HERODOTUS, CAMBYSES, AND THE CROSSWORD PUZZLE*

Abstract: Herodotus depicts a world full of puzzles including, but not limited to, oracles and dreams, which require solution: this calls for a range of interpretative strategies and for a constant sceptical mental alertness. Often, understanding is reached in a moment of insight, something to which Herodotus seems peculiarly attentive among writers of history, and it is suggested that, like the perception of parallels and patterns in past events, this reflects some fundamental cognitive processes.

A s his initial denotation of it as 'enquiries' or 'researches' in the proem implies,[1] the process of obtaining information and understanding is fundamental to Herodotus' work, and that applies as much to the actors in his narrative as to the author himself. In the past couple of decades, a number of scholars have explored the affinities between the two: Christ's discussion of similarities and differences as researchers between Herodotus and the non-Greek kings he depicts has been particularly influential.[2] More recently, Hollmann has devoted a monograph to the various sign systems on display in the *Histories* and their interpretation:[3] he views the latter as essentially structured and rational, hence his particular interest in 'the use and abuse of signs' and his presentation of Herodotus himself as a 'master of signs'.[4] While I am very much in sympathy with the way in which Hollmann situates oracles and dreams in a broader spectrum of puzzles and interpretative challenges, I feel that the model of investigation and analysis deployed in his and other recent work, which perhaps owes something to the intellectual

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[1] ''Exposition of the enquiries (ἱστορίη)' would, strictly speaking, be the title of the work': Asheri ap. Asheri–Lloyd–Corcella (2007) 8, with discussion of the implications of ἱστορίη and further references.

[2] Christ (1994); for some recent variations on the theme, see Demont (2009) and Grethlein (2009), and n.b. also Baragwanath (2008) 59–81.

[3] Hollmann (2011).

[4] Hollmann (2011) 211–65, a revised version of Hollmann (2005).

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disposition of the modern scholars in question, does not do full justice to what we find in the work: in what follows I shall argue that quite often individuals in the *Histories* achieve understanding by a rather different process of insight, less purely rational though still conscious and discursive, and that this process also finds echoes in the outlook and practice of Herodotus as author.

1. Cambyses Finds the Solution

A conspicuous instance of arriving at understanding in this way occurs in the downfall of the Persian king Cambyses. Cambyses is one of the least sympathetic figures in Herodotus' work: a despot, *contemptor deorum*, and homicidal maniac, he is clearly riding for a fall, and his death, when it comes, looks over-determined (3.64, tr. Waterfield, slightly modified):

> When Cambyses heard the name 'Smerdis' he was struck by the truth of what Prexaspes had said and saw the true meaning of the dream, in which someone had brought him a message that Smerdis was sitting on the royal throne with his head touching the sky. When he realised that he had pointlessly killed his brother, he was overwhelmed with grief for him. He was so miserable and upset at the whole disaster that he leapt on to his horse, with the intention of setting out for Susa without delay and attacking the Magus. As he did so, the tip of his scabbard came off and the exposed sword struck him on the thigh. He was wounded in exactly the same spot that he had previously wounded the Egyptian god Apis. Cambyses thought that the wound was fatal; he asked what was the name of the place where they were, and they told him it was Ecbatana. Now, the oracle in Buto had earlier told him that he would die in Ecbatana. He had supposed that he would die of old age in Ecbatana in Media, which was the administrative centre of his empire, but the oracle, as it turned out, had meant Ecbatana in Syria. When in answer to his question he heard the name of the place, although the troubles the Magus had caused him and his wound had driven him insane, he now came to his senses, understood the oracle and said 'This is the place where Cambyses the son of Cyrus is destined to die.'

There is more going on here than a bad man getting his come-uppance:[5] after Herodotus has recounted Cambyses' recognition of his fate, he relates

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[5] Though that is certainly happening: see McPhee (2018) for a forceful argument to that effect, with some consequent differences in emphasis from my account here.

how Cambyses summoned the most eminent Persians in his entourage and, in a death-bed confession, rehearsed the process through which his attempt to evade the implications of his dream led him to have his brother assassinated. This is material which Herodotus has already narrated in chapters 30 and 62–3, the latter immediately before Cambyses' fatal accident: one might expect such repetition in epic, but Herodotus is not normally an uneconomical writer. So why does he repeat himself here?[6]

The answer, I suggest, lies in Cambyses' realisation of what has happened: in chapter 64 he recognises first the futility of the fratricide he has committed, then the gravity of the self-inflicted wound, and finally the significance of the oracle and its prediction that he would die in Ecbatana, and all this brings him to his senses (ἐσωφρόνησε). Furthermore, despite his realisation that he is doomed, there is no indulgence in self-pity: instead, he summons the leading Persians in order to explain to them what has happened, and to adjure them to recover Persian imperial power from the Medes, reinforcing his deathbed instructions by invoking blessings on them if they succeed and curses if they fail in the attempt, or fail to act.[7] Cambyses is undoubtedly a bad man, yet he goes some way here to redeeming himself in the audience's eyes, first and above all because he *understands*: he fits all the pieces together and sees the solution that was waiting to be discovered. Even though he has previously misread the dream and the oracle, his recognition of the truth constitutes a kind of vindication, despite the refusal of the Persians to believe him and the fact that, ironically,[8] it is no longer safe after his death for Prexaspes to tell the truth (66.3–67.1), so that his revelation does not lead directly to action to resolve the political crisis.[9]

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[6] Though in fact the repetition is typically artful: the content of the original message, ὡς ἐν τῷ θρόνῳ τῷ βασιληίῳ ἱζόμενος Σμέρδις τῇ κεφαλῇ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ψαύσειε (3.30.2) is reprised with variation in grammar and word-order at 64.1: ὡς Σμέρδις ἱζόμενος ἐς τὸν βασιλήιον θρόνον ψαύσειε τῇ κεφαλῇ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, the latter then repeated verbatim at 65.2. Note also the more specific ἀποκτενέοντα Σμέρδιν, 65.3 for ἀποκτενέοντά μιν, 30.3 (and Cambyses' stress on his fear for the empire, eliding the fear for his own life mentioned earlier), and likewise the omission of Patizeithes' name at 65.5 when he closely echoes Prexaspes' deduction at 63.4, keeping the focus on Smerdis. The true meaning of the dream is only made explicit at 65.4 (and at 65.5 he picks up his late sister's observation about the loss of his brother as defender from 32.2). de Jong (2006) 9–11 likewise remarks in her extended discussion of this episode on the changes in formulation at Cambyses' realisation.

[7] 3.65; the patriotic rhetoric is picked up by the 'Seven' at 69.2 and 73.1–2, the latter alluding to Cambyses' death-bed imprecation, and then by Prexaspes at 75.

[8] Much of the material I discuss here is also analysed in relation to irony with much greater rigour and precision by Rutherford (2018), esp. 5–9, 24, 38–40.

[9] So to focus only on Cambyses' initial 'failure' (e.g., Hollmann (2011) 116–17, 247–8) is to miss an important aspect of the episode; cf. Harrison (2000) 149–50, 230–1 for

Nevertheless, we also surely think better of Cambyses because he does not simply think of himself, but uses his understanding (or tries to) for the benefit of his realm. There is a close parallel in the downfall of Astyages, another despotic figure who is negatively presented for almost the whole of his reign. Like Cambyses, Astyages attempts to evade the consequences of prophetic dreams, though in his case there are two, and he reads the implications rightly, at least at first[10] but the repercussions from his dysfunctional family life have disastrous consequences for his subjects the Medes when he is duly supplanted by Cyrus and the Persians at the instigation of Harpagus. After his defeat and downfall, Harpagus follows through his revenge by coming to gloat over the fallen king (1.129):[11] once again, in his response Astyages does not think of himself, but reproaches Harpagus for the massive collateral damage which his revenge has caused: 'because of that dinner he had enslaved the Medes', who had been guiltless (1.129.3–4). It is hard not to feel a degree of sympathy for someone capable of such a reaction, however awful their previous behaviour: like the more virtuous Psammenitus (3.14), the ex-king laments not his own sufferings, but those of others, and he takes the largest view in focusing on the repercussions for Media as a whole. These examples also make it clear that understanding in Herodotus is not reserved for good men, nor for Greeks: we may compare the case of Artaÿctes (9.120), who realises that the portent of the salt fish leaping in the fire is a personal message to him from Protesilaos, though he still tries to buy his way out of his impiety;[12] for the motif of belated realisation of the significance of an ambiguous sign, we might further note the cases of Cleomenes (6.80) and Hippias (6.107.4), both marked by a groan of recognition (ἀναστενάξας).[13]

The apparent over-determination in the Cambyses episode is created by the convergence and resolution of a range of explanatory or symbolic mechanisms. First, there is the king's dream with its ambiguous reference to

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'misinterpretation' in the work as a whole, and Manetti (1993) 24–9 on characteristic 'errors' in interpretation of signs.

[10] 1.107–8, illuminated by Pelling (1996).

[11] Cf. with his enquiry how Astyages finds slavery compared with kingship (1.129.1) Leotychidas' rubbing in of his revenge on Demaratus by asking what it is like to be a magistrate instead of a king (6.67.2).

[12] So Flower and Marincola (2002) on 120.2, and *pace* Dewald (1997) 71 and n.22, I cannot see any prompt in the text to doubt his reading of the portent itself; Hollmann (2011) 237–9 leaves both possibilities open.

[13] Croesus likewise groans, and expresses the wish that Solon could talk to every τύραννος (1.86.3–4). This kind of wisdom is plainly different from the often morally equivocal μῆτις which Hollmann (n. 4) associates with the manipulation of signs in Herodotus, which is characterised as practically effective and typically justified precisely by its success.

