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NOMOI AND CANNIBALISM IN HERODOTUS' *HISTORIES*[*]

Abstract: This paper argues that Herodotus does not stigmatise cannibalism in his ethnographies. Rather than 'Othering' cannibalistic peoples like the Massagetae (1.216), Callatiae (3.38), Padaeans (3.99), and the Issedones (4.26), Herodotus' depictions encourage his audience towards a stance of tolerance, while his depiction of the Androphagi (4.106) illustrates his reluctance to attach any particular custom as a marker of 'Other'. In contrast, Herodotus denigrates cannibalism in his accounts of Cyaxares (1.73), Harpagus (1.119), and Cambyses' Ethiopian campaign (3.25). I conclude with the suggestion that Herodotus' depictions of distant peoples following their own custom even in this extreme case should be taken as further evidence of the historian's cultural relativism.

Keywords: Herodotus, ethnography, cannibalism, *nomos*, anthropophagy, cultural relativism

In Tim Burton's 2005 film *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, when the children ask Willy Wonka whether they can eat anything within a room of his famous factory, he states, 'Everything in this room is eatable. Even *I'm* eatable! But that is called cannibalism, my dear children, and is in fact frowned upon in most societies'.[1] For over two thousand years, explorers, ethnographers, and historians have all described cannibalism as something impious and barbaric, a marker of savage tribes in unfamiliar lands.[2] Joseph-François Lafitau, in the eighteenth century, describes the torture of captives among the Native Americans, saying that it 'takes place under such enormously barbarous conditions that the very thought makes us tremble'. Lafitau later

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[1] Burton (2005), emphasis my own. Roald Dahl's novel states that everything in the room, including the trees and bushes, is eatable, but does not mention cannibalism. More recently, the animated television show *Krapopolis* (2023–present) tells the story of a mythical ancient Greek king's endeavours to create 'civilisation'. The antithesis to King Tyrannis' city is the Killassian tribe, and Tyrannis and others frequently reference their practice of cannibalism as one of the clearest signs of their 'barbarism'.

[2] Nichols (2021b) 89.

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describes how captives are burned alive while onlookers break off and eat the cooked flesh.[3] In the fifteenth century, Christopher Columbus states that the Caniba (Caribs) were 'held among all the islands to be very fearsome' because they ate human flesh and raided the surrounding areas to carry off whomever they could.[4] Marco Polo, who travelled to Asia in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, claims that the ceremonies of the people of Zipangu (Japan) were 'so wicked and diabolical that it would be nothing less than an abomination to give an account of them in this book'.[5] Turning to the ancient world, we see similar condemnations in the first century BCE work of Strabo when he calls the inhabitants of Ierne (i.e., Ireland) *ἀγριώτεροι τῶν* Βρεττανῶν ('more savage than the Britons') because they are *ἀνθρωποφάγοι* ('man-eaters').[6] The fifth-century BCE historian Herodotus was one of the earliest chroniclers of supposed cannibalism at the periphery of his world and the practice of using cannibalism as an index of culture has been attributed to him.[7]

This essay examines Herodotus' unique depictions of cannibalism both in his ethnographies and his historical narratives. While scholarship on cannibalism in the modern world has shifted from attempting to prove or disprove the existence of cannibalism to discussing the implications derivable from accusing others of the practice within imperial structures, scholars of the ancient world have been mostly entrenched in either proving—or disproving—Herodotus's claims or approaching them as indications of a 'primitive', even 'barbaric', people.[8] Recent scholarship has moved away from such

[3] Trans. Fenton and Moore (1977) 155–7.

[4] Trans. Willingham (2022) 194.

[5] Trans. Komroff (1953) 3.4. Polo then describes how they invite enemies into their homes, kill them, and then eat them, claiming that human flesh surpasses every other in flavour (3.4). The explorer also describes the people of Fu-Giu in the kingdom of Kon-cha and those in Zipangu as 'addicted to human flesh' (trans. Komroff (1953) 2.80 and 3.4). Polo also states that the people of Sumatra live in a 'beastly manner' because they eat human flesh (3.9).

[6] Strabo 4.5.4 C201. It is important to note that Strabo states he has no reliable witnesses to corroborate this. The geographer also describes how the Derbices of the Caucasus region eat their fathers when they reach the age of 70, an example among many to show the paradoxical (*παραδοξών*) practices of those who are utterly barbaric (*περὶ τῶν τελέως βαρβάρων*. Strabo 11.11.8 C519). The text of Strabo's *Geography* has been taken from volumes one and three of Stefan Radt's ten-volume text, translation, and commentary (2002–11).

[7] Watson (2018).

[8] Murphy and Mallory (2000) 392–3; Nichols (2021b) 89. How and Wells (1912) 311–12 on 4.26 argued that the motivations for cannibalism among peoples in Herodotus—such as their desire to partake of the merits of the dead by eating them—are 'genuine pieces of savage thought', even claiming that cannibalism is often practised 'simply from a taste for human flesh'. For some examples of recent interdisciplinary approaches to cannibalism and

problematic statements but still approaches cannibalism as an indicator of the 'simplicity' of a people.[9] This descriptor, though it accurately describes the lack of intersocietal competition that is seen in ancient and modern examples of cannibalism, can still convey overly-simplistic connotations that lead to conclusions of a people's moral and cultural inferiority. My aim is to recentre Herodotus' depictions of cannibalism: what does Herodotus hope to convey by sharing this information, whether or not the statements are historically true? How does it affect his historical narratives and his ethnographies? Are we left with any sense of his own view of the practice?

William Arens concedes the impossibility of pinpointing the origin of the trope of cannibalism at the edges of civilisation, but proposes Herodotus as a primary suspect given his reputation as the 'first recorder' of other cultures: anthropology and anthropophagy made their literary appearance concurrently in western civilisation.[10] I argue that Herodotus' conceptions and depictions of cannibalism are different from those of later writers, and quite possibly unique.[11] While later authors of antiquity such as Strabo do not hesitate to cast negative moral judgments on cannibalistic acts and traditions, Herodotus, even in the case of cannibalism, retains his usual practice of depicting the *nomoi* (laws, rules, and customs) of far-away peoples in a way that makes them intelligible to Greek readers and promotes a stance of tolerance.[12] As I shall show, Herodotus, avoiding moral absolutism when it comes to the practice, condemns cannibalism typically when it entails transgressing one's own *nomoi*: these 'civilised' societies, instead, pervert the same customs practised by the 'savages' on the outskirts of the known world.[13] Rather than stigmatising cannibalism as a sign of the 'Other', Herodotus employs the adherence to *nomoi* as a motif in order to encourage his audience to consider their own culturally conditioned customs.

its relation to imperial structures and other interpretations, see Giulia Champion's edited volume (2021).

[9] E.g., Asheri, in Asheri et al. (2007) 436; Cueva (2021) 69; and Dewald and Munson (2022) 481. Rosellini and Saïd (2013) 222–4 describe how those on the edges of the known world are both 'savage and marvelous'.

[10] Arens (1979) 10.

[11] Thus, my approach avoids creating a 'barbarian balance-sheet'—as Harrison calls it—as a way of balancing out the 'negative' representations of these peoples. Cf. Harrison (2020) 145–7.

[12] Redfield (2013) 269. Cf. Munson (2009) 457.

[13] Cueva (2021) 73 posits the possibility that Herodotus is perhaps avoiding a moral absolute when it comes to cannibalism, but does not expound on the hypothesis.

