's ability to cheat, mislead and misrepresent the facts.<sup>9</sup> Both the positive image of the ironist as an urbane and modest conversationalist (Cicero, Quintilian)<sup>10</sup> and the negative one, of a deceitful and evasive fraud (Theophrastus), have interesting resonances in the history of Herodotean criticism.

The other principal strand in ancient criticism concerns verbal irony, irony treated as a figure of speech, typically conveying a meaning different from that which the words seem to convey. Thus ironic or exaggerated praise can be a form of blame, and vice versa. Since rhetorical readings of history often saw it as a form of epideictic and thus closely concerned with praise and blame,<sup>11</sup> this too has much applicability to our subject (see e.g. below on the defence and praise of the Alcmaeonids, 6.121ff.). Verbal irony is also closely related to ambiguity of the kind found in tragedy (often designated 'dramatic' irony), found for instance in entrapment scenes, where seemingly friendly or positive words mask a sinister double meaning. Finally, this type of verbal ambiguity is especially characteristic of oracles, central to many episodes in the History as to many tragic plots.

The later history of irony as a concept is largely one of territorial expansion and terminological multiplication. Catalogues of types have been produced, but uniformity of usage is lacking. Situational irony, where the observer (the reader) sees danger or some other circumstance which is unnoticed by the agents, is close to verbal irony and may often be associated

<sup>7</sup> Unlike White (1973) xii and Goldhill (2012) 26 n. 33, I have not thought it necessary to alert the reader when (if at all) I am myself being ironic.

<sup>8</sup> For early uses see Ar. *Vesp.* 174, *Av.* 1211; for Plato see esp. *Symp.* 216e, 218d; *Grg.* 489e; *Rep.* 1. 337a; for Aristotle, *Nic. Eth.* 1108a19–23, 1127b22–32. On Theophrastus see esp. Diggle's commentary (2004) 166–7; Ribbeck (1876), as he remarks, remains fundamental.

<sup>9</sup> On Plutarch's *de Herodoti malignitate* see Marincola (1994) and (2015); Pelling (2007).

<sup>10</sup> Cic. *de or.* 2.269–71, Quint. *Inst.* 8.6.54–6, 9.2.44–53.

<sup>11</sup> See e.g. Cic. *Or.* 37, 66, 207; Woodman (1988) 40–4, 67–8, 74. For praise and blame as the historian's concerns see e.g. Pol. 8.8; Tac. *Ann.* 3.65.1, 4.33.2.

with it. Ironies of fate or destiny, where mortals are the playthings of the gods, extend this theme of ignorance to imply an interpretation of the human condition. The nineteenth century enlarged these ideas still further (cosmic irony, *Welt-Ironie* and the like). There is also Romantic irony, a concept especially associated with F. W. Schlegel but popular with modern post-structuralists: the focus here is on the artist's self-conscious awareness of his own work as art, his creative activity as something both profoundly serious and essentially playful. Before dismissing such ideas as extravagant and anachronistic we should remind ourselves that something comparable can be found in Plato's dialogues.

Clearly, not all of these approaches are equally useful for the modern reader of Herodotus, while the variety of the historian's text is such that different concepts may be more useful in different parts of the work. What is certain is that irony is regularly invoked as an interpretative tool by students of the History.<sup>12</sup> Probably its use is on the increase. How and Wells in their two-volume commentary had a total of eight instances; the useful collection of essays edited by Irwin and Greenwood has 22 examples of 'ironic(al(ly))' and 18 more of the noun itself;<sup>13</sup> the index to the *Cambridge Companion to Herodotus* lists 23 entries under the term; and the idea of 'authorial irony' plays a prominent part in the important book published in 2008 by Emily Baragwanath. Authors do not always make clear what model of irony they are using; often this needs to be deduced from the examples they cite and the conclusions they draw.<sup>14</sup> Given the vast scope of the concept in some modern theories, more explicit statements would be useful. In particular it is important to distinguish between irony of the kind which is intrinsic to the pattern or plot of the story being told (as in the fulfilment of oracles) and irony which pertains to the author's attitude to and treatment of his subject matter (as in the case of the Alcmaeonid digression, discussed further below). The diversification of senses of irony has become so wide that it can be suggested that the word is better excluded from discussion.<sup>15</sup> However

<sup>12</sup> This is hardly new. See e.g. Macan (1908) III, Index IV. See also e.g. *GGL* 647 n. 1 and 653 n. 3.

<sup>13</sup> Irwin and Greenwood (2007). Also an index entry to p. 262, a section of Moles' essay on Soclees, though the term is not actually used there. The concept may be influential in a discussion, of course, without the actual word being used.

<sup>14</sup> This applies even to Asheri in his masterly introduction to the author: see *CH* 49, praising the historian's 'successful mixture of irony and macabre detail'. The footnote here cites 2.111; 8.25.1–2, 107.2, 111.2–3; 9.11, 84–5. It might not be altogether easy to find a common factor in all of these examples.

<sup>15</sup> Thus Christopher Pelling (pers. comm.) has suggested to me that the term 'polyphony' should be preferred (cf. Darbo-Peschanski (1987), e.g. 116; Baragwanath (2008) 20 and works cited there). I do not find this term as helpful as he does: if it refers to

understandable, that position seems extreme, and in the present paper my hope is at least to clarify counsel about current usage, perhaps also to indicate some ways in which the concept can be most effectively employed in future criticism of Herodotus.

In what follows I first discuss dramatic irony, probably the most familiar technique, before dealing with a subset of this type, ‘oracular irony’, (§I); I then proceed to historical irony, the anticipation of future events beyond the narrative (§II); thereafter come discussions of irony arising from the interaction of different cultures (§III) and from surprising juxtapositions or incongruities (§IV); I then address some particularly puzzling passages (§V) before discussing ‘pan-ironic’ interpretations of the text (§VI). In §VII I offer some conclusions and further reflections.

### I. ‘Dramatic’ Irony

I begin from the simplest technique, familiar from tragedy, in which the words of a character bear a different significance from their surface meaning. We may distinguish cases in which the speaker is conscious of this double meaning, and intends to deceive, from those in which the double sense is unconscious, but discerned by the reader. An example of the first category is Astyages’ speech to Harpagus inviting him to dinner and urging him to send his son ahead. ‘And come to dinner with me also yourself (for I intend to celebrate the boy’s deliverance by sacrificing to the gods to whom such honours pertain)’ (1.118.2). The sacrificial offering will be the son of Harpagus. The ambiguity, and the play with the idea of sacrifice, are especially close to entrapment scenes in tragedy (e.g. Aesch. *Ag.* 1037–8).<sup>16</sup> An

Herodotus’ citation of multiple sources, it labels something obvious and is hardly needed; if it means that many different speakers participate in the action of the History, that is true and important but leaves the most problematic voice of all, the narrator, out of account; if it refers to the narrator’s own multivocality (for instance to explain the seemingly conflicting presentation of a character in the work), then fresh problems arise: how clearly are these voices capable of being differentiated, and is one of them dominant? The popular model of ‘further voices’ originating in Virgilian studies does not seem to me to have established a theoretical principle by which one voice can be shown to be primary, the others supplementary (Parry (1963) indeed seems to have regarded his ‘two voices’ as equipollent). But if the historian’s voice is not in some sense in control of the exposition, has he not abnegated his responsibilities? Or is this to apply an anachronistic standard to a still-emerging genre?

<sup>16</sup> See further Rutherford (2012) 331, 355. Another example is the deception of the lustful Persians by Alexander of Macedon (verbal ambiguity at 5.19.1, 20.4). The deception of Panionius by Hermotimus (8.106.2) could have been presented in a similar way, but the historian prefers to use indirect speech, probably in order to enhance the

example of the second category, where the ironic outcome is unforeseen, is the dialogue between Croesus and Adrastus prior to the fatal hunt. Croesus asks Adrastus to accompany his son and protect him—in any case, he is a man in his prime and should be seeking opportunities to show his strength; Adrastus, weighed down by misfortune, reluctantly accepts in order to show gratitude to his host; he assures Croesus that his son will come home unscathed. In the end, of course, it is Adrastus himself who involuntarily slays the young man in the course of the hunt (1.41–2). In the one case the speaker is the ironist, playing cat and mouse with a victim; in the other both interlocutors are in the dark.<sup>17</sup>

In the story of Croesus and Atys there is already a supernatural element in the warning dream which alarms the king. This is an early case of oracular irony, where future events are predicted and fulfilled in some unexpected way. I use the term ‘oracular’ for convenience and because the great majority of cases involve oracles, but dreams can function in a closely similar way. Comparable is the unconsciously prophetic utterance. The Spartans are told by Delphi to seek reparations from the Persian king for the death of their own king Leonidas. When they do so, Xerxes is astounded by their impertinence. Gesturing to his general Mardonius, he comments that Mardonius will give them all the recompense that is appropriate (8.114.2). ‘The herald, accepting that pronouncement, departed.’ Xerxes plainly means that Mardonius will deal with them as the Persians think fit, punishing their arrogance; the narrator paves the way for Mardonius’ defeat and humiliation. When the Persian leader perishes after Plataea the point is picked up (9.64.1).<sup>18</sup>

I turn now to oracular irony *stricto sensu*. (For a catalogue, see Endnote 1). Herodotus is intensely interested in oracles and often refers to them, quoting their responses verbatim where he can. We are chiefly concerned here with the category of misleading or ominous responses, but it should be remembered that these form a small though significant minority among his references to oracles. Most famous of all is the case of Croesus, where the ambiguity is glaring: he is assured that if he crosses the river Halys (to attack

effect of the direct speech when he drops the mask and denounces his victim (106.3): on the technique see Rutherford (2012) 205. For designed ambiguity of speech in tragedy see also Bond on Eur. *Heracles* 726.

<sup>17</sup> See also e.g. 9.58.3 with Flower and Marincola ad loc.

<sup>18</sup> Macan (1908) II.541 neatly remarks that this promise is sarcasm from Xerxes but irony from Herodotus. For another example, 3.153.2, where the actual word *φήμη* is used. In 5.72.3 the Athenian priestess’ words might be taken not only as warning him out of the sacred space but as predictive of Cleomenes’ expulsion with his forces from the Acropolis and Athens. Differently, see 9.91 (no irony or delay but instant recognition).

Persia) he will destroy a great empire (1.53.3, 86.1). Croesus' case is complex in a number of ways: first, there is a further consultation which produces the 'mule on the throne' response, also misunderstood; second, the downfall of Croesus also fulfils the much older prophecy given to Gyges foretelling retribution in the fifth generation (1.13.2); third, the king has been warned at length by Solon not to place too much reliance on his prosperity (1.30ff.) (the wise adviser motif: there is also the warning of Sandanis not to attack Persia, 1.71); fourth, Croesus is alarmed by a portent of swarming snakes about which he sends messengers to consult the oracle at Telmessus (the answer comes too late) (78). A further Delphic response related to Croesus' second son, born speechless; it is fulfilled at the time of the sack of Sardis. This is the only case in the *Croesus-logos* where a happy outcome is involved: the son regains his speech and saves his father—but in the context of Croesus' defeat and overthrow by Cyrus.

Thus Herodotus deploys a number of predictive devices in his narrative, all of which generate irony of the kind familiar from drama and indeed epic, when audience and author share an understanding of the situation which one or more of the characters lacks (but the parallel with drama also holds in that the audience may grasp some parts of the truth while still uncertain of others, as in the case of Xerxes' enigmatic dreams in Book VII). The warner, the oracle, the dream, the portent, are functionally equivalent but can be used in combination: the historian uses all of them in the programmatic Croesus-narrative.<sup>19</sup> Any or all of these can be ignored, forgotten, or understood too late.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, it is striking that the moment of realisation, in which the king truly comprehends his own folly, does not in fact relate, as we might expect, to the Delphic prophecy but to the warnings of Solon at a still earlier point (1.86, looking back to 1.30–3).

It would be tedious to catalogue examples of each device in the text, but a survey of the material suggests the following general points.

(a) Harris has acutely observed that dreams, which are much rarer than oracles in Herodotus, are exclusively dreamed by monarchs or tyrants or their kin (Agariste and Polycrates' daughter are the closest to exceptions).<sup>21</sup> Dreams are, he argues, associated with 'a sinister world of lawless power'. It is also relevant that the kings of Persia cannot plausibly be represented as seeking guidance from Delphi (the philhellene Lydian Croesus is a different matter); their supernatural advice must come from another source.

<sup>19</sup> On oracles and dreams see Endnotes 1 and 2; on the warner figure, Endnote 3; on omens/portents, Endnote 4. On all of the above, Harrison (2000).

<sup>20</sup> For epic parallels see e.g. *Il.* 18.8–14 (prophecy belatedly remembered, as in *Od.* 9.507–14), 243–313 (warning rejected), 2.1–40 (deceptive dream), etc.

<sup>21</sup> Harris (2009) 146–7.

(b) The most significant ironies attach to these monarchical figures, firstly Croesus but subsequently the Persian kings. Cyrus receives warnings and an ominous dream (misinterpreted). Cambyses receives warnings and a similar dream, again misinterpreted; the realisation of its true meaning comes just before his fatal self-inflicted injury. In the same scene he recalls an oracle of Buto, previously unmentioned, which he has misunderstood as having a positive sense (3.64; cf. Soph. *Trach.* 1164–73). Artabanus acts as ‘wise adviser’ to Darius during the Scythian expedition (4.83). Xerxes is the most prominent case of all. His progress toward eventual defeat is accompanied by multiple warnings (Artabanus, Demaratus, Artemisia), as also by portents misread or ignored (7.37, 57, 8.65). Above all he is the focus of the most elaborate (and in some ways mysterious) dream sequence, which also involves Artabanus. Exceptionally, a wise adviser here has an impact: although at first angry and resistant to his uncle, the king thinks again and decides to alter his plans; hence the dream appears, not to warn him of disaster but to urge him on. Here, uniquely, the dream involves direct speech (the Homeric influence is evident). Even so, Xerxes at first dismisses the dream and retracts his invasion proposal, so that further dream interventions become necessary. In the end both Xerxes and Artabanus are persuaded of their god-given mission to undertake the conquest of Greece; the expedition proceeds to its disastrous end. The whole elaborate sequence develops the familiar motifs in a highly original way.