Smerdis—ambiguous because the dream is itself a dream of a message (3.30.2, 64.1), and it is precisely the role of the messenger which creates the slippage in the possible reference of the name.[14] Secondly, there is the correspondence between the accidental wound and that which Cambyses gave the Apis bull (3.29), both in the thigh and dealt by the same weapon: in the narrative, it is Cambyses' perception of this wound as fatal that invests it with significance and brings out the negative reciprocity involved. Finally, there is the oracle which told him that he would die in Ecbatana, given by the Egyptian oracle at Buto: unlike the other two explanatory mechanisms, this has not been mentioned before, but it is this which confirms the pattern and makes Cambyses realise that he is doomed.

While there are distinct types of mechanism at work here, I shall argue that for Herodotus they are in important ways the same kind of thing, and so we ought not only to consider oracles and dreams as aspects of his religious outlook, as has been traditional, nor should we regard them simply as varieties of coded messages, though they are that as well: rather we should see that they belong to a broader range of puzzles and conundrums which challenge the human capacity for understanding.[15] There is no clear divide here between a comprehensible human world and an inscrutable divine or supernatural one, since, as we shall see shortly, some dreams and oracles are perfectly clear, while there are many aspects of human life on which certitude is impossible; rather, there is a spectrum of puzzles of varying degrees of complexity which call for a variety of interpretative strategies.[16] Sometimes a logical and deductive approach will be effective, but often that will not suffice—for example, if the challenge takes the form of an *adunaton*— and a more indirect approach is required, especially where different kinds of elements have to be combined, as in the case of Cambyses;[17] often, too, as in

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[14] So rightly de Jong (2006) 6; Hollmann (2011) 85.

[15] In this regard the underlying principles of Hollmann (2011) seem to me spot-on; n.b. also Baragwanath (2008) 59–64 on continuities in enquiry and understanding in the work.

[16] Harrison (2000) 192–5 hints at a continuity of this kind ('neither knowledge of the divine nor knowledge derived from the divine are envisaged as being in any way of a different order to what we might call ordinary human knowledge … the interpretation of oracles and prophecies is envisaged in fact as being no different in nature from the solution of any other practical question'), but seems to put things the other way round, suggesting that divine knowledge is the ultimate ('[t]he knowledge derived from the divine may indeed form the model for human wisdom … the certain knowledge that can be derived from the gods forms the model of all knowledge'), and so its ambiguity is sometimes deliberately mimicked by humans.

[17] On the verb characteristically used to denote this process, συμβάλλομαι, see Hohti (1977), who argues that it denotes the combination of two elements that 'results in an intelligible whole which has a significance of its own and is more than the total of its parts' (10), entails a sense of 'fitness' (8) and is particular, unlike the universality of εἰκός, and

that instance, the solution arrives in a moment of insight, and Herodotus both feels himself and appeals in his audience to that sense of 'rightness' when the answer suddenly comes into focus or snaps into place like the solution of a riddle or a crossword clue. Apart from divination, which in Herodotus—as in the Greek world in general—is the business of professional seers, the solving of such puzzles is not exclusively or even predominantly a matter for experts, who in fact have an indifferent record in the work.[18] Nor is it restricted to powerful individuals: everyone, male and female alike, has the potential capacity for the necessary insight, and indeed in Greece that capacity is often depicted as being exercised communally to identify solutions to problems which confront that community as a whole.[19]

II. A World Full of Puzzles

Herodotus' concern with issues of investigation, interpretation, and under-standing is made plain by the prominent role which they play in the programmatic *Lydios logos*, and the density of dreams and oracles in this section makes it a convenient platform from which to raise many of the issues which I shall discuss.

We may begin with the first two oracles mentioned in the work, the oracular validation of the rule of the Heracleidai in Lydia at 1.7.4 and the Delphic oracle predicting their revenge on the Mermnads in the fifth generation at 1.13. Both are examples of oracles which are entirely straight-forward in sense: the former is an instance of action taken in accordance with the instruction of an oracle which is not cited, presumably because it was unambiguous,[20] as the latter is both in expression and in setting out the terms of its fulfilment.[21] Much the same is true of the next Delphic consultation,

which typically entails inference or conjecture and does not—indeed sometimes cannot—lead to reliable knowledge (12–14). Compare more recently Hollmann (2011) 31–6, with good observations on the mental process implied by the middle voice; unlike the physical σύμβολον (10–11; cf. Hohti (1977) 10) the two parts do not necessarily have any prior connection or commonality; and see further below, n. 85.

[18] Hollmann (2011) 118–31, and cf. Bowden (2003) for χρησμολόγοι; μαντική is not only expert but frequently hereditary: Flower (2008) 22–71; Struck (2016) argues that it is essentially intuitive, proposing the concept of 'surplus knowledge' outside conscious thought, which would further distinguish it from the kind of problem-solving discussed here.

[19] On communal interpretation see below, pp. 11–12 and n. 39.

[20] For the motif see Kirchberg (1965) 11, though some of her examples are ambiguous, notably 3.64.4, also 5.1.2, 7.189.1. Often the action is religious, e.g., 5.114 (heroisation of Onesilos), 7.117.2 (cult of Artachaees at Acanthos), 9.93.1 (sacred flock at Apollonia).

[21] This oracle is generally regarded as *post eventum* e.g. by How and Wells (1912) and Asheri ap. Asheri–Lloyd–Corcella (2007) ad loc., and within the work is evidently in-

concerning the health of Alyattes,[22] which the oracle effectively answers indirectly by requiring the king to rebuild the temple of Athena as a precondition of consultation;[23] straight answers are also given to health-related consultations later in the book at 1.167 and 174.[24] Likewise Peisistratos is reported to have purified Delos ἐκ τῶν λογίων ('in accordance with the oracles': 1.64.2): over the course of the work there are a couple of dozen instances of oracles providing clear instruction on a particular issue.[25] Of course, the crucial importance of interpreting oracles correctly is a key theme of the opening *logos* (though in fact with the first Delphic oracle at 1.13 the problem, to which we shall return (below, p. 20), is one of mindfulness), but it is worth stressing the obvious but often overlooked point that while the range of puzzles which confront humanity in the work includes oracles, not all oracles are puzzles.[26]

Dreams tend by their nature to be obscure, with elements of unreality, and so to call for explication, hence the well-established tradition of dream-interpretation in the ancient Near East before Herodotus;[27] Astyages' dreams about his daughter Mandane (1.107–8) exemplify that pattern. However, on occasion Herodotean dreams too can be essentially direct and practical, like the one which caused Otanes to repopulate Samos (3.149): the concern with disease and possibly religious offence here[28] is something we have already seen associated with oracles (above, on 1.19); likewise at 6.118 the dream of

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tended to point the lesson about neglecting oracles, but I wonder whether there is not scope for an alternative interpretation whereby the Heracleidai had been already revenged after Atys' death by Croesus' lack of a suitable heir.

[22] A typical reason for consulting an oracle: cf. 1.85 (Croesus' mute son: an unusually oblique response, but still promising an eventual cure), 2.111.2 (Pheros' blindness), 4.149.2 (Aegeid child mortality), 155 (Battos); also 5.92.β2 and 9.33.2 (with Flower and Marincola (2002) ad loc.) for consultations about children; more generally, Parker (1985) 299–300, 304, 311; cf. Eidinow (2007) for parallels from Delphi (46 and nn. 20, 22), Didyma (48–9) and, especially, Dodona (87–93, 120: children; 104–7, 120–1: health).

[23] So Harrison (2000) 155.

[24] With the latter cf. 2.158.5, another of Kirchberg's (n. 20) brief reports.

[25] For example, 2.18, 52.3, 5.67.2, 82.1–2, 6.135.3 on religious matters; 4.178, 5.43 on colonisation; 5.89.2, 6.34, 7.169, 178.1 on war; 4.161.2 on politics; 6.86γ.2 on ethics.

[26] The notoriety of Croesus' failures doubtless increases a tendency to overlook this fact and to foreground the obscurity of oracles in the *Lydios logos*, and hence programmatically for the work as a whole, but a belief in the indirectness of Apollo's oracle was more general (Heraclitus B93 D–K; Arist. *Rhet.* 1407a35–b2), and puzzling responses and their solution made for more memorable stories: Harrison (2000) 156–7 raises the possibility that Herodotus' emphases do not reflect the wider reality; cf. Hollmann (2011) 106, 247.

[27] Highlighted by Pelling (1996); Old Testament dreams appear to result in successful outcomes considerably more often, as in the career of Joseph in *Genesis* 37, 39–45.

[28] For this suggestion see Asheri ap. Asheri–Lloyd–Corcella (2007) ad loc.

Datis which draws his attention to the sacrilegious theft of a statue from Delium is supplemented by an oracle to the Thebans which leads to its eventual restoration.[29] Like the brief reports of oracles, such allusive passages imply that these dreams supplied clear direction or were readily comprehensible, and they also demonstrate that dreams in Herodotus are not always sinister and can have positive outcomes.[30] Again, where the content of dreams is described, they are not necessarily obscure: as we shall see, although on occasion dreams are misinterpreted, the essential challenge which they pose is how to act in response to the information which they provide, since they point more insistently to a specific future than is typical of oracles.[31]

The first significant puzzle of Croesus' reign is a very good case in point: he dreams that his son Atys will be fatally wounded by an iron spear (1.34). That seems clear enough—indeed, Herodotus states at the outset that the dream 'showed him the truth of the impending disaster regarding his son'— and he responds by taking what seem obvious precautions, withdrawing his son from military duties and removing all weapons from the men's quarters. The trouble comes with the advent of the Mysian boar: Atys argues that having no hands or iron weapon, the boar cannot inflict the predicted wound (1.39) and Herodotus tells us that Croesus accepts the validity of this interpretation (ὦ παῖ, ἔστι τῇ με νικᾷς γνώμην ἀποφαίνων περὶ τοῦ ἐνυπνίου, 1.40). The result is a disaster which Herodotus spells out authorially: 'At that moment the foreigner, the very one who had been purified of homicide and was named Adrastos, threw his spear at the boar, but missed it, and hit Croesus' son. He was hit by the spear and so fulfilled the prophecy of the dream' (1.43.2–3), and in what follows we again see the process of realisation

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[29] Cf. the suggestion at 8.54 that Xerxes' sacrifice on the Athenian acropolis might have been at the bidding of a dream.