Cannibalism in Herodotus' Ethnographies

Darius' gathering of the Greeks and Callatiae in Book 3 is essential for understanding the role of *nomos* in Herodotus' depictions of cannibalism. To prove Cambyses' insanity—evidenced partly by his lack of respect for foreign customs—and the cultural power of *nomoi*, Herodotus describes how Darius gathered peoples from the two opposite sides of his kingdom, the Greeks and the Callatiae, a people located far to the southeast in India (Hdt. 3.38.3–4):

> Δαρεῖος ἐπὶ τῆς ἑωυτοῦ ἀρχῆς καλέσας Ἑλλήνων τοὺς παρεόντας εἴρετο ἐπὶ κόσῳ ἂν χρήματι βουλοίατο τοὺς πατέρας ἀποθνῄσκοντας κατασιτέεσθαι· οἱ δὲ ἐπ' οὐδενὶ ἔφασαν ἔρδειν ἂν ταῦτα. Δαρεῖος δὲ μετὰ ταῦτα καλέσας Ἰνδῶν τοὺς καλεομένους Καλλατίας, οἳ τοὺς γονέας κατεσθίουσι, εἴρετο, παρεόντων τῶν Ἑλλήνων καὶ δι' ἑρμηνέος μανθανόντων τὰ λεγόμενα, ἐπὶ τίνι χρήματι δεξαίατ' ἂν τελευτῶντας τοὺς πατέρας κατακαίειν πυρί· οἱ δὲ ἀμβώσαντες μέγα εὐφημέειν μιν ἐκέλευον. οὕτω μέν νυν ταῦτα νενόμισται, καὶ ὀρθῶς μοι δοκέει Πίνδαρος ποιῆσαι νόμον πάντων βασιλέα φήσας εἶναι.
>
> Darius, during his reign, after calling together some Greeks who were present, asked them how much money they would wish to be paid to devour their dead fathers. To this, the Greeks replied that they would do this for no amount of money. Then Darius, after calling some Indians who were called Callatiae—who do eat their parents—asked them in the presence of the Greeks (who could understand what was being said through an interpreter) how much money it would take to cremate their dead fathers. To this, the Callatiae, crying out in horror, ordered him to keep quiet. This, then, is how custom works; and Pindar, it seems to me, is right when he states, '*Nomos* is the king of all'.[14]

The Callatiae's aversion to certain foreign practices is evidenced by their reaction—which was much stronger than that of the Greeks. The use of εὐφημέειν, Tim Rood points out, indicates that one should keep an auspicious silence.[15] The Callatiae not only shouted in response, thus showing their dismay, but even ordered a king to be silent: this custom was an integral and sacred facet of their culture.

Herodotus' decision to use cannibalism as his example of a strange, foreign custom is poignant. The imagery of cannibalism as seen in Greek mythology

[14] The text of Herodotus' *Histories* has been taken from N. G. Wilson's two OCT volumes (2015).

[15] Rood (2006) 300.

and literature, which imagery goes as far back as Homer, shows just how abhorrent the practice was to the Greek world.[16] Cannibalism, then, may be tremendously different from Greek custom, but it is still lawful and significant to the Callatiae. Herodotus describes cannibalism as a custom (*νενόμισται*), thus portraying the Callatiae as a people self-conscious of their own social order like the Greeks, as both parties are interested in the respectful disposal of the dead and wish to find meaning in death.[17] Here and in other passages, Herodotus does not explain the ideological underpinning of cannibalism; the fact that it is a custom—in this case, funerary—seems to be compelling enough for the historian regardless of its motivations. Despite Herodotus not explaining their justifications for the practice, we can elucidate why these peoples would resort to cannibalism here and in other passages by analysing the interpretations of modern anthropologists. In both instances, the corpse is purified: one by fire and the other by returning to nature. In both customs, the memory of the dead remains in the minds and hearts of those who partake in their respective rituals.[18] The historian, then, is suggesting a message of tolerance to his audience rather than pandering to their xenophobia: by quoting Pindar (fr. 169a) at the end of this anecdote, Herodotus emphasises how custom (*νόμον*) rules all things and that everyone, regardless of where they live, are conditioned to think that their own customs are best.[19] Herodotus

[16] In the *Iliad*, Achilles threatens to eat Hector's corpse, which scene depicts the unlawful extent of his rage (Hom. *Il.* 22.345–8, cf. 4.34–6, and 24.212–4). In the *Odyssey*, Polyphemus' eating of Odysseus' men and the Laestrygonians' spearing and eating of them (Hom. *Od.* 9.287–374; 10.115–24) were seen as contrary to the laws of hospitality. In Hesiod's *Works and Days*, the poet tells his brother Perses that animals may eat one another, but humans do not because they give heed to Justice (Hes. *Op.* 276–8). Hesiod's *Theogony* describes Cronus eating his children as a way of maintaining power (Hes. *Theog.* 459–67). Particularly prominent in the mythological tradition are the myths of Tantalus and Pelops on the one hand, and Atreus and Thyestes on the other, the latter of which is alluded to in Herodotus' description of Astyages' unlawful feast, as seen later in this paper. For Tantalus, see Pind. *Ol.* 1.46–51 and Hyg. *Fab.* 83; for Atreus, see Aesch. *Ag.* 1583–1601, Sen. *Thy.* 759–75 and 909–19. Herodotus' depictions certainly influenced the characterisation of later literary descriptions of cannibalism, but the Greek portrayal of cannibals as lawless and unacceptable existed long before Herodotus' *Histories*. See also Cueva (2021) 69 and 74–7.

[17] Asheri, in Asheri et al. (2007) 436.

[18] Redfield (2013) 276–7.

[19] Skinner (2021a) 259–60. There is much controversy surrounding how we should interpret Herodotus' implementation of the Pindaric fragment. Pindar fr. 169a, preserved through quotations from Plato's *Gorgias* and Aelius Aristides' *On Rhetoric* in addition to the survival of papyrus fragments, describes Heracles' theft of Geryon's cattle and stealing of Diomedes' horses. Pindar claims that *nomos* is king because it can deem violent actions as just, but the interpretations that stem from the poet's claim and examples are numerous. For an analysis of fr. 169a with relevant scholarship and a summary of various arguments, see Kingsley (2018) 40–6 and Grintser (2018) 172 n. 42. Scholars have long debated the

argues that not respecting others' customs, even if entirely foreign, is to show madness like Cambyses. When one recognises the sovereignty of *nomos*—that one's perception of moral or societal superiority has been culturally conditioned by a society's concerns, needs, and beliefs—one can better recognise, accept, and understand foreign cultures.[20]

Nomos is central to Herodotus' depictions of cannibalism, beginning with his ethnography of the Massagetae at the end of Book 1. The Massagetae lived in the plains east of the Caspian Sea and were neighbours of the Scythians. The final chapter of Book 1 begins with *νόμοισι δὲ χρέωνται τοιοισίδε* ('[The Massagetae] use these customs'). By beginning the chapter with *νόμοισι*, Herodotus emphasises the lawful and civilised nature of these people. The historian then describes how they practise cannibalism (Hdt. 1.216.2–3):