(c) Other cases can be briefly dealt with. Enigmatic oracles are given by the oracle of Buto to the Egyptian king Psammetichus (2.152) and to the twelve kings (2.147): both of these turn out well for Psammetichus. The Bacchiads found an oracle unintelligible until they learned of another; both foretold the accession to power of the family of Cypselus (5.92β.3). Arcesilaos of Cyrene is warned by Delphi about both the duration of his family’s reign and the time of his own death (4.163–4). There is evidently a regular association of these riddling oracles with royal accessions and successions (one thinks of the prophecies in *Macbeth*).<sup>22</sup> On the Greek side different preoccupations prevail, chiefly military success or conquest of territory. Examples involve the Spartans (1.66: the oracle on Tegea and Arcadia), the Siphnians (3.57–8), the Paeonians (5.1), and Tisamenos the seer (9.33). It is notable that these are developed more briefly and that when the oracle is misunderstood, the consequences are not so far-reaching. One of the most interesting cases is Cleomenes, who excuses his failure to capture Argos by citing an oracle which (so he claims) misled him (6.76–82). Given his willingness to manipulate oracles, one wonders (with Herodotus, 6.82.1) whether this convenient prediction is a fabrication.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. the dreams of Astyages, and of Polycrates’ daughter.

(d) A key issue is how to react to an oracular warning. Croesus' reaction to the Delphic predictions was naïve: in the one case he assumed it guaranteed victory, in the other (a mule on the throne) he took it to mean 'never'. Others are more conscious that enigmas need interpretation. One approach is to seek expert advice. Astyages consults the Magi on his dreams, and acts on their counsel—twice. Unfortunately, his first effort to dispose of the threat is unsuccessful, and when Cyrus reappears he consults them again: this time they are wrong, and in due course Astyages is overthrown (though not before he impales the Magi concerned) (1.107–8, 120, 128). The Magi also give patently inadequate interpretations of bad omens to Xerxes (it is hard to tell truth to power) (7.19, 37). In general Herodotus does not give us a favourable picture of the Magi. Their final appearance in the History is when they seek to calm the winds, and achieve their aim by sacrifices and spells—'or, of course, it may be that the winds died down of their own accord' (7.191).

Things are managed differently in the Greek world. In particular at Athens we find not kings and priestly caste, but citizens in assembly, where on one famous occasion oracular ambiguity becomes itself the subject of debate. On receiving word of the impending invasion Athens consults Delphi and initially receives an oracle of dark pessimism. Dismayed but not defeated, the Athenians present their request again, carrying suppliant branches, and press for a more favourable response (7.141).<sup>23</sup> When Delphi promises that the wooden wall will provide protection, the Athenians are not presented as helpless or bewildered; they report the oracle to the people and actively engage in discussion of the meaning. 'There were many opinions about the meaning of the prophecy, and especially there were two, in opposition to one another' (7.142).<sup>24</sup> The debate between these two interpretations is described at some length, and the question is referred to again later. This is a positive presentation of the Athenian response: rather than accepting a message of doom, they seek a better one; rather than lapsing into resignation or despair, they discuss the meaning of the oracle in open debate.<sup>25</sup> The episode can be added to the dossier on the 'rationality' of the Greek city.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> For the threat made at the end of their speech, cf. Aesch. *Supp.* 455–67.

<sup>24</sup> That the oracle may be fictitious (so e.g. Fontenrose (1978) 124–8, Bowden (2005) 100–7) does not affect the point at issue.

<sup>25</sup> They are not unique among Greeks in proceeding in this fashion. A comparable debate occurs at 5.79ff., where the Thebans are advised by Delphi to seek help from 'their nearest', and conclude that this must refer to their sister-city Aegina. This episode is however less important to the main narrative line of the History than the case in Book VII; moreover, although the Thebans do attempt to follow the advice as so interpreted,

## II. Ironies of History: Insight from Hindsight

‘Irony, pathos, paradox, and tragedy develop from his tacit dialogue with his audience.’<sup>27</sup>

The departure of the Persian general Datis from the island of Delos in 490 was followed by an earthquake, singled out by Herodotus as the first and last shock ever experienced there up to his time. Here too an oracle is mentioned, but its role seems subordinate to the historian’s own firm hypothesis that the quake was a different form of omen, signalling trouble in store. He declares that the three generations comprising the reigns of Darius, Xerxes and Artaxerxes involved more misfortune for Greece than in the twenty generations that had gone before, ‘in part those brought about by the Persians, in part from her own chief states in conflict over the dominion (*περὶ τῆς ἀρχῆς*)’ (6.98.1–2). Artaxerxes reigned for 40 years, down to 425/4. This passage makes explicit Herodotus’ consciousness of the continuing tale of Greek conflict and identifies two aspects, external and internal warfare. That distinction is also made at a later point, when he declares (à propos of the Athenians acknowledging the needs of the alliance as a whole) that they were right to make concessions, ‘for the evil of internal conflict is worse than war fought in unison by as much as war itself is worse than peace’ (8.3), a passage which also refers forward to the contention over the command of the alliance at a later date. How far does the History anticipate or shed a predictive light on subsequent events, especially the rise of the Athenian empire, the growing conflicts with Sparta and other states (notably Corinth), and the eventual outbreak of the Peloponnesian War of 431 and after?

Recent Herodotean criticism has laid increasing stress on this question, insisting that the historian of the 480s is writing in the 440s or 430s. The latest dateable passages in the History date from the beginning of the Archidamian war (latest of all is 7.137, cf. Thuc. 2.67). Some maintain that Herodotus died soon after 430, others allow a longer interval between the dateable references and the completion of the work or the end of his life.<sup>28</sup>

the support from Aegina proves unhelpful and their efforts to take revenge on the Athenians come to nothing (5.81.1, 89.1).

<sup>26</sup> Murray (1990); also Harrison (2006).

<sup>27</sup> Fornara (1971a) 62.

<sup>28</sup> See Endnote 5. Irwin and Greenwood (2007) 12 n. 24 comment that ‘the text constructs an *inferred* audience of the 420s’ (their emphasis). A bold argument that Herodotus lived long enough and completed his work late enough to be influenced by Thucydides was advanced by Raafflaub (1987); similar but more detailed arguments have more recently been set out by Irwin (e.g. (2013), with citation of her earlier papers). Although these suggestions are stimulating, I remain unpersuaded, and would emphasise the cluster of explicit references to the first few years of the Archidamian War, as opposed to the absence of explicit reference to later events. See also Stadter (1996) 808 n. 66 (= Munson

The uncertainty as to whether the History is actually a finished work complicates the problem. But on any view the author could look back on the events of the Persian wars with the advantages of hindsight.<sup>29</sup>

The explicit anticipations of the future are easily collected. Those which refer to specific events are quite often brief and tangential. Some merely refer to the later successes or misfortunes of the son of a character (Greek or Persian) named in the text (e.g. 3.160, 8.85). More telling is the reference to Themistocles' later unpopularity and flight to Persia in 8.109–10, where his alleged advice to Xerxes is said to be a precaution whereby he attempted to build up credit with the king in case he fell out with the Athenians 'as indeed did occur' (109.5). Similar is the passing comment that the Athenians exploited Pausanias' arrogant behaviour in the years after the war in order to relieve the Peloponnesians of command of the alliance (8.3.2; cf. 5.32). In both cases we are given a glimpse, no more, of subsequent developments, changes of fortune and shifting loyalties. It does seem significant that references of this kind become more frequent in the last few books, as Herodotus draws closer to his own times. We are made more clearly aware that the story continues beyond its conclusion.<sup>30</sup>

Explicit references of this kind, however, offer rather slim pickings. Other passages have been drawn into discussion and yield more fruit in terms of historical irony. In some cases, this is a matter of anachronism: at 6.109 Miltiades urges Callimachus to vote with him, and if so 'our country will be free, and moreover the leading city in Greece.' This was not a plausible claim for Athens as early as 490, but foreshadows her future predominance. Elsewhere the anticipation is evident but enigmatic, as when Agariste when pregnant dreams that she gives birth to a lion, and soon afterwards becomes the mother of Pericles (6.131), who is mentioned only here in the work. A lion may symbolise a bold leader or a deadly menace or both; the verdict on Pericles is ambiguous at best, but it is crucial that is not developed. The historian's reserve here may suggest we should be cautious in other cases.

There is however clearly signalled irony in the episode at 5.90–3, where the Spartans summon a meeting of the Peloponnesian league to propose the

(2013) I.355 n. 66); id. (2012) 2 n. 4 (arguing that the absence of interest in Lesbos suggests a completion date before the Mytilenian revolt of 427).

<sup>29</sup> Many scholars have considered the consequences of this, but it is a recurrent theme in the work of Philip Stadter: see his papers of (1996), (2006), and (2012).

<sup>30</sup> I skirt here topics richly handled by students of closure: see esp. Fowler (1989); Roberts–Dunn–Fowler (1997); Marincola (2005). Note e.g. Fowler (1989) 80 = (2000) 243: 'All works leave things undone as well as done', a comment inevitably true of historical works. There is no 'end of history'. For a case study in Roman historiography see Levene (1992) (on Sallust's *Jugurtha*).

reinstatement of Hippias as ruler of Athens, and the Corinthian Soclees opposes the proposal.<sup>31</sup> That Corinth defends Athenian interests while denouncing tyranny is surely meant to call the audience's mind to the antagonism of Corinth towards the new empire of Athens later in the century; Corinth and Sparta are opposed now but will be united then. In the first Book of Thucydides the Corinthians indeed find it necessary to goad and galvanise a sluggish Sparta into action (1.68–71), whereas in Herodotus the Corinthian, representing allied opinion in general, intends to restrain the Spartan war effort. That historical irony is present in the Herodotean episode is confirmed in the words of the Spartans at 5.91.2 (emphasising the growing power and arrogance of the recently-liberated Athens), and still more by Hippias' grim warning at 93, where he calls the gods to witness that in future Corinth will be the victim of Athenian aggression and when that time comes will long for the restoration of the Peisistratids. It is also implied here that Hippias speaks on the basis of his deep knowledge of prophecies/oracles (cf. 5.90, prophecies of uncertain scope and provenance; 5.96.2; 6.107; 7.6). This is the best single example of irony of this type, in which important historical developments beyond the text are predicted or foreshadowed.

Even here it is notable that Hippias' warning is open-ended; we are not told the exact nature of the prophecies on which he draws, and the possibility that he is exaggerating or fabricating them is not excluded. The anticipation of future trouble remains unspecific. So too at 6.67, where Demaratus of Sparta, dethroned and humiliated by Leotychidas, comments darkly that 'this will be the beginning of great things for Sparta, either for good or evil', a remark that precedes his own withdrawal and flight to Zacynthus and thence to Xerxes' court. His ominous words could anticipate the heroism and death of Leonidas, or more generally the losses suffered by the Spartans in the Persian Wars, or a still more distant and ill-defined future in which Sparta will suffer the consequences of the war. Herodotus prefers to suggest that Spartan affairs have reached a momentous turning-point rather than making explicit precisely what Demaratus has in mind or fate has in store. Another case is the departure of the Athenian fleet to assist the Ionians, described as the 'beginning of evils' for both Greeks and barbarians (5.97.3): the immediate reference is to the misfortunes in the Ionian revolt, but audiences are invited, without being forced, to look ahead further to the invasions of Greece and perhaps beyond. How far they look is left up to them.

<sup>31</sup> Węcowski (1996), Moles (2007), Buxton (2012), etc. Hornblower (2013) 267, cf. 248–9, identifies Hippias' prophecy as 'the best card in the hands of the "irony" school of Herodotean interpreters.'

These examples suggest that we should beware of pressing other possible allusions too hard—which is not the same as saying they should be denied outright. Naturally the historian’s audience would be conscious of the general course of events after the Persian Wars. When Croesus or Aristagoras seek allies on the Greek mainland they look naturally to Athens and Sparta: these are already seen, perhaps with some anachronism, as the obvious leading players in the 540s and the 490s, as they will be in the mid-fifth century and thereafter. It is another matter to seek out more precise parallels, for instance seeing the ‘many sophists’ who congregate on Croesus’ court as analogous to those who were drawn to the cultural capital of imperial Athens, or Peisistratus’ purification of Delos as foreshadowing the later Athenian purification of the island in 426/5 (a parallel which depends on Herodotus having lived that long).<sup>32</sup> Both of these are parallels which *might* occur to some members of the historian’s audience, but they are not signposted by the author in any such way as to alert us to a predictive irony, and it is not clear that much is gained by observing the parallel.

Some passages will yield an ironic resonance if we apply our own hindsight. When Cleomenes encourages the Plataeans to seek the protection of the Athenians (6.108), they do so and subsequently stand with the Athenians at the battle of Plataea. The episode involving Cleomenes is mentioned by Herodotus and a date is provided by Thucydides, who records as part of his account of 427/6 how the garrison of Plataea is forced to surrender to the Thebans and is executed ‘after the semblance of a trial’,<sup>33</sup> all survivors being executed and the women sold into slavery. This happened, Thucydides concludes, in the ninety-third year after they had become the allies of the Athenians—those Athenians who had promised aid but never came through with it (Thuc. 3.68.5; cf. 2.73). There can be little doubt that Thucydides means this to reflect badly on Athens; readers of Herodotus, familiar with the major episode in Thucydides, can hardly avoid thinking of the long-range irony in this context. But we cannot be sure that Herodotus shared our hindsight since we do not know whether he lived to see or hear of the disappointment of Plataean hopes (n. 28). Here at least is one case where authorial intention and reader response need to be clearly distinguished.

<sup>32</sup> Both suggested by Moles (2002) 37–8.

<sup>33</sup> Lewis, *CAH*<sup>2</sup> V.406.

### III. Ironies of Incomprehension

On the one hand Herodotus was originally a citizen of Halicarnassus in Caria, growing up under the control of and familiar with other subjects of the Persian empire; hence it has been said that ‘it was easier for Herodotus than most Greeks to be *philobarbaros*’.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, he is said to have been exiled and surely spent a good deal of his life as a traveller, however sceptical we may be about the extent of his journeying. Both factors extended his awareness of other ways and other perspectives. He is prepared to see the point of foreign customs and sometimes to praise them; he does not automatically assert the truth of Greek views or insist that their practices are preferable. This exploration of opposing or alternative ways of life is dramatized in the text itself, most obviously in the famous scene in which Darius questions Greeks and Indians about their burial practices, cremation versus cannibalism (3.38). Here Darius is interested in the result as a scientist is in the result of an experiment; he does not arbitrate between them. Herodotus similarly explores different societies and their *nomoi*; more specifically he allows different characters in his texts, individuals and peoples, to comment on or criticise the ways of others.