[30] Cf. the aid promised to the pharaoh Sethos by a dream in response to his prayer (2.141), though the form it takes, a plague of field-mice, is unexpected. We should probably in this context leave to one side Agariste's dream that 'she gave birth to a lion' (6.131.2) given the ambiguity of lion symbolism (cf. 5.56.1 with Brock (2013) 89–90, 118); this belongs to the common motif of the pregnant mother's dream of giving birth to an animal, plant, or object which foreshadows the future glory or infamy of her child, discussed at length by Lanzoni (1927), esp. 243–5 for the classical material, with brief consideration of childhood portents (226) and dreams of miraculous impregnation (228, 260–1): cf. in particular Philistos, *FGrHist* 556 F 57(a) = Cic. *Div.* 1.39, where the mother of the future Dionysius 1 dreams of giving birth to a little satyr, also an ambiguous figure (see Wardle (2006) ad loc.) and Plut. *Alex.* 2.3–4 (where, however, it is Philip, not Olympias, who dreams of a lion).

[31] Like oracles, dreams can give specific instructions, like that of Sabacos (2.139; see further below, p. 15) and Xerxes' first dream (7.12), and of course the prescriptions of oracles too have to be implemented (below, pp. 14, 20, 22).

and Croesus' gradual recognition that the disaster is no more than had been predicted (1.45).

The fate of Atys highlights the recurrent problem that there is often more than one possible interpretation or fulfilment for a puzzle: as we shall see, success often lies in the ability to go beyond a literal reading, like that of Atys, or the obvious interpretation, or to take a fresh approach. There is a clear prompt to do so when the puzzle contains an apparent *adunaton* such as the idea of a mule becoming king of the Medes (1.55.2),[32] and figurative or riddling language like 'the wooden wall' will naturally lend itself to alternative readings. However, there is a particular danger when there is an acceptable surface reading, as there is to the prediction that if Croesus campaigned against the Persians he would destroy a great empire (1.53.3) or the Pythia's offer to the Spartans of Tegea to dance in and measure out with a rope (1.66.2): in both cases there is a failure of critical judgement which causes the consultants to seize on a superficial interpretation that coincides with their pre-conceived plans and to fail to consider the possibility that there might be another, less apparent signification. This is surely the implication of calling these oracles κίβδηλοι (1.66.3, 75.2): just as a κίβδηλος coin is not uniform, but rather one thing outside and another inside, so a κίβδηλος oracle is not as it first appears, but rather very different in its core from its surface appearance, and so anyone who takes it at face value will be deceived.[33]

The lesson is pointed up by the Spartans' second consultation, which models the process of successful interpretation in detail (1.67–8). First of all, they ask the correct conventional question, which god they should propitiate to get the upper hand in their war with Tegea, and are told to bring back the bones of Orestes. After a fruitless search, they ask Apollo for a clue, and are given a riddle (1.67.4, trans. Waterfield):

> On the Arcadian plain there is a place called Tegea[34]
> Where strong necessity drives the blast of two winds,
> Where there is blow and counter-blow, grief piled on grief.
> There the life-giving earth holds the son of Agamemnon,
> Whom you must bring home if you would be overlord of Tegea.

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[32] Note also 2.152 (bronze men from the sea) and below, p. 19 for *adunata* in fated utterances, and cf. Maurizio (1997) 234–5 for the Delphic motif 'white ravens will appear before …'.

[33] At 5.91.2, on the other hand, the oracle is 'not true coin' because issued by a bribed Pythia and not by Apollo. I follow Kurke (2009) in working from the numismatic sense of the word, though her conclusions are rather different.

[34] Wilson notes in his apparatus that Τεγέη in this line was obelised by Powell and suggests θήκη as a possible alternative.

This in the end is solved by Lichas through, as Herodotus puts it, 'a combination of luck and intelligence': the luck consists in being in the right place, a Tegean forge where the talkative smith tells him about a remarkable larger-than-life coffin; the intelligence lies in working out that this *is* the right place, by matching the details of the oracle to the location—everything fits, though the pieces of the puzzle are not entirely uniform: the smithy's twin bellows are 'winds' by synecdoche, the 'blow and counter-blow' literal and the 'grief piled on grief' metonymic.[35] Lichas 'put[s] these together (συμβαλόμενος δὲ ταῦτα)' to arrive at the solution; from that point, the community can take over and devise a subterfuge to enable Lichas to obtain Orestes' bones.

This is in several ways a characteristic episode. First of all, Herodotus ensures that the solution is made clear by setting out Lichas' reasoning step by step: this is one of the instances in which he chooses to employ a secondary focalisation which mimics the process whereby the penny drops, and as we shall see, in almost all other cases, he spells out the solution authorially to ensure that his readers get the point (below, pp. 27–8).[36] Secondly, this is a communal effort on the part of the Spartans. Whereas dreams are necessarily directed to individuals,[37] the position is more mixed where oracles are concerned. Within Herodotus' work, some oracles are addressed to individuals, but these tend to be figures of unusual eminence, as the nature of his subject would suggest, and overall the frequency of individual consultation appears considerably lower than the historical norm:[38] while poleis did regularly consult Delphi, it would seem that Herodotus wants to give particular prominence to oracles directed to communities, and the consequent participation of those communities in the process of interpretation.

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[35] For the metonymy see Hollmann (2011) 40; there may be an ambiguity in ἀντίτυπος, which could suggest either the anvil's repercussion or something more active such as 'parry' or 'riposte'.

[36] Other instances of secondary focalisation are 1.78.3, 91, 4.164.3 (though it is not spelt out that Alazeir is 'the most handsome bull'), 5.1.3 and 80 (both employing direct speech), 6.37.2, 9.33.3; authorial explanations include 1.48.2, 66.4, 141.3 (a fable), 210.1, 2.152.4, 3.58.2, 125.4, 4.201.4 (a deceptive oath), 6.19.3, 8.96.2, 9.35.2.

[37] In Herodotus dreams are always 'political' and premonitory, dreamt by kings or tyrants and their associates (with the possible exception of Agariste: above, n. 30): Lévy (1995) 18, 25–7; however, while such dreams are always an individual matter, the implications often extend more widely, because of the eminence of those individuals.

[38] For individual consultations of oracles see Eidinow (2007) 42–55 and particularly 72–138 (with a full catalogue by topic of enquiries) for Dodona, where they are about ten times as frequent as consultation by communities (345–8). In Herodotus individual consultations (for which n.b. above, n. 22) tend to have a political aspect (e.g., Miltiades: 6.35.3) or develop one (e.g., Battos: 4.155.3–4; Teisamenos 9.33.2).

III. One Interpreter or Many Interpreters?

The classic example of communal interpretation is the debate at Athens over the 'wooden wall' oracle (7.140–3), where the open debate and decision-making in the assembly invites contrast with the autocratic autonomy of a Croesus, or indeed a Peisistratus; I shall return to this shortly.[39] For the moment, I would particularly draw attention to the harnessing of the intelligence and interpretative capacity of all the members of the community: we saw in the case of the Spartans and the bones of Orestes that it was one individual, Lichas, who solved the problem, and his achievement is very properly celebrated, but that was only possible because he, like everyone else, was working on it; on the other hand, while debate is important, what makes the difference is the moment of insight.[40] This is a recurrent pattern: at Thebes, the debate about who 'their nearest' are is resolved 'when someone at last got the point and said "I think I understand what the oracle means"' (5.79–80); at Sparta, it is the Messenian Panites who suggests covert surveillance of Argeia to find out which of the royal twins is the elder (6.52). The same applies to non-oracular puzzles: at Lampsacus, 'one of the older men' sees the significance of Croesus' threat to 'wipe them out like a pine-tree', namely that pines do not put out new shoots when felled (6.37), and it is Gorgo who solves the puzzle of the blank writing tablets sent by Demaratus (7.239).[41] It should be conceded that solutions are not always credited to individuals, or perhaps even due to one: at Athens, there are a number of advocates of the theory that 'the wooden wall' refers to the navy (and some at least of the older men are barking up the wrong tree here in following a more literal interpretation that links it to the Acropolis stockade),[42] but it is again their ability to see beyond the obvious that enables Themistocles to carry the day by close textual analysis of the oracle and its reference to 'Blessed

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[39] So Barker (2006), rightly bringing Sparta too into the discussion. Dewald (2015) 79 remarks on the peculiar efficacy of communal deliberation in Herodotus; n.b. also below, n. 75.

[40] Similarly, Leonidas takes an individual initiative in deciding to sacrifice himself by sticking to his post at Thermopylae (somewhat in the manner of the Athenian king Codrus, also in response to a Delphic oracle: Lycurg. 1.84–7), thus choosing between the options set out by Delphi and ensuring that Sparta loses a king rather than being sacked by the Persians (7.220); on the further ambiguities of this passage see Baragwanath (2008) 64–78.

[41] Harrison (2000) 194 interprets this motif as 'the outsider coming forward with the correct interpretation' (on the motif of the lone interpreter see also Hornblower (2013) on 5.80.1, with parallels): I would rather want to say that interpretation is not restricted to citizens or political organs; cf. Barker (2006) 16 on the Spartans in book 1 as an 'interpretative community'.

[42] τῶν πρεσβυτέρων ἔλεγον μετεξέτεροι … οἱ μὲν δὴ συνεβάλλοντο τοῦτο τὸ ξύλινον τεῖχος εἶναι, οἱ δ' αὖ ἔλεγον τὰς νέας σημαίνειν τὸν θεόν (7.142.1–2).