> *οὖρος δὲ ἡλικίης σφι πρόκειται ἄλλος μὲν οὐδείς· ἐπεὰν δὲ γέρων γένηται κάρτα, οἱ προσήκοντές οἱ πάντες συνελθόντες θύουσί μιν καὶ ἄλλα πρόβατα ἅμα αὐτῷ, ἑψήσαντες δὲ τὰ κρέα κατευωχέονται. ταῦτα μὲν τὰ ὀλβιώτατά σφι νενόμισται, τὸν δὲ νούσῳ τελευτήσαντα οὐ κατασιτέονται ἀλλὰ γῇ κρύπτουσι, συμφορὴν ποιεύμενοι ὅτι οὐκ ἵκετο ἐς τὸ τυθῆναι.*
>
> No other outer limit of age is set for them [except for this]. Whenever a man becomes very old, all of his relatives gather together and sacrifice him. Simultaneously, they offer up cattle as sacrifices. After boiling the [human and animal] meat, they feast on it. This, to them, is the most blessed way to die. They do not devour the man who dies by disease,

original context of Pindar's fragmentary poem and the extent of Herodotus' engagement with the lyric poet. For those who argue that the reference is merely ornamental, see West (2007) 113–14. Similarly, cf. Asheri, in Asheri et al. (2007) 437, 'Herodotus is not interested here in the original meaning of Pindar's text; he isolates the verse from the context and quotes it as a motto for his purposes of ethnological and moral comparison'. There is uncertainty as to whether Herodotus preserved the Pindaric meaning of the phrase; some argue that Herodotus uses the phrase differently than Pindar does. See Gigante (1956) 110–15. Cf. Thomas (2000) 125–7, who argues that the Darius episode is an example of 'sophistic relativism'. See also Heinimann (1945) 67–8 for an interpretation of Pindar's meaning. Burkert (1990) 22–3 sees Herodotus define *nomos* as a particular custom observed by a certain people, whereas others such as Provencal (2015) 49–53 argue that Herodotus wishes to distinguish human practices from the universal law of nature and justice. For Herodotus not taking Pindar's phrase out of context, see Grintser (2018) 170–4. Kingsley (2018) argues that Pindar's statement should be read into various episodes of Cambyses' violent reign and elsewhere to shed light on the complex nature of one-man rule and popular morality in Persia: not only is *nomos* king, but the Persian king is also *nomos*. More recently, Kingsley (2024) 207–10 states that the intertext points to the validity of cultural systems by alluding to systems under Zeus' rule. For Hdt. 3.38, Pindar, and the historian's use of *nomos* in relation to the rest of the *Histories*, see Humphreys (1987).

[20] Demont (2013) 37–45, esp. 45.

but bury him in the earth, and they consider it a great cause of sorrow that he did not live long enough to be sacrificed.

Dewald and Munson astutely point out that Herodotus' depictions of the Massagetae are deliberately non-judgmental.[21] Herodotus uses sacrificial (*θύουσι*) and feasting (*κατευωχέονται*) imagery to describe how they kill and eat their dead, indicating cannibalism as a ritual in addition to being a convivial and commensal affair. The wording *οὖρος … ἄλλος μὲν οὐδείς* implies that this act is regulated, as there is no exception for how long someone lives. In addition, they view the deaths of these people as *ὀλβιώτατα* (most blessed) if they are eaten and a *συμφορὴν* (great cause of sorrow) if they are not. The use of *ὀλβιώτατα* creates a fitting end to Book 1, as the reader is reminded of Solon's wisdom to Croesus that one cannot know how happy and blessed someone is until they have died (1.30–2). Solon's statement seems familiar and ethically unproblematic in the context of Croesus, but might seem jarring in the context of being eaten. This is precisely Herodotus' point: to the historiographer, one can be most blessed when they die well within the parameters of their own customs, regardless of how different those customs may be from the historiographer's—or the reader's—own practices.

Cannibalism as a funerary, ritualistic, convivial, and cultural practice can also be seen among the Issedones. Herodotus describes the Issedones as neighbours of the Massagetae (Hdt. 1.201) who dwell east of the Argippaeans (4.25) on the northeastern borders of Scythia. Herodotus writes (Hdt. 4.26.1–2):

νόμοισι δὲ Ἰσσηδόνες τοιοισίδε λέγονται χρᾶσθαι· ἐπεὰν ἀνδρὶ ἀποθάνῃ πατήρ, οἱ προσήκοντες πάντες προσάγουσι πρόβατα καὶ ἔπειτα ταῦτα θύσαντες καὶ καταταμόντες τὰ κρέα κατατάμνουσι καὶ τὸν τοῦ δεκομένου τεθνεῶτα γονέα, ἀναμείξαντες δὲ πάντα τὰ κρέα δαῖτα προτίθενται. τὴν δὲ κεφαλὴν αὐτοῦ ψιλώσαντες καὶ ἐκκαθήραντες καταχρυσοῦσι καὶ ἔπειτα ἄτε ἀγάλματι χρέωνται, θυσίας μεγάλας ἐπετείους ἐπιτελέοντες. παῖς δὲ πατρὶ τοῦτο ποιέει, κατά περ Ἕλληνες τὰ γενέσια. ἄλλως δὲ δίκαιοι καὶ οὗτοι λέγονται εἶναι, ἰσοκρατέες δὲ ὁμοίως αἱ γυναῖκες τοῖσι ἀνδράσι.

The Issedones are said to use customs such as these. Whenever a man's father dies, all his relatives bring along cattle. After they sacrifice the cattle and cut them into pieces, they mix up the joints of meat with that of the host's dead parent, and offer up all of the meat as a feast. Then, after stripping his skull bare and cleaning it out, they gild the skull and treat it as a very sacred thing; once every year, they offer up magnificent

[21] Dewald and Munson (2022) 480. Cf. Munson (2001) 161–2.

> sacrifices to it. The son that performs this for his father is like the Greek who celebrates the *Genesia*. In other respects, too, the Issedones are said to be a just people, and the women are said to possess rights equal to those that the men have.

Herodotus portrays the Issedones similarly to the Massagetae by emphasising these practices as lawful customs (*νόμοισι*). The historian then describes how the corpse is mixed with the meat of their flocks and eaten for a feast. Similar sacrificial (*θύσαντες*; *ἀγάλματι*; *θυσίας μεγάλας*) and festive (*δεκομένου*; *δαῖτα προτίθενται*) verbiage is also seen here. Unlike the Massagetae, however, they seem to not kill their relatives, but wait until they are dead.

Peggy Sanday, in addition to How and Wells, argues that the practice of endocannibalism—cannibalism within a tribe or family—often stems from religious traditions.[22] To help the reader understand the religiosity of this custom, Herodotus compares the Issedones' actions of eating their dead and gilding their fathers' skulls to the Greeks' customs at festivals that honour their own dead—such as at the *Genesia*.[23] The numerous participles, verbs, and particular prefixes used to describe the gilding and utility of the skulls give a sense of the careful stages and precision of the ritual. The historian makes the comparison with Greek festivals not only to show the strangeness of the Issedones' customs, but also to show the similarities between the two civilisations: these people are not 'Other' (i.e., 'barbaric') but have many of the same social concerns as the Greeks do: care for funerary *nomoi* and ritual treatment of the dead are universal.[24] To solidify the similarities between the two peoples, the historian lastly claims that the Issedones are *δίκαιοι* (a just people) and *ἰσοκρατέες* (possess equal rights), which indicates their highly 'civilised' nature.[25]

[22] Sanday (1986) 214–32; How and Wells (1912) 311–12 on 4.26.

[23] Gagné (2020) 240; Hartog (1988) 227.

[24] Munson (2001) 91.

