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CROESUS AT DODONA: THE TEST OF ORACLES IN THE ORACULAR CONTEXT*

Abstract: In this paper, I reinterpret Herodotus' account of Croesus' test of the oracles (1.46–9). By comparing the words of Croesus' question with the oracular tablets from Dodona, I show that Croesus' inquiry was troublingly ambiguous. Croesus meant 'What do I happen to be doing right now?' but in the oracular tablets, similar questions mean 'What might I do to find fortune?' I propose, therefore, that the other oracles could have offered Croesus advice about having fortune, which the king unwittingly discarded as not fitting his test, and I argue that this interpretation is more consonant with Herodotus' view of oracles in the rest of the *Histories*.

Keywords: Herodotus, Croesus, Oracles, Delphi, Dodona, Divination, Narratology

Introduction

In the first book of his *Histories*, Herodotus tells how Croesus tested the oracles. According to the story, Croesus concluded from his test that Delphi was the only true oracle.[1] This conclusion could be, and has traditionally been, taken to imply that the rest, including Ammon, Abae, Dodona, Trophonius, and Branchidae (Didyma), gave false oracles. For this reason, some scholars have interpreted the tale of Croesus' test and judgement as a symptom of fierce competition between oracular sanctuaries over clientele.[2] Others have thought that the story is indicative of a profound scepticism on the part of Herodotus or his contemporary audience towards the value of oracles.[3] There are two main issues with both interpretations. First, they take for granted that Herodotus and his audience accepted Croesus' final judgement about the value of these oracles as accurate. Second, nowhere else in the *Histories* does Herodotus treat these oracles as false, and in fact, he actually emphasises that pronouncements from these oracles were truly fulfilled.

In this paper, I offer a new interpretation of the story that is more readily reconciled with the overall picture of oracular divination in the *Histories*. I

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[1] For an explanation of Croesus' ambiguous stance on Amphiaraus at Oropus, see below.

[2] Parke–Wormell (1956) 131–3; Crahay (1956) 195–7; Asheri–Lloyd–Corcella (2007) 108–9.

[3] Legrand (1937) 278; Lateiner (2007) 813; Asheri–Lloyd–Corcella (2007) 108.

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argue that a comparison of Croesus' question with similar expressions from the extant oracular *lamellae* from Dodona reveals an ambiguity that would have made room for two different kinds of true responses. Croesus' judgement about the truth of these oracles was, therefore, framed by his own intent when he interpreted them. By this comparison, I show that although Croesus clearly intended his question as a test (What does he happen to be doing?), the most obvious meaning of his phrasing in an oracular context is one of seeking advice (What might he do to find fortune?). The interesting consequence of this finding is that while the oracles could have given either sound advice about finding fortune or a description of what Croesus happened to be doing at that moment, only the oracles that said something about making a stew would have seemed to be true to Croesus. In light of this fact, I propose an alternative interpretation of the story. The other oracles could have offered Croesus true advice about having good fortune that had nothing to do with cooking. When understood in this way, Croesus' judgement need not cast Herodotean or contemporary popular doubt on the prophetic value of oracles but indicates once again Croesus' own failure at dealing with oracles and their interpretation.

The Story

When Croesus was considering waging war against the Persians, he wanted to get advice from the gods, but he also wanted to make sure that it was the best advice. Thus, he conceived an elaborate scheme to test whether they might know the truth (1.46.3):

> Having commanded the following things of the Lydians, he was sending them for the test of the oracles: after counting the days during the intervening time from that day on which they would leave Sardis, that they consult the oracles on the hundredth day, asking what does Croesus, son of Alyattes, King of the Lydians, happen to be doing (ὅ τι ποιέων τυγχάνοι ὁ Λυδῶν βασιλεὺς Κροῖσος ὁ Ἀλυάττεω); and after writing down whatever each of the oracles would prophesy, that they bring it back to him.[4]

Despite the number of oracles involved, the Pythia's response was the only oracular pronouncement that Herodotus knew. She said in verse:

[4] Hdt. 1.47.1: ἐντειλάμενος δὲ τοῖσι Λυδοῖσι τάδε ἀπέπεμπε ἐς τὴν διάπειραν τῶν χρηστηρίων, ἀπ' ἧς ἂν ἡμέρης ὁρμηθέωσι ἐκ Σαρδίων, ἀπὸ ταύτης ἡμερολογέοντας τὸν λοιπὸν χρόνον ἑκατοστῇ ἡμέρῃ χρᾶσθαι τοῖσι χρηστηρίοισι, ἐπειρωτῶντας ὅ τι ποιέων τυγχάνοι ὁ Λυδῶν βασιλεὺς Κροῖσος ὁ Ἀλυάττεω· ἄσσα δ' ἂν ἕκαστα τῶν χρηστηρίων θεσπίσῃ, συγγραψαμένους ἀναφέρειν παρ' ἑωυτόν. On the use of the potential optative here, see below.

> But I know the number of sand and the measures of the sea, and I understand the mute and I hear the one who does not speak. A scent has come to my senses of a hard-shelled tortoise, cooked in bronze with lamb flesh, below which bronze has been spread, and bronze has been set upon it.[5]

The delegates at Delphi wrote down the response and returned to Sardis. There, Herodotus lays the scene for an evaluation of oracles in the presence of the king:

> And when the others who had been sent were also present, carrying their oracles, then Croesus, opening each one, was looking over the writings. None of the others, in fact, was pleasing to him, but when he heard the one from Delphi, he immediately offered prayers and accepted it, thinking that the only oracle was the one in Delphi, because it had discovered for him what things he did.[6]

Herodotus then explains why Croesus was pleased and was spurred to offer prayers. His plan had been to do something on the hundredth day that he supposed only a god could know. He had settled on cooking a stew of lamb and tortoise in a bronze pot (1.48.2). Thus, with the knowledge of what he had done, it seemed to him that the Pythia had smelled his boiling stew while he was cooking it on the hundredth day from hundreds of miles away. Since Delphi apparently gave the only oracle that correctly described what Croesus happened to be doing at that moment, the king naturally thought that 'the only oracle was the one in Delphi' (*μοῦνον εἶναι μαντήιον τὸ ἐν Δελφοῖσι*, 1.48.1).

It is true that Herodotus goes on to claim that Croesus considered Amphiaraus at Oropus to be truthful. However, the historian is explicit about not knowing what that oracle had said on this occasion, and Croesus is said only to have considered Amphiaraus' oracle to be 'unlying' (1.49). Thus, the connection between the story of the test and Croesus' opinion about Amphiaraus is somewhat strained. These considerations add some credence to Peter Thonemann's argument that the ambiguous reliability of Amphiaraus

[5] Hdt. 1.47.3: *οἶδα δ' ἐγὼ ψάμμου τ' ἀριθμὸν καὶ μέτρα θαλάσσης,|καὶ κωφοῦ συνίημι καὶ οὐ φωνεῦντος ἀκούω.|ὀδμή μ' ἐς φρένας ἦλθε κραταιρίνοιο χελώνης|ἑψομένης ἐν χαλκῷ ἅμ' ἀρνείοισι κρέεσσιν,|ᾗ χαλκὸς μὲν ὑπέστρωται, χαλκὸν δ' ἐπίεσται*. For a pair of extra-contextual interpretations of this oracle, see Wormell (1963); Dobson (1979).

[6] Hdt. 1.48.1: *ὡς δὲ καὶ ἄλλοι οἱ περιπεμφθέντες παρῆσαν φέροντες τοὺς χρησμούς, ἐνθαῦτα ὁ Κροῖσος ἕκαστα ἀναπτύσσων ἐπώρα τῶν συγγραμμάτων. τῶν μὲν δὴ οὐδὲν προσίετό μιν· ὁ δὲ ὡς τὸ ἐκ Δελφῶν ἤκουσε, αὐτίκα προσεύχετό τε καὶ προσεδέξατο, νομίσας μοῦνον εἶναι μαντήιον τὸ ἐν Δελφοῖσι, ὅτι οἱ ἐξευρήκεε τὰ αὐτὸς ἐποίησε.*

in the *Histories* is a result of Herodotus' attempt to explain the disparity between Croesus' claim about the test and the treasure that he knew the Lydian to have given to Amphiaraus.[7] In any case, as this story makes clear, Delphi gave the answer that Croesus was truly expecting, and the others did not.

Approaches to the Apparently False Oracles

This tale seems to promote Delphi at the expense of the other oracular sanctuaries. Scholars have pointed out that the oracles consulted by Croesus appear to make a more fitting list of Delphi's fifth-century oracular competition than of likely destinations for the Lydian king's delegates in the sixth century.[8] They have concluded, therefore, that the story is a Delphic fiction designed to make the other sanctuaries of that epoch look like they delivered false oracles.[9] While they are likely correct about the list itself, their conclusion about oracular competition has been seriously challenged. Esther Eidinow argues that such a notion of direct and intentional competition between oracular sanctuaries is entirely modern and bears implicit and unsupportable assumptions about what, how, and why there would have been such competition.[10] Especially important for the question here, she shows that the known instances in which clients consulted multiple oracles regarding the same issue are more indicative of cooperation than competition.[11] Instead, she suggests that it is better to understand oracular sanctuaries as involved in occasionally overlapping networks of relationships that she calls the 'market in futures'. It is believable that the story of Croesus' test was current at Delphi. However, given Eidinow's findings, it seems safer to think that the Delphians

[7] On the basis of a newly discovered dedicatory inscription from a certain Croesus to Amphiaraus, which is apparently the same one Herodotus (1.52) saw, Thonemann (2016) has suggested that the historian inferred that the dedication was due to King Croesus' trust in Amphiaraus as a true oracle. While Thonemann disputes whether Herodotus made the correct identification of this Croesus with the Lydian king, Simonton (2020) has argued that there is less reason to reject the identification of the dedicatee as King Croesus.

[8] Parke–Wormell (1956) 131–3; Crahay (1956) 195–7; Asheri–Lloyd–Corcella (2007) 108–9.

[9] In addition to those cited above, Fontenrose (1978) 113 seems to nod this way as well.

[10] Eidinow (2014).

[11] Piccinini (2018) has pointed out, however, that there is no literary evidence to suggest that oracles actually directed consultants to seek out the advice of other oracular sanctuaries, which nuances Eidinow's notion of 'cooperation.' Instead, she argues ((2018) 188) for 'desistance,' a 'tacit plan of action of non-disruption, implying mutual recognition of prestige, authority, and remits, which were never challenged by emerging sanctuaries, particularly those looking for an illustrious lineage'. On multiple oracular consultation and the debate over piety and impiety in such cases, see most recently Bonnechere (2010); Eidinow (2019).

perpetuated it as a way of illustrating the power of their oracle, but not necessarily as a way of defaming the competition as though they could derive material profit from condemning some of the best regarded oracular institutions in the world.

A bolder group has supposed that the apparent failure of the other oracles in the story stems from a popular critique of the validity of oracular divination that was contemporary with Herodotus.[12] The debate over oracular fulfilment was certainly alive at the time of Herodotus, but there is no reason to suppose that a thoroughgoing scepticism was the rule rather than the exception. Herodotus himself was aware of the sceptics, and he seems to have been capable of calling out oracular frauds when and where he saw them.[13] His story about the failure of certain Egyptian oracles to convict the thief Amasis leaves little doubt that some oracles could be thought of as false and that Herodotus himself was willing to call these Egyptian oracles liars (ψευδέα, 2.174.2).[14] Herodotus, though, clearly believed in the prophetic value of oracles. He showed the immoderate sceptics no quarter in debate on the issue of oracular fulfilment where he thought the evidence was convincing, as his attention to the oracles of Bacis shows (8.19–20, 77, 96.2; 9.43).[15] More than that, oracular fulfilment is the very principle underlying both micro- and macro-narrative structures in the *Histories*, and he is sometimes involved in offering new prophetic interpretations even of previously fulfilled oracles.[16] The fact that these 'oracular tales' seem to have existed before him in an oral tradition suggests that the belief in oracular fulfilment was widespread both in the past and in his own time. There is, of course, no way to poll ancient opinion on the matter to establish a majority view. However, without a widespread belief in oracular fulfilment, we would have difficulty explaining Thucydides' pronounced scepticism toward, and Aristophanes' lampooning of the use of

[12] Legrand (1937) 278; Lateiner, (2007) 813; Asheri–Lloyd–Corcella (2007) 108. To some extent, Bonnechere (2010) 115–16 implies agreement that this passage seems to look bad for the other oracles involved: 'Croesus' story is now considered an isolated example of *hybris*, but it has left an impression of trickery that has coloured perceptions of Greek oracles to the present day'.

[13] Lateiner (1990).

[14] In addition, Herodotus discusses false-prophets among the Scythians (4.68–9).

[15] See Harrison (2000) 130–2.

[16] See Crosby (2021). Herodotus goes completely against the tradition that he heard in order to claim, for example, that Battus took his name from the Delphic oracle he received. That oracle had called him 'Battus', which Herodotus claims to mean 'king' in the language of the Libyans (Hdt. 4.155.1–3). Thus, Herodotus makes this oracle prophetic not only of his role as the founder of a Greek colony in Libya, but also of his role as a Libyan king.

oracles even later in the fifth century.[17] Simply put, their criticisms and jokes would only have found very narrow marks if oracular fulfilment were not a common article of belief.

Both of these approaches to the interpretation of this narrative fall short in another meaningful way: they require collapsing an important distinction between the narrator and the character that he narrates. Since Herodotus does not voice an obvious objection to Croesus' conclusion, it may seem most reasonable to take for granted that Herodotus thought the king's judgement to be correct. If we examine the text through a narratological lens, though, we can observe subtle narrative triggers to the notion that this assumption is, at least, unnecessary or, at most, unsound. The idea that Delphi was the only true oracle is clearly Croesus' own judgement and not that of the narrator. 'None of the others [the oracles], in fact, was pleasing to him (*προσίετό μιν*), but when he heard (*ἤκουσε*) the one from Delphi, he offered prayers (*προσεύχετο*) immediately and accepted it (*προσεδέξατο*), thinking (*νομίσας*) that the only oracle was the one in Delphi, because it had discovered for him what things he did.'[18] Clearly, the language here is focalised through Croesus and his experiences. Even where Herodotus injects his persona into the story, the thoughts expressed about the oracles are still focalised through Croesus:

> Concerning the response of Amphiaraus, the oracle, I am not able to say what he [Amphiaraus] declared to the Lydians when they had performed the customary things around the temple—for this is not told—except, at least, that he [Croesus] reckoned (*ἐνόμισε*) that he [Amphiaraus] possessed an unlying oracle.[19]

Finally, before announcing the oracle from Delphi and narrating Croesus' claims about the oracles, Herodotus even appears to distance himself, saying, 'Now what the rest of the oracles prophesied is said by no one.'[20] His lack of knowledge about the other oracles, though, is not necessary for the story if we are intended to end up agreeing with Croesus. In fact, such information would only seem to be necessary for disputing Croesus' judgement. At the very least,

[17] Thuc. 2.17.1–2, 54.2–5; 5.26.3; Ar. *Av.* 959–1099; *Pax* 1045–125; *Plut.* 28–55. Oracular fulfilment and the political influence that might be gained by the use of oracles is also an important motivation for much of the action in Aristophanes' *Knights*.