Salamis'. It is likewise the Athenians at large who are credited with the identification of their 'son-in-law' with Boreas, who had carried off Oreithyia, the daughter of Erechtheus (7.189), and the massed Paeonians who identify the singing of the paian with their opponents shouting their name (5.1). So too 'the Spartans' as a body are said to have understood that the reference of the 'five contests' which the seer Teisamenus was told by the Pythia he would win was military and not athletic (9.33). This is a particularly striking case, as they were not the recipients of the oracle, but nevertheless managed to work out its true meaning, to the great benefit of their community.

By contrast, oriental monarchs and other autocrats are much more likely to seek to solve puzzles for themselves, or else to seek professional advice. Astyages looks to the dream-interpreters among the Magi to explain his worrying dreams, which they initially do correctly (1.107.1, 108.2), though later on, after Cyrus' miraculous survival, they too readily sound the all-clear in the belief that the dream has now been fulfilled in a trivial way ('for he will not rule for a second time') as dreams and oracles can be, a judgement that coincides with Astyages' own view (1.120.3–6), and in due course they pay the price (1.128.2). The difficulty that Herodotean advisers have in speaking truth to power is implicit here, and more plainly evident in the reign of Xerxes, in which the Magi conspicuously misinterpret the king's third dream (7.19.1) and the omen of the eclipse (7.37.2–3);[43] Mardonius' consultation of his officers and advisers about the possibility of threatening oracles is likewise undermined by their fear, and he simply imposes his own interpretation, which Herodotus shows to be based on a misunderstanding about the oracle in question and ignorance of another, relevant one (9.42–3).[44] A notable exception is the interpretation of the 'gifts' sent by the Scythians to the Persians, where Darius both allows Gobryas to advance an alternative interpretation, more realistic and less optimistic than his own, and eventually accepts it. The gifts are a rebus message:[45] a bird, a mouse, a frog, and five arrows. Darius characteristically interprets it self-servingly as equivalent to a

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[43] Compare the equivocation in the verdict of the royal judges at 3.31.2–5.

[44] There is the further consideration that although the Persians had not sacked Delphi, they had certainly intended to, and the cases of Aristodicus (1.159.4) and Glaucus (6.86γ.2–δ.1) indicate that Apollo tends to take the intention for the act itself, as Harrison (2000) 150 n. 104 observes; cf. Flower and Marincola (2002) ad loc. for other possibilities. The one instance of a Greek autocrat consulting experts, the dream of Hipparchus (5.56), is not clear-cut, since we are not told what the ὀνειροπόλοι said, but only that he rejected or dismissed the dream (ἀπειπάμενος τὴν ὄψιν): so Hornblower (2013) on 5.56.1, likewise Hollmann (2011) 87, though at 245 n. 78 he treats this as an instance of 'interpretation by professional unheeded', which I think goes beyond what the text says.

[45] For the historical reality of such messages, and the challenge of interpreting them, see West (1988).

gift of earth and water and tokens of surrender, because a mouse is associated with the earth, a frog lives in water, a bird resembles a horse, and the arrows symbolise Scythian military power—weak and stretched reasoning, and doubtless meant to seem so. Gobryas' reading is as follows: 'Listen, men of Persia: if you don't become birds and fly up into the sky, or mice and burrow into the ground, or frogs and jump into the lakes, you'll never return home because you'll be shot down by these arrows' (4.131–2 tr. Waterfield); Darius subsequently accepts the validity of this, observing the Scythians' total disregard for the Persians (4.134.2), but that is only possible because of Gobryas' high status and prior record.[46] As Darius' performance here would imply, kings do not necessarily fare better when they privilege their own understanding: thus shortly after the incidents just mentioned, Xerxes takes no heed of the clearly unfavourable omens of the horse giving birth to a hare and the hermaphrodite mule (7.57–58.1). As we have seen, Croesus and Cambyses both fall into error by failing to spot an ambiguity: here, perhaps, we can see most clearly the damage done by the absence of any debate or dialogue which might have raised the possibility of alternative readings. The most conspicuous failure, however, is that of Cyrus (1.209), who interprets a dream of a winged Darius shading Asia with one wing and Europe with the other as a warning of conspiracy vouchsafed by the gods, who out of concern for him reveal all the future (1.209.4): here one might suggest that his judgement has been warped because he has, as Pelling puts it, 'come to believe in his own propaganda'[47]—ironically as a result of the sequence of events precipitated by Astyages' dreams—and Herodotus spells out his error, explaining that the dream foreshadowed his own death and the future accession of Darius (1.210.1). There is a different kind of failure on the part of the Egyptian Dodecarchs (2.151), who recognise in Psammetichus' use of his helmet to pour a libation the fulfilment of an oracle given at 2.147.4, but are undone by their very moderation and willingness to accept his lack of intent as a mitigating factor.[48]

All the same, kings and autocrats can get things right: we have already noted (above, pp. 8–9) that Croesus initially reads his dream correctly but allows himself to be talked out of it, in line with the recurrent motif of the

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[46] So Corcella ap. Asheri–Lloyd–Corcella (2007) on 4.132.2–3 ('above suspicion of defeatism'), also remarking on the weakness of Darius' reasoning; even the highest status on its own is no guarantee of a fair hearing, however, as Artabanus discovers: 7.11.1.

[47] Pelling (2006) 164 n. 85, bringing out the ambiguity in the Greek.

[48] So Lloyd ap. Asheri–Lloyd–Corcella (2007) 234, 353, though one might wonder whether the oracle is bound to be fulfilled and so precaution is futile: there is a resemblance to Astyages' willingness to accept that Cyrus is no longer a threat.

difficulty of side-stepping the predicted future.[49] In particular, a number of
Greek tyrants display considerable interpretative skill, underlining the point
that for Herodotus the kind of practical insight in play here is not confined to
those who in his own time would pass a test of moral or civic virtue.[50] A
notable case in point is Peisistratus, who on his second return to Attica is
presented with a spontaneous prophecy by the seer Amphilytus of
Acarnania: 'the cast is made, the net is spread, the tunny will shoal in the
moonlit night' (1.62.4); he immediately understands it ($\sigma\upsilon\lambda\lambda\alpha\beta\acute{\omega}\nu$), says that
he accepts it ($\delta\acute{\epsilon}\kappa\epsilon\sigma\theta\alpha\iota$: on this word as marking understanding see further,
below, pp. 18–19) and acts accordingly (1.63).[51] Like many oriental monarchs,
Peisistratus finds his own solution to the puzzle, and indeed this is even more
characteristic of Greek autocrats, who, as already noted, make little use of
expert advice and very largely rely on their own judgement,[52] though not
always successfully: Polycrates ignores the warnings he is given (3.124) and
Arcesilaus III of Cyrene first forgets an oracular warning in the heat of the
moment, and then takes the wrong precaution against the subsidiary warning
by misreading an ambiguous phrase about 'the place surrounded by water'
(4.163–4). On the other hand, Periander correctly reads the object lesson of
Thrasybulus which because of its content is reserved for him: the instruction
to cut down the 'tall ears of corn' is precisely coded so that the messenger can
make nothing of it; so too the first message obtained from his late wife at the
Thesprotian oracle of the dead contains a private key that only he will
understand (5.92ζ.2–η.3).[53] A striking instance of such interpretative intelli-
gence at work is that of Hippias, who has the wisdom to modify his inter-
pretation in the light of experience: initially he believes that his dream of
sleeping with his mother portends that he will capture Athens, and indeed

[49] Even enigmatic dreams are interpreted correctly as often as not: besides Astyages,
note also Polycrates' daughter (3.124) and n.b. Lévy (1995) 22–5.

[50] Cf. Dewald (1985) 53–5 on the success of 'tricksters' in deploying 'practical
knowledge' in the work.

[51] Like the earlier portent of the cauldron boiling over which prefigured his birth,
correctly interpreted by Chilon (1.59.1–3) but ignored by Hippocrates, the oracle marks
him out as destined for greatness: Lavelle (1991); cf. the Delphic oracles regarding
Cypselus (5.92.β–ϵ).

[52] As already noted (above, n. 44), Hipparchus is the only Greek to make use of dream-
interpreters; contrariwise, $\chi\rho\eta\sigma\mu\omicron\lambda\acute{o}\gamma\omicron\iota$ appear only in the company of Greeks, but do not
function as interpreters except in the 'wooden wall' debate (7.142.3–143.3), though n.b.
Bowden (2003) 261 and n. 30, 273–4 for the possibility that these are skilled lay-people
rather than professionals.

[53] Hollmann (2011) 167, 230, 245–6 draws attention to the motif of the uncomprehend-
ing messenger as highlighting the intelligence of the recipient.

there is a tradition of such dreams,[54] but in this case, when he subsequently coughs out a tooth and loses it, he realises that the dream has in this way already been fulfilled, and that his hopes of conquest have been in vain (6.107–8).

It is also striking that the only occasions on which the specific instructions of oracles and dreams are successfully defied concern two rulers of Egypt, Sabacos and Mycerinus.[55] When the Ethiopian pharaoh Sabacos is ordered by a dream to assemble all the priests in Egypt and cut them in half, he refuses to commit any such sacrilege and instead voluntarily abdicates power and leaves Egypt (2.139): knowing that he has in any case reached the end of the fifty years in power foretold by the Ethiopian oracles, he is able to give up power on his own terms by combining the two elements; the ultimate outcome both is and is not as predestined. The case of Mycerinus (2.133) is similarly oblique: an oracle foretells that he only has six years to live and, when he reproaches the god, he is told that this is precisely because he has behaved virtuously, when Egypt was fated to suffer; however, by partying all night as well as all day and so 'turning his nights into days', he technically falsifies the oracle by doubling his remaining life and so wins a kind of moral victory by his ingenuity.[56]

IV. Be Alert!

The same self-confidence underlies the even more direct challenge to authority entailed by testing supernatural sources of information, as Croesus notoriously does with Delphi and other Greek oracles. Recent scholarly discussion of this episode has tended to shift away from a concern with the potential impiety involved in doubting the veracity of divinely inspired utterance to highlighting the ingenuity behind the experiment.[57] It is unde-

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[54] Notably that of Julius Caesar: Plut. *Caes.* 32.9 with Pelling (2011) ad loc.; on the moral aspects of Hippias' dream see also Holt (1998).