Scenes of this nature are frequent enough to be identified as a type. We may call this cross-cultural irony. The irony is twofold: at the expense of the people or custom being criticised (as when Cyrus deflatingly dismisses the Spartans as men who meet to cheat one another in market-places, 1.153), and at the expense of the critic, whose superior attitude is often ill-informed or unconsidered (as when the Scythians reach a scathing verdict on the slavish nature of the Ionians, 4.142).<sup>35</sup> To describe such scenes as ironic may seem a rather elastic extension of the term, but can, I think, be defended if we think of irony as being essentially a matter of the historian dramatizing the inadequate responses, the deficient understanding of his characters. Just as Croesus fails to grasp the sense of the oracle, or the Spartans to foresee the consequences of the liberation of Athens, so a spokesman for one culture can miss something crucial about another, and here again the historian shares his sharper insight with the audience.

Among the passages illustrating this cross-cultural irony a few are worth highlighting.

<sup>34</sup> Meiggs and Lewis (1988) 72, on no. 32 (the comment arises from the evidence of ethnic mixture and intermarriage in this Halicarnassian inscription).

<sup>35</sup> Often taken to be Herodotus’ own final verdict, but unnecessarily. Herodotus is prepared to praise (some) Ionians, e.g. 5.103, 112f.; 8.90.

(a) A fine instance is the consultation of the Egyptian king Psammis by the Eleans.<sup>36</sup> The Eleans boast of the excellence of their management of the Olympic Games, and ask whether the Egyptians can think of any way of making it fairer. Plainly they already take it for granted that the system is perfect and no improvement possible. The Egyptians surprise them, by declaring that the Eleans can only ensure a fair competition by excluding themselves, since they are sure to favour themselves in any contest (2.160). No refutation is offered and it seems likely that Herodotus at least thought they had a point.

(b) An example that does not involve the Greeks arises from the gifts sent by Cambyses to the king of the Ethiopians, conveyed by the so-called Fish-Eaters (3.19–22). Here we have an Ethiopian perspective on the values of Persia. The king dismisses scarlet robes because dye is a form of cheating; he makes the same comment about perfumes and myrrh (the trickery being here a matter of disguising smell rather than true appearance); he scoffs at the gold chains and bracelets because the Ethiopians have stronger fetters than that; the only thing he does admire is the delicious wine they have sent, but this is balanced by his contempt for bread-eating, which he refers to as eating dung. It is not surprising, according to the long-lived Ethiopians, that people with such a diet should die so much younger, and it can only be the quality of the wine that enables Persians to live as long as they actually do. Here indeed we have a startling and amusing view of aspects of Persian life that the Greeks share; if Cambyses or his representatives are disconcerted, Greek readers should share that reaction at one remove. But the Ethiopian king, noble savage though he may be, cannot be right in his unmixed admiration for wine; the dangers of drink, especially for those unused to it, are dramatized elsewhere in the work in other passages involving unaccustomed contact between cultures (especially the tales of Scylas, 4.76–9, and Cleomenes, 6.84).

(c) Mardonius in his speech encouraging Xerxes in the invasion of Greece has a memorable comment on the way the Greeks conduct their wars (7.9β):

From what I hear, the Greeks are pugnacious enough, and start fights on the spur of the moment without sense or judgement to justify them. When they declare war on each other, they go off together to the smoothest and levellest bit of ground they can find and have their battle on it—with the result that even the victors never get off without heavy losses, and as for the losers—well, they're wiped out. Now

<sup>36</sup> H–W I.14 already noted this passage: ‘even the management of the Olympian games is treated with scarcely veiled irony (160.1)’; but their argument that the critical tone with regard to Greek pretensions or assumptions is particular to Book II seems unfounded.

surely, as they all talk the same language, they ought to be able to find a better way of settling their differences: by negotiation, for instance, or an interchange of views—indeed by anything rather than fighting. Or if it is really impossible to avoid coming to blows, they might at least employ the elements of strategy and look for a strong position to fight from. In any case, the Greeks, with their absurd notions of warfare, never even thought of opposing me when I led my army to Macedonia.

Mardonius' account here and elsewhere in the speech puts a fictitious gloss on his own previous attempt to invade, and clearly he must not be taken as the authorial voice. When the Persians do invade in force, they find the Greeks, especially the Spartans, a greater challenge than they bargained for. At the same time, the criticism directed at the Greeks' perpetual inter-state feuding is not without force, and this is surely an example not only of cross-cultural irony (one people having difficulty understanding another) but of another common Herodotean technique, that of putting 'good words in bad mouths', which will be considered in the next section.

Since the appearance of Hartog's distinguished study, many scholars have considered the ways in which Herodotus manipulates 'self' and 'other', using the ethnographic accounts of different peoples and the narrative of their interaction to illuminate both sides.<sup>37</sup> In general this has resulted in an enriched reading of the historian. In particular it has reminded us of his ability to look beyond Greek values without repudiating them. How may this approach be combined with one that emphasises irony?

One area of special interest is the series of passages of which Mardonius' declaration is one, in which foreign races, mainly Persians, comment disparagingly on Greek ways. An early instance was cited above, Cyrus' dismissal of the Spartans as being beneath his notice (1.133). This is paralleled later by Darius' indignant question 'who are the Athenians?' (5.106): the context demands that he take them more seriously than Cyrus did the Spartans. After that we have the sequence of interviews between Xerxes and Demaratus, in each of which the Spartan exile tries to explain his countrymen's attitudes to a king who is first amused and sceptical, later bewildered (7.101–5, 209–10; cf. 234–7). A variation on this pattern is the puzzlement of the satrap Hydarnes who entertains the two Spartans Sperchias and Bulius who are on their way to Xerxes to offer recompense. Hydarnes does not understand why the two men do not submit to Xerxes and reap the ample rewards that a generous monarch has to offer. But the

<sup>37</sup> Hartog (1988); Pelling (1997); Gruen (2011), esp. 21–39. Munson (2001) is also relevant. Differently, Redfield (1985).

Spartans respond that he does not speak with full knowledge, for he knows what slavery is but has never tasted freedom (7.135). At a later stage, the Persians hear that the Greeks are celebrating the Olympic festival and ask what the prize may be. They are astounded to learn that the competition is for a wreath of olive leaves. Here Tritantaechmes, one of Xerxes' entourage, ventures a comment which combines astonishment, praise and misgiving: 'Mardonius, what manner of men are these you've brought us to fight—men who compete with one another for no reward but honour!' (8.26). This comment is marked by Herodotus as *γενναιοτάτην*, 'most noble', but he notes that Xerxes is angered and calls Tritantaechmes a coward.

The irony in these passages resembles the type analysed in the discussion of oracles: Xerxes, Mardonius and others ignore explanations and discount warnings, foolishly certain of their own invincibility. Either they do not see how formidable their opponents are or they cannot accept it; moreover, their different cultural and political assumptions mean that they do not fully grasp Greek values. Such at least is the implication of these much-admired passages: there are of course many other passages which introduce complications. Persians, we have seen, value freedom too (e.g. 1.126–7)—are we to suppose this an inferior kind of freedom? Spartans can be corrupted, other Greeks can be bribed, a strategy often urged on Xerxes—so how much testing can the Spartan devotion to law or Greek love of honour stand up to? Older readings of Herodotus sometimes neglected these complications and preferred to isolate a single patriotic theme as the dominant subject, even 'message', of his main narrative. Now there is perhaps a tendency to devalue or even set aside the patriotic aspect.

Herodotus does rather less to suggest that the Greeks might have any difficulty understanding the Persians and their way of life; Hartog's mirror seems to be more transparent in one direction. Similarly in Book IV the Persians are baffled by the Scythians (4.126, 131–2, 134) while the Scythians, like the Massagetae in Book I, have no difficulty in detecting the Persians' expansionist motives (4.118, cf. 1.206; also 1.46, 3.21.2). But this does not mean that the Greeks themselves cannot be the object of irony in the context of cultural comparison. The most conspicuous case is the Spartan regent Pausanias, the hero of Plataea.<sup>38</sup> In a series of scenes after the battle he is presented first as the considerate guest-friend (returning a captive Coan woman to her family), then as the champion of Greek honour against barbaric practices (when he rejects the vile proposal of Lampon that he mutilate the body of Mardonius); next he ensures that all the monetary loot is

<sup>38</sup> Fornara (1971a) 62–6, esp. 64 (on the portrait of Pausanias): 'a masterpiece of irony and a harbinger of tragedy'; 65: 'a magnificently ironic and tragic picture'; more recently e.g. Stadter (2006) 246, Pelling (2006a) 114–16.

assembled and due portion given to Apollo; finally he surveys the tent of Xerxes, laughs at the luxuriousness of the royal array, and has the slaves prepare a truly royal banquet. To make his point he also orders his own helots to lay out a typical Spartan dinner. The moral is spelt out by Pausanias himself, as he shows off the contrasting tables to the other Greek commanders: what fools these Persians are, if they live in this style, to come and try to rob the Greeks of their poverty (9.76, 78–9, 80–1, 82). The historian did not need to spell out the contrast between this admirable rejection of decadent dining and Pausanias' later corruption by foreign ways and foreign wealth, already mentioned earlier in the text (8.3, cf. 5.32). It is significant that Pausanias just before the comparison of meals is said to have been presented with abundant loot—ten of everything, women, horses, talents, camels and so forth (9.81). Given the earlier references, Herodotus can hardly have meant his audience to ignore the future accusations against Pausanias: even if the historian had reservations (as do moderns) about the Spartan's actual medising, it would have needed clearer signalling to make this passage an exoneration of Pausanias. Rather, the cross-cultural comparison is used as a vehicle for historical irony. Pausanias rightly exposes the Persians' misguided ambitions as absurd; but that does not mean that a Greek, even a Spartan, cannot be tempted to aspire to wealth of the kind associated with the invading power.

#### **IV. Ironic Combinations and Complications**

In a typically original essay Alan Griffiths has identified several cases of what he terms 'situational irony', where, as he puts it, 'the author makes no comment, even though the context seems to cry out for an explicit remark on two juxtaposed items.'<sup>39</sup> His first example is the way in which Demaratus, whose record in coping with problems of legitimacy and succession is hardly stellar, is shown advising Xerxes on how best to ensure his own succession to the Persian throne against a rival claim (7.3).<sup>40</sup> Griffiths must be right in arguing that juxtapositions like this one are meant to startle. Such incongruity is a very frequent feature of Herodotus' text, and scholarly discussion of key cases goes far to show the changing tendencies in modern criticism of this author. Older work tended to see Herodotus as a naively

<sup>39</sup> Griffiths (2001) 172–3.

<sup>40</sup> The others are 8.104 (Hermodimus, who previously forced his arch-enemy the slave-dealer to castrate his children and submit to their castrating him, is appointed escort for Xerxes' royal children ('some paidagogos!')), and 5.21 (having arranged the murder of Persians for over-familiarity with Macedonian women, Alexander marries his daughter to a Persian noble).

credulous compiler, or at best in thrall to his sources, so that contradictions or anomalies could be explained by differently biased informants.<sup>41</sup> Frequently this view was associated with a thesis that the work evolved in conception and combined material composed at widely varying dates which had not been fully integrated (and/or Herodotus might have died leaving the world unrevised). Modern scholarship often prefers to see subtlety where older writers detected confusion. Differences of source need not be denied, but Herodotus is in control of his material.<sup>42</sup> The advantage of this approach is that it enables us to consider the historian as an artist and a thinker, shaping and arranging his material in thoughtful ways. The drawback is that it may encourage accounts of Herodotean ingenuity and subtlety which, though not strictly refutable, go beyond anything that is plausible given what we may guess of the conditions under which he wrote.<sup>43</sup>

The case for pointed or ironic combination of conflicting elements is strong when passages are adjacent or close together in the text: whatever the complexities of composition, it is then harder to suppose that Herodotus was unconscious of the effect. A case in point is 7.56, where Xerxes passes into Europe at the head of his magnificent array. An anonymous local who witnesses the crossing of the Hellespont hails the king as Zeus, and asks (directly? rhetorically? sycophantically?) ‘Why have you assumed the form of a Persian in order to destroy Greece, and brought with you all of mankind? You could have done so without all that.’ The sheer magnificence of the Persian host leads the onlooker to acclaim the king of Persia as king of the gods (cf. Gorgias, 82 B 5a D–K). The next chapter (57) describes two portents which Xerxes ignores, ‘though the meaning was plain’: both clearly prefigure Persian humiliation, and of one Herodotus gives an interpretation: ‘he would lead his expedition against Greece in pride and splendour, but would return running for his life.’ The second chapter clearly deflates Xerxes’ pretensions and exposes (not for the first time) his human ignorance: the historian and the audience know better. (We may indeed wonder if the seemingly wide-eyed observer is ‘really’ as reverential as he seems: the comment could be hyperbolic flattery.)<sup>44</sup>

<sup>41</sup> E.g. de Ste. Croix (2004) 421 and 427, on Herodotus’ treatment of Cleomenes (these remarks come in an essay written in the 1970s).

<sup>42</sup> E.g. Moles (2002) 48: ‘the genuinely negative elements [in the portrayal of Themistocles] ..., though source-derived, are not source-driven.’

<sup>43</sup> Lewis (1984) 597; more recently note Griffiths (2009) 158: ‘This text was surely the result of many years of piecemeal accretion and creative bricolage, and however powerful the controlling intelligence there was bound to be some residual mess.’

<sup>44</sup> More broadly on the presentation of Xerxes see Baragwanath (2008) ch. 8; Bowie (2007) 8–11.

Characters in Herodotus often make surprising speeches: sometimes they seem to speak out of character, whether positively (a good speech from a dubious source) or negatively (bad counsel or dubious ideas from a character who seemed admirable). The first pattern is well exemplified by Leotychidas' speech advising the Athenians to respect the sanction of oaths (6.86), using the paradigm of Glaucus and the oracle. The morality is impeccable but it comes from an unexpected speaker, and one who (we have already been told) is eventually convicted of bribery and banished from Sparta (6.72).<sup>45</sup> The reverse pattern (bad words in a good mouth) is exemplified in Darius' speech to the rest of the conspirators in Book III (72), in which he offers a generalised argument in favour of trickery and lying. Thus far the narrative has presented Darius as a bold, intelligent and energetic noble; this speech strikes a quite different note. The sophistic ingenuity comes strangely from a Persian speaker when we have been told of their devotion to truth-telling (modern commentators cite Darius' solemn condemnations of 'the Lie' in the Bisitun inscription).