[25] Some may argue that Herodotus' use of *ἄλλως* highlights the unjust nature of cannibalism and translate the passage in this way: 'Besides [their practice of cannibalism], the Issedones are said to be just'. While this is a plausible translation, I argue that Herodotus is linking his previous sentences with these closing remarks on the Issedones. Herodotus first compares their practices with those of the Greeks, which, although different, are portrayed in a 'civilised' manner. In the phrase *ἄλλως δὲ δίκαιοι καὶ οὗτοι λέγονται εἶναι*, the *καί*, I argue, is meant to emphasise the just nature of their practice of endocannibalism and connect it with the concluding statement that women wield the same power as men. While *δέ* begins a new sentence, it does not seem to draw a contrast with the preceding sentences, as there is no *μέν* before it to show that their custom of cannibalism should be interpreted differently than their other just practices.

The Padaeans—a nomadic tribe in India—have been the object of moral criticism from modern scholars for their cannibalistic practices, which seem to differ from those of the Callatiae, Massagetae, and Issedones (Hdt. 3.99.1–2):

> ἄλλοι δὲ τῶν Ἰνδῶν πρὸς ἠῶ οἰκέοντες τούτων νομάδες εἰσὶ, κρεῶν ἐδεσταὶ ὠμῶν, καλέονται δὲ Παδαῖοι. νομαίοισι δὲ τοιοισίδε λέγονται χρᾶσθαι· ὃς ἂν κάμῃ τῶν ἀστῶν, ἤν τε γυνὴ ἤν τε ἀνήρ, τὸν μὲν ἄνδρα ἄνδρες οἱ μάλιστά οἱ ὁμιλέοντες κτείνουσι, φάμενοι αὐτὸν τηκόμενον τῇ νούσῳ τὰ κρέα σφίσι διαφθείρειν· ὁ δὲ ἄπαρνός ἐστι μὴ μὲν νοσέειν· οἱ δὲ οὐ συγγινωσκόμενοι ἀποκτείναντες κατευωχέονται. ἢ δὲ ἂν γυνὴ κάμῃ, ὡσαύτως αἱ ἐπιχρεώμεναι μάλιστα γυναῖκες ταὐτὰ τοῖσι ἀνδράσι ποιεῦσι. τὸν δὲ δὴ ἐς γῆρας ἀπικόμενον θύσαντες κατευωχέονται. ἐς δὲ τούτου λόγον οὐ πολλοί τινες αὐτῶν ἀπικνέονται· πρὸ γὰρ τοῦ τὸν ἐς νοῦσον πίπτοντα πάντα κτείνουσι.
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> There is another group of Indians who dwell to the east called the Padaeans, who are nomads that eat raw meat. The Padaeans are said to use customs such as these. Whoever of the townspeople, whether it be a man or a woman, becomes sick, his closest male friends kill him—if he is a man—because they say that that he, wasting away because of his sickness, is depriving them of meat. He utterly denies that he is sick, but they, not acknowledging his claim, kill the man and make a feast of him. If a woman falls sick, her closest female friends perform the same things precisely as the men do. They also sacrifice and feast on anyone who reaches old age. Not very many of these people, however, arrive at this stage of life; for they kill every person who falls sick before they reach that point.

Unlike the previous tribes, Herodotus begins by explaining how the Padaeans eat raw flesh, but still emphasises that these were their practised customs (*νομαίοισι*). Likewise, Herodotus also seems to place no moral distinction between eating raw versus cooked flesh. The historian labels the Padaeans as nomads, perhaps linking the practice to their nomadic lifestyle and emphasising the food insecurity that the people experienced. Like the Massagetae, the Padaeans worry about disease contaminating the human meat. Lastly, there are accepted, regulated customs in the Padaean practice: men kill men while women kill women.[26]

Scholars have been puzzled about Herodotus' depiction of the Padaeans. While Herodotus portrays these actions as customary to the Indian people, he

[26] Rosellini and Saïd (2013) 218.

also states that many who deny that they are sick are killed and eaten regardless. How and Wells argue that Herodotus varies his account here in order to show some 'grim humor', while Dewald and Munson state that words such as *κτείνουσι* depict a more brutal way of killing.[27] Herodotus certainly portrays the Padaeans differently from the Massagetae and other peoples who practise cannibalism. While the Massagetae consider it an honour to reach the age of being sacrificed and eaten, there is no such language for the Padaeans. There is a custom of being sacrificed and eaten when one reaches old age, but few Padaeans ever reach that point because they are killed beforehand due to illness, and Herodotus depicts this violence with stronger language than in his other ethnographical descriptions of cannibalistic practices. If we read the passage with these thoughts in mind, we could conclude that Herodotus treats this practice as morally objectionable since it oppresses a great number of people.

While Herodotus does not place the practices of the Padaeans on the same moral level as the other groups mentioned previously, this does not mean that Herodotus' judgment of the Padaean's cannibalistic practice is entirely negative. We see, for example, terminology in this passage similar to Herodotus' depictions of the Massagetae. The few who die in old age are sacrificed (*θύσαντες*), again denoting ritual. In addition, the same verb is used twice in this passage to denote feasting (*κατευωχέονται*), indicating that the meal is festive.[28] Herodotus attempts to rationalise why the Padaeans kill the sick, claiming that they act the way they do because the sick man is wasting away, which would ruin the body as a source of sustenance. While Herodotus at times clearly disapproves of certain *nomoi*, even religious ones, there seems to be little—if any—disapproval from Herodotus of the actual practice of eating old and sickly individuals despite his distaste for the actions leading up to the eating.[29] Perhaps the passage can be read as ironic, but some of Herodotus' depictions of the Padaeans' practices are reminiscent of the Massagetae.

Rather than view the act of the individual denying being sick and the people's subsequent ignoring and killing of the sick person as ironic, we can perhaps read this as a performative—and even ritualistic—speech.[30] Herodotus uses legal language to describe the conversation between the sick man and

[27] How and Wells (1912) 311 on 4.26; Dewald and Munson (2022) 480–1.

[28] Rosellini and Saïd (2013) 218 argues that *κατευωχέονται* implies that they eat in the context of a 'pig out' rather than a ritual feast, but I argue that this is a ritual feast due to the similar imagery and word choice of Herodotus' cannibalism passages.

[29] For an example of religious *nomoi* that Herodotus clearly disapproves of, see Hdt. 1.199.1.

[30] Compare Agatharchides' depiction of the Troglodytes (fr. 64a, Phot. Cod.250.63, 454a–b. Cf. Diod. Sic. 3.32.5–6). Those who can no longer follow their flocks strangle themselves to death with an ox tail. If someone delays their death, someone can carry out

his closest friends. Herodotus depicts the sick man by using the word ἄπαρνός—one who strongly denies something. This adjective is most commonly seen in judicial proceedings where the accused either denies or confesses a crime, so the fact that Herodotus uses this term here can perhaps be read as ironic, as Asheri et al. have done.[31] The legal language continues, however, in the historian's description of the friends' response. Herodotus uses συγγινωσκόμενοι here and elsewhere to depict guilt which then leads to condemnation.[32] The use of ἀποκτείναντες to describe the killing—which some scholars see as evidence of Herodotus' disapproval towards the Padaean practice—can also be read in legal terms, as the word is used in Herodotus and other sources to condemn somebody to death.[33] The fact that this discussion occurs frequently—according to Herodotus—should not be ignored, as the historian fails to mention any similar resistance from other Indian peoples who must go out into the desert to die when they fall ill, likely for similar economic—and perhaps also environmental—reasons (Hdt. 3.100). While later authors portray the Padaeans as violent cannibals and Herodotus seems to disapprove of certain aspects of their practices—particularly the oppression of sick individuals—the historian also depicts the Padaeans and the eating of human meat in a similar lawful way as the others.[34]

There are, notably, cultural similarities between the Massagetae, Callatiae, Padaeans, and Issedones—particularly, their nomadism. Asheri argues that cannibalism among the Massagetae had Malthusian and magical

that act for them. These actions, though not ritualistic as the Padaeans' in this passage, can be seen as acts of filial piety and obedience to the imperatives of the community. See Bernard (2018) 243–7. Agatharchides was certainly influenced by Herodotus, and we see Agatharchides' own cultural relativism in his lack of judgment in this violent practice. For Herodotean influence on Agatharchides, see Marcotte (2016) 169. For cultural relativism and lack of judgment, see Ameling (2008) 41–3 and Wu (2020) 64.