[18] Hdt. 1.48.1: *τῶν μὲν δὴ οὐδὲν προσίετό μιν· ὁ δὲ ὡς τὸ ἐκ Δελφῶν ἤκουσε, αὐτίκα προσεύχετό τε καὶ προσεδέξατο, νομίσας μοῦνον εἶναι μαντήιον τὸ ἐν Δελφοῖσι, ὅτι οἱ ἐξευρήκεε τὰ αὐτὸς ἐποίησε.*

[19] Hdt. 1.49: *κατὰ δὲ τὴν Ἀμφιάρεω τοῦ μαντηίου ὑπόκρισιν οὐκ ἔχω εἰπεῖν ὅ τι τοῖσι Λυδοῖσι ἔχρησε ποιήσασι περὶ τὸ ἱρὸν τὰ νομιζόμενα (οὐ γὰρ ὧν οὐδὲ τοῦτο λέγεται) ἄλλο γε ἢ ὅτι καὶ τοῦτον ἐνόμισε μαντήιον ἀψευδὲς ἐκτῆσθαι.*

[20] Hdt. 1.47.2: *ὅ τι μέν νυν τὰ λοιπὰ τῶν χρηστηρίων ἐθέσπισε, οὐ λέγεται πρὸς οὐδαμῶν.*

Herodotus is distancing himself from responsibility for the veracity of Croesus' claims. But the act of calling of attention to his own lack of knowledge might be even more meaningful. This gesture toward the missing data may be a narrative trigger that prompts his audience to consider what the other oracles had said and whether Croesus was correct.[21] For all these reasons, it would be too hasty to draw a simple equation between the opinions of Croesus and Herodotus and to assume that the historian intended his audience to conclude the same thing as the king.

Another important, narrative trigger for rejecting this hasty interpretation of the narrative is that the Lydian king is a famously unreliable source when it comes to determining oracular meaning.[22] As the narrator and through the voice of the Pythia, Herodotus makes painfully clear where and how Croesus went wrong in dealing with oracles (1.71.1, 91). Croesus thought that he would stem the tide of Persian expansion but ended up destroying his own great empire in accordance with the oracles (1.53.3–54.1, 86.1). Delphi and Amphiaraus also advised him to make friends of the strongest Greeks, but even after determining the Spartans to be the strongest and arranging an alliance, Croesus did not call upon them until after his unsuccessful invasion (1.77). After he forgot the oracle of Gyges that limited the dynasty of the Mermnadae to three generations (1.13.2), Croesus asked Delphi about the longevity of his reign (1.55–56.1). When the Pythia told him to beware whenever a mule would become king of the Medes, Croesus concluded that his dynasty would never end. He thought that a mule king, who turned out to be Cyrus, was impossible.[23] Herodotus does not present Croesus as any kind of authority on oracular interpretation. For this reason alone, we should be hesitant to take the king's word for it.

More than that, though, we may also observe from Croesus' later experiences that the feeling of pleasure that he took from his test—and apparently took from the Delphic oracle (1.48.1)—is a unique and inauspicious reaction to receiving oracular pronouncements in the *Histories*. Croesus was 'overpleased' (ὑπερήσθη, 1.54.1) with the oracles that said he would destroy a great empire. He was also 'pleased' (ἥσθη, 1.56.1) when he heard the Delphic oracle about a mule king. No one else in the *Histories* reacts with pleasure to receiving oracles. Croesus is also the only consultant who 'reckons' (νομίζειν)

[21] Missing information about the consultation of Mardonius through his delegate Mus and about the oracles that he received causes Herodotus himself to speculate about them in a way that would explain the Persian general's later actions: Hdt. 8.133, 136.

[22] Kindt (2006).

[23] Additionally, when Croesus asked at Delphi about his mute son, the Pythia actually called him a fool: Hdt. 1.85.2.

about the oracular institutions themselves after receiving oracles.[24] He 'reckoned' (*νομίσας*, 1.48.1) that Delphi was the only oracle and 'reckoned' (*ἐνόμισε*, 1.49) that Amphiaraus had an unlying oracle. Indeed, when his consultants arrived at Amphiaraus and Delphi, they prefaced the inquiry by naming the consultant as 'Croesus, King of the Lydians and other peoples, having reckoned (*νομίσας*) these oracles (*μαντήια*) to be the only ones among humans…'.[25] His multiple and prominent failures at oracular interpretation and his altogether unique and ill-fated reactions to receiving oracles trigger the audience to think of Croesus' judgement of the test of oracles as deeply problematic.

Another trigger for rejecting the commonly held interpretation is that Herodotus does not share Croesus' opinion about the oracles. As is so clear from the rest of the *Histories*, Herodotus would not agree that Delphi was the only oracle. In the first place, there are a great number of other oracles that Herodotus presents as being truly prophetic, including those from the collections of Laius (5.43),[26] Bacis (8.19–20, 77, 96.2; 9.43), and Musaeus (8.96.2); those belonging to the dynasty of the Peisistratidae (5.90.2, 93);[27] those of the oracle-mongers like Amphilytus the Acarnian (1.62.4–63), Onomacritus (7.6.4–5), and Lysistratus of Athens (8.96); as well as a raft of unattributed ones (2.147.4–152; 3.124–125; 5.1.2–3; 6.98.1–3; 7.189; 9.42–43.1). Herodotus also tells an additional ten stories about unattributed oracles that are taken as authoritative and obeyed, although we might not call them prophetic in the narrowest sense of the word (1.7.4, 64.2, 165–7; 2.158.5; 4.149.2, 203.1; 5.114; 7.117.2, 197.1–3; 9.93.1). Even if we were to think that Herodotus' use of the word *μαντήια* in explaining Croesus' thoughts ought to be limited to oracular institutions rather than oracles generally, there is still plenty of evidence to indicate that Herodotus disagreed. The historian himself makes much of the accuracy of the oracle at Bouto in the stories of Pherus' blindness, the deaths of Mycerinus and Cambyses, and Psammetichus' rise to tyranny (2.111, 133, 152; 3.64.2–66.2). He also mentions certain Ethiopian oracles that predicted and motivated King Sabacus' abdication after a fifty-year rule (2.139).[28] Thus,

[24] Herodotus, though, does use the word in the passive voice when reporting a claim about the antiquity of Dodona: 2.52.2: *τὸ γὰρ δὴ μαντήιον τοῦτο νενόμισται ἀρχαιότατον τῶν ἐν Ἕλλησι χρηστηρίων εἶναι* ….

[25] Hdt. 1.53.2: *Κροῖσος ὁ Λυδῶν τε καὶ ἄλλων ἐθνέων βασιλεύς, νομίσας τάδε μαντήια εἶναι μοῦνα ἐν ἀνθρώποισι* ….

[26] For fulfilments, see Hdt. 5.46.1–2 as well as D.S. 4.23 and Paus. 3.16.4–5.

[27] The oracles referred to the consequences of Athenian power for both the Spartans and the Corinthians, which suggests their fulfilment in the Peloponnesian War.

[28] Although the story is told by the Corinthian Soclees and not Herodotus' narratorial persona, we also learn that Periander discovered the location of a lost deposit from the Thespriotian oracle of the dead at Hdt. 5.92*η*.2–4.

Croesus' conclusion that Delphi and Amphiaraus were the only (true) oracles stands in stark contrast to the wider world of oracular divination that Herodotus depicts in his *Histories*.

This contrast becomes even more significant when we consider the other instances in which Herodotus mentions the very oracles that apparently failed Croesus' test: Ammon, Abae, Dodona, Trophonius, Amphiaraus, and Branchidae (Didyma). Apollo at Abae, Trophonius at Lebadeia, and the oracle of Amphiaraus at Oropus were among those that the Persian general Mardonius 'tested' (ἀποπειρήσασθαι, 8.133) through his delegate, Mus.[29] Herodotus did not know the nature of the test nor, just as in the case of Croesus' test, what the oracles told Mardonius. Nevertheless, Herodotus seems to have assumed that they actually passed the test and told him something that was true. He guessed that the oracles 'were predicting' (προλέγοι) that if Mardonius had gained the Athenians as allies, he would have been victorious (8.136). Herodotus thinks this because Mardonius happened to try this immediately after receiving the oracles. In other words, spurred by missing information about the nature of the oracular responses stemming from this test, the historian assumed these oracles to be authoritative enough to account for the general's actions. Moreover, the conditional oracular claim that Herodotus supposes the oracles to have given is never falsified in events, and the prediction could have been fulfilled if the condition had been met.

These oracles were also taken as authoritative and were obeyed elsewhere in the *Histories*. The oracle of Amphiaraus told the Thebans that they must choose between receiving his benefits as a *mantis* or as an ally, and they established the tradition of not consulting his oracle (8.134.2). The Pelasgians invoked their gods by the names that Zeus at Dodona had approved (2.52). The same oracle, along with Delphi, told the Apollonians of their crime against Euenius, explained what to do in recompense, and accurately predicted the gift of foresight that Euenius later received (9.93–4). Zeus Ammon at Siwa Oasis defined Egypt and Egyptians in such a way that the people of Mareia and Apis were compelled to continue abstaining from the meat of cows despite their own desires (2.18).[30] The Cymaeans consulted Branchidae regarding the asylum of the Persian Pactys, and although they did not like its responses very much, it happened that Pactys was in fact handed over to the Persians and that Cyme was subjugated, just as the oracle predicted (1.157–60).[31] Nowhere else is there a hint that these oracles were unreliable or unauthoritative, and by all appearances they actually gave oracular pronouncements that were true,

[29] Herodotus uses the same verb (ἀπεπειρᾶτο, 1.46.2) for Croesus' test of the oracles.

[30] See also Hdt. 4.186. Herodotus uses this oracle to confirm his own understanding of the extent of Egyptian land.

[31] See also Hdt. 5.123.

could have been true if their conditions were fulfilled, or were followed in their prescriptions as great authorities. Against this backdrop of admiration for oracular truth and authority in the rest of the *Histories*, Croesus' negative assessment of their value stands out clearly and awkwardly, thus providing the audience with another trigger to reject the king's claim.

As the matter stands, we are left with a difficult choice to make. The apparent failure of the other oracles in this narrative to have seen what Croesus was doing on the hundredth day certainly does make it look as though their powers of foresight were not as strong as Delphi's. However, there is little reason to think that these institutions were actually competing in the modern sense of the term or to suppose that the Delphians would have been so bold as to call these very prominent oracles liars. This story might have been entertaining in an intellectual environment in which the truth of oracles was viewed with great scepticism. However, the world of the ancient Mediterranean that Herodotus depicts and the audience that he expects are clearly sympathetic to oracular fulfilment. Further, the typical interpretation of the text—that these oracles failed to grasp the truth in the test—assumes the validity of Croesus' judgement despite the manifest issue of his weak record of dealing effectively with oracles. The clear distinction between the voices and beliefs of the character and those of the narrator, which a narratological approach helps to parse, also challenges the notion that we are meant to hold the same opinions as the Lydian king. One could object, perhaps, in light of the passages above that some oracles were thought of as authoritative and prophetic only every now and then. This explanation, though, raises an issue of variation in the sources of divinatory power that only appears as a discussion much later in Greek thought to explain the total obsolescence of certain ancient oracular sanctuaries.[32] For Herodotus, it seems that the validity of oracular divination is an all-or-nothing game: the source of real and authoritative oracular institutions and collections abides even when malicious human agents interfere with their communications.[33] Where it is not present, as in

[32] See Plut. *De def. orac.*

[33] Branchidae (Didyma): Hdt. 1.157.3–160.4. Delphi: Hdt. 5.63.1; 6.66. Musaeus: Hdt. 7.6.3–5. For fulfilments, see Hdt. 7.33–37.1; 8.96.2. It is fair to argue that just because these oracles spoke the truth elsewhere does not mean that they must have always spoken the truth. However, there is no way around the fact that the failure of an oracle obtained from an institution in a legitimate manner challenges the legitimacy of the divine power at the institution. The legitimacy of divine power, though, is clearly the highest principle in accounting for problems that arise from oracles in the *Histories*. Before calling into question the prophetic power connected to specific oracular institutions as Croesus does, accusations of human interference are lobbed first: bribed prophets, faithless delegates, and intriguing chresmologues. Herodotus gives us no indication that such a thing might have happened in the case of Croesus' test, and the intricacy of his depiction of the procedure that Croesus prescribes for the consultation suggests the opposite. Regardless, given the distinction that

some of Amasis' Egyptian oracles, there can only be pure frauds. These reasons provide a strong warrant for seeking an explanation that can harmonise the apparent inconsistencies in the text.

Towards a New Interpretation

As Julia Kindt observes, Croesus' test differs from the typical oracular consultation in instructive ways. She writes:

> Herodotus' depiction of the oracle test is a grotesque distortion of an ordinary request at Delphi. To test the oracles, Croesus turns the normal procedure of an oracle consultation upside down. This holds true in two respects: First, in this case, the protagonist already knows the (right) answer to the question that he asks the oracles. Second, it is not the protagonist who is challenged by an obscure divine answer, but the oracular institutions that are challenged by the protagonist's obscure doings.[34]

Essentially, her argument here is aimed at establishing two different kinds of role reversal in this tale. The first type about Croesus' knowledge of the answer to his own question is important and valuable. Croesus' knowledge seems to put him in the role of the divine in the oracular consultation, which, if not hubristic in and of itself, is at least in keeping with his transgressive lines of thinking.[35] There are other stories in which consultants used the knowledge they already possessed to test oracles, and in all instances of such tests, the

I have drawn between the voices of Croesus and the narrator as well as the disjuncture between Croesus' claim about the oracles and the narrator's investment in oracular fulfilment, it is fair to propose a new reading of the passage that attempts to explain the discrepancies.

[34] Kindt (2006) 37–8.

[35] It is important to note that after his interview with Solon, *nemesis* took hold of Croesus, which strongly suggests that the king has already transgressed an important boundary: Hdt. 1.34.1: *μετὰ δὲ Σόλωνα οἰχόμενον ἔλαβε ἐκ θεοῦ νέμεσις μεγάλη Κροῖσον, ὡς εἰκάσαι, ὅτι ἐνόμισε ἑωυτὸν εἶναι ἀνθρώπων ἁπάντων ὀλβιώτατον*. On this passage, Pelling (2006) 150–1 comments: 'It is disputed whether Croesus' overconfidence would itself be regarded as *ὕβρις*. But in any case, it remains true that such thoughts, insufficiently alert as they are to the boundary between god and human, resemble those which *lead to or accompany* hubristic behavior elsewhere … The language here is therefore enough to trigger that nexus of familiar ideas, the traditional notions that wealth, overconfidence, and *ὕβρις* go hand in hand.'

oracles prove their divine powers to the wonder, and occasionally grave disadvantage, of those who test them.[36] Given what happens to him later, Croesus is obviously no exception to this rule. Thus, as a general principle, we may say that oracular divination did not exist to be tested.[37]

Esther Eidinow and Pierre Bonnechere, though, have recently attempted to re-evaluate Croesus' test. To their way of thinking, his actions may be seen as normative in the context of other known instances of multiple oracular consultations.[38] However, they have not succeeded in explaining away the problem that this first instance of role reversal creates. Rather than drawing a close similarity between Croesus' inquiry and other examples of multiple consultations, Eidinow's typology helps clarify what makes Croesus' consultation so very different. She helpfully distinguishes serial consultations (same place with different questions at different times), simultaneous consultations (different places with the same question at the same time), and successive consultations (different places with same question at different times). Croesus' test would, therefore, be classified as a simultaneous consultation. When compared with the other evidence for simultaneous consultations, though, the Lydian king's inquiry is still unique. The others might be called simultaneous in the sense that a city sent delegates to different places to ask the same question at the same time, but in none of the other examples does there appear any special need to ask the question *at the very same moment in time* at the different oracles.[39] As he had conceived it, though, Croesus' test required that the

[36] Posidonius ap. Cic. *Fat.* 3.5; Plut. *De def. orac.* 434D–E; Val. Max. 1.8.ext.8; Macrob. *Sat.* 1.23.14–16; Suda, s.v. Δαφίδας (Δ 99 Adler). For some analysis, see Kindt (2017) 212–14. One popular theory for explaining Croesus' test has been to suppose that such an effort is typical of non-Greeks, at least in Herodotus. Klees (1965) 93–8; Kirchberg (1965) 17 n. 4; Dobson (1979) 350 n. 2; Piccinini (2018) 175–6.