Other anomalies or incongruities are spread more widely across the text. Here the question whether they can or should be reconciled or made to fit with one another is harder to determine. Problems have been found with the presentation of Croesus, Cyrus, Cleomenes, Themistocles, Xerxes himself, and many others. A remarkable shifting of views has taken place with regard to Herodotus' account of Alexander of Macedon. In the past it was routinely assumed that Herodotus was completely taken in by the Macedonian propaganda presenting their king as a secret resistance figure, engineering the assassination of Persian nobles who overstepped the mark with the women of his household, and giving well-meant counsel, warnings and secret encouragement to the Athenians in their defiance of Persia. (He also appeared to endorse the Macedonian claim to Greek ethnicity, a claim that still promotes vigorous controversy.)<sup>46</sup> This approach involved assuming that Herodotus did not make the deductions which we make from his own text, that Alexander in fact came to terms with Persia, that the tale of assassination of Persians was a self-serving fabrication, and that Macedonia offered free passage both ways for Xerxes' invasion force. More recent studies have taken a completely different direction, arguing that Herodotus sees through Alexander's self-exonerating claims and is fully aware of Macedonian medism. According to Badian, he fails to make this explicit because doing so would discredit contemporary Athenian relations with Macedon; the 'subtle

<sup>45</sup> Hornblower also comments on the fact that the Athenians have sworn no oath, so the speech is high-minded yet devious ((2011) 157–9)

<sup>46</sup> So e.g. H–W on 5.17–22 (II.7), 9.44.1 (II.307).

silences' of Herodotus are politically motivated.<sup>47</sup> Others see this silence as a characteristic device to involve the reader in the process of assessing evidence and reaching a conclusion: Herodotus gives readers what they need but leaves them to make the deductions (though there is a fairly clear lead in the presentation of Alexander as Mardonius' messenger-boy in Book VIII, and a negative judgement is passed on him by the Spartan ambassadors, 8.142.5).<sup>48</sup>

The case of Demaratus deserves some more detailed comment.<sup>49</sup> Although this Spartan king in general gets a good press from the historian, there are some distinctly odd features. The following list highlights the main references.

(a) 5.75: he opposes his fellow king Cleomenes in the attempt to establish Isagoras in Athens.

(b) 6.51, 61: he works against Cleomenes at Sparta, spreading malicious stories about him 'out of envy and spite', at a time when Cleomenes is 'working for the common good of Greece'. As a consequence Cleomenes in collaboration with Leotychidas brings about Demaratus' deposition.

(c) 6.67–70. Resentful of the humiliation of his reduced status, he flees to the court of Darius and receives high honours there.

(d) 7.3.1–3: he advises Xerxes on useful arguments to secure the succession (his alleged importance here is promptly deflated by the historian's follow-up comment, 7.3.4).<sup>50</sup>

(e) 7.101–5: he warns Xerxes of the prospect of Greek and especially Spartan resistance ('they too have a master, and that master is Law', 104); but Xerxes laughs at his advice.

(f) 7.209: second exchange between Xerxes and Demaratus: Demaratus predicts the resistance of the Spartans at Thermopylae, but Xerxes still refuses to believe him.

(g) 7.234–5: third exchange between Xerxes and Demaratus: strategic advice about Cythera; Achaemenes accuses Demaratus of disloyalty and seeking to sabotage the invasion, but Xerxes firmly defends him (236–7). These three exchanges, (e) to (g), clearly follow the same pattern and indeed involve cross-references; they were evidently planned as a sequence.

(h) 7.239 (explicitly signalled as 'something I neglected to mention earlier'): an account of how Demaratus earlier sent a warning message to Sparta, and how it was discovered by Gorgo (the daughter of Cleomenes, his former arch-enemy, though that point is not made).

<sup>47</sup> Badian (1994), summarised by Hornblower (2002) 382f.

<sup>48</sup> Fearn (2007); Baragwanath (2008); Hornblower (2013) 109, 116.

<sup>49</sup> See esp. Boedeker (1987); more tangentially relevant is Burkert (1965).

<sup>50</sup> Cf. also Griffiths (2001), already cited.

(i) 8.65: Demaratus is walking together with Dicaeus the Athenian in deserted Attica, on the plain of Thria; they see a mysterious cloud of dust and overhear the Iacchus song, and interpret both as having supernatural origin, signifying the gods' preparations to destroy Xerxes' fleet. Here Demaratus warns Dicaeus not to tell the King what they have witnessed, or he is sure to lose his life.

There are no other references to Demaratus in the rest of the History; only from later sources do we learn more about him and his family living prosperously in land granted him by the Persians in the Troad (cf. 6.70, with Xen. *Anab.* 2.1.3; *Hell.* 3.1.6).

It seems obvious that the references fall into two categories: Demaratus at Sparta (where he is above all the rival and eventually the victim of Cleomenes), and Demaratus at the court of Xerxes. He is on the whole positively presented in both, but in (b) above his malice towards Cleomenes, and the unusual statement of the latter's excellent work for the common good, seem anomalous, and were traditionally taken to imply a different source, one hostile to Demaratus.<sup>51</sup>

Most remarkable of all is item (h) above,<sup>52</sup> in which Demaratus sends a warning message to Sparta about the prospective invasion: the ingenious mechanism of communication is one of a typical Herodotean series of cunning devices to send a secret message (cf. 1.123; 5.35; 8.128). Despite Herodotus' initial half-apology, its placement here can hardly be casual or merely the result of earlier forgetfulness; it picks up on the suspicions of Achaemenes that Demaratus is still on the side of his own people and hoping to do them a good turn, and conflicts with the positive assessment of Xerxes (7.237). In 7.239, however, his motives are ambiguous: Herodotus doubts that he was well-disposed to the Lacedaemonians, and thinks it plausible that he sent this message out of *Schadenfreude*, taking pleasure in his enemies' misfortunes (239.2). The story implies a craftier and perhaps a more malicious Demaratus than we have seen in the scenes with Xerxes, where he plays the part of the honest and dignified spokesman for Greek values (this too is incongruous, as he praises the community which has exiled him).

<sup>51</sup> Older approaches are exemplified and abundantly documented by Tigerstedt (1965) 93–9 with nn. 737–75a (e.g. Jacoby (1913) 412ff.). The oddity of 6.61 might be reduced if we take Herodotus to be referring to the consequences of Cleomenes' actions rather than implying anything about his personal motives (a point made by Hornblower and Pelling (2017) 17, 150, 168).

<sup>52</sup> So peculiar that its status has been doubted: Krueger deleted it, as did Macan, with interesting arguments. For an extended discussion see Corcella (1985). Wilson in his 2015 OCT retains it, following Stein in regarding the passage as a Herodotean afterthought (Wilson (2015a) I.vii–viii on the general point; Wilson (2015b) 201 has an index entry for 'authorial revision/variants', though this passage receives no specific discussion).

The final item in the list is also peculiar. Demaratus has previously taken pains to advise and warn the King what to expect (cf. Croesus to Cyrus). The war is reaching a crisis; a major naval conflict is imminent. But when he and Dicaeus witness the mysterious sights and sounds that seem to them to imply divine support for the Greeks, he urgently advises his companion to keep this secret. The inevitable Persian defeat ensues, and Demaratus fades out of the Herodotean record.

A story can be constructed to connect these varied episodes in a more or less coherent sequence. Demaratus' enmity to Cleomenes is of a piece with his malice towards Sparta in general after his exile; yet when engaging with an absolute monarch he feels the need to praise and exalt his own homeland, perhaps even idealising and longing for it in his exile; that nostalgia prompts him to send a message of warning to his Spartan compatriots as he becomes aware of the impending invasion, but he has no further opportunity and perhaps little inclination to assist the Greeks; finally, conscious of Xerxes' regular scepticism and the suspicion with which he is regularly viewed by the rest of the Persian high command, he is reluctant to bring bad news and risk losing his master's favour. All of this is credible enough, but it should be recognised that it involves a good deal of reading between the lines. Moreover, some rogue elements remain hard to explain—the unique stress on Cleomenes' work for the common good of Greece at the very time when Demaratus is trying to bring him into disrepute, and Herodotus' stress on the uncertainty of Demaratus' motives in sending the secret message (where we may well feel that he opts for the less likely motivation). In short, although Herodotus may well be presenting a subtler and more coherent picture of Demaratus than is at first apparent, the malign effect of a hostile source is not entirely to be discounted.

To sum up this section, the Herodotean text is full of apparent inconsistencies and inconcinnities. In some passages it is overwhelmingly likely that the narrator was consciously combining the discrepant accounts or versions, in order to provoke and intrigue the reader, who is left to do some of the work in interpreting the juxtapositions. These plain cases encourage us to see the same kind of thing in more widely-separated or more complex examples. The fall-back position, that the narrator inadvertently or incompetently combined the inconsistent elements, is always available; but the principle of charity suggests that the reader should look for a more satisfying explanation.

## V. Posing Puzzles

One of the earliest speeches in the History sets its addressee a challenge of interpretation (which he in fact fails). Bias or Pittacus (Herodotus knows both versions) came to Sardis and said to Croesus: ‘O king, the islanders are amassing 10,000 horses so as to make war on you and attack Sardis.’ (1.27). Croesus greets the news with incredulous delight, but his informant then explains his meaning: for the islanders to adopt this strategy would be as foolish as it would be for Croesus to attack the islanders at sea, where they are experienced and the Lydians are not. Croesus takes pleasure in this advice and accepts the warning. The surface meaning of the first speech is quite different from the message the speaker actually means to communicate: it serves as a means by which the sage can safely deliver the advice, wrapped up in an amusing package.<sup>53</sup> It is not only sages, or indeed only human beings, who can behave in this way.<sup>54</sup> When the people of Cyme ask the oracle at Branchidae how to deal with the suppliant Pactyes, they are told to surrender him to the Persians. Aristodicus is suspicious of the reply, and induces the oracle to explain itself further: it turns out that this command has been given so that those impious enough even to contemplate giving up a suppliant can be swiftly punished for such an offence (1.126). In both these cases an apparently plain statement turns out to be no such thing. This gap between what is said and what is meant is a form of irony which many have seen as exemplified in Herodotus’ own practice. The problem is that the passages cited in support of this do not provide a follow-up or clarification such as Bias and Branchidae provide in these examples.

Preeminent in these discussions is the defence of the Alcmaeonids on the charge of aiding the Persians at the time of Marathon by signalling to them that Athens was undefended and open to naval attack (6.115, anticipating 121–31). Herodotus begins the more extended passage with the comment that ‘The tale of the Alcmaeonidae treacherously signalling to the Persians with a shield is, to me, quite extraordinary, and I cannot accept it’ (121.1). He goes on to argue that the family in question were vicious haters of tyrants and that they were the ones responsible for the removal of the Peisistratids ‘provided that what I said further back [5.62–3] is true, that it was the Alcmaeonidae who bribed the Delphic priestess to keep on telling the Spartans that they must set Athens free.’ That liberation is achieved by corrupting an oracle is

<sup>53</sup> In later theory this would be called a ‘figured’ speech: other cases include Ajax’s ‘deception’ speech (Soph. *Aj.* 646–92) and Dido’s in Virg. *Aen.* 4.478–98. See Demetr. *Eloc.* 287–95, with Ahl (1984).

<sup>54</sup> See also 2.28.1 where Herodotus remarks that his scribe informant seemed to him to be teasing/having a joke (*παίζειν*) in his tale of bottomless springs as the source of the Nile.

remarkable—Cleomenes’ horrific death was thought by ‘most people’ to be explained by similar bribery of the Delphic priestess (6.75)—but conceivably this might be a case where the end justifies the means (whereas Cleomenes’ action is represented in the text as wholly self-interested, 6.66). But the further digression on the distinction of the Alcmaeonid family in earlier times is still more peculiar, and gives no evidence whatsoever of the family’s hostility to tyrants or monarchs:<sup>55</sup> first a story of how Alcmaeon’s wealth derived from seizing a golden opportunity offered him by Croesus (6.125, a richly comic episode); then a longer account of how Megacles won the hand of Agariste, daughter of the tyrant Cleisthenes of Sicyon (but did so by default, Cleisthenes’ first choice having danced away his marriage, 126–30); and finally the tailpiece on the offspring of the marriage: Cleisthenes the Athenian reformer, and two generations later the lion-like Pericles (131).

It is widely agreed that Herodotus cannot mean this account of the family to be taken at face value.<sup>56</sup> We should, however, distinguish the defence and the family history. Herodotus can consistently maintain that the Alcmaeonids were innocent of the accusations relating to Marathon while still being perfectly willing to show that their history is neither morally impeccable nor uniformly dignified. He can also distinguish the Alcmaeonids past (Alcmaeon, Megacles), present (unnamed) and future (Pericles, who is mentioned but receives no comment for good or ill). Nevertheless, even the defence is a quirky one (treachery being refuted by a record of bribery),<sup>57</sup> and the narrative of Alcmaeonid history is not encomiastic—if anything, it cuts the participants down to size. Yet the tone is not simply that of burlesque: at the end the forward reference to Pericles, with the symbolic dream of the lion-cub, certainly indicates that the unborn statesman will be a force to be reckoned with, and this verdict may extend to the family as a whole: Xanthippus, son of Aripbron, mentioned here as the father of Pericles, will be prominent in the main narrative shortly as the nemesis of Miltiades (6.136), and figures as commander of the Athenian forces in Ionia after Mycale, in the closing pages of the work. Herodotus’ motives in this passage remain obscure.

<sup>55</sup> I set aside the fact that the Alcmaeonids were not in fact in exile throughout the reign of the Peisistratids (as Herodotus claims, 5.62, a claim that epigraphy refutes, Meiggs–Lewis 6). If Herodotus did not know this it cannot play a part in his authorial strategy; any irony found in this additional twist is in the eye of the reader.

<sup>56</sup> Strasburger (1955); Thomas (1989) 264–72; Moles (2002); Baragwanath (2008) 27–32; and many others. See now Hornblower and Pelling (2017) 266–7, and their notes on particular passages.

<sup>57</sup> Perhaps we should think of playful or paradoxical encomia such as Gorgias on Helen (explicitly a *paignion*) or Isocrates on Busiris; cf. Pl. *Symp.*, esp. Alcibiades on Socrates, *Symp.* 215a4–222b7.