[31] See Antiph. 9, 10; Soph. *Ant.* 435; and Aesch. *Supp.* 1039. The narrator uses similar language in Hdt. 6.69, where Demaratus' mother tells him of his lineage. When Ariston did not believe the mother when she said she received a garland after laying with her, she swore an oath (κατωμνύμην) and said that denying this (ἀπαρνεόμενον) is no way for him to behave. See also Asheri, in Asheri et al. (2007) 498.

[32] Hdt. 1.89.3; 4.43.6; 6.61.2, 92.2; 7.13.2. Cf. Hdt. 1.91.6 and 6.140.2 for other expressions of fault.

[33] Hdt. 6.4. Cf. Antiph. 5.92. For ἀποκτείνω as evidence of Herodotus' disapproval, see Munson (2001) 162–3.

[34] See Tib. 3.7.144–5, where the poet depicts the Padaeans as those who live in the east and perform unholy gatherings (*impia convivia*) on savage tables (*saevis mensis*). There is similar feasting imagery as in Herodotus, but the use of words such as *impia* and *saevis* depicts these people as definitively un-Roman and, therefore, 'uncivilised'. The text for Tibullus has been taken from Postgate (2017).

origins.[35] Malthusianism claims that population growth is exponential while the growth of food supply is linear. Thus, reading the Herodotean cannibals in Malthusian terms implies that these peoples turned to anthropophagy as a solution to their lack of food supply. The fact that these groups were all nomads can add to Asheri's claim that cannibalism had Malthusian origins: because of their travelling lifestyle and lack of agriculture, these peoples do not have as large a food supply as others in more settled regions.[36] Perhaps the mixing of animal with human meat in festive contexts illustrates this idea further: it is not only the eating of their dead that is significant, but also the fact that these people consume enough nutrients to go about their daily tasks.[37] The mixing itself may also hint at a certain hesitation towards performing outright cannibalism, as the mixture allows the diner to be unaware of what piece is animal and what piece is kin. Despite this hesitation, their nomadic lifestyle is perhaps the cause of a people's anxiety about discarding the dead in a landscape that could never be found again: consuming one's kinspeople is necessary as it becomes a way to keep the dead accessible to them.[38] Rather

[35] Asheri, in Asheri et al. (2007) 217. Asheri does not explain the 'magical' component of these origins.

[36] Hartog (2013) 256 claims that there are many kinds of 'nomads' in Herodotus: the fact that these nomadic groups practise cannibalism does not mean all nomadic groups do. For the Massagetae, Dewald and Munson (2022) 82 and 480 argue that the Massagetae were likely nomads because they lived in carts. In addition, the fact that Tomyris suggested to Cyrus that her people would withdraw at a distance of three days (Hdt. 1.206) also suggests nomadic mobility. See Kennedy (2021) 863. For the Issedones, Dewald points out that they are neighbours of the Massagetae and likely also had migratory habits. See Dewald (2021) 756. For the Padaeans, Herodotus labels them as *νομάδες*. See Skinner (2021b) 1032. For the Callatiae, Herodotus gives no additional information outside of the anecdote of Darius I in Hdt. 3.38, but the fact that they live on the far opposite side of the empire likely denotes a nomadic lifestyle. For material evidence, cf. Murphy and Mallory (2000) 393–4.

[37] Homer has perhaps already described the concept of *Altentötung*—the killing of the elderly—in Book 15 of the *Odyssey*, when Eumaeus the swineherd describes the idyllic island of Syria. See Beghini (2021). Strabo 10.5.6 C486–7 describes the people of Iulis on the island of Ceos, who reportedly had a law that those who were over sixty years of age were to drink hemlock so that there might be sufficient food for everyone else. Later, when the Athenians besieged them, the people voted to kill the oldest among them, but the siege was soon lifted. Although the people of Iulis did not resort to cannibalism in this instance, there is likely a link between the people of Iulis and Herodotus' cannibals: *Altentötung* both liberates the elderly from the pains of old age and optimises the community's resources by eliminating those who cannot contribute to providing more resources. See Schneider (2006); Bernard (2018); and Beghini (2021) for a list of instances of elder-killing and the dual motivation of elder-killing.

[38] Perhaps a corollary can be drawn here between these ancient nomads and the Inuit people of northern Canada who, although they do not condone the practice of cannibalism, have performed the action in times of extreme scarcity as a way of keeping the dead's identity with them rather than absorbed by outsiders. See Trott (1995) esp. 31.

than claiming that Herodotus unilaterally depicts cannibalistic societies as counter-cultural and uncivilised, we should think how Herodotus recognised the differences between settled and nomadic cultures and that both groups had anxieties about burial.

While these four peoples all practise ritual and regulated cannibalism, the Androphagi seem to be unique.[39] The Androphagi are depicted as nomads who live at the edge of the known world like the other groups, having fled north after refusing to aid the Scythians against the Persians (Hdt. 4.119). In addition, these people were not very well known, as the Androphagi were cut off from local trade routes. Asheri adds that perhaps the Androphagi were not a real people, but were mythical cannibals sung by epic who were later located to the edge of the known world.[40] I argue that Herodotus, rather than attempting to put forward his typical relativist ethnographical approach, constructs a stereotypical—even mythical—'Other' that can still inform us of the ethnographer's view of the practice despite its negative portrayal. Herodotus' description of the Androphagi is brief, but deeply relevant to the study of cannibalism and anthropology (Hdt. 4.106):

> Ἀνδροφάγοι δὲ ἀγριώτατα πάντων ἀνθρώπων ἔχουσι ἤθεα, οὔτε δίκην νομίζοντες οὔτε νόμῳ οὐδενὶ χρεώμενοι. νομάδες δὲ εἰσι, ἐσθῆτά τε φορέουσι τῇ Σκυθικῇ ὁμοίην, γλῶσσαν δὲ ἰδίην <ἔχουσι>, ἀνθρωποφαγέουσι δὲ μοῦνοι τούτων.
>
> The Androphagi, who have no notion of justice nor adhere to any law, have the most savage manner of all. They are nomads and dress like the Scythians, but they have a unique language and they alone of these groups eat people.

Scholars such as Arens point to this passage when they attempt to pinpoint the link between anthropophagy with anthropology and label the practice as barbaric.[41] As we have seen in his other ethnographical examples, Herodotus shows that cannibalism itself is not a problem if the act is in accordance with local law and custom. Although this is the case, Herodotus seems to be clear that the Androphagi fall outside the *nomos* paradigm that we have seen in previous examples: the Androphagi seem to ignore any normative system. The portrayal of the Androphagi seems particularly straightforward compared to their cannibalistic counterparts, but Herodotus' language, I believe, can offer

[39] Munson (2001) 136–7.