[37] Consider also Xenophon's characterisation of Croesus (*Cyr.* 7.2.16–17), where the king confesses that he dealt wrongly with Delphi from the beginning and ought to have asked for what he wanted instead of testing Delphi. He goes on to say that this inquiry violated a sense of gentlemanly trust that ought to exist between consultant and oracular god.

[38] Eidinow (2019); Bonnechere (2010).

[39] Delphi and Dodona regarding Io's dreams: Aesch. *PV* 655–62; Delphi and Dodona regarding the troubles in Apollonia after punishing Euenius: Hdt. 9.93.4–94; a possible double consultation regarding the foundation of Apollonia: Plut. *De Pyth. orac.* 401F; Paus. 5.22.3); Delphi and Dodona regarding certain rites of celebration—it is far from clear that these stem from the same inquiry rather than plucked from collections: Dem. *Meid.* 51–3; Xenophon's recommendation of double consultation in dealing with state policy: *Vect.* 6.2; the events surrounding the Sicilian expedition: Plut. *Nic.* 13, 14; *De Pyth. orac.* 403B; Paus. 8.11.12; Ismenus, Ptous, Abae, Delphi, and Lebadeia probably regarding Theban prospects at Leuktra: Paus. 4.32.5–6. Bonnechere (2010) 123 n. 32, who has also studied the phenomenon of multiple consultations, argues that what makes Croesus' inquiry irregular is not the fact that he consulted a number of different oracles but that he asked a 'pseudo-question' in anticipation of his real question.

delegates pose his question to the oracles at the same time, that is, on the hundredth day. Given this additional distinction between necessary and unnecessary synchronicity among simultaneous consultations, Croesus' test stands out more clearly as unique compared to the rest of our evidence for multiple oracular consultation. Not only does the unique nature of his test suggest its irregularity and impropriety, but other stories from antiquity reinforce the moral that consultants should not ask a question of an oracle as a test of authority when they already know the answer.[40] People in the ancient world used divination, not as Croesus intended, but in order to acquire knowledge about the past, present, and future that they did not already have.[41]

In her second example of role reversal, Kindt notes that Herodotus' story substitutes typical oracular obscurity for the obscurity of Croesus' actions. This example of role reversal, though, is more apparent than real. Within the context of the test, it may have appeared to Croesus that he presented the oracles with obscurity and received clear responses. However, I argue that an ambiguity in his phrasing of the question resulted in oracular ambiguity of a sort that is actually comparable to the familiar 'great empire' or 'mule king' problems in his later oracles (1.53.3; 55.2). In all of these stories, Croesus interpreted his oracles in the context of his own intent. He intended to topple the expanding Persian Empire, and so he determined that the 'great empire' to be destroyed must be the Persian one rather than his own. He intended to rule for a long time, and so he thought that the 'mule king' of Persia was impossible. He intended to test whether the oracles could perceive him cooking, and so he believed that some of the oracles could not or did not.

As I have argued, the kind of test of prophetic power that Croesus intended would have been improper in the context of oracular consultation. Given that fact, we might wonder whether the context in which Croesus asked his question, an oracular consultation, could have affected how his question would have been understood. Croesus told his delegates to ask the oracles: *ὅ τι ποιέων τυγχάνοι ὁ Λυδῶν βασιλεὺς Κροῖσος ὁ Ἀλυάττεω*.[42] The construction, *τυγχάνειν* with a supplementary participle, is a familiar expression in which the verb, as Herbert Smyth puts it, 'loses the idea of *chance*, and denotes mere coincidence in time'.[43] Essentially, the verb sometimes loses its primary sense and adopts a metaphorical one: 'to happen to be …'. Thus, what Croesus meant by this question was, 'What does Croesus, son of Alyattes, King of the Lydians, happen to be doing?' But *τυγχάνειν* need not lose the idea of fortune or chance

[40] See the examples cited in n. 36 above.

[41] Parker (1985) 299–300, who has studied the practice of Greek divination in comparison with that in African cultures, makes the point that the precise nature of Croesus' inquiry 'would seem as irregular to an African as it did to Greeks'.

[42] Hdt. 1.47.1.

[43] Smyth (1956) §2096.

in the presence of a participle when that participle is understood circumstantially. The verb may be understood in an absolute sense with a circumstantial participle, as in 'to find fortune (in the circumstance of) doing something' (*τι ποιέων τυγχάνειν*).[44] In the phrasing of the question that Herodotus provides, though, Croesus offered no additional contextual clues to clarify his meaning. The question, therefore, is potentially ambiguous.[45] So, how might his question have been understood by the oracles who heard this unmarked inquiry in the context of an oracular consultation?

At the oracle of Zeus at Dodona, consultants recorded their questions on lead tablets, called *lamellae*, and it is because of the durability of that material that we now have a significant body of evidence by which to understand why people consulted that oracle and how they phrased their inquiries. Although a huge number of these tablets had been discovered going back as far as the first excavations of the site by Constantin Carapanos in 1875, less than a few hundred had been published by 2006. Thanks to the publication of a great many more of these *lamellae* in 2013, we now have a corpus of over four-thousand inscriptions relating to public and private inquiries and spanning the sixth and second centuries BCE.[46] Even though most of the inscriptions consist of only a couple of words or a handful of letters, the less fragmentary inscriptions still provide a rich dataset for understanding the grammar of oracular consultation at Dodona. Close analysis of these tablets reveals certain patterns of expression, a grammar, that are typical in an oracular context, and much of this analytical work still remains to be done. By studying how the clause, *ὅ τι ποιέων τυγχάνοι*, and similar ones are used in the corpus of inscriptions at Dodona, I will attempt to show that Croesus' question does not have the meaning there that he intended.

Before examining the use of this and similar expressions in the tablets, though, it is important to clarify the syntax of Herodotus' indirect report of Croesus' question and its context in the narrative. In an indirect question, the present optative without the particle *ἄν* in historical sequence is usually

[44] Powell (1938) s.v. *τυγχάνω* includes an absolute usage: 'have one's request granted'. In most of the examples cited, the verb is found with a circumstantial participle: Hdt. 1.213: *δεηθεὶς Κύρου ἐκ τῶν δεσμῶν λυθῆναι ἔτυχε*; 3.7.2: *καὶ δεηθεὶς τῆς ἀσφαλείης ἔτυχε*; 5.23.1: *τὴν παρὰ Δαρείου αἰτήσας ἔτυχε δωρεὴν μισθὸν φυλακῆς τῆς σχεδίης*; 5.44.1: *τυχεῖν δεηθέντας*; 7.38.1: *χρησίας ἄν τι σέο βουλοίμην τυχεῖν*; 9.109.2: *πάντα γὰρ τεύξεσθαι αἰτήσασαν*. More literally, these phrases mean something like 'get what one wants (in the circumstance of) having asked for it', and since the notion of 'getting what one wants' is closely related to the notion of 'finding fortune or success', the interpretation that I propose should not be viewed as completely foreign to Herodotus' Greek. For a more obvious parallel, see also Thuc. 2.74.2: *προκαλεσάμενοι γὰρ πολλὰ καὶ εἰκότα οὐ τυγχάνομεν*.

[45] The fact that the question is not as clear as it might be is dealt with in more detail below, p. 82 with n. 58.

[46] DVC. For a brief background on the tablets see Parker (2016) 71–2.

considered an oblique optative that represents a verb in the present indicative of the direct report of the question.[47] When understood in this way, the indirect question, *ὅ τι ποιέων τυγχάνοι*, would reflect the direct question, *τί ποιέων τυγχάνει*; ('What does he happen to be doing?'). However, for every rule of Greek grammar, there are exceptions. Simply put, Greek language does not always follow textbook norms, even after passing through the hands of the many scribes and editors who have emended, regularised, and rendered it more easily understandable. It is rare, but an optative verb without *ἄν* in an indirect question in either primary or historical sequence may also reflect an original potential optative either with or without *ἄν*.

This so-called bare potential optative, though rare, is more common than grammar texts have allowed.[48] W. H. S. Jones, commenting on a line in Hippocrates' *Regimen in Acute Diseases*, points out that 'the optative without *ἄν* is often found in the Hippocratic writings where we should expect the *ἄν* to be added.'[49] A number of these omissions in Ionic prose may be explained by scribal errors; however, the seventy-two instances of the bare potential optative in Attic poetry and prose from the early-fifth to the mid-fourth centuries assure us that the potential optative could be understood even without *ἄν*.[50] A number of these examples, although they are typically emended by editors, may be found in questions in prose—like *ἀκούσαις ἄλλῳ ἢ ὡσίν*; (Pl. *Resp.* 352e)—in addition to the more familiar examples from poetry—like *τεάν, Ζεῦ, δύνασιν τίς ἀνδρῶν ὑπερβασία κατάσχοι*; (Soph. *Ant.* 604–5).[51] It is also clear that Herodotus used the bare potential optative at least a few times (e.g., *ὑμέων δὴ ὧν τίς μοι Ὀροίτεα ἢ ζῶντα ἀγάγοι ἢ ἀποκτείνειε*; Hdt. 3.127.3).[52] In his study of the bare potential optative, Victor Bers calls it a 'colloquial usage' in the classical period that comes to be widely attested in Hellenistic times. He concludes by suggesting that it was 'not much more than a syntactical alternate to the usual form with *ἄν*, rare in all colloquial dialects and literary genres but

[47] van Emde Boas et al. (2019) §42.7.

[48] On this point, see Bers (1984) 118–19, 128–35.

[49] Hipp. *Acut.* 45.7–9 (12.6–8): *καὶ γὰρ οἱ πόδες τοίονδε τι πρήξειαν καὶ τἆλλα ἄρθρα, μὴ εἰθισμένα πονεῖν, ἢν διὰ χρόνου ἐξαπίνης ἐς τὸ πονεῖν ἔλθῃ*: Jones (1923) 100 n. 1. A complete accounting of the bare potential optative in the Hippocratic corpus and other Ionic prose, though pertinent, is beyond the scope of this investigation and not entirely necessary for the present argument.

[50] For lists of such bare potential optative verbs, see Kühner–Gerth (1898) 230; Slotty (1915) 140–2.

[51] Kühner–Gerth (1898) 230 lists more examples of such questions found in prose: Antiphon 1.4; Pl. *Grg.* 492b, *Resp.* 437b, *Lach.* 190b; Lys. 31.24; Lycurg. 144; Isaeus 3.54; 4.19; 7.36.

[52] See below for other examples from Herodotus.

excluded only from the most rigid and fastidious sorts of writing'.[53] The volume of evidence for the bare potential optative recommends greater caution in emending texts to reflect textbook Attic norms. More importantly for this investigation, when considered by itself, it is entirely possible to understand the indirect question, *ὅ τι ποιέων τυγχάνοι*, to mean 'doing what might he find fortune?'.

As always, context determines meaning.[54] As readers of Herodotus' account, we have special access to the mind of Croesus. We know that Croesus meant to test the oracles. It is because of our knowledge of this context that we understand that he intended to ask about what he happened to be doing on the hundredth day and not about what he might do to find fortune. It is important to remember, though, that the audience does not always have the same knowledge as characters in the *Histories*. The delegates that Croesus sent, for example, were apparently in the dark about the whole business. Herodotus says:

> Having commanded the following things of the Lydians, he was sending them for the test of the oracles (*ἐντειλάμενος δὲ τοῖσι Λυδοῖσι τάδε ἀπέπεμπε ἐς τὴν διάπειραν τῶν χρηστηρίων*): after counting the days (*ἡμερολογέοντας*) during the intervening time from that day on which they would leave Sardis, that they consult (*χρᾶσθαι*) the oracles on the hundredth day, asking (*ἐπειρωτῶντας*) *ὅ τι ποιέων τυγχάνοι ὁ Λυδῶν βασιλεὺς Κροῖσος ὁ Ἀλυάττεω*; and after writing down (*συγγραψαμένους*) whatever each of the oracles would prophesy, that they bring it back (*ἀναφέρειν*) to him.[55]

[53] Bers (1984) 135.

[54] With this claim, I am operating under the theory that words are arbitrary signs that are given conventional meanings by the societies that use them. These meanings are understood by a society only when they are used in a particular context. Under this theory, it would be an error in understanding how meaning is made in language to insist that this clause has a sort of natural or obvious sense apart from the context in which it is used. Since the context of the clause is complicated both by its meaning for Croesus' test and, as I argue, its meaning in oracular consultations as warranted by the fact that it is worded as an oracular consultation, it is fair to argue that there is an ambiguity present. The effect is that the clause could have been understood differently depending on one's appreciation of these two contexts. I argue further below that Herodotus could have relied on his audience to know enough about oracular consultation to appreciate that context. See the conclusion below.

[55] Hdt. 1.47.1: *ἐντειλάμενος δὲ τοῖσι Λυδοῖσι τάδε ἀπέπεμπε ἐς τὴν διάπειραν τῶν χρηστηρίων, ἀπ' ἧς ἂν ἡμέρης ὁρμηθέωσι ἐκ Σαρδίων, ἀπὸ ταύτης ἡμερολογέοντας τὸν λοιπὸν χρόνον ἑκατοστῇ ἡμέρῃ χρᾶσθαι τοῖσι χρηστηρίοισι, ἐπειρωτῶντας ὅ τι ποιέων τυγχάνοι ὁ Λυδῶν βασιλεὺς Κροῖσος ὁ Ἀλυάττεω· ἄσσα δ' ἂν ἕκαστα τῶν χρηστηρίων θεσπίσῃ, συγγραψαμένους ἀναφέρειν παρ' ἑωυτόν*. I have left the indirect question untranslated for effect.