Another passage crucial for Herodotus' whole work and especially for his position regarding Athens is 7.139, the chapter in which, while admitting that this view will be unpopular, he insists that the Athenians were the saviours of Greece in the war against Xerxes: their contribution, and above all their fleet, was decisive in saving the day. I am not aware of any treatment thus far that has ventured to read this passage ironically, and it would, I feel sure, resist such a reading. In contrast with the sequence in the Alcmaeonid defence (initial statement; supporting argument; family background providing colourful, digressive and somewhat ambiguous additional support), here there are no humorous touches or personal anecdotes to subvert the narrator's firm assertion. The detail with which the historian works out the hypothetical consequences if Athens had *not* stood firm goes beyond any other passage in which he essays counterfactual history.<sup>58</sup> The density of references to Hellas and the Hellenes in the chapter is remarkable (six cases in the last three sections, including τὸ Ἑλληνικὸν πᾶν in §5). The description of the Athenians as 'saviours' (σωτῆρας, 5) is the only place in the History where human beings are given that title.<sup>59</sup> Thematically the chapter looks forward to a series of important scenes in which the question of Athens' loyalties is brought to the fore (esp. 8.3, 6iff., 136.2–3, 142ff.; 9.6–7, 27.6–28.1): in those passages it is made clear that Athenian perseverance was not a foregone conclusion, but in the end they did indeed hold to the alliance. The addition of the religious factor towards the end adds a further level of significance: it was the Athenians above all, 'after the gods' who drove back the king's invasion (7.139.5). The chapter may not be the kind of encomium the Athenians would have welcomed,<sup>60</sup> but its realistic consideration of alternatives makes it a more down-to-earth, less starry-eyed account—and perhaps for that reason less amenable to an ironic reading. We may, however, distinguish two senses of irony here. While this passage does not subvert its own specific claims, it does lay itself open to a reading in terms of historical irony: this is how the Athenians behaved *then*, but consider how things turned out later.<sup>61</sup> The acknowledgement that his praise of Athens will be unpopular (§1) 'flags' this contrast between Athenian self-sacrifice in the past and self-aggrandisement at a later date. The passage is then ironic in one sense but not in another.

<sup>58</sup> Pelling (2013) examines ancient attempts at counterfactual history, and discusses this passage at 13–16. For other discussions see Kleinknecht (1940); Solmsen (1974); Demand (1987) (on the rhetorical technique of the passage).

<sup>59</sup> Otherwise Poseidon at 7.192.2, a river-god at 8.138.1; σῶτειρα of Leto, 2.156.5.

<sup>60</sup> As Pelling (2013) 13–16 remarks. Contrast the treatment of Athenian heroic dedication in Lys. II (see Todd (2007) 155, 230, 246).

<sup>61</sup> Again, see further Strasburger (1955); more recently e.g. Baragwanath (2013).

## VI. Irony and the Herodotean Project

In the earlier sections of this paper we were chiefly considering cases in which irony is localised and specific: the reader either enjoys a greater knowledge than the victim or object of irony, or in some other way discerns a pattern or significance which extends beyond the episode in question. In the last section we began to address the problems posed by the question of Herodotus' own attitude to his material, whether in the narrative or ethnographic sections. Is that attitude, or the resulting treatment, suitably described as ironic? In its most extreme form this can result in speaking of the entire History as an ironic text. Such terminology is widely used.<sup>62</sup> Peter Green in a recent review praises a modern study as possessing 'a dry, ironic wit that matches that of her author'.<sup>63</sup> Lateiner quotes with evident approval the comment of Bury, that 'Gibbon might have taken lessons in the art of irony from Herodotus'.<sup>64</sup> According to a monograph by Stewart Flory, 'Herodotus' view of his subject matter is supremely ironic, and his intent in writing is to make his readers share that view';<sup>65</sup> and among many further comments using the term he goes so far as to say: 'Herodotus implicitly admits, often in an ironic and playful fashion, the impossibility of bridging [the] gap between truth and fiction'.<sup>66</sup>

What exactly is meant here? The associations of irony seem hard to control—humour, cynicism, scepticism, wry wit, mockery, avoidance of full commitment, perhaps even leg-pulling. Irony has been described as a distancing device,<sup>67</sup> and there are many of these in Herodotus (especially the attribution of facts or judgements to named or unnamed sources), but it does not follow that distancing devices are intrinsically ironic. It is hard to resist the suspicion that 'irony' is sometimes used as a catch-all term, one which avoids necessary distinctions. At least it is necessary to differentiate between different sections of the text. For instance, one can accept that the historian is taking a detached and sceptical, partly rationalising, attitude to the mythical

<sup>62</sup> Dewald (1984), reviewing Evans (1982), comments: he 'underplays the presence of Herodotean irony' (re 2.55, Evans 43–4). Cf. Dewald and Marincola (2006) 3: 'an ironic or dramatic detachment', in a context evidently referring to what I call historical irony.

<sup>63</sup> Green (2012), reviewing Roberts (2011).

<sup>64</sup> Lateiner (1989) 33, citing Bury (1908) 47. The comment arises from 8.41.2, the reference to the Athenian sacred snake on the Acropolis. Contrast the opposing views of Shuckburgh ('Herodotos evidently doubts the existence of the serpent') and Bowie ('ὤσ indicates that the Athenians believed in the snake, not that Herodotus did not'), in their notes ad loc.

<sup>65</sup> Flory (1987) 20. Dewald (1990) provides a thoughtful review.

<sup>66</sup> Flory (1987) 54.

<sup>67</sup> Colebrook (2004) 8.

stories of abduction with which the *History* opens; a similar tone pervades the account of Helen's sojourn in Egypt. In the first case the author is explicit that there is a difference in degree of knowledge in the more recent history of the Lydian king Croesus to which he next turns (1.5). Though his consciousness of the distance between myth and history may be intermittent, his statement of the distinction (3.122) should not be underplayed.<sup>68</sup> It follows that there may be a correlation between deficiencies in evidence and whimsicality in treatment. Distance in time is paralleled by distance in space: the author seems to handle far-off regions with a lighter touch and without committing himself fully to the truth of what he relates.

A case could be made for regarding Herodotus as an ironist in the sense defined by Hayden White in relation to Enlightenment historiography. According to White, irony in a historical work involves 'an implicit negation of what is explicitly affirmed'; or, again, 'The aim of the Ironic statement is to affirm tacitly the negative of what is on the literal level affirmed positively, or the reverse.'<sup>69</sup> One does not have to accept any or all of White's highly schematic view of the history and tropes of historiography to see that this kind of assumption is present in much criticism of Herodotus. It may not be wholly anachronistic: Herodotus is clearly aware of contemporary sophistic discussions and rhetorical styles of debate (as shown above all by the three-cornered Constitution debate); his manner of writing may at times be indebted to sophistic paradoxes such as Gorgias' *Helen* and *On what is not*.<sup>70</sup> One can also point to internal features of the text. In numerous places and on a wide range of subjects he expresses doubts, disbelief, astonishment; he selects from a wider range of material and omits much that he claims to know; but he also admits ignorance or imprecision or uncertainties of detail; he leaves questions undecided and treats some as off-limits (mainly religious myths or doctrines) or impossible to settle; he will often express reservations with 'as it seems to me', 'if we can believe it', and similar qualifying phrases. All of this is familiar enough: from one point of view it is part of the case for Herodotus as the father of history, the man who takes a critical approach to his material.<sup>71</sup> Yet it would be hard to deny that another view is possible—that these persistent references to the uncertainties (etc.) tend to sow doubts in the reader's mind—doubts strengthened by three factors in particular: the frequent introduction of variant versions; the often comic or mischievous

<sup>68</sup> See e.g. Feeney (2007) ch. 3, esp. 72–6, with older references; Baragwanath and de Bakker (2012), esp. 19–29.

<sup>69</sup> White (1973) 47, 50.

<sup>70</sup> I am conscious of a debt here to Ubsdell (1982), a ground-breaking thesis which regrettably has never been published. It has also been used by e.g. Baragwanath (2008).

<sup>71</sup> E.g. Murray (1993) 22–5; for a cooler view see de Ste. Croix (2004) 421–2.

nature of so much of his material, so many of his comments; and the repeated admission by the writer that he is recording what is said, and does not vouch for its reality or even necessarily believe it himself (2.123.1, 4.195.2, 7.152.3; cf. 3.9.2).<sup>72</sup> It is often far from clear where the report ends and where the historian's own narrative expansion begins. An extreme view might see the whole of the text as a mosaic of materials for which the historian disclaims responsibility. The author would become a reporter, a mediator of tales told by others, none of them confirmed or guaranteed as true by the author himself.<sup>73</sup>

That position, as already stated, would be extreme. We have emphasised that Herodotus sometimes distinguishes between mythical stories which can neither be confirmed nor refuted and events which belong to a historical period. Similarly, he is conscious that autopsy has evidential value that goes beyond hearsay. Again, in many cases he states firmly that he prefers one version to another, sometimes giving his reasons.<sup>74</sup> Rival authority figures are attacked in polemical passages or dismissed as laughable (Endnote 6). He criticises versions for their implausibility and can explain how distortions may have come about. He commonly identifies his sources and more rarely names individual informants. It is hardly accidental that source-references fade out in the last two books, which come closest to his own time and cover events predominantly on Greek soil: it was in this part of the work that he had most confidence in his material.<sup>75</sup> Finally, there are passages in which he emphatically states and argues the truth of the historical position he accepts—as, for instance, in making the claim that the Athenians were the saviours of Greece in the Persian war. He is by no means a self-effacing author: he is prepared to state his opinions and beliefs.<sup>76</sup> To cite a few instances almost at random: he rejects the tale of Heracles being in danger of being sacrificed by the Egyptians (2.45), the story of Rhodopis accumulating

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Asheri, *CH* 20: (on quotations): 'In other cases ... [they] insinuate doubts or reservations concerning accounts for which the enquirer does not wish to assume responsibility.'

<sup>73</sup> We may contrast the manner of Thucydides, who does not display his doubts or suspend judgement in the Herodotean fashion, but normally adopts a consistent tone of authority and confidence in his narrative. Causes and consequences are set out without qualifying phrases or reservations. When he fails to find out what he wants we sense his frustration (5.68) When he hesitates, he leaves us in no doubt where his doubts lie (esp. 8.87). See further Hornblower (2011) 82 n. 57, citing 5.68 and 8.87, and also 1.138.4; 4.122.6; 6.60.2; 7.44.1, 87.4 (~ 86.5).

<sup>74</sup> Catalogue by Lateiner (1989) 84–90.

<sup>75</sup> Jacoby (1913) 419–67; Shrimpton (1997) 229–65, esp. the list at 249–65; see also Hornblower (2002).

<sup>76</sup> Dewald (1987), (2002).

enough money to build a pyramid (2.134), and the account of Xerxes' emergency measures during a sea voyage home (8.118–20). He emphatically claims that it was Ephialtes, not another, who informed the Persians of the mountain pass which outflanked the Spartans at Thermopylae (7.213–14). As for his opinions, he can pronounce brief assessments of individuals (e.g. Aristagoras, 5.124, Aristides, 8.79); or on peoples, as when he declares that if the Thracians could be united they would be invincible, but that this will never happen (5.3). He remarks that the newfound dynamism of Athens after the expulsion of the tyrants shows that *ἰσσηγορία* is something to be taken seriously (5.78); that civil strife is worse than war to the same degree that war is worse than peace (8.3); that Hellas suffered more evils during the reigns of Darius, Xerxes and Artaxerxes than in twenty generations before these three (6.98, already cited). (This is stated as fact: that these impending misfortunes explain the phenomenon of an unprecedented earthquake is only presented as supposition.)

It is of course possible to treat all such argumentation, all his claims and opinions, as presented ironically, within 'scare-quotes' as it were. On that view Herodotus is not merely teasing or winking at his reader in particular passages but throughout; he is creating an enormous pretence or artifice—not a History but a pseudo-History.<sup>77</sup> But the pan-ironic reading of Herodotus ignores obvious differences between different parts of the text and renders any effort at interpretation virtually futile. 'By becoming absolute irony destroys itself.'<sup>78</sup>

A related modern conception is Romantic Irony, long associated with nineteenth century critics, including the brothers Schlegel, and refined into postmodern irony by theorists such as Richard Rorty and in classical studies by Don Fowler.<sup>79</sup> Romantic irony involves constant awareness on author's and reader's part that the text is a text, that the self-aware artist is a constant presence in and behind the work, that indeed the work is fictive. Perhaps more relevantly to Herodotus, the artist according to this theory combines seriousness and play, detachment and affirmation.<sup>80</sup> 'Irony', to quote Fowler, 'can be viewed as a way of rendering commitment necessarily incomplete and unstable.' That formulation is suggestive, but Fowler's chief concern in this essay is with poetry (no historian is cited), and this means that he does

<sup>77</sup> So essentially Fehling (1989) esp. 175–215. Counter-arguments have been presented by many scholars: see esp. Pritchett 1993, Fowler (1996) 80–6 = Munson (2013) I.72–81. Those who are more sympathetic to Fehling's position on specific problems seem not to have succeeded in constructing a more persuasive overall model.

<sup>78</sup> Tigerstedt (1977) 96.

<sup>79</sup> Details and bibliography in Fowler (2000) 8–33; for Rorty see 5, 7, 31.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. e.g. Seery quoted by Fowler (2000) 9.

not fully engage with the fact that in some works of literature there is a demonstrable relation to a real history and geography and politics which is the subject matter of those works. We cannot ignore the implications of the Bisitun inscription for Herodotus' account of the accession of Darius. Herodotus' narrative is not pure fantasy—he gathered information from others, assessed it, processed it. Assuming this did not all happen accidentally, we have to believe that Herodotus at some points and in some parts of his work was concerned to get things right. Many may think that an excessively modest claim.

Some subjectivity is inevitable. To this extent irony is in the eye of the reader; yet the reader is not alone, but part of an interpretative community. Discussion of specific cases must continue, and the possibility of progress towards some degree of consensus should not be denied *ab initio*.