[40] Asheri, in Asheri et al. (2007) 656. For more, see Nichols (2021a) 79–80.

[41] Arens (1979) 10.

some insights into our understanding of the historian's sources and his decision to portray this faraway people in this manner.

In contrast with his depictions of other cannibals, Herodotus describes the Androphagi as having the most savage manner of life (*ἀγριώτατα ἤθεα*) and having no knowledge of justice (*δίκην*) or law (*νόμῳ*), which phrasing is indicative of the historian's interest in *nomoi*.[42] The historian does not indicate that a particular category of people is being eaten unlike the other groups who practise endocannibalism, thus evidencing that the Androphagi lack structured *nomoi*. The verb *ἀνθρωποφαγέουσι* is not only a pun on the Androphagi, but also emphasises their unique nature: this is the only time the verb is used in the *Histories*, and this unique nature is heavily emphasised by Herodotus' use of *μοῦνοι τούτων* to finish his description of them.[43] The uniqueness of *ἀνθρωποφαγέουσι* seems to suggest a general cannibalism that is different from the circumscribed flesh-eating of the other peoples: while cannibalism is seen as a means of nourishment and ritual among other groups, the Androphagi just 'eat people'. Their practice of cannibalism is listed among a number of other traits: their nomadic nature, their language, and the similarity of their clothing to the Scythians. Their unique language (*γλῶσσαν ἰδίην*), in addition to the aforementioned lack of civilisation and custom, further evidences their isolation, given the linguistic emphasis of peoples such as the Greeks and the Egyptians in determinations of 'barbarian' status.[44]

The language that Herodotus uses to describe the Androphagi is distinctly Homeric, as Homer uses the adjective *ἀνδροφάγοιο* to describe the Cyclops Polyphemus in *Odyssey* 10.200. In this passage, Odysseus tells his story to the Phaeacians and explains how he attempted to cheer up his men after their disaster with the cannibal Laestrygonians and their arrival on Circe's island. By using Homeric language, Herodotus links the Androphagi with the Cyclopes, whom Odysseus calls lawless (*ἀθεμίστων*, Hom. *Od.* 9.106). Herodotus, then, is using 'barbarian' tropes to create a stereotypical 'Other' for his Greek audience, and the label of the people as Androphagi links cannibalism with 'Otherness': the Androphagi become mythical, unique cannibals par excellence.[45]

[42] Thomas (2000) 129.

[43] Wilson's text has *ἀνθρωποφαγέουσι*, but the *apparatus criticus* lists *ἀνδροφαγέουσι* as a potential option, which creates a more vivid pun.

[44] Hdt. 2.158.5: *βαρβάρους δὲ πάντας οἱ Αἰγύπτιοι καλέουσι τοὺς μὴ σφίσι ὁμογλώσσους* ('The Egyptians call all men of other languages barbarians'), and 8.144.2, where the Greeks are kin because they are *ὁμόγλωσσον* ('similar in speech'). Cf. Harrison (1998) 42; Munson (2005) 23–4.

[45] Future work can analyse Herodotus' linking of the Androphagi with the Homeric Cyclops. The roles of civilised and barbarian individual can be inverted in *Odyssey* 9, as Egbert Bakker has shown how the Polyphemus story 'is ambiguous in allowing readings

There are indeed tropes of the cannibalistic barbarian that are widespread throughout the Greek world, and Herodotus himself is clearly aware of these popular perceptions of cannibals at the far reaches of the known world and exploits these traits to construct a people antithetical to the Greek ideal. The fact, however, that Herodotus works against these stereotypes and uses a far more relativist approach for his other cannibalistic exempla highlights both the fluid nature of these *nomoi* and his reluctance to attach allegiance to any particular *nomos* as a marker of 'Other'. Yes, Herodotus, in his description of the Androphagi, creates the most savage people in the world (*ἀγριώτατα πάντων ἀνθρώπων ἤθεα*) and highlights anthropophagy as their most defining characteristic, but the practice of eating people does not make the other cannibals entirely 'Other' to the ethnographer. Herodotus notably casts judgment upon the Androphagi for their practices—including that of cannibalism—but I argue this exhibits much more the intentionality of the ethnographer in his depictions of the *nomoi* of the other cannibalistic peoples. Rather than blindly accept that cannibalism is a sure sign of the 'Other', however, Herodotus highlights how a society can be just—like the Issedones (*δίκαιοι*, Hdt. 4.26.2)—or unjust, and the act of eating people, to Herodotus, is not a true determiner of a people's status as 'Other'.

Cannibalism in Herodotus' Narratives

In his ethnographies, Herodotus does not stigmatise cannibalism as an inherently negative cultural practice. In his narratives, however, where we get more visceral and clearly disapproving accounts of cannibalism that are performed within the 'more civilised' world, we will be able to see whether it is the act itself that Herodotus objects to, or whether it is its purpose, use, and perversion that he condemns.

There are three scenes of cannibalism in Herodotus' narratives: the Scythians tricking Cyaxares (1.73), Astyages cooking Harpagus' son (1.119), and

that are at odds with the hero's self-presentation and its colonial and triumphant bent'. See Bakker (2025) 35, cf. 32. See also Bakker (2013) 57–60; Wilson (2018) 22; and Burkert (1983) 30–4. In Herodotean scholarship, Elizabeth Irwin has pointed out that Herodotus is aware of the ambiguity in *Odyssey* 9 and engages with the Homeric account in a similar manner, particularly in his Ethiopian *logos* (Hdt. 3.17–26). See Irwin (2014) 42–57, esp. 48–51. See also Bosak-Schroeder (2020) 87–92. The comparison between the Androphagi and the Cyclops does not show that Herodotus is defending the Androphagi; he is very explicit in his language and judgment of their practices—and lack thereof. Perhaps, as in the Ethiopian *logos*, Herodotus—through his depiction of the Androphagi—is reminding his readers of the variance of *nomoi* and how customs are culturally conditioned: each person assumes that their own customs are best, and the practices of the Androphagi, to the Greeks, seem to be the antithesis of 'civilisation'.

Cambyses' failed campaign against the Ethiopians (3.25).[46] Cyaxares, Astyages' father who ruled the Medes until 585 BCE, received some Scythian suppliants and sent them Median youths (*παῖδας*) to learn archery and their native language. Herodotus then describes Cyaxares' maltreatment of these Scythians after a failed hunting expedition and their subsequent response (Hdt. 1.73.5–6):

> *οἱ δὲ ταῦτα πρὸς Κυαξάρεω παθόντες, ὥστε ἀνάξια σφέων αὐτῶν πεπονθότες, ἐβούλευσαν τῶν παρὰ σφίσι διδασκομένων παίδων ἕνα κατακόψαι, σκευάσαντες δὲ αὐτὸν ὥσπερ ἐώθεσαν καὶ τὰ θηρία σκευάζειν, Κυαξάρῃ δοῦναι φέροντες ὡς ἄγρην δῆθεν, δόντες δὲ τὴν ταχίστην κομίζεσθαι παρὰ Ἀλυάττεα τὸν Σαδυάττεω ἐς Σάρδις. ταῦτα καὶ ἐγένετο· καὶ γὰρ Κυαξάρης καὶ οἱ παρεόντες δαιτυμόνες τῶν κρεῶν τούτων ἐπάσαντο, καὶ οἱ Σκύθαι ταῦτα ποιήσαντες Ἀλυάττεω ἱκέται ἐγένοντο.*
>
> The Scythians, having suffered these things by Cyaxares, inasmuch as they had suffered things unworthy of themselves, devised a plan to dismember one of their young pupils and, after preparing the child just as they were accustomed to prepare animals, give him to Cyaxares, carrying him as though it was really game, and to flee as fast as possible to Aylattes, the son of Sadyattes, in Sardis after they give the child to him. These things came to pass, for Cyaxares and the guests who were present ate the meat, and the Scythians, having accomplished these things, became Alyattes' suppliants.