The knowledge of the test was not part of Croesus' instructions to the delegates. The infinitives, *χρᾶσθαι* ('to consult') and *ἀναφέρειν* ('to bring back'), and participles, *ἡμερολογέοντας* ('counting the days'), *ἐπειρωτῶντας* ('asking'), and *συγγραψαμένους* ('writing down'), all depend on the initial participle, *ἐντειλάμενος*, indicating Croesus' command. The prepositional phrase, *ἐς τὴν διάπειραν τῶν χρηστηρίων* ('for the test of the oracles'), on the other hand, provides additional information about the purpose of Croesus' actions of sending or of commanding but not the substance of the command. The delegates only knew the question that they were to ask at their assigned oracles on exactly the hundredth day from when they left the city. We should not be surprised by Croesus' secrecy on this matter. As Herodotus explains when narrating the king's thinking about the stew, Croesus' entire goal had been to conceal his test (1.48.2). Since the delegates did not know what he was up to, we cannot be sure that they understood the purpose of Croesus' oracular consultation either. Moreover, to guess that Croesus intended to test the oracles might have been unintuitive, as I have explained above.[56]

Potential Objections

At this point, it is necessary to counter a series of potential objections to the interpretation that I am developing. One objection takes issue with how an audience is supposed to imagine the story as happening in the real world. Such reconstructions are always guesswork to some extent—indeed, there is nothing to say that the king's directions to his Lydian delegates would even have been given in Greek rather than Lydian. Nevertheless, it might be claimed that Herodotus does not give us licence to imagine the king's original directions as bearing a verb in the optative mood. An expression like *ἐπειρωτᾶτε ὅ τι ποιέων τυγχάνει* ('Ask what he happens to be doing.') would be the most obvious interpretation given the rules that govern indirect reports in historical sequence. Moreover, given the habit of phrasing oracular inquiries indirectly, as was conventional,[57] we have reason to suppose that the delegates would have stuck closely to the words Croesus gave them. I have already argued, however, for a number of narrative triggers that prompt the audience to reject Croesus' claim about the oracles, and this claim depends heavily on the notion

[56] The Lydians of the *Histories* are not complete novices regarding oracular consultation: see Hdt. 1.7.4, 13.1–2, 19.2–3.

[57] As is clear from the numerous examples from the oracular *lamellae* I cite below, the indirect report of a question is an exceedingly common style for presenting an inquiry. Further, Herodotus is clearly aware of this trend as we can see in Hdt. 1.53.2, cited below, n. 66.

that his test question is unambiguous. Therefore, I pose several counter-arguments that challenge the typical interpretation and support in different ways the one that I am developing.

First, if the historian intended us to think of the question only in the way that is often assumed, it is curious that it appears so unmarked in his telling. Herodotus might have done any number of things to make this meaning clearer. In summarising this story, the scholiast on Lucian, for example, rephrases the question into direct speech with the addition of the adverb *νῦν* and the substitution of the less ambiguous verb διατελεῖν for *τυγχάνειν*.[58] Additionally, Herodotus might have made it clearer by retaining the imagined original mood of the verb (*ὅ τι ποιέων τυγχάνει*) when making his report in historical sequence. Herodotus reports another inquiry by Croesus that is phrased in exactly this way later when the king chastises Delphic Apollo for allegedly misleading him.[59] It is worth noting, though, that only rarely does Herodotus use an oblique optative in the context of an oracular consultation to replace an originally conceived present indicative.[60] In these instances, though, the predicative sense of the verb *εἶναι* is unambiguous, and *μέλλειν* clearly indicates possible future action. Further, in the context of oracular consultation in the *Histories*, the present indicative usually acquires a sense of futurity, which actually adds to rather than solves the problem of ambiguity here.[61]

[58] Σ Lucian *Iupp. trag.* 30: *τί νῦν διατελεῖ πράττων ὁ Κροῖσος*; The scholiast follows the procedure of the consultation as Herodotus describes it in otherwise unexampled detail. It is interesting that *τυγχάνειν* is replaced by the verb διατελεῖν, which, with a participle, more obviously indicates Croesus' meaning: 'to continue doing something': LSJ s.v. διατελέω. These alterations of the question would be unnecessary if the meaning of *τυγχάνειν* with a participle had a sort of natural meaning.

[59] Hdt. 1.90.4: *ὡς δὲ ταῦτα ἤκουσε ὁ Κροῖσος, πέμπων τῶν Λυδῶν ἐς Δελφοὺς ἐνετέλλετο τιθέντας τὰς πέδας ἐπὶ τοῦ νηοῦ τὸν οὐδὸν εἰρωτᾶν εἰ οὔ τι ἐπαισχύνεται τοῖσι μαντηίοισι ἐπάρας Κροῖσον στρατεύεσθαι ἐπὶ Πέρσας ὡς καταπαύσοντα τὴν Κύρου δύναμιν*. The debate about the legitimacy of Croesus' complaint about the *κίβδηλος* oracle is too extensive to elaborate here; see in particular Klees (1965) 85–6; Kurke (2009); Crosby (2020) 288–99.

[60] Hdt. 1.158.1: *πέμψαντες ὧν οἱ Κυμαῖοι ἐς τοὺς Βραγχίδας θεοπρόπους εἰρώτων περὶ Πακτύην ὁκοῖόν τι ποιεῦντες θεοῖσι μέλλοιεν χαριεῖσθαι* (directly: *κοῖόν τι ποιεῦντες θεοῖσι μέλλομεν χαριεῖσθαι*;); 4.15.3: *σφέας δὲ Μεταποντῖνοι λέγουσι ἐς Δελφοὺς πέμψαντας τὸν θεὸν ἐπειρωτᾶν ὅ τι τὸ φάσμα τοῦ ἀνθρώπου εἴη* (directly: *τί τὸ φάσμα τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐστί*;); 6.66.1: *τέλος δὲ ἐόντων περὶ αὐτῶν νεικέων ἔδοξε Σπαρτιήτῃσι ἐπειρέσθαι τὸ χρηστήριον τὸ ἐν Δελφοῖσι εἰ Ἀρίστωνος εἴη παῖς ὁ Δημάρητος* (directly: *Ἀρίστωνός ἐστι παῖς ὁ Δημάρητος*;).

[61] Hdt. 3.57.3: *ἐχρέωντο τῷ χρηστηρίῳ εἰ αὐτοῖσι τὰ παρεόντα ἀγαθὰ οἷά τέ ἐστι πολλὸν χρόνον παραμένειν*; 5.43.1: *ὁ δὲ ἀκούσας ταῦτα ἐς Δελφοὺς οἴχετο χρησόμενος τῷ χρηστηρίῳ, εἰ αἱρέει ἐπ' ἣν στέλλεται χώρην*; 7.148.2: *πέμψαι θεοπρόπους ἐς Δελφοὺς τὸν θεὸν ἐπειρησομένους, ὥς σφι μέλλει ἄριστον ποιεῦσι γίνεσθαι*; 7.169.1: *πέμψαντες κοινῇ θεοπρόπους ἐς Δελφοὺς τὸν θεὸν ἐπειρώτων εἴ σφι ἄμεινον τιμωρέουσι γίνεται τῇ Ἑλλάδι ….*

This tendency is also to be found in the tablets from Dodona. For example, although consultants used the present indicative of *τυγχάνειν* in their inquiries extremely rarely, there are three inscriptions intact enough to understand the use of the verb.[62]

DVC 345B (second quarter of fifth cent.): *ἐν* ’*Εχίνōι* | *ἐὸ̀*(*ν*) *τυνχά*|*νō*;
‘Will I find fortune being in Echinus?’

DVC 377A (first half of fifth cent.): *θεὸς τύχα· τὰν ἑστίαν καὶ ϝο̣*[*ι*]||*κίαν τυν̣χάνō ἐχϝο*[*ι*]*κ̣έōν*;
‘God, fortune: Will I find fortune inhabiting the hearth and home?’

Lhôte 35A (third quarter of fifth cent.): *ἒ̈ϝōν τυνχάνō*;
‘Will I find fortune leaving [it/him/her]?’

In each of these instances, the context of oracular consultation and that provided by the participles exclude the meaning that Croesus supposed that he was communicating. The context of consultation eliminates the possibility that these consultants were asking about whether they happened to be in a place, live in a home, or leave something or someone be. They would already have had that knowledge. Rather, the participles (‘being’, ‘inhabiting’, ‘leaving’) are clearly meant to be understood as the circumstance under which the consultant hopes to find fortune (*τυγχάνειν* in its primary and absolute sense) with the present indicative understood with reference to the future. Thus, even if Herodotus really did expect the audience to imagine Croesus’ directions as being something like *ἐπειρωτᾶτε ὅ τι ποιέων τυγχάνει*, the context provided by both the *Histories* and the oracular *lamellae* indicates that the inquiry might have been understood in nearly the same way as I am suggesting: ‘Doing what will he be fortunate?’ The expression is still potentially ambiguous.

Second, the existence of the possibility that the optative verb in historical sequence stands in for a present indicative verb of the original expression cannot by itself exclude the other possibility that the historian’s choice to use the optative is meaningful here. Herodotus might have meant his audience to think of Croesus as having used a bare potential optative: *ἐπειρωτᾶτε ὅ τι ποιέων τυγχάνοι* (‘Ask what he might happen to be doing’). In point of fact,

[62] The other clear instances of the present indicative are DVC 254B, 561B, 1592B, 2240A, 2457A. Though quite fragmentary, DVC 3601A appears to use *τυγχάνειν* in a way that is similar to the constructions that I analyse in more detail below: [---]N ⋮ *ὅ,τι δράοντι* [---] | [---]*τυγχάνō* NIO[---] | [---]ΘΕΓ[…..]ΕΚ[---]. Together, these nine instances represent only 11.7% (9/77) of the total instances where we can be certain of verb’s form.

Croesus had apparently not worked out the specifics of his test when he spoke the words in question:[63]

> For in fact, after (ἐπείτε) he sent (διέπεμψε) the delegates to the oracles, having kept watch (φυλάξας) for the appointed day, he was contriving (ἐμηχανᾶτο) the following things: having formulated things (ἐπινοήσας) that were incapable of being both discovered and thought of, cutting up (κατακόψας) tortoise and lamb, he was boiling (ἥψε) them together in a bronze kettle with a bronze lid set upon it.

As Herodotus presents the events, Croesus began to conceive of his plan with the stew only after he had sent his delegates to the oracles. While he might have planned well in advance to do something that would be impossible to guess, he does not seem to have settled on cooking the strange stew until after he sent his delegates. If even Croesus did not yet have a notion of what he was going to do when he issued his orders, the action about which he wished to ask could only have been potential at that point. In such a context, an original potential optative might even be more intelligible than a plain indicative anticipating an as yet unconceived future action.

Third, that one might use a potential optative when consulting an oracle is not absurd. It is truly ubiquitous in the oracular *lamellae* from Dodona. There are, by my count, 197 instances in which the presence of the optative is either secure or nearly certain, and almost all of them are potential.[64] Nearly a third

[63] Hdt. 1.48.2: *ἐπείτε γὰρ δὴ διέπεμψε παρὰ τὰ χρηστήρια τοὺς θεοπρόπους, τὴν κυρίην τῶν ἡμερέων ἐμηχανᾶτο τοιάδε· ἐπινοήσας τὰ ἦν ἀμήχανον ἐξευρεῖν τε καὶ ἐπιφράσασθαι, χελώνην καὶ ἄρνα κατακόψας ὁμοῦ ἥψε αὐτὸς ἐν λέβητι χαλκέῳ χάλκεον ἐπίθημα ἐπιθείς.*

[64] *ἄγειν*: DVC 208B, 3418A; *ἀποικεῖν*: DVC 1468; *γαμεῖν*: DVC 3721B; *γίγνεσθαι*: DVC 313A, 556A, 1268A, 1393, 1889, 2441A, 2552A, 3205A, 3458A, 3722B, Lhôte 41, 50Aa; *εἶναι*: DVC 342B, 993A, 1360A, 1441A, 1486A, 1618, 1781B, 2339B, 2342A, 3097A, 3276B, 3599A, Lhôte 53Ac, 66, 68A, 84A; *διδόναι*: DVC 191A, 2271A, 3400A; *ἐπιτυγχάνειν*: Lhôte 39; *εὐορκεῖν*: DVC 1312A; *εὑρίσκειν*: DVC 195B; *εὐτυχεῖν*: DVC 998B, 2367, 3030A, Lhôte 91; *καταπορεύεσθαι*: DVC 3816B; *κατατυχάνειν*: DVC 2439, 2517A; *οἰκεῖν*: Lhôte 1, 2; *ὁμονοεῖν*: Lhôte 3; *παύειν*: Lhôte 46Ba; *ποιεῖν*: DVC 4081A; *πονεῖν*: Lhôte 158; *πράσσειν*: DVC 6A, 7B, 20A, 217A, 337B, 353B, 502A, 558B, 632A, 992A, 1088A, 1140A, 1190A, 1312A, 1349B, 1380A, 2039A, 2052, 2054B, 2107A, 2108B, 2111A, 2171B, 2210B, 2229A, 2242A, 2261A, 2271A, 2297A, 2418B, 2423B, 2453A, 2473, 2483, 2506, 2593A, 2782A, 2910B, 3033A, 3111, 3135A, 3170A, 3196A, 3219B, 3309, 3364A, 3365A, 3400A, 3401A, 3461B, 3630A, 3838A, 3997A, 4103A, Lhôte 8A, 19, 22A, 22Bb, 40, 46Ba, 47, 82, 91, 92A, 93, 116, 166; *πυνθάνειν*: DVC 366A; *σῴζειν*: DVC 3146A; *τεκνοῦν*: DVC 2140B; *τελέθειν*: Lhôte 2; *τυγχάνειν*: DVC 7B, 18B, 22A, 126A, 142, 167A, 192A, 196A, 262B, 275A, 279A, 332B, 401B, 541B, 586A, 591B, 622A, 756, 844A, 854A, 1051A, 1108A, 1127A, 1148A, 1182A, 1234, 1306A, 1406A, 1415A, 1422A, 1426A, 1484, 2184, 2256A, 2288A, 2365A, 2368A, 2401, 2442B, 2466A, 2486B, 2549A, 2729B, 2736A, 2801A, 2802B, 2817B, 3179B, 3320A, 3366B, 3393A, 3641A, 3653B, 3680B, 3717A, 3807A, 3907, 4150A, Lhôte 22Ba, 88, 89Aa, 96A, 141 bis; *ὑγιαίνειν*:

of these (32% or 63/197) are forms of *τυγχάνειν*, and together these represent over eighty percent (81.8% or 63/77) of the total instances of that verb where we can be certain of its mood. Considering the number of extant inscriptions that we now have, that total may not seem impressive, but it is highly significant given the extremely fragmentary state of the evidence. These tablets indicate that many consultants at Dodona imagined the actions and states about which they were inquiring as being potential and that the optative of *τυγχάνειν* was a very prominent way of expressing those potentials.

Fourth, Herodotus, too, seems to have been aware of the use of the potential optative at oracles. In his account of the very next question that Croesus asks at Delphi and Amphiaraus, the bare potential optative appears twice:

> *Historical Sequence*: Croesus was commanding (*ἐνετέλλετο*) those who were going to convey those gifts to ask the oracles whether Croesus should wage war (*στρατεύηται*: deliberative subjunctive) against the Persians and whether he might win over some army of men as an ally (*εἴ τινα στρατὸν ἀνδρῶν προσθέοιτο φίλον*: bare potential optative).[65]
>
> *Primary Sequence*: Croesus, King of the Lydians and other peoples, reckoning these oracles to be the only ones among humans, both has given you gifts worthy of your discoveries and now asks (*ἐπειρωτᾷ*) whether he should wage war (*στρατεύηται*: deliberative subjunctive) against the Persians and whether he might win over some army of men as an ally (*εἴ τινα στρατὸν ἀνδρῶν προσθέοιτο σύμμαχον*: bare potential optative).[66]

As David Kovacs has argued, the fact that the second version is reported in primary sequence indicates that the optative mood in these indirect questions has been retained from an imagined direct question as a potential optative

DVC 337B; *φυτεύειν*: Lhôte 50Aa; optative endings of insecurely attested verbs: DVC 134B, 352A, 848, 1022A, 1909B, 2389A, 2755A, 2778A, 3405, Lhôte 137B. If one were to expand the criteria of selection to include reasonable conjecture, the number would swell significantly further.