I end this section by considering a passage from the account of Darius' campaigns in Scythia which well illustrates many issues considered above (see 4.94–5). The resistance of the Thracian Getae prompts a description of their religious beliefs and particularly their conviction that they are in a sense immortal: 'when any of them perishes he goes to the deity Salmoxis.' In particular there is a marked distinction between the approach in 94 (descriptive and ethnographic, though not without some humour) and that in 95, where Herodotus takes up and comments on an account by Greek inhabitants of the Pontic coastline. In 94 the procedure of the Getae in sacrificing selected members to Salmoxis (described as a *δαίμων*, 94.1) is reported (4.94):

They believe that they never really die, but that every man, when he takes leave of this present life, goes to join Salmoxis, a divine being who is also called by some of them Gebeleizis. Every five years they choose one of their number by lot and send him to Salmoxis as a messenger with instructions to ask him for whatever they may happen to want. To effect the dispatch, some of them with three javelins in their hands arrange themselves in a suitable position, while others take hold of the messenger by his hands and feet, and swing him up into the air in such a way as to make him fall on the upturned points of the javelins. If the man is killed, they take it as a sign that Salmoxis is in a favourable mood; if he escapes, they put it down to his own bad character, tell him what they think of him, and send another messenger instead. They give the man his instructions while he is still alive. This same tribe will during a thunderstorm shoot arrows up into the sky, and utter threats against the lord of the lightning and the thunder, because they recognise no god but their own.

The bizarre spear-ritual is made to seem extraordinary and foreign (though Macan acutely noted that the regularity of the rite (once in five years) and the use of the lot to determine the victim have a Greek flavour). The notion that the dead man is favoured, the survivor disgraced is paradoxical; and the historian's editorial afterthought 'they give him his instructions while he is still alive' (3) has a mischievous look which we can parallel from postscripts or parenthetical comments elsewhere (e.g. 1.97.2 on the friends of Deioces). The 'otherness' of the Getae is re-emphasised by the practice mentioned at the end of the chapter (shooting arrows upwards during thunderstorms), a recurring 'barbarian' feature.

Chapter 95 strikes a quite different note. According to this version, Salmoxis was in fact a trickster-figure, a mortal from among the Getae who had spent some time as a slave to Pythagoras in Samos and acquired some sophistication through contact with Ionic ways (4.95.2). We might expect this experience of civilisation to encourage him to introduce more cultivated habits (cuisine? dress?) among his people, but although he does indeed construct a dining room and entertain the townspeople, his aim is not to introduce his fellow-tribesmen to a more civilised life-style but to convince them that they will enjoy eternal life after death. Not content with giving them lectures on this theme over dinner, he wins their belief by pretending to be dead and reappearing after an interval of years.<sup>81</sup> His efforts to enlighten others make him seem a true disciple of Pythagoras, but his ingenious deception shows the Getae to be naïve foreigners, himself a rogue. What happened to Salmoxis when he reappeared among his people is not explained; the historian goes on at once to express reservations about this whole euhemerising version (4.96.1–2):

For my part I neither put entire faith in this story of Salmoxis and his underground chamber, nor do I wholly disbelieve it. I think, however, that Salmoxis lived long before Pythagoras' time. In any case, whether there was once a man of that name or whether he is a local god belonging to the Getae, that is enough of him (*χαίρῃτω*).<sup>82</sup>

<sup>81</sup> Cf. Soph. *El.* 62–6, Eur. *Helen* 1049–56; also, rather differently, the story of Aristeeas' disappearance and presumed death, 4.14 (there an interval of seven years as opposed to Salmoxis' three).

<sup>82</sup> Tr. de Selincourt–Marincola, slightly modified. For this formula of dismissal cf. 2.117; for the same kind of transition with different phrasing cf. 1.140.3, a verbal shrug of the shoulders; 2.122; *GGL* 650. See also 2.45.3. On the printed page the tone of these comments is often hard to grasp; perhaps in oral delivery the historian would have made his attitude clear with a wink or a laugh, but it is also possible that he might have varied his performance according to the mood or expected attitudes of a particular audience.

The next sentence resumes the narrative of Darius' advance to the river Ister.

As often, Herodotus has his cake and eats it (here we may find the formulations of White and Fowler apt). His comment contradicts the view of his Greek informants (thus Herodotus shows himself able to criticise his sources) and dissociates the god of the Getae from Greek contacts: there is no cross-fertilising cultural or philosophic influence in this case. But the combination of versions makes it hard for the reader simply to revert to the 'ethnographic' perspective and see Salmoxis as just another foreign god; the more ingenious readings of his activities, whether as self-styled philosophic teacher or self-glorifying trickster, are hard to discard once we are aware of them. The writer's deflating assessment also embraces Pythagoras, 'not the feeblest of the sages' (95.2): if Salmoxis did pick up some of Pythagoras' doctrines as well as some soft Ionian ways, it is not clear that Herodotus thought these borrowed robes would be an unmixed benefit.<sup>83</sup>

Clearly it would be naive on our part to suppose that the historian expects us to make a choice between the versions when he himself suspends judgement. But his sequence of argument is subtle and deliberately avoids the obvious. Chapter 94 gives us fairly straight description of the Getae's beliefs and practice; chapter 95 seems to provide a rationalising account which undermines the validity of their beliefs and dethrones their god; but the final tailpiece in chapter 96, while refraining from a final verdict, suggests an approach through chronology which would undermine the rationalising account itself (it is relevant that contemporary criticism of mythological tradition often appealed to arguments from chronology).<sup>84</sup> The sophistication of thought is easily missed behind the simplicity of expression.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>83</sup> Earlier in the Scythian *logos* Herodotus highlights the unfortunate results of acquiring foreign habits (Anacharsis, 4.76; Scyles, 4.78–80).

<sup>84</sup> A point I owe to one of the anonymous referees of this paper. For an example see Hellanicus *FGrHist* 4 F 168a = Plut. *Thes.* 31 (when Theseus was fifty, Helen was still a child, so how could the hero have carried her away as a young man?). See further Thomas (1989) 173–95 (esp. 184–6) on genealogical thinking in the sixth and fifth centuries.

<sup>85</sup> Pl. *Charmides* 156a sqq., 158b evidently draws on Herodotus when he shows Socrates citing Zalmoxis as a sage who dispenses curative drugs (the reference to Zalmoxis in combination with Abaris, cf. 4.36, and the unusual verb ἀθανατίζω, make this certain). See further Diog. 1.84.2; Diog. Laert. *proem.* 1.1. For a further variation on the Zalmoxis story see Mary Renault, *The Praise-singer* (1978) 84–90.

## VII. Irony and Interpretation

In a postmodern age conclusions are seldom conclusive. Here I merely try to draw some threads together and suggest some possible lines of thought for future work.

1. Consideration of oracular irony made clear that this was a well-established story-pattern in Herodotus' repertoire. It has some background in epic and may also owe something to tragedy. Here at least the author is working on well-established audience expectations. The oracular model is related to similar narrative patterns involving dreams, portents, and speeches of warners; in the most important case of all, Xerxes' preparations for the invasion of Greece, the dream and the warner are skilfully combined (with subsequent brief references to portents). There are some features which suggest Greek superiority in interpreting or dealing with these signs: it is notable, for example, that the Magi in Herodotus always get things wrong.

2. The text of Herodotus includes a significant number of references to later events and these seem to cluster more in the later books. There are also a number of places where both narrative and character-speech seem unmistakably to anticipate future events; these also generally occur later in the work. Unquestionable cases are relatively few, though speculation can detect many more. Opinions vary, but I would see such cases as indicating clouds on the future horizon, rather than overshadowing the entire work. The effect of the signalling of future developments at the end of Sophocles' plays (esp. *Philoctetes* and *Oedipus Coloneus*) is comparable.<sup>86</sup>

3. It is at once apparent that the more well-established types of irony, dramatic and oracular, are determinative of the shape of a story: that is, they shape the narrative episode and provide a satisfying conclusion: the prophecy will be fulfilled. These types are contained within the text and are in a sense exemplary or didactic: they illustrate the power and providence of the gods. Historical irony is comparable in that it looks to a future which is not fully foreseen in the present, but that future is outside the text, and since the predictions are generally vague and the author generally sparing in comment, their significance is less clear and any didactic force strictly limited; the reader has to infer significance and reinforce the text with outside knowledge. The remaining types I have considered offer still less guidance to the reader: they may be broadly described as destabilising techniques, since they generally complicate tone and situation and thus make interpretation more difficult.

4. We should ask what is at stake in the detection of these subtleties. Here it is worth recalling the student's question cited in Sir John Myres' preface to

<sup>86</sup> Stinton (1986) discusses these and other cases in tragedy.

his 1953 book: ‘Sir, if Herodotus was such a fool as they say, why do we read him for Greats?’<sup>87</sup> The question has a delightful aptness in relation to our subject, since it could be read as the genuine puzzlement of a struggling student or the mischievous try-on of a smarter student seeking to discompose the professor. Whatever the long-dead student intended, in those days there were many who were content to regard Herodotus as a fool. It is safe to say that there is no risk of returning to those days. We are far more likely to see subtlety and sophistication in Herodotus than to judge him naïve or over-credulous.<sup>88</sup>

5. Some ironic effects are clearly signalled. Others need to be teased out or pondered; and in some places audiences and readers may reasonably be unsure whether the author is being ironic or not. Herodotus seems to give with one hand while taking away with the other. Is he teasing his readers, or challenging them to join in the task of interpretation? In the various types of irony discussed above, we may see a sliding scale, at one end of which the authorial guidance is tangible, while at the other end the reader’s response is crucial.

6. Although an individual scholar cannot dictate to the academic community, some self-consciousness about irony is useful also to the critic. It will be especially useful if scholars articulate clearly what they mean by irony in a given context. There is a danger of conflation with related concepts, such as scepticism or even humour. Certainly there is much humour in Herodotus’ work, but humour is not coextensive with irony. Scholars might also consider whether interjected questions in their own writings (parenthetical ‘irony?’ and the like) are themselves useful if the point is not followed through.<sup>89</sup> A particularly telling example occurs in an essay on the Herodotean Xerxes which cites the declaration by the historian, after enumerating the vast Persian host, that ‘in all these forces there was not a man who, for stature and nobility of bearing, was more worthy than Xerxes to wield so vast a power’ (7.187). On this Deborah Boedeker comments: ‘Even Xerxes can receive heroic (or is it ironic?) praise.’<sup>90</sup> If this is irony, what can be taken straight?

<sup>87</sup> Myres (1953) vi, quoting the enquiry of one of his earliest pupils.

<sup>88</sup> E.g. Baragwanath (2008) 323 remarks that the naïveté formerly ascribed to Herodotus ‘is rather that of his critics’.

<sup>89</sup> E.g. Lateiner (2014) reviewing Baragwanath and de Bakker (2012): ‘part of his (ironic?) determined exposition of Greek dependence on Egyptian supernatural expertise’ (219). The same trope is used twice on the same page by Dewald (1997) 74 (= Munson (2013) I.393). Even Asheri wavers in this way: see *CH* 2 ‘[Herodotus] suggests—unless he is being ironic’ (referring to 2.143).

<sup>90</sup> Boedeker (2002) 105.

Above all, progress may be anticipated if more can be done to establish stylistic markers which can be shown regularly to accompany irony.<sup>91</sup> Results here will of course be contestable, but even hypotheses will be helpful.

7. Discussion of Herodotus is hampered by our uncertainty about the achievement of his predecessors and about his own evolution as a writer and historian. This double obscurity means that it is very hard to establish how far he has a clear conception of his genre. There are theoretical problems with discussing an author's use or exploitation of generic conventions if the writer in question is actually inventing or conceptualising the genre for the first time. This is relevant if we wish to argue that in some places Herodotus is parodying or otherwise undercutting the genre or playing with his audience's expectation. Nevertheless, some features of the *History* suggest that certain conventions are crystallising, whether the author has inherited these from others or is consciously developing them as his own work advances. The structuring of ethnographic descriptions is one example. Elsewhere the author is conscious that an extensive treatment may need some justification (2.35.1; 3.60); he draws attention to his own indulgence in digressions (4.30.1; cf. 7.171.1). Even if his own conception of his work is inchoate or loosely-defined, he does at least position himself in relation to other genres, sometimes disparaging them. Clearest is the superior stance he assumes in relation to Hecataeus' genealogical reconstructions (2.143; End-note 6). Despite the huge debt he owes to epic, his references to Homer are generally critical, distancing himself from the poetic tradition.<sup>92</sup> Possibly the way in which the Tegeans and the Athenians cite examples of their own military distinction from mythology should be seen as parodying a clichéd rhetorical move (9.26–7: note 27.4 where the Athenians themselves question the value of such mythological evidence).

8. Some of the best work on Herodotus' intellectual environment has focused on his affinities with the sophists. His interest in constitutional forms, nature vs culture arguments, unusual natural and physical phenomena, deceptive speeches, and so forth, all find parallels in the disputations of the sophistic movement. These thinkers also turned readily to polemic, criticising their predecessors and each other.<sup>93</sup> Particularly illuminating for Herodotus

<sup>91</sup> Valuable steps in this direction are taken by Brock (2003) e.g. 11–12, but here too the terms under discussion shift in the course of his account: 'slightly sulky ... combative ... scepticism and irony'.

<sup>92</sup> See e.g. Baragwanath and de Bakker (2012) 50f., 294.

<sup>93</sup> Lloyd (e.g. (1979) 61, 64, 96–8; index, s.v. 'competitiveness') has rightly emphasised the combative nature of intellectual activity in this period. This is relevant to Herodotus' snipings at other authorities (and to the general comment in 2.44.5, which seems to echo Hecataeus' preface (*FGrHist* 1 F 1). See further Thomas (2000) ch. 7, esp. 214–21.

is the atmosphere recreated in Plato's *Protagoras*, since Protagoras is a figure who can plausibly be connected with Herodotus on other grounds. The imagined dramatic date of the dialogue must be close to the time when Herodotus was giving his own epideixeis.<sup>94</sup> Protagoras' willingness to let his audience choose between a *muthos* and a *logos*, his partial rationalisation of mythology while leaving an unreduced element, his bravura exposure of a much-admired poet as contradicting himself, all bear comparison with passages in Herodotus. Some light may be shed also by Socrates' speeches in the same dialogue. In particular it is notorious that Socrates defends a kind of hedonism in the latter part of the work, and that this position is left unrefuted. Whether Socrates 'really' accepts what he is arguing or is presenting a suspect position ironically has divided interpreters. Socrates is of course a special case where irony is concerned, but it does look as if the sophists too went in for ironic self-presentation and paradoxical argumentation (Gorgias is the most conspicuous case)—not surprisingly given their fascination with the power of words. This kind of epideictic tour-de-force certainly provides part of the context for Herodotean performance and perhaps for Herodotean irony.