[55] Though note also Aristodicus at Branchidae (below, p. 17) for a less clear-cut Greek example where *inter alia* he is not the original consultant, and honours are more or less even in moral terms.

[56] Harrison (2000) 103–4 sees Sabacos as able 'to sidestep fate' by avoiding 'a divine trap'; cf. 225–7 on both cases as constituting a partial avoidance of fate, though he perceives less of a moral victory for Mycerinus than I do, somewhat relieving the rather bleak conception of fate here (though n.b. Lloyd ap. Asheri–Lloyd–Corcella (2007) 336, 342 for Egyptian prophecies of doom). Hollmann (2011) 93 attributes Sabacos' success to an ability to bring together information from different sign systems; cf. 234 on Mycerinus' manipulation of the terms 'night' and 'day'.

[57] Christ (1994) 189–93 challenges earlier readings of the test as impious or a cause of Croesus' fall, seeing his failure instead as an intellectual one, and also notes the careful construction of the experimental protocols; his view is in keeping with recent tendencies to

niable that the challenge which Croesus sets the oracles is very cleverly devised, but we should also note how bizarre, even transgressive, Croesus' behaviour is here if considered as an oracular consultation: rather than making an enquiry to seek information—which is likely to require decoding—Croesus confronts the oracles with an abstruse and pointless puzzle of his own devising[58] which *they* have to decode in order to supply an answer he already knows. In effect, he sets himself up as a kind of oracle, a locus of privileged understanding; unlike a regular consultant, he gains no additional information about the future such as a god might vouchsafe, though he does obtain experimental data regarding oracle performance. However, the Pythia responds in kind (1.47): not only does she utter a spontaneous prophecy, refusing to sit there and wait for the question to be posed, but she couches her own response as a puzzle—two can play at that game!—which will only make sense to the individual who created the original puzzle.[59] It is left for Herodotus to provide readers with the solution by filling in the detail of Croesus' original test (1.48), throwing the readers' attention from Croesus' cleverness to Apollo's insight, which will be further validated in the god's retort to Croesus' recriminations after his fall (below, pp. 24–5).

The other test conducted by an oriental monarch is of a rather different kind: Xerxes' experiment to validate the dream he has had, warning him in menacing terms not to abandon his plan to invade Greece, by investigating whether it will appear to Artabanus if he makes the latter put on his clothes and then sit on his throne and sleep in his bed (7.12–18). In a sense the experiment, notwithstanding Artabanus' doubts about the need for pretence, is a success, since the dream does appear to him, though in his own person (thus also confirming his doubts and so doubly persuading him), but ironically Artabanus then drops his guard and takes the illegitimate further step of inferring that the dream portends doom for the Greeks.[60]

see Herodotus as rational and sceptical: cf. Asheri ap. Asheri–Lloyd–Corcella (2007) on 1.46.2, but also Harrison (2000) 134 n. 46: 'Herodotus' attitude is not so much one of disapproval as of wry detachment: Croesus was trying to obtain an impossible degree of certainty'; note, however, the moral disapproval implicit in Xenophon's reworking of this episode at *Cyr.* 7.2.17, which Ellis (2016) 85 attributes to his peculiarly Socratic theology.

[58] Though the anonymous reader has drawn my attention to a proverb recorded by Zenobius (*Centuries* 4.19): 'one must either eat tortoise flesh or not eat it … with reference to those who are starting to embark on some matter, but delaying'.

[59] So rather resembling the coded private messages to Periander (above, p. 14). Kindt (2006) 38–9 highlights Croesus' failure to take any account of the first two lines, with their emphasis on the scope of divine knowledge.

[60] Christ (1994) 193–7 again sees this episode as an exploration of constraints on human enquiry, while Bonnechere (2010) treats it as an exercise in validation; on Artabanus' mistaken confidence see (e.g.) Christ (1994) 195; Lévy (1995) 23; Baragwanath (2008) 250. Notwithstanding the objections of Köhnken (1988) 38–9, it is quite tempting to see echoes

While the testing of oracles and dreams used to be regarded as characteristically barbarian, these days it is recognised that this is not the case.[61] The most striking instance is the performance of Aristodicus of Cyme, who refuses to accept the instruction of Apollo at Branchidai that the Cymeans should hand over their suppliant, the rebel Pactyes, to the Persians (1.158): when the god re-iterates his response, Aristodicus challenges him by a kind of object lesson, driving out the birds nesting in the temple, and, when a disembodied voice upbraids him for sacrilege, effectively charges the god with inconsistency, the nesting birds also being in a sense suppliants. To this the god replies that his response was intended 'to hasten the impiety and consequent destruction of Cyme, so that you never again come to consult me on the issue of the surrender of suppliants' (1.159 tr. Waterfield). While that might suggest that the Cymeans' prospects are bleak, in the event they are able to change their minds for the better: taking to heart the oracle, they convey Pactyes to Mytilene and then, when they discover that the Mytileneans are planning to betray him, transfer him to Chios; while the Chians *do* sell him out to the Persians (1.160), Herodotus does not report any harm befalling Cyme.[62] It is a reasonable conclusion that they have been saved by the ingenious intervention of Aristodicus which changed their minds. We have already seen this readiness to ask for a second opinion or to check details in the second Spartan consultation of Delphi concerning Tegea; the request of the Athenian *theopropoi* for a second and better oracle before Xerxes' invasion (7.141.1–2) is another celebrated instance, and we can compare the way in which Miltiades checks with Delphi whether to accept the invitation of the Dolonci (6.35.3–36.1), or the future Cyreneans' seeking further advice on their Libyan settlement (4.156.1, 157).[63] Herodotus is also

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of a substitution ritual, as suggested by Germain (1956): for another piece of transmuted Near Eastern ritual see 7.39–40 with Thomas (2012) 233–44; for another substitution ritual seen through Greek eyes, n.b. Plut. *Alex.* 73.5–74.1, Diod. 17.116.2–4, Arr. *An.* 7.24.1–3 with Hamilton (1969) 204.

[61] Christ (1994) 190 with n. 67; Asheri ap. Asheri–Lloyd–Corcella (2007) 42 n. 103. The behaviour of Mardonius in 8.133 is rather different, since he polls all the available oracles without expressing any reservations about their value or veracity (though as Bowie (2007) 220 observes, one is again given prominence in the narrative).

[62] This case, though often regarded as parallel to that of Glaucus (6.86), is arguably different to the extent that whereas Glaucus quite directly consults Delphi about the feasibility of theft by swearing a false oath, the Cymean question, though similarly put with a view to breaching the moral imperative to protect suppliants, is open, and prompted by their being in a genuine double-bind: Parker (1985) 313; the Chians' handling of their reward, the *peraia* of Atarneus, shows that they recognised that it was morally tainted (1.160.5).

[63] Note also the objections to Delphic instructions in this story: 4.150.3, 155.4. Christ (1994) 190 distinguishes Greeks from barbarians in that they 'consult the same oracle repeatedly on the same question', which seems to be correct for Herodotus, though for a

conscious that not all oracles are equally reliable, and well aware of the
possibility that their personnel might be bribed (5.63.1, 91.2, 6.66.2–3) and
individual oracles forged (7.6.3) or distorted in transmission (1.158.2; cp. the
careful selectivity of Onomacritus: 7.6.4), so that a degree of scepticism seems
to be authorised in other instances: apart from Aristodicus at Branchidai, we
are told that in his youth Amasis had regularly denied his thefts before
oracles, often successfully, and so as pharaoh only respected those oracles
which had convicted him (2.174).[64]

A similar cautiousness lies behind Artabanus' observation that dreams
have a tendency to reflect the waking concerns of the individual (7.16.β2):
even if he turns out to be off-target in this particular case, he is right to
suggest that not all dreams are significant,[65] just as not all oracles can be
trusted implicitly: awareness that this is so is part of the mental alertness
required for successful interpretation. Again, not everything that might be a
sign really is one—sometimes a bird is just a bird—even if it might appear
uncanny;[66] on the other hand, it is often up to the observer to recognise the
significance in what might otherwise seem insignificant, and recognise the
sign for what it is.[67] In a number of cases, including that of the oracle to
Peisistratus (1.63.1) already discussed, this is marked by the verb δέκεσθαι: in
contrast to Amphilytus' inspired speech, the other speakers involved utter
κληδόνες, words which turn out to have an unintended prophetic signifi-
cance. When Xerxes replies to Spartan demands for compensation for the

conspicuous historical exception n.b. the episode in 388 BC in which the Spartan king
Agesipolis first consulted the oracle of Zeus at Olympia whether it would be legitimate to
reject an Argive offer of a sacred truce, and then asked Delphic Apollo whether he agreed
with his father (Xen. *Hell.* 4.7.2); Bonnechere (2010) likewise distinguishes attempts to
validate the content of oracles from the consultation of multiple oracles (123–4), notes
instances of double consultation by Greeks (125–6) and suggests that such testing of oracles
might be seen as a demonstration of good faith and piety (133); n.b. also Flower (2008)
147–52, who cites some interesting cross-cultural parallels for testing oracles and seers.

[64] Accusations of corruption are similarly levelled against seers in tragedy: e.g. S. *OT*
380–89, *Ant.* 1033–47; Flower (2008) 135–6.

[65] *Pace* Christ (1994) 195, who suggests that the reappearance of Xerxes' dream 'proves
Artabanus' elaborately stated theory of dreams to be empty speculation'; Lévy (1995) 25–6
points out that the anomalous sample of dreams in the work need not invalidate
Artabanus' ideas.