[65] Hdt. 1.53.1: *τοῖσι δὲ ἄγειν μέλλουσι τῶν Λυδῶν ταῦτα τὰ δῶρα ἐς τὰ ἱρὰ ἐνετέλλετο ὁ Κροῖσος ἐπειρωτᾶν τὰ χρηστήρια εἰ στρατεύηται ἐπὶ Πέρσας Κροῖσος καὶ εἴ τινα στρατὸν ἀνδρῶν προσθέοιτο φίλον.*

[66] Hdt. 1.53.2: *Κροῖσος ὁ Λυδῶν τε καὶ ἄλλων ἐθνέων βασιλεύς, νομίσας τάδε μαντήια εἶναι μοῦνα ἐν ἀνθρώποισι, ὑμῖν τε ἄξια δῶρα ἔδωκε τῶν ἐξευρημάτων, καὶ νῦν ὑμέας ἐπειρωτᾷ εἰ στρατεύηται ἐπὶ Πέρσας καὶ εἴ τινα στρατὸν ἀνδρῶν προσθέοιτο σύμμαχον.*

without ἄν.[67] There are two other examples of potential optative forms in Herodotean reports of oracular consultations.

> When they [the Spartans] were always being beaten by the Tegeans in the war, having sent delegates to Delphi, they were asking (ἐπειρώτων), having propitiated whom of the gods might they gain the upper hand over the Tegeans in the war (τίνα ἂν θεῶν ἱλασάμενοι κατύπερθε τῷ πολέμῳ Τεγεητέων γενοίατο).[68]

> In the face of the overwhelming misfortune, the Cyrenaeans were sending (ἔπεμπον) to Delphi for the purpose of asking, having constituted themselves in what manner might they dwell in the land in the finest way (ὅντινα τρόπον καταστησάμενοι κάλλιστα ἂν οἰκέοιεν).[69]

Although these examples of the potential optative retain the particle, it is clear that Herodotus was familiar with this habit of expression among those who consulted at oracles. When he uses the potential optative in an oracular context, Herodotus is as likely as not to include the particle. One cannot, therefore, exclude the possibility of an ambiguous interpretation of the expression because of the historian's narratorial habits.

A second potential objection takes its cue from the reception of Croesus' test in the rest of Greek literature and points out that there is no clear evidence that this story was interpreted with an issue of ambiguity at its centre. In counterpoint, though, none of these later echoes of Croesus' test oracle are sufficient to exclude that possibility either. Generally, later Greek writers only referred to the consultation and the oracle that Croesus received from Delphi as a rhetorical flourish in service to some unrelated point or in developing a point related to the acuteness of Apollo's insight through the Pythia, whether viewed positively, negatively, or as something requiring a (Christian) explanation.[70] Where authors do acknowledge the test aspect of the story specifically,

[67] Kovacs (2010). Kovacs, in fact, suggests that the passage should be emended to include ἄν, but as I argued above, this move is unnecessary.

[68] Hdt. 1.67.2: ἐπειδὴ αἰεὶ τῷ πολέμῳ ἐσσοῦντο ὑπὸ Τεγεητέων, πέμψαντες θεοπρόπους ἐς Δελφοὺς ἐπειρώτων τίνα ἂν θεῶν ἱλασάμενοι κατύπερθε τῷ πολέμῳ Τεγεητέων γενοίατο.

[69] Hdt. 4.161.1: οἱ δὲ Κυρηναῖοι πρὸς τὴν καταλαβοῦσαν συμφορὴν ἔπεμπον ἐς Δελφοὺς ἐπειρησομένους ὅντινα τρόπον καταστησάμενοι κάλλιστα ἂν οἰκέοιεν.

[70] Plut. *De garr.* 512e; Oenomaus ap. Euseb. *PE* 5.21.1, 34.2; Arist. 49.377; Max. Tyr. 11.6; 13.3; 29.7; Tert. *De orat.* 17; *Apol.* 22.10; Origen *Cels.* 2.9.18–23; Philostr. *VS* 1.481; *VA* 6.11.208–10; Porph. *Plot.* 22.6–7; Euseb. *Contra Heiroclem* 14; Themist. *Orat.* 7.97c; 19.227c; John Chrys. *De Babyla* 80; Elias, *in Porph.* 72. There is also an interest in the oracle as providing a memorable instance of the word 'sand': Σ Ar. *Ach.* 3.ii. I take this assemblage of evidence for the story's reception from Fontenrose (1978) 301–2.

Delphi is the clear focus, and none of the other oracles is mentioned as having participated in it.[71] In only one instance in the reception of this story are the other oracles brought clearly into view. Oenomaus the Cynic (ap. Euseb. *PE* 5.20.8–10), who was motivated in his work, *On the Detection of Imposters*, to make all oracles look like frauds, says merely that Croesus preferred (*προκρίνει*) Delphi to all other oracles. However, the judgement is focalised through Croesus even here, and Oenomaus' point is actually that the Lydian was duped by Delphi. Since there is so little attention paid to the testing aspect of the story from the *Histories* in later tradition, and since it is almost never depicted as involving other Greek oracles besides Delphi even when the test is specifically mentioned, the evidence for the reception of this story cannot decide the issue one way or the other. In other words, there is equally no clear evidence for a consistent tradition of interpretation that the other oracles involved in Croesus' test spoke falsely.

A third objection seeks a more obvious warrant from Herodotus than those that I have already adduced above for accepting the interpretation I propose. The counter claim is that Herodotus is not a reticent narrator, and if he had meant for his audience to understand the story in this way, he would have made it more apparent. Herodotus may not be a reticent narrator generally, but it would be a mistake to turn this generalising statement into a rule that he never left anything implied to tease or challenge his audience, particularly when it comes to dealing with oracles.

Elsewhere, I have argued that the 'oracular tale' is a clear narrative pattern and a significant enough part of cultural knowledge that Herodotus could count on his audience to apply the pattern and supply information that he only implies.[72] This information may be as simple as facts about the procedures of consultation that are eclipsed in colloquial expressions. When, for example, Herodotus says that 'the Argyllaeans were sending to Delphi, wishing to remedy their error',[73] he means that the Argyllaeans chose delegates to send to Delphi in order to ask about a way to correct their mistake. When Herodotus says that 'an oracle came to him [Pherus] from the city of Bouto',[74] he means that Pherus received an oracle from Bouto after having sent delegates to inquire about his blindness: Bouto was not in the business of offering unbidden oracles.

[71] Xen. *Cyr.* 17.2.15–18; Lucian, *Iupp. trag.* 30, *Bis Acc.* 1; Σ Lucian, *Iupp. trag.* 30; Malalas, *Chron.* 155; Cedrenus, *Compendium historiarum* 1.240. Suda s.v. Κροῖσος (Κ 2500 Adler) suggests that there was never even a test involved in the consultation.

[72] Crosby (2020) 35–126.

[73] Hdt. 1.167.2: *οἱ δὲ Ἀγυλλαῖοι ἐς Δελφοὺς ἔπεμπον, βουλόμενοι ἀκέσασθαι τὴν ἁμαρτάδα.* Cf. 7.140.1: *πέμψαντες γὰρ οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι ἐς Δελφοὺς θεοπρόπους χρηστηριάζεσθαι ἦσαν ἕτοιμοι.*

[74] Hdt. 2.111.2: *ἀπικέσθαι οἱ μαντήιον ἐκ Βουτοῦς πόλιος*; cf. 2.152.3: *πέμψαντι δέ οἱ ἐς Βουτοῦν πόλιν ἐς τὸ χρηστήριον τῆς Λητοῦς, … ἦλθε χρησμός, κτλ.*

Sometimes, though, anticipating the narrative pattern of the 'oracular tale' is necessary for appreciating deeper, implied significance in passages that are otherwise easily overlooked. For example, in Book 6 Herodotus concludes his account of the Athenian–Aeginetan conflict in the following way:

> On the one hand, war had been joined by the Athenians against the Aeginetans, and on the other hand, the Persian was busy with his own matter, and since his servant was constantly reminding him to remember the Athenians and the Peisistratidae were sitting at court and maligning the Athenians, Darius, taking the case of the Athenians as a pretext, was wishing to subjugate at the same time those of Greece who had not given earth and water.[75]

By itself, the sentence looks like any other transition in the *Histories*, but by anticipating the pattern of pronouncement and fulfilment in the 'oracular tale', the audience can understand the outbreak of war as the fulfilment of a previously mentioned Delphic oracle. That oracle told the Athenians: 'If they should immediately wage war [against the Aeginetans], they will suffer many things in the intervening time and will accomplish many things, but nevertheless they will finally subjugate them.'[76] The fulfilment of the oracle's condition in the first (*μέν*) clause, then, is linked to the mention Darius' preparations for invasion in the second (δέ) clause. The implication here, as I have argued, is that the start of the Athenian–Aeginetan war triggered the prophecy about Athens' great sufferings and accomplishments which would be fulfilled in the Persian Wars prior to their eventual subjugation of Aegina later in the century.[77]

In other instances, a familiarity with the narrative pattern of the 'oracular tale' alone is not enough to discern the implications that are apparently embedded in these stories. The audience needs greater cultural knowledge than we now possess. For example, Herodotus implies that Peisistratus' battlefield tactics are the fulfilment of Amphilytus' oracle about tuna fishing at night, but the nature of the exact correspondences between oracle and event

[75] Hdt. 6.94.1: *Ἀθηναίοισι μὲν δὴ πόλεμος συνῆπτο πρὸς Αἰγινήτας, ὁ δὲ Πέρσης τὸ ἑωυτοῦ ἐποίεε, ὥστε ἀναμιμνήσκοντός τε αἰεὶ τοῦ θεράποντος μεμνῆσθαί μιν τῶν Ἀθηναίων καὶ Πεισιστρατιδέων προσκατημένων καὶ διαβαλλόντων Ἀθηναίους, ἅμα δὲ βουλόμενος ὁ Δαρεῖος ταύτης ἐχόμενος τῆς προφάσιος καταστρέφεσθαι τῆς Ἑλλάδος τοὺς μὴ δόντας αὐτῷ γῆν τε καὶ ὕδωρ.*

[76] Hdt. 5.89.2: *ἦν δὲ αὐτίκα ἐπιστρατεύωνται, πολλὰ μέν σφεας ἐν τῷ μεταξὺ τοῦ χρόνου πείσεσθαι, πολλὰ δὲ καὶ ποιήσειν, τέλος μέντοι καταστρέψεσθαι.*

[77] Crosby (2021).

has left scholars puzzled.[78] Thus Herodotus does occasionally make significant demands on his audience when it comes to teasing out latent meanings through the use of the narrative pattern of the 'oracular tale'.

In this section, I have introduced a number of counterarguments to maintain the plausibility of the interpretation that Croesus' command could be understood in two different senses: 'Ask what he shall happen to be doing'; or 'Ask what he might do to find fortune'. What matters most for my argument, though, is that Herodotus gives us a clause with a verb in the optative mood and, as I will go on to show, this clause shares obvious similarities to documented oracular inquiries from Dodona. I argue, therefore, that the clause, *ὅ τι ποιέων τυγχάνοι*, is sufficiently allusive by itself, given the prominence of similar expressions in the tablets. The fact that the clause was to be used in an oracular consultation is the strongest trigger for considering its meaning in that context. As I will show below, the clause, *ὅ τι ποιέων τυγχάνοι*, in the context of oracular consultation means, 'Doing what might he find fortune?'

Inquiries at Dodona

Close examination of the oracular *lamellae* from Dodona helps supply a greater context in which to understand what Croesus' question, *ὅ τι ποιέων τυγχάνοι*, might have meant in an oracular consultation. To be clear, there are no extant inscriptions in which we find an exact correspondence to the way that Croesus worded his inquiry. There are, however, enough of the same or analogous clauses to observe trends in meaning. The following three inquiries are the closest parallels to Herodotus' phrasing of Croesus' question:

> DVC 261B (mid-fourth cent.): *περὶ (παμ)παφίας* ***ὅ τι κα τ\|υνχάν[οι]μι πράσ(σ)ων.***
>
> 'About all of my possessions, **doing what might I find fortune**.'

> DVC 1415A (first half of fourth cent.): *περὶ τῶν ἀπολομέ⟨με⟩\|νων* ***τί κα ποέων τύχοι***;
>
> 'About the things that were lost, **doing what might he find fortune**?'

> DVC 2367 (second half of fourth cent.): *Θεός. τύχα ἀγαθά· Ἐπίλυτος ἐπερωτῆι τὸν Δία τὸν Νάϊον \| καὶ τὰν Διώναν* ***τί κα ποιῶν εὐτυχιοῖ*** *καὶ τίνι θεῶν θύσας \| καὶ πότερα τὰν τέχναν ἣν ἐπαιδεύθην ἐργάζωμαι ἢ ποτ' ἄλ\|λο*

[78] Hdt. 1.62.4–63.2. Kirchberg (1965) 70–1; Williams (1983) 134 n. 21; Lavelle (1991); Lapini (2011).

τι hορμάσω καὶ ἦ λαμψῶμαι αἴ κ᾽ ἐπιχηρῆι καὶ πότερα τὰν|Φαινομέναν γυναῖκα λάβω ἢ ἄλλαν καὶ πότερα καὶ δὴ|λάβω ἢ ποτιμένω.

'God. Good fortune. Epilytus asks Zeus Naius and Dione **doing what** and having sacrificed to whom of the gods **might he find good fortune**, and whether I should continue working the skill that I was taught or start something else, and whether I will succeed if I should attempt it, and whether I should take Phaenomene as a wife or another woman, and whether in fact I should marry at all or remain single.'

In these cases, the addition of more significant context necessitates a specific interpretation. In the first two tablets, the consultants were clearly asking for advice 'about all his possessions' (*παμπασίας*) and 'about the things that were lost' (*τῶν ἀπολομένων*). In the third, the consultant used the form *εὐτυχεῖν* to emphasise his interest in prospering or having good fortune. Thus, in these inquiries, *τί ποιῶν* expresses a question about the specific action that will lead to *τυγχάνειν*, which must be understood in its primary and absolute sense as achieving a state of fortune or success.[79] In the oracular context, therefore, the closest parallels to the phrasing of Croesus' question mean, 'Doing what might he find fortune?'

The examples that I have just cited clearly make use of a potential optative with *κα* (= *ἄν*), and one might object that the presence of this particle undermines their comparative value with Croesus' inquiry. However, there is strong evidence for the use of the bare potential optative among the inscribed tablets from Dodona.[80]

DVC 342B (early-fourth cent.): [---]*σία πότερα ἔρσ*[*εν*] | [*γένο*]*ς εἴη*;
'… whether the offspring might be male.'