More work is needed on defining and refining our terms of reference, but I hope that this paper has gone some way to show where irony may reasonably be discerned in the work of Herodotus and what is at stake in that process of detection.

*Christ Church, University of Oxford*

RICHARD RUTHERFORD  
richard.rutherford@chch.ox.ac.uk

<sup>94</sup> 'Probably about 433' is the view of Taylor (1976) 64 on the dramatic date of the *Protagoras*.

**Endnote 1: Oracular Utterances in Herodotus**<sup>95</sup>

Q = response quoted verbatim. Underlining indicates the presence of an ambiguity or obscurity in the oracle, the significance of which is only later appreciated. *Italics* indicate that the motif of ‘forgetting’ the prediction is present (4.150 is a variation: they put the prophecy out of mind).

1. DELPHI. 1.7.4 and 13 (Gyges); 1.19 (Alyattes); 1.46–9 (Q) (Croesus); 1.53 (Croesus); 1.55 (Q) (Croesus); 1.65 (Q) (Lycurgus); 1.66 (Q) (Spartans); 1.67 (Q) (Spartans; two consultations, the second quoted); 1.85 (Q) (Croesus); 1.91 (Delphic defence to Croesus); 1.167 (men of Agylla); 1.174 (Q) (Cnidians). 3.57–8 (Q) (Siphnians). 4.15 (people of Metapontum); 4.150 (to Grinnos of Thera), 4.151 (to the Therans), 4.155 (Q) to Battos, 4.157 (Q) to the Therans, 4.159 (to potential settlers at Cyrene), 4.161 (to the Cyreneans), 4.163 (to Arcesilaos of Cyrene) (quoted as direct speech but in prose). 5.43 (Dorieus of Sparta); 5.63 (to the Spartans); 5.67 (Cleisthenes of Sicyon); 5.79 (Thebans); 5.82 (Epidaurians); 5.89 (Athenians); 5.92 (speech of Soclees) 5.92β.2 (Q) (Eetion), 5.92β.3 (Q) Bacchiads, 5.92ε.2 (Q) Cypselus, 5.92η.2 and 4 (Periander, twice). 6.19 (cf. 77) (Argives and (Q) Milesians); 6.34 (Dolonci); 6.52 (Spartans), 6.66 (Spartans), 6.77 (Q) (Argives; same oracle as given partly in 19); 6.86 (speech of Leotychidas) (Q) (Glaucus of Sparta); 6.135 (Parians); 6.139 (Lemnians: here the ambiguity resides not in the oracle but in the resulting promise). 7.140 (Q), 7.141 (Q) (two successive responses, Athenians); 7.148 (Argos); 7.169 (Cretans: quoted but in prose); 7.178 (Delphians); 7.220 (Q) (Spartans). 8.36 (Delphians); 8.114 (Spartans, see p. 6 above: here the ambiguity is in Xerxes’ utterance, not the oracle); 8.122 (the Greeks in general). 9.33 (Tisamenos); 9.93 (oracles of Dodona and Delphi to Apollonians).

2. OTHER NAMED ORACLES. 1.49 (Amphiaraus to Croesus); 1.157–9 (Apollo of Branchidae to people of Cyme). 2.18 (Ammon to the people of Marea and Apis); 2.52 (Dodona to the Pelasgians); 2.111 (Buto to Pheros); 2.133 (Buto to Mycerinus); 2.139 (Ethiopian oracle to Sabacos); 2.152 (Buto to Psammetichus). 3.64 (Buto to Cambyses). 8.20 (Q) (oracle of Bacis to the Euboeans); 8.77 (Q) (oracle of Bacis; date and recipient not stated; occurs in a chapter some judge spurious); 8.96 (Bacis and Musaeus, combined with *quotation from soothsayer Lysistratos*); 8.133–6 (oracle of Apollo Ptoius near Lake Copais, in reply to enquiries from Mardonius). 9.43 (Q) (Bacis); 93 (Dodona and Delphi, see 1).

<sup>95</sup> Cf. Kirchberg (1965); Harrison (2000) ch. 5; Hornblower and Pelling (2017) 193–4.

3. UNSPECIFIED. 1.64 (Pisistratus); 2.29.7 (an oracle of Zeus to the people of Meroe; generalised); 2.147 (to the twelve kings); 2.158 (Necos); 3.16 (to Amasis); 4.149 (to the Spartan Aegidae); 4.178 ('there is said to be an oracle' to the Lacedaemonians). 5.1 (Paeonians); 5.114 (people of Amathus in Cyprus). 6.80 (Cleomenes); 6.98 (Q, one line only; addressee not specified); 6.118 (Thebans); 7.117 (Acanthians); 7.189 (Athenians); 7.197 (Aeolians); 8.53 ('it was prophesied' that the Persians would occupy Attica); 8.141 (Spartans); 9.42 (prophecies cited by Mardonius but according to Herodotus misapplied by him).

### Endnote 2: Prophetic Dreams in Herodotus<sup>96</sup>

Q indicates *oratio recta* from the dream-figure, in the Homeric manner.

1.34 (Croesus); 107–8 (Astyages); 209 (Cyrus); 2.129 (Sabakos); 2.141 (Sethos); 3.30 (Cambyses); 3.124 (Polycrates' daughter); 3.149 (Otanos); 5.56 (Hipparchus); 6.107 (Hippias); 6.118 (Datis); 6.131 (Agariste); 7.12–14 (Xerxes) (Q); 7.17 (Artabanus) (Q); 7.19 (Xerxes); 8.54 (Xerxes).

Notes: (a) The dream to Sethos is one of reassurance, those to Datis, Otanos and Xerxes in 8.54 concern the need to appease the gods. That of Agariste concerns the great future of her imminent child (Pericles). All other cases involve some aspect of the dreamer's fate, normally death.

(b) Quotation of *oratio recta* is notably found only in the extended episode of Xerxes and Artabanus, a sign of the significance of the decisions based on this dream; and here only are the dreams not only deceptive but lying.

### Endnote 3: The Wise Adviser

See Bischoff (1932) and Lattimore (1939). Lattimore's useful catalogue at pp. 25–8 makes it unnecessary to list these in full. He distinguishes the 'tragic warner' from the 'practical adviser', the former being more relevant to our discussion. The latter tends to offer specific stratagems which are often accepted and effective (e.g. 1.80, 8.58–60). The tragic warner's advice is rarely followed and ignoring it often leads to death or defeat. The categories are not always easy to separate, but those which most clearly generate irony would certainly include 1.32, 71, 207; 3.36, 40, 124; 4.83 (*oratio obliqua*); 5.36; 7.10, 46–9, 51; 7.102–4; 8.68; 9.2 and 41 (both *oratio obliqua*), 122.

<sup>96</sup> Based on Frisch (1968); Hornblower and Pelling (2017) 235–6.

### Endnote 4: Portents

See Hollmann (2011) 51–75.

Harrison (2000) 126 remarks on the interchangeability of different forms of divination: ‘Dreams, oracles and omens may reinforce or complement each other.’ To list all omens or portents in Herodotus is, however, impractical: they are very numerous and of very diverse kinds (eclipses, thunder, earthquakes, sneezing, unnatural births and many others); sometimes it is not clear what they actually portend; often, as with storms or floods, it is possible to interpret them without appeal to the divine; and many cases involve sacrificial omens prior to battle. All that need be said is that in certain cases the wrong interpretation of a portent carries an ironic effect parallel to that of a misunderstood oracle, and that in some of these, in Harrison’s words, they reinforce each other. Clear cases include 1.78; 3.153 (fulfilling a chance remark which has been noted as significant); 6.107; 7.37, 57; 8.41 (ominous rather than ironic), 64, 65, 137. Portents may also be *post eventum*, indicating the supernatural at work (e.g. 4.205, 9.120, both involving divine retribution).

### Endnote 5: Explicit References to Later Events within the Text of Herodotus

The following list is, I hope, complete (I gloss the latest references): 3.12.4, 15.3, 160.2; 4.43, 148.3; 5.32; 6.72, 91 (expulsion of the Aeginetans in 431, cf. Thuc. 2.27), 98 (generalised, but with reference to the reign of Artaxerxes: see p. 10 above), 118.3; 7.7, 106, 107, 114, 137 (430 BC, cf. Thuc. 2.67), 151f., 170.3, 233.2 (the attack on Plataea in 431, cf. Thuc. 2.2–6); 8.3, 109; 9.35.2, 37.4, 64.2, 73 (Spartan assaults on Attica in the Archidamian war), 75, 85, 105, 108–13.

On the question of Herodotus’ ‘publication’ date see e.g. Jacoby (1913) 229–32; H–W I.51; *GGL* 590 n. 9; Cobet (1971) 59–71 (59 n. 346 for list); *CH* 51 n. 125; Moles (2002) 34; Irwin (2013).

### Endnote 6: Herodotean Polemic<sup>97</sup>

As noted above, authors in the fifth-century intellectual milieu frequently engage in debate and polemic (this is not a new phenomenon: cf. Hes. *Op.* 26; but we have more abundant and more explicit evidence from this period). Herodotus is no exception. He dissents from ‘the Ionians’ about the geographical limits of Egypt (2.15), puts down the anonymous Greeks who in

<sup>97</sup> See further Lateiner (1989) 91–103; Marincola (1997) 225–6; Thomas (2000) 214–21.

an effort to advertise their own cleverness have produced theories about the Nile floods (2.20–7), and finds the map-makers with their circular world a source of great hilarity (4.36.2); the last passage leads on to a polemical account of the number of continents (37–45). These examples are evidently directed at specific authors, though these are left anonymous. Other passages seem to criticise beliefs in general circulation. Stories or variants are branded ‘silly’, ‘naïve’, ‘foolish’ (e.g. 3.56.1). It shows ‘considerable stupidity’ (*μωρίη*) to claim that the twelve Ionian states are any more Ionian than others (1.146). The Greeks are said to tell many ‘futile’ (*μάταια*) tales, including the story that Psammetichus cut out the tongues of the children’s nurses (2.2.5). The traditional account of the Trojan War itself turns out on enquiry to be a vain tale (2.118.1). Thucydides’ impatience with Greek readiness to accept what they are told without proper investigation turns out to have ample precedent (Thuc. 1.20.3; 6.54.1; cf. Hdt. 2.44.5).

These passages might be described as sarcastic or derisive; irony is not an appropriate label, since in most of them there is no reason to suppose that Herodotus means anything but what he says (the only probable exception is the comment on the Trojan War as told by Homer, which forms part of the whole excursus on Helen, a problematic section which can plausibly be seen as a kind of sophistic *epideixis*, see p. 28 above). In a different category comes the comment on Hecataeus and the Egyptian priests in 2.142–3, especially Hecataeus’ listing of his own genealogy, in contrast with Herodotus himself. Here few readers have felt much doubt that Herodotus is in some way making fun of Hecataeus and boosting his own credit.<sup>98</sup> Whether this episode appeared in Hecataeus’ own work is perhaps a secondary issue;<sup>99</sup> what matters is how Herodotus is using it. It would seem that Hecataeus has indeed achieved something: he got there first (or so it is alleged), he made similar enquiries to those of Herodotus, he made the same discoveries about the incredible antiquity of Egypt. On the other hand, Herodotus did not attempt to boast of his own descent and so did not expose himself to priestly ridicule. Perhaps the criticism goes beyond the personal (competition with an older rival) to the generic (enhancing the reader’s appreciation of how much more Herodotus has done with the same opportunities). If the double use of the verb *γενεαλογεῖν* is meant to remind us of one of the titles given to Hecataeus’ historical work, the implication is perhaps that genealogy is not enough: what Herodotus offers goes much further. Yet Hecataeus is the only contemporary writer whom he cites by name, and he does so on four

<sup>98</sup> For detailed discussions see Jacoby, *RE* VII.274of. (= Jacoby (1956) 222–3); Fehling (1989) 77–86, Lloyd (1988) 107ff.; West (1991).

<sup>99</sup> West (1991), esp. 146–54, thinks not (with ample bibliography of previous discussion).

occasions (three times as *λογοποιός*). In one place he refers specifically to what Hecataeus wrote in his history (*λόγοις*, 6.138, not adjudicating between his account and the Athenian version); in the other two cases this is because of the part he played in events, but the passage in 2.143 stands apart. The uncertainty of tone may indicate that Herodotus was not completely confident of his ability to eclipse Hecataeus with his own work. Irony here has a self-protective quality.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abrams, M. H. (1971) *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (New York).
- Ahl, F. (1984) 'The art of safe criticism in Greece and Rome', *AJPh* 105: 174–208.
- Asheri, D., A. Lloyd, and A. Corcella (2007) *A Commentary on Herodotus I–IV* (Oxford).
- Badian, E. (1994) 'Herodotus on Alexander I of Macedon: a Study in Some Subtle Silences', in S. Hornblower, ed., *Greek Historiography* (Oxford) 107–30.
- Bakker, E. J., I. J. F. de Jong, and H. van Wees, edd. (2002) *Brill's Companion to Herodotus* (Leiden).
- Baragwanath, E. (2008) *Motivation and Narrative in Herodotus* (Oxford).
- (2013) 'Herodotus and the Avoidance of Hindsight', in Powell (2013) 25–48.
- and M. de Bakker, edd. (2012) *Myth, Truth and Narrative in Herodotus* (Oxford).
- Bischoff, H. (1932) *Der Warner bei Herodot* (diss., Marburg).
- Boedeker, D. (1987) 'The Two Faces of Demaratus', *Arethusa* 20: 185–201.
- (2002) 'Epic Heritage and Mythical Patterns in Herodotus', in Bakker–de Jong–van Wees (2002) 97–116.
- Booth, W. C. (1974) *A Rhetoric of Irony* (Chicago).
- Bowden, H. (2005) *Classical Athens and the Delphic Oracle* (Cambridge).
- Bowie, A. M. (2007) *Herodotus: Histories Book 8* (Cambridge).
- Brock, R. (2003) 'Authorial Voice and Narrative Management in Herodotus', in Derow and Parker (2003) 3–16.
- Burkert, W. (1965) 'Demaratos, Astrabakos und Herakles', *MH* 22: 166–77; Eng. tr. in id., *Savage Energies* (Chicago, 2001) 97–110.
- Burn, A. R. (1984) *Persia and the Greeks*<sup>2</sup> (London; orig. ed. 1962).
- Bury, J. B. (1908) *The Ancient Greek Historians* (London).
- Buxton, R. F. (2012) 'Instructive Irony in Herodotus: the Socles Scene', *GRBS* 52: 559–86.
- Cobet, J. (1971) *Herodots Exkurse und die Frage der Einheit seines Werkes* (*Historia Einzelschrift* 17; Wiesbaden).
- Colebrook, C. (2004) *Irony* (London).
- Corcella, A. (1985) 'Erodoto VII, 239: una 'interpolazione d'autore'?', *ASNP*<sup>3</sup> 18: 314–491.
- Darbo-Peschanski, C. (1987) *Le discours du particulier: Essai sur l'enquête Hérodoteenne* (Paris).
- Demand, N. (1987) 'Herodotus' Encomium of Athens: Science or Rhetoric?', *AJPh* 108: 746–58.
- Derow, P. and R. Parker, edd. (2003) *Herodotus and his World* (Oxford).
- Dewald, C. (1984) Review of Evans (1982), *AJPh* 105: 107–8.