[66] Contention as to whether a bird is significant or not goes back to Homer (*Od.* 2.181–
2), though in practice such material in Herodotus seems already pre-selected for
significance, unlike the opaque prodigies of Roman annalistic history (on which see e.g.
Levene (1993) 4–5); contrast the bizarre but significant case of Meles' concubine giving
birth to a lion (below, n. 79).

[67] Hollmann (2011) 52 n. 2 cites the principle of Peirce that 'nothing is a sign unless it is
interpreted as a sign'; those that lack a verbal aspect to draw attention to them are likely
to be harder to recognise as such (below, n. 83).

death of Leonidas by dismissively saying that Mardonius will requite them (δίκας δώσει) as they deserve (8.114.2), the herald 'accepts what is given', in accordance with Delphi's instructions (δέκεσθαι, 8.114.1, δεξάμενος, 115.1), and the ambiguous utterance is fulfilled at Plataea, as Herodotus explicitly notes in the aftermath of the battle (9.64.1).

There is a less literal episode later in the book, during the narrative of the origins of the Macedonian royal house, in which Perdiccas and his brothers ask the Macedonian king for their wages and he gestures to the sunlight and says 'there are your wages' (8.137.3–4): Perdiccas likewise accepts the gift (δεκόμεθα, ὦ βασιλεῦ, τὰ διδοῖς), draws round the light with a knife-point and symbolically gathers it three times into his lap (8.137.5), and though the Macedonians belatedly recognise the implication of the episode, the brothers make their fated escape with the aid of providence. More straightforward is the name of the Samian envoy Hegesistratus, which Leotychidas recognises as an omen, presumably correctly in view of the result of the battle at Mycale (9.91).[68] Two other cases of inadvertent fated utterances concern *adunata*: in the first, during the rebellion of Babylon, one of the besieged Babylonians shouts to the Persians that they will take the city when mules foal; when one of his mules does indeed give birth, Zopyrus recognises a prophecy fulfilled through divine agency (σὺν γὰρ θεῷ ἐκεῖνόν τε εἰπεῖν καὶ ἑωυτῷ τεκεῖν τὴν ἡμίονον), and formulates his plan (3.151.2, 153.2). The other case is that of the Pelasgians of Lemnos: when the Pythia authorises whatever sanction the Athenians impose for the murder of Athenian women and children, and the Athenians call on the Lemnian Pelasgians to surrender their land, the latter reply that they will do so when the Athenians sail from their land to Lemnos in a single day on the north wind—but this is made possible when Miltiades is able to sail from the Athenian settlement in the Chersonese (6.139–40). Here we have the unexpected resolution, but no indication of divine intervention, despite what might seem like impiety in the Lemnians' setting of further conditions. Rather, what Herodotus picks out is again the moment

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[68] See Flower and Marincola (2002) ad loc. for the idea that 'verbally accepting' an omen makes it irrevocable; Powell (1938) s.v. 3, 'esp. *accept* an oracle or omen', includes a couple of instances of obedience to straightforward Delphic responses (4.15.2; 7.178.2) but omits 8.114.1 and 137.5 which are treated as acceptance of gifts. Lateiner (2005) discusses κληδόνες at length with numerous Greek and Roman examples; on 'nomen omen' in Herodotus see Munson (2005) 46–9; the case of the Troizenian Leon is a sinister variant, while the name of Krios the Aeginetan is the basis for a neat piece of repartee (on which see further, below, p. 26); on authorial word-play more generally, see Powell (1937) and Irwin (2007) 46–7.

of recognition on the part of Miltiades that changed circumstances have made possible the formerly impossible.[69]

Another more obvious kind of alertness is the need to keep oracles in mind. We have already noted failures on the part of the Lydian Mermnads and Arcesilaus of Cyrene (above, pp. 6, 14), and Greek poleis which fail to pay heed to the oracles they receive, or to devote due attention to the process of interpretation, can pay a heavy price. The Euboeans, having disregarded an oracle of Bacis as nonsense, pay for their negligence with the loss of much of their livestock after Artemisium (8.20); the Siphnians do not understand the import of 'the ambush of wood and the red messenger', the correct reading of which Herodotus spells out authorially, and end up having a hundred talents extorted from them by the Samian exiles (3.57–8). However, neglected oracles do not universally result in harm: the oracle of Lysistratus which had been 'forgotten by all the Greeks' (8.96.2) turned out to relate to the victory at Salamis.[70] Rather, such oblique and unspecific prophecies, especially those circulating in oracle collections like those of Bacis and Musaeus, point to another difficulty: how to know that an oracle (or other portent) has in fact been fulfilled. Not only are they typically ambiguous and so open to multiple readings,[71] but often they might be compatible with more than one context, as Astyages' dream seems at first to have been fulfilled by Cyrus' playing at being a king, but finds its true outcome later. Apparent fulfillment is not always definitive, and sometimes the reading of an oracle is liable to revision: so the Phocaeans initially set up a colony on Cyrnus (i.e., Corsica: 1.165), but subsequently abandon Alalia after a naval defeat and found a new settlement at Velia in southern Italy, after it is explained that the oracle referred to the hero Cyrnus, to whom they establish a cult (1.167). Here, the original recipients of the oracle are set right by an outsider, a man from Poseidonia, just as the Spartans correctly read the oracle to Teisamenos, whose athletic career, though pretty successful—second in the pentathlon at Olympia (9.33.2)—, was not the true meaning. There is probably another such case in the 'common oracle' of the Milesians and Argives, which would appear to have been initially given simply to the

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[69] Comparison with the Delphic resolution of a territorial dispute between Clazomenae and Cyme (Diod. 15.18.2–3) is instructive: the Clazomeneans win the race by moving the starting line, but this is an entirely calculated stratagem.

[70] Bowie (2007) ad loc. suspects an element of interpolation, but does not bracket the phrase concerning Lysistratus; likewise Wilson in the OCT brackets the clause referring to Bacis and Musaeus (τὸν χρησμὸν … ἐξενειχθέντα), following Powell, but accepts what follows about Lysistratus.

[71] Maurizio (1997) 319 nicely speaks of an oracle as being potentially 'filled with so much meaning that its correct interpretation may elude its human interpreters'.

former but then taken up by the latter, who read 'Argive' in a contemporary rather than epic sense.[72]

A classic parallel from a slightly later period is Thucydides' notice of the 'death or dearth' oracle activated, evidently not for the first or last time, during the plague at Athens, the textual uncertainty enhancing its contextual flexibility.[73] Again, one might point to the oracle to the Spartans warning against a 'lame kingship' (Xen. *Hell.* 3.3.3): since Diodorus (11.50.4) alludes to it in the context of 475 BC, we can reasonably infer that this was an old one which was deployed for particular political ends in the dispute over the succession in 400 BC. In this instance the question was one of interpretation: Diopeithes initially cited it in support of Leotychidas with reference to the fact that Agesilaus limped, and was then outplayed by Lysander's alternative interpretation, which took a figurative rather than literal line.[74] Herodotus clearly shows that in his time there were other oracles which were still 'live', waiting for fulfilment at some unspecified time in the future, like unexploded bombs: such are the oracles predicting that the Athenians will one day do terrible things to Sparta (5.90–1, 93) and/or expel the Dorians from the Peloponnese in alliance with the Persians (8.141) and that they will one day settle Siris in southern Italy (8.62), as well as the oracle predicting that the Persians would invade Greece, sack Delphi and perish to a man which caused concern to Mardonius (9.42: above, p. 12).[75]

Finally, as we have repeatedly seen, interpreters need to remain alert to all the possible alternative solutions. Often fulfilment turns on an ambiguous term, as twice in the case of Cambyses ('Smerdis', 'Ecbatana'). The same thing happens to Cleomenes, who is told by the Delphic oracle that he will

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[72] See Piérart (2003) for full discussion, though n.b. also Hornblower and Pelling (2017) 106–7, 193–5 for some reservations.

[73] Thuc. 2.54.2–3: contrast his mention of the contextually specific Delphic oracle to Sparta in 54.4. The oracle about the Pelargikon which he mentions a little earlier (2.17.1–2) is another instance of an unspecific prophecy finding a plausible but evidently not definitive explanation.

[74] That is certainly how Plutarch presents the matter in the *Lives* (*Ages.* 3.7; *Lys.* 22.1), though in *Mor.* 399B–C he represents the oracle as given on this occasion; Paus. 3.8.9 would seem to allow for either possibility.

[75] Cf. the prophecies about settlement around Lake Tritonis: 4.178–9. Maurizio (1997) 327–8, arguing for the role of the community in validating oracles, likewise proposes that there was 'a common stock of oracles which people knew and recalled when occasion arose'; this seems to me closer to the mark than thinking of oracles as being 'recycled', as Harrison (2000) 130 n. 35, 132 and n. 40, 143–4 puts it, following Asheri (1993) with reference to 8.77 (again with the suggestion that a textual variation facilitated alternative explanations); cf. also Herodotus' comments at 9.43 on what he regards as the true reference of the oracle mentioned by Mardonius. Dewald (1993) 67–9 likewise argues that the significance of *objects* might alter over time.

capture Argos (6.76.1); this turns out to mean a grove sacred to the hero Argos, which the Spartan king recognises (συμβάλλομαι) as fulfilment of a misleading prophecy (6.80).[76] It is not only prophecies which require alertness to alternatives: Gorgo perceives that the writing tablets sent by Demaratus to the Spartans are only superficially blank, and that there *is* a message hidden within (7.239), just as the hare which Harpagus sends to Cyrus (1.123.4) and the tattooed scalp of Histiaeus' slave (5.35.3) camouflage the messenger, though both the latter come with instructions for revealing the message, the point being rather that they should not be recognised for what they are by anyone else.[77] At times, the situation provides a spur to ingenuity, as with Mycerinus (above, p. 15): having as it were signed a blank cheque by swearing to do whatever is requested of him, Themison has, in order to escape his dilemma, to find a way to cast Phronime into the sea (καταποντῶσαι) without drowning her, which he does by a similar kind of equivocation, attaching a rope to the girl and thus following the letter, though not the spirit, of his instructions (4.154.3–4).[78]

V. Herodotus and Insight

Herodotus' people, then, need to apply the appropriate strategy to each puzzle which confronts them—and they also need to act on the understanding or information available.[79] There is no clear demarcation here between supernatural and natural worlds:[80] as we have already seen, some

[76] Though he is able to turn this to his own account when accused of taking a bribe to spare the city of Argos (6.82). Other ambiguities include 1.167.4 (Cyrnus), 4.163.3 (ἀμφίρρυτον: n.b. Corcella ap. Asheri–Lloyd–Corcella (2007) ad loc.) and 9.33 (ἀγών): such verbal ambiguities are typical of crossword clues, in which for example 'flower' commonly refers to a river.