The fact that the perpetrators were Scythians is worthy of note: Herodotus, in his ethnography of the nomadic Scythians, describes how they drink the blood of the first man they kill in battle, use human skins to fashion their quivers, and use skulls as drinking cups (4.64–5). In addition, the Massagetae and Issedones were neighbours to the Scythians and were likely aware of each other's customs through trade and other forms of communication. Knowing these customs, the Scythians were able to create a punishment that was shocking to Cyaxares and his guests.

The historian depicts the Scythians' actions as an inverse of the customs of those who practise cannibalism. Herodotus' emphasis on labelling the Scythians' pupils as *παῖδας* emphasises their youth: rather than killing those who are elderly like the Massagetae and others, the Scythians killed a young man. There is also no mixing of human and animal meat or any verbal or visual indication of ritual or custom. Instead, the human meat is prepared and

[46] These examples of cannibalism only depict anthropophagy. For the drinking of human blood, see also Hdt. 3.11 and 4.64–5.

presented as if it were an animal. Rather than obtaining an honourable death, this young man died ignominiously and unknown, since Cyaxares and the other banqueters had no idea what they were eating during the meal. There is similar feasting imagery (δαιτυμόνες), but the feasters will soon be horrified at what has transpired. While feasting on human flesh was itself abhorrent to Greek and Persian custom, the Scythians' reversal and perversion of the customs practised by certain nomadic peoples creates an even more appalling scene.

Later in Book 1, Astyages feeds Harpagus his own son as punishment for failing to kill the infant Cyrus. Perhaps Astyages came up with this idea from his father, Cyaxares, and recognised the horror that could come from such an act. Herodotus writes (Hdt. 1.119.3–4):

> Ἀστυάγης δέ, ὡς οἱ ἀπίκετο ὁ Ἁρπάγου παῖς, σφάξας αὐτὸν καὶ κατὰ μέλεα διελὼν τὰ μεν ὤπτησε, τὰ δὲ ἥψησε τῶν κρεῶν, εὖτυκα δὲ ποιησάμενος εἶχε ἕτοιμα. ἐπείτε δὲ τῆς ὥρης γινομένης τοῦ δείπνου παρῆσαν οἵ τε ἄλλοι δαιτυμόνες καὶ ὁ Ἅρπαγος, τοῖσι μὲν ἄλλοισι καὶ αὐτῷ Ἀστυάγεϊ παρετιθέατο τράπεζαι ἐπίπλεαι μηλέων κρεῶν, Ἁρπάγῳ δὲ τοῦ παιδὸς τοῦ ἑωυτοῦ, πλὴν κεφαλῆς τε καὶ ἄκρων χειρῶν τε καὶ ποδῶν, τἆλλα πάντα· ταῦτα δὲ χωρὶς ἔκειτο ἐπὶ κανέῳ κατακεκαλυμμένα.
>
> But Astyages, when the child of Harpagus arrived, slaughtering him and dismembering the child limb from limb, cooked some parts of his flesh and boiled others into a stew, and when he made them well prepared, he kept them ready. When it was time for the feast, other guests and Harpagus were present. The tables, full of mutton meat, were placed before the guests and Astyages himself, but the table placed before Harpagus was entirely full of the flesh of his own child aside from his head, hands, and feet. These body parts were placed to the side, covered in a basket.

Like the account of Cyaxares, the feeding of Harpagus' son to his father is an inversion of many of the practices performed by those on the outskirts of the Median empire. Deception, rather than ritual, plays an integral role in Astyages' plot. Herodotus labels the thirteen-year-old—Harpagus' only son—as a παῖς, again emphasising his youth. Eating someone may promote thoughts about the past to remember one's predecessors, but cannibalism in this instance was intended to end one's family line. The recognition of consuming Harpagus' son, rather than bringing some form of comfort or solace, instead brings horror to Harpagus. This punishment is especially stunning because, earlier in Book 1, Solon argued that an indicator of a blessed life is that one must have good, healthy children (εὐπαῖς, 1.32.6). Verbal forms such as σφάξας

and διελὼν depict the violence of the affair and the ignominious nature of the son's death—a son who is not even named—rather than the ritual resonances we see among other tribes. In addition, Herodotus' style treats the dismemberment and cooking of Harpagus' son with 'bland straightforwardness', as Dewald and Munson describe it. This not only shocks the audience, but provides an effective contrast between the straightforward killing and eating of Harpagus' son and the ritualistic language and articulated stages of those who practise endocannibalism in Herodotus' ethnographies.[47] Lastly, Herodotus then describes how, after the meal, Harpagus took what was left of his son and buried him, a reminder that the Medes practised burying their dead rather than eating them: Harpagus followed his own customs whereas Astyages' vengeance was a perversion of the customs of those who cannibalised their dead.

We also see intratextual references to other instances of cannibalism within the *Histories*. When Herodotus describes how the Massagetae boil (ἑψήσαντες) their dead kin, the audience is likely reminded of Harpagus' son, as he too was boiled (ἥψησε) in preparation for being consumed. We again see δαιτύμονες, indicating a convivial gathering, but Harpagus consumes his son while the other guests eat meat from a sheep. Astyages strips away the indeterminacy that characterises funerary cannibalism when he, after showing him the son's hands and feet, asks him whether γινώσκοι ὅτευ θηρίου κρέα βεβρώκοι ('he knew what beast's flesh he had eaten'). Astyages' statement is also reminiscent of the account of Cyaxares in 1.73, as the Scythians dressed the victim like a hunted animal.[48] In both accounts, the young man is dehumanised, whereas the ethnographies indicate that the peoples who practise cannibalism knowingly eat their kin, even though the meat is oftentimes mixed with that of animals. Lastly, Herodotus again mentions the feast in 1.162.1, after Harpagus succeeded Mazares as Cyrus' general, stating that the banquet was held at an ἀνόμῳ τραπέζῃ ('a table without *nomos*'). The feeding of Harpagus' son was unlawful because it was against Persian custom—who had no law for cannibalism in place—whereas those on the outskirts had particular *nomoi* in place for the sacrificing and eating of their dead.

Herodotus also indirectly criticises Greek instances of cannibalism, enacted contrary to their own customs and laws, through his telling of the Harpagus narrative. Multiple scholars have noticed Aeschylus' influence in Herodotus' depiction of the Harpagus scene, particularly the tragedian's *Agamemnon* and how Thyestes ate his children through the deception of

[47] Dewald and Munson (2022) 348.

[48] Dewald and Munson (2022) 349, cf. 288.