DVC 366A (mid-fourth cent.): [*εἰς*] *Ἀπολλωνίαν πλεύσας ἢ ἰάλας τῶν τῆ*|[*ιδ*] *ἐόντων πυνθάνοιτο*;
'… having sailed to Apollonia or having sent [someone else] might he learn of those being there?'[81]

DVC 998B (late-fourth cent.): [..]*έων περὶ* ⟨*παν*⟩|*πανπασίας τίνι θε*|*ῶν ἢ ἡρώων θύων ἢ ε*|*ὐχόμενος εὐτυχοῖ*;

[79] Lhôte glosses *τυνχάνω* with *βέλτιον πράσσειν* and points out a handful of inscriptions that carry this meaning for the word with or without an accompanying participle (Lhôte 18, 22Ba, 89Aa). Lhôte (2006) 342–3.

[80] See the brief discussion in Lhôte (2006) 345. The latest investigation has excluded Lhôte 28a (=DVC 32B) as a possible example.

[81] I adopt the alternative reading offered by the editors.

'… about all his possessions, sacrificing or praying to whom of the gods or heroes might he find good fortune?'

DVC 1051A (late-fifth cent.): [*θεὸς τύ*]*χα ἀγαθά· Ἀριστοκ*|[*λεί*]*ας ἀδελφεᾶς μερ*|[*ιμνή*]*σας τυνχάνοι*(*τ*)*ο*;

'God. Good fortune. Might he find fortune having taken care of his sister Aristocleia?'

DVC 1234 (second half of third cent.): [*θεὸς ἀγαθ*]*ᾶι τύχαι - ἐπ*[*ικ*]*ην*[*ῆται*] *Αἰθαλὶς Διὶ καὶ Διώνα*[*ι*]|[*αἰ μένειν*] *οἱ λώϊον καὶ ἄμειν*[*ό*]*ν ἐστι αὐτεῖ κατὰ χώ*[*ρ*]*αν*|*ὥσπερ καὶ νῦν ἐστι* [*ἢ ὁρμ*]*ᾶν ἦ*(*ι*) *τύχοιμι*.

'God. Good fortune. Aethalis asks Zeus and Dione whether it is better and more desirable for her to remain on land just as she is now or to set out in what way she might find fortune/might chance upon.'

DVC 1360A (mid-fifth cent.): *πῦ τ' ἔρια εἶεν*;

'Where might the wool be?'

DVC 1422A (late-fifth–early-fourth cent.): *ἦ τοῦ παιδὸ*[*ς*]*—ἐτ' οὐ παῖς—μ*(*ε*)*λέ*|*ταν ἔχ*ō*ν τύχοιμι*;

'Whether I might have a child—there is not yet a child—working at it.'[82]

DVC 2054B (first half of fourth cent.): *ὦ Ζεῦ Νάϊε*̣, *πλέων καὶ ἐμπο*|*ρευόμενος* [*λ*]*ῷον πράσσοι*;

'O Zeus Naius, might he do better sailing and being a merchant?'

DVC 2261A (late-fifth–early-fourth cent.): [*θ*]*εοὶ*|[*ἀγαθῆ*] *τύχη·*|[*Ζε*]*ῦ Δωδωναῖε*|[*κ*]*αὶ Διώνη* : (*ἄ*)*μεινον πράσ*(*σ*)*οι·*|*εἰ λῷον καὶ ἄ*[*μ*]*ε̣ι̣ν̣ο̣ν* | *Μενάν̣δρωι πλέον*|*τι μετὰ Θηρ*(*α*)*μένō*|*καὶ νῦν καὶ* : *ἰς τὸν ἐπί*|*λο*(*ι*)*πον χρόνον λῷον καὶ Α̣*|*καὶ ὅτω ἄν τις θεῶ̣ν* [*θύοι*].

'Gods. Good fortune. O Dodonaean Zeus and Dione: Might he do better? Whether it is better and more desirable both now and in future for Menander to sail with Theramenus, and better and m[ore desirable]… and to whom of the gods might one sacrifice.'

[82] I adopt the alternative reading offered by the editors.

DVC 2423B (mid-fourth cent.): *θεὸς τύχα· ἐρωτᾷ Φίλιστος τὸν* | Ω[..]AN *τίνι θῦων λώϊον* (*καὶ*) *ἄμει*|*νον πράσ*(*σ*)*οι.*

'God. Fortune. Philistus asks … sacrificing to whom might he do better and more desirably.'

DVC 2442B (second half of fourth cent.): *τύχοιμ*[*ι*] *ποήσας*;

'Might I find fortune having done [it]?'

DVC 2506 (late-fifth–early-fourth cent.): [---------] | *καὶ* H[…]MOΥΔ[..] [*ἐ*]|*ρωτᾶι τὸν θεὸν εἰ* | *γυναῖκα ἀγαγόμε*|*νος βέλτιον πρά*|*σ*(*σ*)*οι.*

'… [consultant] asks the god whether he might do better having married.'

DVC 2593A (first half of fourth cent.): *παμπασίας* | *πότερα ὠνεύμ*|*ενοι ἢ ἐῶντες* | *λώϊον πράσ*(*σ*)*οιν*;

'[about] all their possessions, whether they might do better buying [it] or letting [the matter] drop.'

DVC 2910B (first half of fourth cent.): *ἦ Ἀγίας* | *ἄμεινον πράσσοι* | *εὐξάμενος*;

'Whether Agias might do better having prayed.'

DVC 3033A (mid-third cent.): *ἀγαθῆι τύχηι· ἐπερωτᾶι* Θ|[..]*ίδας Δία καὶ Διώνην τίνι* | *θεῶν εὐχομένωι λώϊον* | *πράσσοι.*

'Good fortune. Th[..]idas asks Zeus and Dione, praying to whom of the gods might he do better for himself.'

DVC 3364A (first half of fourth cent.): *ἐρωτεῖ* Π[..]N[...] *τ*[*ὸ*]*ν Δία τὸν* | Νάϊον *καὶ τὰν Διών*[*α*]*ν* [*ἦ ἐμ*]|*πορευόμενος κατὰ θα*(*λ*)*ασ*|*σαν βέλτιον πράσσοι.*

'P[..]n[...] asks Zeus Naius and Dione whether he might do better being a merchant by sea.'

Lhôte 22Bb (third–second cent.): Περὶ *γυναικὸ*|*ς ἦ τ' ἄμυννό τε λῷον πρᾶμι*;

'About a wife, whether I might do something better and more desirable.'[83]

[83] Lhôte (2006) 78 argues that *πρᾶμι* may be understood as a syncopated optative.

Lhôte 46Ba (mid-fourth–third BCE): Ἰστορεῖ Νικοκράτ[ει]ᾳ̣ τίνι θεῶν θύουσα | λῶιον καὶ ἄμεινον πράσσοι καὶ τᾶς νόσου | παύσα(ι)το.
'Nicocrateia inquires, having sacrificed to whom of the gods might she do better and might she end her illness.'

Lhôte 68 (mid-fourth–third BCE): Θεοί. Τ̣ύχα ἀγα|θά. [Ἐ]ρ[ω]τεῖ Ἀντίο|χος τ⟨ὸ⟩ν Δί(α) και τὰν | Διώναν ὑπὲρ ὑγι|είας [α]ὑτοῦ καὶ πα|τρὸς καὶ ἀδελφ[ε]|ᾶς τ⟨ί⟩να θεῶν | ἢ ἥρ[ώω]ν τιμᾶν|τι λ[ῶ]ιον καὶ ἄ|με[ι]νον εἴη.
'Gods. Good fortune. Antiochus asks Zeus and Dione regarding his own, his father's, and his sister's health, honouring whom of the gods or heroes might it be better and more desirable for him.'

Lhôte 91 (late-fourth BCE): Θεός. Τύχαι ἀγαθᾶι. Ἐπερωτᾶι Λοχίσκος | τὰν Διώναν περὶ ἐργασίας εἰ κατὰ | θάλασσ[α]ν̣ [πλ]αζόμενος εὐτυχοῖ | καὶ βέλτιον πράσσοι.
'God. Good fortune. Lochiscus asks Dione about work whether he might find good fortune and might do better roving by sea.'

Lhôte 93 (fourth–third cent.): Θεός. Τύχαι ἀγαθᾶ[ι. Ἐπι]κο(ι)νῆτα[ι] Ἱππόστρατος τῶι Δὶ τῶι Νάωι καὶ | ταῖ Διώναι ᾗ μὴ ν[α]⟨υ⟩κλαρη[ῦ]ν̣ λῶιογ καὶ ἄμμεινομ πράσσοιμι.
'God. Good fortune. Hippostratus asks Zeus Naius and Dione whether he might do better and more desirably not being the owner of a ship.'

Lhôte 116 (late-fifth BCE): Περὶ πανπασίᾱ̄ αὐτοῦ | καὶ γενεᾶς καὶ γυναικὸ|ς τίνι θεῶν εὐχόμενος | πράσσοιμι ἀγαθ⟨ό⟩ν;
'About all of his possessions and offspring and wife, praying to whom of the gods might I do a good thing?'

Lhôte 158 (late-fifth BCE): Ἦ ἄλλᾱ̄ς πονοίε̄ι;
'Whether he might labour in a different way?'[84]

By my count, these inscriptions represent nearly twelve percent (11.6% or 23/198) of the number of securely attested or confidently restored uses of the

[84] See also the examples cited above: 342B (early fourth cent.), 366A (mid-fourth cent.), 998B (late-fourth cent.), 1051A (late-fifth cent.), 1234 (second half of third cent.), 1360A (mid-fifth cent.), 1422A (late-fifth–early-fourth cent.), 2054B (first half of fourth cent.), 2140B (first half of fifth cent.), 2261A (late-fifth–early-fourth), 2423B (mid-fourth cent.), 2442B (second half of fourth cent.), 2506 (late-fifth–early-fourth cent.), 2593A (first half of fourth cent.), 2910B (first half of fourth cent.), 3033A (mid-third cent.), 3364A (first half of fourth cent.). Perhaps also DVC 299A (second half of fourth cent.).

optative. Considering the fragmentary state of the evidence and the potential for κα, κ', or ἄν to hide between even the narrowest of square brackets, it is an impressively high volume. More importantly, though, the comparison of these examples to the three cited previously reveals that there is no difference in the meaning of the optative whether or not κα is used: they are all clearly potential.

There is a long list of other fragmentary inscriptions in which questions similar to ὅ τι (κα) ποιέων τυγχάνοι might tentatively be restored, accepting the substitution of different participles of making or doing from ποιεῖν, πράσσειν, or δρᾶν:

DVC 43A (first quarter of fourth cent.): [θϵ]ὸς τύχαν ἀ[γαθάν· ---] | [..]ΤΩΝ ἁπάντ[ων ---] | [.]ΩΝ τί ἐστι τὸ [---] | ΤΟΝ αἰ θϵὸς Α[---]|ΜΟΝ ὁ θϵὸς [--- **τί]** | **κα ποέôν τυν[χάνοι** ---]

DVC 45B (fifth–fourth cent.): [περὶ πα]ν̣κλαρίας ⋮ | [---]ίας τί δράᾱν | [---] ἀ̣γαθὰ ΕΠΟ|[---]ΕΟΝ: αἰ ἔρο̄̃ν | [---]ΟΝΟΝ: | [---]ΜΟ[...] θϵὸς | [--- **τί κα δ]ράᾱ[ν]**

DVC 496 (second half of fourth cent.): [---] σωτηρία τ̣ῶι (Διὶ) καὶ Διώ⟨ι⟩να[ι ---] | [---][..]ΑΝ[.....]Ν πότερα [---] | [---][..] **τί κα [ποέω]ν [---]**

DVC 600B (late-fifth–early-fourth cent): [---]λης : **τί κα πο[έων ---];**

DVC 612A (late-fifth cent.): [---]ΑΝ : ϵἰ δὲ μ̣[ὴ ---] | [--- σωτ]ηρία καὶ [---] | [--- κα]ὶ **τί ποέ̣[ων ---]**

DVC 828B (fourth cent.?): [--- **τί κα πρ]ά̣σσᾱ̣ν̣ [---]**

DVC 839B (fourth cent): [--- **τί κα] πράσ(σ)ᾱ [---]** or πράσ(σ)ων

DVC 928A (fourth cent): [---] **τί κα πο[έων ---]**

DVC 1070A (late-fifth–early-fourth cent): θϵὸς τύχαν· Πα[--- ἐπϵρωτῆι] | τὸν θϵὸν **τί κα [ποιέων ---]** | Δϵξαιρϵâται

DVC 1100B (fourth cent.?): [--- **τί πρ]ά̣σσᾱ[---]** or πράσσων

DVC 1595A (first half of fourth cent.): [--- **τί] κα δρ[άᾱν ---] | [---** τίνα κα θϵôν] hιλασ[κόμενος ---] | [---]Ο̣ΕΙΝ̣[---]

DVC 1690B (second half of fifth cent.): **τί κα πο̣[έων ---]** | φύ[η ---] | ϵὔφιμ[ος ---];

DVC 1764A (mid-fifth cent.): **[*τί κα*] *ποέ̄ον* [.][---]**

DVC 2647 (early-third cent.): [Ζϵ]ῦ Νᾶϵ καὶ [Δ]ιώνα ἐπε̣[ρωτᾶι ὁ δϵῖνα --- περὶ]|τούτων ***τί πράσσ*[ων ---]**

DVC 3319B (late-fifth–early-fourth cent.): [--- ***τί κα*] *ποέ*[*̄ον* ---]|[---] καρπὸν [---]

DVC 3465B (first half of fourth cent.): [---]ΑΣΤ[.] *σο̋ϊον* [---]|[---][.]Ε καὶ πϵ[ρὶ ---]|[---] ***τί κα δρά*(*̄ο*)[*ν* ---]|[---][.]** καὶ ὅστις [---]|[---]Ε δαίμ*̄ον* [---]

DVC 3680B: [α]***ἴ κα τυ*(*ν*)*χάνοιμι πο*[*έων*]** or [τ]ί

DVC 3690B (first half of fourth cent.): [---]ν ἐπερωτῆ τὸν θϵὸν ***τί κα ποι*|[*έων* ---** καὶ] περὶ ἐλευθερίας ϵ̣[ἴ] ᾽στι αὐτῶι|[--- παραμο]νὰ πὰρ τὸν δϵσπότα(ν)

DVC 3789A (fourth cent.): ἀγαθὰ [τύχα· ὁ δϵῖνα ἐπερωτῆι ***τί κα πρ*]|*άσσ*[*ω*]*ν καὶ* [……][---]**

DVC 3834A (fourth cent.?): [---][.] ***τί κα*** **[*ποιέων* ---]|[---]**ΣΑ[---]

DVC 3846A (early-fourth cent.): ἐπερω[τῆι ὁ δϵῖνα ---]| ***τί κα πο*[*ιῶν* ---]|** καὶ αὐτ̣[ὸς ---]

DVC 3913A (first-half of fourth cent.): θϵὸς· ἐπερωτ[ῆι ὁ δϵῖνα ---]| ***τί κα*** **[*ποέων* ---]|[---]**

DVC 3930A (fourth cent.): Μ̣ε[--- ἐπερωτῆι ---]| ***τί κα*** **[*ποέων* ---]**

DVC 3981B (fourth cent.): [---] ***τί κα π*[*οιέων* ---]**

DVC 4036A (end of fifth cent.): [ἐπερω]τῆι Α[.][---]| [τὸν θϵ]ὸν ***τί κ*[*α ποέων* ---]|[---][..]Α[..][---]**

I introduce this evidence to suggest, not to prove, that the form of inquiry under investigation might have been more common than our three intact inscriptions alone would indicate. If the lead tablets were in a less fragmentary state, we would be able to know for sure. The vast majority of the oracular *lamellae*, though, are too fragmentary to provide much of any information beyond points of lexis.