[77] Though in all these cases the message is literally beneath the surface, as figuratively with the 'counterfeit' (κίβδηλος) oracles (above, p. 9); it may be the communicative function of the tablets which directs Gorgo to look for a message rather than reading them symbolically as an object.

[78] Cf. the Apollonians' compensation of Euenios, with Griffiths (1999) 174–5 and n. 23 on scope for ingenuity in the handling of 'the open-ended promise'. The use of ingenious indirection by wise advisers to instruct kings is analogous: Bias (or Pittacus: 1.27) and Croesus (1.88.3) both make their point by drawing their interlocutor into a response founded on mistaken understanding.

[79] And to take due pains in doing so, as the tale of the lion born to Meles' concubine (1.84.3), where he makes an unwarranted assumption, demonstrates; in the case of Athens and Aegina (5.89.2–3), however, the problem was rather an inability to refrain from action.

[80] Just as in the treatment of analogy in Corcella (1984), which progresses from divination to understanding of the unseen in the cosmos and geography, and thence to historical processes, emphasising that analogy must be combined with γνώμη.

oracles and dreams can be quite explicit,[81] and even when they are not, they do not automatically call for the indirect approach. Dicaeus, for example, is able to work out the implications of the portent which he and Demaratus see (8.65) in a purely inductive manner: Attica is empty, so the dust-cloud and voices must be of divine origin, and its origin in Eleusis and association with the Mysteries marks it as favourable to Athens and so threatening to the Persians;[82] finally, the direction which it takes marks the probable (κίνδυνος/κινδυνεύσει) locus of disaster. Again, the debate on the 'wooden wall' oracle moves from reinterpretation of the ambiguous key phrase to inference from the precise wording of the oracle (above, pp. 11–12). That said, Herodotus is mindful that there are many phenomena in the world which offer limited purchase to logical analysis, particularly those that lack a linguistic aspect,[83] and his openness to indirect routes to understanding, and his incorporation into his narrative of instances in which these are successfully followed, are a distinctive feature of the work. Such moments of sudden illumination are familiar to all of us, and recent research is starting to explain the brain processes and psychological mechanisms underlying them.[84] Herodotus' sympathetic recognition of this process can be regarded at the most basic level as arising naturally from his engagement with all

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[81] Though it is notable that he rarely employs the adjective ἐναργής, the *mot juste* for clarity in dreams (so Burnet (1924) on Pl. *Cri.* 44b4, though in some cases it would seem that the dream is 'vivid' rather than 'obvious' in its significance): 7.47.1 fits this usage, but in 8.77 the clarity seems only to appear retrospectively after the oracle's fulfilment, and that would also fit 5.55 (where, however, Wilson prints Wyttenbach's emendation ἐμφερεστάτην, though it should be noted that otherwise Herodotus uses this adjective only in geographic and ethnographic contexts).

[82] Herodotus withholds here the specific reason for Demeter's hostility, that the Persians had burnt her sanctuary, which he only reveals at 9.65.2.

[83] Beyond the cases considered above, one might point to objects (discussed by Dewald (1993), noting that 'the meaning of things is very likely to be multiple' (70)) and more generally to non-verbal communication (Lateiner (1987)).

[84] 'Insight problem solving' has been an object of academic study since the early 20th century and is currently a hot topic, to judge by the growth in bibliography over the past decade in neuroscience and psychology, the former using imaging techniques such as EEG, functional MRI and Event-related Potentials to identify the areas of the brain involved (see for example Bor (2012) 178–84 on the role of the prefrontal parietal network in structuring information by 'chunking', especially when seeking new patterns), while psychologists investigate the cognitive processes at work ('restructuring', relaxation of mental constraints and presuppositions) and techniques such as 'incubation' (i.e., sleeping on the problem to allow unconscious processing), distraction, and mindfulness which may assist it; note however the recent paper of Zhang and Zhang (2016), proposing a genetic factor, perhaps an indication that a full understanding will require a holistic approach, as seems to be increasingly the case in neurobiology (for example the work of Antonio Damasio (e.g., Damasio (2006)) on the role of emotion in decision-making).

aspects of human experience; more specifically, it is consistent with his acceptance of different levels of knowledge, understanding and certitude, hence his willingness to argue from analogy as well as to deploy the terminology of formal argumentation, and to use language such as συμβάλλομαι and εἰκάζω of his own researches as well as of the interpretative activities of his characters.[85] However, Thucydides' world of λόγος and ἔργον was a more rigorously rational one in which there was little place for insight of this kind, and later historiography very largely followed his lead.[86] Herodotus, by contrast, not only recognises the value of insight as a source of understanding: he values understanding for its own sake even in situations where it comes too late to be acted upon; indeed, it seems to be particularly those instances in which he is at pains to spell out the explanation. We have seen this already in the fate of Cambyses (above, pp. 2–5), and it is evident also in the programmatic case of Croesus, where there is likewise a convergence of signs of different kinds.[87] Here the process of ἀναγνώρισις is drawn out for emphasis: while Croesus invokes Solon on the pyre, and Herodotus reprises the episode in summary, focalised through Croesus, to underline the fulfilment of the wise adviser's warning, he still considers

[85] On Herodotus' use of analogy see Corcella (1984) and Thomas (2000), esp. 200–11 (n.b. 206 n. 88 for συμβαλεῖν, and 190–220 for the language of proof); on his language of inference and interpretation n.b. also Hollmann (2011) 13–19 (τεκμήριον), 24–7 (σημαίνω), 41–3 (εἰκάζω), 46–7 (τεκμαίρομαι) and, for συμβάλλομαι, above, n. 17. Darbo-Peschanski (1987) 164–89 highlights the provisional and qualified nature of many of Herodotus' assertions of fact; Irwin (2007) 47–50 explores the wider implications of Herodotus' use of συμβάλλεσθαι.

[86] Lateiner (1987) 89–90 remarks on Thucydides' very limited interest in non-verbal behaviours, and West (1987) 262 on the absence of dreams from his work; as already noted, he does include oracles, but takes a more analytic attitude to them (above, n. 73; however, in the case of Cylon it is he (1.126.4–6) rather than Herodotus (5.71) who alludes to an ambiguous oracle concerning 'the greatest festival of Zeus', though he does not press the point; n.b Hornblower (1991) and (2013) ad locc.) and likewise he has a rather different attitude to portents: Rusten (2013). One might note in this context that insight stands apart from the antithesis between instinct and reason underlying influential contemporary works on decision-making such as Gladwell (2006), esp. 266–72 and Kahneman (2011).

[87] Note the deferral of Croesus' correct use of the oracle in seeking help for his dumb son (1.85; above, n. 22), the fulfilment of which falls at the point at which everything is resolved, and of the portent of the horses which ate snakes, correctly interpreted by the Telmessians with their reasoning spelt out *in extenso* (1.78), which has no directly explanatory function but further foreshadows Croesus' downfall, as well as providing an instance of the Telmessians' interpretative skill, further validated in the narrative of the fall of Sardis (1.84.3; above, n. 79). The sense of convergence is enhanced by numerical patterning too: Croesus has ruled for fourteen years and been besieged for fourteen days, and fourteen Lydian boys are put on his pyre as a human sacrifice (1.86.1–2; on significant numbers in Herodotus, and for the reign of Croesus in particular, see now Wallace (2016)).

himself deceived by Apollo, and it is left to the god to answer his reproaches by spelling out the way in which he mishandled the oracles and failed to solve the riddle of the Persian mule;[88] only then does the Lydian king acknowledge that the fault was his and not the god's, and so sees the whole picture and fully understands it.[89]

VI. Patterns and History

This sense of 'rightness', of things fitting together, can help bring a coherence to a range of features of the work. On a modest surface level, we might for example note the case of round numbers: by this I do not mean numbers rounded for convenience or because of insufficiently detailed information, but numbers which end up rounded. A classic example is the fortune of the Lydian Pythios, which he offers to Xerxes: when the king asks what he is worth, Pythios says that he has worked out that the total is four million gold Darics less 7,000, and the Persian king responds by presenting him with the deficiency to round the total up (7.28–9). Again, the desertion of a Lemnian and a Tenian ship before Salamis rounds the Greek fleet up from 378 to 380 (8.82), while the Thespian survivors in the Greek camp at Plataea, though unarmed, serve to bring the total of Greek forces to a tidy 110,000 (9.30); likewise the various stages of the Royal Road between Susa and Sardis neatly total 13,500 stades, 450 parasangs, or 90 days' journey—three months, or three months and three days if you add on the Ephesus to Sardis leg (5.52–4).

Once one is aware of it, one can see Herodotus' interest in such neatness or 'rightness' expressed in other ways too. One such area is a concern with patterns and correspondences which we have already observed in the fall of Cambyses: one might point, for example, to the two shrines of Herakles on which the Athenians formate during the Marathon campaign (6.108, 116) or the precincts of Demeter at both Plataea and Mycale (9.101), and the synchronisms between Plataea and Mycale and Himera and Salamis are of the same kind. Here the instinct is to see some form of divine providence at work, as also in such episodes as the wrath of Talthybius, or the revenges of Demeter at Plataea, Poseidon at Potideia, and Protesilaos on Artaÿctes or, on the human plane, the vengeance of the eunuch Hermotimus on Panionius;

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[88] Kindt (2006) 42–3 remarks on the unusual clarity and directness of Apollo's language here.