- (1987) ‘Narrative Surface and Authorial Voice in Herodotus’ *Histories*, *Arethusa* 20: 147–70.
- (1990) Review of Flory (1987), *CPh* 85: 60–4.
- (1997) ‘Wanton Kings, Pickled Heroes, and Gnostic Founding Fathers: Strategies of Meaning at the End of Herodotus’ *Histories*’ in Roberts–Dunn–Fowler (1997) 62–82.
- (2002) ‘“I didn’t give my own genealogy”: Herodotus and the Authorial Persona’, in Bakker–de Jong–van Wees (2002) 267–89.
- and J. Marincola, edd. (2006) *The Cambridge Companion to Herodotus* (Cambridge).
- Diggle, J. (2004) *Theophrastus: Characters* (Cambridge).
- Evans, J. A. S. (1982) *Herodotus* (New York).
- Fearn, D. (2007) ‘Narrative Ambiguity: Murder and Macedonian Allegiance (5.17–22)’, in Irwin and Greenwood (2007) 98–127.
- Feeney, D. C. (2007) *Caesar’s Calendar: Ancient Time and the Beginnings of History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles).
- Fehling, D. (1989) *Herodotus and his ‘Sources’* (Leeds); Eng. tr. by J. G. Howie of *Die Quellenangaben bei Herodot* (Berlin, 1971).
- Flory, S. (1987) *The Archaic Smile of Herodotus* (Detroit).
- Flower, M. and J. Marincola (2002) *Herodotus: Histories, Book 9* (Cambridge).
- Fontenrose, J. (1978) *The Delphic Oracle* (Berkeley and Los Angeles).
- Fornara, C. W. (1971a) *Herodotus: an Interpretative Essay* (Oxford).
- (1971b) ‘Evidence for the Date of Herodotus’ Publication’, *JHS* 91: 25–34.
- Fowler, D. P. (1989) ‘First Thoughts on Closure.’ *MD* 22: 75–122; repr. in id. (2000) 239–83.
- (2000) *Roman Constructions* (Oxford).
- Fowler, R. L. (1996) ‘Herodotus and his Contemporaries’, *JHS* 116: 62–87; repr. in Munson (2013) 1.46–83.
- Frisch, P. (1968) *Die Träume bei Herodot* (Beitr. zur Klass. Phil. 27; Göttingen).
- Goldhill, S. (2012) *Sophocles and the Language of Tragedy* (New York and Oxford).
- Gould, J. (1989) *Herodotus* (London and New York).
- Green, P. (2012) ‘He’s Back!’ (Review of Roberts (2011)), *The New Republic*, 9 April 2012.
- Griffiths, A. (2001) ‘Kissing Cousins: Some Curious cases of Adjacent Material in Herodotus’, in Luraghi (2001) 161–78.
- (2009) Review of Baragwanath (2008), *JHS* 129: 156–8.
- Gruen, E. S. (2011) *Rethinking the Other in Antiquity* (Princeton).
- Harris, W. V. (2009) *Dreams and experience in classical antiquity* (Cambridge, Mass. and London).
- Harrison, T. (2000) *Divinity and History: the Religion of Herodotus* (Oxford).

- (2006) ‘Religion and the Rationality of the Greek City’, in S. Goldhill and R. Osborne, edd., *Rethinking Revolutions through Ancient Greece* (Cambridge 2006) 124–40.
- Hartog, F. (1988) *The Mirror of Herodotus* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London); Eng. tr. by J. Lloyd of *Le miroir d’Hérodote* (Paris, 1980).
- Hollmann, A. (2011) *The Master of Signs: Signs and the Interpretation of Signs in Herodotus’ Histories* (Cambridge, Mass. and London).
- Hornblower, S. (2002) ‘Herodotus and his Sources of Information’, in Bakker–de Jong–van Wees (2002) 373–86.
- (2011) *Thucydidean Themes* (Oxford).
- (2013) *Herodotus: Histories, Book 5* (Cambridge).
- and C. Pelling (2017) *Herodotus: Histories, Book 6* (Cambridge).
- Irwin, E. (2013) ‘The *Hybris* of Theseus and the Date of the *Histories*’, in K. Ruffing and B. Dunsch, edd., *Herodots’ Quellen/Die Quellen Herodots* (Classica et Orientalia 6; Wiesbaden) 7–93.
- and E. Greenwood, edd. (2007) *Reading Herodotus: a Study of the Logoi in Book 5 of Herodotus’ Histories* (Cambridge).
- Jacoby, F. (1913) ‘Herodotos’, *RE* Suppl. II.205–520; repr. in id. (1956) 7–164.
- (1956) *Griechische Historiker* (Stuttgart).
- Kirchberg, J. (1964) *Die Funktion der Orakel im Werke Herodots (Hypomnemata 11; Göttingen)*.
- Kleinknecht, H. (1940) ‘Herodot und Athen: 7.139/8.140–4’, *Hermes* 75: 241–64; repr. in Marg (1962) 541–73.
- Lateiner, D. (1989) *The Historical Method of Herodotus* (Toronto).
- (2014) Review of Baragwanath and de Bakker (2012), *Ancient Narrative* 11: 209–27.
- Lattimore, R. (1939) ‘The Wise Adviser in Herodotus’, *CPh* 34: 24–35.
- Levene, D. (1992) ‘Sallust’s *Jugurtha*: an Historical Fragment’, *JRS* 82: 53–70.
- Lewis, D. M. (1984) ‘Postscript 1984’, in Burn (1984) 587–609.
- Lloyd, A. B. (1988) *Herodotus Book II*, vol. 3 (Leiden).
- Lloyd, G. E. R. (1979) *Magic, Reason and Experience* (Cambridge).
- Luraghi, N., ed. (2001) *The Historian’s Craft in the Age of Herodotus* (Oxford).
- Marg, W., ed. (1962) *Herodot: eine Auswahl aus der neueren Forschung* (Munich; repr. Darmstadt 1965).
- Marincola, J. (1994) ‘Plutarch’s Refutation of Herodotus’, *AncW* 25: 191–203.
- (2005) ‘Concluding Narratives: Looking to the End in Classical Historiography’, *PLLS* 12: 285–320.
- (2015) ‘Plutarch, Herodotus, and the Historian’s Character’, in R. Ash, J. Mossman, and F. Titchener, edd., *Fame and Infamy: Essays ... C. Pelling* (Oxford) 83–95.
- Meiggs, R. and D. M. Lewis (1988) *Greek Historical Inscriptions to the End of the Peloponnesian War* (Oxford, revised ed.; orig. 1969).

- Moles, J. (1996) 'Herodotus Warns the Athenians', *PLLS* 9: 259–84.
- (2002) 'Herodotus and Athens', in Bakker–de Jong–van Wees (2002) 33–52.
- (2007) "'Saving" the Greeks from the "Ignominy" of Tyranny? The "Famous" and "Wonderful" Speech of Socles (5.92)', in Irwin and Greenwood (2007) 245–58.
- Muecke, D. C. (1969) *The Compass of Irony* (London).
- (1982) *Irony and the Ironic<sup>2</sup>* (London; orig. ed. entitled *Irony* (1970)).
- Munson, R. V. (2001) *Telling Wonders: Ethnography and Political Discourse in the Work of Herodotus* (Ann Arbor).
- ed. (2013) *Herodotus*, 2 vols. (Oxford Readings in Classical Studies; Oxford).
- Murray, O. (1990) 'Cities of Reason', in id. and S. Price, edd., *The Greek City* (Oxford) 1–25.
- (1993) *Early Greece<sup>2</sup>* (London; orig. ed. 1979).
- Myres, J. L. (1953) *Herodotus, Father of History* (Oxford).
- Parry, A. (1963) 'The Two Voices of Virgil's *Aeneid*', *Arion* 2: 66–80; repr. in id., *The Language of Achilles and Other Papers* (Oxford, 1989) 78–96.
- Pelling, C. (1991) 'Thucydides' Archidamus and Herodotus' Artabanus', in M. A. Flower and M. Toher, edd., *Georgica: Greek Studies in Honour of George Cawkwell* (*BICS* Suppl. 38; London) 120–42.
- (1997) 'East is East and West is West—or Are They? National Stereotypes in Herodotus', *Histos* 1: 51–66; rev. version in Munson (2013) II.360–79.
- (2002) 'Speech and Action: Herodotus' Debate on the Constitutions', *PCPS* 48: 123–58.
- (2006a) 'Speech and Narrative in Herodotus', in Dewald and Marincola (2006) 103–21.
- (2006b) 'Educating Croesus: Talking and Learning in Herodotus' Lydian *Logos*', *CLAnt* 25: 141–77.
- (2007) '*De malignitate Plutarchi*: Plutarch, Herodotus, and the Persian Wars', in E. Bridges, E. Hall and P. J. Rhodes, edd., *Cultural Responses to the Persian Wars* (Oxford) 145–64.
- (2013) 'Historical Interpretation and What Didn't Happen: the Virtues of Virtual History', in Powell (2013) 1–24.
- Powell, A., ed. (2013) *Hindsight in Greek and Roman History* (London and Swansea).
- Powell, J. E. (1937) 'Puns in Herodotus', *CR* 51: 103–5.
- Pritchett, W. K. (1993) *The Liar School of Herodotus* (Amsterdam).
- Raaflaub, K. A. (1987) 'Herodotus, Political Thought and the Meaning of History', *Arethusa* 20: 221–48.

- Redfield, J. (1985) 'Herodotus the Tourist', *CPh* 80: 97–118; repr. in Munson (2013) II.267–91.
- Ribbeck, O. (1876) 'Ueber den Begriff des εἴρων', *RhM* 31: 381–400.
- Roberts, D., F. Dunn, and D. P. Fowler, edd. (1997) *Classical Closure: Reading the End in Greek and Latin Literature* (Princeton).
- Roberts, J. T. (2011) *Herodotus: a Very Short Introduction* (Oxford).
- Rosenmeyer, T. G. (1996) 'Ironies in Serious Drama', in M. S. Silk, ed., *Tragedy and the Tragic* (Oxford) 497–519.
- Rutherford, R. B. (2011) 'The Use and Abuse of Irony', in D. Obbink and R. Rutherford, edd., *Culture in Pieces: Essays ... Peter Parsons* (Oxford) 84–103.
- (2012) *Greek Tragic Style: Form, Language and Interpretation* (Cambridge).
- Saïd, S. (2002) 'Herodotus and Tragedy', in Bakker–de Jong–van Wees (2002) 117–45.
- Schellenberg, R. S. (2009) "'They Spoke the Truest of Words": Irony in the Speeches of Herodotus' *Histories*', *Arethusa* 42: 131–50.
- Shrimpton, G. (1997) *History and Memory in Ancient Greece* (Montreal).
- Solmsen, F. (1974) 'Two Crucial Decisions in Herodotus', *Mededelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, Afd. Letterkunde, Nieuwe Reeks* 37.6: 139–70; repr. in id., *Kleine Schriften III* (Hildesheim, Zurich and New York, 1982), 78–109.
- Stadter, P. A. (1992) 'Herodotus and the Athenian Arche', *ASNP* 22: 781–89; repr. in Munson (2013) I.334–56.
- (2006) 'Herodotus and the Cities of Mainland Greece', in Dewald and Marincola (2006) 242–56.
- (2012) 'Speaking to the Deaf: Herodotus, his Audience, and the Spartans at the Beginning of the Peloponnesian War', *Histos* 6: 1–14.
- Ste. Croix, G. E. M. de (2004) 'Herodotus and King Cleomenes I of Sparta', in id., *Athenian Democratic Origins*, edd. D. Harvey and R. Parker (Oxford) 421–38.
- Stinton, T. C. W. (1986) 'The Scope and Limits of Allusion in Greek Tragedy', in M. Cropp, E. Fantham, and S. Scully, edd., *Greek Tragedy and its Legacy: Essays presented to D. J. Conacher* (Calgary) 67–102; repr. in id., *Collected Papers on Greek Tragedy* (Oxford, 1990) 454–92.
- Strasburger, H. (1955) 'Herodot und das Perikleische Athen', *Historia* 4: 1–25; repr. in id., *Studien zur Alten Geschichte*, 2 vols. (Hildesheim and New York, 1982) II.592–626; Eng. tr. in Munson (2013) I.295–320.
- Taylor, C. C. W. (1976) *Plato: Protagoras* (Oxford).
- Thomas, R. (1989) *Oral Tradition and Written Record in Classical Athens* (Cambridge).
- (2000) *Herodotus in Context: Ethnography, Science, and the Art of Persuasion* (Cambridge).
- Tigerstedt, E. N. (1965) *The Legend of Sparta in Classical Antiquity*, vol. 1. (Stockholm).

- (1977) *Interpreting Plato* (Stockholm).
- Todd, S. C. (2007) *A Commentary on Lysias, Speeches I–II* (Oxford).
- Ubsdell, S. (1982) *Herodotus and Human Nature* (Unpublished D.Phil. thesis, Oxford).
- Węcowski, M. (1996) ‘Ironie et histoire: le discours de Soclès (Hérodote V 92)’, *AncSoc* 27: 205–58.
- West, S. R. (1991) ‘Herodotus’ Portrait of Hecataeus’, *JHS* 111: 144–60.
- White, H. (1973) *Metahistory: the Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore and London).
- Wilson, N. G. (2015a) *Herodoti Historiae*, 2 vols (Oxford Classical Texts; Oxford).
- (2015b) *Herodotea: Studies on the Text of Herodotus* (Oxford).
- Woodman, A. J. (1988) *Rhetoric in Classical Historiography* (London, Sydney and Portland).