In addition to the examples of close correspondence above, there are also some intact inscriptions bearing inquiries that are quite comparable in different ways to Croesus' phrasing:

DVC 313A (second half of fifth cent.): … *τί κα δραόντοιν hυγία κὴ γενία κἀνδρογένεια | γινύο(ι)το* …
'Doing what might they have health and offspring and male issue?'

DVC 2441A (second half of fourth cent.): … *τί κα] | ποήσαντί οἰ [γ]ε̣ν[ϵ]ὰ γένοιτο ἐ[ρσεν]τέρα.*
'Doing what might he have rather masculine offspring?'

DVC 2525A (late-fourth cent.): … [*τί*] *κα ποιήσας hυγιαίνω.*
'Having done what may I be in good health?'[85]

Lhôte 107A (first half of fourth cent.): … *ὅ τι δρῶν ἢ ποιῶν λῶιον καὶ ἄμεινον | ἔσται αὐτῶι καὶ χρημάτων κτῆσις ἀγαθὴ ἔσται.*
'Accomplishing or doing what will it be better and more desirable for him and will there be a beneficial acquisition of money?'

Some percentage of the inscriptions for which I have suggested *τί* (*κα*) *ποιῶν τυγχάνοι* in the paragraph above may instead have utilised different terms, like those of the tablets that I have just listed, and a number of very fragmentary inscriptions may fall into this group as well.[86] However, there is a basic similarity of form that the more complete examples hold in common. These are questions about what action to undertake (*τί ποιῶν*) for achieving a desirable state (to speak generally, *τυγχάνειν*).

This evidence not only shows the prevalence of the phrase, 'Doing what…?' (*vel sim.*), but it also makes clear that it was relatively common for consultants to ask Zeus more open-ended questions. Scholarship had rightly emphasised the predominance of two basic question forms: 'Should I do X action?' and 'To whom of the gods should I sacrifice in order to be successful?'[87] However, the expanded data from Dodona now shows a wider variety and greater number of open-ended questions, like 'Where?' and 'How?'.[88] The

[85] There is also a slightly less grammatically clear tablet (DVC 3601A) from the first half of the fifth century: [---]N ⋮ *ὅ,τι δράοντι* [---] | [---] *τυγνάνō* NIO[---] | [---]Θ̣ΕΓ[.....]ΕΚ[---].

[86] More fragmentary: DVC 45B, 496A, 612A, 828B, 3465B.

[87] Amandry (1939) 197–8; Lhôte (2006) 336–42; Eidinow (2007) 132–3; Flower (2008) 102–3; Johnston (2008) 68–71.

[88] What? (in addition to those above) DVC 128A, 227B, 268A, 313A, 352A, 380A, 426A, 481?, 771A, 995A, 1003A, 1102A, 1217A, 1349B?, 1415A, 1545A?, 1754A?, 2166B, 2287A, 2380, 2441A?, 2525A?, 2586A, 3022A, 3210A, 3259A, 3295B, 3362A, 3769B, 4073A; Lhôte

most common open-ended question is 'What?'. While consultants often phrased such inquiries by using the words, *τί ποιῶν* (*vel sim.*), along with a finite verb reflecting a desirable state, at other times they simply used the construction, *τί* with a finite form of *ποιεῖν*, *πράσσειν*, or *δρᾶν*.

DVC 1099B (fourth cent.?): *πὲρ τοῦ hερμήου* | ***τί δρά῱***;
'About the Hermeion: **What should I do**?'

DVC 2747A (second half of fifth cent.): ***ἔ τί ποέ̄με̄ς;*** *π*[*o*]*έ̄μ*(*ες*)
'Or what should we do?'

DVC 3445A (early-fourth cent.): [*περὶ εὐτ*]*ụχίας αὐτô, γενε*|[*ἂς*] ***τί κα ποι(οῖ)***;
'About his good fortune and that of his offspring, **what might he do**.'

The consultant who wrote 3445A frames his question with the mention of 'good fortune' ([*περὶ εὐτ*]*ụχίας*) in the editors' judgement, and the others seem to imply as much. Unsurprisingly, fortune is regularly an explicit concern in the tablets as can be seen from the frequency of the other words deriving from the *τυχ*-stem: *ἐπιτυγχάνειν*, *εὐτυχεῖν*, *εὐτυχής*, *εὐτυχία*, *κατατυγχάνειν*, *παντυχία*, *τύχα*, and *τυχαῖος*.[89] Even if that were not the case, though, it is safe to assume that no one would have gone to the oracle in order to fare badly or even middlingly in what they ended up doing. The interrogative *τί* with a finite form of *ποιεῖν*, *πράσσειν*, or *δρᾶν* in the subjunctive or optative, therefore, effectively means the same thing as *τί* (*κα*) *ποιῶν τυγχάνοι*.

Finally, consultants frequently employed the verb *τυγχάνειν* in their inquiries,[90] but with a participle, it almost never means what Croesus did. Rather, as I have shown from the examples of the form *τί* (*κα*) *ποιῶν τυγχάνοι*

20, 154? Where? DVC 1360A. How? DVC 187A, 207B, 361, 2439, 2473, 2763A, 3047B, 3066A?, 3276B?, 3849A?.

[89] The following words are clearly present or restored by the editors. *ἐπιτυγχάνειν*: DVC 359B, Lhôte 39. *εὐτυχεῖν*: DVC 730B, 998B, 1082A, 2367, 2897A, 3030A, 3296B; *εὐτυχής*: DVC 1312A; *εὐτυχία*: DVC 558B, 1822B, 3363B, 3520A, 4083A; *κατατυγχάνειν*: 167A, 2439, 2517A; *παντυχία*: DVC 94, 3771; *τύχα* (excluding greeting): DVC 75, 252A, 393B, 1158B, 1187A, 1223A, 1290A, 1370A, 1436A, 1510A, 1608B, 1643A, 1810A, 1828A, 2002A, 2074A, 2093A, 2107A, 2146B, 2176, 2482B, 2488A, 2510, 2638B, 2707A, 2982A, 3381B, 3390A, 3453B, 3771, 3950A, 4046A; *τυχαῖος*: DVC 31A, 39A, 221B, 1088A, 1340A, 2410A, 3005, 3192A, 3289A, 3745A

[90] *Τυγχάνειν* + genitive: DVC 7B, 60A, 126A, 142, 874B, 1484, 2275A, 2365A, 2368A. More fragmentary: DVC 322B, 848, 1629, 3130A, 3663B, 3717A. *κατατυγχάνειν*+genitive: 2517A.

and similar expressions, the participle almost always represents the circumstance under which good fortune (*εὐτυχεῖν*/(*κατά-*)*τυγχάνειν*) is expected or desired. For example, one client wrote: Π*ερὶ γυναικὸς*|*πότερόν κα τ*[*υγ*]|*χάνοιμι λαμβάνων*|Κ*λεολαΐν*; 'About a wife, whether I might find fortune taking Cleolaïs (as a wife).'[91] There are quite a number of actions and states that consultants were considering with such inquiries, including, but not limited to, dedicating, travelling abroad, farming, trading, pruning, emigrating, burying, dwelling, sharing, sailing, and, saddest of all, being a widow.[92] In fact, there are only three inscriptions where consultants used *τυγχάνειν* with a participle in a way that might be considered consonant with Croesus' usage:

> DVC 196A (mid-fifth cent.): *θεὸς τύχα·*| *Ευθυμίδας ἀνερωτῆ*|*τὸν θεὸν* ***ἦ τυνχάνοι***|***κα ποιέων*** *ἃι ἄριστο*(*ν*).
>
> 'God. Fortune: Euthymidas asks the god **whether he might happen to be acting** in what way is best.'

> DVC 2466A (mid-fourth cent.): *ἦ τυγχάνοι κα* ⟨*ε*⟩ *ζῶσα*;
>
> '**Whether she might happen to be living**?'

> DVC 3907 (late-fifth–early-fourth cent.): *θεὸ*[*ς*] *τύχα*[*ν*] *ἀγαθάν· ἐπικοινῆτα*[*ι* ---]|*ὠι τῶι Διὶ τῶι Νάω*[*ι*] *καὶ ταῖι Διώναι* ***[ἦ τυγ]***|***χάνοι*** *κα*⟨*ι*⟩ ***ἀμελήσασ*(*α*)** *καὶ ταῦτα* ***[νο]***|***σοῦσα*** *περὶ τῶν ὀμμάτων.*

[91] Lhôte 22Ba. cf. *ἄγων* and *ἀγόμενος*: DVC 1127A, 1406A, 1966A?, Lhôte 89Aa.

[92] *ἀναιρῶν* and *ποταναιρέων* (*προσαναιρέων*): DVC 126A, 262B; *ἀνθεὶς* (*ἀναθεὶς*): DVC 80A; *ἀντεχόμενος*: Lhôte 96A; *ἀποδημῶν*: Lhôte 88A; *γαϝοργέων* (*γεωργῶν*): DVC 275A, 278B?; *δικαζόμενος*: DVC 142, 192A, 1681A, 1722B?; *δοῦς*: DVC 2801A; *ἔϝων* (*ἐὼν*): Lhôte 35A; *ἐμπορευόμενος*: DVC 279A, 580A, 2802B, 3497A, 3653B, Lhôte 89Aa; *ἐπάγουσα*: DVC 1426A; *ἐπανιών*: DVC 142; *ἐπικόπτων*: DVC 1108A; *εὐχόμενος*: DVC 352A?, 848?, 1628A?, 2256A?, 2401?, 2897A?, 3179B?, 3342B?, 3807A, *εὐτυχ-* 998B, *εὐτυχ-* 2897A?; *ἐχϝοικέων* (*ἐξοικῶν*): DVC 377A; *ἔχων*: DVC 1422A; *ἐών*: DVC 345B; *θύων*: DVC 352A, 622A, *εὐτυχ-* 2897A?; *ἰαώμενος*: DVC 299A; *ἱλασκόμενος*: DVC 7B; *hισσαμένα* (*ἑσαμένη*): 541B; *κατθεῖσα* (*καταθεῖσα*): DVC 126A; *μεριμνήσας*: DVC 1051A; *οἰκέων* (*οἰκῶν*): DVC 835A?, 2817B; *πεδέχων* (*μετέχων*): Lhôte 96A; *πεπαμένος*: DVC 22A; *πλεύσας*: *εὐτυχ-* DVC 3030A; *ποιέων* (*ποιῶν*) and *ποιήσας*: DVC 401B, 2442B; *ναυκλαρέων* (*ναυκληρῶν*): DVC 1182A; *κατατυγχ-* 167A; *τελέσας*: DVC 4178A; *χηρεύουσα*: DVC 3320A; *χρεύμενος* (*χραόμενος*): Lhôte 89Aa. Based on the editors' emendations to some of the more fragmentary inscriptions, a few more participles may be added: *ἀμποδισάμενος* (*ἀναποδισάμενος*): DVC 1418A; *ϝεργαζόμενος* (*ἐργαζόμενος*): DVC 2077B; *ἐπιχηρέωντες* (*ἐπιχειρῶντες*): DVC 2378A; *ἰών*: 1306A; *μαστεύων*: DVC 591B; *μένωσα*: DVC 586A; *ὁρῶν*: *εὐτυχ-* DVC 3296B; *παραμένων*: DVC 1738A. There is even an impersonal construction that gives the same sense: … *φυλάσσοντι τυνχάνοι* … DVC 3366B.

> 'God. Good Fortune: [A woman] asks Zeus Naos and Diona **whether she might happen to have been negligent and to be contracting a disease** affecting the places around her eyes.'

In the first two tablets, the consultants ask 'Whether?' (not 'What?') and in the case of the first, the extra detail is given that he is asking about 'acting in what way is best'. Thus, in the case of the first inscription, *ἦ τυνχάνοι κα ποιέων* must refer not to any future plan but to something the consultant was presently doing. Otherwise, the question would have to mean something like 'Whether he might find fortune acting in what way is best?' which is a question that would not need to be asked. In the second tablet, the participle *ζῶσα* seems to limit the meaning of the expression to an inquiry about a missing person. If there were another participle, like *χηρεύουσα*, in its place, we might have understood the question to be about the welfare of a widow or even about the consultant's own prospects as a widow. The participle, *ζῶσα*, though, cannot be taken in the same sense here since 'Whether she might find fortune being alive?' would be nonsense unless the woman were suicidal—that is, however, not an impossibility. The third consultant might have been concerned about the cause of her present illness, but the participle *νοσοῦσα* would fit oddly since she would presumably know whether she was suffering from eye disease. Instead, she might have wondered 'whether she might find fortune even though [concessive force] having been negligent and suffering a disease affecting the places around her eyes'.[93] What becomes clear from these examples is that our ability to understand the intent of these kinds of questions is greatly dependent on context. When referring to the present, consultants may use *τυγχάνειν* with a participle to ask whether matters 'happen to be' or 'happen to have been' a certain way; when referring to the future, they used *τυγχάνειν* with a participle to ask about what they should do to be successful or whether they would be successful in what they proposed.

The phrasing of Croesus' question to the oracles is, therefore, quite ambiguous. In the way Herodotus presents the question, Croesus did not provide enough context about the crisis that prompted oracular consultation and gave no indication of his particular interest in the present that would help an oracle determine whether he was referring to a present reality or a future circumstance. It is only because Herodotus tells the background of the king's plan to test the oracles of Greece that the audience even knows for certain what Croesus really meant. It is also very unlikely that oracular sanctuaries anticipated inquiries designed to test their prophetic powers. It is related to this fact that, although *τυγχάνειν* with a participle like *ποιέων* may mean 'happen to be doing', this meaning is nearly absent from the context of

[93] I am grateful to James Holt for his observation of this possibility.

oracular inquiries. Further, the expression *τί* (*κα*) *ποιῶν τυγχάνοι* among the Dodona tablets always means: 'Doing what might he/she find fortune?' Thus, in an oracular context, Croesus' question is likely to have been understood in a way that he did not intend.

Implications for Herodotus' *Histories*

Accepting the possibility that the oracular sanctuaries, apart from Delphi, may have taken Croesus' meaning differently and that this possibility is part of Herodotus' narrative strategy has important consequences for how we read this story. First of all, the other oracles that Croesus received need not be thought of as false according to the story that Herodotus tells, even if they appeared that way to Croesus. If the question that he asked may mean either 'What does/might Croesus happen to be doing?' or 'Doing what will/might Croesus find fortune?' in theory, all of the responses would have come back with a description of a particular action or set of actions. Croesus, though, was looking for the oracle that said something about his stew, not for oracles that would tell him how to find fortune in life—though perhaps he should have. Thus, his judgement was framed by his intent. This means that the other oracles may have offered good and potentially effective advice about being fortunate, but Croesus ignored them because they seemed false in the context of the test that he had arranged. Of course, a prominent part of the story is still the marvel of Delphi's prophetic insight. However, in this interpretation, the celebration of Delphi's powers does not necessitate the denigration of the other oracles. I contend that this interpretation is more consonant with Herodotus' own attitude toward these oracles in the broader context of the *Histories* and with the attitudes of anticipated audience.