[89] There is a similarly deferred ἀναγνώρισις earlier at the death of Atys (1.44–5), where the affinity with tragedy is more overt; contrast Thuc. 3.113.5, rightly identified as a moment of ἀναγνώρισις by Hornblower (1991) 533, where the effect on the Ambraciot herald is such mental paralysis that he abandons his mission and departs in confusion. The anonymous reader remarks on the aptness for the whole topic of Ezra Pound's version of Heracles' ἀναγνώρισις at S. *Tr.* 1174, 'What splendour, it all coheres'.

indeed, reciprocity, well known from the work of Gould in particular to be a central concern of Herodotus, is at once a patterning and an ethical system.[90]

Such episodes tend to be concentrated towards the end of the work, as the narrative moves towards its conclusion, but even here, there are elements in which it is hard to see a religious aspect. For example, in 8.92 Herodotus narrates an encounter between Themistocles and the Aeginetan Krios, who had featured in the 'hostage crisis' of Book 6 (6.50, 73) and who is not simply vindicated of the suspicion of medism here, but at this very moment rescues the heroic Aeginetan marine Pytheas, a POW preserved by the Persians in admiration of his valour (7.181), who thus returns home safely. Here we see an almost cinematic tying up of loose ends in a way that appeals to a desire for tidy narrative closure.

Both thematic and verbal correspondences are in play in the elaborate apparatus of ring-composition which is a striking feature of Herodotus' work. At the local level, verbal response serves as a closural device, marking off a section of the narrative, often after a temporal diversion or digression, but we can also register correspondences in narrative content, most conspicuously between the stories of Gyges and Candaules' wife and of Xerxes and the wife of Masistes at either end of the work which, together with the renewed evocation of the Trojan War, serve as a frame for the entire work.[91]

At other times the same sense of 'neatness' comes out in an appreciation of the neat riposte, as when the Andrians trump Themistocles' invocation of the Athenian divinities Πειθώ and Ἀναγκαίη by reference to their own native gods, Πενίη and Ἀμηχανίη (8.111), or when Periander's alienated son replies to his attempted reconciliation by telling him that he is liable to the sacred fine he himself had imposed on anyone who spoke to the boy (3.52).[92] The Pythia's riposte to Croesus' riddle (above, pp. 15–16) is another example, and the same eye for the apposite is at work in the historian's appreciation of the way in which sacrificial animals in Scythia are made to cook themselves (4.61); I would suggest that moral victories like those of Mycerinus (above, p.

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[90] Gould (1991), also id. (1989) esp. 42–7, 80–5.

[91] Flower and Marincola (2002) 291–2, 304–5; for ring-composition as a local structuring device see e.g. Boedeker (2002) 104–5 and, more generally, Immerwahr (1966) 53–8, all with further references. Douglas (2007), building on the work of Roman Jakobsen (e.g. 4–6, 72, 99–100), argues that the use of ring-composition in many cultures springs from a deep-rooted instinct to create parallelisms.

[92] The former episode is doubly pleasing given the earlier demonstration of Themistocles' sharpness in repartee (8.59 with Bowie (2007) ad loc.): as with insight (above, pp. 4, 14), individuals who are morally ambiguous or worse are capable of verbal dexterity: cf. Cleomenes (5.72, 6.50) for repartee and, more broadly, (e.g.) the clever framing of a deceitful oath at Barce (4.201), Artaÿctes' artful misrepresentation (9.116), and Darius' granting Oeobazus' request that his sons remain at home by having them killed (4.84). Note also the observations of Griffin (2014) 16–17 on memorable sayings.

15) and Nitocris' posthumous showing-up of Darius (1.187) appeal to the same sensibility.

There is a clear affinity between this kind of verbal patterning and Herodotus' fondness for fables and proverbs. The successful αἶνος functions by drawing or suggesting a parallel between the current situation and another one, a connection which may not be immediately apparent and may be expressed in oblique terms.[93] Proverbs and other maxims likewise suggest popular ways of making sense of a sequence of events by assimilating them to a familiar pattern which has become enshrined in folk-wisdom; such γνῶμαι reflect and appeal to common experience, without necessarily claiming to represent universal truths.[94]

It is also noteworthy that Herodotus shows evident concern that his audience shares these perceptions. With other aspects of his work, he is quite often willing to leave open interpretative choices such as which account to prefer, and it has been suggested that in this way he enlists his audience as active participants in doing history;[95] where puzzles are concerned, however, as we have seen, he almost always provides a solution, either focalised through the individual or group responsible for the solution, or—as for example when no solution was found at the time—through the authorial voice (above, p. 10). Thus the audience can feel a sense of satisfaction if they found the answer before being given it,[96] or at least appreciate the fitness of that answer once it is explained, and are spared any possible frustration: anyone who tries to solve puzzles will want to have the solution.[97] Just as it seems at times that Herodotus wants to put on display for us his own skill in solving more logical puzzles in his work such as the cause of the Nile's flooding (2.19–27), or the reasons why Helen cannot have gone to Troy (2.120), as he sets out in detail the reasoning by which he has worked out a solution, attesting to his own willingness to work things through, so, too, the patterns, correspondences, and round numbers are phenomena which he has

[93] See the discussion of Hollmann (2011) 132–42, some of whose examples (e.g., Artaphrenes to Histiaeus at 6.1.2) have the sharpness of repartee; also Griffin (2014) 12, suggesting a comparison with Aesopic stories.

[94] So, with different emphases, Lang (1984) 58–67; Gould (1989) 81–2, though Shapiro (2000) argues for a greater degree of coherence in Herodotus' use of proverbial wisdom; Griffin (2014) brings out beautifully the numerous popular elements in the work.

[95] E.g., Dewald (1987) 167–8; Lateiner (1989) 84; Baragwanath (2008) 4–5, 18–20 (and *passim*).

[96] de Jong (2006) 15 remarks that 'the reader … though usually understanding it [a dream] earlier than the dreamer himself … still shares his blindness for a while'.

[97] Recent research in psychology (e.g., Shen *et al.* (2016)) has drawn attention to the characteristic association of insight with positive emotional feelings, which I would suggest Herodotus feels himself and wants his readers to feel too; see below for the suggestion that there is also an affective aspect to his interest in patterns.

registered himself, and then draws to the attention of his readers for them to appreciate in turn, as he clearly anticipates that they will.

VII. Conclusion

It is becoming clear from contemporary research that the drive to seek for patterns and the desire to perceive order are fundamental to human existence: as Daniel Bor puts it, 'perhaps what most distinguishes us humans from the rest of the animal kingdom is our ravenous desire to find structure in the information we pick up in the world. We cannot help actively searching for patterns', to the extent that we create artificial ways of doing so in games such as crossword puzzles 'that inject pleasure into our lives because of the sense of satisfaction we feel when we spot beautiful structures.'[98]

We can see that Herodotus' approach to history reflects this, both in the way that he selects and organises his material and in his presentation of his perceptions to his readers: the concern which he shows to articulate the solutions to apparently obscure and baffling puzzles, his interest in picking out patterns, correspondences and other instances of neatness or tidiness in history, and the way in which the various kinds of puzzle not only conform to a common pattern, but on occasion work together at moments of particular significance, all serve to show that for Herodotus history is not simply one damn thing after another, because in important ways things fit together, and we can make sense of them. This understanding is to a great extent the product of hindsight: we have seen how the solution to particular puzzles is so often only achieved in retrospect, and the logic of events likewise only emerges after some time has elapsed. Such a position is compatible with the idea that for Herodotus history is essentially a kind of 'prophecy in reverse',[99] but to focus exclusively on fate or the divine is to skew the picture, particularly since the recurrent patterns which Herodotus detects in events at the largest scale such as the rise and fall of empires lend themselves equally to understanding in secular terms.[100] While interpretations of this kind tend to recruit supernatural phenomena such as oracles in their support, in so doing they over-privilege the macro level and 'master narratives', and miss the

[98] Bor (2012) 147–9; see also 138–43 on the process of structuring disparate information in complex ways by 'chunking' (cf. above, n. 84) and 184–6 for the suggestion that consciousness consists in the combination of diverse kinds of information held in areas all over the brain. Compare above, n. 91 on ring-composition, and for the pleasure of seeing patterns, see previous n.

[99] Harrison (2003), and cf. id. (2000) 230–4 for a good discussion of fate as the product of hindsight.

[100] The analysis of Immerwahr (1966) is still fundamental here.

point that the search for understanding in the *Histories* is going on constantly at the micro-level, and is, as I have argued, by no means exclusively theological or moral. Much of the material discussed above has no obvious religious aspect; hence I would want to locate oracles, dreams, and omens in a wider context, and to see the specifically religious and causal aspects of such phenomena as subordinate to a broader sense of history as patterned and coherent.

At the same time, if Herodotus has a teleological view of history, it is teleological only in a provisional or qualified sense: he is far too aware of the chronic instability of human existence for any kind of determinism, and his use in the programmatic statement of that principle at 1.5.4 of the prospective imperfect ('and those cities that in my time were great, were previously small') signals his awareness that his work will be read in times to come when circumstances have changed.[101] Just as the apparent fulfilment of an oracle or solution of a puzzle may turn out not to have been definitive, so we need to recognise that the lessons of history may be contingent, and that future readers may well be led by the *Histories* to new insights.[102]

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[101] Grethlein (2013) 185–223 is an excellent analysis of the ways in which the work is and is not teleological.

[102] Harrison (2018) presents a bracingly sceptical discussion of the challenges of learning from history in Herodotus' work (345–8 on 'instability' are particularly relevant here); in a footnote (353 n. 93) he quotes Pelling (2007), 200–1: 'Historical understanding requires constant thought and re-examination; it is a highly provisional business, and every time one thinks and reads again one may come up with something new.'

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