Atreus.[49] Dewald and Munson argue that the Greeks envisioned the non-Greek world as similar to the one depicted in their own remote and ancient tradition.[50] However, the evidence tests this conclusion. These myths, including that of Thyestes and Atreus, were retold in various manners and modes and were used to ask continually questions about Greek identity and custom. Tragedy, Pelling points out, often makes an audience uncomfortable because the problems and phenomena seem close to home.[51] Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*—and the *Oresteia* as a whole—explores themes of vengeance, family, and power, all of which are likewise central in Herodotus' account of Harpagus and his son. Therefore, the Greeks of myth themselves are not entirely innocent of outrageous crimes such as cannibalism. Herodotus portrayed the actions of Astyages in a similar way to Greek myths not as a means for his audience to judge the Medes for their violent actions, but to have them consider their own customs and heritage: as Pelling puts it so succinctly, the audience is able 'to find Self in Other and Other in Self'.[52]

Lastly, Herodotus describes Cambyses' failed campaign against the Ethiopians. Cambyses' campaign is the first instance in the *Histories* where Herodotus labels the king as insane (ἐμμανής, 3.25.1). On their journey, Cambyses and his men eventually run out of food. Herodotus describes the literal decimation of Cambyses' army by cannibalism (Hdt. 3.25.6–7):

[49] Cf. How and Wells (1912) 93 on 1.73; Burkert (1983) 103–9; Asheri, in Asheri et al. (2007) 161–2, Dewald and Munson (2022) 349.

[50] Dewald and Munson (2022) 349.

[51] Pelling (1997) 65. Herodotus writes how Phrynichus staged a production on the Sack of Miletus that moved the crowd to such tears that the playwright was fined for reminding them of 'evils that were so close to home' (οἰκήια κακὰ, Hdt. 6.21.2).

[52] Pelling (1997) 66. The reminder of one's own customs, past and current, can also be seen in the account of Phanes (3.11.2–3), where the Greeks and Carians killed Phanes' children and drank their blood as revenge for his betrayal. Similar to the other acts of cannibalism, Phanes' children are unnamed children (παῖδες) whose ignominious deaths mark the end of Phanes' bloodline. The drinking of human blood, Asheri claims, reveals a practice of human sacrifice that was not only performed in mythological accounts like Iphigenia and Polyxena, but also in contemporary times, including the cult of Zeus Lykaios during the festival of the Lykaia, where many ancient authors claimed that humans were sacrificed—and perhaps even eaten. See Pl. *Resp.* 565D–E; pseudo-Plato, *Minos*, 315B–C; Theophrastus fr. 13.22–6 Pötscher; Paus. 8.38.7. Cf. Asheri, in Asheri et al. (2007) 409; Hughes (1991) 92–7, 136–7; and Eidinow (2019). It is worthy of note, however, that bones have not been found on Mt. Lykaion, which brings doubt as to the authenticity of human sacrifice. Whether these accounts are authentic or not, there was at least some belief in Greece that human sacrifices—sometimes performed together with acts of cannibalism—were performed. It seemed important to Herodotus that the Greeks remember that they had performed—and perhaps still did perform during Herodotus' lifetime—similar actions and punishments and should not be so quick to judge.

> οἱ δὲ στρατιῶται ἕως μέν τι εἶχον ἐκ τῆς γῆς λαμβάνειν, ποιηφαγέοντες διέζωον, ἐπεὶ δὲ ἐς τὴν ψάμμον ἀπίκοντο, δεινὸν ἔργον αὐτῶν τινες ἐργάσαντο· ἐκ δεκάδος γὰρ ἕνα σφέων αὐτῶν ἀποκληρώσαντες κατέφαγον. πυθόμενος δὲ ταῦτα ὁ Καμβύσης, δείσας τὴν ἀλληλοφαγίην, ἀπεὶς τὸν ἐπ' Αἰθίοπας στόλον ὀπίσω ἐπορεύετο, καὶ ἀπικνέεται ἐς Θήβας πολλοὺς ἀπολέσας τοῦ στρατοῦ.
>
> The soldiers, for as long as they were able to take anything from the ground, survived by eating grass, but after they arrived in the desert, some of them performed a terrible deed: after casting lots, they devoured every tenth man among them. After Cambyses learned these things, he, abandoning his mission against the Ethiopians, retreated because he feared his men's eating each other, and he arrived in Thebes after losing much of his army.

Herodotus gives moral judgment to the action of these men by labelling it a terrible deed (δεινόν ἔργον). These soldiers, though they experienced food scarcity like the peoples on the outskirts of the known world, acted contrary to their own *nomoi*, which is why this action was denigrated by the historian. Men in the prime of their lives were being killed and eaten by lot as opposed to the articulated stages of eating their elders in the historian's ethnographies. In addition, the act of cannibalism is what eventually stopped Cambyses' mad campaign: he was frightened (δείσας) that his men were eating one another (ἀλληλοφαγίην). Perhaps Cambyses was frightened because their eating of one another would result in having fewer men, which would lead to less likelihood of success. Perhaps Cambyses feared that he might be chosen by lot, if Seneca is to be believed (Sen. *De Ira* 3.20.2–4). Or, to judge by Herodotus' emphasis on *nomoi*, perhaps the act of cannibalism was so contrary to Persian custom that Cambyses briefly snapped out of his madness enough to call a retreat. Cambyses' fear and eventual recall of his soldiers illustrates the level of atrocity that was committed. Even to a mad king like Cambyses, cannibalism is a sign of something that is against Persian custom and should never be performed, even in the direst of circumstances.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Herodotus did not place the practice of cannibalism on the fringes of the known world as an indicator of a less civilised group of people. Herodotus portrayed cannibalistic peoples because of his interest in foreigners and their *nomoi*, and the effect of this portrayal shows how foreign, nomadic peoples practised regulated, convivial, nutritive, and funerary cannibalism. Herodotus did not denigrate these tribes—and even his more negative

descriptions of the Padaeans and Androphagi shed light on the historian's reluctance to link cannibalism fully with 'Otherness'. Instead, he attempted to share the customs of foreign peoples in such a way as to be better understood. Rood states that Herodotus 'does not claim that all customs are equally valid, but rather that recognition that one's own perspective on others' customs is culturally determined should lead to tolerance'.[53]

And yet, acts of cannibalism in Herodotus' narratives—performed by those well within the boundaries of the 'civilised' world—are depicted as going against *nomoi* and are inversions of these same customs practised by those on the periphery. Youths, unnamed in Herodotus' *Histories*, die inglorious, violent deaths and are at times consumed unknowingly. Instead of ritual or nourishment as motivators, revenge or desperation drives these people to commit these actions. Within these episodes, we see themes of the instability of sons and family lines, seeing oneself in the practices and stories of others, and the importance of acting within one's own customs. Herodotus wrote lawful depictions of cannibalism by showing that the Callatiae, Massagetae, Issedones, and Padaeans all follow their laws and customs, as foreign as they might seem to his readers. Instead, it is the Medes and Persians—and, by extension, the Greeks—who should be condemned for their own uncustomary acts of cannibalism and other related deeds, as they have frequently acted contrary to the customs that these faraway 'barbaric' groups practise.

RYAN MASATO BALDWIN
University of Cincinnati baldwirm@ucmail.uc.edu

[53] Rood (2006) 298. Returning briefly to the animated show *Krapopolis* (see n. 1), after the Killassians decide to not pursue farming (s. 1 ep. 10), King Tyrannis asks what they will eat to survive. The leader responds, 'We're going back to cannibalism. It's the most efficient system. People get old or sick, we recycle them into meals'. To this, King Tyrannis responds, 'That sounds surprisingly sustainable'. The two cities later become friends and allies.

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