The interpretation that I propose here may also give greater significance to the second line of the Delphic oracle. As the Pythia says, 'But I know the number of sand and the measures of the sea, and I understand the mute and I hear the one who does not speak.'[94] These lines, of course, do not seem germane to Croesus' question, and scholars have typically explained them as a 'stock manifesto of Apollo's prophetic powers', to quote H. W. Parke and D. E. W. Wormell.[95] Kindt extends the importance of this declaration of divine omniscience further by suggesting that it is meant as a 'hint to Croesus that Apollo can see more than he, and that things can turn out to be different than

[94] Hdt. 1.47.3: *οἶδα δ' ἐγὼ ψάμμου τ' ἀριθμὸν καὶ μέτρα θαλάσσης,|καὶ κωφοῦ συνίημι καὶ οὐ φωνεῦντος ἀκούω.*

[95] Parke and Wormell (1956) 133. See also Crahay (1956) 193; Kirchberg (1965) 17; Fontenrose (1978) 113.

they appear at first sight'.[96] These observations are likely to be true, but I think there may be more. In light of the argument that I have been developing for the ambiguity of Croesus' inquiry, the Pythia's claim to 'understand the mute'—a mute person being someone who can make vocal sounds but cannot speak clearly in a language[97]—may be read as emphasising the fact that she understood Croesus' true meaning even though his inarticulate expression left the matter unclear.

This interpretation might be taken to suggest that the oracles apart from Delphi simply misunderstood Croesus' question and the nature of his test. However, within Herodotus' *Histories*, there would be something odd about the idea that the gods and heroes of the other oracular sanctuaries could have had authoritative knowledge of the past, present, and future and yet have misunderstood what Croesus meant. Also, it was a relatively common notion that the gods and their oracles could read the minds of their consultants. A particularly famous example is Xenophon's consultation at Delphi before setting off on his campaign. 'And going, Xenophon asked Apollo, sacrificing and praying to whom of the gods might he complete most fairly and best the journey which he has in mind (ἣν ἐπινοεῖ), and having completed it well, might he be safe.'[98] Interestingly, Socrates criticised Xenophon for asking the wrong question about to whom of the gods he should pray and not whether he ought to go at all, but he says nothing about assuming that Apollo could read his mind about his intent to fight in the East. Some of the lead tablets from Dodona also show similar phrases that seem to assume that Zeus knew the thoughts of his consultants.

> DVC 123 (second half of fourth cent.): [Θεός· Φ]*ανόστρατος ὦ Ζ̣εῦ ἐρωτᾶι* | [*εἰ λ*]*ώϊον καὶ ἄμεινον καὶ πρᾶ*|[*γμ' ἀ*]*χ̣αθὸν διαλεγομέν*(*ωι*) *Ἰφικρά*|[*τει* **ἃ ἐ**]**ν νῶι ἔχω** *καὶ ποιομένωι* | [*αὐτ*]*ὸν φίλον*.
>
> 'God: Phanostratus, o Zeus, asks whether it is better and more desirable and good business for him to speak to Iphicrates **what things he has in mind** and to make him a friend.'

[96] Kindt (2006) 38. Kindt's point about a 'hint' here takes its force not from the superior knowledge of Apollo, which is asserted outright, but from the idea that events may turn out to be different than they seem at first, like a mute capable of being understood and an unspoken word capable of being heard.

[97] Arist. *HA* 536a32–b5: *τὰ δὲ ζῳοτόκα καὶ τετράποδα ζῷα ἄλλο ἄλλην φωνὴν ἀφίησι, διάλεκτον δ' οὐδὲν ἔχει, ἀλλ' ἴδιον τοῦτ' ἀνθρώπου ἐστίν· ὅσα μὲν γὰρ διάλεκτον ἔχει, καὶ φωνὴν ἔχει, ὅσα δὲ φωνήν, οὐ πάντα διάλεκτον. ὅσοι δὲ γίνονται κωφοὶ ἐκ γενετῆς, πάντες καὶ ἐνεοὶ γίνονται· φωνὴν μὲν οὖν ἀφιᾶσι, διάλεκτον δ' οὐδεμίαν.*

[98] Xen. *An.* 3.1.6: *ἐλθὼν δ' ὁ Ξενοφῶν ἐπήρετο τὸν Ἀπόλλω τίνι ἂν θεῶν θύων καὶ εὐχόμενος κάλλιστα καὶ ἄριστα ἔλθοι τὴν ὁδὸν ἣν ἐπινοεῖ καὶ καλῶς πράξας σωθείη.*

DVC 603A (late-fifth cent.): [---]Ẹ̣ΛΕ[.]Α [---] | [--- **ἃ] ἐν νοῖ ἔχω̄** [---] | [---]Μ̣ΟΝ *εὖ πράσ*[*σω̄* ---]

'… **what things I have in mind** … do well …'

DVC 797A (mid-fourth cent.): [--- **ἃ] ἐν νῶ[ι] ἔχει** [---] | [---] *δρῶ* [*κ*]*ορῶν* [---] | [---]ΕΟ[.][---]

'… **what things he/she has in mind** … I do … of the girls …'

DVC 973A (first half of fourth cent.): *θεὸς τύχα·* [Ζεῦ Νάϊε *καὶ*] | Διώνα Δε[---]|*ίμωι δείξ*[*ατε αἰ λώϊόν*] | *κα πράσσο*̣[*ι* ---]| *ὥσπερ νῦν* [*καὶ* **ἃ α]|ὐτὸς τῶι νῶ[ι ἔχει** *πρά*]|*σσων*.

'God. Fortune: Zeus Naius and Diona, show to De(…)imus whether he might do better … just as now and doing **what things he himself has in mind**.'

DVC 3661A (first half of fourth cent.): [*θεός*]· *ἐρωτῆ* [*ὁ δεῖνα* ---] | [.] *ἦ οὐ τὰ* Π[.....][---]|[.]ΤΙΛΛΙΩΝ[..]Α[..]ΔΕ[--- *ἄμ*]|*εινον* **ὅπει νοεῖ** [--- *ἰς τὸ*]|[*ν*] *ἔπι̣τα χ*[*ρ*]*όν*[*ον*].

'God: [Name] asks … whether not the things … better **in what way he/she thinks** … into the time to come.'

DVC 3702 (late-fifth–early-fourth cent.): [*πε*]*ρὶ τοῦ πράμ*[*ατος*] | **[ὃ] ἐ̣πινοεῖ πράσ[σειν]** | [.....] *ἐστ*[*ί*].

'About the matter **which he/she has in mind to do** … is.'

Lhôte 53Bb (mid-fourth–third cent.): ᾽Η *γυνα*[*ῖ*]*κα* **ἂν ἐ|π[ὶ] γνώ[μ]α̣ς ἔ[χ]ε̣[ι]** | *λαβ*̣[*εῖν λ*]*ῶ*[*ιον*] *κ*̣*α*[*ὶ*] | *ἄμε*[*ι*]*νον πράξε*[*ι*];

'Whether he will act better and more desirably to take as a wife the woman **whom he has in his thought**?'

Lhôte 67 (late-fifth cent.): T*ίνι* {I} *κα θεῶν εὐξάμενος πράξαι* | **ἃ ἐπὶ νόōι ἔχē**;

'Having prayed to whom of the gods might he do **what things he has in mind**?'

Lhôte 135 (fourth cent.): ᾽Η *καὶ* **ἄγ κα αὐτὸ|ς ἐπὶ γνώμαι ἔχ|ηι** *καὶ χρήηι*;

'Whether [the oracle] also would declare even the woman **whom he himself would have in mind**?'[99]

[99] I follow Lhôte's interpretation here.

It may seem strange that these consultants would not reveal verbally the exact nature of their inquiry. However, such and even far more extensive attempts at concealment, like the Athenian consultation about the Sacred Orgas in 352/1 BCE,[100] seems to have been done more to conceal the matter from meddling humans, who were sometimes accused of interfering with the gods' messages, than from the gods themselves.[101] Nevertheless, in order to have taken away an authoritative sanction, these consultants must have assumed that Zeus knew about what they were concerned.

The evidence above may even enrich the interpretation that I have been developing still further. If we may assume that the oracles of Amphiaraus, Ammon, Abae, Dodona, Trophonius, and Branchidae (Didyma) all recognised Croesus' intent, as some consultants at oracular sanctuaries clearly believed, and if they had given responses about what the king should do to find fortune, as I have suggested, then the result is not a disruption of narrative momentum but a more profound dramatic irony. One might suppose that entertaining the potential for Croesus to have taken any oracular advice he might have been given would disrupt the narrative momentum of the Croesus *logos* and undercut his climactic misunderstanding of the 'great empire' oracle. Viewed in the context of the greater narrative arc of the Croesus *logos*, though, it is clear as early as Herodotus' account of Gyges' oracle that the dynasty of the Mermnadae will end with Croesus (1.13.2). Thus, entertaining the potential that Croesus could have been given useful advice about what to do to bring himself fortune could not seriously disrupt the flow of the narrative: there was ultimately nothing that he could have done to remain in power. The notion that he designed a potentially ambiguous test is also fitting with a Croesus who failed to notice a far more obvious oracular ambiguity. In this way, appreciating the flaw in the test helps establish a consistency in Croesus' character and builds momentum toward his climactic misinterpretation of the 'great empire' as he makes progressively more consequential errors in dealing with oracles.

[100] *IG* II².204. Incidentally, the elaborate procedure that the Athenians developed—sealing alternative questions in two jars stored on the Acropolis and asking the Pythia to identify the jar with the words according to which they should act—also shows that some thought Apollo to have the ability to read rolled up tins inside metal jars even as far away as Athens.

[101] Tim Rood offered the fascinating suggestion that Herodotus' use of ἐπινοεῖν to describe Croesus' plan for the test (1.48.2: ἐπινοήσας τὰ ἦν ἀμήχανον ἐξευρεῖν τε καὶ ἐπιφράσασθαι) might be another subtle nod to the language of oracular consultation in light of the evidence above. Rather than asking a question about having success in what he 'planned' to do, in which case he would have needed to assume that the gods had knowledge of his plan like other consultants did, Croesus 'planned' something he thought was impossible for the oracles to discover.

It is also ironic and fitting that the other oracles would have answered the question that he should have meant by the words he used.[102] The *logos* recounts the king's fall in fortune, which is largely framed by his interview with and recollection of the philosopher Solon.[103] In their conversation, Croesus asked Solon who was 'the most blessed' (ὀλβιώτατος) of all, expecting the philosopher to name him. Unexpectedly, though, Solon names Tellus the Athenian first, and Cleobis and Biton second. Later, Solon explains, 'For not in any way is the very rich man more blessed (ὀλβιώτερος) than the man who has enough for today, unless fortune (τύχη) should attend him that, while having all good things, he end his life well … Before a man should die, do not call him blessed (ὄλβιον), but fortunate (εὐτυχέα)'.[104] In the Herodotean account of Solon's philosophy, blessing is not a state that humans can expect to attain in life; only fortune is within grasp. If Croesus had actually meant to ask the oracles what he might do to find fortune (ὅ τι ποιέων τυγχάνοι), it would indicate that he had actually learned this limitation from Solon. Before his moment of clarity on the pyre, however, Croesus believed that he was the most blessed of all (1.34.1). Thus, he had little inclination to ask an open-ended question about finding fortune that actually could have been of help to him. In the end, Croesus' blindness about the mutability of human fortune is double since neither Solon nor these other oracles could get him to look to the end.

Conclusion

There is good reason to think that Herodotus' fifth-century audience would have been familiar with the habits of communication in an oracular context and would, therefore, have been able to draw these connections. First, most of the tablets from Dodona bear the inquiries of private consultants rather than communities, and there are obvious patterns of expression used for framing the purpose and substance of consultations. These facts suggest a broad familiarity with the grammar of communication in the oracular context, at least among those who took their problems to Dodona. Second, Herodotus

[102] In fact, in Xen. *Cyr.* 7.2.20, Croesus asks Delphi a question—ἐπερωτῶ τὸν θεὸν τί ἂν ποιῶν τὸν λοιπὸν βίον εὐδαιμονέστατα διατελέσαιμι—whose meaning is remarkably similar to the interpretation that I have proposed for ὅ τι ποιέων τυγχάνοι. This question and the response that Delphi gives—σαυτὸν γιγνώσκων εὐδαίμων, Κροῖσε, περάσεις—then become central to the rest of Croesus' backstory and future. The story of this consultation is totally unique to Xenophon.

[103] I am grateful to Scarlett Kingsley for prompting me to consider how my interpretation of Croesus' test fits in with the episodes of the *logos* involving Solon.

[104] Hdt. 1.32.5, 7: οὐ γάρ τι ὁ μέγα πλούσιος μᾶλλον τοῦ ἐπ' ἡμέρην ἔχοντος ὀλβιώτερός ἐστι, εἰ μή οἱ τύχη ἐπίσποιτο πάντα καλὰ ἔχοντα εὖ τελευτῆσαι τὸν βίον … πρὶν δ' ἂν τελευτήσῃ, ἐπισχεῖν μηδὲ καλέειν κω ὄλβιον, ἀλλ' εὐτυχέα.

counts on his audience's knowledge of oracular divination for understanding his *Histories*. Their knowledge of its practice at the most famous oracles in Greece allows him to draw analogies with the practice at less familiar ones. 'The rite of divination in Egyptian Thebes and in Dodona', as he says, 'happen to be similar to each other', and 'the prophetess [of Satraean Dionysus] declares oracles just as in Delphi, and there is nothing more complicated'.[105] We have only a very limited idea what any of this means now, but the method of divination at Delphi and Dodona were clearly part of Greek cultural knowledge. If we may suppose for these reasons that Herodotus' audience knew about the kinds of questions that people tended to ask of oracles, we should also think that they may have gasped, sighed, or shaken their heads when they heard how Croesus intended to phrase his test question and again later when they heard about Croesus' displeasure with the oracles he received. Through their knowledge of the oracular context, Herodotus' audience could have been and still can be in on the joke.

The rest of the *logos* further corroborates the impression, if there were any doubt before, that Croesus was no expert in oracular matters. Given the king's numerous failures at interpreting oracular truth, it is unlikely that Herodotus' audience would have taken his judgement of the oracles here as representing the facts of the matter. Nor should we, for our part, think that his judgement represents Herodotus' own view of these oracles or contemporary scepticism toward the effectiveness of oracular divination generally. Croesus' judgement is his own: tendentious, uncritical, and deeply flawed. These other oracles could have been correct and helpful to Croesus, but he could only ever understand divine pronouncements in the context of the plans that he had already made.

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[105] Hdt. 2.57.3: *ἡ δὲ μαντηίη ἥ τε ἐν Θήβῃσι τῇσι Αἰγυπτίῃσι καὶ ⟨ἡ⟩ ἐν Δωδώνῃ παραπλήσιαι ἀλλήλῃσι τυγχάνουσι ἐοῦσαι*. 7.111.2: *πρόμαντις δὲ ἡ χρέωσα κατά περ ἐν Δελφοῖσι, καὶ οὐδὲν ποικιλώτερον*.

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